

THE OMORI RYU

By Kim Taylor

The first techniques that a student of *Iaido* must learn in either the *Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu* or in the *Muso Shinden Ryu* are the *Shoden Waza*. These are usually introduced as the *Omori Ryu* which invariably causes confusion. Is it a set in the main school or is it a separate school in itself? As will be mentioned, it is both.

Since these *kata* are the first and quite often the only introduction people have to *Iaido* they have a great influence on what is thought of the art. Due to their unique nature they have perhaps given the art of *Iaido* a rather undeserved reputation. They have also influenced what type of student continues on in the art. When asked why they did not return after the first couple of classes, most people will say that they liked it but they didn't like all the kneeling. Does this mean that beginners should start with standing techniques? Perhaps, if one is seeking lots of students but it can be argued that this would do them no favors.

OMORI RYU HISTORY

The history of the *Omori Ryu* is linked with that of several schools including the *Muso Ryu* so the proper starting place is difficult to find. We will begin with the *Muso Shinden/Jikiden* line. The man credited with the origination of *Iaido* is **Jinsuke Shigenobu** (*Hayashizuki*) who lived around 1546-1621. He was thought to have been born in *Sagami* (*Shoshu*) and to have travelled to *Mutsu* where he studied the sword from 1596 to 1601. The sword drawing art he founded between 1601 and 1615 is usually termed *Batto Jutsu*. In 1616 he went on his second *Musa Shugyo* (*dojo* tour) at the age of 73 and never returned.

Shigenobu has been given the title of first headmaster of the *Muso Jikiden/Shinden* School. From his teachings several hundred schools of *Iai* were developed, of which some 20 to 30 are still extant.

One of the names for *Shigenobu's* art is the *Muso Ryu*. "*Muso*" here means dream or vision, reflecting the way in which he was inspired to create the techniques. The second headmaster was **Tamiya Taira no Hyoe Narimasa**, the founder of the *Tamiya Ryu*. *Tamiya* was an instructor to *Ieyasu* (1542-1616), *Hidetada* (1578-1632) and *Iemitsu* (1604-1651), the first three *Tokugawa Shogun*.

The seventh headmaster of the *Muso Jikiden/Shinden* line was a man named **Hasagawa Chikaranosuke Eishin** (b. approx. 1700). He studied under the sixth headmaster, *Nobusada Danuemon no Jo Banno* (*Manno Danueimon Nobumasa*) in *Edo* during the *Kyoho* era (1716-1735).

Eishin transformed many of the techniques and is said to have devised the style of drawing with the blade edge up in the *obi*. He added the *Iai Hiza* techniques (*Chuden* level) to the *Okuden* levels of *waza*. It was *Eishin* who first used the name *Muso Jikiden*, which had been the name of an earlier school of swordsmanship. The full name of the school came to be the *Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu*. In this case "*muso*" means matchless or unique. "*Jikiden*" means transmitted directly, as from teacher to pupil. *Eishin* eventually left *Edo* and travelled to *Tosa* (*Koshi*) in *Shikoku*. **Omori Rokurozaemon Masamitsu**

was a student of *Eishin* and was expelled from the *Ryu* at one time for personal reasons. *Omori* was a student of *Ogasawara Ryu Reishiki* or etiquette as well as the *Yagyu Shinkage Ryu (Bishu)* school of sword. The *Yagyu Shinkage Ryu* had a set of five *Iai* techniques called the *Saya-no-uchi Batto Gohan*. *Rokurozaemon* developed a set of eleven *Iai* techniques which were initiated from the formal seated posture called *seiza*. For this innovation *Eishin* re-admitted him to the school.

Hayashi Rokudayu Morimasa (1661-1732) the ninth headmaster of *Muso Ryu* was a cook and pack horse driver for *Yamanouchi Toyomasa*, one of the *daimyo* at *Edo*. *Hayashi* studied *Shinkage Itto Ryu* (of the *Mito Han*) in *Edo*. He was also a student of *Arai Setatsu Kiyonobu* the eighth headmaster of what was named the *Shinmei Muso Ryu* at that time (*Muso Shinden/Jikiden Ryu*). *Hayashi* also studied *Shinkage Ryu Kenjutsu* with *Omori Masamitsu*. When he became the ninth headmaster of the *Muso Ryu*, he began to teach the *Omori seiza Iai* as the *Shoden Omori Ryu*. Up to this point the *Muso Ryu* only contained techniques which began from *Iai Hiza (Kiza, one knee raised)* and *Tachi Ai* (standing). This *seiza* set became the initiation to *Iaido*, "*Shoden*" being broken down to "*Sho*", beginning and "*den*", initiation. *Hayashi* eventually returned to his home in *Tosa*, finally establishing the *Muso Ryu* in *Shikoku*.

Hayashi Morimasa taught *Hayashi Yasudayu Seisho (Masataka)* who became the tenth headmaster.

In turn, *Hayashi Masataka* taught *Oguro Motoemon Kiyokatsu* who became the eleventh headmaster. *Oguro* also studied the sword under *Omori Masamitsu*. Thus we can see that although *Omori* was never a headmaster of the *Muso Ryu*, he had a direct influence on the school, being an instructor to at least 2 headmasters. This relationship of *Omori* to *Muso Ryu* is shown in the chart below.

In the *Taisho* era (1912-1926) the 17th headmaster (*Tanimura Ha*), *Oe Masamichi (Shikei)* (1852-1927) reorganized the school and officially incorporated the *Omori Ryu Iai waza* as the *Shoden* level. *Shikei* is the man who named the school the *Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu* and set its present three level system.

At the time of the 11th headmaster the school split into two lines, the *Shimomura* and the *Tanimura*. The *Tanimura* line became associated with the "common" folk, or the *Goshi* farmer/warriors while the *Shimomura* stayed closer to the *Samurai* classes. Both lines were still quite secretive about their teachings when a *Kendo* expert named *Nakayama Hakudo* (1869-1958) studied under teachers from the two branches. *Nakayama* developed a style of *Iai* which has become known as the *Muso Shinden Ryu* which is centered around *Tokyo*. It is *Nakayama* who popularized the name *Iaido* which appeared in 1932. The *Muso Jikiden Ryu* has since become more open and remains situated mainly in the West and South of Japan. The "*muso*" in *Muso Shinden* means vision as it did in the original *Muso Ryu* of *Shigenobu*. These two contemporaries, *Oe Masamichi* and *Nakayama Hakudo* are largely responsible for the modern survival and growth of *Iaido*. The two schools teach similar techniques, the *katas* differing in interpretation more than in fundamentals. The *Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu* has 11 *Omori Ryu* techniques while the *Muso Shinden Ryu* has added one more for a total of twelve. The names used for the individual *waza* are different for each school. At the *Chuden* and *Okuden* levels of training both the names and the numbers of techniques are the same.

OTHER SCHOOLS DERIVED FROM OMORI RYU

The influence of the *Omori Ryu* was not confined to the *Muso Ryu* lineage, it also played a somewhat paradoxical role in the emergence of some modern *Iaijutsu* schools.

TOYAMA RYU

In 1873 the *Rikugun Toyama Gakko* was set up as an army training school. The school included instruction in the sword and in 1925 the *Toyama Ryu Gunto Soho* was defined. The *gunto* being the later army sword that was of *katana* design and mounted somewhat like the old *tachi*, suspended from the belt instead of tucked through an *obi*. Teaching at the *Toyama Gakko* were *Kenshi* skilled in the *Omori Ryu*. These instructors developed a set of seven *Iaido* techniques for the *gunto* which were performed from the standing position.

NAKAMURA RYU

Nakamura Taisaburo (1911- 2003) studied the *Toyama Ryu Gunto Soho* and was one of the leading authorities on the school. He went on to create the *Nakamura Ryu* and define *Batto Jutsu* as the essential element. *Nakamura* eliminated the *seiza* position saying that it was not practical. He also stressed the importance of *Tameshigiri* practice. From the standing *Iaido* of *Hasagawa Eishin* to the origin of *Omori Ryu* as a school incorporating *seiza* and *reishiki*, to the modern *Iaijutsu* of *Nakamura* which rejects the *seiza* position we have come full circle.

MODERN OMORI RYU PRACTICE

The *Omori Ryu* as it is practiced in the *Muso Ryu* is a highly formal set practiced for the most part from *seiza*. Great stress is placed on precise physical and mental form. The set is as much about *reishiki* as it is about *Iaido*, but since *Budo* begins and ends with *reishiki*, this is probably not a problem.

But why learn *Omori* first, what was the reasoning behind this choice instead of, say, a set of standing techniques. After all, the standing techniques are easier to learn, and they are "practical". Anyone seeing them would not be tempted to say that *Iaido* was less "combat real" than *Iaijutsu*. It probably isn't hard to reason why the *Iai Hiza* position is not used as the starting point. The pains in the left leg would just about guarantee that nobody would learn the proper techniques simply because of the distraction. What should probably be resisted however, is the temptation to say that since the Japanese student was used to sitting in *seiza*, it was a good starting point because it was familiar. Standing is even more familiar, and the position from which the sword is most likely to be drawn. Even if we accept *Omori* as the starting position, why would *Nakayama Hakudo* and *Oe Masamichi* then choose *Iai Hiza* techniques for the *Chuden waza*. The very last techniques we learn are the easiest.

Are they the easiest though? Surely the headmasters of the *Muso Ryu* from *Hayashi Morimasa* onward had some reason for making *Omori Ryu* the *Shoden* level. Let's assume they knew better than we and try to find some reasons.

The most striking thing about *Omori* is that a lot of the cuts are done from a kneeling position. This is handy because it doesn't allow the student to swing too far before the blade hits the floor. It removes

the need to teach the student not to finish the cuts too low. Without being shown or told, the student discovers *shibori* and *te-no-uchi*, or at least discovers the need for them.

Kneeling also removes three out of seven joints from consideration while learning how to cut. This wisdom of this becomes apparent when you try to teach a beginner how to cut from a standing position. Tell a beginner to make a big cut keeping the hips low and the back straight. It won't happen. Now put the student on one knee and just ask for a big cut. The hips stay down since the toes, ankles and knees are not available to push them up. The back stays straight since if it moves the kneecap is likely to grind around on the floor. The hips stay square to the cut for the same reason. The student has only the shoulders and arms to swing with allowing you to concentrate on them.

The *seiza* position itself is useful. The *saya* must be properly controlled or it hits the floor. The back can be kept straight since only one joint (hip) is involved in letting it bend. *Nuki tsuke* is simplified with only one possible orientation of the hips (forward). Spiritually, the student begins and finishes in the most humble possible position, one that is close to the floor. The position is vulnerable to attack and therefore can't be aggressive as can *Kiza* or *Tachi Ai*. Moving up to a standing position from *seiza* requires great leg strength, giving the student a good root into the ground. Sitting solidly in *seiza* allows the student to know what that root should feel like while standing.

The list of benefits is long, think about all the instruction you have ever received in *Iai*, almost all of it can be examined in the *Omori Ryu*.

Omori is *Shoden*, it is the teaching set. It is the place where we learn to walk, later we run. Counting the partner practices, the *Muso Jikiden Ryu* contains somewhere around 60 *kata* in total. The average person could probably memorize that many movements in a month so the object of *Iaido* must not be how many techniques we can memorize. The point is to perform one technique perfectly at the proper moment. For that you need only one technique but you need to be able to do it properly. The argument is the old one of quality vs. quantity. To do *Iaido* you must know how to cut, *Omori Ryu* teaches you. To do *Iaido* you must know how to carry your sword, *Omori Ryu* teaches you. Patience, perseverance, perspective, perception, perspiration and all the other P words of practice (yes, even pain) are taught in *Omori Ryu*. It is *Shoden*, as important as your first breath of air.

Malcolm Shewan, in his book on *Muso Shinden Omori* describes the *kata* as idealized and often impractical movements which are not meant to be battlefield maneuvers. Instead they are a matrix within which we can re-live the experience of the man who created the *kata*. *Omori* is a complete set and we should look at it as such, seeing the underlying principles of the whole. The set is not "beginner's stuff"; if we could perform a perfect *Mae (Shohatto)* we would achieve the perfection of *Iai*.

THE OBJECTIONS TO IAIDO AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO IAI-JUTSU

As was mentioned earlier, the fact that *Muso Ryu* begins with *Shoden Omori* has often created the impression that *Iai-do* is something overly concerned with form and etiquette, having nothing to do with "real" *Iaijutsu*. This is rather like watching someone hit a tennis ball against a wall and then saying the game is silly since the wall doesn't hit the ball back. Some of the comments on *Iaido* published over the last few years are informative.

Otake Ritsuke describes modern *Iaido* as being too fast on the *noto*; this is an affectation for show only and is dangerous. *Iaijutsu* instead emphasizes a fast draw and cut (*haya waza*) which is more realistic and practical.

Omori Ryu has a slow *noto*, but also a slow *nuki tsuke*. Both are slow to teach proper form. *Chuden* and *Okuden* contain *haya nuki*, fast draw, but even here, fast is not attempted until the draw is smooth.

Nakamura Taisaburo has several comments on *Iai-do*, claiming it is not practical or realistic. The comments are found in Draeger's **Martial Arts and Ways of Japan**.

1. *Seiza was not a position the classical warrior would adopt, it cannot be done with the daisho (two swords).*

The classical warrior was as likely to be wearing a *tachi* and a *tanto* as the *daisho* which was not popular until the *Edo* period. The *shin-to* or *katana* was not introduced until the middle 1500s and the matched *daisho* style was developed much later. The very warriors that would have carried and used the *daisho*, the *Tokugawa* era *samurai*, were those who developed and adopted the *Omori Ryu*. The upper levels of *Muso Ryu Iaido* begin from the "battlefield" positions.

2. *The nuki tsuke of Iai-do is too slow; it exposes a suki (opening).*

This is doubtless true for the beginner practicing *Omori Ryu*, but a beginner is almost by definition exposing *suki* most of the time. This would not change whether a slow or a fast *nuki* was being attempted. For the expert the draw can be slow or fast, the opening will not be there. As with most martial endeavors, speed is not as important as proper timing. If speed were all that was needed the heavyweight boxing crown would be held by a flyweight. The *nuki tsuke* of the *Muso Ryu* can be very fast in the upper levels of practice.

3. *The kiri tsuke of the Iai-do student is weak since they lack experience with tameshi-giri (cutting practice).*

To be flippant, there is no law that prohibits *Iaidoka* from obtaining straw while allowing *Iaijutsu* practitioners to use it. *Tameshigiri* can be practiced by anyone. When you begin practicing however, you have a better chance of succeeding if you have been taught the proper mechanics of cutting. A great way to learn this is by practicing *Omori Ryu* as was pointed out above.

4. *The chiburi of Iai-do is not practical, only by wiping the blade on a cloth or a piece of paper would the blade be clean enough to return to the scabbard.*

This is true. The *Iai-jutsu* of the *Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu* has a *chiburi* that consists of spinning the blade and then hitting the *tsuka* with a fist. The *Toyama Ryu Iai-jutsu* uses the exact same circular *chiburi* as does *Omori Ryu*. The *chiburi* "represented" by these motions would not be performed by the swordsmen involved after actually cutting someone or something. An *Iaido* exponent would doubtless use a cloth too.

5. The *noto* of *Iai-do* is too fast and is used only for show; the *noto* of the classical warrior is slow and demonstrates *zanshin* (lingering heart, awareness).

The student of *Iaido* had better demonstrate *zanshin* or the instructor will soon show its usefulness. As to the quick *noto*, it might be argued (by me only) that one should be ready for further attacks after finishing one opponent. One man thoroughly dead at your feet doesn't mean that all potential enemies are dead. By taking a long time to do *noto* you are leaving a *suki* of the same sort that is left with a slow *nuki tsuke*. In any case, fast or slow, drawing or sheathing you must be ready to change according to the circumstances. That is *fudoshin*.

6. The manners and customs of modern *Iai-do* students are careless. Most of them have a *koiguchi* that is chipped and scratched.

All beginners have a *saya* that is chiseled, nobody starts out perfect. *Omori Ryu* is a school that contains major influences from the *Ogasawara Ryu Reishiki*. *Omori* is a school of the manners and customs of the sword. It is also a school where the slow *nuki tsuke* is done, allowing the student to learn how not to scratch the *koiguchi*. A poor student of *Omori Ryu* will have poor manners but that is no fault of *Iaido* itself.

Nakamura goes on to say that modern practice should be a balance of old and new but the showmanship, sport and competition aspects should be discarded. The link between *Kendo* and *Iaido* should be recognized, the *shinai* is not a sword.

Obata Toshishiro in his book **Crimson Steel** states, "the *Samurai* never wore his long sword when seated because it was not worn into the house, yet '*Iaido*' as the new sword drawing art was termed taught many sword drawing methods from the formal seated '*seiza*' position."

The *samurai* did wear his long sword when seated. He wore it when he practiced *Omori Ryu Iai*. At the time the art might have been termed *Batto-jutsu*, *Iai-jutsu* or some other name but since the term *Iaido* did not become popular until the 1930s and since the common people in the *Edo* period did not practice swordsmanship, the '*Samurai*' most certainly practiced *Iai-jutsu*' from '*seiza*'.

Reid and Croucher in **The Way of the Warrior** have this to say. "When it is well performed *Iaido* is a beautiful, almost balletic use of the sword, but it bears little relation to the speed, poise and concentration of the art of *Iai-jutsu*. The combat value of studying *Iaido*, especially with a blunt sword, is almost nil, but on the other hand the aim of the adept in this way is spiritual and bodily harmony and growth, not killing power."

If one needs killing power to have speed, poise and concentration, perhaps one should practice with automatic rifles instead of these horribly inefficient blunt swords.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Draeger, Donn F., 1983, **The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan**, Vol. 3, Weatherhill N.Y. Jones, Trevor, 1989, A Brief History of Iaido, Kendo News #4, April, British Kendo Association.

Mears, Bill, 1990, **Yugen Kan Dojo Iaido Manual**.

Obata, Toshishiro, 1987, **Crimson Steel**, Dragon Books, USA

Otake, Ritsuke, 1977, **The Deity and The Sword Vol. 1**, Minato Research and Publication Co. Tokyo Japan.

Reid, H. and M. Croucher, 1983, **The Way of the Warrior**, Methuen, Toronto.

Sato, Kanzan, 1983, **The Japanese Sword**, Kodansha International, Tokyo.

Shewan, Malcolm Tiki, 1983, **Iai: The Art of Japanese Swordsmanship**, European Iaido Federation publication.

Warner, G. and Donn F. Draeger, 1982, **Japanese Swordsmanship**, Weatherhill, N.Y.

Dojo Mailing List

I'Aikido de la Montagne, 3734 Avenue du Parc,

Montreal Quebec, Canada. H2X 2J1.

Roy Asa, c/o Japan Camera Centre, 88 Lesmill Rd.

(Don Mills) Toronto Ontario, Canada. M3B 2T5. (FAX

(416)445-0519)

Mitsuru Asaoka, 2445 Cape Horn Ave. Coquitlam

B.C. Canada. V3K 1K1 (604)525-5080 FAX(604)520-5999

Douglas Blue III, 673 Panorama Trail West.

Rochester N.Y. 14625.

Jim Callfas, 88 East Lynn Ave. Toronto, Ont.

Canada. M4C 3X2 698-8688.

Central YMCA Aikikai, c/o Stuart Rae 375

Brunswick Ave. #504, Toronto Ontario, Canada. M5R 2Z3

Kazuo Chiba, 3846 Eagle St. San Diago California

USA. 92103

Malcolm Copp-Taylor, Yugenkan Dojo, Unit 19,

Charlton Trading Estate, Shepton Mallet, Somerset,

England, BA6 8ER.

Stephen Cruise, 10 Glenborough Pk. Willowdale

Ontario Canada. M2R 2G5 (416)229-4986

Ted Davis, Dept of Biology, University of

Victoria. Box 1700 Victoria B.C. V8W 2Y2

Doshikan Kendo Club, c/o Shozo Kato 124 East

79th St. Apt 3A New York NY. USA 10021(212)535-6470

Don Harvey, 81 Sandcliffe Road, Midway, Burton-

on-Trent, Staffs. DE11 7PH.

International Kendo Federation c/o Nippon-

Budokan 2 Kitanomaru-koen Chiyoda-ku Tokyo Japan. 102

(211-5804, 211-5805)

Japanese Swordsmanship Society, PO Box 1116

Rockefeller Stn. New York, New York. USA 10185 (212)691-

2891

JCCC 123 Wynford Dr. Toronto Ontario Canada. M3C

1K1

Ken Zen Institute, c/o Kenjun Kasahara 152-158

West 26th Street New York NY. USA 10001 (212)741-2281

Roy Kennedy, 124 Glen Springs Dr. Scarborough

Ontario, Canada. M1W 1X8

Larry Nakamura, 24 Beckwith Road, Etobicoke

Ontario, Canada. M9C 3X9. (416)622-2962

New England Aikikai, 2000 Massachusetts Ave.

Cambridge Mass. USA. 02140 (617)661-1959

New York City Kendo Club, c/o Noboru Kataoka 46

West 83rd Street New York NY. USA 10024 (212) 874-6161

Goyo Ohmi 43 Milington Cr. Ajax Ontario, Canada.

L1T 1R3 (416)683-8346

F.Y. Okimura, 7557 de Normandie, Montreal

Quebec, Canada. H2R 2V2.

Renbukan Dojo, c/o Mr. Tamio Tateno, 207 Nelson

St. Brantford Ontario, Canada. N3S 4C2.

Pierre-Paul Rivet, 12 Desmarteau Boucherville

Quebec. J4B 1Z9.

Robert Savoie 532 Avenue Duluth E. Montreal
Quebec Canada. H2L 1A9 (514)288-8679 or 842-0342

Dr. D.W. Schwerdtfeger, 8580 Lakewood Shores
Road NW. Rice, MN 56367.

Sei Do Kai Iaido, c/o Kimberley Taylor,
Department of Animal Science, University of Guelph,
Guelph Ontario, Canada. N1G 2W1. (519)824-4120 ext 6225
FAX (519)836-9873

Marion M. Taylor, 32 Bedford Court Amherst, MA
USA 01002 (413)256-0219

Valley Aikido, c/o Paul Sylvain, 131 King St.
Northampton Mass. USA. 02140

Peter Verra, 1452 Paddington Ct. Burlington,
Ont. Canada. L7M 1W7. (416)336-7159

Katsuo Yamaguchi, 3-24-1 Shinbori Higashiyamoto-
shi, Tokyo Japan 189. (0425-65-9146)

Yasuo Yamashibu, Tonda-cho-1-4-2, Okayama Japan
700. (0862-25-5471) (FAX 0862-23-9433)

Yugenkan Dojo, c/o Mr. Bill Mears, 100 Elmwood
Ave. Crystal Beach Ontario, Canada. L0S 1B0. (416)871-
7772 ext. 314

Zanshin, Ecole D'Aikido et Iaido, c/o Donna
Winslow, 5425 Bordeaux #503D, Montreal Quebec, Canada.
H2H 2P9 (514)521-6786