HEKI DANJŌ MASATSUGU

A Search for Traces between Fiction and Reality
by Johannes Haubner

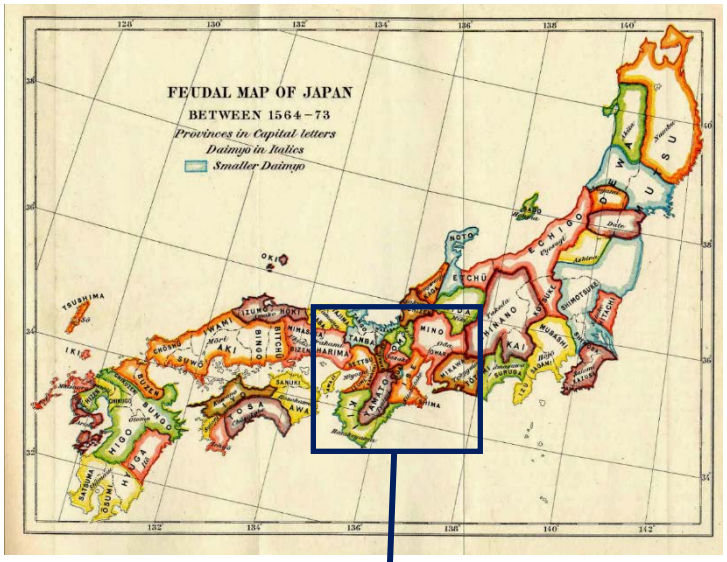
No one in the history of Japan has arguably exerted a greater influence on archery than Heki Danjō Masatsugu. The shooting technique he developed revolutionised the archery practiced by foot soldiers, subsequently giving rise to a multitude of archery schools that either trace their origins directly to him or claim him as their inspiration.

Whether Heki Danjō actually existed remains a subject of debate to this day. This article attempts to synthesise information about his life from publicly available sources and to situate him within his proper geographical and temporal context. These sources include various books and online articles, most notably the publications of Ishioka Hisao (found in 現代弓道講座 *gendai kyūdō kōza*, edited by Uno Yōzaburo), an extensive article by Ken Kurosu on his Kyudo blog, and an analysis of the Heki and Yoshida archery schools by Nakayama Hisao. Further details can be found in the appendix.

The Heki Clan

The Heki clan (*Heki uji*, 日置氏) is an ancient Japanese clan that, according to the S*hinsen Shōjiroku* (新撰姓氏録 *Newly Selected Record of Hereditary Titles and Family Names*, 9th century), migrated from the kingdom of Goguryeo to Yamato Province. Goguryeo, which existed from 37 BCE to approximately 668 CE, was located in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and was one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, alongside Baekje and Silla. According to another account, the Heki clan originated from the Haji clan (*Haji uji*, 土師氏), a powerful Japanese family tasked, particularly between the 4th and 6th centuries (Kofun period), with overseeing burial rituals and the construction of burial mounds.

The Heki clan was originally a hereditary service-holding clan (*naoi uji*, 名負氏 alternative spelling 負名氏). These clans were granted specific hereditary titles to take care of specialised duties, services, and craft guilds for the Imperial Court. As noble officials, members of the Heki clan were said to be responsible for the security and maintenance of the Imperial Palace and, in particular, for managing the lighting and care of the torches. They also participated in Shintō rituals and produced the implements required for these ceremonies. The clan maintained a close relationship with the Kamo clan (*Kamo uji,* 賀茂氏), a lineage dating back to at least the 10th century that held high-ranking positions within the Imperial Court and at Shintō shrines. Like most clan names, "Heki" (or "Hioki," 日置) is derived from the family's ancestral seat: *Hioki-gō* (日置郷) in the Katsujō District (葛上郡) of the historical Yamato Province, an area located in what is now Nara Prefecture. According to records in the *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀), a chronicle dating from the 8th century, this region was home to several legendary imperial palaces in ancient times: the Katsuragi-Takaoka Palace (葛城高丘宮) of the second emperor, Suizei (581–549 BCE), the Wakigami-no-Ikegokoro Palace (掖上池心宮) of the fifth emperor, Kōshō (475–393 BCE), and the Akitsushima Palace (秋津島宮) of the sixth emperor, Kōan (392–291 BCE). Even today, a large number of Shintō shrines can be found in this area.
One branch of the Heki family served as high-ranking vassals in the Okayama Domain (located in Bizen Province, the southeastern part of present-day Okayama Prefecture). Another branch traces its lineage to the Shimazu clan (島津氏). As feudal lords (*daimyō*), members of this branch were granted territories, including the Satsuma Domain (present-day Kagoshima Prefecture). The progenitor of this family line is Shimazu Tadahisa (died 1227). Along with the Heki clan, several other noble samurai families originated from the Shimazu clan.
Furthermore, members of a Heki family were also based in the north of Iga Province, as will be discussed later.
It remains unclear whether the various Heki clans in these different regions were related to one another or whether they shared a common ancestor. It is also not definitively established to which branch of the aforementioned families Heki Danjō Masatsugu belonged. However, some records suggest that he was part of the Heki clan from Iga.



historical map: https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-HUIaj_dyCpc/VUWI4nmh9nI/AAAAAAAAAFos/NM_XmBFiqtI/s1600/feudal-japan.jpg)

Map of the region today © Google Maps

Historical Provinces in 16th-Century Japan (fiefs, domains, daimyates)

The first fiefs (藩 *han*) were granted by the Emperor as early as the 9th century and were tied to a specific level of income. From the 12th century onward, this evolved into a feudal system of governance, which eventually came under the authority of the military government (*shogunate*) and persisted until the Sengoku period, the 'Warring States period' (15th century). At the beginning of the 17th century, the Tokugawa shoguns reorganised the system and brought the fiefdoms (*daimyates*) under their own rule. Heki Danjō is believed to have lived and been active in the historical provinces of Yamato, Iga, and Yamashiro. It is also said that he took part in battles in Ōmi Province.

Ōmi Province (近江国), the main theatre of the Ōnin War (present-day Shiga Pref.)

Yamashiro Province (山城国), home to the former capital, Heian-kyō, seat of the Emperor from 794 to 1869 and seat of the Ashikaga shoguns during the Muromachi period (c. 1336–1573); today the southern part of Kyoto Prefecture

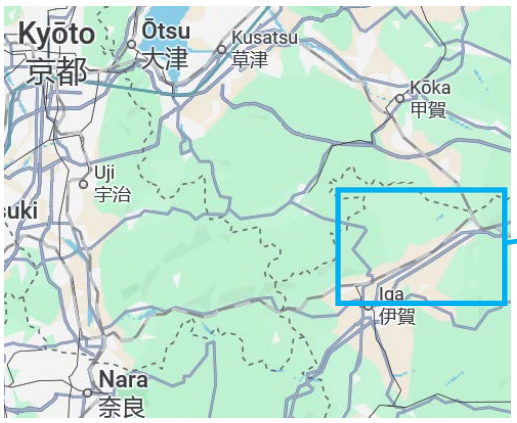
Iga Province (伊賀国), located in the west of present-day Mie Prefecture, is believed to have been the ancestral seat of the Heki clan. Iga served as the point of origin for the Iga lineage of the Heki schools (*Iga Heki Keitō*), founded by Heki Yazaemon Noritsugu. From this lineage, schools such as the Chikurin school of archery later developed.

YAMATO Province (present-day Nara Pref.): Yamato (大和国, "Land of Great Harmony") is considered the heartland of Japan. It was here, starting around 600 CE, that the Japanese Empire evolved from a loose confederation of states. Nara was one of the first imperial capitals in this region. Yamato represents the essence of original Japan. The "spirit of Yamato" (*yamato damashi*) is legendary and serves as the foundation for the code of honour of the warriors (*bushi* or *samurai*).
The Yamato region was the birthplace of the schools of archery that trace back to Heki Danjō (*Yamato Heki Keitō*).

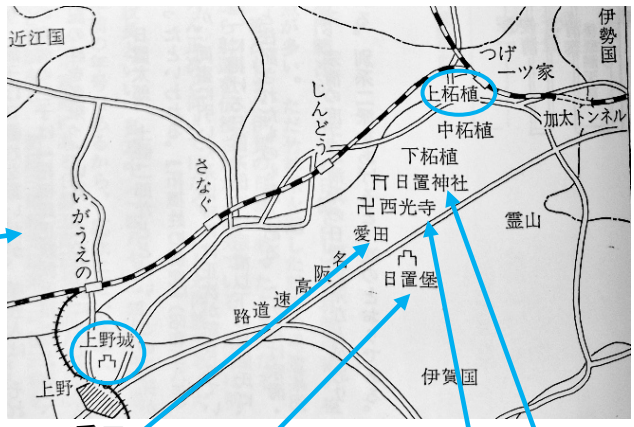
Birth and Naming

Heki Danjō Masatsugu (日置弾正政次) was born in the mid-15th century, likely in the year 1443. The exact dates of his life data are unknown. It is generally believed that he was born in the historical province of Yamato (present-day Nara Prefecture) or the adjacent province of Iga (in the western part of present-day Mie Prefecture). A genealogy of archery (射学系図 *shagaku keizu*) identifies his birthplace as Takaichi (高市) in Yamato Province (Nara Prefecture). Other sources, for instance the records of Yoshida Shigenobu (son of Yoshida Insai), cite Aita (愛田) or Hioki Castle (日置 also pronounced *Heki*) as his place of birth. Both locations are situated in Iga Province (see map below). Iga (in present-day Mie Prefecture) is an agricultural region, which, despite conflicts in neighbouring provinces, was considered a place of peace and security. The military governor (守護 *shugo*) at the time was weak, allowing the local samurai landowners (地侍 *jizamurai*) to develop a system of self-governance. During the 16th and 17th centuries, Iga also became a stronghold for the *shinobi* (忍び), today often romanticised as "Ninja".

After their defeat by the Minamoto clan, the main line of the Taira clan retreated to Iga Province. The Heki clan of Iga is said to descend from Taira no Munekiyo (平宗清) of the Iga-Taira branch. Munekiyo was a retainer to the military leader Taira no Yorimori (平頼盛), who lived in the 12th century. The tutelary shrine of the Heki clan is located in the region of the city of Iga, close to Saiko-ji (西光寺), the Buddhist family temple of Munekiyo. However, as the family consisted of various branches, the surname "Heki" was typically passed down only to the eldest son. It remains uncertain to which specific lineage Heki Danjō Masatsugu belonged. One theory suggests that only Heki Yazaemon Noritsugu (日置弥左衛門範次, 1394–1427), who established the Iga branch of the Heki school, was descended from the Taira clan in Iga, whereas Heki Danjō Masatsugu, who founded the Yamato branch together with his first student, Yoshida Shigekata, is to be associated with the Minamoto clan.



Above: Current map ©Google Maps



Aita 愛田
Heki Castle 日置堡
Munekiyo Family Temple, Saiko-ji 西光寺
Heki Family Shrine 日置神社

The map on the right (from Uno Yōzaburo, Vol. 1, p. 165) shows the ancestral region of the Heki clan in Iga Province (Iga-no-kuni, present-day Mie Prefecture), located northeast of the modern-day city of Iga.

The province of Ōmi (近江国) borders the area to the upper left, and the province of Ise (伊勢国) to the upper right. The town of Kamitsuge 上柘植 (top right) and Ueno Castle 上野城 (bottom left) in the city of Iga are framed in color.

As was customary among the samurai, the name Heki Danjō Masatsugu (日置弾正政次) was composed of a clan name (in this case 日置 *Heki*), an official government title (弾正 *Danjō*), and a personal given name (政次 *Masatsugu*). The term "Danjō" refers to an official responsible for the detection and prosecution of crimes. It is one of approximately one hundred official titles established under the *Ritsuryō system*, a legal framework developed in the 7th century. Such titles were generally hereditary and were often retained even when the holder no longer performed the associated official duties. Heki Danjō also went by several other names or aliases, including Kagemitsu (影光, "shining apparition"), Munekazu (宗品, "source of dignity"), Itoku (威徳, "endowed with high moral character"), and Toyohide (豊秀, "possessing outstanding talents"). In the genealogy of the Yoshida family, the latter, Toyohide, is considered to have been his primary, commonly used given name (rendering his name as Heki Danjō Toyohide, rather than Masatsugu).

Study of Various Archery Schools and Participation in the Ōnin War

Heki Danjō was born in the 15th century, during the Muromachi or Ashikaga period (1336–1573). This era was marked by internal unrest and political instability. He lived through the reigns of three emperors (*tennō*): Go-Hanazono (1428–1464), Go-Tsuchimikado (1464–1500), and Go-Kashiwabara (1500–1526). The Imperial House, however, had become impoverished. It was financially dependent on the shogun and held no political power. Since 1185, following the victory of Minamoto no Yoritomo in the Battle of Dan-no-Ura, the shogun had held sole authority in the country. Yet, the Ashikaga shogun, who ruled during Heki Danjō's lifetime, proved increasingly weak. Neither Ashikaga Yoshimasa, Ashikaga Yoshihisa, Ashikaga Yoshitane, nor Ashikaga Yoshizumi succeeded in maintaining the centralised feudal authority. Provincial governours (*daimyō*) sought to expand their own territories and revolted against the shogun. This conflict escalated into a nationwide civil war, the Ōnin War (1467–1477), which effectively brought an end to the rule of the Ashikaga shogunate.

However, the country found no peace due to the ambiguous power structure, which led to a period of persistent warfare that lasted for about a century: the Sengoku period (戦国時代), the "Warring States period". Large parts of the capital, Kyōto, were destroyed, marauding bands roamed the land, and the economy collapsed. Meanwhile, largely autonomous feudal lords (*daimyō*) fought for predominance. The historical map on page 2 provides an impression of the vast number of fiefdoms (藩 *han)* that existed in Japan at the time. Yet, eras of war are also periods that foster advancements in weaponry. Consequently, not only did the craft of bow-making evolve (for instance, the development of the *Higo Yumi*: composite bows with a wooden core), but archery techniques were also refined, and a number of new schools of archery emerged.

Heki Danjō Masatsugu grew up during this turbulent war-torn era. He was born into a family that practiced the archery tradition of the Henmi ryū (逸見流), a school of archery founded in the 12th century by Henmi Kiyomitsu (1110–1168). Masatsugu was likely a student of Ichikawa Yoriyuki (市川頼行), head of the school at that time. His master entrusted him with three secret scrolls, which had been passed down from Shinra Saburō Yoshimitsu (新羅三郎義光, 1045–1127), a progenitor and patron of many martial arts, including the Ogasawara ryū and Takeda ryū.
Masatsugu, however, did not remain at the level of his master. Instead, he sought to refine the archery techniques he had learned. During his travels across the country, he studied other traditional schools of archery, specifically the Ogasawara ryū and the Takeda ryū. Upon returning to Yamato, he focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the bow's function, paying particular attention to maintaining full tension at the point of maximum draw (審固持満 *shinkojiman*) and achieving a precise, penetrating strike (飛貫中 *hikanchū*).

Between the ages of 25 and 40, he likely served as a samurai of the "Northern Guard" (北面 *hokumen)* at the palace of Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado (後土御門天皇, 1464–1500). Early in this Emperor's reign, the Ōnin War broke out, provoked by succession disputes in Ōmi Province. In various battles, he had to demonstrate his skill as an archer, eventually earning a reputation as a master of the bow. The Ōnin War (1467–1477) marked a fundamental shift in warfare. Whereas, previously, small units led by a mounted samurai would clash, large armies now faced one another. Ordinary foot soldiers were also equipped with bows, making it necessary to refine archery techniques and optimise them for the demands of the battlefield. Heki Danjō improved the archers' posture (*dōzukuri*), including the positioning of the feet (*ashibumi*), adapting these elements to the specific circumstances of combat. Above all, he sought to increase both the accuracy and the penetrating power of the arrows by optimizing the posture and the application of force in the hands, elbows, and shoulders.

It is no longer possible to reconstruct his personal technique precisely today. Written records, such as the *yumi mokuroku* (弓目録) that has survived to the present day, were composed only after his death. Furthermore, his teachings continued to evolve through the generations that followed him. It is likely that even Masatsugu's first student, Yoshida Shigekata, introduced his own distinct emphases.

Heki Danjō and his Student Yoshida Shigekata

The connection with the Yoshida family proved pivotal for the subsequent dissemination of Heki Danjō's technique. The Yoshida clan takes its name from the locality of Yoshida (in the Inukami District of Ōmi Province, present-day Shiga Prefecture). Furthermore, the family had a presence in Izumo Province (the Izumo Yoshida lineage), located in what is now Shimane Prefecture. There were eight primary branches, which produced a number of exceptional archers and horsemen. Some of these branches were linked to the Ogasawara and Takeda clans.
Around the year 1500 (possibly as early as 1494), Heki Danjō visited the family of Yoshida Shigekata (吉田 重賢), who belonged to the Sasaki branch of the Uda-Genji-Yoshida lineage.
Shigekata lived from c. 1462 to 1543 and originated from Kawamori no shō in Ōmi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture). He was himself an outstanding archer, having been trained from a young age in the traditional archery techniques of the Genji (Minamoto) line, specifically the Henmi, Ogasawara, and Takeda ryū. Legend says, when the two first met, Yoshida Shigekata used a large, silver-adorned bow to shoot an arrow through four thick bamboo poles. Heki Danjō then took a thin, low-draw-weight bow and shot an arrow through seven thick bamboo poles. Deeply impressed, Yoshida Shigekata and his son, Yoshida Shigemasa (吉田重政, 1484–1569), invited Danjō to their home and became his students. It remains unclear how many times Heki Danjō visited the Yoshida family, possibly within a period of up to seven years.

Once Shigekata had understood and practically mastered the teachings of Heki Danjō, Heki Danjō presented him with a *Shigetō bow* as a symbol of his exclusive authority to teach (see image). The year in which this took place remains unclear. Shigekata integrated this new technique with existing methods and, at the beginning of the 16th century, established the Heki-Yoshida style. In doing so, he laid the foundation for the Yamato lineage of the Heki school (*Yamato Heki Keitō*). The term „Heki ryū" is sometimes used interchangeably with „Yoshida ryū".

The technique developed by Heki Danjō, which was subsequently disseminated by Yoshida Shigekata, revolutionised archery. Archers who had mastered this method were highly sought after by the warlords of the era. Ultimately, more than eighty percent of the provincial lords (*daimyō*) had their foot soldiers trained in this technique, and Heki Danjō soon came to be celebrated as the "progenitor of the revival of archery" (弓術中興の始祖 *kyūjutsu chūkō no shiso*). The objective of hitting the target with penetration, precision, and consistency (貫中久 *kan-chū-kyū*) remains the motto of the Heki school to this day.

The Final Years of Heki Danjō

According to most sources, around the year 1500, Heki Danjō retired to a monastery on Mount Kōya (高野山 *Kōya-san*) to live as a monk. Following Buddhist tradition, he shaved his head and adopted the name Rurikōbō (瑠璃光坊), literally something akin to "monk with the radiance of lapis lazuli". He drew inspiration for this name from a pilgrim's verse: "As I look upon the dew on the moss in the temple garden this morning, it appears exactly like the luster of lapis lazuli." In Buddhism, lapis lazuli represents wisdom, spiritual growth, inner clarity, and healing power. The dew on the moss symbolises the transient life (無常 *mujō*).

Rurikōbō, also known as Heki Danjō Masatsugu, passed away in this monastery at the age of 59, likely in 1502, though some sources suggest it may have been a few years later. At the time, civil war was still raging throughout the country. It would take nearly another hundred years until the unification of the country, when a centralised state replaced a decentralised feudal social order.

Heki Danjō Masatsugu did not live to see the widespread adoption of his technique, which would eventually be taught across numerous branches. Also, the key tenets of his teachings were only recorded after his death in the scrolls that have survived to the present day: the *Yumi Mokuroku* (弓目録), *Mugonka* (無言歌), and *Shintō no Maki* (神道の巻).

Main hall and cemetery of the Kōya-san (高野山) temple complex, founded in the 9th century, located in a mountain range in Wakayama Prefecture, south of Osaka
(images from Wikimedia Commons, public domain, Creative Commons licenses)

Alternative Theories Regarding the Life and Death of Heki Danjō

Although many details about Heki Danjō have been recounted and passed down, his actual existence remains a subject of debate. The traditional records concerning his life contain numerous contradictions and inconsistencies.

Essentially, there are three theories regarding Heki Danjō Masatsugu:

1. Heki Danjō Masatsugu was a real historical figure, as described above. The ambiguities surrounding his life are merely the result of flawed historical documentation.

2. Heki Danjō Masatsugu is identical with his first student, Yoshida Shigekata. In this view, there was only one individual, and "Heki Danjō" was simply an epithet or alias used by Shigekata.

3. Heki Danjō was an incarnation of Hachiman (八幡), the God of War and a guardian deity, implying that Heki Danjō is a fictional figure. This was the perspective held, for instance, by Yoshida Genpachirō Shigeuji (吉田源八郎重氏, 1562–1638). Shigeuji later adopted the name Insai Issuiken (印西一水軒) and founded the Heki ryū Insai ha school. However, the association with Hachiman could also be an honorific title bestowed posthumously or later in time, much like in the case of the samurai, provincial governor, and renowned military commander Minamoto no Yoshiie (源義家, 1039–1106), who was known as Hachimantarō Yoshiie (八幡太郎義家) due to his bravery and exceptional skill as a general and archer.

Note:
It is undisputed that the Heki-Iga lineage (*Iga Heki Keitō*) does not trace back to Heki Danjō Masatsugu, but to Heki Yazaemon Noritsugu (日置弥左衛門範次, 1394–1427). The Heki ryū Chikurin ha (日置流竹林派), among others, later evolved from this Iga lineage. Whether there was a family relationship between Masatsugu and Noritsugu remains unclear. Furthermore, the theory that the legendary archer Heki Sadatsugu, who lived in Iga Province in the early 15th century, had two sons, who went on to propagate the art of archery is not historically substantiated. Nevertheless, there are a number of connections between Noritsugu's Iga lineage and the Yamato lineage associated with Masatsugu and his student, Yoshida Shigekata.

Pictorial Representations of Heki Danjō

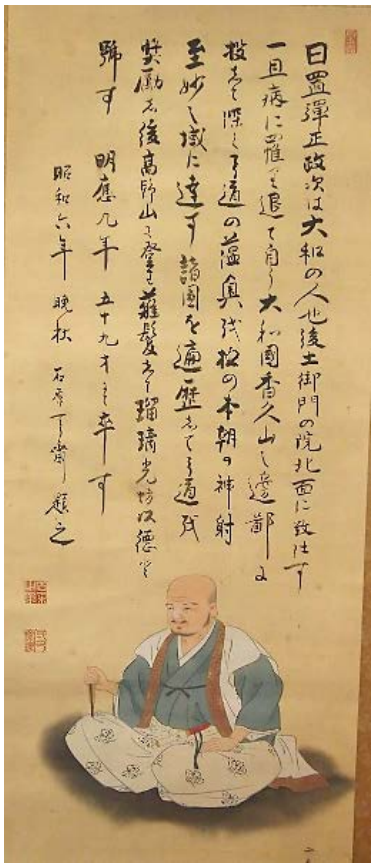
In addition to written accounts, there are several images that purportedly depict Heki Danjō Masatsugu. However, all of these images were created after his death, and it is not always certain whether they truly represent Heki Danjō. Some examples are provided in the following.

The image on the left is a little-known depiction of Heki Danjō Masatsugu. It was reportedly commissioned by Yazaki Hayato (矢崎隼人), an archer of the Heki-Yoshida school in Sendai, and likely dates back to 1681. It is part of the Sendai City Museum collection.
(cf. https://ameblo.jp/kuroken3147/entry-12486271844.html)

The text within the image does not explicitly state the name "Heki Danjō Masatsugu." It does, however, contain references to the Yoshida family, who learned archery on Mount Kōya from a monk named Rurikō (瑠璃), the name adopted by Heki Danjō Masatsugu after he retired to the monastery.

In the image at the bottom left, the name of the person depicted is also not recorded. However, the content of the accompanying text suggests that it is Heki Danjō.

The other two images explicitly mention the name Heki Danjō. The image at the bottom right describes his service as a bodyguard to Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado and his subsequent retirement to Mount Kōya.



Images of Heki Danjō at different stages of life, as shown, for example, by Goka Sensei at a DKyuB seminar
(Goka, Tomotsugu: The History of the Heki Ryū in the Modern Era, lecture at the DKyuB Heki Summer Seminar, 2022)https://kyudo.de/fileadmin/documents/Ausschreibungen_DKyuB_BL_LL/Heki_2022/Vortraege_2022/Goka__Tomotsugu_The_history_of_heki_ryu__For_German_Kyudo_Seminar_in_2022_summer_.pdf)

The depictions below could possibly be mistaken for other individuals. The top image, showing Heki Danjō, is widely circulated but, unlike the two images below, it lacks a caption. While there are only minor differences between the images, they share the same composition, and all the individuals shown wear the same family crest (紋 *mon*) on their kimonos.

Heki Danjō (for example, illustrated in Uno Yōzaburo, Vol. 1):
The original image is said to be in the possession of the Toda samurai family (富田家 *Toda-shi/Tomita-shi*) from Izumo Province (present-day eastern Shimane Prefecture). This family represents the Heki ryū Bishū Chikurin ha.
A notable feature is the family crest on Heki Danjō's kimono: a

so-called *kutsuwa-mon* (轡紋). It represents a horse's metal bit, the piece placed in the animal's mouth to which the reins are attached. In the context of a family crest, it symbolises steadfastness, unyielding resolve, and a martial spirit. It was popular with samurai families.

The Takeda clan bears a similar crest, though with a different internal arrangement of lines.

Taga Takatada (多賀高忠, 1425–1486), also known as Taga Bungo no Kami Takatada (多賀豊後守高忠), who is depicted here, was a member of the Kyōgoku clan. Originating from Ōmi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture), he was a military commander, an excellent archer (including mounted archery), and a talented poet of the Muromachi period.
(This image, dating from 1795, is part of the collection of the Tokyo National Museum.)

Taga Takatada also wears a *kutsuwa-mon* (轡紋) on his kimono, which becomes clearly visible upon closer inspection.

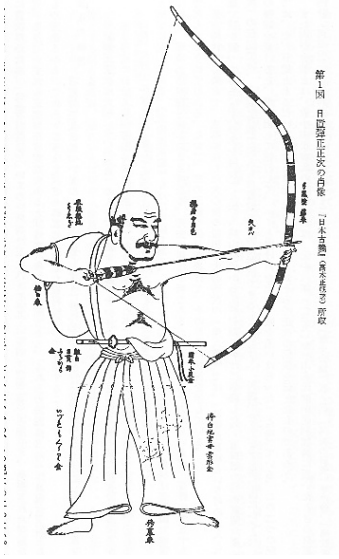
The image on the left is also a depiction of Taga Bungo no Kami Takatada (多賀豊後守高忠) and is a detail from a scroll by Matsuoka Tokikata (1767–1843). It originates from the Sokushū-Tempel (即宗院 sokushū-in) in Kyoto, which was built in the 14th century in honor of Shimazu Ujihisa (島津氏久), a governor of the provinces of Ōsumi, Hyūga, and Chikugo.
The crest of the Shimazu clan is also a *kutsuwa-mon* (轡紋):

or

The Shimazu clan (島津氏) was a noble family dating back to the early 13th century, which held dominion primarily over the Japanese province of Satsuma (present-day Kagoshima Prefecture). From 1609, the Ryūkyū Kingdom (Okinawa) served as their vassal state. The Heki clan (日置家) also emerged as a branch of the Shimazu clan.
Today, the scroll is part of the Waseda University collection.

The most widespread depiction, and likely the only one that shows Heki Danjō with his bow at full draw, is shown below. There are at least four slightly different versions:

Illustration (left) of Heki Danjō (Rurikōbō), published in the *Nihon Kogi* (日本古義), a five-volume work on archaic Japanese terms authored by Takagi Masatomo (高木正朝) and published in 1833.
(The image, which spans two pages in the *Nihon Kogi*, has been joined together here by the author.)
As his monastic name is also mentioned, the image likely depicts Heki Danjō during the final years of his life. According to the text at the bottom, the image originates from the collection of the Sone family. It is not dated. The text in the image includes annotations specifying the colours of the clothing.
The discrepancy between the date of the *Nihon Kog*i (1833) and the date associated with the image from the Sone family collection (1838) may suggest that the latter refers to the date the copy was made, rather than the date of the original.



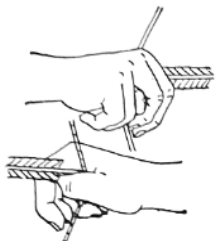
Heki Danjo, as depicted in Uno Yōzaburo (宇野要三郎), *Gendai kyūdō kōza* (現代弓道講座), 5th edition, Vol. 1, p. 160.
The text along the right edge of the image indicates that this illustration is contained in the Nihon Kogi (see above). The upper section of the bow, however, has been reconstructed, though with a flatter curvature compared to the coloured illustration below.
This image bears the same text as the one found in the Nihon Kogi. While not all characters are legible, the text essentially describes the colours of the original: for instance, a black-lacquered bow with rattan wrappings, a cloud-patterned *hakama* (lower-body garment) featuring golden mica, and a vermilion *hakama* lining.
Compared to the coloured depiction from the Sone family collection below, it is noticeable that there are fewer wrappings on the bow, and the sash hangs down more prominently from the waist.

The image on the left was found online. It was also used in a presentation by Goka Sensei during a DKyuB seminar in 2022. The source, indicated along the left edge of the image, is the Sone family collection, and the date is given as the sixth month of Tenpō 7 (June 1838). A similar image (on the right) can also be found online, for example, on Wikipedia.
The two images differ in several respects, including the fletching of the arrow and the size and placement of the inscription on the left edge. Obviously, these are different copies.

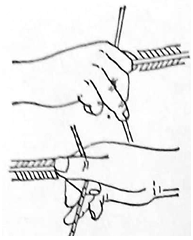
The images from the Sone family collection depict Heki Danjō as the monk Rurikōbō. The bow, *a shigetō yumi* adorned with numerous rattan wrappings (*tō*), as well as the fletching on the arrow, convey a sense of great refinement. The *hakama*, adorned on the outside with a delicate gold pattern and featuring a vermilion lining visible near the feet, as well as the green kimono, which is tied back as is customary for archers, also appear

highly valuable. Furthermore, much like the samurai of feudal Japan, the archer carries a traditional short sword (脇差 *wakizashi*) close to his body.

When attempting to analyse Heki Danjō's shooting style based on what is likely the only surviving image with his bow at full draw, one must bear in mind that the work was created many years after his death, and the artist may have prioritised aesthetic composition over technical accuracy. Nevertheless, assuming that Heki Danjō is depicted correctly at full draw, a comparison with the modern-day Heki ryū Insai ha technique reveals some similarities but also distinct differences.
The positioning of the feet largely corresponds to the contemporary *soto hachimonji ashibumi* (外八文字足踏), a stance resembling the Japanese character for the number eight (八). This represented an innovation for the era, as the T-shaped Ashibumi (丁字足踏 *chōji ashibumi*) was more common at the time.
The left arm is largely extended, and the placement of the hand on the bow (*tenouchi*) is very similar to how it is taught today. However, the right hand lacks a glove and the grip on the string resembles the Mongolian draw (thumb draw) or a variation of a pinch draw. Given that the arrow is positioned on the outside of the bow, the Mongolian technique is the more probable interpretation. It is not recorded whether Heki Danjō wore a thumb ring (指機 *yubiki*), as was customary for this technique, or not.



Mongolian draw
(*mongorugata*)



Variant of the pinch draw
(secondary release pinch draw)
(*tsumamigata no henkei*)

(Images: Uno Yōzaburo, Gendai kyūdō kōza, Vol. 1, p. 33)

What is particularly striking, however, is that the right shoulder is positioned somewhat higher, and the arrow is held significantly lower — unlike in modern practice, where the arrow touches the cheek (*hōzuke*) or the corner of the mouth (*kuchiwari*).
In historical illustrations (see the middle image below), one can see the arrow being held very low at full draw, as is the case in the depiction of Heki Danjō. Since, in the image of Heki Danjō, the arrow points sharply upward, this might also represent a technique used for long-distance shooting. According to research by Toshio Mori (cited by Ken Kurosu in his Kyudo blog post dated December 16, 2011), aiming was achieved, until approximately the 12th century, by sighting directly along the arrow shaft. From around the 14th century, the practice shifted to aligning the arrowhead with the target, and it was not until the 16th century that aiming began to be based on the spatial relationship between the bow/arrow and the target.

Chinese archer:
Detail from the *Wubei Zhi* by Mao Yuanyi (1621);
published in Chinese Archery Studies, p. 31
(Note also the T-shaped foot position!)

Japanese archer with a simple wooden bow: Detail from Uno Yōzaburo, Vol. 1, p. 37
(from the Records of Traditional Wooden-Bow Archery Techniques, 木弓故実撮録 *Kiyumi Kojitsu Satsuroku*)

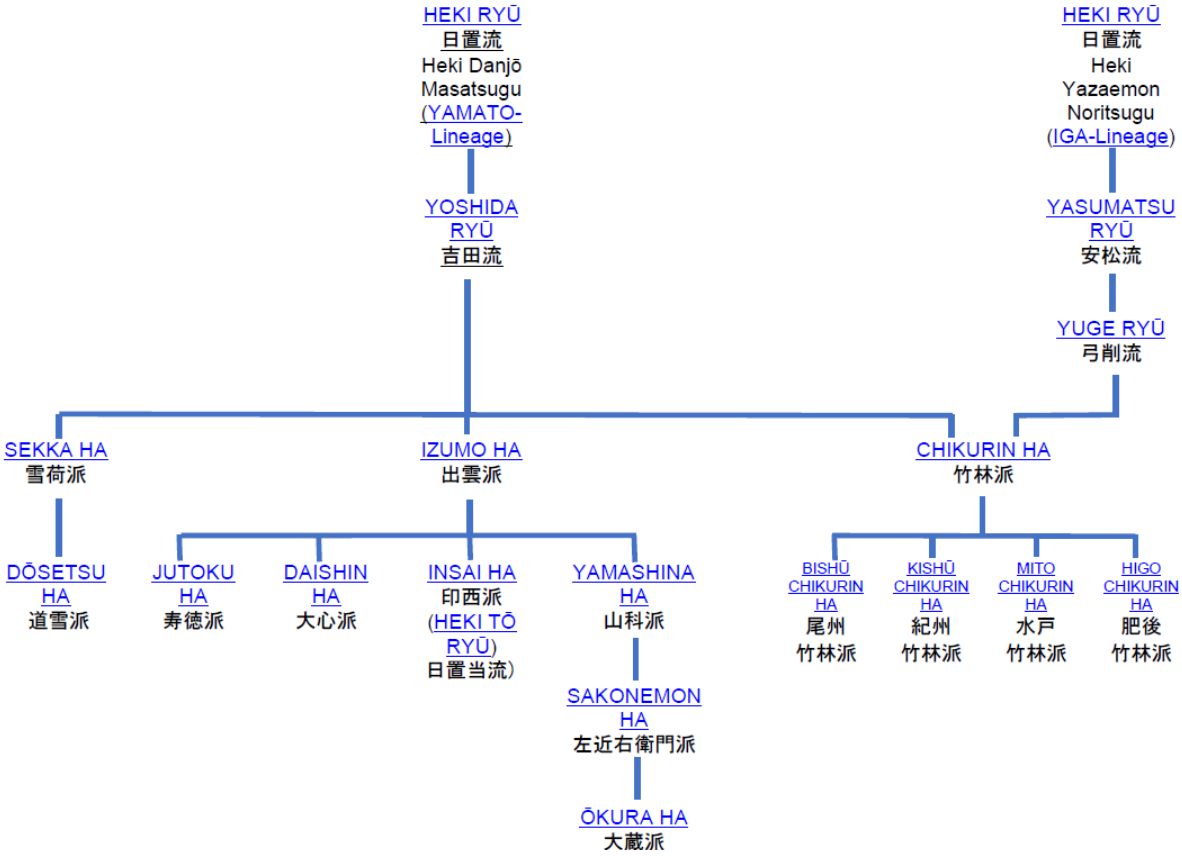
Heki Danjō Masatsugu
(Image from a lecture by Goko Sensei at a DKyuB seminar in 2022)

The technique of holding the arrow very low likely originated in China (see illustration, top left). From the 8th century onwards, Japan maintained an active economic and cultural exchange with that country, which led to Japanese archery being significantly influenced by Chinese traditions. The Mongolian draw technique was introduced via this route. Like the Japanese, the Chinese distinguished between ceremonial archery (禮射 *lǐshè* in Chinese, 礼射 *reisha* in Japanese) and martial archery (武射: *wǔshè* in Chinese, *busha* in Japanese). There were also various schools of archery, as well as a specialised technique for mounted archery (騎射 *qíshè* in Chinese, *kisha* in Japanese). Many archery rituals were adopted from China, and the *Raiki Shagi* (禮記 射義), a text dating back to the time of Confucius, is familiar to every modern *kyūdōka* (practitioner of Kyūdō). The *Shagaku Yōroku* (射學要録), a manual written in 1788 by Hirase Mitsuo (平瀬光雄), a master of the Heki-ryū Chikurin ha, describes concepts such as the "five types of archery" and "six disciplines" (五射 六科 *gosha rokka*). It is largely based on the *Shagaku Seisō* (射学正宗), an ancient Chinese treatise by Gao Ying dating from 1607. Other cultures, such as the Scythians, Assyrians, or Persians, may also have influenced Japanese archery (see Uno Yōzaburō, Vol. 1, p. 38). However, it is generally assumed that the Mongolian draw technique was adopted from China.

Dissemination of the Heki Schools of Archery

There is strong evidence to suggest that Heki Danjō Masatsugu was a historical figure. In any case, his teachings have shaped generations of archers, and — as the following overview illustrates — they gave rise to a multitude of schools (*ryū*) and branches (*ha*). Heki Danjō's teachings spread primarily through the Yamato lineage, also known as the Yoshida ryū. Meanwhile, the Iga lineage traces its origins to Heki Yazaemon Noritsugu. Whether there was a family relationship between Masatsugu and Noritsugu, or if their connection was purely a matter of shared technical principles, remains a subject of debate.

Ishioka Hisao (in Uno Yōzaburō, Vol. 1, p. 155) describes a style of archery (*ryūha*) as the utmost of individual mastery. It is not merely a matter of imitating the technique through great effort and intensive training, but rather of grasping the underlying general principles (一般原則 *ippangensoku*). Refining one's technique while simultaneously upholding these core principles is the task of a master, and constitutes the essence of a school passed down through generations.



Source: Ishioka Hisao et al., Nihon Budō Taikei, Dōhō, Kyōto, 1982, p. 27,
from Munumenta Nipponica 45-3 (complemented by J. Haubner)

The essential features of Heki Danjō's teachings, as preserved to this day within the Heki school, include a firm stance in the shape of the Japanese character for "eight" (外八文字足踏み *soto hachimonji ashibumi*), the correct grip on the bow with the left hand (手の内 *tenouchi*), the optimal pressure of the left hand against the bow while drawing (角見の働 *tsunomi no hataraki*), and the continued expansion of physical and spiritual energy at full draw leading into the release (伸合い *nobiai*). Adhering to these principles results in consistent, centred, and penetrating hits upon the target (貫中久 *kan-chū-kyū*).

Heki Danjō Masatsugu
(Image source: Presentation by Goka Tomotsugu)

Further reading on the Heki ryū (by the author, available in German only)

- Alte und neue Bogenschulen — Der Siegeszug der Heki ryū im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert (https://kyu-do.de/download/Kyudo-Bogenschulen.pdf)
- Heki ryū — Bogenschießen im Zeichen der Sonne (https://kyu-do.de/download/Heki_im_Zeichen_der_Sonne.pdf)

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Neuburg a. d. Donau, October 30, 2026