

= Sakakibara Kenkichi =

Sakakibara Kenkichi (Japanese : 佐々木 健吉 , 19 December 1830 ? 11 September 1894) , was a Japanese samurai and martial artist . He was the fourteenth headmaster of the Jikishinkage school of sword fighting . Through his Jikishinkage contacts he rose to a position of some political influence ; he taught swordsmanship at a government military academy and also served in the personal guard of Japan 's last two shoguns .

After the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate Sakakibara was instrumental in preserving traditional Japanese sword techniques in the early Meiji Era . Despite his eventual opposition to the practice of sword fighting for sport , his work during this period laid the foundations for the modern sport of kendo . In his later years he taught a number of noted martial artists , and was honoured by the All Japan Kendo Federation after his death .

= = Early life = =

Sakakibara was born on the fifth day of the eleventh month of Bunsei (19 December 1830) into the Sakakibara clan ; his given name at birth was Tomoyoshi (豊吉) . His family lived in the village of Otsuwa near modern @-@ day Tokyo . He started studying Kashima Shinden Jikishinkage @-@ ry? with Otani Nobutomo in 1843 . He proved proficient in that style , and was granted a menkyo kaiden (licence of mastery) by Otani in 1856 , despite his family being too poor to pay for it . He was later to become the fourteenth headmaster of the school . As a talented swordsman , he once duelled with Yamaoka Tessh? ; the two men faced off for over forty minutes without moving , before sheathing their swords with neither striking a blow .

= = Edo period = =

In 1856 Sakakibara was appointed as a professor at the K?busho (武蔵) , a shogunate @-@ sponsored military academy . He received this post through the auspices of his teacher Otani , who had himself been granted a teaching position there . In this role , Sakakibara was noticed by the shogun Tokugawa Iemochi , who appointed Sakakibara as his bodyguard and fencing instructor . He also married Taka , the daughter of the shogun 's personal retainer Iwajiro Mihashi . In order that his headmastery of the Jikishinkage ryu would not interfere with his duties to the shogun , his student Matsuoka Katsunosuke was temporarily placed in charge of the school .

By 1863 , Sakakibara was a head keeper at Edo Castle and received a stipend of 300 ry? per year . He resigned from this post in 1866 , after Iemochi 's death and started a dojo in Kurumazaka (a neighbourhood of Edo , now part of modern Ueno) .

= = Meiji period = =

Despite his connections to the shogunate , at the Battle of Ueno in 1868 Sakakibara did not participate in the fighting between the pro @-@ shogunate and Imperial forces , considering it to be his duty to guard the Kan 'ei @-@ ji temple . He did , in fact , rescue the Imperial Prince Kitashirakawa Yoshihisa (who was at the time the abbot of Kan 'ei @-@ ji) from the Sh?gitai , physically carrying him away from the combat . Sakakibara subsequently returned to the service of the Tokugawa family as Captain of the Guard under Tokugawa Iesato , whom he served until 1870 . After the Meiji Restoration Sakakibara was offered a position with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department , which he refused out of loyalty to Iemochi . He was , however , part of the group of fencers who created the forms for the Keishich? @-@ ry? (剣道) , the style of sword fighting created in 1868 for use by the police , and he worked briefly as a prison guard at the police headquarters .

The new Meiji Government had banned the carrying of swords and in 1876 banned the practice of duelling , and so traditional swordsmanship was no longer popular . Sakakibara tried to find new ways of promoting kenjutsu . His motives may have been financial , as without a sponsor he , like

many other martial artists of the era , was suffering from penury ? his poverty was such that he had to accept help from his wife 's uncle Katsu Kaish? in constructing a residence . He began organising gekiken kogyo (剣道場 , " sword combat performances ") , feeling that such public competitions would instil an appreciation for the art of the swordsman in their audiences . He started an organisation called the Gekken Kaisha (剣道会 , " Fencing Society ") , which , inspired by the popularity of sumo wrestling , organised these contests . The first public kogyo organised by Sakakibara 's group took place in April 1873 , and lasted for over a week . Other martial artists , witnessing the success of the Gekken Kaisha , followed suit .

As part of his public performances Sakakibara occasionally demonstrated a tameshigiri technique called kabuto wari (兜割 , " helmet breaking ") , which involved slicing through a steel helmet with a single stroke of the sword . In 1887 he performed this before the Emperor Meiji , as part of a demonstration organised by one of the Emperor 's relatives . Of the three sword masters present who attempted this cut , Sakakibara was the only one to succeed in cutting the helmet , despite the fact that he had been unable to make the cut in practice attempts .

Despite the success of the gekiken kogyo performances , in his later years Sakakibara regretted their development . In his view , the rules and strictures of gekiken were perverting kenjutsu into new forms that were no longer relevant to battlefield combat . He disdained the point @-@ scoring swordsmanship of other kendoka of his era , ignoring light touches by his opponents in order to deliver his own powerful strikes . Nonetheless , the gekiken kogyo practices which he began created an interest in fencing which led ultimately to the development of modern kendo .

In his later years Sakakibara returned to coach and train in his dojo in Kurumazaka , after trying his hand unsuccessfully at running a k?dan (講談 , " storytelling ") theatre and an izakaya (居酒屋) (bar) . Those who trained at the Kurumazaka dojo included Nait? Takaharu , who was to become head of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai , and foreigners such as Austrian ambassador and fencing expert Heinrich von Siebold , and German Erwin Bälz , physician to the Japanese Imperial Family . Takeda S?kaku , the founder of Dait? @-@ ry? Aiki @-@ j?jutsu , also studied with Sakakibara at Kurumazaka .

On New Year 's Day of 1894 , Sakakibara passed on the Jikishinkage headmastership to his disciple Jir?kichi Yamada . Sakakibara died of heart failure due to beriberi on 11 September the same year , at the age of 63 . He was entombed at Sai? @-@ ji temple Yotsuya , Tokyo and given the posthumous Buddhist name Gik?in J?zan Yamato? Koji (吉泉山 山王 居士) . In 2003 he was inducted into the All Japan Kendo Federation 's Kendo Hall of Fame (剣道 名人 会) .