

The History and Background of Japanese Kendo Kata

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Translated and added to by Robert Stroud

In the early history of Japanese swordsmanship dogu or kendo armor had not yet been developed. Kenjutsu matches of that time were with real swords or bokutoh. Because of this a swordsman had to risk his life for each match. Everytime a swordsman entered a match he either lived or died.

The early methods of kendo practice consisted only of kata. Therefore each kenjutsu school or ryu-ha created a unique set of kata that distinguished it from other ryu. Every ryu-ha was proud of their particular kata's creator. The core or main sword techniques (toh ho) were kept extremely secret. Each ryu-ha did not allow outsiders to observe these core techniques. Also a ryu-ha's own students were not taught these secret techniques until they had reached a high enough level of skill.

Gradually shinai and dogu were developed so that kenshi (swordsmen) could use them for uchi tachi or attacking practice. But even then kata mastery was still considered to be the first step of kendo training. Students needed to develop their techniques with kata practice first. And only then could they enter shiai geiko or free fighting match practice.

Up until the end of the Edo era (the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate) many outstanding experts or genius swordsmen mastered kendo through their kata training.

The Creation of Modern Kendo Kata:

The Japanese police force first established a unified system of kendo kata by combining various traditional sword schools or Sho Ryu Ha. This was referred to as Keishicho Gekken Kata or Police Department Attacking Motion Kendo Kata.

Kenjutsu Era:

Meiji 13, 1880 Outstanding kenshi, from different ryu ha were hired by the police in order to standardize the instruction of kata and develop a new kata system. By 1886 ten Kata had been created based on different kata of traditional ryu ha.

Meiji 28, 1895 Dai Nihon Butokukai (Great Japan Martial Virtues Association) established.

Meiji 32, 1899 Butokuden (Kyoto, Okazaki area) built.

Meiji 39, 1906 Butokukai unified kenjutsu ryu ha because kendo had been introduced as a subject for the public school system. Dai Nihon Butokukai Kendo Kata. At that time three kamae were established, Gedan no kamae (person), Chudan no kamae (earth) and Jodan no kamae (sky).

Ryu Ha Major Sensei

Shinto Munen Ryu Watanabe, Noboru

Shinto Munen Ryu Shibae, Umpachiro

Musashi Ryu Mihashi, Kanichiro

Jikishin Kage Ryu Tokuno, Kanshiro

Kyoshin Mechi Ryu Sakabe, Daisaku

Shinto Munen Ryu Negishi, Shigoro

Jikishin Kage Ryu Abe, Morie

Kendo Era:

Meiji 44, 1911 Kendo became a junior high school subject. Dai Nihon Butokukai started the Butoku Gakkou school. This helped increase the growth of kendo. Therefore

a standard kata set which did not favor any one particular ryu was needed for kendo instruction. The Mombusho, the Japanese Ministry of Education, requested to be part of the committee to establish kata throughout Japan. Butokukai established a kendo kata research committee, to draft a standard, at the same time. It was composed of 23 experts from various ryu-ha.

Taisho 1, 1912 Dai Nihon Teikoku Kendo Kata or Great Imperial Japan Kendo Kata October completed. It consisted of 7 tachi long sword forms and 3 kotachi short sword forms.

Taisho 16, 1917 Additional kendo kata material added to standard by Naito, Takaji; Takano Sasaburo; Kadono, Tadashi; Nakayama, Hakudo and Minatobe, Kuniharu. Showa 8, 1933 With more additions to the original standard the material was finalized.

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