

Monument to Saito Kannosuke

Saito Kannosuke (1833–1898) was a master swordsman who trained the retainers of the Omura family. He practiced Shindo Munen-ryu swordsmanship, which became the basis for modern-day kendo.

Kannosuke was born in Edo (modern-day Tokyo), the third son of swordmaster Saito Yakuro, considered one of the three great swordmasters of the nineteenth century. Kannosuke began practicing at his father's dojo from a young age. As a teenager, he developed an effective thrust that could debilitate an opponent. At age 17, he was said to have single-handedly defeated a group of samurai from Choshu domain (modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture) who came to spar at the dojo.

In the early 1850s, Omura Sumihiro (1830–1882), the last lord of Omura, was impressed by the Saito family's sword skills and invited Kannosuke to instruct his retainers. Kannosuke was also appointed head of the lord's personal guard. Over the following six years, Kannosuke trained the samurai of Omura in Shindo Munen-ryu. Kannosuke's sword skills and intense training methods earned him the nickname "Devil."

Over his lifetime, Kannosuke is believed to have trained more than one thousand samurai. Many of his students fought in the Boshin War (1868–1869), the war between forces of the Tokugawa shogunate and those seeking to return political power to the Emperor. The forces supporting Emperor Meiji (1852–1912), including the Omura family, prevailed and ended shogunate rule.

After some 40 years of living in Omura, Kannosuke's health deteriorated and he moved back to Tokyo, where he died in 1898. A memorial stone at Kushima Castle was erected by his students and members of the Omura family to express their gratitude for his instruction.