

# Sword and Spirit

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## The Life of Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto no Shigenobu

*Editor's Note: In this issue we are honored to present what is quite likely the most complete and accurate biography of the founder of iaido available in English. We are deeply grateful to Mr. Jack James for his permission to reprint here the work he originally published on [jushinden.wordpress.com](http://jushinden.wordpress.com).*

During the Muromachi period lived a man who would go on to change the art of swordsmanship forever. The legacy he left has survived nearly half a millennium, a legacy larger than that of any martial artist in his wake.

On the 12th of January 1542, a boy known as Asano Tamijimaru was born into a warrior family in Hayashizaki, a small village in Tateyama, Dewa Province (modern day Yamagata Prefecture, Murayama City).

His father was Asano Kazuma no Minamoto Shigenari. A retainer to the Mogami family branch in charge of the southeastern part of Dewa, he served Mogami Inaba no Kami Mitsuhide, the sixth Mogami Lord and overall 15th Lord of Tateoka Castle, in the Kitamurayama District of Tateoka City (also in modern day Yamagata Prefecture, Murayama City). Asano was known as a gentle and outgoing individual, earning him the trust of his lord.

Tamijimaru's mother, Sugano, was the daughter of the Takamori Household in Tateoka. She was once a handmaiden to the princess of Yamagata Kasumi Castle and was an intelligent woman with a strong sense of determination, excelling in many arts.

At the age of five<sup>1</sup> Tamijimaru's family was struck by tragedy. In 1547 Tamijimaru's father was brutally murdered by Sakagami Shuzen (also known as Sakagawa Ichiunsai or Unsai), a fellow retainer of the Mogami Clan. Serving as a martial arts instructor to the clan, Sakagawa bore a strong grudge and sense of envy towards Asano due to the way he performed etiquette within the castle. One night, blinded by his resentment, Sakagawa



ambushed Asano on his way back from visiting his family grave site at Hayashizaki Daimyojin Shrine. Sakagawa violently murdered Asano and fled, into the dead of night.

Tamijimaru and his mother Sugano, deprived of their breadwinner, were thrown into poverty. It is said from the moment his father was murdered, his mother spent years praying to the deity of Hayashizaki Daimyojin Shrine with one single wish—retribution for her husband's death.

With the infant in her arms, Sugano prayed every day at the shrine, all the while waiting for her son to come of age and enact her vengeance. After eventually hearing from his mother that his father had been murdered by a man called Sakagawa Shuzen, Tamijimaru took his first step towards justice and began his martial arts training as his mother instructed.

When he turned seven years old, Tamijimaru began studying Kyo Ryu Kenjutsu Heiho under Higashine Jiro Dayu, a chief vassal and kenjutsu instructor to the Mogami Clan his father served. Kyo Ryu is also known as Kyohachi Ryu. This style of swordsmanship was founded in the Heian Era, and legend states that all other *kenjutsu* schools to this day were born from this style. The famous Yoshioka brothers who Miyamoto Musashi defeated were said to be practitioners of this school.

When he was 12 years old, Tamijimaru decided to reside at Hayashizaki Daimyojin to begin training in earnest. However, his spirit and technique were not one and developed very little during his time training.

At 14 years of age, Tamijimaru went once more to the shrine to perform 100 days of prayer and meditation, this time pouring his entire soul into his training. On this occasion, his dedication shone through, with his spirit and technique harmonizing. Then, one night, the deity of the shrine appeared to him in his dreams. During this epiphany, Tamijimaru received the innermost secrets of the most superb swordsmanship from the god.

At this moment, his sword became one with the god's; the most supreme *battojutsu*, which would shine throughout history, was born.

Among the secrets of batto that were bestowed to Tamijimaru from the god of the Hayashizaki Daimyojin Shrine was *Kesa no Hitotachi no Seishin* (袈裟の一太刀の精神), the mindset of *Kesa no Hitotachi*:

*Do not draw, do not force others to draw.*

*Do not cut, do not force others to cut.*

*Do not kill, do not be killed.*

*Even if one encounters the greatest of sinners, one should kindly offer a sermon and steer them onto the righteous path.*

*If the worst occurs and they do not heed one's sermon, then without hesitation apply Kesa-uchi and send them to Buddha.*

This taught the young Tamijimaru that above all, one should avoid violence at all costs, favoring steering your opponent onto the righteous path of peace and morality rather than simply cutting them down. He learned that it was better to create a great man who in turn would create more great men, instead of just killing.

It was only as a last resort that one should turn to violence, and this was only to prevent others from being subsequently killed by that opponent. This was known as *katsujinken*, the life-giving sword.

In order to attain this state, Tamijimaru would have to cut away the Three Poisons from within himself: *don*, *shin* and *chi*. “*Don*” referring to the Buddhist *Raga* or desire, “*shin*” to *Dvesa* or rage, and lastly “*chi*” being *Moha* or ignorance. After detaching himself from these poisons, he finally achieved serenity, thus wielding a “Sword of Compassion” and represented the god of the shrine itself.

He also received the secrets of wielding the *sanjaku sanzun katana* (a long sword with a one-meter blade) and the *kyusun gobu wakizashi* (a short sword with a roughly 29cm long blade)<sup>2</sup>:

*“One should use the long sword as if it were short and the short sword as if it were long. Destroy your opponent's distance and timing by smothering them in close quarters while still being able to draw the long sword; overcome tremendous distance, utilizing every inch of one's body with the short sword.”*

In 1559 upon turning 17, Asano Tamijimaru changed his name in light of discovering his new self, a practice very common for Japanese warriors. He henceforth went by the name of Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu. He chose



Hayashizaki after the name of his village, Jinsuke after his father's infant name, and Shigenobu by utilizing the first character of his father Shigenari's name.

Soon after this, Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu received the inner secrets of Kyo Ryu Kenjutsu Heiho from Higashine Jiro Dayu. He traveled back to the shrine where he had received his epiphany and vowed to the god that he would avenge his father's death, simultaneously praying for success on his coming journey.

Shigenobu requested leave from his mother and his teacher to begin *musha shugyo*, a warrior pilgrimage, and set out onto what would later be known as the Nakasendo Road (one of the five main roads of the Edo period), leaving Hayashizaki Village on the path of vengeance.

While walking the Nakasendo, Hayashizaki found himself in Shinshu (modern day Nagano Prefecture). While there, he found lodging at the residence of Kitayama Hanzaemon, a member of a powerful local clan. During his stay, however, the Ibaragumi, a group of *nobushi* turned bandits, attacked the residence. In an incredible feat, Hayashizaki drew his sword, and in one swift, continuous movement, he dispatched the leader in a flash and easily finished off the remaining enemies. Talk of his amazing swordsmanship spread like wildfire, acting as a lightning rod drawing many warriors who were so impressed that they requested to be his students.

After his stay in Shinshu, Hayashizaki headed out onto the Tokaido Road, heading south in the direction of Bishu (modern day Nagoya), where eventually he reached the castle grounds. After Bishu, he later settled in the former city of the Heian Emperor, Kyoto. Along the way, he trained with many skilled martial artists and attracted numerous students, who would subsequently go on to create their own schools of swordsmanship.

In April 1561, the 19-year-old Hayashizaki took part in a martial arts competition held before the 13th *shogun* of the Ashikaga Shogunate, Ashikaga Yoshiteru. Among the spectators were several local *daimyo* (military leaders), including Matsunaga Tanjo. During Hayashizaki's duels, he spectacularly defeated Nitta Yoshiaki, a master of Suwa Ryu, and was awarded a famous sword made by the Nobukuni family of smiths. This event was another turning point for his style and already growing reputation.

Not long after his success, Hayashizaki's life was in for a dramatic turn of events. In May of the same year, he learned that the man who murdered his father, Sakagami Shuzen, the man he had been so desperately searching for all those years, was living in Fushimi, Kyoto, hiding under the alias Rozan Daizen Toshitaka.

Upon hearing that the killer was residing in the same city, Hayashizaki immediately proceeded to Matsunaga Tanjo, whom he had met at the competition the previous month. Matsunaga was acting as the local shogunate security officer, and he was able to acquaint Hayashizaki with Miyoshi Nagayoshi. Miyoshi was the daimyo holding authority over the region, and his authorization would be essential for Hayashizaki to carry out his mission. He proceeded to contact Miyoshi and requested permission to confront Rozan. Impressed by Hayashizaki's martial prowess and dedication to his father, Miyoshi gave Hayashizaki his official stamp, signifying his consent for Hayashizaki to confront his father's killer.

Filled undoubtedly with anticipation and determination, Hayashizaki began his reconnaissance on Sakagawa, carefully observing his movements and awaiting the opportune chance to seek justice. It was finally on the 17th of May that Hayashizaki was ultimately able to confront his father's killer at Tanbakaido. Drawing his Nobukuni blade, Hayashizaki clove Sakagami's head cleanly from his shoulders in the perfect embodiment of *iai* and sending him to Buddha. At last, Hayashizaki was able to avenge his father, decisively putting an end to his family's years of grief.



After performing the Buddhist rites, Hayashizaki prepared Sakagami's head and set off on the long journey back to his hometown. Almost immediately, ripples were felt through Kyoto as the story of Hayashizaki's dedication echoed through the streets.

Upon arriving back in his hometown, Hayashizaki told his mother and teacher of his achievements on his pilgrimage and proceeded to lay Sakagami's head atop his father's grave. He prayed that his father could finally rest in peace, and he went once more to the shrine where it all started. The local village held a festival at the shrine in his honor to celebrate his bravery, devotion, and martial prowess. With his mission complete, Hayashizaki offered his Nobukuni sword to the shrine, where it remains to this day.

Sadly, the following year (1562), after many years of hardship, Hayashizaki's mother passed away due to illness and Hayashizaki was orphaned. With no more reason to stay in Hayashizaki Village and keen to further improve his swordsmanship, he set out again onto his second *musha shugyo*. Hayashizaki headed south to Yonezawa before then proceeding on towards Aizu (west of modern-day Fukushima Prefecture). There he took temporary residence in Akai Village, Wakamatsu, eventually spending three years in southern Tohoku. During his stay there, Hayashizaki took on many students from the surrounding area, training them in *iai*, and further spreading his style.

In 1565, Hayashizaki travelled further south into the Kanto region of Japan and onto Kashima in Ibaraki Prefecture. While traveling around Kashima, he spent his time practicing and studied *Tenshinsho Shinto Ryu* for around three years before setting out to his next destination. During this time, Tsukahara Bokuden was also studying the style from his adopted father.

At 26, Hayashizaki took residence with Matsuda Norihide, a direct vassal of the Hojo Clan. He instructed the clansmen in the martial art he had spent so many years refining. The following year (1569), Takeda Shingen's forces attacked Suruga (modern day Shizuoka Prefecture), storming Kanbara Castle. While in the service of Matsuda, Hayashizaki took part in the subsequent battle of Kanbara Castle. Despite massive



losses on both sides, Hayashizaki demonstrated his phenomenal skills and following the battle even presented two heads that he had claimed from Shingen forces. After exhibiting his prowess on the field, Hayashizaki received a direct invitation from the Hojo Clan, asking him to return to continue instructing martial arts to their soldiers. Over the next few years, he continued training and amassing students.

In traditional pilgrimage fashion, it was time to depart once more. On the 10th of May 1595, Hayashizaki continued on his path south to Ichinomiya (modern day Omiya, Saitama Prefecture). He lived on the grounds of the local Shinto shrine, where he would spend three years developing his art further and searching for internal harmony.

After many years of wandering, Hayashizaki found himself arriving in Kawagoe City on the 18th of February, 1616. During his time in the city, he stayed with Takamatsu Kanbei.

The following year he took his leave of Kawagoe, finally heading off in the direction of his home village, only to vanish into the sands of time. His whereabouts after this period, his place of death, and the location of his grave are unknown, though a humble wooden plaque remains in Kawagoe, signifying his final known resting place.

It is very rare for someone with as much influence as Hayashizaki to have so little recorded of them. However, his life and legacy took place amongst long periods of civil upheaval—the fall of the Ashikaga Shogunate and a move



towards decentralized government and the daimyo system, which subsequently cast Japan into the Warring States period. Finally, the country would arrive at a time of national unification and peace, the Edo period.

Throughout this turmoil, it is thought most records were lost amidst the rise and fall of governments. Along with the death of his students in war, many records were lost when they changed hands. But despite this, Hayashizaki amassed many students who would continue his legacy—some who would create their own military fighting methods, and some who were already famous in their own right.

These students include but are not limited to:

- Takamatsu Kanbei Nobukatsu, Ichimiya Ryu (Takamatsu Line).
- Higashi Shimono no Kami Motoharu, founder of Shinmyo Muso Higashi Ryu
- Tamiya Heibei no Jo Shigemasa, founder of Tamiya Ryu and second generation Jushin Ryu.
- Nagano Muraku Nyudo Kinrosai, founder of Muraku Ryu and third generation Jushin Ryu.
- Ichimiya Sadayu Terunobu Koshin, founder of Ichimiya Ryu, fourth generation Hayashizaki Shin Muso Ryu (Ichimiya Ryu Tani Ha).
- Sekiguchi Yarokuemon Shinshin Ujimune, founder of Sekiguchi Ryu.
- Katayama Hoki no Kami Hisayasu, founder of Hoki Ryu.
- Sakurai Gorozaemon Naomitsu, teacher of Mima Yoichizaemon Kagenobu, founder of Suio Ryu.
- Ashikaga Shogun Yoshiteru
- Hojo Ujinao
- Date Chikuzen
- Katakura Kojuro
- Uesugi Kagekatsu
- Iwanari Chikaranosuke
- Takikawa Sakon
- Senshi Yamashiro no Kami
- Nitta Ichiro
- Sakuraba Hayato
- Matsuda Samanosuke
- Daitoji Suruga no Kami Masashige

- Amakasu Omi no Kami
- Utsunomiya Mikawa no Kami
- Nagano Shinano no Kami
- Matsudaira Shuzen
- Okudaira Kuhachiro
- Torii Hikoemon

The swordsmanship passed on to a boy of only 14 has continued for almost 500 years, still prospering to this day. No one knows exactly why the *kami* (god) of the shrine chose a young boy to receive the secrets of divine swordsmanship. Perhaps it was a moment of compassion by the kami, looking down on a boy struggling to survive with his mother. Or possibly Tamijimaru was destined to be the mouth of the kami in order for divine iaijutsu to prosper. It may even have been the plan of a God of War, hungering to carve its way through a country in civil turmoil. Maybe it was the wisdom and devotion needed for man to live through a country in chaos. The only thing that can be certain is that mere men will never understand the workings of gods. 🌀

#### Notes:

1. Many sources cite Hayashizaki's age as six, and subsequent ages a year older. This is due to the *kazoedoshi* tradition in Japan of being classed as one year old at birth and aging another year at New Year's.

2. Many sources claim he received the secret of utilizing a long *tsuka* (hilt) for iai but this is a mistake.

The mistake derives from Higashi Shimono no Kami Motoharu having a student of similar name: Hayashizaki Jinsuke Katsuyoshi. He was a practitioner of a Shinto Ryu Kenjutsu which advocates the benefits of a longer sword and hilt. Tamijimaru inherited the secrets of the longer sword, and the hilt was longer simply for balance purposes. His focus was on instantaneous reaction from the scabbard.

Tamiya Heibei no Jo Shigemasa was also a practitioner adept with a sword with a long *tsuka* to gain a distance advantage over the opponent (but he did not utilize a longer sword).



### **Timeline of Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto no Shigenobu's Life**

- 1540: Parents Asano Kazuma no Minamoto Shigenari and Sugano were married.
- 1542: Born on 12th of January.
- 1547: Father murdered by Sakagami Shuzen.
- 1549: Entered into the Higashine Dojo to study Kyo Ryu.
- 1554: Prayed at Hayashizaki Daiyojin to improve swordsmanship; mind and technique were not ready.
- 1556: Performed hundred-day prayer and meditation at Hayashizaki Daimyojin and this time received the secrets of iai in an epiphany.
- 1559: Changes name to Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu. Masters Kyo Ryu; sets out on musha shugyo.
- 1560: Arrives in Kyoto.  
     Awarded Nobukuni sword.  
     Defeats Sakagami Shuzen on Tanbakaido.
- 1562: Loses his mother Sugano to illness; sets out on second pilgrimage.
- 1563: Travels from Yonezawa and recruits students at Akai village in Wakamatsu, Aizu.
- 1565: Studies Tenshinsho Shinto Ryu alongside Tsukahara Bokuden.
- 1568: Enters into the service of the Hojo Clan as a martial arts instructor.
- 1569: Fights in the battle of Kanbara Castle.
- 1595: Settles onto sacred grounds in Ichinomiya
- 1598: Leaves Ichinomiya to continue pilgrimage.
- 1616: Stays with Takamatsu Kanbei in Kawagoe.
- 1617: Sets off on final journey back to his hometown, never to be heard of again.

**Jack James (Rokudan, Renshi) first began training in martial arts at a young age under the influence of his grandfather, a practitioner of judo and aikido. He later took up iaido, which became the central focus of his practice. James Sensei graduated from the University of Central Lancashire with a degree in Japanese, with a minor in Mandarin Chinese, and later (to deepen his pursuit of iaido) completed a master's degree in Translation at the University of Portsmouth.**

**Now working as a translator and interpreter in Fukuoka, James Sensei has won the Fukuoka Prefectural Taikai across multiple grades and has represented Fukuoka at the All Japan Iaido Championships. He studies Muso Shinden Jushin Ryu and leads the Higashi Wakahisa Iaido Branch of Jushin Ryu Tekisuijuku. He is currently the only non-Japanese instructor teaching this tradition in Japan.**

**In addition to his training and teaching, he devotes his time to researching the history of iaido, with a particular focus on Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto no Shigenobu and the art's development within the Tosa Domain.**

**James Sensei notes that this article was also published previously in *Kendo World*.**



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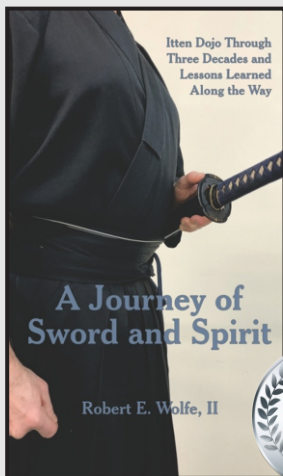
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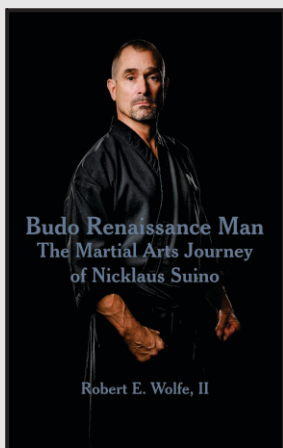
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