

Japanese Conceptions of Technique and Educational Theory in *Neko no Myōjutsu*: Exploring the Originality of Japanese *Budō*

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I. Introduction

Budō, which originated in Japan, has now spread widely across the world. In recent years, people internationally have increasingly found the technical philosophy of Japanese *budō* intellectually and culturally compelling, and their interest has further extended to the distinctive cultural background underlying this philosophy of technique. There is a growing tendency to seek an understanding of Japanese culture through *budō*, and within academia *budō* has also become an object of Japanese studies (Japanology). This trend is particularly strong in Europe. At the same time, however, it is frequently pointed out that accurate information concerning *budō* culture has not always been properly conveyed. In response to these global developments, our project team¹ has worked—at the request of European partners—not only to promote practical instruction but also to disseminate knowledge about *budō* culture.² The primary intellectual demand in Europe concerns explanations, grounded in scholarly evidence, of Japanese conceptions of technique as they relate closely to questions of the mind. It is clear that many Europeans perceive the originality of Japanese *budō* precisely in this dimension. More recently, another question has increasingly been raised: *Why is budō positioned as a form of education?* For Japanese people, the presence of *budō* within education is an established and self-evident fact. Indeed, in Japanese junior high schools *budō* even became compulsory following the 2008 revision of the national Course of Study. Looking at a more familiar example, many parents encourage their children to practice *budō* because they believe it cultivates courtesy and resilience. However, when viewed from a broader perspective, it is natural to wonder why techniques originally developed for defeating opponents came to be regarded as possessing such educational value. Japanese people themselves are scarcely aware even of the *strangeness* of this transformation. From a global perspective, however, it may be precisely here that the originality of Japanese *budō* resides. The relationship between Japanese conceptions of technique and education is directly connected to the significance of *budō* in contemporary global society. It is therefore an urgent task to communicate this issue to the international community on the basis of careful scholarly examination.

In light of the above considerations, this paper presents examples of the Japanese conception of technique in *budō* that many non-Japanese practitioners find “cool,” while also offering perspectives

¹ Budo World Project

<https://budo-world.taiiku.tsukuba.ac.jp/>

² Since 2005, I have carried out more than a dozen projects aimed at disseminating *budō* culture through invited lectures and related academic activities. In addition, through projects supported by the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (KAKENHI), I have continuously conducted collaborative academic exchange with Europe in cooperation with the Budō Culture Forum (Hungary) and Eötvös Loránd University. As a particularly notable outcome of this research, I have published books presenting findings on *budō* culture in English as well as in the local language (Hungarian).

for understanding *budō* as a form of education.

Among texts through which one may gain insight into specifically Japanese conceptions of technique in *budō*, *Neko no Myōjutsu*, published in the mid-Edo period, should certainly be regarded as essential. Despite its brevity, the work is rich in implication and presents, in the form of an allegory, a profound conception of technique characteristic of Japan. It is also said to have been kept at hand as a favorite text by Yamaoka Tesshū, and even today many practitioners of *budō* continue to read it with particular interest. *Neko no Myōjutsu* constitutes one chapter of the ten-volume *Inaka Sōji*, written by Issai Chozan (1659–1741), and is often described as an introductory work intended to popularize Daoist (Lao–Zhuang) thought.

The author, Issai Chozan (personal name: Niwa Jūrōzaemon Tadaaki), was a retainer of the Sekiyado domain. He possessed extensive learning, being well versed in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintō, and also deeply knowledgeable in Daoist (Lao–Zhuang) thought and Zen. In Kyōhō 12 (1727), he wrote *Neko no Myōjutsu* (included in *Inaka Sōji*), and two years later, in Kyōhō 14 (1729), he published the well-known *Tengu Geijutsuron*.

The early modern period in which this text was written was a time when martial arts matured as a cultural practice while maintaining close relationships with various fields of learning, religious traditions, and performing arts; as such, it is of great importance in the intellectual history of *budō*. After Tokugawa Ieyasu promoted Neo-Confucianism—particularly Zhu Xi learning—among Confucian traditions, Confucianism came to occupy a central position as a dominant form of scholarship throughout the Edo period. However, from the Genroku era (1688–1704) onward, with the rise of the Wang Yangming school and the Ancient Learning school in opposition to Zhu Xi learning, interest also increased in Daoist (Lao–Zhuang) thought, which has often been described as representing the reverse side of Confucian thought.³ The present text was written against this historical background.

As prior research on this text, insightful studies have been presented by Shinji Nakabayashi, Teruo Oboki, and Akira Yuasa.

Shinji Nakabayashi, drawing on the similarity between *Neko no Myōjutsu* and the “Wooden Cock” episode in the *Zhuangzi*, argues that although earlier studies of martial arts thought have tended to interpret its background primarily in terms of Buddhism and Confucianism, Chinese Buddhism itself was strongly influenced by Lao–Zhuang thought, and that in the Edo period Lao–Zhuang philosophy functioned as a counterpart to Confucianism. On this basis, he points out that research on martial arts thought should be conducted from a broader perspective that includes not only Buddhism and Confucianism but also Daoist philosophy and religious Daoism. Teruo Oboki, focusing on the statement concerning the purpose of swordsmanship—“Swordsmanship does not exist solely for the purpose of defeating others; rather, it is an art that clarifies life and death when one is confronted with an extreme situation”—develops an original interpretation based on this passage. Akira Yuasa points

³ Watanabe Ichirō, ed., *Budō no Meicho* (Tokyo: Copy Shuppanbu, 1979), 9.

out that the text presents a staged model of training progression—moving from *technique* to *ki*, then to *mind*, *no-mind*, and finally *naturalness*—and further draws attention to its discussion of admonitions concerning the proper conduct of training.

As for commentaries on this source, there are also studies by Watanabe Ichirō⁴ and Ishii Kunio⁵; among these, the treatment included in *Budō no Meicho*, edited by Watanabe Ichirō, is particularly detailed. In his discussion of *Neko no Myōjutsu*, Watanabe explains that the text sequentially presents the proper cultivation of technique (*waza*), vital energy (*kisei*), and mental training (*renshin*), and further points out that this structure is modeled on the “Wooden Cock” episode in the *Zhuangzi*, in which a fighting cock is progressively trained by eliminating impulsive aggression, oversensitivity, and empty display.

Although each of these studies elucidates, from its own perspective, the conception of technique in Japanese *budō* articulated in this source, the present paper builds upon these earlier scholarly contributions while further deepening the discussion through engagement with research from other fields. Ultimately, it seeks to examine this issue from the standpoint of educational theory.

II. Lifelong *Budō* Theory and the Progressive Structure of Technical Realization

The narrative of *Neko no Myōjutsu* is structured broadly in two parts. The outline of the first half is as follows.

There was a swordsman named Shōken. A large rat had appeared in his house and ran about boldly even in broad daylight. The master attempted to have his pet cat capture it, but the rat instead leapt at the cat and bit it, causing the cat to cry out and flee. He then gathered cats from the neighborhood reputed to be excellent and sent them into the room where the rat was, yet the rat sprang at them with such ferocity that the cats shrank back and could not advance.

Enraged, the master himself took up a wooden sword and attempted to strike the rat down, but he was unable to defeat it. At this point, Shōken instructed a servant to fetch an incomparable cat aid to live several hundred meters away. The cat brought by the servant did not appear particularly clever, nor did it seem capable of acting with efficiency; however, when it was sent into the room, the rat froze and remained motionless. The cat then approached slowly, as if nothing were amiss, seized the rat, and returned.

That night, the cats who had failed to capture the rat gathered together and held a discussion, seating the old cat in the place of honor. Each of the cats knelt before him and said: although they had been regarded as excellent cats and had trained themselves by sharpening their claws so that they could capture not only rats but even weasels and otters, they had never imagined that such a formidable rat existed. By what kind of method, they asked, had he been able to capture the rat so easily? They

⁴ Watanabe Ichirō, ed., *Budō no Meicho* (Tokyo: Copy Shuppanbu, 1979), 7–16.

⁵ Issai Chozan, *Tengu Geijutsuron / Neko no Myōjutsu*, trans. and annotated by Ishii Kunio (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2014), 153–176.

requested that he teach them this marvelous technique. The old cat, smiling, replied that although they were all young cats who worked quite skillfully, they had likely been caught off guard by an unexpected situation because they did not yet know the correct method. He then asked them first to explain what kind of training each of them had undertaken.

From among the assembled cats, a young and spirited black cat stepped forward and said: he had been born into a household devoted to catching rats and had dedicated himself to that art. From kittenhood, there had been nothing he could not accomplish through swift and agile techniques—he could leap over a seven-foot screen and pass through the smallest openings. By feigning sleep and devising stratagems, or by suddenly springing up, he had never once failed to catch even rats running along beams and girders. Yet on this occasion he had encountered an unexpectedly powerful rat and suffered a defeat he would regret for the rest of his life. It was, he said, truly vexing. In response, the old cat pointed out that his training still placed primary emphasis on technical skill and relied excessively on technique-centered ingenuity.

Next, a large tiger-striped cat stepped forward and said that he believed *ki* to be of primary importance in martial practice and had therefore long devoted himself to training in the cultivation of *ki*. By overwhelming his opponent with *ki*, he would first secure victory at the level of *ki* before advancing against the enemy. He added that he was even capable of capturing rats running along beams and girders merely by fixing them with his gaze. However, he admitted that this method had not worked against the rat in question.

In response, the old cat admonished him, saying that his training relied too heavily on the force of *ki* and did not represent the most effective method. One cannot assume that one is strong while the opponent is weak; even a cornered rat may bite a cat. The resolve of one who is driven to desperation becomes especially powerful, and against such an opponent, the force of *ki* cannot prevail.

Next, a somewhat older gray cat stepped forward and said that he had long cultivated attunement (harmonizing oneself with the opponent), resolving conflicts without contention by bringing himself into accord with his opponent. Accordingly, even if a strong rat were to appear, it would be unable to oppose him. However, the rat he encountered that day did not respond even to such attunement; its movements back and forth were almost divine in nature, and he had never before seen anything like it. In response, the old cat pointed out that the attunement he described was the product of deliberate calculation and therefore lacked the quality of natural attunement.

He continued by explaining that this did not mean that what each of them had cultivated in their training was useless. Technique, *ki*, and attunement were all important; however, when intentional contrivance is present in them, it gives rise to a sense of opposition in the opponent. As for himself, he said, he did not employ any particular technique at all, but simply responded naturally through *mushin* (“no-mind”), thereby emphasizing the importance of *mushin*.

He went on to say that even his own state did not represent the ultimate stage, and then presented the following example.

Long ago, there was a cat in a neighboring village that slept all day. It displayed no forceful presence

and appeared much like a cat carved from wood. No one had ever seen it catch a rat. Yet in the vicinity where that cat lived, there was not a single rat to be found; the same was true even when it moved elsewhere. I once asked that cat the reason for this, but it did not answer. I asked four times, and all four times there was no reply. It was not that it refused to answer; rather, it did not know how to answer. That cat had forgotten both itself and external things and had returned to *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”). The old cat concluded by saying that even he himself fell far short of the state attained by this “wooden cat.”⁶

The foregoing constitutes the first half of *Neko no Myōjutsu*. What deserves particular attention is that the cats who appear in the narrative are described as progressively increasing in age: a “young and spirited black cat,” a “large tiger-striped cat,” and a “somewhat older gray cat.” The cat that ultimately captures the formidable rat with ease is referred to as the “old cat.” It is therefore reasonable to interpret this sequence as a metaphorical representation of the stages of human life, extending from youth through maturity to old age.

Correspondingly, the young and spirited black cat is portrayed as training primarily in *technique*, the tiger-striped cat as cultivating *ki*, the somewhat more mature gray cat as seeking *attunement*, and the old cat as having attained *mushin*. In this way, the text suggests that the content of training deepens progressively over a long period of time as one advances through each stage.

Moreover, the text explicitly states that “this does not mean that what each had cultivated in training was useless,” thereby making clear that training at the earlier stages is neither futile nor unnecessary. Rather, wholehearted engagement with the content appropriate to each stage (and corresponding phase of life) is indispensable for advancing to the next stage, and the text thus emphasizes that training at every stage is essential.

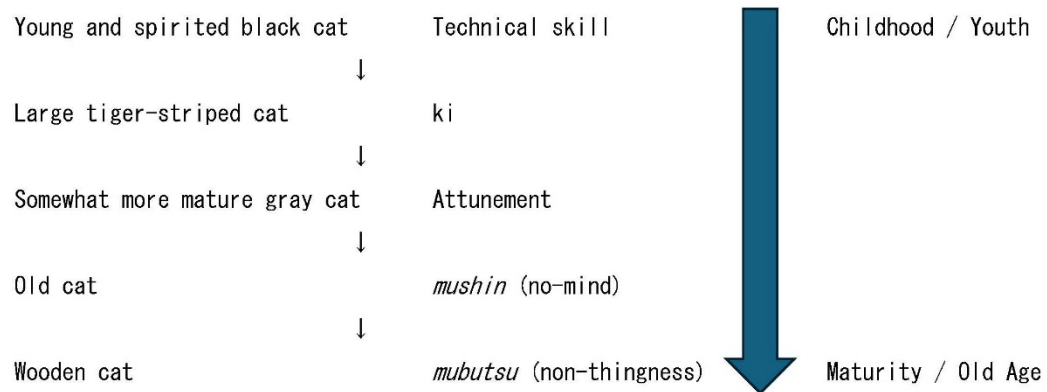
He further states that even his own attainment does not represent the ultimate stage and accordingly presents, as the highest ideal, the state of the “wooden cat,” which displays no aggressive presence and appears as though carved from wood. By remarking that “I myself fall far short of that cat,” he indicates that there always remains a higher level beyond one’s present attainment and thus suggests the necessity of an unending pursuit of further realization.

Although the state of the “wooden cat” is presented here through the keyword *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”), it is not explained in detail in this first half of the text; rather, its fuller significance is elaborated in the latter half.

In other words, it may be said that the first half of the text presents a schematic account of training extending across the whole of one’s life—namely, a model of *lifelong budō* together with a stage-based conception of technical development as outlined below.

Although it has become the prevailing view that the prototype of this episode may be found in the

⁶ See Nakayama Mitsutoshi, ed., *Inaka Sōji; Tōsei Ana-sagashi; Imayō Heta Dangi, Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei*, vol. 81 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990), 42–46.



“Wooden Cock” passage of the Zhuangzi, it will be useful here to review that passage before proceeding further.

There was a man named Ji Shengzi who was training a fighting cock for the king. Ten days after he had taken charge of the bird, the king asked whether it was already fully trained. Ji Shengzi replied, “Not yet. At present it behaves arrogantly and relies on its vital energy alone.” After another ten days, the king again inquired about its progress. Ji Shengzi answered, “Not yet. When it hears a sound or catches sight of a shadow, it immediately reacts to it.” After another ten days, the king inquired once more. Ji Shengzi replied, “Not yet. It still fixes its gaze on its opponents and displays an intimidating force.” After a further ten days, when the king again asked about its condition, Ji Shengzi answered, “Now it has reached full mastery. Even when other cocks crow, it shows no reaction. Seen from a distance, it appears like a cock carved from wood. Its virtue is now complete. None of the other cocks would dare confront it; all turn away and flee.”⁷

The passage describes a process in which impulsive aggression, oversensitivity, and empty display are progressively eliminated, resulting in the completion of an ideal fighting cock that appears as though carved from wood. Judging from its content, there can be little doubt that this allegory constitutes the prototype of *Neko no Myōjutsu*, and that the thought of the Zhuangzi exerted a profound influence on its author, Issai Chozan.⁸

⁷ See Kanaya Osamu, ed., *Zhuangzi*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), 54–55.

⁸ Ichirō Watanabe remarks that the “old cat,” which plays the central role in *Neko no Myōjutsu*, embodies a state of antiquity and austere simplicity that outwardly appears almost dull and unremarkable, while inwardly containing profound wisdom. In this way, he argues, the text brings into relief the Daoist ideal expressed in the phrase “doing nothing, yet leaving nothing undone.”

(Watanabe Ichirō, ed., *Budō no Meicho* [Tokyo: Copy Shuppanbu, 1979], 9.)

When considered together with the “Wooden Cock” episode in the Zhuangzi, it may reasonably be concluded that the first half of *Neko no Myōjutsu* was strongly influenced by Lao–Zhuang thought.

What deserves particular attention here is that, in the “Wooden Cock” passage of the *Zhuangzi*, the strongest fighting cock trained by Ji Shengzi reaches completion in only forty days. By contrast, in *Neko no Myōjutsu*, the progression from the “young and spirited black cat” to the “old cat” suggests a model in which mastery is attained through training sustained over the course of an entire lifetime. In this respect, the notion of lifelong *budō* articulated in this text may be said to be more strongly emphasized than in its Chinese intellectual prototype. Considering that this text circulated widely and continued to be read over a long period thereafter, one may discern here an important characteristic feature of Japanese *budō*.

III. Yi-Based Logic Underlying the Conception of Technique

In the latter half of the text, the discussion develops beyond the level of the “Wooden Cock” episode in the *Zhuangzi*. As in that episode, the first half expresses the depth of technical insight through allegorical reference to animals; however, it does not address martial technique directly. From this point onward, the character of the narrative changes markedly, and through a dialogue between Shōken and the old cat, the discussion shifts explicitly to the problem of swordsmanship.

However, it should be noted that the swordsmanship discussed here is not directed primarily toward defeating an opponent. As the text states, “Swordsmanship is not a discipline devoted solely to striving to overcome an enemy; rather, it is an art through which, when confronted with a critical situation, one clarifies the true nature of life and death.” In this sense, the practitioner’s attention is oriented not toward the opponent but inward toward oneself. This orientation may be understood in relation to the historical transition from the early Tokugawa period’s system of military rule based on armed force to a form of civil governance grounded in learning and thought. In other words, this is a theory of swordsmanship shaped within a peaceful age.

Furthermore, the text states that “a warrior must constantly cultivate this mind and train in this art,” thereby shifting the focus of the discussion increasingly toward the problem of the mind.

The text contains the following passage:

When there is an obstruction within the mind, it manifests itself in outward form. Once form arises, there is an opponent and there is a self, and the two stand in opposition and enter into conflict.

— omitted —

What I call *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”) does not mean absolute emptiness. The mind originally has no form. One should not store up things within it. Even the slightest accumulation becomes something upon which *ki* comes to rely. When *ki* comes to rely, even slightly, on something, it is no longer possible to respond freely and appropriately to changing circumstances without attachment.

— omitted —

By “non-thingness,” I mean neither storing nor relying upon anything—there is neither opponent nor

self; one responds in accordance with whatever comes and leaves no trace behind.⁹

The concept of *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”), which was not fully elaborated in the first half of the text, is here explained as a state in which nothing is retained as an obstruction within the mind. Discussed in relation to *ki*, it is described as a condition in which, precisely because the mind contains nothing, it assumes no fixed form; consequently, there is neither opponent nor self, and one is able to respond freely and spontaneously to any situation.

Furthermore, this point is discussed with reference to the following passage from the ancient Chinese classic the *Yijing*:

“It has no thought and performs no action. Quiescent, it does not move; yet when stimulated, it penetrates the affairs of all under Heaven.”

(That is, the *Yi* is without mind and without intentional action. In itself it remains silent and unmoving; yet when someone approaches it with a question, it responds to that intention and ultimately comprehends all phenomena under Heaven, thereby clarifying their auspicious or inauspicious character.)¹⁰¹¹

Up to this point, it becomes possible to understand that *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”) refers to a condition in which the mind, precisely because it retains nothing within itself, assumes no fixed form. However, the Yi-based theoretical framework that underlies this interpretation remains difficult to grasp.

At this point, Shōken asks, “What does it mean to say that there is neither opponent nor self?”¹²

The old cat replied:

It is because there is a self that there is an opponent. If there is no self, there is no opponent. What is called an “opponent” is originally the name given to something that exists in a relation of opposition. Just as with such pairs as yin and yang or water and fire, whatever has form necessarily has something that stands in opposition to it. If there is no form within one’s own mind, there is nothing that stands in opposition to it. When there is nothing that stands in opposition, there is nothing to contend with. This is what is meant by “there being neither opponent nor self.”¹³

The intellectual foundation of this line of thought is what has been termed Yi-based logic. This interpretation has been advanced by the school of Susumu Takahashi and other scholars specializing

⁹ *Inaka Sōji*, Iwanami ed., 47.

¹⁰ *Inaka Sōji*, Iwanami ed., 47.

¹¹ Takada Shinji and Gotō Motoki, trans., *Yijing* (vol. 2) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), 238–240.

¹² *Inaka Sōji*, Iwanami ed., 47.

¹³ *Inaka Sōji*, Iwanami ed., 47–48.

in East Asian philosophy.¹⁴ Stated in more technical terms, it is a mode of thought grounded in a relational worldview based on mutual correlation (*sōtai*). Susumu Takahashi explains this mode of thought as follows:

In general, the Chinese perceived all things in the existing world in terms of opposing pairs: heaven and earth, hardness and softness, above and below, noble and base, male and female, flourishing and declining, good and evil, right and wrong. All things and events stand in constant opposition to one another while at the same time mutually correlating and depending upon each other. Such relations of opposition, mutual correlation (*sōtai*), and mutual dependence (*sōe*) were expressed, sometimes in terms of particular elements and sometimes in more inclusive terms, as hardness and softness or yin and yang.¹⁵ In other words, ancient Chinese thinkers carefully observed the phenomena of the world and understood that everything that exists is constituted through pairs of opposites symbolized by yin and yang. Furthermore, they recognized that without the existence of women one would not become aware of oneself as male; without knowing what is hot, one cannot understand what it means for something to be cold; without winter, one cannot perceive that it is summer; just as there is “below” because there is “above,” “outside” because there is “inside,” and “left” because there is “right.” In this way, they perceived that members of an opposing pair can exist only because the other exists. Although opposition is present here, there is no division, since each side depends upon the other for its very existence. This relationship is referred to as *sōtai* (mutual correlation). A relationship in which opposing elements exist in mutual correlation is referred to as *taitai* (correlative opposition). A worldview structured by such relations is therefore described as a correlative worldview grounded in the logic of *taitai*. (Although this goes somewhat beyond the immediate scope of the present discussion, ancient Chinese thinkers further conceived that there must be an underlying principle that makes such a correlative worldview possible, and they called this principle the *Dao*. This idea is succinctly expressed in the well-known passage from the *Xici zhuan* of the Yijing: “One yin and one yang—this is what is called the Dao.”)

In other words, within a correlative worldview structured by *sōtai*, the statement “what is called an opponent is originally the name given to a relation of *taitai* (correlative opposition)” succinctly expresses the idea that the self and the opponent exist not merely in opposition but in a mutually correlative relationship. That is, an opponent exists because there is a self; if there is no self, there is no opponent. Here, the “self” refers to the condition of one’s own mind: when the mind retains some attachment, this gives rise to form, and consequently an opponent also comes into being. Conversely, when the mind retains nothing—that is, in the state of *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”) —there is no opponent. It is precisely this state that is represented by the “wooden cat.”

Here, one can clearly discern the influence of Yi-based logic as an underlying philosophical framework.

¹⁴ A school of scholars specializing in East Asian thought associated with Takahashi Susumu, his teacher Hara Tomio, and later scholars inheriting this intellectual lineage.

¹⁵ Takahashi Susumu, *Rōshi* (Tokyo: Shimizu Shoin, 1988), 116.

This Yi-based mode of thought was not limited to Confucianism, Daoism, or any other particular school; rather, it constituted a fundamental stratum of thought rooted in the lived experience of ancient Chinese people prior to the formation of formal philosophical traditions.¹⁶

As suggested by its citation of a passage from the *Yijing*, the conception of technique presented in *Neko no Myōjutsu*, while clearly influenced by Lao–Zhuang thought as earlier scholars have pointed out, also reveals that a more fundamental layer of Yi-based thought underlies it.

IV. Educational Theory

After developing an extremely intricate theory of technique, *Neko no Myōjutsu* undergoes a sudden shift in tone at its conclusion.

The relevant passage is as follows:

A teacher transmits technique and instructs the student in its underlying principles. However, the attainment of truth must come from oneself. This is called *jitoku* (self-attainment). It is also referred to as *ishin denshin* (direct transmission from mind to mind) and *kyōge betsuden* (a special transmission outside doctrinal teachings). This does not mean opposing established teachings; rather, it refers to that which even a teacher cannot directly transmit. This principle applies not only to Zen learning but also to the mental methods of sages and to the arts and techniques centered upon martial arts. In all such cases, attainment is achieved through self-realization, and thus all are forms of *ishin denshin* and *kyōge betsuden*. Teaching merely means pointing out and making known something that already exists within oneself but cannot yet be perceived by oneself. It is not something bestowed by the teacher. Teaching is easy, and listening to instruction is also easy. What is difficult is to discover with certainty that which already exists within oneself and make it truly one's own. This is called *kenshō* (seeing one's true nature). Enlightenment means awakening from the delusive dream of false thoughts. *Satori* (awakening) means the same thing; they are not different.¹⁷

As the foregoing discussion demonstrates, the final section of the text ultimately converges upon the problem of education, as is especially evident in passages beginning with phrases such as “A teacher...” and “Teaching means...”.

The state described throughout this paper as the ultimate secret of swordsmanship—or, borrowing the terminology of the text itself, the state referred to as “awakening” (*satori*)—is emphatically presented as something that even a teacher cannot directly impart. Rather, it is originally inherent within oneself, and what is essential is to attain it through *jitoku* (self-attainment). The role of the teacher is to guide the student toward this realization, never to bestow it. How, then, is such guidance carried out? The teacher instructs through *kata* (form), demonstrating techniques while guiding the

¹⁶ Takahashi Susumu, “Nihon no Budō to Dentō Bunka,” in *Bu to Chi no Atarashii Chihei*, ed. Society for the Studies of Physical Arts (Kyoto: Shōwadō, 1998), 4.

¹⁷ *Inaka Sōji*, Iwanami ed., 49.

student toward the underlying principles embodied within them, while the deeper truths and ultimate realization that must be grasped from them are left for the student to attain independently. Here, the text presents a mode of education distinctive to Japanese *budō*: transmitting without directly teaching.

Particular attention should be paid to the fact that this educational theory is explained through the use of Zen terminology such as *ishin denshin* (“direct transmission from mind to mind”), *kyōge betsuden* (“a special transmission outside doctrinal teachings”), and *kenshō* (“seeing one’s true nature”). This becomes especially clear when considered together with the statement in the text that “this principle applies not only to Zen learning but extends from the mental methods of sages to the arts and techniques centered upon martial arts.” Taken together, these passages make it evident that the educational theory presented here is fundamentally grounded in Zen thought.

V. Conclusion

The principal findings clarified through the present study may be summarized as follows:

- A strong conception of *lifelong budō*, in which training is sustained throughout the entirety of one’s life, was clearly identified.
- A stage-based conception of technical development was recognized, in which the object of cultivation progressively deepens from *technique* to *ki*, *attunement*, *mushin*, and ultimately *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”).
- The text explicitly presents the view that no stage, however elementary, is without value, and that training at every stage—from the most basic onward—is indispensable.
- By stating that “even one’s own attainment does not represent the ultimate stage” and that “I myself fall far short of that cat,” the text indicates that there is always a higher level beyond one’s present attainment and thereby suggests the necessity of an unending pursuit of further realization.
- *Neko no Myōjutsu* clearly takes the “Wooden Cock” episode of the Zhuangzi as its prototype, and there can be little doubt that the thought of the Zhuangzi exerted a profound influence on its author, Issai Chozan. At the same time, however, the consciousness of *lifelong budō* is expressed more strongly in *Neko no Myōjutsu* than in its prototype, the “Wooden Cock” episode, and in this respect an important characteristic of Japanese *budō* may be discerned.
- Within the theory of swordsmanship, an ultimate state is presented in the proposition that “because there is a self, there is an opponent; if there is no self, there is no opponent.”¹⁸ The condition in which the self is absent is expressed as *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”), understood as a state in which the mind retains no attachments whatsoever.
- While this conception of technique clearly reflects the influence of Daoist (Lao–Zhuang)

¹⁸ Tesshū Yamaoka, who is said to have kept this work constantly at hand as a personal guide, expressed the truth he himself attained in the words: “Where there is a self, there is an enemy; where there is no self, there is no enemy.” (*Yamaoka Tetsutarō Sensei Izon Kenpōsho*, vol. 1, *Ken no maki*).

thought, as has been pointed out by earlier scholars, it also became evident that a more fundamental layer of Yi-based thought underlies it.

- The text ultimately culminates in a theory of education, developing a distinctive educational approach characterized by “transmitting without directly teaching.” Viewed from a broader perspective, the entire narrative itself may also be understood as a treatise on education, insofar as the old cat expounds theories of technique to the other cats and to Shōken.
- A pronounced influence of Zen thought was clearly evident in this educational theory.

Finally, it should be noted that this work presents a theory of swordsmanship shaped within a peaceful age and develops an educational theory concerned with the proper cultivation of the mind under conditions of peace. No longer confined merely to the improvement of technical skill, its focus turns instead toward a process of self-pursuit aimed at attaining *mubutsu* (“non-thingness”), a state in which the mind retains no attachments whatsoever. Earlier scholars, including Nakabayashi Shinji, have pointed out that two fundamentally different forms of spirituality can be identified in relation to the problem of the mind in *budō*. One is what Sōgawa Tsuneo describes as “the mentality that operates within a world concerned with how to kill an opponent as skillfully as possible.”¹⁹ It begins with the problem of the mind when confronting an opponent and is connected to the cultivation, *shugyō*, and eventual mastery of technique and art itself. Nakabayashi Shinji referred to this as an artistic and path-seeking spirituality (*geidōteki / gudōteki seishinsei*). In contrast, the other form consists of an ethical and moral spirituality oriented toward an ideal image of the human being, one that is not directly connected to technical skill itself.²⁰ The problem of the mind discussed in *Neko no Myōjutsu* belongs to what Nakabayashi Shinji describes as an artistic and path-seeking spirituality assertive energy (*geidōteki / gudōteki seishinsei*). At the same time, however, its focus is directed not toward the opponent but inward toward the self, and the ultimate state it describes gradually transcends the mere problem of technique itself. It is therefore not difficult to foresee that such a perspective would ultimately develop into a path of human formation. It may be argued that *Neko no Myōjutsu*, examined throughout this study, suggests both the historical process and the underlying reasons by which *budō*—originally an art of combat—came to be positioned in modern society as a means of human education.

It is perhaps in this respect that one may discern an important aspect of the originality of Japanese *budō*.

¹⁹ Sakai Toshinobu, Maebayashi Kiyokazu, Sōgawa Tsuneo et al., “Dai 1-kai BAMIS Kokusai Fōramu Budō Sesshon Shinpojiumu: Budō ni Shinshin Tōgō Kagaku no Kanōsei o Saguru — Kanō Jigorō no Jiseki ni Narai, Ima o Kangaeru [1st BAMIS International Forum Budō Session Symposium: Exploring the Possibility of Mind–Body Integrative Science in Budō — Reflecting on the Present through the Achievements of Kanō Jigorō],” *Budōgaku Kenkyū* 44, no. 1 (2011): 56.

²⁰ Nakabayashi Shinji, *Budō Ronkō* (Tokyo: Nakabayashi Shinji Sensei Isakushū Kankōkai, 1988), 77–84, 200–213.