

## CONTRIBUTOR

Yasuhiro Sakaue is a Professor in the Graduate School of Social Sciences at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo. He has published widely on the history and sociology of sport in Japan. His most recent book is *Showa tenno to supotsu – gyokutai no kindaishi* [The Showa Emperor and Sports – A Modern History of the Imperial Presence, *Yoshikawa kobunkan*, 2016]. He has written extensively on the modern history of Japanese martial arts and is editor of the book *Umi o watatta jujutsu to judo – Nihon budo no dainamizumu* [Jujutsu and Judo Overseas – The Dynamism of Japanese Budo, *Seikyusha*, 2010].

# THE HISTORICAL CREATION OF KENDO'S SELF-IMAGE FROM 1895 TO 1942 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AN INVENTED TRADITION YASUHIRO SAKAUE

## DOI

10.18573/mas.66

## KEYWORDS

Swordsmanship, Kendo, Self-Image, Invented Tradition

## CITATION

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 2018. 'The Historical Creation of Kendo's Self-Image from 1895 to 1942: A Critical Analysis of an Invented Tradition'. *Martial Arts Studies* 6, 10-26. doi.org/10.18573/mas.66

## ABSTRACT

The self-image of kendo (Japanese swordsmanship) in modern times is a complicated historical fabrication and an 'invented tradition' [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983] involving 'ethno-symbolism' [Smith 2009] relating to images and ideas of history, heritage, and cultural identity in modern Japan. This means that, despite the high current value and status of Japanese swordsmanship, its cultural identity is shot through with paradoxes and contradictions. This article aims to examine the formation of this self-image through the invention of traditions, and how swordsmanship came to be bound by these inventions. There are numerous components to the invented traditions of Japanese swordsmanship, but this article will focus on three key dimensions: (1) how the tradition was reconstructed, accompanied by the name change from *kenjutsu* or *gekiken/gekken* to *kendo*; (2) the fabrication of historical facts around methods for swordsmanship competition; and (3) the recasting of 'levels of mastery' in supposedly traditional styles of teaching and learning swordsmanship. In conclusion, the article reflects on the possibility of freedom from such constraints in the future and explores the question of possible further changes in the future of kendo.

## INTRODUCTION

Kendo literally means 'the way of the sword', but in the past, Japanese swordsmanship has been known as *kenpo* and *kenjutsu*.<sup>1</sup> Swordsmanship was a necessity for the samurai class in the Tokugawa period (1603-1867), and the approximately 250 clans nationwide practiced various schools of swordsmanship and established teachers to provide instruction as part of the Tokugawa shogunate's policies for encouraging literary and military arts. The number of swordsmanship schools grew to more than 600 by 1867 [Imamura 1967: 342].

Training methods in swordsmanship included two elements: *kata* (predetermined patterns of movement) using wooden swords and practice with *shinai* (bamboo swords) and other equipment. Towards the end of the Tokugawa period, this kind of equipment became mainstream and started to be known as *gekiken* or *gekken*. This growth in shared kinds of relatively safe training equipment helped to reduce the secretive and closed character of schools, and even made it possible for matches to take place among different schools.

With the abolition of the samurai class following the fall of the shogunate in 1868, swordsmanship inevitably underwent major changes, especially in relation to the attempt to establish a modern state based on the Western model. This resulted in some clan teachers losing their jobs. As the political and social environments witnessed reforms, some aspects of the swordsmanship tradition were discarded while others were adapted and continued. Crucially, some historical facts were even fabricated. This means that the self-image of swordsmanship in modern times is a complicated historical fabrication and an 'invented tradition' [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983] involving 'ethno-symbolism' [Smith 2009] relating to images and ideas of history, heritage, and cultural identity in modern Japan. This means that, despite the high current value and status of Japanese swordsmanship, its cultural identity is rife with paradoxes and contradictions.

This article re-examines the ways that this self-image has been formulated in modern times. Its premise is that current understandings of martial arts histories may be coloured by 'invented traditions', and that 'mytho-histories', invented in modern times, should be subject to academic scrutiny [Bowman 2016: 926; Bowman and Judkins 2016: 1]. However, historical research into Japanese swordsmanship that challenges dominant myths can be 'taboo'. Examples are limited to studies such as those by Otsuka [1995], Sakaue [1998], Sogawa

[2015] and Bennett [2015].<sup>2</sup> This is because to claim that an ostensible tradition is actually more recently invented involves revealing that past 'memories' have been ideologically overwritten. Hence, this present study will at times be at odds with established 'authoritative' accounts of the history and culture of swordsmanship.

A key problem is that martial arts such as kendo have sometimes been regarded as at least partly 'responsible' for World War II. This claim was made from August 1947 to March 1948, for instance, by the authorities of the American occupation forces.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this claim, 1,219 executives of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai (Great Japan Martial Virtue Society) were removed from office because they were regarded as having been 'tools of militarism' during the Second World War. Around the same time period, in January 1946, 1,927 martial arts teachers were removed from their roles in secondary schools, 887 of whom had been swordsmanship teachers [Sakaue 2009: 244]. It is perhaps because of this humiliating experience, and of the laying of 'blame' for the War at the feet of these martial arts, that martial arts historians have tended to avoid such subjects.

There are numerous components to the invented traditions of Japanese swordsmanship, but this article will focus on three key dimensions. The first is the matter of how the facts of tradition were reconstructed, accompanied by the change of name from *kenjutsu* or *gekiken/gekken* to *kendo*. The second is the fabrication of historical facts around methods for swordsmanship competition. Finally, the third is the recasting of 'levels of mastery' in supposedly traditional styles of teaching and learning swordsmanship. There are two principal reasons for selecting these three areas. The first is that, unlike the reconstruction, fabrication, or recasting that can be seen in the creation of other traditions, they reveal patterns that help us further understand the dynamism and diversity of created traditions in modern Japan. Second, these matters continue to have a strong impact on kendo to this day.

Bennett's [2015] monograph provides the most detailed historical research on kendo to date. He attempts to push the understanding that kendo is an invented tradition into wider cultural and academic

1 When Romanizing Japanese words, a macron is sometimes used to indicate a long vowel sound: kendo is written as 'kendō', budo as 'budō', etc., but I have eschewed the use of diacritics in this paper since many of these words are already established in English usage. Note also that given names precede surnames, according to Western (rather than Japanese) convention.

2 Inoue [1998, 2004] gives examples of research that treats judo as an invented tradition. However, it was publicly acknowledged by Jigoro Kano (to his credit) that judo is an invented tradition. In the case of judo, unlike kendo, such issues as the connection with the jujutsu of the pre-modern era [Nakajima 2017] and jujutsu being first to spread overseas [Sakaue 2010] are issues in critical research.

3 Although the postwar occupation of Japan's main islands was officially conducted under the auspices of the Allied Powers, it was largely controlled by General Douglas MacArthur and his subordinates at General Headquarters (GHQ) in Tokyo. The occupation of Japan's main islands lasted until April 1952. The American occupation of the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa) continued until May 1972 and was administered separately.

consciousness and discussion. However, Bennett's work approaches the evolution of kendo exclusively in terms of the evolution of its cultural and political meanings from a 'macro-level' standpoint; it does not provide a 'micro-level' treatment of the invented traditions in quite the ways that this article seeks to.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this article will not examine the macro-level factors of nationalism and political ideology that determined the evolution of kendo; rather, it will focus on the 'internal world' of swordsmanship and enquire into the factors that determined its values and cultural content. In other words, this article aims to present an overview of how the world of swordsmanship was remade after the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate, as well as to offer insight into its internal state of affairs (Section 1). Sections 2-4 then examine the formation of kendo's self-image through invented traditions and how swordsmanship came to be bound by them. The final section considers the possibility of future freedom from such constraints and explores possible further changes in kendo's future (Section 5).

The primary period dealt with in this paper begins with the establishment of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai in April 1895 and ends with the revamping of that organization as an auxiliary organization of the government in March 1942 in response to World War II.

## 1 REORGANIZATION OF THE WORLD OF SWORDSMANSHIP BY THE DAI-NIPPON BUTOKUKAI

### 1.1. *The Establishment of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai*

It is helpful to begin with an explanation of the reorganisation of the world of swordsmanship effected by the actions of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai (hereafter referred to as 'Butokukai').

The establishment of the Butokukai in 1895 was an attempt to formalise, institutionalise, and encourage the martial arts that were regarded as having been established 1,100 years ago by the emperor Kanmu. The source of the name 'Butokukai' derives from a sacred symbol in the name of a martial arts hall that was established in Heiankyō (ancient Kyoto), the Butokuden. The Butokukai rebuilt the Butokuden Hall and brought in a newly created ritual called the *Butokusai*. The purpose of this was to revere the virtues of the emperor Kanmu, to call to mind patriotism for the country, to demonstrate martial arts by gathering martial artists from across the country, and to preserve and encourage the martial arts.

4 For critical reviews of this book, see Molle [2016] and Bowman [2017].

This was not merely nostalgia. This was a historical context characterised by anxiety and complex emotions around Japan's relations to powerful western nations, none of which had been ameliorated by the country's wars with China and Russia (1894-1895 and 1904-1905). So, the Butokukai's efforts and activities undoubtedly had actual military and political significance. This can be seen clearly in the fact that the Butokukai at the time encouraged shooting, horsemanship, bayonet practice, swordsmanship, jujutsu, swimming, and rowing. It also categorized archery and use of the spear as martial arts worth preserving [Sakaue 1989: 89-92].

The establishment of the Butokukai and its rapid growth are symbolic of the dramatic changes that occurred in Japanese culture at the time. The revision of the treaty with the UK and the scrapping of extraterritoriality; the exhilaration following Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95); and the forced return of Chinese territory captured during the war due to Russian, German, and French pressure drove the extolling of Japanese identity [Pyle 1969: 163-187] and caused a reassessment of traditional Japanese culture such as the martial arts [Sakaue 2001: 95-100], which had earlier been abandoned due to rapid westernization after the Meiji restoration.

The Butokukai made imperial family member Akihito Komatsunomiya, the commander in chief of the Japanese army who led Japan to victory in the Russo-Japanese War, president of the organization, and also gave official cabinet roles to other well-known politicians. Moreover, governors throughout the country were appointed as heads of local branches while police were mobilized to collect 'membership fees', which were essentially treated as a local tax. All of this enabled the institution to capture and develop expansive social authority while vastly inflating its membership numbers. By May 1910, membership had grown to 1,651,736, although the vast majority of these members were not practitioners of the martial arts.

These facts cannot be understood outside their historical context. After reconstructing the Butokuden in Kyoto in 1899, the Butokukai built similar Butokuden halls in the branches of each prefecture [Sakaue 1989: 65-96].<sup>5</sup>

5 Denis Gainty [2013] approaches the Butokukai as an example of an embodied intersection of self and society and argues that the local bodies of Butokukai members from 1895 to 1912 were not only means to experience national identity and participate in the work of the state but also sources of great power in defining those experiences and shaping those collectives. He also emphasizes the role of martial arts as a traditional Japanese local body practice, claiming that it should not be considered an 'invented tradition' intended to create and shape a modern populace in the period [Gainty 2013]. Note, however, that, whereas Gainty is focused on the Meiji era, my argument is that kendo emerges as a powerful invented tradition during the 1920s and 1930s, and that the various titles (*shogo*) and ranking system (*dan'i seido*) must be understood in this context.

### 1.2. The System of Titles

From the perspective of the martial arts, this signified the emergence of a powerful support organization that was part of the 'story of the state'. The local Butokuden functioned as places for martial artists nationwide to show off the martial arts of the school to which they belonged. Among these, the Butokuden in Kyoto held a large demonstration tournament in May each year, attracting martial artists from throughout Japan. In 1910, the number of participants was as high as 1,620, of whom 979 (60%) were swordsmen [Otsuka 1994: 42].

This tournament was used not only to display kendo abilities; it was also a forum in which skill was judged. Starting in 1895, those recognised as having outstanding skills were awarded the title of *seirenscho* (changed to *renshi* in 1933). By May 1921, 800 titles had been given for kendo, 360 for jujutsu, 257 for archery, 43 for iai, 38 for sojutsu (spear), 30 for swimming, 12 for the naginata, and 43 for various other arts [Nakamura 1994: 32]. Subsequently, after 1903, the titles of *hanshi* and *kyoshi* were also awarded.

The number of titles awarded to swordsmen is shown in Table 1. Those receiving these three titles formed a pyramid in the world of swordsmen, first receiving the title of *seirenscho* in the strict three-level system followed by elevations to *kyoshi* and *hanshi*. The uppermost title of *hanshi* generally required practice in the martial arts for forty or more years after becoming an adult and was awarded to fewer than thirty practitioners. These title holders also received a pension. The pension was awarded because many martial artists at the time lived in financially 'miserable circumstances'. However, the pension was discontinued in July 1921 [Butokukai 1936a].

	Hanshi	Kyoshi	Seirenscho, Renshi
May 1921	16	101	524
Jan 1930	28	173	1,424
May 1934	19	307	2,594
Mar 1937	21	416	2,688
Mar 1941	25	777	4,776
Mar 1942	27	914	5,487

**Table 1:** The number of titles awarded to swordsmen. [Source: Murakami 1921: 1-120; Kunaisho 1930: 204-321; Kunaisho 1934: 737-793; Butokukai 1937, 1941a; Nakamura 1985: 324]

The judging to determine these titles was initially carried out by a three-person selection committee made up of Kunimichi Kitagaki (baron, former president of Butokukai, and *Muto* school swordsman), Nobori Watanabe (viscount, awarded the title of *hanshi* in May 1903, and *Shintomunen* school swordsman), and Jigoro Kano (principal of Tokyo Higher Normal School, and Kodokan director, awarded the title of *hanshi* in May 1905). These three were also members of the Butokukai's Conference Committee. However, this selection committee was expanded in September 1914, with selections made by each type of martial art. Actual selection was done by the Butokukai headquarters surveying, considering, and submitting conclusions in advance, with the selection committee using that information as a reference in making determinations upon viewing the skills displayed at the demonstration tournaments [Butokukai 1936a].

This system of titles began to function as a unified certification system on a nationwide level. The system of titles by Butokukai joined the traditional skills certification systems in place at each school, with demand for the new system growing in inverse proportion to the declining demand for the old. The authority of the new system also grew. Thus, the Butokukai was successful in organizing leading swordsmen from across the country (though only the swordsmen were overseen across the board by the Butokukai; other organizations existed for other martial arts, such as Kodokan for jujutsu and Dai-Nippon Kyudokai for archery, each with its own unique ranking system).

In this manner, those with the *hanshi* and *kyoshi* ranks sat at the top of the swordsmanship pyramid and attained hegemony.

### 1.3. The System of Ranks

The system of ranks, starting with 1<sup>st</sup> dan and going through to 10<sup>th</sup> dan, began in 1917. Ranks above 5<sup>th</sup> dan were recognized from June 1937. Its implementation was decided by *hanshi* and *kyoshi*. In letters to 102 *hanshi* and *kyoshi*, Butokukai headquarters asked about whether to institute a ranking system – 99 respondents were in favour and only three opposed. Based on this response, the Butokukai made the decision to implement the system [Nakamura 1985: 322]. In doing so, *hanshi* and *kyoshi* became the appointed judges of the skills of kendo practitioners. In May 1921, 10 out of 47 prefectures in the country had no *hanshi* or *kyoshi*; by March 1937, however, there were no prefectures without *hanshi* or *kyoshi* [Murakami 1921: 1-31; Butokukai 1937]. This enabled each prefecture to implement rank examinations.<sup>6</sup>

6 The rules of 1918 allowed for up to two out of three judges to be *seirenscho*, while the 1926 rules also allowed 4<sup>th</sup> dan or higher to be judges. In addition, there was a method of acquiring a rank by written judgement through application to the Butokukai headquarters with recommendation from judges [Nakamura 1985: 338, 347, 349-351].

As can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3, particularly after the 1930s, the number of swordsmen that had acquired ranks increased, and the base of the swordsmanship pyramid began to rapidly expand.<sup>7</sup> Hanshi and kyoshi had not only symbolic authority but the authority of rankings, through which it became possible for them to control the technical details of swordsmanship. In addition, it became a new source of funding via examination fees.

Rank examinations were not only tests of skill but also of writing. After 1917, 'proper knowledge' was clarified as part of rank examinations for swordsmanship, and all practitioners were required to communicate that knowledge. The correct answers required for the written examinations were on such subjects as the proper ideals and ideology for swordsmanship, compiled in the created traditions of the modern era. The three created traditions discussed in the following sections are typical of this knowledge and produced strong, unshakeable justifications for, in, and through the system of rank examinations.

#### 1.4. A Lack of Competitive Tournaments

The demonstration tournaments of the Butokukai were not competitive events intended to determine a champion. Opportunities for martial artists from across the country to demonstrate their skills only occurred once in the tournament and are estimated to have lasted no longer than ten minutes [Sakaue 1998: 167]. Demonstrations of swordsmanship were given in pairs using a three-point system, and the results did not in themselves necessarily determine titles. In other words, winning or losing at the tournament was not seen as emblematic of the true skills of swordsmen, though it is thought that they did conform with the notions of hanshi and kyoshi at the top of the world of swordsmanship. For example, the Butokukai headquarters decided to do away with competitive demonstration tournaments in 1908. That is, they undertook no judging and made no determinations of wins or losses. Indeed, when it was decided that matches between hanshi and kyoshi would be determined by the three-point system, passionate opposition arose, with participants deciding to boycott the tournament. Aside from showing their disdain for such a system, this can be understood as a sign that no competitive forum for swordsmen to show off their skills as yet existed [Sakaue 1998: 173-177].

Thus, in the absence of a new competitive forum to attract swordsmanship enthusiasts, the Butokukai strove to establish the view that 'swordsmanship is not a competitive sport'. Hence, this sword tradition became overwhelmingly influential. The Butokukai itself had never held a championship competition to determine a nationwide champion. Championship tournaments at the national level were held three times prior to World War II, though these were

Year	Number
1926	2,352
1930	9,179
1933	19,755
1934	25,066
1935	31,135
1936	38,144
1937	47,961
1938	56,399
1939	70,020
1940	86,426
1941	108,866
1942	139,693

**Table 2 (left):**

*The number of swordsmanship rank holders.* [Source: Butokukai 1941b: 5; Nakamura 1985: 324]

**Table 3 (below):**

*The constitution of swordsmanship rank holders in 1932 and 1942.* [Source: Butokukai 1932: 6; Nakamura 1985: 324]

Rank	1932	1942
10	—	0
9	—	7
8	—	17
7	—	106
6	—	356
5	339	3,682
4	797	7,173
3	1,584	12,929
2	5,199	36,994
1	11,836	79,339

<sup>7</sup> Starting in March 1934, attaining a rank of 5<sup>th</sup> dan or higher was made a new condition for becoming a kyoshi, which systematized the relationship between titles and ranks [Nakamura 1985: 351].



all national celebrations related to the imperial household and were held with Emperor Hirohito in attendance [Sakaue 1998: 184, 193; Sakaue 2016: 195-196, 205-207]. In swordsmanship, titles and ranks had more authority than tournament results, and the pyramids of titles and ranks were viewed as demonstrating the skill of practitioners of swordsmanship.

Thus, the Butokukai continued to take a negative view of competition-based swordsmanship, though at the same time it was swordsmen in universities and high schools who took the lead roles in sponsoring competitive tournaments [Otsuka 1995: 47-55, 60-64]. However, the Butokukai's youth demonstration tournaments started in 1899 for those below the age of 25, and team competitions began in 1920, with teams competing to win a flag in a tournament-style system.

### *1.5. Reorganization of Principles, Ideology, Martial Arts Schools, and Incorporation into School Curricula*

I wish to suggest that the above changes in fact constituted a reorganization of the principles and ideology of swordsmanship – within the Dai-Nippon Butokukai organization, among its individual swordsmen, and in particular among those swordsmen who fervently wished for the adoption of swordsmanship into the curricula of elementary and secondary schools. The main strategy adopted by the central figures was the submission of a bill to the Imperial Diet and to force the government to implement it. Already by 1879, the police were practicing swordsmanship as well as jujutsu and had hired swordsmen as instructors. By further incorporating swordsmanship into school curricula, they solidified the continuation of swordsmanship into the next generation and attempted to develop employment possibilities and prospects in the field. In the process, new principles and a new ideology for swordsmanship were created [Sakaue 1989: 103-107; Sakaue 2013: 26-43].

In addition, swordsmen wishing for the incorporation of swordsmanship into school curricula demanded that the Butokukai unify the kata and naming conventions to be used in order to establish a nationwide unified method of swordsmanship instruction as required by the Ministry of Education [Sakaue 1989: 104-105]. The Butokukai heard the demands of these swordsmen and, with the passage of the bill in the Imperial Diet, as well as the decision to adopt swordsmanship as an elective class in the curricula of secondary schools from 1911, an investigation committee of five hanshi and twenty kyoshi was created and the Dai Nippon Teikoku Kendo Kata (10 offensive patterns of movement using a wooden sword) were re-established [Nakamura 1994: 117-126; see also Butokukai 1936c].

The standardised kata enabled the unification of the schools of swordsmanship. They were created as a nationwide unified method of instruction, yet they meant neither the actual dissolution of schools nor their consolidation. Indeed, the standardisation provoked passionate reactions when imposed by the Butokukai. The same happened at a different time when unified kata were instituted in archery and naginata: the standardisation was viewed by some as a rejection of traditional techniques handed down by various schools. But the archery kata were revised and those opposed to the naginata kata were forced out of their positions and silenced [Irie 1976: 59-63; Nakamura 2004: 18-19]. However, in swordsmanship, the use of standardised bamboo swords in practice and in competitions was already commonplace and the importance of kata was comparatively minimal, which is perhaps why there was less resistance across swordsmanship schools than in archery and naginata schools.

In 1911, swordsmanship in secondary schools was legalised. By 1924, 720 schools (79%) taught swordsmanship in physical education classes and 102 schools (11%) taught it in extracurricular classes. There were only 88 schools (10%) that did not teach swordsmanship. In addition to advocating the adoption of swordsmanship in secondary school curricula, the Butokukai even stressed that it should be introduced in elementary schools [Butokukai 1924: 3-4]. As will be shown in the next section, it attempted to make this happen via the passing of a bill in the Imperial Diet.

## 2 THE INVENTION OF THE WORD 'KENDO'

### *2.1. A Tradition Restored: The Path to Bushido Training*

Like the term 'judo', the term 'kendo' is a modern Japanese invention [Inoue 1998, 2004]. The name-change from kenjutsu or gekiken/ gekken to kendo was enacted by the Butokukai in 1919, and the appellation was increasingly used in school curricula by 1926. Hiromichi Nishikubo (1863–1930) had been appointed vice president of the Butokukai and principal of the Martial Arts Vocational College in January 1919, and it was he who had led the name-change initiative. The primary reason for the change of name was to clarify that the objective of kendo was not just to learn skills but to train one's mind and body and to focus significantly on training one's spirit. Thus, physical training came to be regarded as merely supplementary [Nishikubo 1915: 4-9; 1926: 634].

That this thinking was endorsed by Nishikubo is vividly demonstrated by the bill submitted to the Minister of Education in September 1919 (resubmitted in June 1924), which emphasized not only name changes to 'kendo' and 'judo' but also that these two martial arts were 'spiritual education, and their use in physical education was inappropriate in the extreme; they should be made independent classes' [Butokukai 1924: 2; see also 1936b]. In addition, Nishikubo asserted that swordsmanship should be implemented as an independent subject or as a kind of moral education [Nishikubo 1926: 631].

Consequently, at this point, I would like to focus on Nishikubo's claim that swordsmanship had *already* been established as a training culture focused on developing character during the Tokugawa period:

During the Tokugawa period, kendo started to increasingly display its value as a way to train one's samurai personality through acquiring manners, etiquette and the general ways of a samurai, just as Confucianism and Buddhism influence the principle of acquiring both literary and military arts. Bushido (the way of the warrior) also had an influence ... Kendo started to emphasise training one's spirit and was connected with bushido ... The writings of each school stated the goal of kendo as follows: to clarify how to select life or death when facing justice, to clarify what bushido is, to train in honour the virtue of the spiritual sword and to be prepared to die for duty, and to train one's spirit neither to seek to kill another nor to prevent oneself from being killed ... In the past, a samurai trained his bones and muscles and studied the spirit of loyalty, manners, honor, shame, austerity, bravery, diligence and patience, among other virtues, so historical emotion will always refer to the bushido of ancestors and will be of great practical use for kendo trainees emulating the samurai way or spirit. [Nishikubo 1926: 615, 616, 631]

With the Tokugawa period, the role of literacy and battle were reversed, with military arts brought under the control of literary arts. As a result, a developed character became the ultimate goal and training the 'samurai personality' was given greater priority than acquiring the skills of swordsmanship. This is evident in the 1860 rules of the *Kobusho* (shogunate military academy), which state: 'What is extremely important while acting in thought of budo (martial arts) is to learn the skills of archery, swordsmanship, and spearmanship with *rei-gi-ren-chi* (important rules to be followed as humans) as the base' [Sogawa 2015: 39-40].

Accordingly, it is possible to argue that Nishikubo's claim that swordsmanship has changed to a form that aims to cultivate one's

samurai personality is not an individual or idiosyncratic affirmation or fabrication but rather was based on such historical facts as those previously discussed. The name change to kendo registers such historical change and should be regarded as a testament to this transition. Importantly, it also acted as a catalyst to boost kendo's status by reference to the samurai tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Nishikubo emphatically insisted that kendo training would not only lead to bushido but would also help cultivate the 'national virtue' desired by contemporary Japan: 'When one trains in kendo, handed down from our ancestors, one naturally fosters one's bushido spirit and its dignity, and it is natural that one realises our country's national virtues, such as ancestor worship, loyalty and patriotism, the spirit of martyrdom and sacrifice, and the like' [Nishikubo 1926: 631]. This type of claim may appear anachronistic at first glance, but what must be remembered is that bushido in this evocation is being used to try to 'fill the historical gap' so to speak between the Tokugawa period and the 1920s.

Bushido might be said to have existed as a code of conduct for samurai, but it was only *called* bushido from the Meiji period. Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1936), an Englishman who stayed in Japan during the Meiji period and introduced Japanese culture to the world, published a book called *Bushido or The Invention of a New Religion* in 1911. In it, he (correctly) notes that bushido was a recently-created religion that did not appear in any dictionary before 1900, while also providing a description of the concept of 'morality of the nation' on the basis of which the people are regarded as the Emperor's children who would sacrifice their lives willingly out of obligation, loyalty, and piety.

The existence of this newly-created bushido (also known as Meiji bushido) was the premise of kendo's creation. As a result, bushido training began to mean something more than learning the samurai code of conduct; it came to mean cultivating a national virtue necessary for a modern nation. Thus, the name change to kendo was inseparable from the creation of bushido in the Meiji period. The *butoku* (martial virtues) and bushido heralded by the Butokukai were effectively made one and the same [Sakaue 1988: 88].

Nishikubo's claim was therefore part of a strategy to introduce kendo and judo as academic subjects in their own right in secondary schools. The application for this was submitted to the House of Lords as a proposal by Nishikubo and others, including the Kodokan director Jigoro Kano (both of whom were also members of the House of Lords).

8 However, it is undeniable that swordsmanship during the Tokugawa period focused on practical use: killing, protecting oneself, and the idea of *mu* (selflessness) borrowed from Buddhism and Zen to explain a state in swordsmanship that was used to kill successfully [Sogawa 2015: 54-58; 2017: 12, 20].

This was accepted in March 1925 [Sakaue 1990: 44-45]. The last part of the quotation above uses almost the exact same wording as that of the formal proposal itself. Undoubtedly, it was successful because the majority of the members in the House of Lords were of royal or noble lineage. Thus, they were highly likely to support Nishikubo and the Butokukai's claim that kendo was a discipline that cultivated a samurai personality in the Tokugawa period and had an important role in national education.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2. Sanctification of Kendo

In 1919, the Butokukai also changed the name of *bujutsu* to *budo* as a general term for the martial arts. These name changes served multiple purposes, including reifying and venerating *budo*, differentiating it from sport, and preventing *budo* from changing by stabilising it institutionally.

The Butokukai insisted upon the difference between sport and *budo*. On the one hand, they argued, victory in sport is considered to be the main objective; discipline is only relevant in terms of notions of fair play, common-sense, and so on. On the other hand, victory in *budo* is not viewed as the objective; instead, training one's mind and body is considered the goal. In addition, because of its historical origin and its goal of training one's spirit, *budo* was represented as more sophisticated than either hobbies or sport [Butokukai 1925: 4].

For this reason, Nishikubo actually despised and strongly criticised kendo matches, even when performed as part of community events or village festivals, stating: 'To compete and perform with sport that originated as a hobby soils the sacred nature of *budo*, which has existed since ancient times' [Nishikubo 1926: 632].

Since Nishikubo believed that 'budo training must be sacred', he considered the current state of *budo* to be insulting and corrupted:

Training for *budo* must be sacred ... However, in reality, there are people laughing and joking while practising and not being sincere ... There are people who are laughing and joking and thus forgetting that training is something sacred. In serious cases, people view *budo* training as something akin to village theatricals or sumo performances. Many of the audience members also think they are watching some show. This is regrettable ... To include *budo* training in gatherings such as a memorial service for the dead does not stand to reason and is outrageous ... It is absolutely unacceptable to have the word *budo*

written alongside the dances by geisha and other various shows ... There is nothing as insulting to *budo*, and it is absolutely saddening and infuriating. I cannot but be outraged by seeing such things ... Today's kendo has inherited bad characteristics and has been staged as public martial art shows in Asakusa. I often hear people watching *budo* training and saying that it may be the right way to do it but it is not interesting and such. In other words, the people practising and watching both want to add some fun. In outrageous cases, there are examples of those doing it with a referee as one sees with sumo in rural areas. To begin with, training should not be fun. This type of thinking is the exact opposite of what I have repeatedly been saying, that the *budo* hall is sacred and must not be desecrated. [Nishikubo 1915: 21-26]

From the outrage Nishikubo shows here, we can imagine people enjoying *budo* as a popular amusement. Such a scene – full of laughter, levity, cheering, and the heightened energy of holidays – was far removed from Nishikubo's argument for 'sacredness'.

Nishikubo was opposed to *budo* being a popular amusement or developing as a sport, and he only envisaged it as a means to train one's self and especially one's mind. Kendo's self-definition as 'the way to cultivate bushido' played a role in managing kendo's status as a 'way of being' that was explicitly and deliberately connected to a strong sense of tradition and national values, while also offering ways to protect this from mutating into any other kind of activity, from competitive sport to 'mere' hobby.

From 1919, the Butokukai formulated various regulations to meet *budo*'s 'original' objective, including the match rules, regulation of the weight of bamboo swords, prohibition of cheering and clapping, and prohibition of clothing that appeared distasteful both within and outside the *budo* hall. The kendo team match during the youth martial arts tournament hosted by the Butokukai used a special ten-point rule, with four points available for victory, three points for *kiai* (fighting spirit), and three points for posture and manner. At the same time, students of the Butokukai Martial Arts Vocational College were prohibited from participating in matches with others. Nishikubo also boycotted participation in the second Meiji Shrine National Athletic Festival's kendo division in 1925. As a result, the third tournament's name was changed to Meiji Shrine National Physical Education Festival and the entrance fee was abolished. This incident epitomised the kind of pressure that enforced the idea of the sacred nature of *budo* upon society [Sakaue 1998: 178-183].

Against this backdrop, in answer to the question 'What is kendo?' there can henceforth be only one 'correct' answer – like the model answer for the rank grading exam: 'kendo is the training of one's body and mind to create a samurai personality and is a physical education method and mental training method that is educational and virtuous' [Nemoto 1936: 198].

9 Kendo and judo did not become a separate subject in middle school, but, by 1926, the name used in physical education in middle school was changed from *gekiken*/*gekken* to kendo and from *jujutsu* to judo. By January 1931, both became compulsory in physical education in middle school.



### 3 A FABRICATED TRADITION: HISTORY OF SANBON-SHOBU

Kendo's competition method involves two people facing each other with a bamboo sword and striking at one of the four regulated areas – *men* (head), *do* (trunk), *kote* (forearm) and *tsuki* (throat) – to win. In today's kendo, the principal rule is *sanbon-shobu* (three-point system). The winner is the first to score two out of three available points. If only one point has been scored in regulation time (the normal duration of the contest is 5 minutes), then the person who scored the point is the winner. If no point is scored, then extra time may be allowed to determine a victor.

One may wonder when the three-point system started. The model answers to the questions in a 1937 publication on kendo state the following:

There would not be any sanbon-shobu in a real fight ... In the past, all matches were ippon-shobu (first point wins). However, from the Meiji period, ippon-shobu was too short, so it was changed to three points. In other words, three ippon-shobu took place. Later, instead of performing three ippon-shobu, people started to compete according to the total number of strikes in a single match (you win with two out of three effective strikes).

[Ota 1937: 160]

Thus, according to this answer, kendo matches changed from ippon-shobu (one-point system) to sanbon-shobu (three-point system). Another (identical) answer in this set of model answers confirms this [Tanida 1939: 123]. This narrative remains dominant today, and most people involved in kendo believe it is true. However, history suggests otherwise.

To see this, we need only review the match records of a famous swordsman called Namishiro Matsuzaki (1833–1896) as given in his biography [Sonoda 1957]. There we can see, for instance, that in a March 1852 match the victor was decided by how many strikes landed out of five. Five strikes were evidently neither considered to be too many nor too complicated. Indeed, matches of over ten strikes were also recorded. In May 1854, Matsuzaki fought against famous swordsmen in Edo and the records of those matches are presented below:

*Jusanbon-shobu* (13-strikes match)

Namishiro Matsuzaki: 4 strikes vs. Eijiro Chiba:  
7 strikes 2 *aiuchi*

*Juppon-shobu* (10- strikes match)

Namishiro Matsuzaki: 6 strikes vs. Shunzo Momoi:  
3 strikes 1 *aiuchi*

Here, *aiuchi* (hitting each other simultaneously) was also counted, and there were 13 strikes in total for the 10-strikes match. In other words, around the end of the Tokugawa period, the best swordsmen fought each other in these types of matches. Swordsmanship matches were held across different schools and used point systems that differed from the official narrative.

We might therefore ask when today's three-point system started. Again, we can examine Matsuzaki's matches – this time, after the Meiji period. First, let us consider a match hosted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department in November 1884:

Namishiro Matsuzaki ○ vs. Sekishiro Tokuno ○○

Namishiro Matsuzaki ○○ vs. Matanoshin Natsumi ○○○

Namishiro Matsuzaki vs. Tadatoku Shingai: Draw

The method of judging in this case is uncertain. It is not clear, for instance, whether it was 'best out of five' or 'first to three', and so on. But matches evidently did not stop until five or three strikes were made. Available evidence suggests that judges checked the time and stopped the match in the middle to declare the winner. In the third match, neither competitor made a successful strike and it was judged a draw.

Meanwhile, during this period, there were three-point matches being held in a residence of a *daimyo* (feudal lord) in Tokyo, Saineikan of the Imperial Palace. Matsuzaki's records use phrases like 'I won all three strikes' and 'victory with all three strikes'; it thus appears that three one-point matches took place. For example, a match hosted in Saineikan in June 1885 was evidently a three-point match, whereas 15 special matches between greatly skilled swordsmen performed upon the wish of a former lord who attended involved five strikes without a judge. Matsuzaki regarded the five-strike match without a judge as a method that could better showcase the strengths of each participant, although he also conceded that the three-point with a judge was unavoidable because of the needs of 'unskilled people'. Nonetheless, he criticized it as an inconvenient method that encouraged competition and possibly led to cheating.

Despite such possible dissensus among swordsmen, the three-point system (in which two points are necessary to win) became mainstream in kendo matches. The first such match in Matsuzaki's records took place in November 1894, at a match in the Emperor's presence. This took place at the Imperial Headquarters in Hiroshima and was held as a part of the celebration of the victory in the Sino-Japanese war. There were 26 swordsmen selected from each prefecture in Western Japan. Matsuzaki's two recorded matches both ended in a one-point-each draw:

Namishiro Matsuzaki ○○ vs. Sakonta Okumura ○

Namishiro Matsuzaki ○○ vs. Kazuma Asano ○

The following year, in April 1895, the Dai-Nippon Butokukai was established, and in October of the same year, the first Daienbu Taikai match was held over the course of three days, involving 914 martial artists from across Japan. The kenjutsu division took place on the first day, with 320 competitors (including Matsuzaki) divided into 160 groups. This was not a tournament in which the winner would be selected, but rather entailed a single match with a chosen opponent scored according to *sanbon-shobu*. This three-point system became the 'rule' of the Butokukai demonstration competitions [Sakaue 1998: 167]. Meanwhile, judo matches also used a three-point system, called *nihon-shobu* (two-point match), until this changed to *ippon-shobu* (one-point match) in 1924 [Oimatsu 1976: 75-76].

As a result, by the Meiji period, the diversity of styles in swordsmanship matches disappeared and the three-point system became mainstream. This raises the question of why the Butokukai chose and enforced the three-point system. One reason could be that it was a simple expedient to enable the scheduling of 160 demonstration competitions in one day. Certainly, the Butokukai divided the martial arts hall into four sections and held matches concurrently, with judges in each section. Each of the four areas needed to complete 40 matches per day. Even in an eight-hour day – from, say, 9am to 5pm – to complete 40 matches would require an average match length of only 12 minutes. In the face of such a scheduling challenge, it would be impossible to have five- or ten-point matches (longer matches may have been possible with fewer competitors). It would seem then that the three-point system was adopted because of reasons of time and scale. Since 1904, the jujutsu division had limited match time to 10 minutes; kenjutsu also needed to impose similar limits [Sakaue 1998: 167].

In light of this, it is clear that pre-Meiji swordsmanship matches did not employ the *ippon-shobu* system, and to claim otherwise is a fabrication of history. Why this kind of fabrication took place and spread as common knowledge is worthy of reflection and further analysis.

My own hypothesis is that the techniques, strategies, and processes utilised in the establishment of kendo led, intentionally or unintentionally, to such fabrication. As already seen, an important aspect of the process was the emphasis on tradition, and thus traditions that were suitable were selected and valorized whereas those deemed unsuitable were removed and fabricated into a new and preferable tradition. This certainly seems to be the case with the claim that kendo matches used *ippon-shobu* before the Meiji period. The actual swordsmanship matches of the end of the Tokugawa period and early

Meiji period could by no stretch of the imagination be said to amount to 'real sword fights', as they were contested by accumulating as many points as possible. It seems more natural to say that such fabrication took place to create an image of real sword fights and to eradicate a tradition that was unwelcome.<sup>10</sup>

This kind of fabrication of history made it possible to say that kendo was the true successor to the 'real sword fight' era tradition. The problem is that this made it impossible to revive the five- or ten-point system actually employed in earlier matches. Hence, any reform or actual historical reconstruction of an earlier kendo match system became largely restricted by its own fabricated narrative: for, if a real fight using Japanese swords is to be established as the standard, then *ippon-shobu* can be the only acceptable system for matches.

Of course, reflection on this raises the question: why should the kendo match have three points rather than one? If we consult the 'model answer' collections quoted earlier, we find the following answer:

**If it is a one-point match, then the match may end before showing your actual strength due to your condition and such. However, if there are three points, then even if the opponent gets the first point, you can make a comeback by taking the next two points or you can use the first point to check the skills of your opponent and think of a strategy for the other two points. In addition, even if you get hit for the first point, you can attack with a strong mind set to not get hit again and foster a strong spirit for defeating your enemy even when you fall. Also, it is easier for the judge to see one's true ability if there are three points rather than one.**

[Ota 1937: 160-161]

In other words, the stated rationale for the three-point system is that it allows participants to show their true skill and is thus deemed preferable to a one-point system. The rationale, therefore, refers not to the tradition of a real sword fight (to the death) but to the ability to show skill within a reasonable set of parameters. In this regard, kendo's match system has been created by mixing references to a 'real sword fight tradition' with other criteria that are actually contradictory. The upshot is that, at the same time as dimensions of possible 'reality' are lost, so, too, has 'rationality' as a method of competition been greatly restricted by insisting on the reference to the supposedly real sword fight tradition. Here, we can see a glimpse of kendo's inherent dilemmas and paradoxes.

<sup>10</sup> Considering the swordsmanship boom since the 1920s in novels and movies, we can also propose that this was based on a phenomenon that involved the fantasising of swordsmanship in modern times by regular people [Otsuka and Sakaue 1990: 34-35].

As the wartime structure was built, the tradition of the real sword-fight overwhelmed rationality as a competition method, and the system changed to a one-point system in March 1939 during the Sino-Japanese War. Since then, kendo has further evolved as a combat skill [Bennett 2015: 140-154].

## 4 AN ADAPTED TRADITION: SHU-HA-RI

Some of the Tokugawa period's swordsmanship tradition was superseded and later modified in modern times. For example, there is *shu-ha-ri*, a pedagogical method that divides swordsmanship into three stages. The first stage (*shu*) is to follow the teacher's instructions, perform the movements accurately, and learn it without error; the second stage (*ha*) is to break the restraint and expand your own method through creativity and learning other schools' methods; and the third stage (*ri*) is to go even further, whether (or both) into realms of inventiveness or the achievement of a state of '*mu*' ('empty mind' or 'nothingness').

This pedagogical approach is delineated in certain Meiji-era swordsmanship manuals and has been passed down through the generations [Takasaka 1971 [1884]: 40; Hirose 1971 [1884]: 61; Kumamoto 1971 [1895]: 187]. One such manual, for example, *Budo Kyohan* (Textbook of Budo), published in 1895, states: 'In my school, innocence<sup>11</sup> is the state we aim for, and the main objective is to devote oneself to developing one's natural character ... We follow certain rules but are not confined to them and put effort in enhancing one's natural character' [Kumamoto 1971 [1895]: 187]. This introduces a teaching method that comes together with *shu-ha-ri*.

However, by the 1930s, this approach to the *shu-ha-ri* pedagogy was transformed for the ranking exam as follows:

The first stage, *shu*, is to throw away one's self, learn from the teacher and to emulate his ways; the second stage, *ha*, is to think by yourself while carrying out comparative research into other schools; and the third stage, *ri*, is to achieve independence from your school through hard research and craft and establish your own approach. If one can follow the spirit of *shu-ha-ri* in practice, then the mind will become clear on its own and achieve a state of selflessness at a superior level. [Ota 1940: 203]

Here, the idea of breaking away from the teachings of your teacher and each school in the second stage is changed to 'comparative research into other schools' while the third stage's 'inventing one's own clever skill' and a state of 'selflessness' is changed to 'independence from your school'. Thus, *shu-ha-ri* is presented not as a practical method of learning and is instead transformed into a means for attaining the ultimate 'state of selflessness' while serving as a guide in terms of how famous swordsmen in the past started their own schools.

In regard to the third stage of the *shu-ha-ri*, one official 'model answer' explanation of it states that *ri* is 'a separation from the various schools and the invention of original or effective techniques sufficient to create a first-rate school' [Tanida 1937: 84; Tanida 1939: 156]. This explanation is largely consistent with the original teaching. However, in this case, again, the act of breaking the teachings of masters or schools in the second stage (*ha*) is removed.

One example of starting a school in terms of this 'model' approach is Tesshū Yamaoka's (1836-88) *Muto-ryu*, which was founded in 1880. However, this example is, in actual fact, an exception. This is because, since the Meiji period, rather than creating new schools, the world of kendo advocated integrating schools in order to make kendo into a stable part of physical education and school curriculum. Nishikubo refers to these achievements with pride in the following manner:

In the Tokugawa period, kendo's separation into different schools reached its peak, and there were over 200; but in the Taisho period today [i.e., 1912-1926], these schools are becoming integrated into one *Dai-Nippon Teikoku Kendo Kata*. Actually, current Hanshi and Kyoshi (the highest ranked teachers) each formerly had their own schools, but now they have all learned the kata formulated by the Butokukai and are all teaching this. Hardly any of them perform their school's kata, and the training institution for kendo teachers, Butokukai Martial Arts Vocational College, does not teach any other kata than that formulated by Butokukai, so that the training is the same across all schools. [Nishikubo 1926: 632]

What is to be emphasized here is that the most important part – breaking away from school and teacher – has been removed from *shu-ha-ri*. As a result, kendo since modern times has practically advocated upholding the teacher's (i.e., the Butokukai's) teachings as absolutes that students must follow with perfect fidelity. This means that, despite explicit statements to the contrary, practitioners of kendo are forced to stay at the first stage and cannot even move to the second stage, let alone the third stage – especially not to create their own version of kendo.

11 'Empty mind' or 'nothingness'.

Of course, in the past, teachers of kendo could have taught skills and practiced methods of different schools based on the various characteristics of each school. In 1930, there were 193 *hanshi* and *kyoshi*, and 160 of them had their own schools. However, as Nishikubo points out, 'training methods became completely uniform as well'. The standardisation of all elements of training is not surprising, of course, especially to the extent that kendo became part of a national curriculum. However, what is more surprising is the extent to which this standardisation spread out to kendo as a whole, so that the various and unique styles of kendo practiced in different schools disappeared.

The greatest reason for this homogenisation is the spread of the title (*shogo*) and rank (*dan*) system. This system certainly had a great positive effect in the promotion of kendo, but it also had a negative impact in the form of standardising kendo and ultimately erasing its variety and the unique characteristics of different schools. Regarding this point, the alumni of university kendo clubs met in 1940 in a gathering and made some telling observations. For instance, Saiki Tsuchida (alumnus of Waseda University) stated the following:

Kendo practice by students today may differ a little, but is mostly the same. It is the same everywhere. It is the same in the same school, but even the same in different schools.<sup>12</sup> It is becoming very unified. Thus, the personality of the individual is becoming lost, so I feel that this scariness or strength has become very rare.  
[Tsuchida et al. 1940: 26]

On the same issue, Masao Miyata (alumnus of Keiō University) said: 'I have toured Kyoto before ... around 1919-1920 ... Since then, as Tsuchida said, things have changed towards becoming standardised'. Kojiro Watanabe (alumnus of Tokyo University) observed:

This is not just true of student kendo but of kendo in general. I think that what is behind it is the Butokukai gradually prohibiting matches, and their pickiness about style and posture has also undoubtedly had some impact. Student competitors seem to be doing much better now, but on the other hand, I feel that individual character is being suppressed. However, everyone has personality, so I think it is necessary that guidance is provided to improve on that as well.  
[Tsuchida et al. 1940: 42]

Finally, Saiki Tsuchida observed:

As for student kendo training, I feel that there are increasing numbers training solely for *dan* grades and *shogo* status. As a result, everyone's style becomes the same. If you have a unique style, you probably won't be able to get *dan* and *shogo*! [laughter] Thus, it is not just an issue of skills, but it is a matter of a certain 'mood' becoming widespread in various directions.  
[Tsuchida et al. 1940: 42]

As I have argued, following the transition toward the integration of schools beginning in 1919 and the name change to 'kendo', the Butokukai began to exert control over kendo in various ways. Simultaneously, the spread of titles (*shogo*) and the ranking (*dan*) system led to increasing standardization and the suppression of individual expression. The teaching of *shu-ha-ri* could have served as a basis for resisting this trend and maintaining greater autonomy and variety, but this pedagogical approach was modified and, in the process, lost its power to resist such trends.

## 5 THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE

I have argued that the invented traditions of kendo in modern Japan have increased the value and authority of kendo by making it into a recognised part of 'traditional Japanese culture', but that they also sought to prevent it from becoming a part of popular culture or sport. These traditions also worked to prevent the creation of any new or unique styles of kendo, and hence led to its standardisation. Given the many paradoxes and contradictions at play in the institutional existence of modern kendo, one might wonder whether kendo can now possibly reinterpret its principles and undergo any progressive self-reform or transformation.

One answer to this difficult question came from Ukichi Sato (1895–1975), a kendo teacher of Tokyo Higher Normal School, who sought to 'establish a self that thinks' in order to promote kendo's self-reform:

Kendo today needs to reflect on its roots and start again from scratch.

We must not just accept past meaning, objectives, values and the like of kendo as it is. We should not blindly believe ancient writings and legends. We need to have a strict as well as free mind to rethink this.

12 NB: 'school' in this context is intended to refer to public middle schools and the like, not styles (*ryuha*).

To do this, we must establish a self that thinks ...

Our kendo must not be an echo of kendo of the past. The deepest elements of kendo should not be dictated to us by a third person. Instead, we should confront them directly; we should delve into kendo ourselves to find our own meanings, values and objectives. Unless we do this, we are following someone else's account of kendo, not our own ...

Those practising kendo should find their own kendo. One's own kendo should be created by oneself. That is right. It needs to be a creation ...

A kendo practitioner seriously pursuing the path must destroy the worship of an idol and face the practice itself. We must remove the obstructions in between and bathe in the light of the path directly ...

It is most important to establish a self that pursues the path.

We must establish our own kendo by listening to our pure soul lying deep within. We must seek our own goodwill that is together with god or, to be more direct, ask our inner god to do so.

[Sato 1928a: 26-27]

Sato's claim here is unique and powerful among the various kendo theories in modern Japan. Furthermore, he was also an outspoken critic of the Butokukai. For instance, if we recall the boycott on participation in the second Meiji Shrine National Athletic Festival's kendo division, imposed in 1925 by the vice president of the Butokukai, Nishikubo, that was discussed earlier: the Butokukai sent a statement outlining the reason for doing so to all hanshi, kyoshi, and seirenscho title holders, as well as to the principals of all secondary schools nationwide [Butokukai 1936b]. Sato directly criticized this in the *Asahi Sports* magazine, fundamentally criticizing Nishikubo's arguments.

First, he argues, 'sportsmanship that is the aim of sport is the same as the cultivation of the samurai spirit in the martial arts'; 'the cultivation of the samurai spirit should not be monopolized by martial artists'. Furthermore, he writes: 'There should not be this kind of discrimination in the festival, where we perform before the spirit of the Meiji Emperor'; 'If these are the values of the martial arts, then perhaps we should rather participate in a competitive tournament and demonstrate their true value as an example to other sports' [Sato 1925: 25].

Second, he states: 'martial arts are not contests to determine victory or defeat', though 'if the win-lose format is taken away from the martial arts, they will no longer exist as martial arts'. This is because it is not only competitions, but actually all martial arts practices that 'are done on the premise of win and lose' [Sato 1925: 25].

Ultimately, Sato directly criticizes the Butokukai, saying: 'the martial arts cannot be monopolized by the Butokukai'. Furthermore, he proposed: 'The things of Japan should be spread to the rest of the world'. And, 'these must be the property of ordinary citizens'. Finally, he called upon martial artists as follows:

The time for worshipping idols is past. Wake up to your own power! We cannot allow our martial arts to be fraudulently oppressed by anyone. We must not be used by them [the Butokukai]. If you truly love the martial arts, then throw off your virtuous old clothes, wake up, and take a stand! [Sato 1925: 25]

Seen from a broader perspective, the criticism by Sato might be connected with a radical ethos that is referred to as the 'Taisho era democracy' – a bold, democratic, liberal thinking movement (1912-26) unseen in Japanese history up to that era. Certainly, change was in the air: the Ordinary Election Law granting the right to vote to men 25 and older had just been promulgated five months prior to this, in May 1925.

In any event, Sato strongly criticized and rebuked the self-righteousness and conservatism in Nishikubo's thinking on martial arts. He also raised the larger question of to whom the martial arts belonged and denied the right to a monopoly by the Butokukai. Rather, he suggested that the right to determine a path for martial arts should be claimed by ordinary citizens. Sato's argument to 'establish a self that thinks' in order to promote kendo's self-reform, as we have seen, should be understood as an extension of this idea.

In response to the declaration of the boycott sent by the Butokukai to martial artists, it should be noted that many letters of support were received by the Butokukai headquarters [Butokukai 1936b]. Opposing arguments like those of Sato evidently reflected the views of only a minority of martial artists nationwide. However, that is not to say that Sato was alone and without support. Support for his position is evidenced by a preparation committee that was created by the representatives of other organizations besides the Butokukai, and which was successful in holding a kendo tournament at the Meiji Shrine National Athletic Festival [Naimushyo 1926: 134-142].

The preparation committee, which included Sato, issued a statement regarding the reason for participating on the day of the tournament, in



addition to publicizing criticism of the Butokukai. This demonstrated a liberal outlook on how sport and the martial arts could move forward while exerting equal influence on one another [Naimusho 1926: 134-142]. Moreover, the Minister of Education, in a radio broadcast, touched on the issue of the boycott by the Butokukai and refuted their position, saying that 'sport has originally not been for mere pleasure or comfort, and has not been just for show' [Monb Daijin-kanbo 1927: 20].

Based on the above events, the Butokukai's boycott of the National Athletic Festival appeared to end in a victory for Sato and his cohorts, both in argument and in the actual event itself. However, the incident did not end with the tournament. The Meiji Shrine National Athletic Festival changed its name in 1926 to the Meiji Shrine National Physical Education Festival, and this change allowed the Butokukai to decide to participate without appearing to change its mind or lose face. This is because, from the perspective of the Butokukai, the name change meant that the Butokukai's argument that the martial arts are not for competition had been accepted.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the other demands of the Butokukai had been met, and the Ministry of Education had changed the names of martial arts to kendo and judo in school curricula, also in 1926.

In fact, Sato continued to criticize the Butokukai, and argued that a win-lose format was *necessary* for martial arts just as it was for sports. However, Sato himself did not promote kendo, nor did he bring it into popular culture or make it into a sport. Rather, in later writings, Sato emphasized ideas such as the following: 'Japanese martial arts are the most valuable as a means of understanding the pure spirit of Japan, and most appropriate for promoting the awareness of a Japanese people'; 'in combination with Bushido, Japanese martial arts promote development, with a resulting demonstration of the desired virtues in the martial arts of the spirit of loyalty and patriotism'; and so on [Sato 1928b: 85-86].

This was the 'precious characteristic' of martial arts that was not found in sport. Moreover, the disparities between the martial arts and sport in 'ethnicity and national character' created several other differences: Sato discussed examples taken from competition rules in order to critique the immaturity of kendo competitions as 'the beauty of the martial arts spirit not bound by winning or losing'. In addition, Sato asserted that very burdensome and assiduous etiquette and unscientific and irrational practice methods, as well as the resulting 'suppression of expressing one's emotions', were unique to kendo as part of Japanese culture.

Contrary to our expectations, perhaps, Sato's theory of kendo was itself steeped in 'ethno-symbolism' [Smith 2009] and remained conservative in that it for the most part did not differ much in kind from the Butokukai's own arguments. Like the Butokukai, Sato was happy to accord himself the status and responsibility to make declarations about the value of kendo, how it would be taught in schools, and so on. So, Sato's statements can be said to have been part of, made within, and reflective of the same overarching system or structure. Indeed, the argument to 'establish a self that thinks' in order to promote kendo's self-reform as promulgated by Sato arguably remains blind to the complex problems involved in breaking through the constraints and self-regulation that even he was forced to embrace. Nonetheless, Sato firmly believed that kendo should 'belong' to ordinary citizens and he remained committed to the right of self-determination regarding kendo's values and culture – a belief aligned with a philosophy of universal human rights.

The force and value of such universalist, democratic, and egalitarian lines of thinking have not diminished in the ninety years that have passed since that time. Indeed, innovative, experimental, practitioner-led research and innovation have transformed many fields, not just the martial arts. So, whatever the future holds for kendo, it will inevitably have to deal (whether 'traditionally' or 'creatively') with the paradoxes involved in maintaining an identity and an institutional stability achieved via the production and manipulation of often internally-contradictory invented traditions. It will also have to negotiate the always potentially destabilizing effects of the *shu-ha-ri* philosophy that it explicitly claims to advocate and balance creative innovation against not only ongoing developments in historical knowledge but also its commitment to a self-constructed, and self-restricting, invented tradition.

13 Another reason for the Butokukai's change in attitude was the acceptance of the Butokukai's assertion that entrance fees should not be charged (i.e., that the martial arts were not a spectacle) [Butokukai 1936a].

## REFERENCES

- Bennett, Alexander. 2015. *Kendo: Culture of the Sword*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bowman, Paul. 2016. 'Making Martial Arts History Matter'. *International Journal of the History of Sport* 33.9, 915-933.  
[doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2016.1212842](https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2016.1212842)
- Bowman, Paul and Benjamin N. Judkins. 2016. 'Editorial: The Invention of Martial Arts'. *Martial Arts Studies* 2, 1-5.  
[doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10061](https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10061)
- Bowman, Paul. 2018. 'Book Review: *Kendo: Culture of the Sword*'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24.1, 199-200.  
[doi-org.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/10.1111/1467-9655.12774](https://doi-org.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/10.1111/1467-9655.12774)
- Butokukai (Dai-Nippon Butokukai). 1924. 'Dai 25 kai seinen dai enbukai kiji (Report of the 25th youth martial arts tournament)', *Kaiho* (Bulletin of the Butokukai) 34.
- Butokukai. 1925. 'Dai 26 kai seinen dai enbukai kiji (Report of the 26th youth martial arts tournament)', *Kaiho* 36.
- Butokukai. 1932. 'Kakunen genzai yūdansya-sū (The number of rank holders in each year end)', *Bukoku* (Bulletin of the Butokukai) 47.
- Butokukai. 1936a. *Dai-Nippon Butokukai Enkaku Ten* (The history of the Butokukai Volume 10), Butokukai.
- Butokukai. 1936b. *Dai-Nippon Butokukai Enkaku Chi*, Butokukai.
- Butokukai. 1936c. *Dai-Nippon Butokukai Enkaku Gen*, Butokukai.
- Butokukai. 1937. 'Budo hanshi, kyoshi, renshi, chiho betsu jinin chosa hyo (The investigation results of number of martial arts *hanshi*, *kyoshi* and *renshi* in each prefecture)', *Shōwa 12 nen Budo hanshi kyoshi renshi meikan* (The directory of hanshi, kyoshi and renshi in 1937), Butokukai.
- Butokukai. 1941a. 'Budo hanshi, kyoshi and renshi, chiho betsu jinin chosa hyo (The investigation results of number of martial arts *hanshi*, *kyoshi* and *renshi* in each prefecture)', *Budo hanshi, kyoshi and renshi meikan* (The directory of hanshi, kyoshi and renshi), Butokukai.
- Butokukai. 1941b. 'Kakunen genzai budo betsu yūdansha-su shirabe (The number of rank holders as of January in each year end)', *Bukoku* (Bulletin of the Butokukai) 119.
- Gainty, Denis. 2013. *Martial Arts and the Body Politic in Meiji Japan*. London: Routledge.
- GHQ/SCAP. 1949. *Political Reorientation of Japan*, September 1945 to September 1948. Volume 1. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Hirose, Shinpei. 1971 [1884]. *Kenpo hiketsu* (The secret of swordsmanship). *Shiryo Meiji budo -shi* (Documents of budo history in Meiji period). Edited by Watanabe Ichiro. Shinjinbutsu Oraisha, 49-62.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrance Ranger (eds.). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Imamura, Yoshio. 1967. *19 seiki ni okeru Nippon taiiku no kenkyu* (A study on the physical education in the nineteenth century). Fumaido.
- Inoue, Shun. 1998. 'The Invention of the Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and the Kodokan Judo'. *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*. Edited by Stephen Vlastos. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Inoue, Shun. 2004. *Budo no tanjo* (The birth of budo). Yoshikawa kobunkan.
- Irie, Kohei. 1976. "'Kyudo-Yosoku" no hunyu ni kansuru kenkyu' (A study on the Diffusion of the Kyudo-Yosoku). *Bulletin of the Faculty of Physical Education Tokyo University of Education* 15.
- Kumamoto, Sanemichi. 1971 [1895]. *Budo kyohan* (Textbook of budo). *Shiryo: Meiji budo-shi* (Documents of budo history in Meiji period), 181-314.
- Kunaisho (The Department of the Imperial Household) (ed.). 1930. 'Budoka meikan'. *Budo hokan* (Thesaurus of martial artists). Kodansha.
- Kunaisho (The department of the imperial household) (ed.). 1934. 'Budoka meikan'. *Kotaishi denka gotanjo hoshuku showa tenran shiai* (The Competitive tournament for celebrating the birth of the Crown Prince held in the presence of the Emperor Showa). Kodansha.
- Molle, Andrea. 2016. 'Book review: *Kendo: Culture of the Sword*'. *Martial Arts Studies* 2, 113-115.  
[doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10069](https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10069)

Monbudaijin kanbo gakko eiseika. 1927. Taiiku undo shuji kaigi yoroku. (Summary of the Meeting of the Board of Directors for the Physical Education Movement)

Murakami, Susumu (ed.). 1921. *Taisho budoka meikan* (Thesaurus of martial artists in the Taisho Era). Heian kokokai.

Nakajima, Tetsuya. 2017. 'Bakumatsu ni okeru Jujutsu no taito to sono jittai: Tenjinshinyo-ryu Iso dojo "Taryu Shiai Seimei Hikae" o tegakari ni (Emergence of the jujutsu match and its actual situation at the end of Tokugawa period: Analysis of Tenjinshinyo-ryu's record "Taryu Shiai Seimei Hikae")'. *Bulletin of the Association for the Scientific Studies on Judo*, Report XVI. Kodokan.

Nakamura, Tamio. 1985. *Shiryo kindai kendo-shi* (Documents of kendo history in modern era). Shimazu Shobo.

Nakamura, Tamio. 2004. 'Kindai naginata shoshi (A brief history of naginata in the modern era)'. *Kindai naginata meicho senshu* (Collection of classic modern writing on naginata) 8. Honnotomosya.

Nemoto, Michio. 1936. *Kendo yogi: Bunken zyukun-yo oyobi renshi shodan sanko* (Reference book for the examinations of the Renshi title and secondary school kendo teacher). Daidokan.

Nishikubo, Hiromichi. 1915. *Budo Kowa* (Lectures on Budo). Keisatsu kyokai Hokkaido shibu.

Nishikubo, Hiromichi. 1926. 'Kendo'. *A New Japanese History* 4, edited by Yorocho chohosha.

Ota, Tatsutaka. 1937/ *Juken hikkei kendo dokuhon: Saikin 6-kanenkan zenkoku shiken mondai kaisetsu* (Handbook for the examination for proceeding to a higher grade: Commentary on the examination questions appeared in all parts of Japan in last six years). Konoeya shoten.

Otsuka, Tadayoshi, Utsunomiya Shingi, and Sakaue Yasuhiro (eds.). 1990. *Nobinobi Kendo gakko* (The liberal school of Kendo). Madosha.

Otsuka, Tadayoshi. 1995. *Nihon Kendo no Rekishi* (The History of Japanese Kendo). Madosha.

Pyle, Kenneth B. 1969. *The New Generation in Meiji Japan*. Board Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 1990. 'Dai-Nippon Butokukai no seiritsukatei to kozo, 1895-1904 (The organizing process and structure of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai, from 1895 to 1904)'. *The Journal of Administrative and Social Sciences* 1.3-4, 59-112. Fukushima University.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 1990. 'Taisho-ki niokeru Dai-Nippon-Butokukai: sono seiziteki-gunjiteki-kino o chushin toshite (Dai-Nippon Butokukai in the Taisho Era (1912-26): An analysis of its political and military function)', *Taiikushi Kenkyu* (Japanese Journal of the History of Physical Education) 7, 37-51.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 1998. 'Kendo no kindai to sono teiryu: sanbon-shobu o chushin ni (The modernization of kendo and its undercurrent: The history of Sanbon-shobu)'. *Nihon bunka no dokujisei* (The uniqueness of Japanese culture). Edited by Nakamura Toshio. Sobun Kikaku.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 2001. *Nippon yakyu no keifugaku* (A genealogy of Japanese Baseball). Seikyusha.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 2002. '1930 nen ni okeru kendoka no jittai bunseki: kendo no kindaiishi saiko (The true state of swordsmen in 1930)'. 26th Conference of the Japan Society of Sport History.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 2009. 'Budokai no senji taiseika: Budo sogo dantai "Dai-Nippon Butokukai" no seiritsu (The reorganization of the world of martial arts for the war: The establishment of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai)'. *Maboroshi no Tokyo orinpikku to sono jidai: supotsu, toshi, shintai* (The Tokyo Olympics of 1940 and its period: Sport, body and urban areas in the wartime). Edited by Yasuhiro Sakaue and Hiroyuki Takaoka. Seikyusha.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro ed. 2010. *Umi o watatta jujutsu to judo: Nippon budo no daizumizumu* (The jujutsu and judo sailed across the sea: The dynamism of Japanese martial arts). Seikyusya.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro (ed.). 2015. 'Nippon no budo: Nashonarizumu no kiseki (The Japanese martial arts: A tracings of nationalism)'. *Higasi azia no supotsu nashonarizumu* (The sport nationalism in the East Asia). Edited by Masaki Tosa. Mineruba Shobo.

Sakaue, Yasuhiro. 2016. *Showa tenno to supotsu* (The Emperor Showa and sport). Yoshikawa kobunkan.

Sato, Ukichi. 1928. 'Meiji jingu taikai ni Butokukai no husanka ni tsuite, huruki koromo o nugisuteyo (The Butokukai's boycott of the participating in the Meiji Shrine National Athletic Festival: Throw off your virtuous old clothes)'. *Asahi Sport*, Oct 15, 1928

Sato, Ukichi. 1928a. 'Kendo no tatenashi (Self-reformation of kendo)'. *Taiiku to Kyogi* (Physical Education and sport) May 1928.

Sato, Ukichi. 1928b. *Kendō* (Kendo). Meguroshoten.

Sogawa, Tsuneo. 2015. *Nihon-budo to Toyo-shiso* (Japanese martial arts and oriental thought). Heibonsya.

Sogawa, Tsuneo. 2017. 'Edo noshintai kara meiji noshintai e: Kano Jigoro ni miru kindai noshintai (Transition of the body from Tokugawa to Meiji period: A modern body in Kano Jigoro's Judo)'. *Kindai-nihon o tsukuttashintai* (The body made modern Japan). Edited by Tsuneo Sogawa. Taishukan shoten.

Sonoda, Tokutaro. 1957. *Kenshi Matsuzaki Namishiro den* (Biography of Matsuzaki Namishiro). Kurume Toshokan Tomonokai.

Takasaka, Masataka. 1971 [1884]. *Chiba Shusaku sensei zikiden kenjutsu meijin den* (The true instruction of the master swordsman Chiba Syūsaku). Shiryo: Meiji budo-shi (Documents of budo history in Meiji period), 23-48.

Tanida, Saichi. 1937. *Kendo shiken mondai mohan kaito shu* (Model answers to the questions of the kendo dan grade examination), enlarged 5th edition. Shubundo.

Tanida, Saichi. 1939. *Kendo shiken mondai mohan kaito shu* (Model answers to the questions of the kendo dan grade examination). Shubundo.

Tsuchida, Saiki et al. 1940. 'Gakusei kendo senpai zadankai (Round-table talk by the alumni of college kendo clubs)'. *Tsurugi* (Sword) May 1940.

## ABOUT THE JOURNAL

**Martial Arts Studies** is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Cardiff University Press  
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

**Martial Arts Studies** is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.  
[cardiffuniversitypress.org](http://cardiffuniversitypress.org)

### Journal DOI

10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

### Issue DOI

10.18573/mas.i6

*Accepted for publication 30 June 2018*

**Martial Arts Studies**

Journal design by Hugh Griffiths



MARTIALARTSSTUDIES.ORG

TWITTER.COM/MASTUDIES

# MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

## EDITORS

Paul Bowman  
Benjamin N. Judkins

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Kyle Barrowman  
Qays Stetkevych

To discuss publication or to submit  
a paper please contact:  
[martial.arts.studies@gmail.com](mailto:martial.arts.studies@gmail.com)

## EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch *University of York*  
Stephen Chan *SOAS*  
Greg Downey *Macquarie University*  
D.S. Farrer *University of Guam*  
Adam Frank *University of Central Arkansas*  
Thomas A. Green *Texas A&M University*  
T. J. Hinrichs *Cornell University*  
Leon Hunt *Brunel University London*  
Felipe P. Jocano Jr *University of the Philippines*  
Gina Marchetti *Hong Kong University*  
Meaghan Morris *The University of Sydney*  
Daniel Mroz *University of Ottawa*  
Meir Shahrar *Tel Aviv University*  
Dale Spencer *Carleton University*  
Douglas Wile *Alverno College*  
Phillip Zarrilli *Exeter University, Emeritus*