

Bujinkan

The Bujinkan Dojo is a new martial arts organization, having been established by Hatsumi Soke (Founder) in the last 30 years. The literal translation of Bujinkan is "Hall of the Divine Warrior." Hatsumi Soke gave his organization this name to honour his teacher Takamatsu Toshitsugu, the first person to receive the title Soke in all of the nine Ryu of which the Bujinkan is composed and which have histories dating from the eighth century onwards. The teachings of these schools have been handed down in direct teacher/disciple relationships throughout a lineage of some two hundred and one Soke and thousands of warriors under their tutelage.

In brief, bujutsu refers to the classical martial arts/systems (pre-1600's), while ninjutsu is a section within bujutsu. To think of ninjutsu as being something outside of bujutsu is incorrect, as is thinking of the Bujinkan Dojo as teaching only ninjutsu.

Hatsumi Masaaki received the teachings of the nine schools of the Bujinkan from Takamatsu Toshitsugu. Takamatsu Sensei received these teachings from three sources: Toda Shinryuken, Ishitani Matsutaro, and Mizuta Yoshitaro. A brief description of each school is essential to an understanding of the Bujinkan as a whole.

Schools of the Bujinkan

GYOKKO RYU - Jewel Tiger School

1st Soke: Tozawa Hakuunsai (circa 1100) - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Toda Sensei

Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (28th Soke)

System: Koshijutsu (Bone Finger Technique) striking system

This is a striking system that focuses on the striking and tearing of soft fleshy areas of the body. This style of striking is based upon Chinese Chuan-Fa (Fist Method) and is said to have been brought to Japan in the 8th century by Yo Gyokko.

How the teachings of Gyokko Ryu were passed from him to Tozawa are unknown, as written records from this era are not available. Gyokko Ryu was incorporated into the collective known as Iga Ryu Ninpo, when it was passed into the Momochi family (circa 16th century) and has been incorrectly referred to as a "ninjutsu" school because of this.

KOTO RYU - Tiger Felling School

1st Soke: Sakagami Taro Kunishige (circa 1300) - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Toda Sensei

Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (18th Soke)

System: Koppojutsu (Bone Breaking Technique) striking system

This is a striking system that focuses on striking the bones and joints of the body with the intention of breaking/destroying them. This style is also said to be based on Chinese Chuan-Fa and is said to have been brought to Japan by Chan Busho. An exact date for this transfer is not given, but it is known that he travelled to Japan by way of Korea.

The teachings of Chan Busho were passed through several generations to Sakagami Taro Kunishige, who redeveloped them and is recognized as the first Soke. However, it was the fourth Soke, Toda Sakyo Ishinsai (circa 1400) who named them "Koto Ryu." Like the Gyokko Ryu, Koto Ryu was passed on to the Momochi family and became part of the Iga Ryu Ninpo collective.

TAKAGI YOSHIN RYU - High Tree Raise Heart School

1st Soke: Takagi Oriuemon Shigetashi - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Ishitani Sensei/Mizuta Sensei
Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (17th Soke)
System: Jutaijutsu (Grappling Technique) grappling system

This is known as a grappling system, yet it contains a complete repertoire of grappling and striking techniques. An important aspect of its taijutsu (body dynamics) is that techniques are applied in such a way as to limit, and when possible, eliminate, the opponent's chance of applying any ukemi (receiving body) falling/breakfall skills. The basis for this school is found in the Rinpoden (Shining Method Tradition) of Soun Ryu (circa 1500). Soun Ryu is thought to have been a Taoist sage from China. Two generations later his teachings were redeveloped by Takagi Oriuemon Shigetashi and named Yoshin Ryu. The second Soke, Umanosuke Shigetada, added to the curriculum and renamed the system Hontai (Main Branch) Takagi Yoshin Ryu. Umanosuke travelled all over Japan, duelling and teaching along the way and is responsible for spreading the art.

SHINDEN FUDO RYU - Immovable Diety Tradition School

1st Soke: Izumo Kanja Yoshiteru - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Toda Sensei
Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (26th Soke)
System: Dakentaijutsu (Striking Weapons Body Techniques) striking system

This school is known as a striking system, but also contains a complete repertoire of striking and grappling techniques. This style is based heavily in nature - moving in natural ways, to and from natural positions, flowing/adapting/changing freely like nature. The first Soke is said to have developed this Ryu from his knowledge of Koshijutsu (see Gyokko Ryu) methods. It was passed on to a member of the Minamoto family (circa 1100) who named it Shinden Fudo Ryu.

GIKAN RYU - Have Regard for Justice School

1st Soke: Usho Bankan Gikanbo - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Ishitani Sensei
Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (15th Soke)
System: Koppojutsu (Bone Breaking Technique) striking system

This is a striking system that traces its roots to the 13th Soke of Gyokko Ryu, Sogyokko Kanritsushi. One of his students taught Usho Bankan Gikanbo who later established Gikan Ryu and is recognized as the first Soke.

KUKISHINDEN RYU - Tradition of 9 Demon Deities School

1st Soke: Izumo Kanja Yoshiteru
Taught to Takamatsu by: Ishitani Sensei/Mizuta Sensei Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (28th Soke)
System: See Below

This is a complete system that consists of 9 sub-sections, each specializing in a different aspect of martial culture. It was named "Kukishin Ryu" after Kuki Yakushimaru (circa 1300).

The 9 sections of this school are referred to as Happo Hikenjutsu (Eight Methods Secret Sword Technique). The Happo, first 8 sections, were changed to suit the particular needs of any given time.

- Gunryaku Tenmon Chimon (military tactics/strategy)
- Jojutsu/Hanbo (cane/half staff techniques)
- Rokushakubo/Tai no Kuraidori (6ft staff/body management)
- Naginata/Bisentojutsu (small/large halberd techniques)
- Kodachi/Juttejutsu (small sword/truncheon techniques)
- Kisha/Suijutsu (equestrian archery/swimming techniques)
- Sojutsu (spear techniques)
- Taijutsu Kenpo (body technique sword method)
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GYOKUSHIN RYU - Jewel Spirit School

1st Soke: Sasaki Goemon Teruyori - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Toda Sensei

Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (21st Soke)

System: Ninjutsu (Stealth/Endurance) system

This is a ninjutsu system that traces its roots back to the 13th Soke of Gyokko Ryu, Sogyokko Kanritsushi. Gyokko Ryu was established by Sasaki Goemon Teruyori, an ancestor of Sasaki Gendayu Sadayasu who was a student of Sogyokko. This school has never been taught publicly, even to Bujinkan members.

KUMOGAKURE RYU - Hidden (Amongst) Clouds School

1st Soke: Iga Heinaisaemon Ienaga - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Toda Sensei

Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (14th Soke)

System: Ninjutsu (Stealth/Endurance) system

This is a ninjutsu system that traces its roots to Iga Ryu Ninjutsu. It specializes in taijutsu (body dynamics) and the use of the Kamayari and Ippon-sugi Nobori. The Kamayari is a spear with a sickle-shaped blade, while the Ippon-sugi Nobori is a tool used for climbing trees. Both were secret tools of this school. Not much else is known about this school, as it, along with the Gyokushin Ryu, is not taught publicly.

TOGAKURE RYU - Hidden Door School

1st Soke: Togakure Daisuke - - Taught to Takamatsu by: Toda Sensei

Current Head: Hatsumi Masaaki (34th Soke)

System: Ninjutsu (Stealth/Endurance) system

This is a system on ninjutsu that specializes in taijutsu (body dynamics) and the use of numerous Kakushi Buki (Secret/Hidden Martial Tools/Skills). There were 18 areas in which ninja of this school became proficient, each specializing in a different aspect of Japanese martial culture.

Togakure Daisuke is recognized as the founder of what we now know as Togakure Ryu Ninjutsu (circa 1100). He developed this school from training he had received at Togakushi mountain during his youth, his battlefield experiences and the additional training that he later received from Kumogakure Doshi in the Iga province. The Soke lineage of this school includes people from both the Iga and Koga provinces.

Bujinkan training today

What is different about the Bujinkan?

What sets the Bujinkan apart from other modern cognate forms of martial training (Karate, Kendo, Judo, Aikido, etc.) is that the techniques which are still studied today were formed on the battlefields of Japan before nationwide peace was achieved by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. During the 250 years of peace that followed, the warrior class, their skills no longer needed on the battlefield, began to turn to more humanitarian endeavors. The martial arts that were founded during this time of peace hold perfection of character as more important than combat effectiveness. The Bujinkan is unique in that combat effectiveness is still held at the highest level, techniques not being diluted to accommodate safety. This means that there is no tournament competition, as techniques are studied for real-life situations only.

Participants generally practice with a partner, taking turns performing the role of uke (receiver of a technique). The instructor will typically demonstrate a basic technique (kihon) with an uke at the beginning of class, and the students will pair up and attempt the technique just shown. As the class progresses, numerous henka (variations) of the kihon will be shown. It is this limitless world of variations that the student is expected to enter so that he can spontaneously create a technique from nothing should the need arise, as real-life situations rarely play themselves out as a kata shown in class.

How are students graded?

Most Bujinkan Dojo groups do not hold formal gradings. The instructor watches the students during every training session and issues grades when a student has shown that they are ready for it. New grades are issued on the basis of each member's ability to naturally express Budo Taijutsu rather than on their ability to remember, rehearse, and perform set movements on a particular day. The student is being graded every day. Each member is expected to be able to demonstrate a number of spontaneous combative applications (henka) of the techniques appropriate to his/her level, and is required to study and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of armed skills, strategy, philosophy, history, and other complementary skills and techniques.

What is the ranking structure?

The Bujinkan ranking structure consists of three belts - white, green/red, and black. The white belt is worn by new members of the dojo, and is referred to as "Mukyu" (No Rank). Junior dojo members (Kukyu - Ikkyu, 9th Rank-1st Rank) wear a green belt. Female practitioners are recognized as having different physical and mental abilities than their male partners, and may opt to substitute a red belt for a green one (and a purple uniform for a black one) if they choose to do so as a reflection of this difference. The black belt is worn by senior members and teachers of the Dojo. There are ten black belt levels, Shodan to Judan (1st step to 10th step). The 10th level is further divided in to 5 sub-levels: Chi, Sui, Ka, Fu, and Ku (Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Void). This corresponds to the 5 levels of Shoden, Chuden, Okuden, Menkyo, and Menkyo Kaiden found in many classical martial ryu. A person with rank from Nidan to Yondan (2nd to 4th degree black belt) may obtain a Shidoshi-ho (Assistant Instructor) license from Hatsumi Soke, allowing them to instruct under the supervision of a fully licensed

instructor. When a student is ready for Godan (5th degree black belt), he is tested personally by Hatsumi Soke. Upon passing, he becomes a fully licensed senior instructor (Shidoshi) and can open his own school, being personally responsible only to Hatsumi Soke himself.

What are some Bujinkan resources available to me today?

The best resource on Bujinkan Budo Taijutsu training today is the Sanmyaku (Mountain Flow) newsletter issued by Hatsumi Soke himself. This is information straight from the source, and is a must for all Bujinkan members. There are local publishers of Sanmyaku in various countries around the world. In Canada, write: Edward Brown, Sanmyaku-Canada, Box 27589, Yorkdale PO, Toronto, ON, Canada M6A 3B8. Contact Kasumi on #martial to get the address of a publisher in your country.

The next best resource on the Bujinkan would be any books authored by Hatsumi Soke himself. There is no acceptable substitute author on this subject. Two good books are: Essence of Ninjutsu: The Nine Traditions, and The Grandmaster's Book of Ninja Training.

There are many Bujinkan websites out there with lots of information. Please take these with a grain of salt, as much of this information comes from unofficial sources and much of it is heavily influenced by the American Ninja Boom. Generally speaking, take anything with salt that mentions ninja ninja ninja without referring to the other six schools of the Bujinkan or that refers to the Bujinkan as teaching exclusively ninjutsu. In actual fact, the vast majority of material covered in training in Japan comes from the other six schools. One half-decent page that I have seen is the Bujinkan Australia Dojo homepage.

Finally, training with a happy heart is stressed as important in the Bujinkan. Before his death, Takamatsu told Hatsumi Sensei just how important it is:

"The way to experience happiness is to let go of all worries and regrets and know that being happy is the most satisfying of life's feelings. Reflect back on all the progress in your life and allow the positive, creative, and joyous thoughts to outshine and overwhelm any sorrow or grief. Happiness is waiting there in front of you. Only you can decide whether or not you choose to experience it.