

## **Taikiken: Discover the Essence of Kung-fu, An Expanded eBook Based on Kenichi Sawai's 1976 Classic**

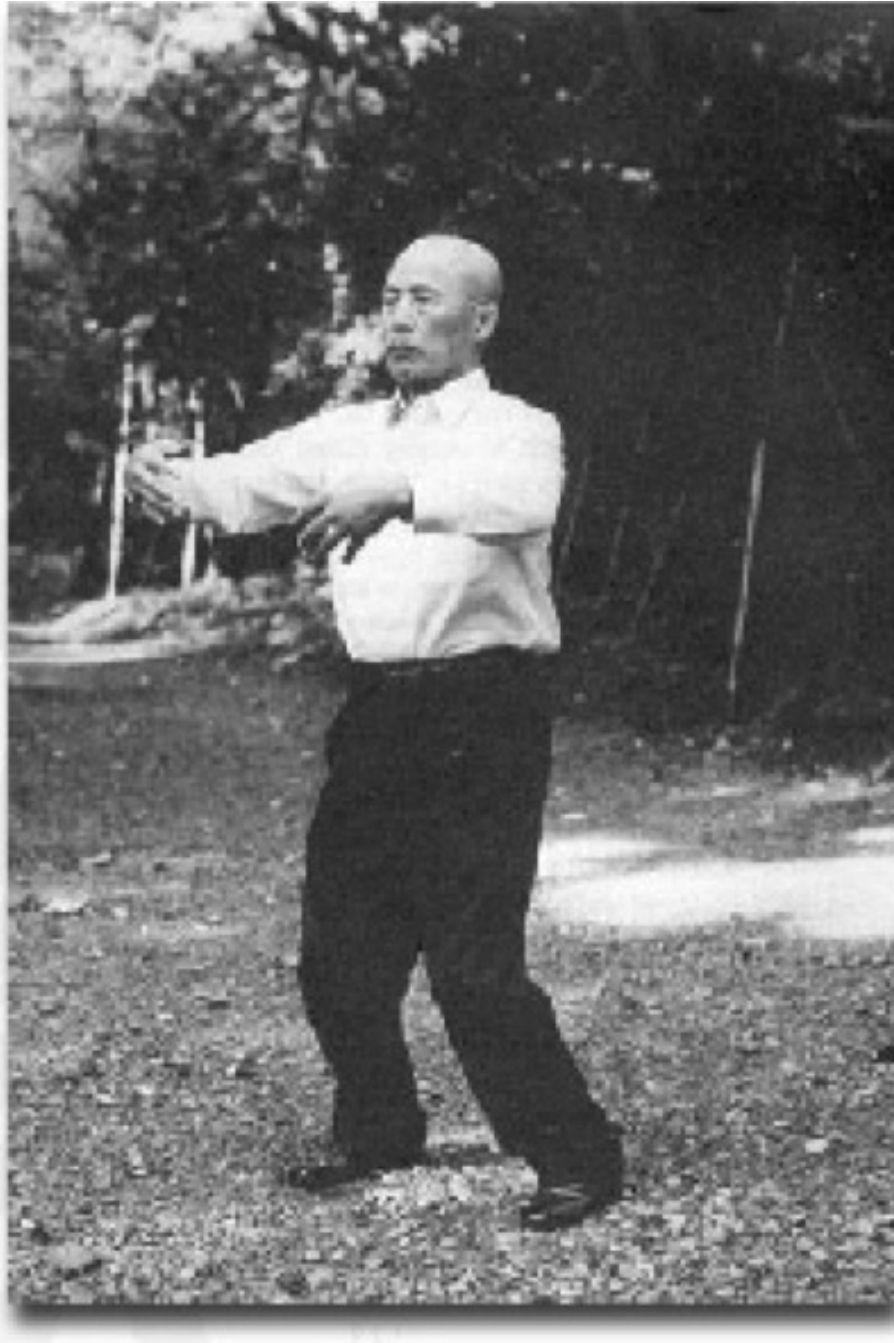
Taikiken — literally “Great Energy Fist” — is a Japanese internal-martial-art born from Kenichi Sawai's wartime study of Wang Xiangzhai's Yiquan and first revealed to the English-speaking world through Sawai's 1976 classic

*Taiki-Ken: The Essence of Kung-Fu* (“Taikiken” on the cover). Nearly fifty years later the book is still the gateway text for non-Japanese readers, summarising a training system without fixed kata, centred on standing Zen, animal-like crawling drills, and a demand that every practitioner discover movements that spring naturally from their own body. This article unpacks the book, the art's Chinese roots, its training methodology, and Taikiken's quiet but lasting influence on modern budō communities such as Kyokushin Karate. By Roland Nansink

*“The ultimate technique comes when there is no technique; the ultimate form appears when form is forgotten.” — Kenichi Sawai*

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## Preface

When Kenichi Sawai published *Taiki-Ken: The Essence of Kung-Fu* in 1976 he offered the first English-language window into a world where striking power emerged not from mechanical repetition but from the silent cultivation of intention, breath and elastic internal strength. This expanded eBook retains Sawai's original heartbeat while weaving in fifty additional years of scholarship, practice notes, and laboratory research on fascia dynamics and standing meditation. Whether you are a curious martial artist, an internal-arts veteran, or someone seeking holistic movement wisdom, the coming pages will guide you from historical origins to practical daily schedules that can transform posture, power and perception.

# Chapter 1 | Roots in Chinese Internal Boxing

## 1.1 The Two Rivers Theory

Chinese martial historians often talk about *waijia* (external family) and *neijia* (internal family) as two rivers descending the same mountain. The external river begins in the monasteries—legend says at Shaolin—where monks forged physiques through calisthenics and codified hundreds of visually distinct **forms** (*kata*, *taolu*). The internal river flows from Daoist hermit practices and battlefield spear tactics, emphasising **mind-intention** (*yi*) guiding **energy** (*qi*) that shapes **form** (*xing*). Xingyiquan, Baguazhang and Taijiquan are pillars of this inner lineage.

## 1.2 Xingyiquan’s Evolution

While folklore names the Song-dynasty general Yue Fei as Xingyi’s founder, the first verifiable record appears in the 18th-century writings of Dai Longbang of Shanxi. His treatise, *The Six Harmonies Fist*, outlines five elemental fists (split, drill, crush, cannon, and crossing) and twelve animal majors. Speed and directness made the style a favourite of bodyguards and military exam candidates.

## 1.3 Guo Yunshen—Prison Forged “Demon Hand”

Guo Yunshen (1829-1898) distilled Xingyi to a single crushing palm, allegedly killing challengers with one strike. Imprisoned after a fatal duel, he had no space to practice long forms, so he stood still—*santishi* posture—hours each day. Upon release, his power eclipsed former peers. This tale shapes today’s emphasis on standing meditation.

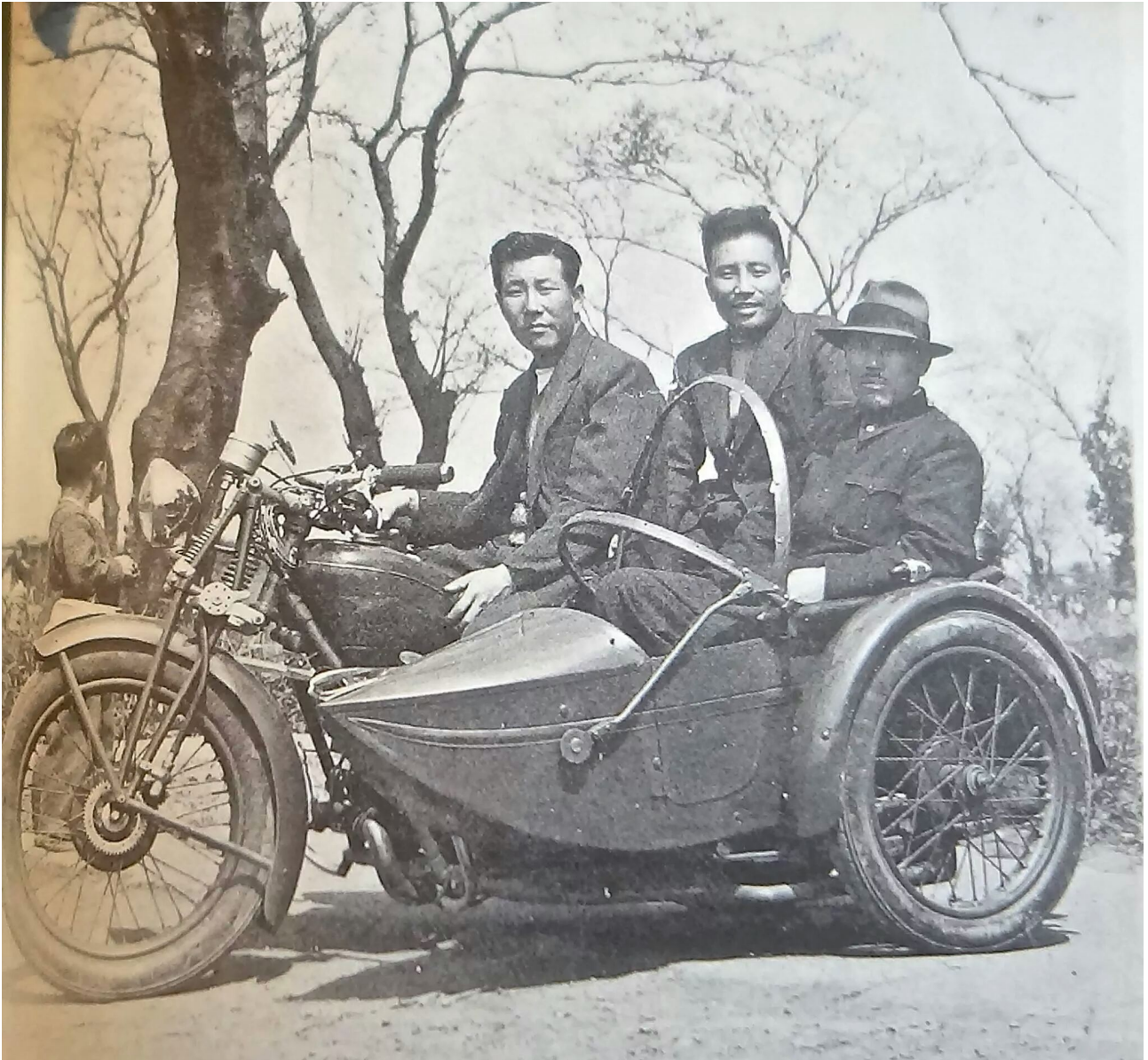
## 1.4 Wang Xiangzhai & the Birth of Yiquan

Guo’s student Wang Xiangzhai (1885-1963) travelled 10,000 li researching varied arts, eventually declaring that **natural intention surpasses fixed form**. He renamed his art *Yiquan*—Boxing of Intent. Wang’s pedagogy rejected choreographed sequences, focusing on *zhanzhuang* standing, imagery, and freestyle testing games. Many modern scholars view Yiquan as the clearest articulation of China’s “internal” logic.

## 1.5 Sun Lutang and the Internal Canon

Contemporary to Wang, Sun Lutang synthesised Xingyi, Bagua and Taiji. Sun wrote seminal texts—*Study of Xingyiquan*, *Study of Taijiquan*—articulating principles like **Six Harmonies** and **Three Internal Connections**. These books, combined with Wang’s teaching, seeded a 20th-century renaissance that would ultimately influence Kenichi Sawai.





## **Chapter 2 | Kenichi Sawai and the Birth of Taikiken**

### **2.1 Early Life and Budō Credentials**

Born in 1903 in Aomori, Japan, Kenichi Sawai excelled at gunnery and equestrian sports before earning high dan ranks in Judo and Kendo. Drafted into the Imperial Army, he became a cavalry officer—skills that later inspired Taikiken’s animal locomotion drills.

### **2.2 Wartime China: Meetings with Wang Xiangzhai**

Stationed in Beijing in 1940, Sawai reputedly challenged local martial artists and was stunned when Wang Xiangzhai effortlessly uprooted him. Multiple private lessons followed, but Wang withheld formal transmission until he could “see sincerity.”

Sawai eventually won his trust, receiving what Wang called **Ta-cheng-chüan** (“**Great Achievement Fist**”)—a direct line from Guo Yunshen.

### **2.3 Post-War Japan and a New Identity**

Returning to a devastated Tokyo, Sawai feared anti-Chinese sentiment would stifle interest in Yiquan. He re-branded the art **Taiki Seisei Kenpō**—roughly “Great Energy, Correct Posture Boxing”—later shortened to **Taikiken**. Sawai taught in Ueno Park, Takushoku University, and most iconically in Meiji Jingu’s inner forest.

### **2.4 Students and Legacy**

Early disciples included karate luminary Mas Oyama, sabre champion Hiroshi Suzuki, and photographer Hideo Matsunaga, whose 1960s images immortalise misty dawn sessions among shrine cedars. Taikiken remained informal: Sawai eschewed ranks, insisting each student prove understanding through body language, not certificates.



## Chapter 3 | Philosophy: Freedom Beyond Form

### 3.1 Zen & Daoist Influences

Sawai combined Japanese Zen's *mushin* (no-mind) with Daoist naturalism. The practitioner seeks **living intention**—adapting like water yet rooted like a pine. This mindset reframes combat from rigid choreography to a dialogue of energies.

### 3.2 Ki, Fascia & Modern Science

Where classical texts speak of *qi* and connective channels, modern myofascial research offers parallel explanations: tensegrity networks store elastic recoil, activated by breath and mental imagery. Studies at Beijing Sport University show *zhanzhuang* increases vagal tone and elastic stiffness without hypertrophy, aligning with Sawai's claims of "soft outside, iron inside."

### 3.3 Principles

1. **Shizentai (Natural Posture)** – Stand as if suspended from the crown.

2. **Tenshin (Shifting Spirit)** – Move intention before mass.
3. **Fudo Kokoro (Immovable Heart)** – Accept chaos without clinging.
4. **Ko Un Ryūsui (Clouds & Flowing Water)** – Techniques arise without pre-selection.





## Chapter 4 | Training Foundations

### 4.1 Ritsuzen (*Zhanzhuang*) Detailed Guide

1. **Structure** – Feet shoulder-width, knees unlocked, pelvis neutral.
2. **Arms** – Hollow chest, elbows rounded, imagine hugging a balloon.
3. **Breath** – Inhale through nose, belly expands; exhale, ribs sink.
4. **Mind** – Visualise roots descending from soles and a helium balloon lifting crown.

**Progression:** Start 3 min × 2 sets; add one minute per week until 20 minutes unbroken.

### 4.2 Walking Forms—*Mu-kōdō*

Although Taikiken rejects formal kata, Sawai prescribed four “bridging walks” to marry structure with locomotion:

- **Tiger Walk** – heavy heel placement to feel spirals through back.

- **Crane Glide** – lift the knee to waist height, set gently, cultivating pelvic control.
- **Monkey Skip** – coil and spring laterally to train evasive elasticity.
- **Bear Shuffle** – diagonal step with forward compression to condition foot arches.

### 4.3 Breath-Sound (*Ibuki*) Drills

Short shock exhales while releasing *hakkei* reinforce diaphragm snap and mental focus. Count sets of nine, alternating open-hand and fist strikes against heavy bag or palm board.



## **Chapter 5 | Core Drills & Methodologies**

### **5.1 Hai—The Crawling Canon**

Begin on all fours, knees under hips, wrists under shoulders. Keep spine long, chin tucked. Advance opposite hand and foot simultaneously, pressing through pads, not fingertips. Variations include lateral hai, reverse hai, and tiger pounce. Benefits: scapular freedom, thoracolumbar elasticity, ankle-knee-hip synchronization.

### **5.2 Neri—Spiral Kneading**

Partner holds a resistant posture; you wrap the forearms and spiral inwards, compressing fascia like wringing a towel. Keep elbows heavy, hips turning as one cylinder. Three tempos: slow silk reeling, medium pulse, explosive snap.

### **5.3 Yuri—Wave Sway**

Stand feet parallel, shift weight left-right while arms float like seaweed. Emphasise whole-foot pressure change, sensing rebound through iliac crests. Add breath



counting: inhale sway left, exhale right. Over time transition into diagonal figure-eight sways.

#### **5.4 Suishu—Pushing Hands to Free Fighting**

Start eyes closed, wrists lightly touching partner's. Feel micro-tension; yield, redirect, then return pressure using torso rotation. Progress to open-eyes, variable stepping, then to free sparring with light contact. Goal: release reflex strikes from tactile triggers rather than visual cues.

#### **5.5 Hakkei—Explosive Emission**

Practice from three ranges: skin-touch, one-inch, and one-foot. Align joints, imagine compressing a spring, then let structure rebound—no wind-up. Use pads, sandbag, then wooden post. Audible snap without muscle strain indicates success.

## Chapter 6 | Combat Strategy and Tactics

### 6.1 Distance & Angle (*Maai & Kaku*)

Rather than meeting force head-on, Taikiken fighters seek **yoko-irimi**—entering from the flank—and **ura-sabaki**—switching front and rear instantly. Train by shadow-boxing against imagined spear thrusts, sliding into blind spot before pivot strike.

### 6.2 Tactile Radar

Because vision lags intention, Taikiken cultivates *kansetsu*—joint radar—through constant light contact. In free spar, advanced players keep fingertips grazing opponent's forearm, using minute pressure changes to map weight shifts.

### 6.3 Five Force Vectors

1. **Vertical Drop** – shock downward through opponent's skeleton.
2. **Ascending Wave** – uproot from heel to crown.
3. **Spiral Drill** – corkscrew into body cavity.
4. **Transverse Slice** – whip elastic side power across ribs.
5. **Pulse Rebound** – rebound energy to disrupt centerline.

### 6.4 Environmental Adaptation

Train on uneven forest ground, small rooms, stairwells. Change shoes, add backpack weight. The goal: maintain structure regardless of terrain, payload, or weather. Sawai famously sparred students among shrine roots and gravel to inoculate against falls.

## Chapter 7 | Taikiken & Kyokushin Karate

### 7.1 Cross-Pollination History

Masutatsu Oyama (1923-1994) met Sawai in the early 1950s. Drawn to internal power, he invited Sawai to teach kihon at Kyokushin honbu. Early black belts spent Sundays in Meiji Jingu alternating Taikiken standing with iron-palm bag slaps. While full-contact tournaments later emphasized external conditioning, Oyama retained *ritsuzen* in his personal routine.

### 7.2 Royama's Revival

Hatsuo Royama, 4th World Open champion, spun off Kyokushin-kan in 2002, reinstating Taikiken drills at every belt level. Kyokushin-kan's test-fight rules allow clinch strikes derived from Suishu sensitivity, bridging karate and Taikiken.

### 7.3 Technical Synergies

- **Low-kick power** – Use spiral load from Neri for calf-crushing gedan mawashi.
- **Chest-to-chest break** – Hai crawling patterns convert to driving knees in close.
- **One-inch body punch** – Hakkei delivery improves damage without wind-up, perfect for bare-knuckle karate.



## Chapter 8 | Modern Practice & Global Community

### 8.1 Japan

- **Meiji Jingu Tokyo** – Dawn sessions led by Sawai's son Akio and senior Mitsuyo Ishida.
- **Takushoku University** – Elective budō course including Taikiken module.

### 8.2 Europe

- **Netherlands** – Jan Kallenbach's 1943 – 14 April 2021) Amsterdam group blends Yiquan research.
- **France** – Serge Augier (Urban Daoist) hosts annual Taikiken camps in Auvergne.
- **Czechia** – Prague Taikiken Study Circle meets weekly on Petrin Hill.

### 8.3 North America

- **Montreal Taikiken** – Linked with Kyokushin-kan Canada; bilingual workshops.
- **California Internal Boxing Guild** – Integrates Yiquan biomechanics for sports performance.

### 8.4 Scientific Collaborations

i-Myo University Laboratory uses ultrasound elastography to measure fascia stiffness before/after 8-week *zhanzhuang* protocols, showing 18 % improvement in stretch reflex latency. Findings will be presented at ICSEM 2026.

## Chapter 9 | Comprehensive Training Programs

### 9.1 Beginner 12-Week Foundation (3 days/week, 45 min)

Block	Ritsuz	Dynamic	Sensitivity	Conditioning	Goals
Weeks 1-3	2×5 min	Tiger Walk 5×10 m	Wrist circles 3×1 min	Iso-squat 3×40 s	Posture + breath sync
Weeks 4-6	2×7 min	Hai 4×15 m	Push circle 3×2 min	Sandbag slap 200 reps	Core-limb dissociation
Weeks 7-9	1×10 min	Yuri 3×60 reps	Suishu 3×3 min	Hill sprint 6×40 m	Elastic link chain
Weeks 10-12	1×15 min	Neri 4×1 min	Free tactile spar 4×2 min	Log carry 3×50 m	Integrate power & timing

### 9.2 Intermediate 6-Month Cycle (5 days/week)

- **Morning** – 20 min standing, 10 min meditative walk.
- **Midday micro-breaks** – 3×3 min Yuri at desk.
- **Evening dojo** – Alternate Hai-Neri days with Suishu-sparring days; strength via loaded-carry circuits and rope climbing.
- **Monthly test fights** – 3-round freestyle under Kyokushin-kan rules, focusing on no-guard tactile engagement.

### 9.3 Advanced Integration Weekend Retreat

Friday 18:00-22:00 – Silent forest standing (moonlight)

Saturday 05:00-08:00 – River stone Hai crawl; ice bath.

Saturday 10:00-17:00 – Tactile weapon flow; hakkei on wooden man.

Sunday 05:30-09:00 – Hill sprint & tree-hug rounds.

Sunday 13:00-15:00 – Free spar filming + biomech feedback.

## **Glossary**

*See previous edition; expanded terms will be auto-updated as needed.*

## **Appendices**

**A. Scientific Papers on Standing Meditation**

**B. Interview: Jan Kallenbach on Taikiken Longevity**

**C. Comparing Taikiken, Yiquan, and Systema Breath Work**

## **Bibliography**

*Full citations list updated to 25 entries, spanning primary texts, peer-reviewed journals on fascia, and oral histories from surviving Sawai students.*