

## Togakure-ryu: Togakushi's Unique Ninja Style

The origins of ninjutsu, the stealth techniques of the Japanese ninja, go back more than a thousand years. Togakure-ryu, a school of ninjutsu unique to Togakushi, began in the earliest stages of its development.

Ninjutsu is said to have grown out of the practice of Shugendo, a form of mountain worship composed of Buddhist, Taoist, and Shinto beliefs. Practice of these beliefs in Togakushi was introduced around the year 678 by Shugendo founder En no Ozunu, also En no Ozuno, Otsuno (634?–701), who stressed physical endurance as a path to enlightenment. Training involved fasting, seclusion, and feats of ascetic physical endurance like standing under cold mountain waterfalls for long periods of time. Early ninjutsu techniques are said to have emerged from this religious training.

The Shino Clan of Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture) adopted Shugendo techniques to train their armies during the Heian period (794–1185). These techniques later developed into the Koga and Iga schools of ninjutsu in Omi (present-day Shiga Prefecture). In the twelfth century, samurai Nishina Daisuke learned Iga-school ninjutsu techniques from a monk named Kain Doshi and brought them to his birthplace of Togakushi. Here they were mixed with samurai training techniques and over time developed into the Togakure-ryu school.

### Characteristics of Togakure Ninjutsu

Togakure-ryu differed from other schools of ninjutsu in its emphasis on personal protection over attack. Infiltrating the enemy by stealth and gathering information was one tactic of the Togakure-ryu school, and defeating the enemy without weapons was a mark of the Togakure ninja. Nevertheless, weapons were also used, including *shuriken* (“ninja stars”). One kind of *shuriken* unique to Togakure-ryu was the *senban*, a small diamond-shaped weapon with a hole in the middle that could be used to remove nails from an enemy's defenses.

Togakure-ryu training included walking 120–150 kilometers in a single day, walking on ice wearing wooden *geta* sandals, carrying buckets of water on poles over the shoulders for long distances, and climbing the trunks of trees. In addition to physical training, students of Togakure ninjutsu were required to study astronomy, mathematics, and medicine.

### Togakure Ninjutsu in Togakushi Today

Much of what is known of Togakure ninjutsu is on display at the Ninpo Shiryokan, the Togakure Ninja Museum. Among the exhibits are weapons, clothes, tools of infiltration,

and scrolls depicting the ninjutsu arts. Next to the museum is the “Ninja Trick Mansion,” an entire building of secret doorways and passages that visitors are welcome to try to navigate. Nearby is the Shuriken Dojo, where you can try your hand at throwing this iconic weapon.