

INSIDE

NINJUTSU

NINJUTSU, BUJINKAN & JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS MAGAZINE SPRING 2026

Why you're sparring all wrong

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- ➔ Samurai exhibit comes to UK
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OWN YOUR OWN SAMURAI CASTLE

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Why flexibility isn't enough

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FOREWORD



SPRING 2026 EDITION

Spring brings renewal, and in this issue of *Inside Ninjutsu* we explore how innovation and environment shaped the world of the shinobi. We examine the arrival of firearms in Japan and how matchlock weapons transformed warfare. Seasonal strategy also comes under the spotlight, revealing how weather and timing influenced when a ninja might infiltrate an enemy stronghold. We also tackle a controversial question in martial arts circles: do groin strikes really work in a real fight? Elsewhere, we go behind the scenes of *American Ninja 4* with villain Kely McClung.

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DISCLAIMER

The articles presented in this magazine are intended for informational, historical, and entertainment purposes only. The authors and publishers do not condone or endorse any criminal acts, and readers are encouraged to approach the content with a responsible and ethical perspective. Prior to engaging in any physical activity or attempting techniques discussed in this magazine, it is strongly advised to consult a qualified medical professional or trained instructor to ensure your safety and well-being.

Readers are welcome to freely distribute this magazine, keeping in mind the importance of responsible sharing and the adherence to legal and ethical standards. The content herein is meant to inspire curiosity, knowledge, and appreciation for martial arts and related subjects.

BUYU BULLETIN



News



Stories



Blogs



Your Stories Wanted!

As we continue our journey through the shadows, "INSIDE NINJUTSU" invites you to become an integral part of our vibrant community. We are thrilled to announce an open call for contributions from passionate individuals like you, who embody the spirit and dedication of the ninjutsu tradition.

Whether you're a seasoned practitioner, a martial arts club leader, or an avid researcher, we welcome your stories, insights, and discoveries to grace the pages of our esteemed publication. "INSIDE NINJUTSU" is more than just a magazine; it's a platform for the global ninjutsu community to share, connect, and celebrate our shared passion.

Share the achievements and milestones of your martial arts club. Whether it's a recent accomplishment, a unique training approach, or a special event, we want to showcase the diverse and thriving ninjutsu communities around the world.

Are you organizing a seminar or workshop? Let the community know! Share details about your upcoming events, imparting knowledge and skills to fellow practitioners. It's an opportunity to connect and enrich the ninjutsu experience for everyone.

Excited about a new book or video related to ninjutsu? Whether it's your creation or a recommendation, we want to feature it. Let us know about the latest releases that captivate the essence of ninjutsu.

Have you stumbled upon a historical gem related to ninjutsu? Whether it's a newfound scroll, artifact, or an insightful discovery, share your historical revelations with the community. Let's collectively unravel the secrets of the past.

How to Contribute:

Feel free to submit entire articles, accompanied by captivating pictures. Your contributions can cover a wide range of topics—personal experiences, training methodologies, historical insights, or any other aspect that fuels your passion for ninjutsu.



[InsideNinjutsu.com](https://www.insideninjutsu.com)



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BUYU BULLETIN - NEWS



DATE SET FOR SW MARTIAL ARTS SHOW

The [South West Martial Arts & Wellbeing Show](#) is scheduled for 2026, featuring 5X World Champion Joe Hallett conducting workshops on tricking and nunchaku. The event, held in Thornbury, features various martial arts styles, workshops, and is supported by local groups. Bujinkan Inyo Dojo has previously attended.

NEW HEAD OF THE MUSASHI CLAN

A significant moment in the modern ninjutsu world took place this month as the Musashi ninja clan celebrated the appointment of its 20th family head, marking a new chapter for one of Japan's most historically rooted

shinobi-samurai lineages.

Leadership had been handed over by the 19th family head of the Musashi clan, Takuya Shibata, to the 20th family head, Takuya San.



HELSINKI TAI KAI TRAIN WITH SOMEYA SENSEI

One of the most respected figures in the Bujinkan is returning to Europe for a landmark event. From July 10th-12th, 2026, Someya Kenichi Dai Shihan will lead a Tai Kai in Helsinki, Finland – an unmissable weekend of study, tradition, and practice in Budō

Taijutsu.

This Tai Kai will be centred on three themes:

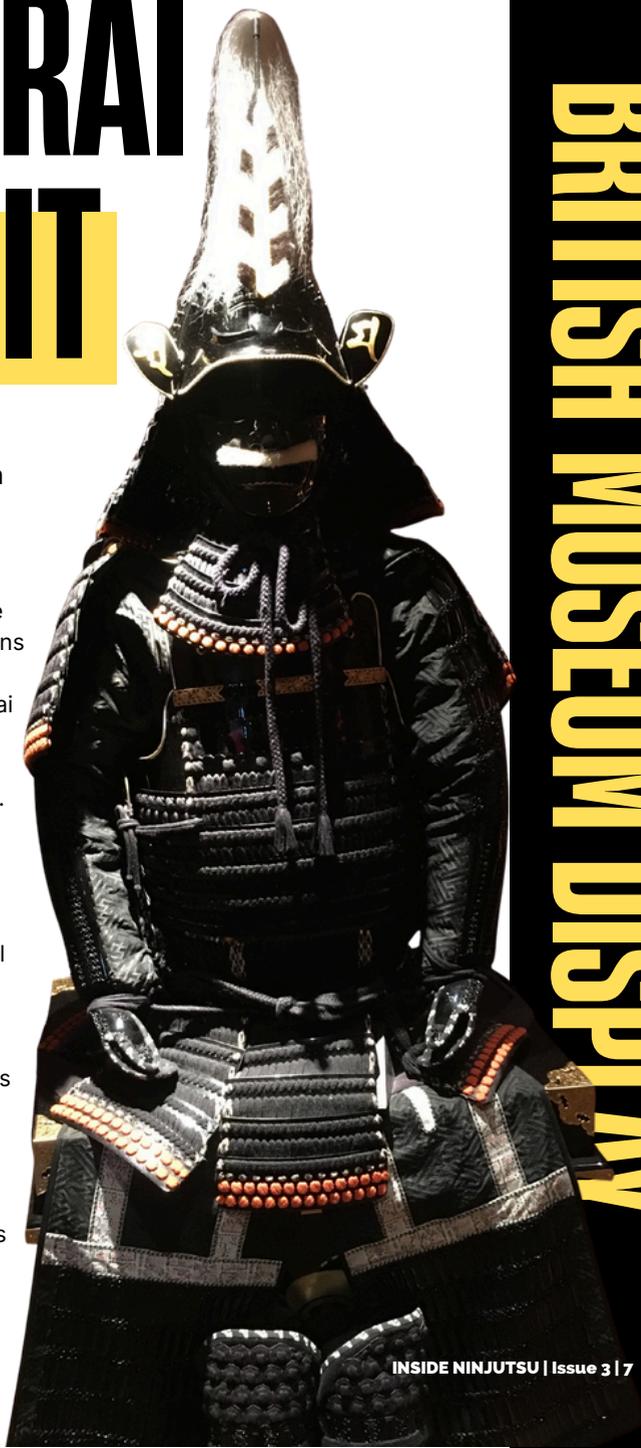
- Kenjutsu – The art of the Japanese sword
- Kyoketsu Shoge – The flexible, dynamic weapon of the ninja
- Shinden Fudō Ryū Jūtaijutsu – Powerful, natural movement rooted in the earth

SAMURAI EXHIBIT

The British Museum's Landmark 2026 Exhibition Unmasks a Millennium of Myth

The British Museum unveils one of its most ambitious explorations of Japanese history to date: a sweeping, myth-busting samurai exhibition running until 4 May 2026 at its Great Russell Street location in London (WC1B 3DG). For practitioners and historians of ninjutsu—indeed for anyone fascinated by Japan's warrior traditions—this exhibition promises to be a pivotal cultural moment.

Far from simply celebrating the samurai as armoured champions of battle, the exhibition peels back the layers of legend, nationalism, and global pop-culture reinvention that have shaped our modern perceptions of these iconic figures. What emerges is a more nuanced, deeply human story, one that resonates across centuries and cultures.



BRITISH MUSEUM DISPLAY

SHINOBI STORIES AT A GLANCE



ALL-JAPAN NINJA CHAMPIONSHIP



One hundred of Japan's most dedicated shinobi gathered to test their mettle in the 42nd All-Japan Ninja Championship – a competition blending athleticism, agility, and traditional stealth techniques. After hours of fierce competition, Entry No. 29, Nekohira, emerged victorious in the “Jikara” (strength) division with a total score of 374 points, while Entry No. 5, Namu, claimed first place in the “City” division with 395 points.

JONATHAN PIENAAR - AMERICAN NINJA 2 ACTOR DIES AT 63

Jonathan Pienaar, the South African actor remembered by martial-arts film fans for his role as Tommy Taylor in *American Ninja 2: The Confrontation* (1987), has died at age 63. According to reports from South Africa's Eye Witness News, Pienaar passed away in his sleep on Monday, 10

November, after suffering heart failure. His ex-wife, Rosana Maya, confirmed the news: “Most beautiful man, unique soul. Like your wolves, you gave so much for so little. The world is a lesser place without you in it, my sadness too deep. Fly with angels, my love.”



JAPANESE CASTLE FOR SALE

A six-storey castle-style property in Akabira is on the market for around £50,000. Built in 1991 and inspired by traditional designs like Himeji Castle, the unusual listing includes a restaurant, elevator and parking, though repairs could cost about £39,000.

Image: Houses of Japan

TRIBUTES PAID TO MARTIAL ARTISTS



BUJINKAN DAI SHIHAN DIES AFTER ILLNESS

The martial arts community is deeply saddened by the death of respected Bujinkan instructor Simon Yeo, a 15th-degree black belt and Dai Shihan whose lifelong dedication to training, teaching, and sharing knowledge touched students around the world. After decades immersed in the traditions of Bujinkan Budō Taijutsu—

alongside achievements in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and other disciplines—his passing following illness has prompted an outpouring of heartfelt tributes from friends, practitioners, and those who trained under his guidance.

From early journeys to Japan to study with Grand Master Masaaki Hatsumi, to authoring influential writings on ninjutsu and mentoring generations of students, Simon's legacy reaches far beyond the dōjō. We remember not only a highly skilled martial artist, but a generous teacher, a gentleman, and a friend.

Read the full tribute at www.INSIDENINJUTSU.COM to explore his life, training, and the memories being shared in his honour.



The international martial arts community is mourning the passing of Quintin Chambers Sensei, who died peacefully at his home in Hawaii at the age of 92. A respected teacher, scholar, and one of the earliest Westerners to live and train extensively in Japan, Chambers played a pivotal yet understated role in preserving and transmitting traditional Japanese martial arts to the modern world.

The phrase—quiet, but exceedingly important—may best sum up Quintin Chambers Sensei.

He leaves behind not only students and readers, but a living legacy: a bridge between cultures, eras, and traditions, built carefully and respectfully, one technique at a time.

Quintin Chambers Sensei will be deeply missed.



SHIRAISHI TO VISIT USA

Summer begins in North America with a landmark moment in July, when Bujinkan Dai Shihan Shiraishi Isamu teaches his first United States taikai in the Seattle area from July 24th to 26th. Hosted at the Lynnwood Event Center, the gathering will occupy an expansive training hall and bring together practitioners from across the continent. For many, the significance lies not only in the instruction itself but in the rarity of direct access to senior Japanese teachers outside Japan, reinforcing the continuity between the Honbu dōjō and the wider international community.

BUJINKAN EVENT

From September 25th to 27th, Randa Richards and Michael Jones return to Huntsville, Alabama, following successful sold-out events in 2022 and 2024. Hosted by Bujinkan Rocket City Dōjō, the seminar will again include a limited-capacity dinner gathering, reinforcing the sense that these occasions function as reunions as much as training opportunities. Richards and Jones, who have trained together since 2007 and opened their Cardiff dōjō in 2015, represent a generation of instructors carrying the art forward through partnership and community building.

TRAIN WITH A MASTER

In Ireland, Junichi Kan, the twenty-second grandmaster of Gyokushin Ryū and one of the most senior and respected instructors within the Bujinkan, will headline the Galway taikai on August 15th and 16th. Events of this calibre remain uncommon in Europe, and their value lies in preserving the immediacy of transmission that can only occur through direct contact

MEMOIR

Long-time Bujinkan instructor Kenji Nakadai has added an important voice to the historical record with the publication of his memoir. Writing on Instagram, Nakadai Sensei announced that his book has now been translated into English by Joe Maurantonio, making it accessible to a much wider audience.

FIELD CRAFT

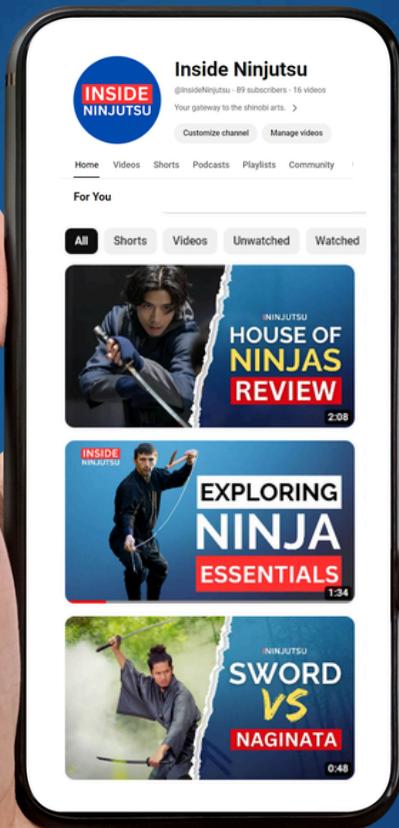
Bujinkan Macedonia has taken training beyond the dojo walls and into the wild. Embracing the practical survival aspects often associated with historical shinobi skills, students have been training outdoors, constructing shelters in woodland environments. Using only deadfall from surrounding trees, they built A-frame structures designed to protect against the elements.

NEW JINENKAN SOKE

On December 1st, a quiet but meaningful transition took place within the Jissen Kobudō Jinenkan.

Manaka Unsui Sensei formally retired as head of the organisation, passing leadership to Sensei Mario De Mol of Belgium (10th Dan), who now assumes the roles of Jinenkan Chō and Sōke of the Jinen Ryū lineages.

INSIDE NINJUTSU on YouTube



DID NINJA HAVE SUPERHUMAN BODIES?

RETHINKING THE NINJA BODY

On December 7th, a special lecture titled “Ninja • Ninjutsu Studies Course in Tokyo: The World of Ninpō Taijutsu” was held at Mie Terrace in Nihonbashi, Chūō-ku, Tokyo. Bringing together scholars, martial artists, families, and enthusiasts, the event offered a rare opportunity to examine ninjutsu not as pop culture fantasy, but as a historical and evolving body of knowledge.

The first part of the program featured Professor Yuji Yamada, Professor of Humanities, who delivered a fascinating lecture titled “The Body of a Ninja.” Yamada’s talk challenged many long-held assumptions about ninja training and physical ability—particularly those that modern audiences often take for granted.

Fujita Seiko and the Construction of the “Superhuman Ninja”

Professor Yamada explained that many of the physical feats now commonly associated with ninja—extraordinary jumping ability, breath-holding tests, extreme endurance, and seemingly superhuman movement—are not widely documented in Edo-period ninjutsu texts. Instead, Yamada pointed to the significant influence of Fujita Seiko, the 14th head of Kōga-ryū Ninjutsu, whose writings and teachings in the early Shōwa period played a major role in shaping the modern image of ninja physical training.

According to Yamada, Fujita described rigorous tests such as candidates submerging their heads in water-filled barrels for extended periods, walking

across water-soaked paper without tearing it, and training breathing so subtle it would not move a piece of cotton or paper placed at the nose. Fujita also spoke of remarkable jumping and falling abilities—claims that, while captivating, push the limits of what is physically plausible.

Yamada emphasised that while such accounts may reflect training ideals, metaphors, or personal exaggeration, they cannot be reliably confirmed through earlier historical documentation. Importantly, Edo-period ninjutsu manuals tend to focus far more on strategy, intelligence gathering, deception, and survival, rather than on extreme physical conditioning.

Myth, Transmission, and the Power of Demonstration

Professor Yamada did not dismiss these traditions outright. Instead, he highlighted how ninjutsu was historically transmitted—often orally, within families or close teacher-student relationships, rather than through formal written manuals. This makes it difficult to definitively state what practices did or did not exist. However, from an academic standpoint, Yamada stressed the importance of distinguishing documented history from later interpretation and performance.

He also explained how Fujita Seiko’s ideas gained widespread influence through public demonstrations, lectures, and media appearances. Fujita taught figures such as Okuse Heibei, who traveled across Japan and appeared on television,





helping to establish a shared public image of ninja training. Over time, these dramatic descriptions became accepted as historical fact, even when evidence was thin.

This process, Yamada suggested, mirrors how ninja abilities became increasingly exaggerated in films, manga, and anime—where spectacle naturally takes precedence over realism.

A Living Tradition and a Curious Audience

The second half of the event featured Yoshifumi Hayasaka, a classical martial artist, who spoke on Kotaro Kobayashi, a well-known ninjutsu practitioner of the Shōwa era. Hayasaka discussed how Kobayashi transmitted teachings through Kiyomi Maehara, passing down rare documents and methods, some of which were demonstrated alongside his students.

The event drew a wide-ranging audience, from children to elderly seniors, and generated lively discussion and many questions—clear evidence of continued public fascination with ninjutsu. Rather than diminishing the ninja mystique, Professor Yamada's lecture offered something more valuable: a clearer understanding of how that mystique was formed, and how historical research can deepen, rather than diminish, our appreciation of the shinobi tradition.

As Yamada's talk made clear, the true legacy of the ninja may lie not in superhuman feats, but in the subtle interplay between history, myth, transmission, and imagination—a legacy that continues to evolve even today.



DO GROIN STRIKES REALLY WORK IN A FIGHT?

On an episode of Don Roley's Ninja/Ninjutsu podcast, the seasoned martial artist and ninjutsu expert delves into a topic that often sparks debate in self-defense circles: the effectiveness of groin strikes in a fight. While many self-defense classes tout the groin strike as a go-to move, Roley provides a more nuanced perspective, shedding light on

both its strengths and limitations.

Don Roley, the founder and head instructor of the Colorado Springs Bujinkan Dojo, brings decades of experience to the discussion, having spent nearly 15 years training under the guidance of top instructors in Japan. His deep knowledge of ninjutsu, combined with his translations of ancient martial arts texts, makes his insights particularly valuable for practitioners and enthusiasts alike.

In the podcast, Roley acknowledges that a strike to the groin can be effective but emphasizes that it is not as easy to land as one might think. There's an innate instinct to protect this area of the body which often makes it difficult to execute a direct blow. He highlights how men, in particular, have spent a lifetime reflexively guarding against strikes to this sensitive region, making it a challenging target.

**REALITY CHECK
FROM DON ROLEY**

Roley also discusses a common pitfall in self-defense training: the assumption that a groin strike is a guaranteed fight-stopper. While it can certainly incapacitate an opponent under the right circumstances, Roley cautions that in the heat of a fight, with adrenaline coursing through the body, pain receptors are dulled, potentially reducing the effectiveness of such a blow.

To illustrate his point, Roley demonstrates a technique from Koto Ryu. The technique cleverly plays into the natural reaction to protect the groin. When an opponent shifts their hips back to avoid a kick to the groin, this defensive move sets them up for a more powerful follow-up strike. This tactic, Roley explains, highlights the importance of using the opponent's instincts against them, rather than relying solely on the initial strike to achieve victory.



For those interested in a deeper exploration of the subject, the full podcast episode offers a wealth of practical advice and detailed demonstrations. Don Roley's discussion not only challenges common assumptions about groin strikes but also provides valuable strategies for incorporating them effectively into your martial arts practice.

TO CATCH THE ENTIRE CONVERSATION AND SEE THE TECHNIQUES IN ACTION, SEARCH FOR DON ROLEY ON YOUTUBE.





WHY YOU'RE SPARRING WRONG — AND HOW TO FIX IT

For generations, sparring has been treated as the holy grail of martial arts training. If you don't spar, the logic goes, you can't fight. Pressure testing is essential, realism is king, and anything less than hard contact is dismissed as fantasy.

But according to karate expert Jessie Enkamp, that mindset may be holding you back.

In a recent video, Enkamp challenges one of the most deeply rooted assumptions in martial arts: that frequent, hard sparring is the best—and only—way to improve. Drawing on examples from elite fighters, neuroscience, animal behavior, and traditional training principles, he argues that most people are sparring in a way that actively reduces learning.

Even the Best Fighters Have Stopped Sparring

Enkamp begins with a provocative observation: many of the world's top fighters no longer spar the way amateurs are taught to.

Elite competitors like Max Holloway, Donald Cerrone, and others have publicly stated that they spar very little—or not at all—especially when it comes to heavy contact. The reason isn't fear or softness. It's efficiency.

As Enkamp notes, countless fighters "leave their careers in the gym." Every hard round becomes about winning instead of learning, and the accumulated damage eventually costs them their health, longevity, or motivation.

As Enkamp notes, countless fighters "leave their careers in the gym." Every hard round becomes about winning instead of learning, and the accumulated damage eventually costs them their health, longevity, or motivation.

The irony? These fighters didn't stop improving when they reduced sparring. In many cases, they improved faster.

The Problem Isn't Sparring — It's How You Do It

Enkamp is clear: sparring does matter. At some point, techniques must be tested against resistance. Without that, skills collapse under pressure.

The issue is that most people approach sparring as fighting, rather than as learning.

When sparring becomes about winning rounds, protecting ego, or proving dominance, it triggers the fight-or-flight response. Stress hormones rise, creativity drops, and learning shuts down. You might survive the round, but your nervous system isn't adapting.

This is where Enkamp turns to an unexpected source: the animal kingdom.

Why Play Is the Ultimate Training Method

When puppies chase balls, bear cubs wrestle, or lion cubs pounce, they're not just playing—they're rehearsing survival skills. To the animal, it feels like fun, but neurologically, it's high-level training.

Scientific studies show that play lowers cortisol (stress) and increases dopamine (pleasure)—a hormonal combination directly linked to neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to learn and adapt.

High stress impairs memory and skill acquisition. Play does the opposite.

As Enkamp points out, humans are no different. As children, we learned coordination, balance, and problem-solving through play—not through fear of failure. Growing up didn't change how the brain learns. It just changed how we train.

Serious Play vs. Gym Wars

The best fighters understand this intuitively. That's why Muay Thai fighters spar lightly, focusing on timing, distance, and flow. To an outsider, it may look like a dance—but those same fighters are among the toughest on earth.

MMA coach Firas Zahabi has said the same about Cuban boxers: playful, light contact, no ego—and consistent Olympic success.

Play doesn't mean laziness. Enkamp calls it serious play. The intent is real, the focus is sharp, but the stakes are low enough to encourage experimentation. This mirrors military training, where simulations, mock battles, and war games are used to maximize learning without the irreversible cost of real combat.

Finite Games vs. Infinite Games

To explain why mindset matters, Enkamp references philosopher James Carse and his idea of finite and infinite games.

A finite game is played to win. An infinite game is played to keep playing.

Most sparring is treated like a finite game: win the round, dominate your partner, prove something. But martial arts mastery is an infinite game. There is no final victory—only ongoing refinement.

When sparring becomes an infinite game, losing becomes data. Mistakes become information. Winning isn't scoring points—it's learning something new. Or as Enkamp paraphrases: winning is playing, and playing is winning.



Five Rules for Smarter Sparring

Enkamp outlines practical principles to transform sparring from ego combat into accelerated learning:

See losing as winning

Every round should answer one question: What did I learn? If you gained insight, you won—regardless of the score.

Be comfortable getting hit safely

If you can't relax enough to take light contact without fear, you're sparring too hard. Risk is essential for growth—but only when injury risk is low.

Adapt to your partner

Sparring isn't about exploiting size, strength, or experience. Use lighter or less experienced partners to work weaknesses, switch stances, or test unfamiliar strategies.

Spar early, not last

Your nervous system learns best when you're fresh. Save conditioning for later—sparring deserves your sharpest mind.

Abandon your favorite techniques

Don't rely on what already works. Try new movements, even if they fail. Failure is the tuition fee for improvement.

Hard training has its place—but if it costs you curiosity, health, or enjoyment, it's unsustainable. And unsustainable training leads nowhere.

As Enkamp concludes, the day you stop learning is the day you stop living. The question isn't whether you spar. It's whether your sparring is helping you evolve—or quietly holding you back.



350

IN 1676, AT A TIME WHEN JAPAN WAS SETTLING INTO THE LONG PEACE OF THE EARLY EDO PERIOD, A REMARKABLE BOOK WAS COMPILED THAT SOUGHT TO PRESERVE A WAY OF WAR ALREADY FADING INTO HISTORY. THAT BOOK WAS THE BANSENSHŪKAI, NOW 350 YEARS OLD, AND STILL THE MOST EXTENSIVE SURVIVING RECORD OF SHINOBI KNOWLEDGE.

3

ALONGSIDE THE SHŌNINKI AND THE NINPIDEN, THE BANSENSHŪKAI FORMS A TRIO OF ESSENTIAL HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS THAT ILLUMINATE THE TOOLS, TACTICS, METHODS, AND PHILOSOPHIES OF JAPAN'S FAMED NINJA.

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OF THE THREE, THE BANSENSHŪKAI STANDS APART FOR ITS SHEER SCALE AND AMBITION: 22 VOLUMES, ARRANGED INTO TEN BOOKS, ATTEMPTING TO GATHER TOGETHER THE COLLECTIVE WISDOM OF THE SHINOBI TRADITIONS OF IGA AND KOGA.

NINJUTSU BY NUMBERS

60,000

NUMBER OF VISITORS TO THE FESTIVAL OF SOMA NOMAOI

FOR OVER A THOUSAND YEARS, THE PEOPLE OF THE SOMA REGION HAVE GATHERED TO RECREATE THE BATTLEFIELD EXERCISES OF THEIR ANCESTORS. WHAT BEGAN AS MILITARY TRAINING FOR THE SOMA CLAN UNDER THEIR FOUNDER, TAIRA NO KOJIRO MASAKADO, HAS EVOLVED INTO A GRAND THREE-DAY FESTIVAL OF HORSE RIDING, PAGEANTRY, AND COMBATIVE SPECTACLE





SAMURAI FIREARMS

When firearms arrived in Japan, the samurai quickly adapted. Discover how the matchlock transformed warfare, tactics and battlefield strategy during the turbulent Sengoku era.

Japan's familiarity with gunpowder weaponry began long before its first exposure to modern firearms. Due to close proximity and cultural exchanges with China, Japanese military knowledge included basic gunpowder-based weaponry as early as the 13th century. These rudimentary weapons, referred to as *teppō* ("iron cannon"), were primarily iron tubes that could be charged with gunpowder but lacked the sophistication of later firearms.

The Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 brought some of the earliest encounters with gunpowder as the Mongols utilized explosive projectiles, terrifying Japanese defenders with devices that sounded like thunder and appeared as flashes of lightning, according to contemporary accounts. However, while Japan observed the power of gunpowder in warfare, there was little advancement in firearm technology until the arrival of European matchlocks nearly 300 years later.

In 1543, the trajectory of Japanese warfare changed dramatically when Portuguese traders, the first Europeans to reach Japan, introduced matchlock firearms, known as *tanegashima* after the island where they were first demonstrated. Unlike earlier gunpowder devices from China, the Portuguese matchlocks were more advanced and effective, with triggers, sights, and a match mechanism that allowed for more accurate and repeatable firing. The local daimyo (feudal lord) of Tanegashima, Tokitaka, purchased two matchlocks and quickly tasked a Japanese swordsmith with replicating the design. Within a few years, Japanese craftsmen had mastered the production of these guns, and by the late 1550s, firearms had already begun to influence Japanese military tactics and strategy.

The arrival of the matchlock firearm coincided with the Sengoku Jidai (Warring States Period, 1467–1600), an era of intense civil conflict as regional lords, or daimyo, fought for dominance. The new firearms were rapidly integrated into Japanese warfare,

Figure 1
A booklet on display at the Royal Armouries in Leeds

with daimyo like Oda Nobunaga, one of the leading figures of the period, commissioning hundreds of matchlocks for his armies by the late 1540s. While firearms were initially questioned for their slow reloading times, low effective range, and vulnerability to moisture, they offered a key advantage: simplicity of training. While it could take years to develop an elite archer, a peasant conscript could learn to operate a matchlock gun in weeks, allowing for the rapid expansion of firearm-equipped infantry.



In time, Japanese commanders developed techniques to maximize the impact of firearms on the battlefield. For example, the volley fire technique—where multiple ranks of gunners fired in succession—created a continuous stream of bullets that could devastate charging forces. The 1575 Battle of Nagashino showcased this strategy when Nobunaga's forces, equipped with around 3,000 arquebuses, used a fortified firing line and timed volleys to crush a cavalry charge by the Takeda clan, an event that marked the tanegashima's critical role in determining battle outcomes.

By the late 1550s, firearms had already begun to influence Japanese military tactics and strategy.

The Japanese quickly adapted the imported firearms to suit their own needs, improving on foreign designs and developing local innovations. Craftsmen modified matchlocks to withstand Japan's humid climate by creating lacquered protective boxes and found ways to fire effectively even in rainy weather. Larger calibers were developed to increase bullet lethality, and Japanese firearms designers experimented with methods to increase accuracy, even firing at night using

strings to hold firearms at a fixed angle.

Firearms also spurred gradual changes in samurai armour. Although traditional armour designs were retained, modifications like bulletproof breastplates and reinforced shoulder and skirt guards began to appear as firearms became more prevalent. These adaptations allowed samurai to maintain their distinct appearance while providing additional protection against bullets.

The widespread use of firearms during the Sengoku period facilitated the rise of leaders like Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, each of whom relied on firearm-equipped infantry in their campaigns. Ieyasu's success in unifying Japan by 1600, and subsequently establishing the Tokugawa Shogunate, ended the Sengoku period and ushered in the Edo period, a time of relative peace that lasted over two centuries. During the Edo period, the need for large standing armies diminished, and the use of firearms declined, shifting toward ceremonial use and hunting.

Below, a samurai reenactor. Right, matchlock musket display in Leeds

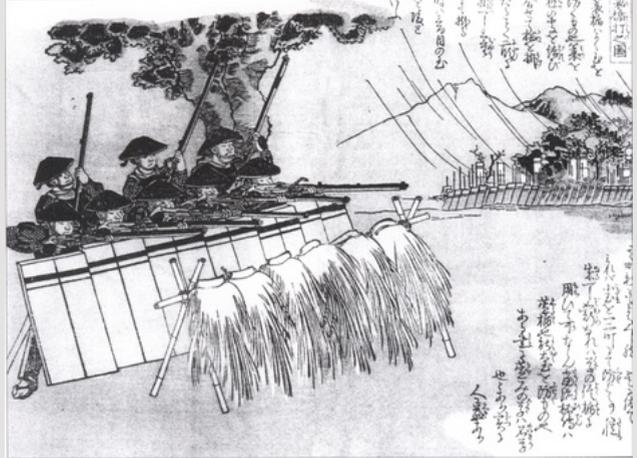


Despite the decrease in military necessity for firearms, Japan developed a martial art specifically for firearm use known as hōjutsu or teppojutsu. This martial tradition, rooted in the techniques of black powder firearm handling, continued to be practiced among the samurai class as part of their martial discipline. Today, hōjutsu survives primarily as a historical martial art, with practitioners using antique matchlock firearms like the tanegashima to preserve the techniques of Edo-period gunnery.

Japan developed a martial art specifically for firearm use known as hōjutsu or teppojutsu.

The introduction of firearms to Japan represented a turning point in Japanese military history, influencing everything from tactical innovations to social organization. While initially dismissed as less effective than traditional archery, firearms' ease of use and rapid integration ultimately changed how wars were fought. By the time of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan's experience with firearms had not only altered the battlefield but had also left a lasting legacy on Japanese martial culture, one that continues to be honored through the preservation of hōjutsu and Japan's unique firearms heritage.

Picture
Portrait of Oda Nobunaga



Picture above
Tan-zutsu demonstration by GunSamurai /
Wikipedia



LEE CHARLES SHARES HIS JOURNEY



Boxing, Blockbusters, and Bruce Lee

Fighting, Film, and Never Giving Up

At the South West Martial Arts Show, Inside Ninjutsu sat down with actor and martial artist Lee Charles for an inspiring conversation about life on and off the screen. Known for his fight work in major films alongside Hollywood legends, Lee shared insights into his intense training regime, his experiences working with action icons, and the values that keep him grounded — especially the importance of family. Between the buzz of the event, where he also delivered a dynamic movie fighting workshop, Lee opened up about the mindset that took him from the ring to the big screen

Inside Ninjutsu (IN): How does it feel to be at the South West Martial Arts Show?

Lee Charles (LC): Yeah, it's great. I mean, obviously, I've known Claire and Ollie for many years now, and we're close friends, and I'll always support this event, and it's good to see so many people in the martial arts community come out and share their



experience and get involved with each other. And it's good to see the younger generation coming through as well.

I think over the last few years martial arts has been rehighlighted back into society and more people are starting to get involved. It's good they can see some of the older guys that have been around for many, many years, learn about the history of martial arts in Britain — really, with these guys — Steve Rowe, Master Sken — and I think it's important that they know the heritage behind the martial arts and why we're here, really.

IN: What does your martial arts training look like at the moment?

LC: Martial arts wise, well, for me, I still do my boxing, my kickboxing, I do jiu-jitsu. Obviously, working in the movie industry now, I probably train harder now than I did when I was competing. When I was fighting, it was a different type of training. It's not as focused on wanting to go out and win a belt or get in there. So yeah, I mean, I'm up at half 3 every day.

I get in the gym for 4, train, I go boxing at 10:00, I do jiu-jitsu at 1:00 p.m. So yeah, I'm a busy guy even on my days off.

When you're competing, you're having to train for a duration of time where it's so many rounds and so many things over a period of time. Whereas when you're on film, it's like all day, every day. It's non-stop. You have to be physically fit, depending on the role. You have to be either in shape or out of shape, depending on what type of character they want you to play.

In *Gangs of London*, I had to put two stone on for that role. We filmed that scene for seven days, 12 hours a day. The intensity for that is completely different. But it's the mindset that's different. I prepare myself to go on screen exactly the same way I used to when I used to fight. I have the same build up, the same thing to get my head switched on.

They're both very similar but very different at the same time. I'm very fortunate to do what I do now. I'm very fortunate for the journey that martial arts has took me on — from being a young kid that was obsessed with Bruce Lee to go on to work in Hollywood and to be working with the likes of Tom Cruise, Denzel Washington, and Sylvester Stallone is beyond your dreams.

IN: What's it like working on Hollywood movies?

LC: Yeah. I mean, for me, I am a massive film nerd. I'm a big nerd. I say this all the time. I'm really into films. I've been into films since I was a young boy. I worked in a video shop when I was 13. It was probably illegal, but back in the 80s, early 90s, we got away with those things.

I was fortunate enough to now go on to do that. And when I met Stallone, I was like a kid in a sweet shop. It was like Christmas Eve. It was like Santa had come. This guy, whose movies had such a big influence and effect on my life, gave me inspiration and attributed to who I've become today, just like Bruce Lee did, just like Jackie Chan did, just like Arnold Schwarzenegger did.

Getting to work with these guys and see the whole process — it's the best job in the world. It really is the best job in the world. And getting to see that finished product up on the big screen — I've been fortunate enough now that I've done a couple of movies. I've been able to take my son to see them without telling him I'm in them. When he sees his dad come on the screen, whenever I was in *Fast 10* with John Cena and Jason Momoa, it blows his mind.

It's nice to think that long after I'm gone, there's still going to be that there for people to say, "That was my dad or that was my granddad." I think leaving that legacy behind will always be something I'll be grateful for.

IN: What is it like being a role model?

I'm a firm believer that anyone can do anything they want, but you have to work for it. You have to put in that effort. You have to put in that desire. You have to have that hard work. If you're willing to do those things day after day, if you're willing to take losses day after day, and you're willing to readapt and change that mindset, eventually you're going to go on to win

INSIDE

NINJUTSU

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HISTORY

NINJA INFILTRATION TACTICS REVEALED

Seasonal Secrets of Shinobi

A

newly highlighted historical document is offering rare insight into how ninja once thought about timing,

stealth, and the natural world. According to a report by Asahi Shimbun, references to ninja techniques have been discovered in an early Edo-period manuscript written by Mizuya Doi, a resident of Iyo Province (modern-day Ehime Prefecture). The text focuses on the life of his ancestor, Sengoku-period warlord Doi Kiyoyoshi (1546–1629), and includes a remarkable passage describing ninja methods in unexpected detail.

The discovery was confirmed by Professor Yuji Yamada of Mie University, one of Japan's leading ninja researchers and a specialist in ancient and medieval religious history. Professor Yamada found that the eighth volume of *Seiryōki*—a multi-volume chronicle running to at least 30 volumes—devotes around three pages to a conversation between Kiyoyoshi and a ninja believed to have



come from Tanba Province (present-day Kyoto and Hyōgo). In the passage, the ninja explains when it is easiest to infiltrate a house across the four seasons, offering practical observations rooted in daily life rather than romanticised legend.

According to the text, spring is difficult because warmer weather keeps householders awake late into the night. Summer is more favourable due to lighter clothing and easier

movement over moats and stone walls, but comes with risks: mosquitoes may wake the occupants, and shorter nights leave less cover for escape. Autumn presents a different challenge. Attentive householders might notice the sudden silence of insects—a natural warning sign. To counter this, the ninja describes a method called *mushiawase*, which involves taming insects in advance and making them sing. Professor Yamada speculates these insects were likely crickets, carried in a basket to maintain a constant sound while infiltrating, masking the telltale silence that would otherwise arouse suspicion.

"The period from December 20 to January 15 is especially suitable for infiltration - this reflects a timeless truth: during the busy year-end and New Year period, people's vigilance tends to relax."

Winter, the ninja explains, is generally poor for movement due to cold weather and heavy clothing, yet opportunities still exist—particularly when the head of the household has been drinking and is fast asleep. The manuscript also notes, without explanation, that the period from December 20 to January 15 is especially suitable for infiltration. Professor Yamada suggests this reflects a timeless truth: during the busy year-end and New Year period, people's vigilance tends to relax—a warning he notes still applies today.

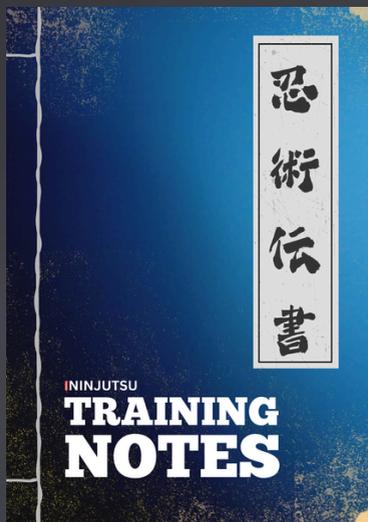
As reported by *Asahi Shimbun*, this is the first known written record of *mushiawase*, and while it remains unclear whether the technique was widely practised, the passage offers compelling evidence of the ingenuity and careful observation that characterised real historical ninja. Far from shadowy myths, these accounts reveal *shinobi* as pragmatic specialists, closely attuned to seasons, human habits, and even the behaviour of insects in their pursuit of stealth.



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WATER SPIDER

REASSESSING THE NINJA'S MIZU-GUMO

THAT SINKING FEELING

Few images are more striking in the popular imagination than the ninja gliding silently across a lake on strange floating devices. The mizu-gumo — often translated as “water spider” — is one of the most iconic of these so-called ninja tools. Described in the 17th-century *Bansen shūkai* (1676), sometimes referred to as the “ninja bible,” the mizu-gumo is usually depicted as a wooden float worn around the hips to keep a shinobi buoyant.



In theory, it was simple: a wooden seat or disk, sometimes paired with flippers, allowing the user to move across rivers and moats. In practice, however, things are far murkier.

Rob Tuck, Associate Professor of Modern Japanese Literature at Arizona State University, has taken a closer look at the so-called ninja water tools and

raised serious doubts about their real-world application. Tuck is no dilettante: a Columbia-trained scholar of Japanese cultural history, his research focuses on 19th-century literature and Sino-Japanese exchange. His credentials lend weight to his critiques, particularly when tackling claims often repeated uncritically in martial arts and pop culture circles.

BLUEPRINT OF THE SHINOBI

The *Bansenshukai* is one of the most important surviving documents on historical ninjutsu. Compiled in 1676 by Fujibayashi Yasutake, the manuscript gathers knowledge from the ninja traditions of Iga and Koka. Spanning multiple volumes, it records techniques for espionage, infiltration, disguise, surveillance, signalling,

weather prediction and the use of specialised tools. It also explores strategy, psychology and the mindset required for covert operations. Rather than focusing purely on combat, the *Bansenshukai* emphasises intelligence gathering and planning. Today historians regard it as one of the most valuable sources for understanding the real practices of shinobi in feudal Japan.

"Popular media tends to present the contents of the so-called 'ninja manuals' of the Edo period entirely uncritically," Tuck writes. "The unspoken assumption...is that Edo-era manuals accurately depict tools and techniques that the historical shinobi definitely used. This, though, is a fairly dubious assumption."

The problem, he argues, is twofold. First, there is little to no corroborating evidence outside of military manuals that these tools were ever deployed by actual shinobi. Second, many of the devices described simply don't hold up under scrutiny. As Tuck bluntly puts it, "quite a few of the tools and devices in the 'ninja manuals' don't seem usable — it's highly unlikely that they would actually work for their supposed purpose. This is obvious to anyone who reads the 'ninja manuals' with even a moderately critical eye or a basic knowledge of physics."

A DEVICE THAT DOESN'T FLOAT

Particularly damning are calculations around the mizu-gumo's supposed buoyancy. The Bansen shūkai specifies that the boards making up the device should be just under 8 mm thick — "about the thickness of my little finger or a medium-size slice of bread," notes Tuck. Yet physics suggests that to actually float a human body, the structure would need to be around 15–16 inches thick. In other words, the design would have to be more than fifty times larger than described.

This gap between text and reality has led some modern interpreters — from museums to TV shows like *Mythbusters*



— to modify the design substantially. Synthetic foam disks or heavily altered constructions may keep a person afloat, but these are a far cry from the fragile, wafer-thin wooden float specified in the 17th-century text.

As Tuck points out, "if you have to mostly disregard the design in BSSK to get it to work, that calls into question how authentic and useful BSSK really is as a window onto actual shinobi practice."

SKEPTICISM

Tuck is not alone in his doubts. As early as the 1960s, scholars like Murayama Tomoyoshi and writers such as Jay Gluck openly questioned whether such contraptions were practical. Gluck dismissed "round sandals a foot or more in diameter meant to enable the wearer to walk on water" as "Rube Goldberg type contraptions," quipping that "onetime use of most of these could well result in one less ninja."

Even Okuse Heishichirō, one of the postwar architects of the ninja boom in Japan — hardly known for his critical rigor — flagged the Bansen shūkai's water devices as mayutsuba-mono, a phrase suggesting something dubious or deceptive, which Tuck playfully translates as "smells like bullshit."

For Tuck, the issue is less about proving whether the mizu-gumo "worked" and more about how we understand the Bansen shūkai and similar texts. Rather than treating them as direct windows into the lives of historical shinobi, he suggests they are better read as cultural artifacts of imagination — records of what 17th-century writers thought ninjas might have done, not necessarily what they actually did.

"My take on the BSSK and other 'ninja manuals'...is pretty simple," he concludes. "I think they're far better understood as evidence of what people from the 17th century onward thought the shinobi might have done, not what they actually did."

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SCREEN SHINOBI



REVISITING THE FOURTH
INSTALMENT IN THE
FRANCHISE FROM 1990

NINJA
BOOM



BEHIND-THE-SCENES: MAKING AMERICAN NINJA 4

When *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* exploded onto screens in 1990, it delivered everything fans expected from the franchise—rogue military plots, masked ninjas, exotic locations and an explosive finale. Directed by Cedric Sundstrom and starring Michael Dudikoff and David Bradley, the fourth instalment marked Dudikoff's final appearance in the series.

The plot revolves around a terrorist conspiracy to blow up New York City unless a \$50 million ransom is paid. Agents Sean Davidson, Carl Brackston and Joe Armstrong must unite to stop the threat. The action unfolds against the dramatic landscapes of southern Africa, with ninjas training in the countryside and geopolitical tension simmering in the background.



KELY MCCLUNG

FROM STICK FIGHTING CHAMPION TO SILVER SCREEN VILLAIN

Before stepping onto a film set, Kely McClung had already forged a formidable reputation in the martial arts world. Having trained in dozens of fighting systems, he broke into the film industry after winning the brutal International Full Contact Stick Fighting Championships.

At the time, producers were reportedly searching for the “next” Jean-Claude Van Damme.

“I was brought in to be that next guy,” McClung recalls.





BAPTISM BY BRUISES

Originally, Mike Stone was set to play Super Ninja. When circumstances changed, McClung was offered the role. As a masked villain, he gained something rare in cinema: invisibility.

McClung doubled extensively for David Bradley and, at times, for Michael Dudikoff. Bradley's explosive kicking ability was elite—"He could kick better than me in terms of form"—but McClung's weapons expertise often put him in frame. Dudikoff, meanwhile, was more actor than martial technician, but, as McClung notes, "Michael would let you make him look good."

In one remarkable sequence, McClung effectively fights himself—doubling both masked combatants in the same scene. "I spin, I take the punch, I kick, I take the kick."

Wigs were occasionally deployed to disguise the switches. They rarely fit. Sharp-eyed viewers can spot moments where Dudikoff spins into a kick with dark hair—only to land with blonde hair again.

Action cinema may look glamorous, but McClung describes it as relentless.

In the climactic melee, a spiked leather jacket sliced open his bicep during a chokehold. A river sequence required submerged timing under a tight ninja mask; on the final take, he resurfaced nearly half a mile downstream—unnoticed.

A VILLAIN'S REGRET

One lingering disappointment remains. In an earlier draft of the story, Super Ninja was meant to defeat Bradley's character — justifying Dudikoff's dramatic arrival. The scene was altered.

But as a young actor, he didn't push for changes.



"I was just happy to be there," McClung reflects.

And then there was his first nude scene. Day three. Tied up. Surrounded by 200 crew members. "Dreaming of being an actor," he laughs, "and here I am in a loincloth in a ninja movie."

SET SECRETS: TENSION BEHIND THE CAMERA

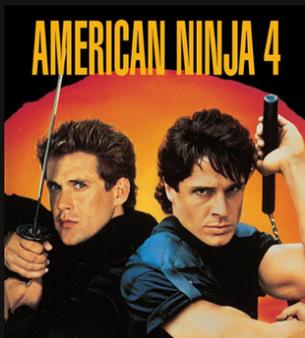
Production wasn't without friction. Dudikoff was brought in mid-shoot with a lucrative contract to bolster the franchise. Bradley, fresh from American Ninja 3, found himself in an



awkward position. Rivalries were common in that era of action cinema—long before ensemble nostalgia projects made cooperation fashionable.

McClung, a newcomer with perceived star potential, was caught somewhere in between.

He later learned he'd been viewed as a possible future leading man—marketed, in one producer's mind, as



a "martial arts Mel Gibson," just as Dudikoff had been pitched as a muscular James Dean.

The role of Stretching

WHY FLEXIBILITY ISN'T ENOUGH

Flexibility is one of the most visible hallmarks of martial arts – from the high kicks of karateka to the deep stances of taijutsu practitioners. Yet, while stretching and warm-ups are part of nearly every modern dojo routine, they are not originally a feature of classical Japanese martial arts. The ancient traditions of the samurai and ninja were forged in times when training was designed for immediate survival, not gradual preparation.

Respected martial artist and scholar Dr Kacem Zoughari explains:



“In classical martial there is no warming up exercise. There is this aspect of tanren.”

“The idea of warming up, those kind of exercise you do before starting a class. Well, first of all, you need to understand that in classical martial art doesn't exist. Warm me up doesn't exist. In classical martial there is no warming up exercise. There is this aspect of tanren, conditioning and reinforcement.”

In other words, what we now know as “warming up” evolved later, as martial arts adapted to a changing world.

Today, a warm-up and some light stretching are common in every class, preparing the body for movement and reducing the risk of injury – even if such practices were absent during Japan's warring states.

Stretching increases range of motion, aids body awareness, and enhances posture and control



— all vital elements for executing techniques, maintaining kamae (combat postures), and developing balance. However, as Dr Zoughari warns, stretching must be approached with care:

"You need to understand that flexibility can be not good for the body, if you don't do it in the right way. You have to listen your body."

Flexibility alone is not enough for martial artists. A practitioner who can drop into the splits may still struggle to lift their leg above waist height without strength. True martial readiness combines flexibility, strength, and mobility — the ability to move powerfully and with control through one's full range of motion. Resistance bands and controlled lifts within the stretch can help develop this functional strength.

As Dr Masaaki Hatsumi notes in *Ninjutsu: History and Tradition*:

"Stretching the leg muscles for limberness and increasing the flexibility of the hip joints are crucial for mobility, proper support of the body and powerful leaps & jumps."

Hatsumi has also demonstrated sequences such as *Ryu Tai Undo* — or "Dragon Body Exercises" — incorporating movements like the butterfly stretch, box splits, and extended leg reaches. These routines help build a supple yet strong body capable of swift transitions between stances and techniques.

Ultimately, flexibility in martial arts extends beyond the muscles. Dr Kacem Zoughari reminds us that the practice of stretching holds a deeper significance:

"Stretching means to stretch your mind, to stretch yourself."

A truly flexible warrior adapts not just in body, but in thought and spirit. Physical stretching becomes a metaphor for growth — expanding limits, softening rigidity, and finding strength through fluidity.

TYPES OF STRETCHING

Dynamic stretching keeps the body in motion, gradually extending the range of movement through controlled, repetitive actions. This form is more suitable before a session, as it raises the heart rate and primes the muscles for explosive activity.

Static stretching involves holding a stretch at the end of a muscle's range, promoting relaxation and lengthening. It's best done after training to return muscles to their natural length and encourage recovery.



Move Like a Shinobi

4 Essential Exercises for the Modern Ninja

Shinobi had to be agile, balanced, and physically resilient. Running across rooftops, scaling castle walls, and sneaking into enemy strongholds required a unique level of athleticism.



1 Bear Crawl on a Railing

Crawling has become a staple in movement training – and for good reason. It works your shoulders, core, glutes, and quads, all while developing coordination. To take it to ninja level, try crawling along a railing or narrow beam. This combines the strength benefits of the bear crawl with a serious balance challenge.

2 Calf Jumps

Jumping is a basic, primal movement – but there are many ways to challenge the body. In this variation, keep your legs mostly straight and jump by explosively extending through the calves. These "calf jumps" increase lower leg reactivity, ankle strength, and vertical explosiveness. Think of it as training your body's natural springs – key for rapid take-offs or quick evasions.

3 Rope Climbing

Ninjas were expert climbers, often seen scaling castle walls using ropes or grappling hooks. Rope climbing builds incredible grip strength, core stability, and pulling power. It's also a test of endurance and willpower. You can anchor a climbing rope to a pull-up bar or sturdy tree branch. Use just your arms for the ultimate challenge – or add your legs for control and assistance.

4 Precision Jumps

Leap from one specific spot to another with control and purpose. Precision jumps develop explosive leg strength, focus, and balance. You can use towels or tape to mark your takeoff and landing zones. The goal? Land softly, with minimal noise. In free running and parkour, this is a foundational movement – and it connects directly with the stealthy agility of the ninja.

WATCHLIST



DOJO LIFE

Step inside the South West Martial Arts Show, where kickboxers, kung fu practitioners, and HEMA fighters get their first taste of Bujinkan Ninjutsu.

www.youtube.com/@InsideNinjutsu



NINJA QUEST

Dive into the survival skills, tactics, and fieldcraft that defined ninja and samurai operations beyond the battlefield.

www.youtube.com/@InsideNinjutsu



SCREEN SHINOBI

The series dedicated to the warriors of the silver screen. Step behind the camera to explore the truth behind movie ninja.

www.youtube.com/@InsideNinjutsu



DOCUMENTARY

Watch the short film exploring that idea of kaizen through the lived experience of Bujinkan training.

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FEATURES

1. Explore Ancient Wisdom: "Inside Ninjutsu" serves as your gateway to the ancient world of ninjutsu and traditional Japanese martial arts. Delve into centuries-old wisdom, techniques, and philosophies preserved within the pages.
2. Latest News & Updates: Stay informed with the latest happenings in the world of ninjutsu, the samurai and the Bujinkan. From events to noteworthy developments, "Inside Ninjutsu" keeps you up-to-date.
3. In-Depth Reviews: Gain insights into the newest books, training materials, and equipment relevant to ninjutsu and the Bujinkan. Our reviews help you make informed choices on your martial arts journey.
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