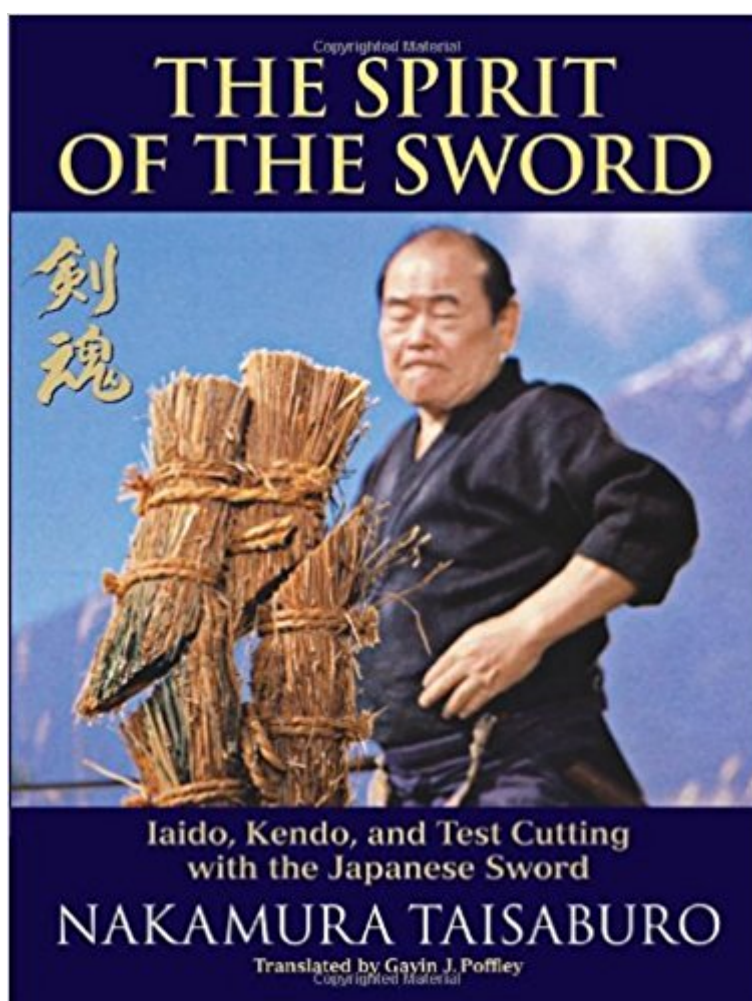


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The Spirit Of The Sword: Iaido, Kendo, And Test Cutting With The Japanese Sword



Synopsis

Nakamura Taisaburo's landmark book on the art of the sword includes technical information, thoughtful analysis, and fascinating recollections of his own training and teaching. One of the most famous Japanese swordsmen of the twentieth century, Nakamura sensei is widely acknowledged as the preeminent reinvigorator of the practice of tameshigiri (test cutting) as a test of technical and spiritual mastery. *The Spirit of the Sword*--first published in Japanese in 1980, now translated into English for the first time--is regarded by many as the most complete of Nakamura's writings on Japanese swordsmanship. Here Nakamura instructs the reader on the integration of iaido, kendo, and tameshigiri; the correct mental approach to sword practice; training methods; numerous kata or forms; a guide to sword maintenance; and historical notes on the use of the sword as a weapon. Illustrated with over 800 original photographs, this book is a must-have for any student of the Japanese sword and an excellent resource for sword enthusiasts in general.

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Customer Reviews

“The Spirit of the Sword” was a great joy for me to read; I now have the immense satisfaction of finally understanding Nakamura Taisaburo's thoughts on swordsmanship. Gavin J. Poffley has done a masterful job of accurately translating Nakamura sensei's philosophy, technical explanations, and anecdotes, capturing the nuances and subtlety of his instruction; it is a beautiful and captivating book that should be on the shelf of everyone who is interested in practical swordsmanship. •Guy Power, Renshi seventh dan, Okuden Menjo and Densho, Nakamura Ryu “Finally, some insight into Japanese

swordsmanship from a truly original source! Powerfully written and authentic, *The Spirit of the Sword* is a book that can be read every year for deeper meaning. •Bob Elder, seventh dan, Zen Nihon Toyama Ryu Iai Do Renmei •“The same power and directness that made his swordsmanship luminous shines through this text •the fruits of a natural genius, forged in the heat of battle and further refined through decades of intense investigation. Nakamura sensei’s commitment to swordsmanship was born from the knowledge that his superior skills had saved him three times from postings that had cost the lives of fellow instructors. This book was written in their honor and in the hope that future generations might stay true to the principles of combat that keep these arts truly martial. •John Maki Evans, seventh dan Nakamura Ryu; author of *Kurikara: The Sword and the Serpent*

Nakamura Taisaburo (1912-2003) was a renowned sword master and the founder of the Nakamura-ryu style of sword arts. He was the chief instructor of the All-Japan Toyama-ryu Iaido Federation and the head of the All-Japan Battojutsu Federation. He held a 9th-dan rank in Battojutsu and Iaido as well as an 8th-dan rank in Jukendo and a 7th-dan rank in Kendo. Gavin J. Poffley has a master’s degree in Japanese translation from the School of Oriental and African Studies and has also studied at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and Hiroshima University, writing dissertations on the modernization of Japan’s martial arts and the history of Okinawan karate. He has dan ranks in Shorin-ryu karate and Dentokan aiki-jujutsu as well as experience in many other systems. Gavin currently resides in East London with his wife, Taeko.

An excellent book on the Japanese Sword for all martial artist reference library, A number of clear photos on selected techniques as well as clear discussions on a large number of topics. What is most refreshing in a martial arts book is the author’s view that a martial art must evolve to become better and not rely on rigid "ryu" and incomplete training information passed down, and practicing and demonstrating techniques that have no practical use. This rings a bell for today’s sports competitions where flowery forms are created to win trophies but have few or no practical applications and do little to preserve or improve the art but make it more into an acrobatic dance. In an day where many martial arts have been sporterized, altered, and actual combat applications not practiced, passed down, or lost this book is a good reminder to all practitioners to keep in mind what real martial arts are all about and how this should direct our training, and advancement in the art. Some examples: Insights are given into the aspects of the bokken, shinai, Katana when used for practice as well as for demonstration and skill development, or in sport such as kendo. The

importance of learning correct cutting techniques with a sharp sword to improve our skill, advancement and to preserve the real martial art. An insightful discussion of kata with both strong points and weak points of some kata and a continued striving to improve ourselves and the art. The importance of Shu-ha-ri.

I first became aware of Nakamura Taisaburo sensei from the 1978 documentary film, *Budo: The Art of Killing* (Jap. title, *Eien naru budo*). Having been a lifelong practitioner of karate-do, I was vaguely familiar with the arts of kendo and iaido, but had never before witnessed the tameshigiri (test cutting) and kumitachi (step sparring) used in battojutsu and kendo. Nakamura sensei's demonstrations made a lasting impression on me. Many years later, I began training in the sword arts and my respect for Nakamura sensei only increased. This book, *The Spirit of the Sword* (2013), is the bible of Nakamura Ryu history, philosophy and techniques. Filled with Nakamura sensei's observations on all aspects of kendo, iaido and battodo, the book represents a lifetime of wisdom on training with the sword. While Nakamura sensei is sometimes blunt in his appraisals of training paradigms and practices in other styles and systems, he is always respectful. One can be certain that he has given considerable thought (and practice) to his assessments, based on his adherence to the philosophy of shu-ha-ri. Covered in the text, which is complete with photographs, is Nakamura sensei's practice of happo giri (eight cuts) and suburi (exercises with the tanrenbo). There are many photos of basic kata (forms), kumitachi and tameshigiri. Included are sections on equipment for practice and how to create and use the equipment. Especial emphasis is placed on tenouchi (gripping the sword) and its ultimate importance in proper use of the sword. Throughout the text, Nakamura sensei's deep commitment to the study of the Japanese sword as the spirit of the Yamato people is clearly evident. This respect, while generally typical of classical Japanese thought, is humbly exemplified by Nakamura sensei. This book is sure to become a classic text for practitioners of all Japanese sword arts. Praise must also be given to Gavin J. Poffley, who has made a thoroughly readable translation of this important work. Such a fine translation is a boon to non-Japanese speaking students who have waited many years for this gem to become accessible.

I titled this review as a homage to Bruce Lee's *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. Perhaps I may be making a misguided connection between the two, but after reading the first two chapters, I couldn't help but be reminded of Bruce Lee's book. Replace traditional kung fu with iaido and kendo, and you get this book. Much of the beginning is spent by Nakamura sensei critiquing iaido and kendo and how separately, they do not give practitioners a solid understanding of Japanese swordsmanship.

Combined is better than one alone, but with the addition of tameshigiri one can gain the most understanding possible. The middle chapters are spent covering tameshigiri, Toyama Ryu and Nakamura Ryu katas and kumitachi exercises. Like most martial arts, this is not a replacement for an instructor. The content does look deceptively easy. With a base in Toyama ryu, it makes sense as that was created to train soldiers. You need teaching that can train them to effective swordsman quickly. I think most iaido students could piece together most of the moves, but again, it is not a replacement for a teacher. There are many pictures in this book. Keep in mind though, this book is really from 1980 and translated from Japanese. The pictures are pretty tiny. Thumbnails would be a more accurate description of them. I think they are clear enough, but compared to many other books out there, I can see where someone would gripe about them. Again, these are 30+ years old. Since Nakamura sensei focused a lot on tameshigiri, I must say the chapter about tameshigiri-related injuries was very insightful. It's a great chapter to keep you in the right mindset if you decide to adopt tameshigiri into your sword practice. He recollects injuries of fellow swordsmen and even his own. I really appreciated this chapter. It's a great example of learning more from your mistakes than from your successes.

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