

**Yagy\_ Shinkage Ry\_** (柳生新陰流) is one of the greatest and most famous Japanese schools of swordsmanship or *iaido*. Its name roughly means "Yagy\_ New Shadow School," Yagy\_ being the name of the family which came to head the school at the end of the 16th century. It grew out of a school headed by **Kamiizumi Nobutsuna**, who named **Yagy\_ Muneyoshi** his successor in **1565**. Today, the Yagy\_ school remains one of the most widely practiced schools of Japanese swordsmanship.

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## Feudal Japan and birth of the Shinkage school

Until the 16th century in Japan, martial techniques were concerned with effectiveness in real battle. At the time of the founder of Shinkage-ry\_, Kamiizumi Nobutsuna, the superiority of a school was determined through duels. Basic postures were very distinct; very low, in protection of the body. The idea of winning at any price was deeply ingrained in the schools which were born at this time, as were the concepts of *Isatsu-no-tachi* (the school of the sword that kills only once) or *Ichi-no-tachi* (the sword of only one cut). A lot of importance was placed on the technology of swords and armor themselves. However, with the arrival of muskets ([arquebuses](#)) and other elements of modern warfare, these traditionally invincible techniques were no longer sufficient. Kamiizumi, with the creation of the Shinkage-ry\_ (New Shadow School), changed basic postures a bit by raising them slightly. He changed the manner of holding the sword. He shortened the length of the blade of the sword which in that era could be two metres, similar to that of the school Koden Enshin Ryu and perhaps most importantly, he perfected a new method of

teaching to make the study and practice of the [Way of the Sword](#) easier. Before, practice was carried out with either a very hard wooden sword (a [bokken](#)) or one with a dulled steel blade. The practitioners had to therefore stop their blows during teaching if they did not want to hurt themselves or their students. Kamiizumi created a practice sword made of strips of [bamboo](#) supported in a leather scabbard, which had the same balance as a regular steel sword. This bamboo sword came to be known as [shinai](#) (lit. 'does not kill') and it has continued to be used for practice and competition in modern *kendo*. It allows striking with quickness, fluidity and potency without causing serious or disabling wounds as one would with the wooden sword and without having to stop the attacks. However, blows delivered with a *shinai* are far from being soft, and can still cause serious concussions. Kamiizumi, sensing the changes in the ways of war at the time, re-thought his methods of martial arts ([bujutsu](#)), and began to advocate the utilization of light armour during training. The face of war was being transformed, and as it was necessary to move faster than before, Nobutsuna perfected a style of sword "freer" in its movements, more sparse, more restrained, more adapted to brawls and to duels than the fields of large scale battles.

Kamiizumi qualified the ancient schools of sword as *satsujin-ken*, or the killing swords. They are characterized by postures and offensive techniques, designed to win at any price. He wanted to establish "tatsujin-ken", the sword of an Accomplished man, an Expert. The art of the sword of the Shinkage school takes into account the opponent's weaponry and methods to adapt itself to, contrary to the former sword styles which wanted to impose their dominance without taking into account the opponent. The strategy of the Shinkage school takes into account the geography of the terrain, the hour of battle and other numerous parameters. For instance, in the understanding of the deep, secret level (*goku*) of the technique named *empi* (The "Swallow takes Flight" which describes a technique

of spearing an opponent in which the sword is thrown) is using the sword not only to defend the position but to also have the "power of adaptability" in facing different individuals, as a captain must consider the winds and change sails in order to travel in the best direction to reach his objective. It is similar to a hunting hawk, which must constantly reconsider the best trajectory in which to strike effectively. Like the raptor, it is necessary to be able to anticipate, to be able to assess and definitively act. "Move with the mind, in order to move with the body" is one of the central tenets of the school. If one's sword does not stop the movement of the enemy, if one tries to fit to the opponent's rhythm, if one enters into the evolutionary mind of the adversary to find his weakness, then this sword style is called *Katsujin-ken*, the sword of the One who preserves Life, the Sword of the Victor.

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## History

The feudal lord Kamiizumi Nobutsuna led a simple life. Although he was not a monk, he kept his head shaved, which was a sign of renunciation of the everyday world. He did not have children and left all his property to his student [Yagy\\_ Muneyoshi](#). Muneyoshi is renowned as a remarkable swordsman. He developed the *mut\_* techniques of using bare hands against the sword and it is he who appended the name of his family (Yagy\_) onto the name of the school, founding the Yagy\_ Shinkage-ryu. But it was his son, [Yagy\\_ Munenori](#), who became the master of the techniques of *mut\_* and created the techniques of [iaijutsu](#).

Upon Muneyoshi's death in [1606](#), the school split into two, his elder son [Yagy\\_ Toshiyoshi](#) taking command of the [Owari](#) branch, while Munenori became the head of the [Edo](#) branch. This branch ceased to

continue in the 14th generation but the Owari branch of [Nagoya](#) survives, under the guidance of a direct descendant of Munenori, Master Yagy\_ Nobuharu Toshimichi.

Munenori's son, [Yagy\\_ J\\_bei Mitsuyoshi](#), contributed greatly, in turn, to the school. He was not only a master of sword, but also a strategist, an expert of *jujutsu-yawara*, *ninjutsu*, *kemp\_* and an ascetic who went on *musha-shugyo*, the warrior's ascetic journey. His sword technique was named *chie-no-ken* (sword of Transcendent Wisdom).

The one who codified the techniques of the Yagy\_ Shinkage-ryu into its traditional form was the fifth heir (*soke*), [Yagy\\_ Renya Toshikane](#). He invented and codified all the instructive series of basics (*kihon-waza*) into a code known as *Hassei-h\_* or more commonly *Sei-h\_*. These series were made responsible for making understood essential points of forms (*kata*) transmitted by Munenori. Before the advent of modern kend\_, he created a form of free fighting in teaching with shinai.

Nakai Masakatsu, a middle school teacher whose teachers were proficient in Shinkage Ryu and Shingan Ryu taught this art to [Morihei Ueshiba](#) (the founder of [Aikido](#)) from 1903 to 1908 in his dojo in [Sakai](#) near [Osaka](#) where Ueshiba was serving in the 61st Regiment in the [Japanese Army](#). In 1908 he gave Ueshiba the *menky\_ kaiden* (full license) in Got\_ha Yagy Shingan Ry\_.