



1st World Congress on Health and Martial Arts in Interdisciplinary Approach, HMA 2015

# Acceptance and sublimation of aggressiveness and violence in Japanese martial arts: from a view-point of the history of the techniques and equipment used in *budo*

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## Abstract

Japanese martial arts have been developed and passed down under the proposition of 'sublimating the violence inherent in the martial arts while accepting it.' Let me cite a few examples of this from my perspective as a researcher with a focus on the history of the techniques and equipment used in the martial arts. In kendo, the Japanese art of fencing, a shinai (bamboo sword) and several pieces of protective armour—men (face guard), kote (hand and forearm protectors), dou (breastplate), and tare (groin and leg protectors)—have been developed, which allow a kendoka (kendo practitioner) to make direct full-contact blows and thrusts that were impossible to make in Kata Kenjutsu (traditional swordplay). Through the use of this armour, we can ensure safety and give consideration to avoiding fatal injury while accepting—to an extent—the violence inherent in martial arts. The main purpose of the art of grappling in jujutsu or judo is to gain a victory by holding down, 'pinning' or otherwise restraining an opponent, not by delivering a death blow. Such a proposition can also be seen in binding techniques where the knots and lashings used to tie up an opponent are designed so that the opponent can be released at any time. As can be seen from the above, the concepts inherited by Japanese martial arts are effective measures by which to explore the theme of the HMA Congress.

**Key words:** injury • jujutsu • judo • kendo • sword

**Published online:** 17 September 2015

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**Contributor:** Susumu Nagao conceived the study design, collected and analysed the data, prepared the manuscript and secured the funding.

**Funding:** None

**Conflict of interest:** Author has declared that no competing interest exists

**Ethical approval:** Not required

**Provenance and peer review:** Under responsibility of HMA Congress

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**Cite it:** Nagao S. Acceptance and sublimation of aggressiveness and violence in Japanese martial arts: From a view-point of the history of the techniques and equipment used in *budo*. In: Kalina RM (ed.) Proceedings of the 1st World Congress on Health and Martial Arts in Interdisciplinary Approach, HMA 2015, 17–19 September 2015, Czeszochowa, Poland. Warsaw: Archives of Budo; 2015. p. 19–24

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## INTRODUCTION

First of all, I would like to express my respect to the mission of the Congress, 'a scientific argument justifying the permanent strengthening of all dimensions of health through rational practice of martial arts as a counterweight to the expansion of a culture of violence'. My believe is that the legacy that Japanese martial arts have inherited can contribute to the mission of the Congress to a certain degree. In my opinion, since the late Muromachi period, Japanese martial arts have been developed and passed down under the proposition of 'sublimating the aggressiveness and violence inherent in the martial arts while accepting it'. As the field of my research is the history of the techniques and equipment used in the *budo*, especially *kendo*, I will explain my position by presenting a few examples from my perspective.

## EXAMPLES IN SWORDPLAY AND KENDO

Rites relating to swords date back to the age of Gods and ancient times, and the techniques used to make a warped sword—called *wantou*, a characteristic sword of Japan—to the middle of the Heian period (10th Century). The origin of today's *kendo* (an athletic sport in which a practitioner wears four pieces of protective armour—*men* (face and head guard), *kote* (hand and forearm protector), *dou* (breastplate) and *tare* (groin and leg protector)—and delivers blows and passes to an opponent with a bamboo sword called a *shinai*) can be found in *shinai uchikomi geiko* (practice striking and thrusting with *shinai* and protective gear) that had been established in the middle Edo period (1710's).

## ARTIFICE OF SHINAI IN THE SHINKAGE-RYU SCHOOL AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

In chronological order, the *hikihada shinai* was devised by Nobutsuna Kamiizumi in the late Muromachi period (around 1550's). The leather wrapping on a sword scabbard is called the *hikihada*, and a *hikihada shinai* is a piece of bamboo measuring around 38-39 inches (97-100 cm) in length inserted into a *hikihada* with a split from the centre to the front. It also is known as a *fukuro shinai*. In a practice or a match (duelling) of that time, a practitioner usually used a wooden sword, but it was not uncommon for real swords to be used, which might occasionally result in wounds or death. With the invention of the non-painful and non-lethal *fukuro shinai* by Kamiizumi, practitioners of the school of Kamiizumi (the Shinkage-ryu School) could practice direct full-contact blows against each other, and were no longer limited to *sundome* (non-contact) blows.

Kamiizumi was the lord of Ohgo Castle in Kohzuke Province (present-day Gunma Prefecture). After losing a battle with the Hohjo Clan, Kamiizumi surrendered the castle. During his time with the Nagano Family, whom he served thereafter, he suffered misery due to the fall of castle. Eventually, he embarked on a training tour around all of Japan with his disciples, and mastered swordsmanship and the art of war. Kamiizumi was the master of three key origins of swordsmanship: the Nen-ryu, Shinto-ryu and Kage-ryu schools. His most important act was to extract *kimyo* (a secret distinct from other schools) from the Kage-ryu School and established the Shinkage School.

Specifically, *kimyo* means the techniques and theory known as *marobashi*. This is a smooth circular and free motion conducted according to an opponent's action without deviating to any of the four dimensions—*ken* (attack), *tai* (defence), *hyo* (front), *ri* (back)—and resembling a round ball rolling on a board in body, mind and sword (Ref. *Seiden Shinkage-ryu* by Toshinaga Yagyu). This marked a conversion from *setsunintou*, sword to kill people by overwhelming an opponent by power and speed; to *katsuninken*, sword to take advantage and control of opponent's attack (the terms *setsunintou* and *katsuninken* are derived from *Zen* words).

The time during which Kamiizumi lived (1508? – 1577?) was the middle of a turbulent warring period in the Age of Civil Wars. Why then did Kamiizumi dare to devise the *fukuro shinai* and the theory of *marobashi* in such times? From the age of his maturity to his later years, the production, distribution and use of guns increased in Japan and the gun played the major role on the battlefield. It is presumed that Kamiizumi was aware of the limitations of battles among individuals armed with the Japanese sword, and looked to a way of keeping swordsmanship alive in such times. The techniques and the theories created by Kamiizumi were handed down to the Hikitakage-ryu School and the Yagyu Shinkage-ryu School which were derived from the Shinkage-ryu School.

Kagetomo Hikita (1537? – 1605?) was one of the early disciples of Kamiizumi. Hikita served the Hosokawa Family. When he was on the verge of turning 60, Hikita asked for leave and left on a training tour (knight errantry) around all of Japan from 1595 to 1601. During his training tour, the Battle of Sekigahara—the biggest battle in Japanese history—took place in 1600. What drove Hikita in his golden years to go on a training tour around Japan in such turbulent times was a sense of crisis that the Shinkage-ryu School established by Kamiizumi had

split into several sects in which the instructions and the understanding differed among students.

According to *Hikita Bungoro Nyudo Seiunsai Kaikokuki*, which described the training tour of Hikita, he faced 24 opponents in matches during the training tour. The breakdown of weapons that the opponent used in the matches was: wooden sword 10 people; *fukuro shinai* 5 people; stick 2 people; cane 1 person; either a stick or a cane 1 person; and unknown weapons 5 people. No opponents used a real sword, and the majority of opponents used a wooden sword in the match. Furthermore, no description appeared in the book of Hikita killing or injuring an opponent or of he himself being injured.

The savage atmosphere that was seen in the matches of Musashi Miyamoto who walked across the provinces of Japan in later years was not felt in *Hikita Bungoro Nyudo Seiunsai Kaikokuki*. Of course, even a wooden sword has lethal potential and some of Hikita's opponents used a metal-reinforced wooden sword or a stick measuring 152 to 182 cm in length. Hikita's courage in fighting his opponents with a *fukuro shinai* measuring just 100 cm in length and his ability to gain victories in all the matches is deserving of admiration [1].

During Kamiizumi's tour, one opponent, Munetoshi (or Muneyoshi) Yagyū, who was the leading swordsman in the *Goki* (five provinces closely to the Emperor Home City Kyoto, an area to the south of Kyoto, Osaka and Nara prefectures), lost his match with Kamiizumi and became a disciple of Kamiizumi. Kamiizumi presented Munetoshi with a challenge to devise ways of achieving a state of *mutou-no-kurai*, and Munetoshi eventually reached that stage. *Mutou* means, in one aspect, a *jujutsu* technique in which one captures an armed opponent using one's bare hands. According to Heiho Kadensho, *mutou* means putting one's self at an advantage by utilizing timing and spacing with an opponent, even under an unfavourable situation in which an opponent uses a spear or *naginata*, in contrast to the defender's sword of normal length, or where an opponent uses a sword of normal length in contrast to the defender's knife.

It is a secret principle and the essence of the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū School that in a relative relationship with an opponent, the first step is to give scope to the opponent's force; and the second step is to take control of that force using a small weapon or even with one's bare hands. Paradoxically, the Shinkage-ryū School took the position that masters such as Kamiizumi, Hikita and Munetoshi Yagyū—who had reached a state of *mutou-no-kurai*—could fight

sufficiently well with just a *fukuro shinai*—regardless of how strong the opponent's weapon was.

A son of Munetoshi, Munenori Yagyū (the author of the *Heiho Kadensho*) who served the Tokugawa Family as a sword instructor, applied the concept of *setsunintou* and *katsuninken* to politics in his understanding. Force is violence, and a weapon is an unfortunate and ominous instrument in the first place (the concept of *setsunintou*). However, Munenori developed a theory that stated that killing a bad person (*setsunintou*) could save the lives of many people (*katsuninken*). In other words, the use of a weapon for building peace changes the unfortunate and ominous *setsunintou* into *katsuninken*. His way of thinking was reflected during the reign of Iemitsu Tokugawa, the third shogun of the Tokugawa Family, who adored Munenori as a mentor or father figure.

The foundation of the Tokugawa shogunate, which lasted for 260 years, was said to be established during the reign of Iemitsu, to which the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū School made a substantial contribution. Iemitsu frequently held cavalry battle games called *shinai-uchi* in the fields near Edo as training for samurai. Samurai who attended *shinai-uchi* training used a *fukuro shinai* as a weapon, not a sword or a wooden sword. It is presumed that *shinai-uchi* were held to release the pent-up energy (violence) of *samurai*. However, Iemitsu's plan was actually to limit the weapons that could be used in offensive and violent scenes to the *fukuro shinai*, which was a symbol of peace.

#### IMPROVEMENT IN PROTECTIVE ARMOUR AND ESTABLISHMENT OF SHINAI UCHIKOMI GEIKO IN THE JIKISHINKAGE-RYU SCHOOL

Based on the findings of the research into the history of swordplay, training armour was used in the late 1600s. However, this armour was fairly primary the face guard (*men*) made of bamboo strips not metal strips, and there was no padded cap inside—it was simply placed on the head. In the same manner, the hand and forearm protector (*kote*) was created based on the glove for the right hand that was used in Japanese archery (*yugake*). Those were also in a primary form, and had the purpose of minimizing injury during practice with wooden swords [2].

Sword practice at that time consisted mainly of practicing forms (*kata*) and, except for the schools such as the Shinkage-ryū School that used *fukuro shinai*, most schools used wooden swords and practitioners practiced *sundome* (non-contact) blows. Additionally, by virtue of the stable feudal system, opportunities to fight in the battlefield had decreased in the extreme,

which reduced the fighting spirit of samurai. Thus swordplay came to respect the beauty of style, including accomplished form and elegant action, which was called *kaho*.

In the 1710s, Mitsunori Yamada and his son Kunisato Naganuma, who belonged to the Jikishinkage-ryu School—which was part of the lineage of the Shinkage-ryu school, improved the training armour to depart from the *kaho* trend and establish sword training that was genuinely useful and effective. The *men* was fitted with a padded cap and the *dou* was made from bamboo based on battle armour (*takegusoku*). With a *fukuro shinai* of 3 feet (91 cm) in length added, *shinai uchikomi geiko* was established so that practitioners could make full contact blows [2]. In other words, they sought to replicate battle while freeing practitioners from concerns about injury while allowing the aggressiveness and violence inherent in swordplay, and also to attain the purpose of training for educating *samurai*.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF SHINAI UCHIKOMI GEIKO

In the 1750s, *shinai uchikomi geiko* that used training armour—*men*, *kote* and *takegusoku*—was encouraged also in the Nakanishiha Itto-ryu School. Each school in the domain started to adopt the practice of disciplinary training using training armour. In the 1780s, Sadanobu Matsudaira, the lord of the Shirakawa Domain (later *roju*—the shogun’s council of elders), urged the inclusion of elements of actual battle and discipline in all martial arts including sword and spear. Sadanobu ordered the domain to do so saying “The logical school is popular in recent swordplay as is the case with *Zen*. However, swordplay is supposed to study victory or defeat in the course of nature by striking each other without thinking logically. We should learn from schools teaching the art of the spear and the swordplay involving thrusting and striking while wearing training armour.”

Around the same time, Yasuchika Matsudaira, who was the lord of the Mimasaka/Tsuyama Domain and had a deep friendship with Sadanobu, unified the equipment to be used in sword and spear training. Students in swordsmanship schools were required to wear *men* and *kote* and use a *fukuro shinai* regardless of the school. Likewise, students in spearman-ship were required to wear *men*, *kote* and *takegusoku* (*dou*), and use a *tanpoyari* (spear with a cotton or leather tip stuffed with crumpled cotton) that was made by each school. Yasuchika encouraged matches with other schools inside and outside the domain and integrated the schools based on the results of

the matches (a school whose winning percentage fell below 50% was disbanded).

The background to the use of such disciplinary training and the encouragement of matches with other schools in the Shirakawa and Tsuyama domains was that both domains were relatives of the Tokugawa Family (*Shinpan*), although they were located on opposite sides of Japan, and geographically stood at the forefront in confronting outside feudal lords of powerful domains (Tozama Yuhan). Therefore, both domains placed importance on these policies as measures to educate *samurai*.

The encouragement of *shinai uchikomi geiko* missed the original purpose (secure the elements of actual battle and disciplinary training) over the course of time, which increased the number of those who participated simply seeking the amusement and fun of the swordplay wearing training armour. That was a remote cause of swordplay uniting with competition performances in the later times [3].

After the establishment of the feudal system, training tours around the country (knight errantry) or matches with other schools were prohibited in public because they might cause trouble. However, from the 1790s onwards, some people went on training tours pretending to go on pilgrimages to places such as Ise or Konpira shrine, and positively exchanged information on sword techniques and how to make training armour. In the 1830s, the training armour had a close performance to that of the today’s armour, and a *shinai* or called *wari-shinai*, was employed that was made of a large piece of bamboo split into 4 or 5 parts, nearly the same as today’s *shinai*.

A particularly strong fighter was Susumu Ohishi, who was a feudal retainer of the Yanagawa Domain in Chikugo. Standing 2.12 m tall, Susumu was a master of the spear, and he would come uninvited to training halls in Edo and defeat everyone in sight using a *naga-shinai* of 5 feet 3 inches (about 161 cm) in length. Therefore, each training hall had a *naga-shinai* as a countermeasure when fighting against Ohishi. Additionally, foot movements called *okuri-ashi* or *fumikomi-ashi* (stepping-in) were frequently used that had the same footwork as the foot movements used in today’s *kendo*.

As seen from the above, although *shinai uchikomi geiko* was developed to attain the elements of real battle and disciplinary training in the beginning, it improved to using nearly the same equipment and techniques as today’s *kendo* and united the technique that deviated from a real battle with the use of sword,

in other words, competitive techniques (a major example being *fumikomi-ashi*).

Subsequently throughout the 1850s, the techniques of swordplay were divided into two types; techniques to be used in *kata* or a fight with a real sword, and techniques for competition. As a major example, we note Shusaku Chiba, who was the founder of the Hokushin Itto-ryu School (lineage of the Nakanishiha Itto-ryu School). Shusaku systematized techniques unique to swordplay using a *wari-shi-nai*, including *fumikomi-ashi* stepping, and used them separately from the techniques for *kata* or fighting with a real sword.

On the other hand, Nobutomo Odani who belonged to the Jikishinkage-ryu School and served as a chief of the *shogunate* military academy (Bakufu Kobusho) aimed to find a compromise between the elements of real battle and disciplinary training and the equipment and techniques unique to the swordplay with the use of a *shinai*. As a representative example of his efforts, Odani set the length of *shinai* as 3 feet 8 inches (about 115 cm) as a rule at the academy, which was nearly the same length as the *shinai* used in today's *kendo* of 3 feet 9 inches (about 118 cm).

Judging from the equipment and the technique, *kendo* had already been provided with the completeness and the same content as today's *kendo* by the end of the Edo period. It can be said that *kendo* is a physical exercise culture in that it avoids deviation from the elements of real battle and disciplinary training as far as possible, while allowing the aggressiveness and violence inherent in swordsmanship to a certain extent and, at the same time, generates and passes on the competitive techniques unique to swordplay using a *shinai*. These characteristics of *kendo* have allowed it to be passed down until today as a measure for recreation or education based on the safety secured from the use of training armour and a *shinai*.

### EXAMPLES OF JUJUTSU, JUDO AND HOJOJUTSU (ART OF THE ARRESTING ROPE)

Since the area of my research is *kendo*, I have given long description of *kendo*. I will now introduce some examples of *jujutsu*, *judo* and *hojojutsu* in the following limited space.

The techniques of *jujutsu* and *judo* in Japan were originally derived from the techniques of grappling with an opponent in battle whilst wearing armour. Among the techniques of grappling, the art of grappling (so-called *katamewaza*, including holding down, choking and joint-locking) is effective in one-on-one fighting

on the battlefield, but not always effective for a fight against numerous opponents. Rather, throwing or striking and kicking might be more effective in that case. Striking and kicking techniques may have killing power, but the main purpose of their use is to make an opponent wince once when they are used in fighting or the art of self-defence.

The art of grappling, particularly choking, likewise has killing power—depending on the manner of use; however, it is an effective technique to exercise temporal control over an opponent who resorts to force. As seen from the above, it is not an exaggeration to say that most techniques used in *jujutsu* and *judo* consist of those that exert temporal control over an opponent or that make an opponent wince.

*Jujutsu* and *judo* have had the thoughts of killing manner (*sappou*) and restoring manner (*kappou*) since old times. Striking and kicking techniques are called *sappou* (killing manner), as they can deliver a blow to vital parts that nearly correspond to the meridians in Oriental medicine (*keiraku*). By contrast, although it involves vital parts in a similar manner, the manner of restoring an opponent is called *kappou* [4].

Fainting caused by choking, known as *ochi*, is loss of consciousness caused by transient functional disorder. During a *judo* match, after an umpire declares the conclusion of a match, prompt treatment helps quicken the natural awaking from *ochi*, which is commonly known as “resuscitation” (*katsu*). *Kappou*, which has been inherited by *jujutsu*, is said to have a wide variety of contents. *Kappou* as used in today's *judo* has several types of restoring breathing that are used to aid recovery from fainting caused mainly from choking, and there are several types of restoration techniques for testicles that have been pushed up into the abdominal cavity by kicking them [5].

The Takenouchi-ryu School is one of the oldest schools of *jujutsu* in Japan, and was formally known as Takenouchi-ryu Jujutsu Koshinomawari Kogusoku, which was a comprehensive martial art with grappling with an opponent in the Age of Civil Wars called “*torite koshinomawari kogusoku*” as a core and said to be the origin of *jujutsu* (Ref. Website of Old Martial Arts of Japan). As you can see in demonstrations by the Takenouchi School, the style employed *kappou* and *hojojutsu* in addition to the techniques of *jujutsu*. Furthermore, the knots and lashings used are designed to permit the easy release of an opponent.

*Hojojutsu* is said to be come from China along with arresting tools in the middle of the 1500s. The art was improved and developed during the course of its

dissemination to various places in Japan, and handed down, and dozens of schools were derived over time. The principle of the art in each school is based on *hajakensho* (manifest the correct path by destroying false doctrine). A truncheon (*jitte*) is likened to the sharp sword that can drive off Satan (Goma no Riken) that is held in the right hand of Acala (Fudo Myoo), and the arresting rope to a rope for binding evil and rescuing people (Fudo no Kensaku) that is held in the left hand of Acala.

In the Edo period, use of an arresting rope was deemed to be an act of divine mind. The art of the arresting rope has two types: one is called *haya-nawa*, and the other is called *hon-nawa*. *Haya-nawa* means to capture a criminal at the time of arrest by winding the rope around a wrist or the neck to overcome resistance and prevent escape on a temporary basis. The technique needs to be completed in as short time as 10 seconds for both winding and releasing, efficiently and without causing injury or neuropathy.

*Haya-nawa* uses no knots after winding the rope around a subject in contrast to *hon-nawa*. This was intended to avoid disgracing a suspect by tying her/him at the time, when whether the suspect was a real culprit had not as yet been determined, and to avoid the possibility of dispute. *Hon-nawa* means to tie a criminal with a rope so that she/he cannot free her/himself from a rope, taking into account her/his gender, position, occupation, circumstances and other conditions. There were hundreds of types of

*hon-nawa* from dozens of schools [6]. In any case, speed—without causing injury or neuropathy and speed of easy release—are noted as characteristics of the Japanese art of *Hojojutsu*.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned above, Japanese martial arts and military arts have, since the late Muromachi period inherited the undercurrent spirits and thoughts of *set-sunintou*, *katsuninken* that has been handed down by the Shinkage-ryu School. That can be found in the following:

- 1) The thoughts and the techniques of the Shinkage-ryu School is to give scope to an opponent's attack (force) as a first step and to take control over this force by *muto-no-kurai*;
- 2) Sublimate and inherit aggressiveness and violence for educational purposes by securing safety through the use of a *shinai* and training armour (examples of swordplay and *kendo*); and
- 3) Technical composition aiming to take control of an attack or violence temporarily, rather than to deliver a death blow (examples of *jujutsu*, *judo* and *hojojutsu*).

I hope that my opinions will provide some useful references to the argument in the Congress.

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