

Western Regional Button Association is pleased to share our educational articles with the button collecting community. This article first appeared in the Idaho State Button Society newsletter in August 2017. WRBA is honored to have been given permission from ISBS and the authors to reprint it for our February 2018 WRBA *Territorial News*. Enjoy! WRBA gladly offers our articles for reprint, as long as credit is given to WRBA as the source, and the author. For this article, please receive permission from the author before reprinting. Please join WRBA! Go to www.WRBA.us

Fans ? of Japan: What Looks Like a Fan, Might Not Be a Fan

by Janis Couey, Colorado Springs Button Club
and Janet Koda, Garnet Button Club

According to Webster's Dictionary, a fan is a device (as a hand-waved triangular piece or a mechanism with blades) for producing a current of air to cool or refresh oneself. Simple hand fans were developed in China, Ancient Greece and Egypt. In the 17th century, Japan invented the folding fan. Much later, Japanese and Chinese fans became very popular when they were imported to Europe by seafaring merchants.

Sometimes what may look like a fan, may not be a fan. It might be a Hagoita, a battledore. A battledore is a wooden rectangular paddle used in a traditional Japanese game called Hanetsuki.



*Top Left:
Hagoita
paddle
backsides
with
shuttlecock*



*Bottom
Right:
Janis Couey
with fancy
Hagoita
paddles*

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Hanetsuki is a badminton-like game played on New Year's Day, using a brightly colored feathered shuttlecock.

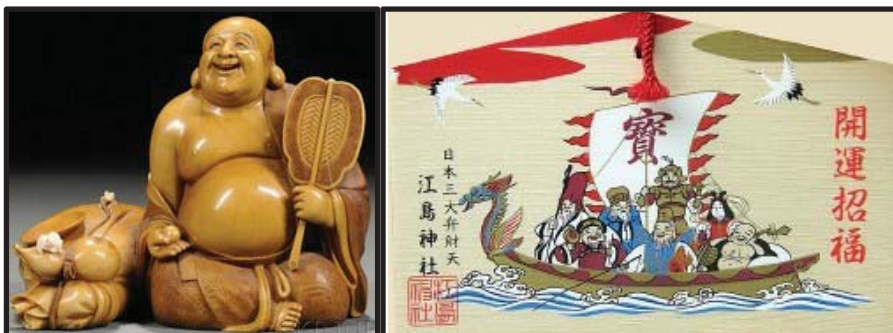
Another wooden fan shaped object is the Gunbai. The gunbai is a device used by a Sumo (Japanese wrestling) referee or Gyoji. My grandfather was a Gyoji and we still have his Gunbai.



Left to Right: Gyoji with Paddle, Gunbai Paddle (center), Gyoji refereeing a Sumo Bout holding a paddle.

The umpire uses the Gunbai to signal his instructions and designate the winner or outcome of the wrestling bout. On the paddle are written Kanji characters that have the meaning of "Between the Earth and Heaven, this judgment was made in the upmost honesty and with the very best of knowledge."

One of the Seven Lucky Gods, Hotei, god of contentment and happiness has a Gunbai as one of his attributes. In this case, it is called a wish giving fan. It is used to grant requests from patrons who were deserving. Hotei has the power to see the future and judge between good and bad.



Left to Right: Hotei Figurine with Paddle, Wooden temple plaque of Seven Lucky Gods

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Through history, the Gunbai or war fan was used by Samurai military leaders to signal or communicate with their troops. These war fans were made of lacquered wood, metal covered wood or solid metal. This kind of Gunbai baton was also be used as a weapon or for protection, deflecting arrows or many kinds of blades.

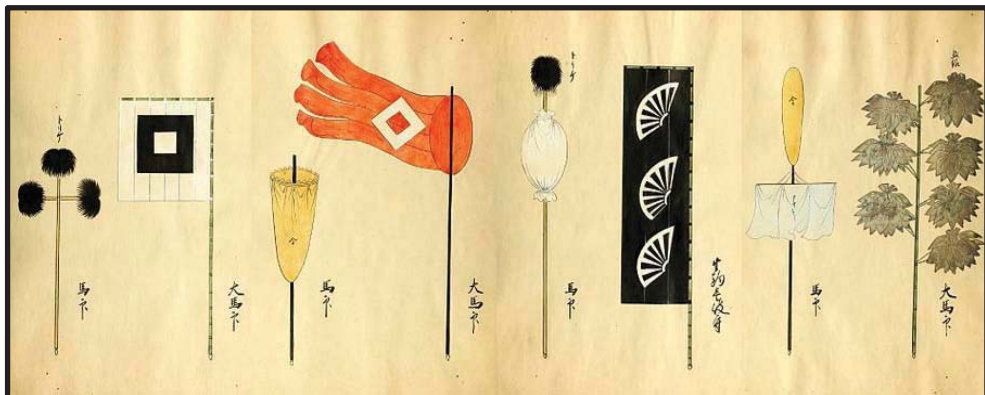


Left : Armoured Samurai with Gunbai in 1800's



Right: Shogun Statue with Gunbai at Kofu Station

Another item that looks like a fan is really a military standard or Sashimoto which was used to designate clans or separate battalions by the family crests. Sometimes they were banner type lags in the shapes of Japanese bells, round shaped gongs, small umbrellas, or air streamers. They were carried in front or back by warriors in a leather holder which was secured by sturdy straps. The carrier sometimes had ropes to keep the Sashimoto standard upright and steady in the wind or while running or riding on a horse into battle.



Various kinds of Sashimoto depicting warrior clans

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So take another look. What may look like a fan, may not be a fan at all.



You decide. With this thought in mind and what was observed during a button show last summer, BODs were given to winners of a fan award.

Above Left to Right: Gunbai, Hagoita & Sashimoto
(courtesy of E. Burkheimer & Martha Towne)

References:

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