

# Provenance

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## **Session 1. Thursday 9 January. 09:12 to 12:40. Attended.**

Subject: Takeda Shūzō, 86. Rig: Kata v3 gloves (left and right), sensor collars on four tools, three overhead depth cameras. Usable capture: 2 h 51 min. Replay gate: not run.

Remarks:

The workshop is at the end of a lane behind the Miyagawa, the last building before the river wall, and the snow on its roof is deeper than the door is tall. I had to dig out the step to bring the cases in. Inside it smells of hinoki and kerosene and something sweet that turned out to be the old man's cough syrup.

Takeda-san watched me unpack without getting up from his chair by the stove. When I held out the left glove he took a long time to put his hand into it, and I saw why: the top joint of his little finger is gone, healed smooth, like the end of a dowel. He held it up so I would not have to ask.

"Nineteen fifty eight," he said. "A plane blade. My master said you are not a carpenter until you have given the wood something."

I taped over the left little fingertip pad so the empty sensor would not throw noise. The cameras are framed tight on the bench top, as the contract requires: they see hands and tools and wood, and nothing

above the wrist. Masters do not want their faces sold along with their hands, and nobody wants a camera watching their kitchen. Calibration took forty minutes. Segment lengths stored as reference.

His granddaughter, Takeda Hana, made tea and then left for a ryokan in Sanmachi, where she is repairing shoji screens for the tourist season. She is the apprentice of record. She asked how many hours we needed. I told her three hundred. She looked at her grandfather's hands for a moment and said, "Then you'd better start."

He cut half of a kanawa tsugi in keyaki: the long scarf joint with the wedge driven through the middle, the one the temples use when a pillar rots at the foot and new wood has to be spliced into old without anyone noticing. His hands shake. Not much when the chisel is on the wood, but on the way to it, like someone threading a needle on a moving train. He knows. He does not mention it, and neither do I.

## **Session 2. Friday 10 January. 09:05 to 13:30. Attended.**

Usable capture: 3 h 40 min. Replay gate: not run.

Remarks:

A good morning. He talked while he worked, which he did not do yesterday, mostly to the wood. "You again," he said to a knot.

He pulls the plane toward himself, the way they all do here, and the shavings come up pale and curled and break off at about a hand's length. Once he stopped and held one up to the window. The light came through it, but it was torn in three places. He looked at it for a while and then fed it to the stove.

I asked whether he had always worked in the mornings. He said no, he had always worked at night. "Mornings are for other people's questions."

I am aware that these remarks go to Osaka with the data. I am also aware that nobody in Osaka reads the remarks. I have been writing them

for four years. I write them anyway. It helps me remember what the numbers were about.

**Session 4. Monday 13 January. 09:00 to 12:15. Attended.**

Usable capture: 2 h 58 min. Replay gate: run on sessions 1 to 3. Result: FAIL. Joint gap 0.41 mm (threshold 0.05 mm).

Remarks:

The replay arm in Osaka cut his joint from his own data, and the two halves would not close. Kuroda-san called me at lunch. She was kind about it, in the way she is kind about deadlines.

“The advance has already gone to the family,” she said. “If the model does not pass, the advance comes back. You understand what we sell, Ota-kun. We do not sell a joint. Anybody can buy a joint. We sell seventy years of one particular man’s hands. Provenance is the product.”

I know. It is on the front of the brochure, in a typeface designed to look hand-cut.

When I told Takeda-san about the gap he did not seem surprised. He said, “Leave the gloves here tonight.”

I explained the rules for unattended capture: rig sealed, cameras running, gloves on the hook, chain of custody logged at both ends. He listened to all of it and then asked whether the gloves would be cold in the morning. I said they would be at room temperature. He said, “This room has no temperature after midnight,” and laughed until he coughed.

Request for unattended night capture sent to Osaka 14:02. Approved 14:20.

**Session 5. Monday 13 January into Tuesday 14 January. Unattended. Rig sealed 18:30, unsealed 08:10.**

Usable capture: 4 h 12 min (00:55 to 05:07). Replay gate: run on session 5 alone. Result: PASS. Joint gap 0.03 mm.

Remarks:

I do not know what to write. It is as if somebody else cut it.

In the morning there was a board propped on the bench with pencil on it, in his large unsteady hand: *Tomorrow. Leave three millimetres on the shoulder. Do not trust the left side of the grain.* Beside it lay the joint, finished, with exactly three millimetres left on the shoulder.

Takeda-san was asleep in the chair by the stove with a blanket over his knees. Hana was making rice. She said he always sleeps there after a night at the bench, that he has done so since her grandmother died, and that I should not wake him.

He woke a little after nine and went straight to the bench and ran his hand along the joint for a long time, the way people touch a horse. Then he said, to the joint, "There you are."

### **Sessions 6 to 11. Unattended, nightly.**

Usable capture: 26 h 40 min. Replay gate: PASS on all. Mean gap 0.028 mm.

Remarks:

Kuroda-san sent a message with three exclamation marks, which I have never seen her use. Osaka wants clips for the launch reel.

The days are slow now. He does not want the gloves in daylight. He sits by the stove and tells me about temples: a hall in the hills above Furukawa where, in 1979, he replaced the foot of every pillar without the roof once moving; his master, Ōno, who could judge the moisture in a board by touching it to his lip. I asked whether there had been other apprentices. "There were boys," he said. "They went to Nagoya to make kitchens."

I did two years at a joinery school in Kyoto before this job. I was not good. I was careful, which is not the same thing. My teacher told me, not unkindly, that my hands would always be translating. I suppose that

is why I record other people's. I like to think that the Tutor gloves, the ones that will play his model back into a learner's fingers, will give some boy in Nagoya, or some girl in Lyon, the hands I never had.

In the afternoons Hana goes to the ryokan, and in the evenings she comes back with her fingers red from the cold. She eats with us, and goes upstairs early, and never asks about the data.

## **Session 12. Monday 20 January. Data review. No capture.**

Remarks:

I was cutting clips for the reel tonight and something was wrong with the left hand.

On the paring cuts, before every single stroke, the left little finger presses down on the back of the chisel. Only for an instant. A small weight, like a full stop placed at the start of a sentence instead of the end. It is a beautiful habit. It settles the blade. And the pad that registers it is the pad I taped over on the first morning, over a finger that ends at the second joint.

Tape is not insulation. A force sensor under tape still reads force if something presses on it. Nothing in that glove should be able to press on it.

I ran the camera geometry against the reference. The hands in the night sessions are about six millimetres narrower across the span. The knuckles are less swollen. The left little finger is whole.

The cameras cannot tell me whose hands they are. They were built not to. I sat in my room at the guesthouse with the footage running, a pair of hands in a box of light, cutting the most perfect joint I have ever seen, and I could not see a face, and I understood that this was the whole point of the box.

I have not told Osaka. I am writing this down so that tomorrow I will know I saw it tonight.

**Session 13. Tuesday 21 January into Wednesday 22 January. Un-attended. Observed.**

Remarks (draft, not submitted):

At midnight I walked back from the guesthouse along the river. Snow was falling straight down, no wind at all. The lane had no footprints but mine. The workshop window was lit low, the way it is when only the stove is on.

He was asleep in the chair. The blanket, the open mouth, the pencil still in his hand. She was at the bench, wearing the gloves.

I watched her through the glass for perhaps twenty minutes, because I could not make myself knock. She worked the way he describes Ōno working, without hurry and without stopping. She read the pencil on the board and then she did what it said. Every few minutes she looked over her shoulder at the chair.

When I opened the door she did not jump. She put a finger to her lips and nodded at him, and went on until the stroke was finished, and only then took off the gloves and came outside with me into the snow.

“How long?” I said.

“Tonight? Since one.”

“You know what I mean.”

She thought about it properly, which I had not expected. “His eyes went six years ago. The cataract first, then the thing at the back. He could still feel, so for a year he roughed out and I finished. Then he started falling asleep in the chair. He leaves me the board.” She lifted one shoulder. “He wakes up and it’s done.”

“And he thinks he did it.”

“He is an old man who falls asleep at his bench at night and wakes up with the work finished. What would you think?”

“That someone else did it.”

“You’re young,” she said, and it was not an insult. “When you’re old you know you can’t remember half of what you’ve done.”

I told her what I sign is a provenance claim. That if I certify the model as his hands and it is not his hands, that is fraud, and not a small one, and it would come back on her, not on me.

“I know what it is.” There was snow on her eyelashes. “The bank takes the workshop in March. Your advance paid them until March. If the model passes, there are royalties, and he can die in his own chair in his own room. That is all this is.”

“Then why not sell your own hands? Under your own name?”

She laughed, short, not at me. “Have you read your company’s form? Fifty years of documented practice. A verified record of major works. I have twenty three years at that bench, and nineteen of them are in his name. Every hall I finished in the last six years has his name on the certificate. Who do you think the temples call? Who do you think your company called?”

She went inside and came back holding something carefully in both hands, like an egg. A shaving of hinoki, the whole length of the board, unbroken, so thin that I could see the porch light of the house across the lane through it.

“Look,” she said.

Then she went back in to finish the joint before he woke.

I wrote this report on the walk back. It says what I saw. I have not sent it.

**Session 14. Wednesday 22 January. 10:00 to 15:00. Attended. No usable capture.**

Remarks:

Hana went to the ryokan at ten. I told Takeda-san I needed to check the gloves in daylight, which was not true, and he put them on without arguing, and we sat by the stove with nothing to measure.

After a while he said, “Ōno-san went blind when I was twenty five.”

I said nothing. The stove ticked.

“Four years before he died. He would sit up in the workshop at night with a lamp he couldn’t see by, and leave me boards. Leave the shoulder long. Watch the left side of the grain. I came in after midnight and did what the board said, and in the morning he touched it and said, There you are. The certificates on those halls say Ōno.” He turned his gloved hands over on his knees. “They are good halls.”

“You know,” I said.

“I know the sound of my own chisel. I’m old, not deaf.”

“Does she know that you know?”

He looked at me as if I had asked whether snow was cold. “If she knew, she would stop. She would think I was giving her something, and she is too proud to be given things. She has to be stealing it. Ōno-san let me steal it.”

“Takeda-san, what I sign is a legal document. It says these hands are yours.”

“Whose name is on your form?”

“Takeda.”

“Then write Takeda,” he said. “It is her name too. It is the only thing I own that is good enough to give her.”

He fell asleep in the gloves a little after two in the afternoon, with his chin on his chest. I took them off him one finger at a time.

**Session 15. Thursday 23 January. Calibration re-run.**

Reason: original calibration taken with left little fingertip pad obstructed (tape). Reference geometry replaced with night set (sessions 5 to 13). Sessions 1 to 4 excluded (tremor artefact). Provenance: TAKEDA. Hand match against reference: 0.99. Replay gate: PASS.

Remarks:

None.

**Sessions 16 to 61. Unattended, nightly. Capture complete Tuesday 4 March.**

Usable capture: 300 h 04 min. Model TKD-01 submitted.

Remarks:

On the last morning the board on the bench said, in his pencil: *Tomorrow. Nothing. Rest.*

He was asleep in the chair. I packed the cases quietly and did not wake him. Hana carried the camera stands out to the car for me through the slush, which she did not need to do.

At the car she said, "He told me you had trouble with the tape. On the first day."

"Yes," I said.

"He has never talked about tape before." She looked at me for a long moment, as though she were reading the grain. "Thank you for your patience, Ota-san."

I do not know how much she knows. I do not know how much he knows that she knows. I think the three of us are going to leave it there, which, as I learned in that workshop, is how a good joint is meant to close: by itself, under its own weight, with nothing showing.

**Support ticket 48113. Tuesday 11 November. Model TKD-01 (Takeda). Translated from French by Hearth.**

Hello. I am a cabinetmaker in Lyon. I have used the Tutor gloves with the Takeda model for four months and my joints have never been so clean. One question only. Before every paring cut, the left glove presses my little finger down onto the back of the chisel. At first I fought it, but the cut is better when I let it happen. In your film, Takeda-san's left little finger is missing at the top. So how does he do this? Is my glove defective? Thank you. Élodie M.

**Reply. R. Ota, Capture.**

Dear Élodie,

Your glove is not defective. Masters have habits they do not always know about, and the model learned the hands, not the film.

Let the finger go first. It has done this many times before, at night, while somebody slept.

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