

Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu

Quintin T. G. Chambers is one of the very few foreigners to have been accepted as a member in the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu. As a disciple of the current headmaster, Mr. Chambers writes authoritatively about this important traditional stronghold of classical Japanese martial arts. This introductory article gives the reader a broad outline which will serve as a basis for more specific and technical articles in the future.

Quintin T.G. Chambers

We usually think of a cultural treasure in terms of ancient buildings and works of art, but rarely with respect to the martial arts (**bugei**) or martial ways (**budo**). The Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu, however, was designated an intangible cultural treasure by the Japanese government in 1960. It is the only one in the history of Japanese martial arts.

The Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu has a strong claim to being one of the oldest of several thousands of **ryu** (traditional and systematically developed martial arts organizations) in Japan. It was founded by Izasa Ienao, who was born in 1387, just prior to the Muromachi period (1392-1573), Japan's most intense period of internal wars. As a young man, Ienao served under the military ruler of Japan, Yoshimasa, and in the wars of that time experienced many battles without mishap or defeat. When Ienao was sixty years old he prayed to the god of Katori shrine, defined as a god of war, and spent one thousand days in meditation, purification, and hard training in the martial arts. At the end of this time he designed about one hundred techniques and established them in **ryu** form, which he named after the god of Katori. Until his death at the age of one hundred and two years, Ienao trained many disciples, a number of whom became famous swordsmen.

As in all the classical **ryu** of martial arts, many weapons and techniques for using them must be studied. The categories of study in the Katori Shinto Ryu include **iai-jutsu** (sword drawing and techniques); **kenjutsu** (sword techniques), **bojutsu** (staff art), **sojutsu** (spear art), **naginata-jutsu** (halberd art), **yawara-gi** (an early type of **jujutsu**), **shuriken-jutsu** (the art of throwing small bladed weapons), **ninjutsu** (the art of concealment), **senjo-jutsu** (the tactical arts of war), and **chikujō-jutsu** (the art of fortification).

Otake Risuke, the current headmaster of the **ryu**, lives some distance from Tokyo in Chiba Prefecture and makes his living by breeding race horses as his father did before him. He entered Katori Shinto Ryu at the age of sixteen and underwent severe training with his teacher who once made him stand barefoot in the snow for five hours holding a training sword (**bokken**) in **seigan kamae** (middle-level combative engagement posture) to strengthen his mind and body. Otake **sensei** has no **dojo** of his own, but trains his small group of dedicated personal disciples in his yard between his house and the stables. Working in natural terrain, in the snow and rain, in the bright sunshine, or whatever conditions befall the day, he and his disciples adhere to the classical methods of training. Too much reliance on the ideal conditions of a **dojo** can, in time, lead to a loss of realism and a consequent weakening of the techniques in terms of combative meaning.

Entry into the Katori Shinto Ryu has always been severely restricted. One seeking entry must be well recommended and have proved himself to be dedicated to the study of classical martial arts (**bugei**). The new entrant is required to take an oath by which he promises, among many things, not to seek the oppor-

tunity to use his techniques nor misuse his skill; he is under oath to guard the secrets of the **ryu**. The oath must be signed in his own blood. Otake **sensei** does not believe that the classical standpoint on teachings of the martial arts is outdated.

The martial arts are not for everybody; they should not be taught indiscriminantly. He, therefore, has no intention of popularizing the Katori Shinto Ryu teachings and considers it his obligation, as headmaster, to preserve the traditions of the **ryu** and to teach the techniques unchanged as they have been handed down for five hundred years.



A professional horse breeder, Otake **sensei** is an accomplished rider and one of the few remaining experts with mounted sword techniques.