

小野派一刀流

ONO HA ITTŌ RYŪ

An introduction



*In memory of Sasamori Takemi, 17th Sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū,
who passed away in August 2017*

Guy Buyens
July 2022

PART I: THE SCHOOL

Introduction

Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (小野派一刀流) is one of the most influential Kenjutsu schools in Japan.

Kenjutsu (剣術), the art (technique) of using the sword, usually refers to the art of the traditional schools (Koryū: 古流), of Japanese swordsmanship, that predates modern Kendō.

Ittō-ryū (一刀流) stands for “one sword school” (or “one stroke school”) and **Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (OHIR)** can be translated as the Ono fraction of Ittō-ryū .

Ono Ha Ittō-ryū , can be studied in the Reigakudō (in Tōkyō, Japan). Given the distance, “Practice Groups” in recognized Keiko-jō (training places), where training can be coordinated by more experienced practitioners are allowed and recognized by Reigakudō. Through these groups, interested people can be introduced to Ono Ha Ittō-ryū and can be presented afterwards to teachers of Reigakudō, either in Japan or at international seminars. In Europe these groups are located in Italy, Germany and Belgium.



Belgian members at Reigakudō

Reigakudō was created by Sasamori Junzō (16th Sōke) who brought the school back to Tōkyō. His son Sasamori Takemi (17th Sōke) became the second Chief of Reigakudō and after his death (2017), his successor Yabuki Yūji (18th Sōke) became the third Chief of Reigakudō.

In Belgium, we are a small group of people with many years of experience in traditional martial arts. In 2011, we started to train in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū with the late Sasamori Takemi, first during a seminar in San Diego, immediately followed by a visit to Japan. The first years we had the chance to join the German group, coordinated by André Otome, who had trained several years in Reigakudō. When André returned to live in Japan, we organized the Keiko-jō ourselves.

We train in strict adherence with Reigakudō's policy, under the leadership of Yabuki Yūji, the 18th and current Sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū. At least once a year we go to Japan and whenever Reigakudō' teachers are coming to Europe for a seminar, we try to attend. In June 2018 we were proud to host the first International seminar with Yabuki Sōke, assisted by Asai Sensei and Kawakami Sensei (both Menkyo Kaiden).



Belgian members with Yabuki Sōke, Asai Sensei and Kawakami Sensei.

Groot-Bijgaarden 2018.

About Ono Ha Ittō-ryū

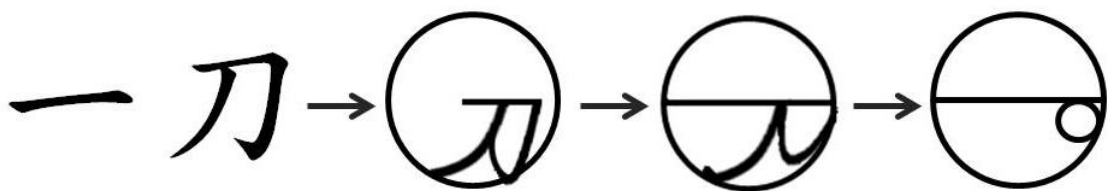
Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (小野派一刀流) was developed by Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki (1565–1628), himself student and immediate successor of Itō Ittōsai Kagehisa, who was at the origin of Ittō-ryū (一刀流).

*Ono Ha Ittō-ryū is at the origin of many other systems. For instance **Mizoguchi-ha Ittō-ryū** (溝口派一刀流), was founded by Mizoguchi Shingoemon Masakatsu (a student of the second headmaster of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū , Ono Jiroemon Tadatsune); and **Nakanishi-ha Ittō-ryū** (中西派一刀流), was founded by Nakanishi Chuta Tanesada (who studied under either the 5th or 6th generation headmaster of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū). Although many other Ittō-ryū branches were developed, Ono Ha Ittō-ryū remains the oldest of the surviving Ittō-ryū styles. Later, different Ittō-ryū branches would have a significant influence on the development of modern Kendō.*

The aim of this school is to defeat the opponent with one stroke, hence the name “**Ittō**” (一刀) which should be interpreted as “one stroke” or “one beat (flow)”. The reference to “one” is also philosophical and indicates that everything starts with one and ends with one. “One” refers also to Kiriotoshi (cut to drop), which is the basic technique in the school. Nevertheless it is said that the thrust or **Tsuki** (突き) is the most feared technique in Ittō-ryū .

The symbol of the school is a circle that contains a line and a smaller circle:

Everything starts from one: The symbol starts with one point, to become multiple dots in a straight line. Many points then become one line. At the end of the line, it continues and makes a small circle: one line continues, to end in a which is the perfection of oneself. At the end of the perfect, small circle, the symbol continues in a the bigger circle, which ends exactly where it started: at the small circle. The big circle is the bigger Self, the True Self. This True Self is connected with the cosmos. The meaning of the two circles is that you should be perfect; True Perfection; but everything starts from one point.



The symbol (**Kamon**) of Ono ha Ittō-ryū as explained by Sasamori Sōke. Interesting to see how the kanji for sword, Tō (刀), and even the concept of one sword/cut, Ittō (一刀), are incorporated in the symbol.

Note: *this is only a description of the symbol. Like in many Koryū, the true symbol belongs to the school and can only be used when permission is given.*

Historical context

The creator, **Ganso** (元祖), of Ittō-ryū ("one sword" or "one stroke") school of sword fighting, was a famous Japanese swordsman called **Itō Ittōsai Kagehisa** (伊東 一刀齋 景久).

Ittōsai was originally named Itō Yagorō, and lived in a seaside village called Izu, where at a young age, he already became famous for chasing away a group of bandits.

He learned his sword techniques from Kanemaki Jisai of the Chūjō-ryū.. After mastering this school, he made a warrior pilgrimage throughout the many domains of Japan.

On this journey, he reached the Tsurugaoka Hachimangū shrine (dedicated to Hachiman, the deity of war) in Kamakura where he paid homage to the gods and practiced his swordsmanship. One day, when being attacked, he somehow unconsciously and without thinking drew his sword and cut his offender down in one stroke. This inspired him to create "Musōken" (夢想劍), later to become a fundamental technique of the school.



Itō Yagorō changed his name to Itō Ittōsai Kagehisa after he created "Hosshato" (払捨刀), a technique based on his own experience when engaging multiple enemies in his bedroom despite the fact that he had drunk too much sake the evening before.

Ultimately after understanding the mysteries of the sword he would create his own school, called Ittō-ryū.

As already mentioned, prior to starting his own style, Ittōsai studied **Chūjō-ryū** (中条流) with Kanemaki Jissai, a student of Toda Seigen (famous for short sword).

Chujō-ryū (中条流) is a kenjutsu school founded in the 14th century by Chujō Nagahide. Chūjō-ryū (and later its branches Toda-ryū and Kanemaki-ryū), had its origin in Nen-ryū founded in the Nanbokucho period (1336-92).

Nen-ryū is the Kenjutsu school founded by Sōma Shirō Yoshitomo in the 14th century. It is the root art of Chujō-ryū, and therefore also of Ittō-ryū. Later in his life, Yoshitomo joined the Jufuku-ji in Kamakura under his Buddhist name Nen Ami Jion), eventually traveling to teach in Okinawa. The Karate kata "Jion", is said to be called after him.

Before he became independent, Ittōsai received the Kōjō Gokui Goten of the Gogyō (five elements) doctrine. Later, the Goten has been treasured as a special secret in Ittō-ryū .

Ittōsai gradually became stronger through various matches, but he also meditated, made visits to shrines, recognizing the necessity of possessing spiritual strength.

Nevertheless, it is said that when Itō Ittōsai was a shugyōsha (a warrior embarked in a Musha Shugyō, or training journey), he fought more than 30 duels without losing once.

In the end, he suddenly vanished, disappearing without telling his students where he was going.

Ittōsai never completely formalized his style. This was done by Ittōsai's successor, **Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki** (小野次郎右衛門忠明), previously known as Mikogami Tenzen, who is therefore considered as the founder, **Ryūso** (流祖) of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū .

Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki was one of the many students of Ittōsai. Tadaaki's original name was Mikogami Tenzen, a samurai of the Satomi clan, from Awa Province. One day Mikogami answered the request of Kagehisa, who, while passing through, was seeking for matches. Mikogami lost and decided to follow Kagehisa as a student.

Before he became the successor of Ittōsai, Mikogami Tenzen had to fight a serious duel with Ono Zenki (another student of Ittōsai) in order to become the successor of his master.

Zenki, a former ferryman, who had challenged Ittōsai only to find his superior, became Ittōsai's student before Tenzen, therefore being his senior. However, when both students had their match, Mikogami Tenzen won. He received the Kamewarito sword and the secret documents from Ittōsai and succeeded him as the second generation Sōke.

Quote: from the DVD "Ono Ha Ryu Kenjutsu" by Sasamori Takemi (2016):

"He (Itō Ittōsai) wanted to remain impartial, but told him one thing: there will be a match tomorrow but think of it as beginning now. This is what he told Mikogami Tenzen. To Ono Zenken he just said there will be a match tomorrow and sent him home. When he went to the match location, Mikogami Tenzen wasn't there. Zenki thought that he must have run away out of fear. Then the morning sun came up and Tenzen was standing with his back to the rising sun, in front of a single tree growing on a small hill. And he was in a high spot. That's what determined the match. What I'm saying is, there's a hint in Ittōsai telling him to think of the match as beginning now. Mikogami Tenzen heard that and immediately went to the match location, checked the terrain, checked the angles as well, and at the time of the match, he was standing in the most useful location. That's how it's been passed down"

Later Mikogami would serve as an instructor to the Tokugawa shogun, along with Yagyū Munenori of the rival school Yagyū Shinkage-ryū.

In fact Yagyū Munenori, who was already the fencing instructor of the shogun, recommended Mikogami to Ieyasu, after recognizing Mikogami's extraordinary talent. Although it is acknowledged that Mikogami was Munenori's superior in swordsmanship, his severe character led him to be the less favored of the two.

Quote: from Sasamori Takemi's book "Bushido and Christianity":

Before he was hired by the Shogun, Mikogami had declared that he was the "best swordsman among Heaven and Earth." Obata Kanbe Kagenori, a samurai serving the Tokugawa shogunate as a military scholar, challenged him to a duel. Military scholars (Gunkakusha) are experts on military topics such as strategy and tactics. Obata was no match for Mikogami, and after he was soundly defeated became Mikogami's student. Shortly thereafter, Mikogami faced Yagyū Munenori, a master from the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū and fencing instructor to the Tokugawa family, but Munenori was no match for him either. It was these two who recommended Mikogami to Ieyasu. The story does not stop there, though. Around the same time, the chief of Hizaori Village (modern-day Asaka City, Saitama) rushed to Edo to appeal for help from the Shogun. - A swordsman named Onime murdered a member of our village and then locked himself in someone's house. We heard that a skilled sword master named Mikogami Tenzen was in Edo. We will not be able to resolve this situation on our own unless he comes to our village! - the chief pleaded. Upon hearing this, Ieyasu ordered Mikogami to subdue the criminal and directed Obata to go along as an official inspector. When he arrived at the village, Mikogami challenged the bandit to a duel and cut off both of his arms no sooner than the fight started. Mikogami asked Obata, "Should I take his head?" and when Obata nodded his approval, Tenzen decapitated him with a single blow. Mikogami finished the job quickly and calmly while the nearby onlookers trembled with fear. When Ieyasu received word of what had transpired, he elevated Mikogami to hatamoto status and employed him as the fencing instructor of his son Hidetada.

Mikogami became the fencing instructor of the shogun's son Hidetada and took the name of Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki and he named the faction of Ittō-ryū that he had developed "Ono Ha Ittō-ryū".

Quotes: from the DVD "Ono Ha Ryu Kenjutsu" by Sasamori Takemi (2016):

It's not to say that Ono Jirōemon was of another school, but even towards the Shogun it seems that he didn't show any reservation. Ken wa ken (Sword was sword) This is a legend as well, but one time the Shogun was going on and about the Way of the Sword. There was a carpet there and they were sitting. Without saying a word, Ono Jirōemon rips out the carpet. The Shogun then stumbled over. Then he said: Sword techniques aren't about talking, you need to do them; you had an opening just now and were tumbled easily. He'd do that kind of thing. So the Shogun wasn't very happy.

He was serving Hidetada Tokugawa, and he was delayed in departure for the front at the Battle of Sekigahara. Ono Jirōemon was a vassal of Hidetada at the time, so he invaded and was victorious at the Battle of Shizugatake. This was a long time ago, so it's said he was a pioneer of great achievement and such, but in reality, Hidetada's honour was in part preserved by the work of Ono Jirōemon.

Eventually, Tadaaki would pass the responsibility of his school over to his third son **Ono Jirōemon Tadatsune** (originally named Tadakatsu), who later would become the fencing instructor of Tokugawa Iemitsu (grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu).



Grave of Ono Jiroemon Tadaaki
and his son, Yokoji Temple, Narita
(picture taken by Frederic Roncioni)

For some generations, the tradition staid in the Ono family.

The third headmaster Ono Jirōemon Tadao (the fourth son of Tadaaki, who became adopted by Tadatsune as his heir), worked as an official kenjutsu instructor to the Shoguns Ietsuna, Tsunayoshi, and Ienobu, and became friend with Tsugaru “Etchū-no-kami” Nobumasa, 4th Daimyō of the Hirosaki Domain.

Ono Jirōemon Tadakazu (the fourth headmaster) was originally named Okabe Sukekurō, but he changed his name to Tadakazu after being adopted as Tadao. He taught to Tsugaru Nobumasa’s son, Tsugaru Tosa-no-Kami Nobuhisa, eventually even passing the transition to him.. Tsugaru Nobuhisa returned the responsibility for the transmission of the teaching back to the Ono family, when he taught Ono Jirōemon Tadaharu and Ono Jirōemon Tadakata, who continued the Ono family line.

Succession in the Ono family:

- Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki (小野次郎右衛門忠明)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadatsune (小野次郎右衛門忠常)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadao (小野次郎右衛門忠於)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadakazui (小野次郎右衛門忠一)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadakata (小野次郎右衛門忠方)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadayoshi (小野次郎右衛門忠喜)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadataka (小野次郎右衛門忠孝)
- Ono Jirōemon Tadatsada (小野次郎右衛門忠貞)
- Ono Nario (小野業雄)

There were no successors in the Ono family after Ono Nario, but in the Tsugaru clan, both the Yamaga and Tsugaru families would work together, to transmit the system.

The succession of the school would also be handled by the **Tsugaru clan**.

The Tsugaru clan ruled the Hirosaki Domain (also known as Tsugaru Domain), located in northern Mutsu Province (modern-day Aomori Prefecture) They were part of Tokugawa Ieyasu's Eastern Army during the Battle of Sekigahara.



*The Daimyō of Tsugaru followed **Yamaga Sokō**(山鹿素行), author of *Seikyō yōroku* (Essentials of the Sagely Confucian Teachings), who claimed that Bushidō is that in which Reigi is important. He was claiming that Reigi doesn't result if there isn't love or respect for the other person. In fact, Yamaga Sokō himself was a student of Obata Kagenori, who had studied Ono Ha Ittō-ryū directly from Ono Tadaaki.*

At one point, Yamaga Sokō was banned from Edo to the Akō Domain (famous for the incident with the forty-seven rōnin), for criticizing the orthodox Zhu Xi school of neo-Confucianism that was supported by the shogunate. However, he sent his adopted son, Okinobu, to live in the Tsugaru Domain. Therefore the leaders of the Tsugaru Domain studied both “Yamaga-ryū (system of strategy from Yamaga Sokō) and Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (Kenjutsu). Because of this interaction, Ittō-ryū ultimately migrated from the capital Edo to the Tsugaru Domain.

Succession in the Tsugaru family (Sōke):

- Tsugaru “Tosa-no kami” Nobuhisa (津軽土佐守信寿)
- Tsugaru “Dewa-no kami” Nobuaki (津軽出羽守信著)
- Tsugaru “Etchū-no-kami” Nobuyasu (津軽越中守信寧)
- Tsugaru “Tosa-no kami” Nobuakira (津軽土佐守信明)
- Tsugaru “Jijū” Yasuchika (津軽侍從寧親)
- Tsugaru “Jijū” Nobuyuki (津軽侍從信順)
- Tsugaru “Jijū” Yukitsugu (津軽侍從順隼)
- Tsugaru “Tosa-no kami” Tsuguakira (津軽土佐守承昭), last daimyō of the Hirosaki Domain
- Tsugaru Hidemaru (津軽英麿)
- Tsugaru Yoshitaka (津軽義孝)

Despite the fact that the official succession was handled within the Tsugaru family, it was not feasible to have a person with such a high social status as a feudal lord to be engaged in the instruction of the domain's retainers. Therefore the Yamaga family took the responsibility of teaching both Yamaga-ryū (strategy) and Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (Kenjutsu) to the retainers of the Tsugaru domain.

Yamaga Sokō who taught military strategy to the Tokugawa Shoguns, the House of Tsugaru and Ono. was taught Ittō-ryū by the founder of the Ono-ha, Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki. Later Ono Jirōemon Tadayoshi and Ono Jirōemon Tadataka taught the entire Ono Ha Ittō-ryū system to Yamaga Hachirozaemon Takami (retainer of the Tsugaru clan).

Succession in the Yamaga family:

- *Yamaga Hachirozaemon Takami (山鹿八郎左衛門高美)*
- *Yamaga Jirousaku Takaatsu (山鹿次郎作高厚)*
- *Yamaga Tomozou Takakyuu (山鹿友蔵高久)*
- *Yamaga Morie Takanobu (山鹿盛衛高之)*
- *Yamaga Motojirou Takatomo (山鹿元次郎高賛)*

Nakanishi Chuta Tsugusada learned Ittō-ryū from Ono Jirōemon Tadao and Tadakazu. The school he started later became the Nakanishi faction of Ittō-ryū.

Ittō-ryū spawned various other factions, such as the Chuya, Kaji, Hokushin Ittō-ryū, and others, not to mention its importance in laying the groundwork for the [martial art of] Kendo that evolved out of the Edo Period.

Two years after the Meiji restoration (1869), the Tsugaru were relieved of their offices by the abolition of the Han system. Fortunately, the transmission of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū continued after the Meiji restoration by former retainers of the Tsugaru clan until it was eventually passed to **Sasamori Junzō** (笹森順造).

Sasamori Junzō (1886-1976) was born near current Tsugaru city (founded in 2005 from the merger of the town of Kizukuri and the villages of Inagaki, Kashiwa, Morita, and Shariki, all from Nishitsugaru District), in Aomori prefecture (previously known as Mutsu Province). Sasamori Yozo, his father, was skilled in martial arts, in particular the spear, and used to be the Commander of the Household Guards of the Tsugaru Domain.



Junzō started to learn Ittō-ryū in the 1890's from Tsushima Kenpachi, a former master of Ittō-ryū for the Tsugaru Clan. After that he studied for a long period under Nakahata Hidegoro sensei (also a former master of Ittō-ryū for the Tsugaru Clan). After graduating from the Amori Prefecture School, he entered Waseda University, where he would become captain of the Kendō club.

In 1926, Sasamori Junzō acceded as 16th Sōke to the legitimate Ono Ha from Yamaga Motojirou Takatomo the successor of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū of the Yamaga family (Tsugaru Clan). Moreover, the Sōke within the Tsugaru domain (Tsugaru Yoshitaka, who was the father of Her Imperial Highness, Princes Hitachi), presented Sasamori Junzō with all the secret initiation

materials and documents of the school. Sasamori Junzō, became a Japanese politician in the Taisho and Showa Eras and served as a cabinet minister during the Katayama government. He has served as a Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Denver, President of Tooku Gijuku, Director of Aoyama Gakuin, Member of the House of Representatives, Member of the House of Councilors, President of the Demobilization Agency, Director of the Compensation Agency, Minister of State.

Sasamori Junzō was also a well-known and high ranked Kendō practitioner (Kendo Hanshi 8th Dan, author of the book “This is kendo”) and gathered all the information about Ono Ha Ittō-ryū in a book entitled “Ittō-ryū Gokui” (“The Secrets of Ittō-ryū ”).

Sasamori Junzō brought the school back to Tōkyō, where he established his Dōjō, called Reigakudō. **Reigakudō** was founded on 15 December, 1963 as both a kendo training hall focused on ancient Japanese martial arts (kobudō) and a Christian hall of worship (later, the Komaba Eden Church). Sasamori Junzo became the first chairman (dōshu) of Reigakudō.

Sasamori Takemi (笹森建美), was the 17th Sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū . He took the role of the preservation of the system from his father, Sasamori Junzo, in 1975.

Sasamori Takemi was born the third son of Sasamori Junzo, in Hirosaki (Aomori Prefecture) in 1933.

A Philosophy graduate of Waseda University, he later studied at Duke and Hartford School of Divinity (US) and continued to follow in his father's footsteps as a Christian scholar. Sasamori Takemi, resided in Setagaya-ku, Tōkyō, Japan. Based at Komaba Eden Church, he was a Christian minister and Kenjutsu Sōke.



Sasamori Takemi studied Ono Ha Ittō-ryū with Sasamori Junzō until his father's death in 1975, when he became not only the successor of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū, but also of O-naginata Chokugen-ryū and Shinmusō Hayashizaki-ryū Iai. . He was also the 2nd Chairman of the Reigakudō. He has served as a standing director of the Japan Kobudo Association (Nihon Kobudō kyōkai) and a standing director of the Kobudo Promotion Association (Kobudō shinkō-kai). He has also been a special lecturer at the National Police Academy.

Sasamori Takemi passed away in August 2017 at the age of 84.

Yabuki Yūji (矢吹裕二) is the 18th and current Sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (小野派一刀流).



Yabuki Yūji, is a Tōkyō Metropolitan Police Department Kendō Instructor (Kendō Kyōshi, 7th dan).

He was born in Iwaki City (Fukushima Prefecture) on February 10th, 1970.

In 1992 he joined The Metropolitan Police Department (Keishichō), where he also learned Ono Ha Ittō-ryū under Ishiyama Sensei.

In 1998 he became a direct student of Sasamori Takemi, the 17th Sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū. Eventually he was given Menkyo Kaiden by Sasamori Sōke.

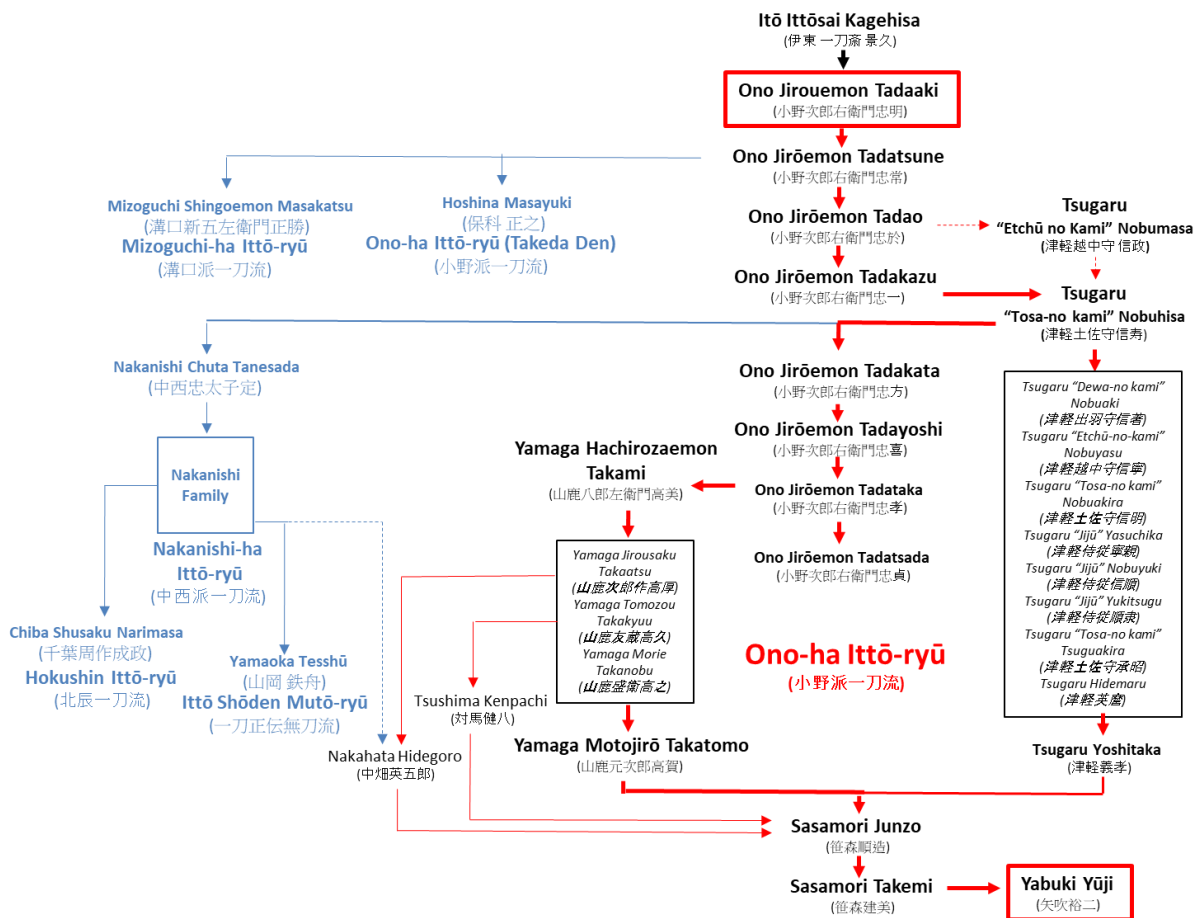
In 2017 Yabuki Yūji was designated as the 18th Sōke and the third Chief (dōshu) of Reigakudō by Sasamori Takemi, who passed away that same year. In May 2020, a general incorporated foundation, the **Reigakudō Foundation** has been established. The purpose of this foundation is to preserve and transmit Ono Ha Ittō Ryū, Shin Muso Hayashizaki Ryū, Chokugen Ryū and Shibukawa Ryū Juttejutsu which are the schools which the Reigakudō inherited.

- Chokugen-ryū occurred in Kyoto during Genki-Tensho period and descended to Tsugaru Domain during Keicho period. The whole length of the Naginata of Chokugen-ryū is more than 9 Shaku. The current headmaster (sōke) of Chokugen-ryū Naginata Jutsu: is Yabuki Yūji (also sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū).
- Also Shinmuso-Hayashizaki-ryū was spread out among Bushi In the Tsugaru Domain. Toru Ishizaki, Menkyo Kaiden in Ono-ha Ittō-ryū, is the current Sōke.
- The Shibukawa Jittejutsu was also handed down to Junzo Sasamori and from there to his son and to members of the Metropolitan Police.

Yabuki Sōke dedicates whole his life to embodying amity and comity (**Enman** 円満) as passed on by the previous Sōke.

Note: The Kanji for **En** (円) can also be pronounced “**Maru**” (circle). **Enman** can therefore also be translated as fully round. The circle also comes back in the Kamon of the school but is also present in many techniques. Indeed many Waza are performed while making a small circle (called Komanji). A **Manji** (卍), is used as a symbol for Buddhist temples, its shape symbolizes eternal cycling. A **Komanji** is a small Manji.

Ittō-ryū (一刀流) lineage:



Notes:

- This is an abbreviated lineage, a more complete one can be consulted in Sasamori Junzō's book "Ittō-ryū Gokui" (in Japanese).
- Jirōemon (次郎右衛門) is also written Jirouemon, although Jirōemon is also correct since the name comes from Jirō (次郎), u (右) and emon (衛門).

Most of the teachings of the school have been kept secret for a long time but were presented to a larger public by Sasamori Junzō in his book "Ittō-ryū Gokui".

There is an instructional DVD by Sasamori Takemi, (17th Sōke of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū) in Japanese with English subtitles. We included some quotes from that video, however readers are strongly recommended to listen to the explanation of Sōke himself. Also his book "Bushido and Christianity", translated in English by Mark Hague, is an excellent source for those who don't read Japanese.

The system, its strategy, tactics and philosophy

Ittō-ryū (一刀流) stands for “one sword school” (or “one stroke school”). The reference to “one” is philosophical and indicates that everything starts with one and ends with one. In the school, there is the saying **Ittō soku bantō** (一刀即万刀), which means that one sword equals many (lit. 10.000) swords, indicating that many, eventually will lead to one again.

Quotes from the interview between Kitano "Beat" Takeshi and Sasamori Takemi (Shincho 45, Sep 2011):

In ancient times, zero-based numbering didn't exist. In Japanese thinking, the first whole number was the numeral one and everything started from one and ended with one. Consequently, one plus one was not two, but turned into ten. All things began with one and ended with one, or returned back to one. So, when drawing the crest of Ittō-ryū, if you start with a single point (a small circle) and extend it out to write "one" (一) in Japanese it eventually turns into a large circle that encompasses everything. My interpretation of this is that everything starts with a single point, and if this point is extended out in a straight line, the line will eventually become a circle that encompasses everything. That point where you start is yourself, and to become a complete person, you must embrace the truth of the greater cosmos. I consider this to be the lesson of Ittō-ryū.

Ono Ha Ittō-ryū contains over 170 techniques in its curriculum, but when we train, we start with the first technique, called Hitotsugachi, and after practicing the hundreds of techniques in the curriculum, we eventually return to the same technique of Hitotsugachi. The starting point is the end point and the end point is the starting point.

“One” also refers to **Kiriotoshi** (切り落とし), lit. “cut to drop”, which is the basic technique in the school. Ono Ha Ittō-ryū starts and ends with Kiriotoshi: “Kiriotoshi ni hajimari Kiriotoshi ni owaru” (切り落としに始まり切り落としに終わる). In order to be successful when executing Kiriotoshi, one must first do Kiriotoshi to one’s mind, i.e. first eliminate any fear of dying or being cut.

An important principle in Kiriotoshi is **Sharin Zenten** (車輪前転) or “a wheel rolling forward”. You win over your opponent by riding over his sword, called **Uwadachi** (上太刀). This is done like a wheel that rotates as it moves forward. It is very important that you don’t stop moving forward after you raise your sword up, otherwise it is useless.

The relationship between the two swords when they meet or cross, called **Watari Komi** (渡り込み), is important. Don’t try to move your opponent’s sword out of the way when the two swords meet, but just slide into him with your entire body and your sword tip will naturally cross over to him.

In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū, you have to cut down your opponent with “one cut” of your sword. It is a sword style in which you move forward and cut down your opponent decisively in one stroke, no matter what.

Quotes from the interview between Kitano "Beat" Takeshi and Sasamori Takemi (Shincho 45, Sep 2011):

The instant that both sides cut toward each other, our side wins and the opponent dies." "In Ittō-ryū we never back away from our opponent. The words run away don't exist. This is because we can beat our opponent even when they come forward to cut us. Always, always go forward. This is why some of my students who came to practice with us after training in Kendō said that, after coming to Ittō-ryū, they lost their fear of competition. They told me that before they practiced with us, all they thought about was backing away from or trying to avoid their opponents, but now they don't try to avoid being hit.

The way to use steps is called **Ashizukai** (足使い). For instance, in Hitotsugachi of the Ōdachi kata there are 3 consecutive steps; These steps are Sho, Chū and Dai (small, medium, big).

1. **Ugoki o okosu tame no ashizukai** (動きを起こす為の足使い): Step, used in order to initiate the movement (in fact to invite the opponent, thus creating an opening).
2. **Maai o hakaru tame no ashizukai** (間合いを計る為の足使い): Step, used in order to measure the distance.
3. **Shobu ni Hairu tame no ashizukai** (勝負に入る為の足使い): Step, used in order to enter the fight.

Ittō-ryū, like other traditional schools of fencing, not just, values practicing and mastering its core doctrines through **Kumitachi** (組太刀) and **Kata** (形). However training is also supplemented with written documents and oral teachings that ultimately leads to the unification of physical techniques and principles: **Jiri itchi** (事理一致).

During practice, most techniques are performed by **Shikata** (仕方) against **Uchikata** (打方), using a wooden sword or Bokken. Uchikata usually wears thick protective gloves called "**Onigote**" (鬼籠手). The use of **Onigote** is distinctive for Ittō-ryū .

- In many instances, Shikata will strike to the Onigote but in fact is aiming to the head of the Uchikata. This means that when Uchikata lowers the Kote after he is hit, the kissaki of Shikata should come above the head of Uchikata. This is referred to as **Kote Garami Men Uchi** (小手絡み面打ち): a Menuchi related to Kote.
- When striking the Onigote, with a pushing cut, or **Oshigiri** (-押斬), it is important that the **Bokutō** doesn't bounce. Moreover in Oshigiri, the Onigote are hit with the mono-uchi and the sword is pushed against the Onigote to prevent the opponent from entering.
- There is a second way to hit the Onigote: with a pulling cut, or **Hikigiri** (引斬). In this instance, the Onigote are cut further and then the sword is pulled back (usually ending in an appropriate Kamae like Hongaku).
- There is a third way to hit the Onigote, like in Yorimi (part of Ōdachi Tsuika series of Kumidahi): hit the Kote in a more "caressing" way, called **Nadekiru** (撫で斬).



The role of **Uchikata** (打方) is very important in Ittō-ryū . Uchikata is the role taken up by the most senior practitioners.

- Against beginners, Uchidachi makes it seem as though he will strike to hit, but he clearly misses.
- Against mid-level practitioners, he still makes it seem as though he will strike, but just stops short.
- Against advanced practitioners, he makes it seem as though he will strike, and does.

In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū there is **En-no-kiri** (縁の切): cut a connection. In fact, you should not lose the connection, as if attached to a string, except in the last instance when you cut the opponent. However, once mastered how to obtain victory with **En-no-kiri**, you should also learn to obtain victory with **Muen-no-kiri** (無縁の切): cutting a non-existing connection. In that instance you break the connection already before the cut.

- This can be taken further to the training of **Kiriotoshi** (切り落し) where you stay connected with the opponent and obtain victory with Uwadachi followed by a stab to the throat, i.e. “Deba”: in **En-no-kiri-otoshi** you follow him with Seme-age and strike his Kote with a large movement but you never lose the connectivity. In **Muen-no-kiri-otoshi** you let go the connection and as soon as your opponent attempts to strike back you hit him.
- En-no-kiri can be called **Uen-no-kiri** (有縁の切). Although Uen is more often used in Buddhism to express connectivity.

When you take a sword in your hand and face the enemy there can be no disconnection between your sword and body. Your sword and body should become one: your body must become full of your sword (懸中の待, **Ken-chū-no-tai**), and your sword full of your body (待中の懸, **Tai-chū-no-ken**). Cutting something is not done only by the workings of your hands – moving your body filled with the spirit of your sword, utilising your sword in possession of your body, then with your body as the principal factor and your sword in the centre (中心, **Chūshin**), you will finally be able to start cutting properly with your sword. If your body and sword act in one like this at all times then there will be no opening (隙, **Suki**) for the enemy to attack. This is what’s meant by **Ken-mi-fu-i** (剣身不異): the “sword” (剣, Ken) and the “body” (身, Mi) are “not different” (不異, Fu-i).

Shikata can finish Kiriotoshi in 2 ways:

- He can finish his cut by moving forward and stabbing Uchikata to the throat: this is called **Deba** (出刃).
- Or he can cut further and cleave Uchikata in two: this is called **Iriba** (入刃).

One way to ensure connectivity when doing Kiriotoshi , is expressed by **Kobushi tsuke** (拳付け). For instance from **Gedan no Kamai**, facing an opponent in **Seigan**, the **Kissaki** points to the opponent’s fist and continue to do so when he raises his sword to cut.

For the execution of techniques it is said that five elements have to interact properly (work in consistency). These are:

1. **Kokoro/shin** (心): mind/heart (In Japanese, the heart represents the mind)

2. **Ki** (気): energy
3. **Ri** (理): principle
4. **Ki** (機): opportunity
5. **Jutsu** (術): technique

All these 5 elements must be employed together to achieve one truth: **Gokaku ittai** (互格一諦):

- The mind and energy are unified: **Shin-ki ichigen** (心気一元)
- Energy and principle are in perfect unity: **Ki-ri gōitsu** (気理合一).
- Principle creates opportunity: **Riki issen** (理機一閃).
- Opportunity and technique are in harmony: **Gijutsu itchi** (機術一致)

When practicing **Kumidachi**, one should be fierce, strong, execute techniques with intensity. This is captured by the Japanese adjective **Hageshii** (激しい). See later.

Shi ni tachi (死に太刀) is a sword that has been rendered unable to attack. In contrast to **Ikutachi** (生太刀), a sword that is alive or still in a position able to win. However there is also a more philosophical use of these terms:

- When wickedness and evil are struck down under the blade of this sword, justice and good prevail. In order to do **Kiriotoshi** (切り落とし) you need to first closely examine your own heart and cut away greed, arrogance, and evil.
- When **Kiriotoshi** (切り落とし) is used to stop evil in the world, it is also called the Sword that Leads to Life (**Ikutachi**), and in cases where the sword is merely used to kill to serve a person's own lust or selfish desires, it is called the Sword that Leads to Death (**Shi ni tachi**).

Kirishitenasai (切りしてなさい) or cut (but as an imperative, a kind of strong request), according to Ittosai's teaching, is also a matter of cutting away various thoughts. Cutting away one's pride and weak points; cut away all of the advantages and shortcomings; cut away your ego, too.

In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū there are the twelve tenets, called **Junikajō** (十二個条 or 十二ヶ条). In fact the **Junikajō Mokuroku** is the first scroll of transmission in the school. These twelve tenets are:

1. **Futatsu no metsuke no koto** (On "two points of eye contact")
2. **Kiriotoshi no koto** (On "to cut down")
3. **Enkin no koto** (On "distance and closeness")
4. **Yoko-tate jōge no koto** (On "horizontal, vertical, up, down")
5. **Irotsuke no koto** (On "Applying color")
6. **Megokoro no koto** (On "the mind's eye")
7. **Kogishin no koto** (On "doubt/hesitation")
8. **Matsukaze (or shofu) no koto** (On "the wind in the pines")
9. **Chigyō no koto** (On "the form of the earth")
10. **Muta shintsu no koto** (On "the heart transmitting the self")
11. **Ma no koto** (On "interval")
12. **Zanshin no koto** (On "the remaining mind")

Combative distance and timing are part of the concept of **Ma-ai** (間合い), literally translated as “meeting an interval” but in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū often the translation of combative distance.

- There is **Shi-no-ma** (death range), the distance where one can be cut easily (where the monouchi can strike a target), and there is **Sei-no-ma** (life range), the distance where one cannot be cut directly.
- **Issoku Ittō no ma** (一足一刀の間) is a distance where the target is within reach by using only one step. In **Ai-seigan** (both opponents in Seigan), this is when the sword tips cross about 9 cm (3 Sun).

A distance that is larger is called **Tō-ma** (遠間) and a smaller one is **Chika-ma** (近間).

- When both Uchikata, and Shikata, move forward and cross blades (e.g.. assuming Ai-Seigan), they can meet at 2 consecutive distances before the initiative becomes possible:
 - **Shokujin no Ma-ai** (触刃の間合い): where both **Kissaki** start to touch.
 - **Kōjin no Ma-ai** (交刃の間合い): where **Kissaki** are fully crossed, but still there is not yet a striking distance. Kōjin (crossing blade) is obviously closer than Shokujin (touching blade), but still further than **Issoku Ittō no Ma-ai** (一足一刀の間合い).

Regarding the state of mind, **Ryūrō Muge** (流露無碍), lit. flowing dew without obstacles, is important. The sword in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū must be used smoothly and spontaneously like dew that is flowing with no obstacles. To achieve this, a state of constant awareness is essential (expressed in **Muimushin**). Nevertheless, a mental state of not thinking about anything is also important (**Munen Musō**).

Ryūrō Muge is also compatible with the concept of continuously moving.

In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū there is the concept of **Isshō Nihai** (一勝二敗): “One is victory, Two is defeat”. In order to win you have to take action. If you take action after avoiding an attack, it requires two moves and if the opponent is strong, he will win. This is in line with the concept that in order to defeat your opponent, you must move forward. To defeat the enemy you have to take initiative. This doesn’t mean rushing towards an opponent. In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū you also learn to let the opponent attack and then take the initiative.

When using the sword, the body and sword must act as a single unit. This is known as **Kenmifui** (剣身不異): “the sword and the body are inseparable” (see above). However both the sword and the body are controlled by the mind, therefore “the mind and the sword are inseparable”: **Kenshinfui** (剣心不異).

In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū there is also **Kenchūtai-Taichūken** (懸中待 - 待中懸): be prepared to react when attacking and be prepared to attack while waiting. **Kenchūtai-Taichūken** and **Taichūken-Kenchūtai** (prepared to attack while waiting and defend when attacking) are considered as one concept.

Taguriuchi (手繰り打) is a strategy where the action starts by drawing in (Taguri) the opponent, in order to strike (Uchi) him. Taguru, however is not just pulling, in fact it refers to spinning thread onto a wheel. You pull in but in the same time you reel it out.

Ichiyō Raifuku (一葉来復 or 一陽来復) refers to the transition of the seasons. In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū it is the ability to reverse direction without pausing. But not by using a rhythm of two beats (step back then go forward), but by pulling back and going forward a single beat.

To go straight forward, directly into your opponent, known as the principle of **Chūshin-Chokunyū** (中心直入), is the most effective approach, because the centre of the opponent looks strong, but in fact is weak.

Kurai (位) refers to mental and physical stance or preparedness. It is the ability to adapt physical stance and preparedness requires skill, therefore Kurai can be seen as a reflection of one's skills. Moreover, in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū, rank within the school is based on skill level, so in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū, Kurai sometimes should be translated as skill level, rank or position.

There are three important natures:

1. When you cut down the enemy's sword in **Kiriotoshi**, it is with the nature of dew: **Tsuyu no kurai** (露の位). It is like a drop of dew that has been collected on a leaf. It is constantly on the verge of falling but only plops down as the tension breaks.
2. When swords connect in **Kumitachi**, you should embody the nature of a flash, spark: **Sekka no Kurai** (石火の位). When your sword meets the opponent's sword it has the feeling of a sickle striking a stone: sharp and fierce. Be that stone that can make a spark and burn everything. To do that you have to remain assertive, fierce, strong in the execution of the techniques, which is expressed by the Japanese adjective, **Hageshii** (激しい). Hitting the opponent should also be executed in one continuous motion, in one beat, **Ichibyōshi** (一拍子).
3. Once you have struck down the sword of the enemy with the nature of a spark (Sekka no kurai), you immediately assume the nature of the temple bell, **Bonshō no kurai** (梵鐘の位), and send out a resounding echo that overwhelms your opponent. Although in Ono-ha Ittō-ryū there is no shouting, there is a strong Kiai when performing a technique, done in a silent, Internal way.

In **Kōjō Gokui Goten**, a set of 5 techniques (called superior, essential 5 matters/points), this mental and physical preparedness is related to the 5 elements (**Gogyō**):

1. **Ki no kurai** (木の位) in **Myōken**, refers to wood: a tree that gradually grows bigger and exerts pressure on the space
2. **Hi no kurai** (火の位) in **Zetsumyōken**, refers to fire that at first spreads a little but grows and burns the fields (related to the Kusanagi no Tsurugi the legendary sword in Kojiki, used in a heroic act to cut the burning grass)
3. **Do no kurai** (土の位) in **Shinken**, refers to earth, the place where everything falls in (everything comes down to earth due to gravity). Here, no matter what kamae, everything comes straight.
4. **Kin no kurai** (金の位) in **Konji-chō-ō-ken**, refers to metal (gold) because it is a divine technique that will help you to defeat and cut down dragon like the king of birds with its

golden wings (Gokurakucho) defeats the evil dragon (Akuryu), like the sword of the Buddhist deity (Mañjuśrī) from the Mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa (Kriyā-tantra).

5. **Mizu no kurai** (水の位) in **Dokumyōken**, refers to water, which is soft and formless but therefore not contained and it can take the form of its vessel

Tachiumare is the birth or origin of a sword or strike. When the opponent is about to strike, the sword tip will become firm and he will even raise the **Kissaki** slightly. When he is about to thrust he will lower his Kissaki. Reading this allows you to be prepared. Understanding (reading/sensing) Tachiumare is a big advantage in a fight.

Matsu o tawamete yanagi o oru (松をたわめて柳を折る) "Bend the pine, break the willow" is also one of the secret teachings of Ittō ryū (described by Sasamori Junzō in his book "Ittō-ryū Gokui"). When both opponents use hard techniques, it leads to both opponents hurting each other. Therefore, one should counter hardness with softness and softness with hardness.

It is also worth mentioning the concept **Shinkōbōei** (進攻防衛), which indicates that the best defence is attack. Students of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū learn never to retreat; Even if in some Waza one gives the impression to pull away, it is only a strategy to let the enemy come in so it is easier to attack him.

The concept **Shu Ha Ri** (守破離), describes the stages leading to mastery. It is not only used in Budō, but also in other disciplines, such as Noh and Go. Shu Ha Ri relates to how to learn things over time:

- At the beginning of studying a Waza we need to keep the teaching of our teacher as it is. We imitate his moving and execution. This keeping is **Shu** (in some way this is Shin).
- At the next step, the rules can be broken and other things can be tried. This breaking is **Ha**.
- Next, there is the separation from the teaching to make one's own way. This is illustrated by **Ri**.
- Then with this experience, one will go back to **Shu** (but now, a more mature stage), illustrating that everything happens in a circle.

Nevertheless, in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū there are various stages a student must pass through:

- **Shidō** (志導): the desire to begin training, to seek guidance
- **Nyūmon** (入門): entering the gate, i.e. desire is turned into action
- **Shoshin** (初心): beginner (lit. beginner's heart)
- **Mijuku** (未熟): inexperienced (lit. not yet mature), novice
- **Jukuren** (熟練): proficient (lit. mature practice)
- **Jotatsu** (上達): (constant) improvement in skill
- **Seimyō** (精妙): exquisite, further refinement of skills and knowledge
- **Enman**: (円満): mastery, perfection (lit. fully round)

Omote (面) and **Ura** (裏), literally front and back, are important concepts in Japanese culture as they can refer to what can be shown to others and what has to remain hidden to outsiders.

- In that context, they relate to concepts like Tatemaie (建前) and Honne (本音), respectively a formal, official view (even a facade) versus an opinion (a view of one's true feelings). Of

course such a discussion is beyond the scope of this document. Omote and Ura, however, are also important in relationship to the direction of a cut.

- In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū , **Omote** refers to techniques coming from left to right (from old imperial Japan where the emperor looked to the south and considered the east - at his left - where the sun rose to be Omote). **Ura** refers to techniques coming from right to left. Of course for a technique to come from left to right, it has to be executed by the attacker from right to left since the opponent sees the mirror image of the attacker.
- To make it even more confusing, one should know that the Omote side is the visible side (outside) when wearing a sword on the left hip through the Obi (cutting edge pointing upwards). In contrast to Ura, the hidden, inner side. When drawing the sword into Seigan no kamae, the outside will be on the left side, hence this is the Omote side of the sword, the other side (on the right) will be called the Ura side.

Manners, courtesy, etiquette, expressed in Japanese by the word **Reigi** (礼儀) or **Reihō** (礼法) are very important. In fact, several words, including Rei (礼), refer to manners, courtesy, etiquette:

- **Reigi** (礼儀)
- **Reihō** (礼法)
- **Reigisahō** (礼儀作法)
- **Reishiki** (礼式)

According to Yamaga Sokō, author of Seikyō yōroku (Essentials of the Sagely Confucian Teachings), Bushidō is that in which **Reigi** is important. He was claiming that Reigi doesn't result if there isn't love or respect for the other person. If there isn't consideration of the other party it doesn't result in true Reigi, it's just the preservation of a fixed thing. Because the Yamaga family took the responsibility of teaching both Yamaga-ryū (strategy) and Ono Ha Ittō-ryū (Kenjutsu) to the retainers of the Tsugaru domain, the concepts of Yamaga Sokō were transmitted in parallel.

The name of the Ono Ha Ittō-ryū training place in Tōkyō is **Reigakudō** (礼楽堂), which can be translated as "Etiquette study hall".

PART II: Practice

Training always starts and ends with **Zarei** (座礼), or kneeling bow, toward the Kamiza (not in the reference to the Kamidana, but as a reference to ancestors). It refers to facing Ittōsai and even the teachers before him.

Students should begin the training with the awareness that they are inheriting the Waza from Ittōsai.

Rei (礼) remains important throughout the training.

A standard Ono Ha Ittō-ryū training usually consists of:

I. **Junbi taisō** (準備体操): warming-up

Note: *The warming up that is usually performed at Reigakudō is not specific to Ono Ha Ittō-ryū, it is a general Japanese type of warming up.*

II. **Kake Kyū-hin** (架九品): the practice of 9 Kamae.

The 9 basic Kamae in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū are:

1. Seigan (正眼)
2. In (陰)
3. Yō (陽)
4. Jōdan (上段)
5. Gedan (下段)
6. Wakigamae (脇構)
7. Onken (隠剣)
8. Kasumi (霞) [chūdan (中段), jōdan (上段)]
9. Hongaku (本覚).

These kamae are usually trained in this order but Hongaku is repeated twice, once at the end and once after Gedan no Kamae.

In between the different Kamae, Seigan is assumed, except between Wakigamae and Onken and between Chūdan Kasumi and Jōdan Kasumi (Gedan no Kasumi is omitted).

After Jōdan Kasumi there is **Tsuki Tsuite Hongaku** (突き付いて本覚): a thrust followed by Hongaku.

After the second Hongaku there is either **Suri-age/Men** (磨上面) or **Suri-age/Kote Orishiki** (磨上小手折敷き).

Summary:

- **Seigan** 正眼
- **In** 陰, followed by **Seigan** 正眼
- **Yō** 陽; followed by **Seigan** 正眼
- **Jōdan** 上段 (in Kake Kyūhin, this it is Migi Jōdan); followed by **Seigan** 正眼
- **Gedan** 下段; followed by **Seigan** 正眼
- **Hongaku** 本覚; followed by **Seigan** 正眼
- **Wakigamae** 脇構
- **Onken** 隠剣; followed by **Seigan** 正眼
- **Chūdan Kasumi** 中段霞
- **Jōdan Kasumi** 上段霞
- **Tsuki tsuite Hongaku** 突き付いて本覚
- **Suri-age / Men** (磨上面) or **Suri-age / Kote Orishiki** (磨上小手折敷き)

Note: *In Ono Ha Ittō-ryū there are many more Kamae. For instance:*

Gedan Kasumi (下段霞)

Hidari Jōdan (左上段)

Kobushi Jōdan (拳上段)

Dai Jōdan (大上段)

Gyaku Hongaku (逆本覚)

Hira Seigan (平正眼)

Shinken (真剣),...

III. **Suburi** (素振り): practice swinging, practiced alternating from In (陰) and Yō (陽):

- **Shomen Suburi** (正面素振り): forward cut towards the head
- **Te-no-uchi** (手の内): cut towards the opponent's forearm (Kote)

IV. **Kiriotoshi** (切り落し), lit. "cut to drop".

Note: *The practice of Kiriotoshi (切り落し) starts and ends with Rei (礼).*

Both opponents first start with Ritsurei (立礼, standing Rei) from a non-fighting distance. Then they take Kamae with the Bokutō while entering into Ma-ai to sit in Seiza and perform Zarei (座礼, sitting Rei). Uchikata puts on the Onigote for this practice.

The opposite (first Zarei then Ritsurei) is done at the end of the Kumitachi.

Kiriotoshi is the most important technique in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū . It is said that Ittō-ryū begins from Kiriotoshi and ends at Kiriotoshi . Therefore this technique is performed in the beginning of the training in a similar way than Ipponme from the Ōdachi kata. The exercise is repeated several times and starts and finishes with Ritsurei.



*Yabuki Sōke performing Kiriotoshi
(during second part of Futatsugachi)
Groot-Bijgaarden 2018.*

Key points of Kiriotoshi:

- Sharin Zenten: a wheel rolling forward.
- Uwadachi: riding over his sword.
- Watari Komi: the meeting (crossing) of the 2 swords.
- Kiriotoshi: cut down.
- Ago no shita: under the chin (= finishing position of the Kissaki after the cut).
- Seme-age: attack and lift = push Kissaki forwards and upwards, along the opponent's centre line, in order to make the opponent step back.
- En-no-kiri: cut a connection.
- Oshigiri: striking Kote with a pushing cut.
- Kote Garami Men Uchi: a Menuchi related to Kote (although you strike Kote, the aiming is Men).
- Isshō Nihai: One is victory, Two is defeat (there is only one motion in Kiriotoshi, not two).

Students learn Kiriotoshi at a long distance, finishing by a stab to the throat. This is referred to as “**Deba**” (出刃). Uchikata steps back and assumes Jōdan-no-kamae. Doing so, Uchikata avoids to be stabbed while Shikata follows him with **Seme-age** (攻め上げ) and strike Uchikata’s kote with a large movement.

There is also the “**Iriba**” (入刃) version in which Shikata ends his Kiriotoshi with a strike on the head instead of a stab. This is done using a shorter distance and is trained at the end of Shin-Gyō-Sō or Itsutsu no Kiriotoshi.

Kiriotoshi is often practiced in 3 different ways: **Shin** (真), **Gyō** (行), **Sō** (草). The engaging distance (Ma), the way of moving, the speed and “where to cut”, are different:

- **SHIN** (真)
 - The engaging distance is large (far): **Tō-ma** (遠間)
 - The way of moving is: **Futsū Ashi** (普通足), which is normal or regular walking (lit. normal feet/steps)
 - In Kiriotoshi, the cut in Shin is directed to the navel: **Heso** (臍)
- **GYŌ** (行)
 - The engaging distance is medium: **Chū-ma** (近間)
 - The way of moving is faster (than Shin): **Haya Ashi** (早足), fast steps
 - In Kiriotoshi, the cut in Gyō is directed to the throat, **Nodo** (喉)
- **SŌ** (草)
 - The engaging distance is small (near): **Chika-ma** (近間)
 - The way of moving is fast with very little steps: **Kake Komi** (駆け込み), which, although translated as rushing, still allows control of the movements
 - In Kiriotoshi, the cut in Sō is directed to the head, **Men** (面). This is **Iriba** (入刃).

Note:

“Kai-Gyō-Sō” or “Shin-Gyō-Sō” comes from the three ways of writing in Japanese calligraphy or “Shodō” (書道): **Kaisho** (楷書), **Gyōsho** (行書) and **Sōsho** (草書). Beginning with the original non-cursive Kai (which is equivalent to Shin) form, this is gradually broken down into the semi-cursive Gyō style and then the cursive Sō style.



Nihon (Japan), written in 3 styles

(Kaisho, Gyōsho, Sōsho)

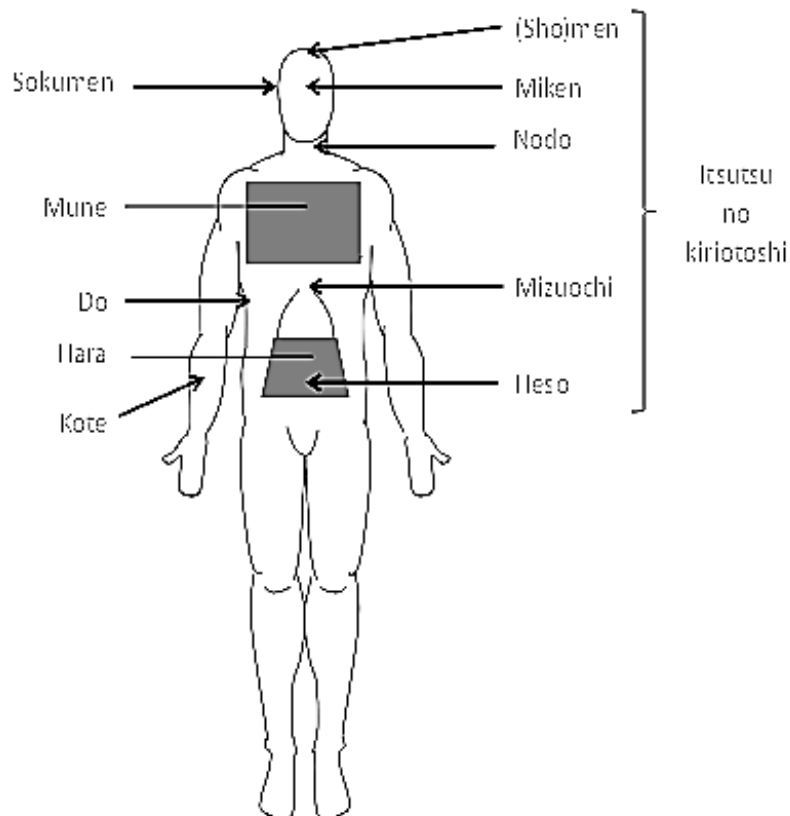
Another terminology for this kind of practice, is **Randome** (although strictly speaking, Randome refers to a practice where Shikata can do any Kiriotoshi).

There is also another form of **Kiriotoshi** that is often trained, which is called **Itsutsu no Kiriotoshi** (5 kinds of Kiriotoshi):

- navel (**Heso**)
- solar plexus (**Mizuochi**)
- throat (**Nodo** or **Inkō**)
- face (**Miken**)
- head (**Men**).

The first 4 are examples of Deba, the last is Iriba.

Targets most frequently used in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū :



On the right end side the 5 targets on the centre line that are used in Itsutsu no Kiriotoshi. It should be noticed that the hands and wrists but especially the thumbs are also important targets.

V. **Kumitachi** (組太刀)

After Kiriotoshi , students start with Kumitachi.

Note: *The Ōdachi Kumitachi includes Go-Juppon or 50 victories spread over 36 encounters. Ono Ha Ittō-ryū has a counting system that puts emphasis on the number of victories, rather than the number of encounters in a Kata (in one encounter there can be 1, 2 or even 3 victories).*

Ipponme through Gohonme are the basic techniques of the Ittō-ryū Ōdachi kata. Because the fundamental principles of the remaining Waza are based on the first five Waza , they should be sufficiently learned. Once students have acquired a proper and solid foundation, through the study of these 5 Waza , they can move on and they will be able to master the other Waza without difficulty

In fact, the 50 kata of the Ōdachi set, are a preparation for the Kōjō Gokui Goten (a set of 5 kata) which Itō Ittōsai derived from the teaching of Kanemaki Jisai (Chujo-ryū and Kanemaki-ryū).

*In addition to the 50 Waza of the original Ōdachi Kumitachi, as taught by Ono Jiroemon Tadaaki, the next generations of Sōke, Ono Jiroemon Tadatsune (son of Tadaaki) and Ono Jiroemon Tadao, have put together an additional set of 10 Waza : **Ōdachi Tsuika** (大太刀追加).*

In the beginning and end of this Kumitachi, Rei is done in **Seiza**. It is done in a courteous way to show respect. The back should be kept straight (not bent). Uchidachi (normally the most advanced student) pauses for one breath, Shidachi pauses for 3 breaths. When the eyes meet again, Shikata follows the movements of Uchikata.

Note: *In fact both opponents first start with Ritsurei (standing Rei) from a non-fighting distance. Then they take Kamae with the Bokutō while entering into Ma-ai to sit in Seiza. They perform Zarei and Uchikata puts on the Onigote.*

At the start of each Waza, both opponents are separated at **Sangen-no-maai**. From there, both opponents assume Kamae and move to **Issōku ittō no ma-ai**, the distance from where an effective initiative can be started.

At the end of each Waza, after **Zanchin**, Uchikata and Shikata assume **Ai-seigan** (both in Seigan, sword tips crossed). Uchikata then drops his sword tip and grasps the hilt of the sword (Kashira), releasing the right hand; Shikata mirrors this. Uchikata and Shikata then withdraw 5 small steps to **Sangen-no maai**. The way in which both parties approach and separate is similar for all techniques.

Uchikata assumes the role of mentor and teaches Shikata, who assumes the role of the disciple.

VI. Katageiko (形稽古):

More advanced students continue with the study of other kata: **Katageiko** (形稽古):

- Training through repetition and studying of kata (formal set of techniques used to transmit the techniques of the school) is an essential part of practice.
- Kata of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū are **Kumitachi** (組太刀): they are done in pairs and are based on real combat situations. So once the students have mastered the basic patterns, it is possible for their opponent to attack from different ma-ai and angles and not in a predetermined fashion. The techniques being used don't change fundamentally, the way in which they are applied are not necessarily fixed. Students must learn to adjust accordingly.
- Students usually make use of a wooden sword or **Bokutō** (木刀), and Uchikata (the one undergoing the techniques but yet guiding) wears thick protective gloves called "**Onigote**" (鬼籠手).
- Nevertheless in the school there is also the usage of an **Habiki** ("pulled edge"). An habiki (刃引き) is a steel (compared to Zinc alloy in an iaitō) edged blade sword with an edge that is blunted. It is more robust than an iaitō but in contrast to a Shinken, not sharp.
- Each kata (形) consist of a number of Waza (techniques). In total there are more than 150 Waza in Ono Ha Ittō-ryū . These include kata with the long sword, the short sword, habiki and battō kata (sword drawing).

Kata of Ono Ha Ittō-ryū are learned in the following order:

- **ŌDACHI** (大太刀): 50 (Ōdachi Gojupon) + 10 additional Waza (Ōdachi Tsuika)
- **KODACHI** (小太刀): 9 Waza
- **AI KODACHI** (合小太刀): 8 Waza
- **SANJŪ** (三重): 1 Waza
- **HABIKI** (刃引): 11 Waza
- **HICHŪ NO HI GOKUI HOSHATŌ** (秘中の秘 極意払捨刀): 10 (or more) Waza
- **KŌJŌ GOKUI GOTEN** (高上極意五点): 5 Waza
- **HAKIRI-AI** (ハキリ合): 12 Waza
- **KUKA-NO-TACHI** (個之太刀): 9 Waza
- **TA-RYŪ-KACHI-NO-TACHI** (他流勝之太刀): 11 Waza
- **TSUMEZA BATTŌ** (詰座抜刀): 17 Waza
- **TACHIAI BATTŌ** (立合抜刀): 5 Waza

Other kata are:

- *Seijō-Rei-ken* (40)
- *Gunshin Ogami no shiki tachi* (7)

Addendum: Ittō-ryū and (gendai) Kendō

In “One on One with Sasamori Sensei (Ono-Ha Ittō-ryū), Part Two: Ono-Ha Ittō-ryū and True Perfection”, Sasamori Takemi Sōke tells us that Kendō came from Nakanishi-ha Ittō-ryū. They developed the Shinai and this branch was the main influence in the development of Kendō. Indeed, Nakanishi Chūzō Tsugutake (Nakanishi-ha Ittō-ryū) popularized the use of Shinai and protective gear when he introduced “Shinai uchikomi keiko” to the samurai in Edo (modern Tokyo). Schools in Edo that offered Shinai competition training soon became popularly known as “Ittō-ryū academies” (regardless of their actual lineage affiliations). In other words, “Ittō-ryū” became a slang designation for all styles and schools of Shinai competitions. These shinai competition became popularly known as “Gekiken” or “Gekken” (battling swords). Thus, the popular imagination linked Ittō-ryū to Gekken. After Shinai competition training became popular people began to evaluate martial art academies on their record in producing students who could perform well in competitive Shinai matches. In this new competitive environment no instructor was as successful as **Chiba Shusaku Narimasa** (1794--1855) of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū. Chiba Shusaku Narimasa had developed a curriculum of 68 specific techniques for dueling with Shinai. Many versions of this curriculum were written down by Chiba's students and distributed as the “key” to successful competition. In this way, Chiba's list of 68 Shinai techniques set the standards for mastering Shinai competition from the 1850s to the 1920s and beyond.

However, one of the fathers (if not the father) of modern Kendō (as it exists today), was **Takano Sasaburo** (1862-1950). Sasaburo was trained from a very young age in Kenjutsu by his grandfather Mitsumasa (Sakichiro), a student of Nakanishi Chubei Tanemasa, who had been a direct disciple of the 4th Ono-Ha Ittō-ryū Sōke, Ono Tadaichi. Mitsumasa (the father of Sasaburo's mother) who had received Menkyo, worked as a Kenjutsu instructor for the military but also had a Dōjō of his own. At that time they would refer to their Kenjutsu as “Itto-ryu” or “Ono-Ha Itto-ryu”. Only later the style of Ono-Ha passed through the Nakanishi family via Mitsumasa (and later Sasaburo) has also come to be called “Nakanishi-Ha Itto-ryu. It is said that Sasaburo, by the age of five, was able to demonstrate all of the basic 50 Itto-ryu kata in front of the domain chief when he came around on a tour of inspection. Upon his grandfather's death Sasaburo took over Mitsumasa's business and ran it until 1886. Later he would join the police as instructor and would become one of the most renowned competitors of the Keishichō (Tōkyō Metropolitan Police Department). Takano then became an instructor at the Tōkyō Shihan Gakkō (Tōkyō Teacher's College). The president of the college was Kanō Jigorō (1860--1938). It housed the first department of Physical Education in Japan and was the first school to train martial art instructors for public schools. Later he would go on to teach at other places, including Waseda University. Takano Sasaburo took the 68 shinai techniques of Chiba Shusaku Narimasa and pared the number down to 50 techniques. Among his legacy there are some important books: “Kendo” (1915; reprinted 1984), “Nihon kendo kyohan” (Japanese Kendō Teaching Manual, 1920), and “Kendo kyohan” (Kendō Teaching Manual, 1930; reprinted 1993). These works are still studied today. In 1912, Takano Sasaburo (Ittō-ryū) was part of the committee responsible for the creation of Dai Nippon Teikoku Kendō Kata, the precursor to modern Kendō-no-Kata. Other members were: Negishi Shingorō (Shindō Munen-ryū), Tsuji Shinpei (Shingyōtō-ryū), Monna Tadashi (Hokushin Ittō-ryū) and Naito Takaharu (Hokushin Ittō-ryū).

After Japan's defeat and occupation in 1945 by the Allied Powers public instruction in Kendō was banned because of its involvement in wartime indoctrination. At that time, few people were as influential as Sasamori Takemi's father, **Sasamori Junzō** (1886—1976), Ono-Ha Ittō-ryū Sōke and former principal of the Tō-ōgijuku, the Tsugaru Domain's main educational institute. In fact, Junzō was also an American-educated Christian educator and liberal politician, who became a member of the House of Representatives from Aomori in 1946. The next year he became a Minister of State in the Katayama Cabinet, where he held posts as the Director General of the repatriation Agency and the President of the Demobilization Board. As a respected member of Government, he was able to convince General Douglas MacArthur (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) and his staff that Kendō could be taught in a democratic fashion. In 1950 he founded and served as the president of the Zen Nihon Shinai Kyogi Renmei (All Japan Federation for Bamboo Stick Competition). It would, however, still take a few years before the words "Kendō " and "Budō were allowed to be officially used again. As mentioned already elsewhere, Sasamori Junzō achieved 10th Dan and was author of the book "**This is kendo**" (the first English-language Kendō book published in 1964) and many other Japanese-language texts that still remain in print today.

In 1952, the Zen Nihon Kendō Renmei (All Japan Kendo Federation) was established. This was also the first public use of the word " Kendō " after World War II. Kendō was fully rehabilitated in 1953 after the Korean War had begun and could be taught in public schools again, however, initially not yet as Budō (martial art) but as Kyōiku Supotsu (physical education sport).

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