

Tenshin Shoden Katori Shintô Ryu Budô Kyôhan

by Yoshio Sugino & Kikue Ito

Tenshin Shôden Katori Shintô-ryu is often regarded as the oldest historically traceable sword tradition of Japan. But it may also be the most accessible school for non-Japanese practitioners. This fact is partly due to the energetic efforts of the late Yoshio Sugino; when only foreigners who resided in Japan were allowed to train in the Narita dojo of Ôtake Risuke, Sugino opened his Kawasaki dojo to all who were interested and he travelled to Europe to bring kobudo to his students.



Sugino came in contact with Katori Shintô-ryu in 1928, when he was 23 years old. He was already an accomplished practitioner at the Kôdôkan when Kano invited four *shihan* from the Katori Shintô-ryu, to also acquaint his judo students with kobudo. Tamai Saidô, Kuboki Sozaemon, Itô Tanekichi and Shiina Ichizô weekly taught in Tokyo and travelled on to Kawasaki to give further instruction at the Kawasaki dojo of Sugino. When in 1935 the koryu budo organization *Nihon Kobudô Shinkôkai* was founded, Katori Shintô-ryu was represented by Tamai and Shiina sensei, together with Sugino. Until the end of the war Sugino trained weekly in the *hombu dojo* in Chiba founded by Morisada *sôke*, where he also instructed the younger generation. Up till 1945 Sugino worked as a budo instructor at several schools in Tokyo and Chiba and also taught Katori Shintô-ryu on these occasions. In 1945 he wrote the book *Tenshin Shôden Katori Shintô Ryu Budo Kyôhan*, together with Ito Kikue (who had

graduated from the women teacher college Joshi Shihan Gakko, where Sugino gave instruction in Katori Shintô-ryu *naginata*). In the nineteen fifties Sugino was involved as a budo advisor in film projects of the directors Kurosawa and Inagaki, which resulted in many Katori Shintô-ryu elements in the fighting scenes of films like *Seven Samurai*, *Musashi* and *Yagyu Bugeichô* (for a good example from the last movie, see [this clip](#)). In 1966, Danippon Butokukai bestowed Sugino with the title *kobudô hanshi* and in 1982 he was honored with a 10th dan kobudo by Kokusai Budôin.

Nearly seventy years after its first appearance in Japan, *Tenshin Shôden Katori Shintô Ryu Budo Kyôhan* is now published in a western language. Translated into German by Izumi Mikami-Rott and Ulf Rott, a new generation of budoka can get acquainted with the work of Sugino Yoshio. The book looks good. Although the cover design somewhat resembles a New Age publication, the many photographs have been reproduced without further loss of quality. There is a preface by the current *sôke* and an additional supplement of thirty pages with, among other things, a historical overview of Sugino's Yuishinkan dojo and a glossary with explanations about things like techniques, religious matters, measurements et cetera. The Japanese text of *Budo Kyôhan* is well translated; difficult concepts are explained in brackets and specific words and concepts are maintained in Japanese next to the German translation.

Looking at the contents, a comparison with *Katori Shintô-ryû, Warrior Tradition* (based on the *Deity and the Sword* series) by Ôtake Risuke becomes obvious. Both writers approach their subject from different angles however. Where the book of Ôtake for a large part consists of series of photographs of the curriculum without any further explanation, Sugino focusses on describing the contents of the kata in an extensive text. In his book he treats *omote* sword, *bô*, *naginata*, together with *iai-jutsu* and he reserves much space for detailed explanations on *kamae*, *ma-ai*, execution of techniques and other basics. In some cases this leads to interesting discrepancies with Ôtake's text. In the discussion of the *iai kata kusanagi no ken* for example, the position *tate-ichimonji* is described as a transitional moment between *yoko ichimonji* (or *torii no kamae*) and *jôdan no kamae*, while according to Ôtake this movement must be seen as an *atemi* strike with the *tsuka*.

Another clear difference between both books is the treatment of religious backgrounds. Ôtake describes extensively (mikkyô-)buddhist, taoist and confucianist elements of which the connection with Katori Shintô-ryu is sometimes clear (for example in the case of the use of the taoist *gogyô* system in the context of *chikujôhō*, the development of fortifications), but in other cases might not be more than general religious concepts. In *Budô Kyôhan* Sugino limits himself to the treatment of the shintoist roots of Katori Shintô-ryu. His ideas about *nihon damashii* are discussed in a militant tone and include an interesting elaboration on the usefulness of the Japanese sword in modern combat. His book paints a clear picture of the militaristic rhetoric of pre-war Japan and the part budo played in this.

Present-day practitioners of Katori Shintô-ryu are faced with two currents within the ryu that have grown apart in the way the kata are executed and sometimes discussions can be heard about what KSR must have looked like before this division had taken effect. In this respect *Budô Kyôhan* was written in a very interesting period in the history of the ryu, when the responsibility for the continuation of it was shared by a group of *shihan*, who must all have left their personal mark on the way they instructed their students. If we are to believe some sources, the Ôtake line is the only true line of Katori Shintô-ryu in existence today and there are even those who claim that the practitioners of other organizations are no more than frauds. The fact that in his preface to *Budô Kyôhan* Sugino Yoshio thanks *izasa sôke* and six *shihan*, among whom the teacher of Ôtake Risuke, Hayashi Yazaemon *sensei*, for their support in the realization of this book, leads one to believe that sixty years ago the ryu was less polarized.

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