

1-1-2013

Bakumatsu Fencing Schools and Nationalism

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Published version. "Bakumatsu Fencing Schools and Nationalism," in *Japan at War*. [Publisher Link](#).
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Bakumatsu Fencing Schools and Nationalism

During the final decades of the Tokugawa period, the number of fencing academies (*dōjō*) and swordsmanship styles (*ryūha*) increased. The first styles of fencing and other martial arts developed in the background of the Sengoku Era, but were not used to train common troops. Instead, they developed as one cultural art among many. In one famous example, the writings of the Noh theater master Zeami, who professionalized Noh and systematized how it should be taught, influenced the swordsman Yagyū Munenori. Yagyū copied many of Zeami's pedagogical tools—for example, maintaining secret teachings given only to trusted students who could pay the required fee. He and his ancestors monopolized their family style, Yagyū Shinkage ryū, and were instructors to the successive Tokugawa shōgun.

With war and concern for martial valor disappearing by the late 17th century, swordsmanship entered a period of stagnation. Much of the same criticism directed against the samurai during the Genroku Period (1688–1704)—namely, that they had become too extravagant and lazy—was also leveled at swordsmanship, then seen as a simple flowery dance.

Later, swordsmanship again became popular as a path for self-perfection. Moreover, changes in the equipment allowed swordsmanship to be practiced as fencing. Certain schools adopted the use of bamboo

swords and armor, the predecessors of modern kendō. Practitioners could engage in full-power striking and sparring, which were previously considered too dangerous with wooden swords. During the 19th century, two interrelated trends dominated the spread of fencing: the increasing number of commoner practitioners and the spread of armored fencing.

Martial art schools catered to different sectors of samurai society. Fencing styles for low-ranking samurai, for example, received little support from domain authorities. Instructors received only a pittance of a stipend, and they rarely enjoyed demonstration audiences with the *daimyō* or shōgun, unlike styles practiced by high-ranking samurai. However, this also meant that styles practiced by low-ranking samurai were not as strictly managed by officials. Consequently, they tended to engage in practices considered unorthodox, such as holding matches with swordsmen from other schools, or cross-training. This was especially so among commoner-dominated styles in the countryside. In theory, martial arts, as a possible tool for violence, were supposed to be monopolized by samurai. The shōgunate and domains repeatedly issued edicts throughout the 19th century forbidding the practice among commoners. But for disaffected rōnin wandering the countryside, and even within Edo itself, teaching fencing to commoners was one of the few sources of income. Commoners who claimed descent from a former warrior family, sometimes called “rural samurai,”

could reinforce their identity by practicing swordsmanship. Growing numbers of rural entrepreneurs also translated their financial capital into social and cultural capital, investing in rural Noh theater, and forming poetry and nativist (*kokugaku*) study groups. Rural swordsmanship became yet another art that gave local elites a chance to imitate their social betters, the samurai. As disorder spread in the form of peasant protests, gangs, and wandering disaffected samurai throughout the Kanto region surrounding Edo during the *bakumatsu* period, local elites used swordsmanship for self-protection. Some became rank-and-file members of newly created peasant militias. Others even found employment within domains that wanted to reform samurai martial spirit by forcing their men to train in competitive fencing, which was deemed more realistic.

For much of the Tokugawa period, fencing focused on self-cultivation, a mix of Buddhist and Confucian teachings, and lessons from the Chinese military classics. Thus, during the 19th century, sport fencing meshed with a broad range of philosophical teachings that reflected the politics of the day—in particular, anti-foreign and pro-emperor teachings. Edo *dōjō* became meeting sites for like-minded samurai from various domains, and the biographies of many Meiji Restoration figures on both sides of the conflict, such as Kido Kōin, Katsu Kaishū, and Sakamoto Ryōma, were practitioners of popular styles of the day. After the Meiji Restoration, many former fencing instructors continued to teach in private *dōjō*, becoming the fore-runners of modern kendō.

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See also: *Bushidō* in Sports; Katsu Kaishū; Sakamoto Ryōma; *Sonno-jōi*; Tokugawa *Bakumatsu* Military Reforms; Tokugawa-Era Peasant Uprisings.

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Bataan, Battle of (1941–1942)

Bataan is a peninsula on the big island of Luzon in the Philippines; it is some 25 miles long and roughly 20 miles wide and extends south into Manila Bay. The peninsula figured prominently in General Douglas MacArthur's plans for defending the Philippines against a Japanese invasion in World War II. The original plan called for U.S. and Philippine forces to withdraw into the Bataan Peninsula, and there fight an extended defensive battle until reinforcements arrived from the United States.

MacArthur changed this plan prior to the U.S. entry into the war following the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor. He believed that, even with mobilization of the Filipino army and promised reinforcements