



PRESENTS  
THE 100 NINJA POEMS  
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義盛百首

YOSHIMORI HYAKUSHU  
YOSHIMORI'S 100 POEMS  
OR  
THE 100 SHIOBI-UTA OR NINKA POEMS

The *Yoshimori Hyakushu* is a collection of 100 short Japanese *Waka* poems that are dedicated to conserving instructional statements that teach and instruct on various elements of ninjutsu. They are positioned and collected into block groups which appear to have similar themes and are attributed to the famous 12th century warrior and possible “shinobi”, *Ise no Saburo Yoshimori* 伊勢三郎義盛. However, there is no documented evidence for this and the first recorded account of these 100 poems occurs in a manuscript written in 1612 by *Ogasawara Saku'un Katsuzo* 小笠原作雲勝三 which was printed 4 times during an 11 year period between 1653 to 1664 and titled: *Gunpo Jiyoshu*, 軍法侍用集 which translates as ‘The Collected Way of the Samurai Military Arts’ and is translated here in this book. A short selection of these 100 poems then reappear in the 1676 ninjutsu manuscript *The Bansenshukai* 萬川集海, written by *Fujibayashi Yasutake* 藤林保武. In this ninja document the poems are renamed the *Shinobi-uta* (or *Ninka*) which translates directly as 'ninja poems'. Some of the poems in this latter document were edited and changed from the original text to some extent but have only slight differences in most cases, with the exception of one poem having a reversal in meaning.

A *Waka* or *Tanka* poem is a style of classical Japanese verse, consisting of syllable units of the pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. Collections of this form have been compiled

since ancient times and it constitutes a large genre of Japanese literature. Because of their rhythmic ease people would not only use this form of poetry for literary value but also they used them to teach or learn a set of skills, thus, professions, arts and other elements could be passed down the generations.

The supposed 12<sup>th</sup> century author, *Ise no Saburo Yoshimori*'s origin is not known exactly, however, in the *Tale of the Heike* (1219-1243) he was a bandit in the *Suzuka* Mountains of *Ise* province. There are several theories and legends surrounding his origins, however, there is very little fact. One theory says he came from *Iga*, the home of the ninja. However, his most popular legend tells of how, he met and attacked *Minamoto no Yoshitsune* in the mountains but was defeated by him and became a disciple, thus *Yoshimori* became one of the four great retainers of *Yoshitsune*.

The triumphant, *Yoshitsune* is one of the most popular heroes in Japan's history. He was one of two sons of one of the most important samurai clans at the time, the *Genji* clan along with his elder brother *Minamoto no Yoritomo* the founder of *Kamakura Shogunage*. *Yoshitsune* is well known for his splendid and unexpected tactics and *Yoshimori*, the proposed author of the 100 poems, is also said to have had a unique way of fighting and had been a highly skilled guerrilla tactician.

In the ninja manual, the *Bansenshukai* of 1676, *Yoshimori* is listed as one of 7 generals who use the arts of the shinobi and it is recorded that he was the author of the 100 ninja poems.

Even though these poems are a section of the *Gunpo Jiyoshu* manual of 1612, which is one of the three main documents in this book, they have been given their own chapter as the *Gunpo Jiyoshu* was a collection of wartime experiences and lessons written by *Ogasawara Saku'un*, whereas these poems are attributed to another writer of an early time. Thus, here they form a separate chapter external to the *Gunpo Jiyoshu* where their meanings can be discussed and examined. Furthermore, the discussion of the age of these poems shows us that they are probably not attributable to the 12<sup>th</sup> century hero, however, they are older than the 1612 document that they were recorded in. That gives us a window of somewhere between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century as their point of origin. Therefore, they are *the* oldest collection of written ninjutsu information in the world.

The full 100 ninja poems are available in English on Amazon, March 2011.

ANTONY CUMMINS & YOSHIE MINAMI

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