

IAI-JUTSU of
HONTAI YŌSHIN RYŪ

(本體楊心流の居合術)



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Introduction

When I started to write a series of articles on Hontai Yoshin-ryu for koryu.com, I did not intend to continue with an article on iai-jutsu. Otherwise, of course, it would have made more sense to make a series of four right away. More-over, Hontai Yoshin-ryu is known as a jujutsu school and although it is incorporating different weapons including the sword, it is certainly not classified as a kenjutsu or iai-jutsu school. Nevertheless, the school also trains its students in the proper use of the sword.

I had the chance to closely witness the formalization of the iaijutsu techniques in our school by the late **Inoue Tsuyoshi Munetoshi, 18th generation Soke**. It was only when I realized that there were several misconceptions about the iai-jutsu in Hontai yoshin-ryu that I decided to write this article as a follow-up of the 3 for koryu.com. I first wrote this article in 2009 but I modified it later to be posted on our website.

Also this article is a way to contribute to the memory of **the late 18th generation Soke**, the late **Kurushima Sensei** (menkyo kaiden), who was my iaijutsu teacher when I lived in Japan and the late **Sato Sensei** (also menkyo kaiden), who started to correct my kodachi techniques just before he passed away.



The history of Iaijutsu in Hontai Yoshin-ryu

Although jujutsu remains the core of the school, the sword is important as well. In fact, from its origin, Hontai Yoshin-ryu had several famous sword masters among its teachers:

*The founder of the school, **Takagi Oriemon Shigenobu**, also called Umon, was the second son of Inatobi Sanzaemon, Kenjutsu Shinan-Yaku, or master sword teacher, of the Shiraishi domain. At one point in time, Takagi left for the neighboring domains of Ushu and Hitachi, and entered the martial gate of one Muto Danuemon, a high level strategist of warlord Yoshihide. As his pupil, Umon learnt Muto-ryu Kodachi and Kyochi-ryu Sojutsu, pursuing the techniques and secrets of these schools to their highest levels. Later, Takagi received instruction from sword masters and studied hard, mastering also the techniques of the Naginata, Shuriken and Taijutsu. Takagi improved his art by undertaking a journey throughout the country. Once an accomplished master of the bujutsu, he took up service as the master sword teacher of the Shiraishi domain.*

*Another famous sword-master from Hontai Yoshin-ryu was **Takagi Gennoshin Hideshige**, 3rd Soke, who served the Himeji-han as a “bugei” expert. In Himeji castle, there is a book on display with the wages of all retainers. Takagi Gennoshin Hideshige was paid five hundred koku, an unusual high price for a sword teacher, indicating that he was highly appreciated by the Himeji han.*



Visit to Himeji with members of our dojo.

The importance of the sword in Hontai Yoshin-ryu, is also illustrated in the change of Soke ceremony between the 17th and 18th generation, where Inoue (father) received an old sword from Minaki soke. That sword, which was always carried by the 13th generation soke, Yagi Ikugoro, has been regarded as a school treasure and it has been handed down for a long time by the school.

Formal Iaijutsu training has not always been part of the daily teachings of all soke, but Inoue Tsuyoshi Munetoshi, the 18th generation Soke, begun again to formally teach Iai-jutsu to his students. Together with Kurushima sensei, he re-vitalized Hontai Yoshin-ryu Iaijutsu kata and kihon, based on original writings and own experience. Both, were also very much in favor of Kenjutsu exercises with bokken (wooden sword), recognizing the need to re-enforce the correct usage of the sword. In their mind, Kenjutsu and Iaijutsu are essential but training with the sword goes beyond the need to prepare students to employ it against other weapons.

The role of iai-jutsu and kenjutsu in general

There are a lot of excellent books on iai-do and I am a little embarrassed to repeat what others have done so much better.

Nevertheless, for those who are less familiar with iai-do, I thought it was useful to also include some basic explanations on the subject. Those who are familiar with the subject can skip the next paragraph and go to the Hontai Yoshin-ryu specific part.

Sword fighting has always been an important component of the Japanese classical martial arts, be-it because these schools were headed by famous samurai for which the sword meant so much more than just another weapon. Therefore, when you train in a koryu and you touch a sword, you should out of respect for these old masters, move and act properly with that sword. Also you should be able to have the right attitude in sword fighting. If you are not talented, at least you should lose your fight with dignity.

There are 2 main kinds of sword fighting techniques: sword drawing techniques, called iaijutsu and kenjutsu.

iai-jutsu, is often described as the art to draw the sword while cutting the opponent. We do have to realize that in the early days, drawing the sword was not a major aspect of sword manipulation. Indeed, in times of great battles, the emphasis was surviving as a group on a large battle field, rather than to win individual duels. Later in history, however, drawing techniques have become more important and led to the origin of an art on itself.

iai-jutsu is written with 3 kanji:

- **I** (reside; to be; exist)
- **AI** (join)
- **JUTSU** (art; technique).

*The initial name (15th century) for sword drawing is **batto-jutsu** (not to be mistaken with **ba-jutsu**, which is the art of riding a horse while fighting).*

*Only later (17th century), there was a tendency to use the name **iai-jutsu**. Still later, the art of drawing the long sword became also known as **iaido**. Schools who still use the names **batto-jutsu** and **iai-jutsu**, generally are more combative in nature and some also find test cutting, or **tameshigiri**, very important.*

*The name **iaido** became popular in the beginning of the 20° century when schools wanted to incorporate the philosophical component, inherent in all **budo**, into their art's name. Of course, "do" (also pronounced "michi" in Japanese), is what Chinese Taoists call **Tao**, the way. Do is written with the strokes for "principal", and joined with the radical for "movement". Therefore, it can be seen as an "important road", the way one has to*

follow. Do in a martial context is used as a suffix to indicate the philosophical context of the art.

Drawing the sword while cutting is not easy to perform with a partner, therefore most iaido practice is done alone. Nevertheless, some schools also train from time to time some kenjutsu kind of techniques to develop a better sense of reality in distance and timing.

Kenjutsu, in contrast to iai-jutsu, is characterized by training forms against an opponent. Another difference between the two is that in kenjutsu, the action usually begins with the sword unsheathed, and the emphasis is on both attack and defense. This distinction is however not consistent as some kenjutsu kata start with the sword sheathed and some iai-jutsu kata also have defenses.

In the Tokugawa period, there were many kenjutsu schools and some of them still culture the old sword fighting techniques.

Kendo, the modern form of kenjutsu, was created during the late 18th century. Use of the shinai (bamboo sword) and bogu (protective armor) made the delivery of strong strikes and thrusts possible. Kenjutsu as such, went into temporary decline, following the Meiji Restoration, but in 1879 the Tokyo Police Force and later the army initiated kenjutsu practices again. At the end of World War II, the occupational authorities tried



The author in kenjutsu style, during a demonstration organized by Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu in Belgium. (In the back Esaka sensei, Hanshi, 10th dan, Vice-president of Zen Nihon Iaido Renmei)

to ban kenjutsu but immediately following the end of the Occupation period, in 1952, the Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei (All-Japan Kendo Federation) was established. By 1957 kendo was part of the physical education in all Japanese middle schools. However, like in all budo sports, techniques had to be adapted for competition purpose. Although the strikes of a shinai can by no means be compared with the cutting technique of a sword, kendo, if practiced well, can be an excellent training form for kenjutsu.

The role of iai-jutsu in Hontai Yoshin-ryu

Although jujutsu remains the core of the school, the sword is important as well:

- Kodachi (the short sword) has been one of the oldest corner stones of the school, since the founder was an expert in kodachi even before he started to formalize the school.
- Tachi dori (translated as catching the sword) are part of the official curriculum and consist of unarmed defense, against an opponent with a long sword.
- Also tanto, (which is usually translated as knife) which is part of the official curriculum (in techniques that are called tanto dori), can be seen as a very short sword, so different in shape than contemporary Western knives.
- Other weapons in Hontai Yoshin-ryu (cho bo and hanbo) are trained in kumidachi form, i.e. in encounters against the long sword.



Kodachi against sword (tachi) by Roger and Frederic

Iai-jutsu training has been formalized again in Hontai Yoshin-ryu by Inoue Tsuyoshi Munetoshi, 18th generation Soke, since it is essential that students can correctly manipulate the sword to perform all the Kumidachi kata in the school and since it becomes harder (even in Japan these days) to ensure that beginners gain these skills in parallel of their normal training. It was his vision that it would be better to ensure proper training within the system again.

Until the mid-eighties, Hontai Yoshin-ryu students were encouraged to get additional iai training outside the school and in the Nishinomiya municipal dojo, there were more than enough opportunities to do so.

When I lived in Japan, I had to chance to follow classes in Toyama-ryu, which at that time was represented in Nishinomiya by our soke (apart from Hontai Yoshin-ryu, Inoue soke was very skilled in iai-do but also other gendai budo like kodokan judo, kendo and jukendo, all in which he was high ranked). Most of the iai-do classes were given by Kurushima sensei, also a menkyo kaiden of Hontai Yoshin-ryu and a remarkable teacher. Both Inoue soke and Kurushima sensei worked hard to convince students to use their sword properly and with dignity

I found Toyama-ryu (a modern form of iai created by the Imperial Japanese Army) very useful, since Kata are performed from a standing position and techniques are kept extremely simple. Toyama-ryu attaches also a lot of importance on tameshigiri (test cutting, see later). In other words, I considered it an efficient way to quickly gain

confidence with the sword techniques that are needed to perform Hontai Yoshin-ryu kata.

Because iaijutsu is included in our training and we now have again a formal set of kata does not mean that it is considered part of the main curriculum of the school.

On the other hand, like in every koryu, when you formalize things, you have to ensure that students train these aspects with the same sense for perfection as other parts of the system.



The current soke insisting on the proper execution of iaijutsu, during a seminar in Belgium

lai-jutsu training in Hontai Yoshin-ryu

As in many iaijutsu or iaido systems, a routine training in Hontai Yoshin-ryu will usually start with a **kihon** (basics) in order to prepare for the actual kata that usually consists of the following four techniques:

- *nukitsuke, or the drawing of the blade;*
- *kiritsuke, or the cutting of the enemy;*
- *chiburi, or the shaking of the blood from the blade*
- *noto, the re-sheathing of the sword.*

During kihon, these techniques are trained separately starting from Seigan no kamae. A lot of emphasis is given on the most delicate part, which is the actual cutting with the sword.

***Kiri** is usually written with the kanji (切), meaning “to cut”. When kiri, like in Hontai Yoshin-ryu, is written with an alternative kanji, the emphasis is put on killing (斬) instead of cutting (切).*

This is consistent with the true martial spirit of the art, when one trains to cut with a sword, it is with the intention to learn how to kill. Whether or not one will use that skill is something different and is purely philosophical: “a true sword is not a sword that kills but one that gives life”.

***Seigan no kamae** is a name often used in Hontai Yoshin-ryu (in different weapon applications) and in iaijutsu, it is also known as chudan no kamae, the middle level kamae, compared to gedan (lower level) and jodan (upper level).*

Seigan consists of two kanji: the first meaning correct, the second eyeball. In seigan no kamae, one will aim with the kissaki (sword tip) to the eyes of the opponent, thus creating pressure on someone who might otherwise feel the need to recklessly attack. In some tactics, however, it might become interesting to release this pressure and invite the opponent to attack when self being mentally prepared and strong.

In the Kihon, students will perform the following techniques:

1. KARATAKEWARI
2. KASUMIGIRI
3. MAKKOGIRI
4. KESAGIRI
5. SUIGETSU HARAI TSUKI
6. IWATSUBAME
7. NAMIKAESHI
8. MENWARI
9. AWASEGIRI



Kihon in our dojo: cut towards the head (menwari)

An article like this is not intended to focus too much on technical aspects. Therefore, potential errors in drawing, cutting and even in gripping and manipulating the sword (**te no uchi**) should be addressed with a qualified teacher.

Nevertheless, when performing kata, different aspects should receive sufficient attention and I would like to mention some of them.

- The first is breathing (**kokyu**) before starting a kata: in general, one should breath a few times calmly before the execution of a kata. Breathing is essentially abdominal and an opponent should not be able to take advantage of the breathing cycle. After a full breathing cycle, a new inspiration phase is started and ad the end of that phase, the technique (usually a nukitsuke) starts. In regular Hontai Yoshin-ryu training, this kind of breathing is done 1 time (ik-kokyu) but occasionally 3 times (san-kokyu).
- Another point of attention is the way to look (**metsuke**). A kata will always start with enzan no metsuke, a way of looking at the whole figure (not a particular point), as if looking at a faraway mountain.
- During the execution the attention is narrowed down and finally maintained in **zanshin** (state of awareness) at the end of the kata.
- Finally, I would like to comment on the execution rhythm of a kata. Iai kata in Hontai Yoshin-ryu are always performed calmly, without precipitation, certainly at the beginning and the end of a kata this is emphasised by creating an atmosphere of serenity. This does not mean that all parts of a kata are slow, on the contrary, they will stand out in speed because they are preceded and followed by periods of tranquillity (even when concentration is maintained).

Kata are divided into 2 types of IAI techniques: **I-WAZA**, or sitting techniques (in most schools they are called suwari-waza), and **TACHI WAZA**, or standing techniques

- Standing techniques (tachi waza) are: Omote no waza (5 techniques); Ura no waza (6 techniques) and Oku no waza (7 techniques).
- Sitting techniques (i-waza) are: Omote no waza (4 techniques); Ura no waza (4 techniques), in no waza (4 techniques) and yo no waza (4 techniques).
- There are 2 special techniques (**gokui ken**): Yo-ryu no tachi (an i-waza) and setsu-ryu no tachi (a tachi waza).

Another part of iai-training in Hontai Yoshin-ryu, consists of **kumidachi**, which is an exercise of sword against sword, but in iaijutsu style.



Same kumidachi technique by the 18th soke (photo left) and Frederic and Roger from our dojo (photo right) from two different angles.

Both opponents are standing several meters from each other. Uchidachi will draw the sword, while doing 3 steps and will try to cut the opponent, shidachi will do taisabaki and counter attack. Usually in Hontai Yoshin-ryu, tori is called the opponent who in a kata actually performs the technique, in contrast to uke. In iaijutsu, however, there is a tendency to name both opponents shidachi and uchidachi respectively, referring to the giving and receiving sword.

Tameshigiri

Testing the cutting skills, is quit important in Hontai Yoshin-ryu and students are encouraged to do this on a regular basis (for instance once a month or every 2 months).

Tameshigiri used to be the name for of a sword test: a cutting exercise to test the quality of the blade rather than the cutting skills of the swordsman. The materials used to test the quality of the sword were condemned criminals and cadavers.

These days, tameshigiri is performed on adequate material (like tatami or bamboo) to test the cutting abilities of the swordsman.

Some purists, however, are seeking other ways to give a name to this activity. Tameshigiri can be written in 2 different ways and each can be pronounced in an alternative way: shito which is sword testing, and shizan, which is test cutting. You can

see this distinction being made recently by some iai-do people. Another name for testing cutting techniques, is suemono giri (cutting fixed/still objects) as it is used by Masumoto Takakazu, current soke of Enshin-ryu (Masumoto Takakazu, organizes a well-respected enbu in his hometown Osaka, each year in which he always invites our soke. The enbu I am aware of opened with a nice suemono giri).

Although some people insist on the use of alternative words for tameshigiri, in Hontai Yoshin-ryu, and as long as you know what you are doing (i.e. recognize the historical context), it does not matter that much.

In our dojo in Belgium, we have set up a system where a shinken is available for students and where the cost of the tatami mats you cut is paid by yourself. One of the sempai will take care of the preparation of the tatami, the junior students have the honor to clean the dojo after the training.

Addendum 1: the katana

The Japanese sword is often called katana, but in fact there are many types of swords. Therefore, some prefer the more literal “Nihon-to” as translation for Japanese sword.

Depending on the length of the blade (the unit of measurement is the shaku, which is defined as 10/33 meters, approximately 30.3 cm or 1 foot), several names are used:

- **Tanto** is a knife, with a blade shorter than one shaku.
- Sho-to are swords with blades longer than 1 shaku but less than 2. Examples of sho-to are the wakizashi and the **kodachi**.
- **Daito** is the long sword, which has a blade longer than 2 shaku (in fact there is also the odachi, an abnormally long blade, longer than 3 shaku and carried across the back)

Nevertheless, in an iai-jutsu context, the sword is usually called katana.

*Indeed “katana” in general is the name that is used almost exclusively for the daito, the typical long Japanese sword as it was worn by the samurai from 1500 till 1867. In their case, the katana was paired with a similar but shorter sword. Both blades were worn blade-side-up. The two weapons together were called the **daisho** which literally means big-small, and was exclusive for the samurai.*

When training with a sword, proper reference to the major parts of the sword is essential:

- **HA** (刃 Cutting edge
- **KISSAKI** (切先 sword point/tip
- **MONO UCHI** (物打ち part of blade near (10 cm) the tip, this is the cutting area
- **MUNE**(棟 Back of blade, opposite side of the edge.
- **TSUBA** (鐔 or 鐔: Sword guard
- **TSUKA** (柄 Handgrip, hilt (ending in the **Tsuka-gashira**: the pommel of the sword, the butt of the handle).

Other parts of the sword:

- **BŌSHI** (鋩子 Tempered area in tip
- **FUKUSA** (ふくら the curved point (cutting edge) of Kissaki
- **HA MACHI** (刃切 end of cutting edge (HA), which is a notch for habaki,.
- **HAMON** (刃文 temper pattern/ line.
- **MEI** (銘 name (signature) of the smith on tang.

- **MEKUGI ANA** (目釘穴 *Hole in the tang for fixing Nakago and Tsukagi, by a piece of dry bamboo that is nailed through the hole*)
- **MUNE MACHI** (棟区 *end of the ridge.*)
- **NAKAGO** (茎 *Tang of blade.*)
- **SHINOJI JI** (鎗地 *surface of the blade between the ridge and Shinogi-suji.*)
- **SHINOJI SUJI** (鎗筋 *Line of blade that runs parallel to the ridge*)
- **YASURI ME** (鑿目 *File marks on tang.*)
- **YOKOTE** 横手

The fittings of the sword:

- **HABAKI** (はばき *Fitting between tsuba and blade, wedge for koiguchi.*)
- **MEKUGI** (目釘 *Retaining peg.*)
- **MENUKI** (目貫 *Decorative fixtures on handle.*)
- **SAME** (鱈 *sharkskin, used for wrapping of TSUKA.*)

The katana is sheathed in a scabbard, called SAYA (鞘). Terms related to the SAYA are:

- **KOIGUCHI**: *Scabbard mouth, literally carp's mouth*
- **KURIGATA**: *Knob for tying Sageo*
- **SAGEO**: *Cord attached to the Saya*

In kumidachi applications of Hontai Yoshin-ryu, the sword is often called **tachi**, a reminder of the older days, when the daito was worn cutting edge down and was suspended by cords from a belt (which was the way swords were worn before the 16th century).

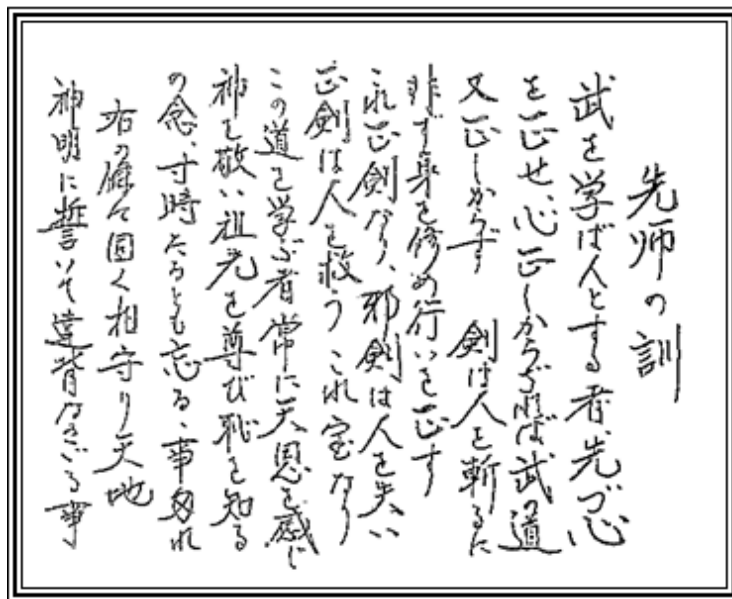
A wooden sword, called **bokken** or **bokkuto**, is also frequently used in Hontai Yoshin-ryu training, especially for the exercises against the long staff, called cho bo or roku shaku bo (6 shaku, being about 1.82 meters). This is not only for safety reasons but also because the impact can be quite big and damage to a sword is possible.

Practice of iaijutsu is performed with a training sword, called **iai-to**, which is not sharp. Only the experts are using a real sword, called **shinken**. This is also true for other parts of Hontai Yoshin-ryu, and for instance in high level enbu (martial art demonstrations) like the yearly Nihon kobudo enbu taikai (Nihon Budokan), shinken are used (for instance for tanto dori, tachi dori, kodachi and hambo kata), except for the cho bo kumidachi kata where bokken is used.

Addendum 2: The “words of the ancient masters”

A training with the 18th generation soke would always end by reciting the “words of the ancient masters” and in his memory I decided to include the translation here.

The “words of the ancient masters” (sensei no oshie), was written by Chiba Shusaku Narimasa, the founder of Hokushin Itto-ryu. He was one of the last great sword masters of the samurai era and the headmaster of one of the three most famous sword schools in Edo (present day Tokyo), and one of the developers of modern kendo.



BU O MANABAN TO SURU MONO
MAZU KOKORO O TADASE

KOKORO TADASHI KARAZAREBA
BU NO MICHİ MATA TADASHI KARAZU

KEN WA HITO O KIRU NI ARAZU
MI O OSAME O KONAI O TADASU
KORE SEIKEN NARI

JAKEN WA HITO O USHINAI
SEIKEN WA HITO O SUKUU

KORE TAKARA NARI
KONO MICHİ O MANABU MONO

TSUNE NI TENON O KANJI KAMI O
UYAMAI
SOSEN O TATTOBI

HAI O SHIRU NO NEN
SUNJI TARU TO MO
WASURERU KOTO NAKARE

Those who wish to study the way of the warrior. Must first correct the heart.

If the heart is correct The way of budo will also be correct.

The sword is not for cutting a person down. It is for disciplining the self and training one's conduct. This is true sword

An evil sword takes live A true sword protects life. This is a treasure.

Those who wish to study this way Be grateful for the blessings of heaven, respect the gods, Honour your ancestors. Never forget the sense of honour.

Always be mindful of these teachings