History of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō

I. The Hokushin Ittō-ryū during the Edo period (1603-1868)

The Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō is one of the most famous and distinguished koryū (traditional martial art schools) of Japan. It was founded in the early 1820s, some decades before the end of the Edo period, by the bushi (samurai / member of the warrior class) and master swordsman Chiba Shūsaku Taira no Narimasa (1792-1855). Considered the strongest swordsman of his time, he was one of the last to be called a kensei (sword saint) during the Edo period. The name of his school, Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō can be translated as “The north-star’s one sword school of strategy”.

Chiba Shūsaku Narimasa

Chiba Shūsaku Narimasa was born 1792 in the village of Kesen (today part of Kesennuma) in northern Japan. He was the second son of the bushi (samurai) Chiba Chūzaemon Naritane, who studied the Hokushin Musō-ryū under the school’s sōke (head of the school) Chiba Kōemon. The sōke is the sole head of a ryūha (school) and is responsible for making decisions, leading and representing the school, passing on the teachings to the next generation and to issue grading licenses. The title is passed down from generation to generation and each sōke has the responsibility to protect and pass on the ryūha to the next generation.

Hokushin Musō-ryū was a branch of the Hokushin-ryū, renamed by the 11th generation sōke of the school. The foundation of the Hokushin-ryū goes back to the Genpei war (1180-1185), fought fiercely between the Taira and Minamoto clans. The school was founded during that time by one of the most famous warriors of this period and daimyō (lord) of the Chiba clan, Chiba Koresuke Tsunetane, who established his school as the military education system for his successors and vassals.

Due to his mastery with the sword, Chiba Chūzaemon (the father of Chiba Shūsaku) was adopted by Chiba Kōemon and took on the family name of Chiba. As a child, Chiba Shūsaku studied the Hokushin
Musō-ryū together with his younger brother Chiba Sadakichi Taira no Masamichi (1797-1879) under their father Chiba Chūzaemon. Later the brothers also studied directly under their grandfather Chiba Kōemon, both finishing their studies of the Hokushin Musō-ryū and receiving the menkyo-kaiden (license of full mastery) scroll.

After the family moved to Matsudo (near Edo) in 1809, Chiba Shūsaku initially started to study the school of Ittō-ryū Hyōhō under Asari Yoshinobu Matashichirō, before continuing his studies under his teacher's teacher, Nakanishi Chūbei Tanemasa. Both men were menkyo-kaiden (full mastery) licensed teachers of the school.

The Ittō-ryū Hyōhō was founded in the 1580s by the legendary sword master Itō Ittōsai Kagehisa during the Sengoku period (warring states period 1467-1603). His successor was a famous warrior and retainer of the Tokugawa clan, Mikogami Tenzen Tadaaki (who later changed his name to Ono Jiroemon Tadaaki). Mikogami Tenzen was recognized as tenka-ichi (strongest under heaven) by the Tokugawa shōgunate and went on to become the personal fencing instructor of the Tokugawa shōguns. Through the immense fame and influence his position brought, the Ittō-ryū was spread all over the country with numerous branches and master swordsmen holding teaching licenses of the art.

The previously mentioned Asari and Nakanishi lines which Chiba Shūsaku studied were two branches of the Ittō-ryū. It is said, that Chiba Shūsaku was viewed as a genius swordsman by his teachers, as he remembered every teaching after only being taught once and mastered them shortly after. In this way he very quickly managed to receive the menkyo-kaiden license of the Ittō-ryū. Asari Yoshinobu furthermore arranged the marriage between Shūsaku and his own daughter and took Shūsaku in as
his adopted son and successor (dōjō-yōshi). During this time, Chiba Shūsaku changed his name to Asari Shūsaku Narimasa and became the leading teacher at the Asari-Dōjō in Matsudo with his father-in-law.

After a few years, Chiba Shūsaku surpassed his teachers and deemed the techniques and practice methods of the Ittō-ryū at the Asari- and Nakanishi-Dōjō incomplete and insufficient. This was due to both dōjō mainly focusing on practice with lightweight bokutō (wooden swords) and shinai (bamboo swords for sparring), but not placing very much emphasis on reality based applications with shinken (real swords). This caused a falling out with his father-in-law Asari Yoshinobu, which led to Shūsaku divorcing, leaving the Asari family and changing his family name back to Chiba.

Following these events, Chiba Shūsaku started his musha-shugyō (warrior pilgrimage) together with his younger brother Chiba Sadakichi. Chiba Sadakichi had always been his older brother’s training and sparring partner and was considered an equally strong master swordsman himself. Together the Chiba brothers visited many dōjō and fought numerous duels all over the country, defeating a large number of famous sword masters from the most prestigious schools of the time. The best known schools they faced were the Shintō Munen-ryū, Jikishinkage-ryū, Maniwa Nen-ryū, multiple Ittō-ryū and Shinkage-ryū lines and many other schools whose names are not as well known today.

Based on his previous mastery of the sword in two ryūha and on the profound experiences he had during his musha-shugyō, Chiba Shūsaku founded his own school which he named Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō in 1820. The name is a combination of his family art, the Hokushin Musō-ryū and of the Ittō-ryū Hyōhō he had mastered under Asari Yoshinobu and Nakanishi Chūbei.

In some ways the Hokushin Ittō-ryū is a simplified form of the Ittō-ryū, but focused, as intended by its founder Itō Ittōsai, on the very essence of the Ittō-ryū’s techniques for a reality based application with shinken (real swords). Chiba Shūsaku’s teaching of bujutsu (art of war) was in many ways scientific and well-structured, which made it easier for his students to learn and master the techniques and teachings compared to other ryūha. There was even the saying that if someone needs six years to master a school, he will only need three years to master the Hokushin Ittō-ryū. There have even been students who received the menkyo-kaiden scroll (full transmission and mastery of the school) after just one year of very severe and consistent training.
In 1822 Chiba Shūsaku founded his own dōjō called Genbukan near Nihonbashi Shinagawachō in Edo. His younger brother Sadakichi moved into a house just around the corner from the Genbukan and became the main instructor of the dōjō. Because of the fame the brothers earned during their musha-shugyō, as well as the brothers and their students defeating every challenger showing up at the Genbukan, the school gained a lot of popularity and members. The Genbukan was later moved to Kanda Otamagaike (also in Edo) where it became one of the Tenpō San-Dai-Dojō (the three great dōjō of the Tenpō period) together with the Renpeikan of the Shintō Munen-ryū and the Shigakukan of the Kyōshin Meichi-ryū.

In 1839 Chiba Shūsaku was requested to meet with the Mito branch of the Tokugawa clan (one of the Tokugawa gosanke, the three great branches of the Tokugawa clan) by the clan’s officials. Along with his disciple Usui Shinsaburō (also called Rokurō), he travelled there to perform a demonstration of his skills in front of Tokugawa Nariaki, the 9th daimyō (lord) of the Mito clan and father of the last shōgun Tokugawa Yoshinobu. Impressed by the demonstration, Tokugawa Nariaki wanted to have Chiba Shūsaku as his province’s primary teacher for his family and retainers. Accepting the invitation, Chiba Shūsaku moved to Mito to teach Hokushin Ittō-ryū to the Tokugawa family and later at the military academy of the Mito clan called the Kōdōkan as well. The Kōdōkan was founded by Tokugawa Nariaki in 1841, but closed in 1872 after the Meiji restoration.

Before moving to Mito in 1839, Chiba Shūsaku entrusted the Genbukan to Chiba Sadakichi, as his own three sons, Chiba Kisotarō Takatane (born 1825), Chiba Eijirō Nariyuki (born 1833) and Chiba Michisaburō Mitsutane (born 1835) were still too young to lead the dōjō. Chiba Sadakichi thus led the Genbukan over a period of around eight years (1839-1848) as sōke-dairi (representative sōke) during the absence of his older brother and contributed greatly to the fame of both the Hokushin Ittō-ryū and of the Genbukan. During this time he also was the main teacher of his brother Shūsaku’s three sons and had a great influence on their technique, philosophy and life in general. In 1848 Chiba Sadakichi
entrusted the Genbukan to the oldest of his brother’s sons, Chiba Kisotarō, who at that time was 23 years old and ranked menkyo-kaiden. Chiba Kisotarō thus became the 2nd sōke of the Genbukan as his father Shūsaku was the 1st sōke of this line.

Chiba Sadakichi had for a couple of years built up his own base of private students (uchi-deshi), separately from the Genbukan, whom he taught directly at his own house located at Nihonbashhi Hirotomechō. Together with his 24 year old son Chiba Jūtarō Kazutane (who also held the rank of menkyo-kaiden), he managed to open his own dōjō at Okemachi in Edo inside the former Kanoya-Yashiki (Kanoya residence) which he named Chiba-Dōjō.

Until that time, it was common for a bujutsu dōjō to teach only members of the bushi (samurai) class. However, being a visionary with the heart of a revolutionary, Chiba Sadakichi opened the doors of the Chiba-Dōjō not only for the bushi class, but also for peasants, artisans and merchants. He even allowed women and children to join the Hokushin Ittō-ryū, something which was unthinkable in other ryūha and dōjō. Chiba Sadakichi’s approach to bujutsu was that skill and talent were not a matter of birth right or origin, but could be acquired by every human being if they trained hard and consistently enough.

Through this open-door policy the Chiba-Dōjō enjoyed great popularity which led to an enormous growth of students. Soon, the premises of the Chiba-Dōjō became too small and Chiba Sadakichi decided to purchase the next door Tōjōichidō-Juku (an old private school which had recently closed) in order to expand the Chiba-Dōjō. More and more students enrolled, including many shihan who previously studied and received Menkyo-kaiden from other ryūha. Most of them came for taryū-jiai (duels with masters or members of other ryūha), eager to make a name for themselves, but they were defeated by Sadakichi, his son Jutarō, his daughter Sana, or their students. After their loss some of the defeated swordsmen asked to be accepted as students of Sadakichi. In this way the Chiba-Dōjō brought forth many highly skilled menkyo-kaiden ranked students, surpassing the Genbukan to become the biggest of the San-Dai-Dōjō in the 6th year of Kaei (1853).

Sometimes the Genbukan was referred to as the “Dai-Chiba no dōjō” and the Chiba-Dōjō as the “Ko-Chiba no dōjō”. Up until now there has been a lot of confusion about those terms. However, dai (big) and ko (little) were used to describe the age difference of the Chiba brothers, not the size of their dōjō. The Genbukan was the dōjō founded by the older brother (dai) Shūsaku and the Chiba-Dōjō was the one founded by the younger brother (ko), Sadakichi.
With the Genbukan and the Chiba-Dōjō being very successful, the Hokushin Ittō-ryū was widely referred to as tenka-ichi (the strongest school under heaven). This also became the ryūha’s motto and slogan to attract further students. The swordsmen of the school succeeded in officially recorded shiai all over the country, fought with shinai or bokutō. Others sought fame by defeating and killing their opponents in, by that time, illegal duels with shin肯 (sharp swords).

In 1853 when Commodore Matthew C. Perry appeared in Edo bay to forcefully demand the opening of Japan to the west, the Tokugawa shōgunate was thrown into turmoil. Many clans despised the idea of becoming puppets of the west, like it happened in China and other Asian nations and viewed the shōgunate as too weak to rule. In place of the shōgunate, they desired a restoration of political power to the emperor. One of the anti shōgunate movement leaders was Tokugawa Nariaki, the daimyō (lord) of the Mito clan who had made Chiba Shūsaku his clan’s leading kenjutsu (swordsmanship) instructor (and who later was put in charge of defending Japan from foreigners). However, he was at conflict with Ii Naosuke who would in 1858 become the tairō (regent of Japan instead of the shōgun).

In 1853, Chiba Sadakichi was also named as the official kenbunyaku (referee for duels) at the Edo residence of the Tottori clan. Soon afterwards he was also appointed as the official swordsmanship instructor of the Tottori clan and taught Hokushin Ittō-ryū to the clan officials at the clan’s Edo residence. From that time on, his son Chiba Jūtarō mainly led the teaching at the Chiba-Dōjō as the 2nd sōke of this line. During the same year Chiba Kisotarō and Chiba Eijirō started to teach Hokushin Ittō-ryū at the Edo residence of the Mito clan, occasionally travelling to Mito to teach at the Kōdōkan as well.

When the great Ansei earthquake devastated large parts of Edo in 1855, the Chiba-Dōjō burned down along with the surrounding neighbourhood. This year was a very tumultuous one in the history of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū as it was also the year when the founder of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū, Chiba Shūsaku and his son Chiba Kisotarō died. The Genbukan was then led by Chiba Eijirō as the 3rd sōke.
Only one year later in 1856, Chiba Sadakichi and Jūtarō managed to rebuild and even enlarge the Chiba-Dōjō. Located next to the personal living quarters of the Chiba family, it contained several rooms for training and teaching, as well as dormitories for their uchi-deshi (live-in students). Not counting official clan dōjō, it was the largest privately owned dōjō in Japan at the time, with thousands of students studying the Hokushin Ittō-ryū there under them. In 1860 Chiba Jūtarō followed in his father’s footsteps and was also appointed a kenjutsu (swordsmanship) instructor of the Tottori clan.

Rising resentment towards the Tokugawa shōgunate after the arrival of Americans in 1853, followed by the forced opening of the country, triggered several outbursts against the shōgunate. One of the most critical was the assassination of the tairō, Ii Naosuke, in March 1860. Seventeen Hokushin Ittō-ryū swordsmen from the Mito-clan who had studied the art either at the Genbukan in Edo or the Kōdōkan in Mito and one Yakumaru Jigen-ryū swordsman from Satsuma, ambushed and killed Ii Naosuke as well as his guards despite being greatly outnumbered. The assassination took place directly in front of the Sakuradamon, one of the gates of the shōgun’s castle in Edo and the centre of power of the Tokugawa regime. This led to a series of continued violence and insurrections against the shōgunate.
Two years later in 1862 Chiba Eijirō, the 3rd sōke of the Genbukan line of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū, also died. He was succeeded by his younger brother Chiba Michisaburō as the 4th sōke. Because of the involvement of some of the Genbukan’s students in the assassination of tairō Ii Naosuke, the Genbukan was closed for a period of time in 1864 for a police investigation ordered by the shōgunate.

During the same year Chiba Jūtarō married one of his daughters to one of his best disciples, as he had no sons who could succeed him and the school as sōke. The student was then officially adopted into the Chiba-family under the name Chiba Tōichirō Kiyomitsu.

In 1867 Chiba Sadakichi and Chiba Jūtarō were involved in the assassination of a shōgunate official and subsequently placed under house arrest by authorities. However with the Meiji restoration bringing the 264 year long rule of the Tokugawa shōgunate to an end only half a year later in 1868, the orders of the old government were nullified and Sadakichi and Jūtarō were both released to continue teaching at the Chiba-Dōjō in Tōkyō (formerly known as Edo).

During the year 1868, Chiba Jūtarō adopted another one of his menkyo-kaiden ranked students and arranged a marriage between him and his other daughter. With the adoption the student also took on the family name Chiba and became known as Chiba Tsukane.

II. The Hokushin Ittō-ryū during the Meiji period (1868-1912)

During the Boshin war (1868-1869) following the downfall of the Tokugawa shōgunate, the old shōgunate forces fought fiercely against the new imperial government. Many Hokushin Ittō-ryū swordsmen fought during this war for one or the other side. One of those fighting for the new imperial government was Kobayashi Seijirō Sadayuki, one of the shitenno (four strongest masters) of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū at the time. He previously studied the art under Chiba Eijirō and Chiba Michisaburō, receiving menkyo-kaiden. During the Boshin war he fought under the command of Nakamura Hanjiro, who became infamous as one of the four most notable assassins of the Bakumatsu-period and was
nicknamed Hitokiri Hanjirō (Hanjirō the assassin). Under Nakamura’s command Kobayashi Seijirō participated at the battle against the Aizu-clan in the Tōhoku region of Japan, cutting many enemy soldiers down with his sword.

In 1871 after the Boshin war was over and Japan was united under the Meiji-government, Chiba Jūtarō named Chiba Tōichirō his successor as the 3rd sōke of the Chiba-Dōjō line and entrusted the Chiba-Dōjō to him before leaving for Tottori to teach as the official clan swordsmanship instructor. However during the same year, the Meiji-government eradicated the feudal clan system, replacing clan domains with prefectures as well as abolishing the bushi (samurai) class and their privileges. Roughly 2 million bushi were suddenly unemployed. Because there was no Tottori-clan anymore to which he could teach kenjutsu to, Chiba Jūtarō was forced to move back to Tōkyō.

In 1872 Chiba Michisaburō passed away and left the Genbukan without an heir as his own son Chiba Katsutarō was becoming blind and not able to lead it. Additionally the dōjō itself started to deteriorate as the building was quite old, making it impossible to teach there without rebuilding it completely. This led to the Genbukan eventually being closed that year.

With the bushi class abolished, the interest in the martial arts declined and many students left the school. To prevent this, Chiba Shūnosuke Yukitane (the son of Chiba Eijirō who was primarily taught by his father’s disciple Shimoe Hidetarō), founded the Chiba-Gekikenkai together with Chiba Tōichirō and Chiba Sana (the daughter of Chiba Sadakichi) at the Chiba-Dōjō in 1873. The Chiba-Gekikenkai was established to promote official gekiken matches (duels fought with shinai or bokutō) between exponents of various schools who wished to test their skills. The duels were initially open only to a select audience, but later opened to the general population. In this manner the school regained a lot of popularity and the Chiba-Dōjō could attract some new students.

The famous ukiyo-e artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi created several woodblock prints which depict scenes from the Chiba-Gekikenkai held at the Chiba-Dōjō.
Many bushi were very disaffected with the abolishment of clans and the associated loss of their status and work. The province of Satsuma in the south of Kyūshū, which was very influential in overthrowing the old Tokugawa shōgunate, became a gathering place for many who formerly fought fiercely for the new imperial government. In 1877 the so called Satsuma rebellion of Saigō Takamori broke out. The battles took place over large parts of the Kyūshū region. To crush this rebellion and to demonstrate the strength of the imperial government’s newly reorganized army, imperial troops from all over the country were sent to Kyūshū. One of the imperial’s elite fighting forces was named the Keishichō Battōtai. The Battōtai was a special close combat force of the Tōkyō police department. It consisted of many highly skilled swordsmen who would charge against the gunfire of Saigō Takamori’s troops and, once in the trenches, cut down the front line of the enemy forces while the rest of the imperial troops could approach without being harassed by gunfire.

One of the Battōtai fighters was Kobayashi Seijirō, who previously fought in the battles of the Boshin war. During the Satsuma rebellion he again fought fiercely, this time against the troops of Saigō Takamori and even against his former commander, Nakamura Hanjirō (who was Saigō’s right hand during the rebellion). Kobayashi later stated that it caused him deep grief to fight and kill his former comrades, however it was his duty for the sake of a unified Japan to do so and there was no place for his own personal feelings.

After the Satsuma rebellion was quelled and Japan finally had internal peace under the new imperial government, Kobayashi resigned from the police force and founded the Shiseikan (his private dōjō) in his house in Tōkyō. There he taught the Hokushin Ittō-ryū and, without ever knowing it, was critical in the survival of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū’s full curriculum by passing it on a few years later to one of his students, Noda Shirō.
Two years after the Satsuma rebellion in 1879, Chiba Sadakichi, the 1st sōke of the Chiba-Dōjō line and younger brother of the schools founder Shūsaku, died at the (for that time quite advanced) age of 82. During the same year, Chiba Tōichirō left the Chiba family together with his wife to return to his original family, as his older brother and heir to the family had died. When Chiba Tōichirō left, Chiba Tsukane became the 4th sōke of the Chiba-Dōjō line.

As mentioned previously, the majority of the Japanese population during the Meiji period had lost interest in the martial arts and many ryūha had already died out with no new students to carry on their teachings. The Chiba-Dōjō also went through a very tough period as the dōjō had become too big for its current number of students. Unable to sustain the dōjō financially, Chiba Tsukane had to move it from Okemachi to Yotsuya using a much smaller and easier to maintain facility.

While Tokyo was restructured, many of the old buildings from the Edo period had to be demolished. One of the buildings which fell victim to this was the deteriorated (and already closed eight years prior) Genbukan at Kanda Otamagaike. The dōjō was demolished in 1880 to make space for a road.

In 1881 Chiba Tsukane paused his teaching at the Chiba-Dōjō as he and his father in law Chiba Jūtarō got offered a position as kenjutsu and gekiken instructors at the newly built Furitsu Taiiku Enbu-jō in Kyotō, which was opened in 1882. They accepted and taught Hokushin Ittō-ryū there together.

Meanwhile in Tōkyō, Chiba Shūnosuke Yukitane was gathering supporters to reopen and rebuild the Genbukan. Finally in 1883, after it was closed for a period of eleven years and demolished after eight, he was able to rebuild it in Kanda Nishikichō. This was possible with the technical and financial support of the two Hokushin Ittō-ryū swordsmen Yamaoka Tesshū and his teacher Inoue Hachirō (one of the
shitenno). Both were famous menkyo-kaiden ranked fighters of the school, who actively fought during the bloody years of the Bakumatsu.

In 1884 there was an article written about the female naginatajutsu classes held at the Genbukan by Chiba Shunosuke, which was published by the local Asano-shinbun newspaper.

One year later in 1885 Chiba Jutarō, the 2nd Sōke of the Chiba-Dōjō line, died at 61 (an average age for the time). Chiba Tsukane the 4th sōke taught Hokushin Ittō-ryū again at the Chiba-Dōjō in Tokyo during those years, as he had already returned from Kyōtō.

During those days it was very hard to find students and to make a living out of teaching koryū-bujutsu (the arts of war). Many people saw the old martial arts as a reminder of the violent years of the Bakumatsu and Meiji restoration. Many bujutsu teachers of that time had been actively involved in the fighting and killing of that period and were ill-perceived by the majority of the populace as an obsolete leftover from times past. Given the circumstances, bujutsu teachers who wanted to pass on their schools to the next generation had to take on any teaching jobs which came along, be it teaching their ryūha to a private rich merchant, to the military, police, or fighting in public gekiken shiai. Many changed their profession during this time and dozens of schools died out completely.

In 1886 Chiba Shūnosuke asked his students in a public speech to keep on training hard in order to maintain the Genbukan, despite the rapidly declining interest in kenjutsu. However only a couple of years later (between 1887 and 1897) he was finally forced to close the Genbukan due to a lack of students. This was the end of the Genbukan line which started with Chiba Shūsaku in 1822 and nobody else could ever continue it.
Around the years 1896-1897, Chiba Tsukane closed the Chiba-Dōjō in Tōkyō, moving to Taipei in Taiwan and teaching the Hokushin Ittō-ryū there. As Taiwan was a Japanese colony since 1895, many Japanese were encouraged by the government to teach the Japanese lifestyle and culture to the Taiwanese. He opened his new dōjō in Taipei on the 3rd of February 1897, calling it Hokushinkan. It was the last dōjō the Chiba family ever actively led themselves. After a few years he closed the dōjō and moved to Manchuria for work.

In 1899 Chiba Shūnosuke took on work for the Japanese government in Pusan, Korea. He died in 1911. In 1942 Chiba Eiichirō, the son of Chiba Shūnosuke Yukitane, wrote and published the book *Chiba Shūsaku Ikō*, in which he states that his father was the last person to ever lead the Genbukan. The Chiba family line of the Genbukan would never again actively involve itself in the politics of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū and withdrew from the position of sōke. With this the Chiba-Dōjō line became the only sōke line of the school left in existence.

### III. The Hokushin Ittō-ryū during the Taishō period (1912-1926)

Chiba Tsukane the 4th sōke of the Chiba-Dōjō line moved back from Manchuria to Japan, where he died in 1918. His son Chiba Tsurutarō studied the school under his father, but was an acupuncturist and had opened a clinic at the Kita-Senjū district in Tōkyō. The Chiba family in general was very skilled in acupuncture. There still exist texts about this subject written by Chiba Shūsaku in possession of the Chiba-family. Tsurutarō’s clinic was flourishing, so the time he could dedicate to training and teaching Hokushin Ittō-ryū was limited. He taught Hokushin Ittō-ryū to his son Chiba Akira, who also became a highly skilled acupuncturist at the same time. But like his father he did not have the time to take on students, being too busy with his main profession. Chiba Akira thus became the last member of the Chiba family who actively practiced Hokushin Ittō-ryū until today. As both Chiba Tsurutarō and Chiba Akira didn’t take on any students or teach the school actively, they were both sōke-dairi, nominal headmasters of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū. Nevertheless the Chiba-Dōjō family line always kept full authority over the school, as the Genbukan line ended with Chiba Shūnosuke and his son Eiichirō relinquishing their school duties as sōke.
That the family of the founder is still in charge of a koryū (traditional martial art school) despite being inactive and not practicing for generations is found in many ryūha. The Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū family line (Iizasa family) for example is inactive and didn’t practice for the past two generations. However the current sōke of the school Iizasa Yasusada still issues makimono (grading scrolls) and authorizes the various shihanke (master lines) of his school. He could very well pass the school out of his family and have one of the other shihanke become the new sōke. The school would then be passed down through the new family until something similar happens. As this practice varies by school, it is difficult to make general statements about succession in koryū since it can be handled very differently. For the Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō, control over the ryūha and the position of sōke stayed solely within the family at that time.

During the year 1914 the menkyo-kaiden ranked student of Kobayashi Seijirō, Noda Shirō, opened his own dōjō in Otaru, Hokkaidō. It was close to a cave shrine of Genbu, the black tortoise deity of the north. Because of this and to honour the founder of the school, Chiba Shūsaku, he requested the Chiba-family to name the dōjō Otaru-Genbukan. They agreed under the condition that it be made clear that it was not the Edo-Genbukan line of Chiba Shūsaku, but a completely different dōjō (shihanke) branch of the school. During the opening ceremony of the newly founded Otaru-Genbukan, a couple of famous Taishō period kenshi (swordsmen) of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū, like Naitō Takaharu and Takano Sasaburō, were present and performed kumitachi kata enbu.
IV. The Hokushin Ittō-ryū during the Shōwa period (1926-1989)

During the 1930s two students enrolled at the Otaru-Genbukan of Noda Shirō in Hokkaidō and studied the Hokushin Ittō-ryū under his tutelage. The senpai (older student) was Kobayashi Yoshikatsu and the kohai (younger student) was Konishi Shigejirō. Both studied the art as uchi-deshi of Noda Shirō and received menkyo-kaiden (full transmission) of the art around the year 1940 after roughly six years of hard and intense training. When the 2nd World-War broke out, Noda Shirō appointed Kobayashi Yoshikatsu as 2nd shihanke and Konishi Shigejirō as 3rd shihanke in order to increase the chance of his line’s survival through a difficult period of Japanese history.

The side lines of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū outside the leadership of the two sōke lines (Genbukan and Chiba-Dōjō) were generally referred to as shihan lines (master lines) led by a shihanke. They also were sometimes referred to as x-ha, with ha meaning line and the x being replaced by the family name of the 1st head of said line. This was done to make it easier to understand who learned from whom and to separate lineage in schools with many authorized branches. A very famous example for this is the Ittō-ryū Hyōhō. The various branches are commonly referred to using this naming pattern such as Ono-ha Ittō-ryū Hyōhō, Nakanishi-ha Ittō-ryū Hyōhō, Asari-ha Ittō-ryū Hyōhō, etc.

Chiba Akira’s son Chiba Hiroshi Masatane was born in 1934 and raised in the family clinic, but didn’t actively practice his family martial art. The 5th sōke of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū Chiba Hiroshi, despite not practicing himself, led and represented the school actively unlike his father and grandfather (sōke-
Konishi Shigejirō became a fighter pilot for Japan during World-War II and fought until the war ended. After the war he moved to Tōkyō where he taught the Hokushin Ittō-ryū and worked as a painter and artist. Kobayashi Yoshikatsu moved to Osaka where he stopped training and teaching, resigning his position as shihanke. He went on to become a modern kendō teacher at a local kendō dōjō. During the 1980s Konishi Shigejirō reopened the Otaru-Genbukan again in Suginami-ku, Tōkyō, where it is still located.

V. The Hokushin Ittō-ryū during the Heisei period (1989-)

In 2001 a student named Ōtsuka Yōichirō enrolled at the Otaru-Genbukan (at that time located in Suginami-ku, Tōkyō) to study the Hokushin Ittō-ryū under Konishi Shigejirō. When Ōtsuka Yōichirō became a shihan (master) he was allowed to open his own branch dōjō of the school, which he named the Shinmeikai-Dōjō. In the beginning of 2007 he received the menkyo-kaiden scroll of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū from his teacher Konishi Shigejirō, who sadly passed away one year later in June 2008. Ōtsuka Yōichirō was the last person to receive menkyo-kaiden from him. The Otaru-Genbukan was then continued on by his son Konishi Shin’en, the 4th shihanke of this line.
After the death of his teacher Konishi Shigejirō, Ōtsuka Yōichirō continued to preserve the teachings of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū at the Shinmeikai-Dōjō, teaching the school to several students in Kudanshita, Tōkyō, as the 1st shihanke of this line.

In 2010 a foreign student from Germany named Lösch Markus enrolled at the Shinmeikai-Dōjō to study the Hokushin Ittō-ryū under him, soon becoming an uchi-deshi (private student).

Chiba Hiroshi, the current family head of the Chiba family and 5th sōke, was aware of the fact that he couldn’t transmit the teachings of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū to a successor as he didn’t practice the art himself. He thus decided to entrust the Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō and the position of 6th sōke to an actively practicing menkyo-kaiden licensed shihan of the school in 2012. To find a suitable shihan (master), to whom the Hokushin Ittō-ryū could be entrusted, Chiba Hiroshi closely observed all three active lines of the school.

The three still active shihanke lines of the school were the Shinmeikai-Dōjō of Ōtsuka Yōichirō, the Otaru-Genbukan of Konishi Shin’en and the Tōbukan of Ozawa Satoshi. All other lines which were active during the Edo, Meiji, Taisho and Showa periods ceased to exist, leaving only those three lines to actively preserve the teachings of the school.

On the 1st of July 2013 Chiba Hiroshi formally handed over the Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō and the position of sōke to Ōtsuka Yōichirō and his family. Together they reopened the Chiba-Dōjō in Tōkyō.

One year later in 2014 Ōtsuka Yōichirō’s student Lösch Markus received the menkyo-kaiden of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū from his teacher. In addition he was also taken on as a dōjō-yōshi (foster son) of the 6th sōke and was renamed Ōtsuka Ryūnosuke, as Ōtsuka Yōichirō didn’t have any children who could act as his successor for the school.

Two years later on the 26th of March 2016, the official appointment ceremony of Ōtsuka Ryūnosuke to the position of 7th sōke of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū Hyōhō took place at the Nakano Sunplaza Hotel in Tōkyō. During this ceremony the school was handed over from Ōtsuka Yōichirō to his foster son, Ōtsuka Ryūnosuke, with the support of the 5th sōke, Chiba Hiroshi. At that time the Chiba-Dōjō was also officially moved from Tōkyō to Munich in Germany, where it is currently located and serves as the
honbu (headquarters) of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū worldwide. It is led by Ōtsuka Ryūnosuke, the 7th sōke, who teaches and leads the Hokushin Ittō-ryū in Japan and among the world.

The appointment ceremony of the 7th sōke, Ōtsuka Ryūnosuke, 2016 in Tōkyō

The Chiba-Dōjō (honbu) nowadays
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