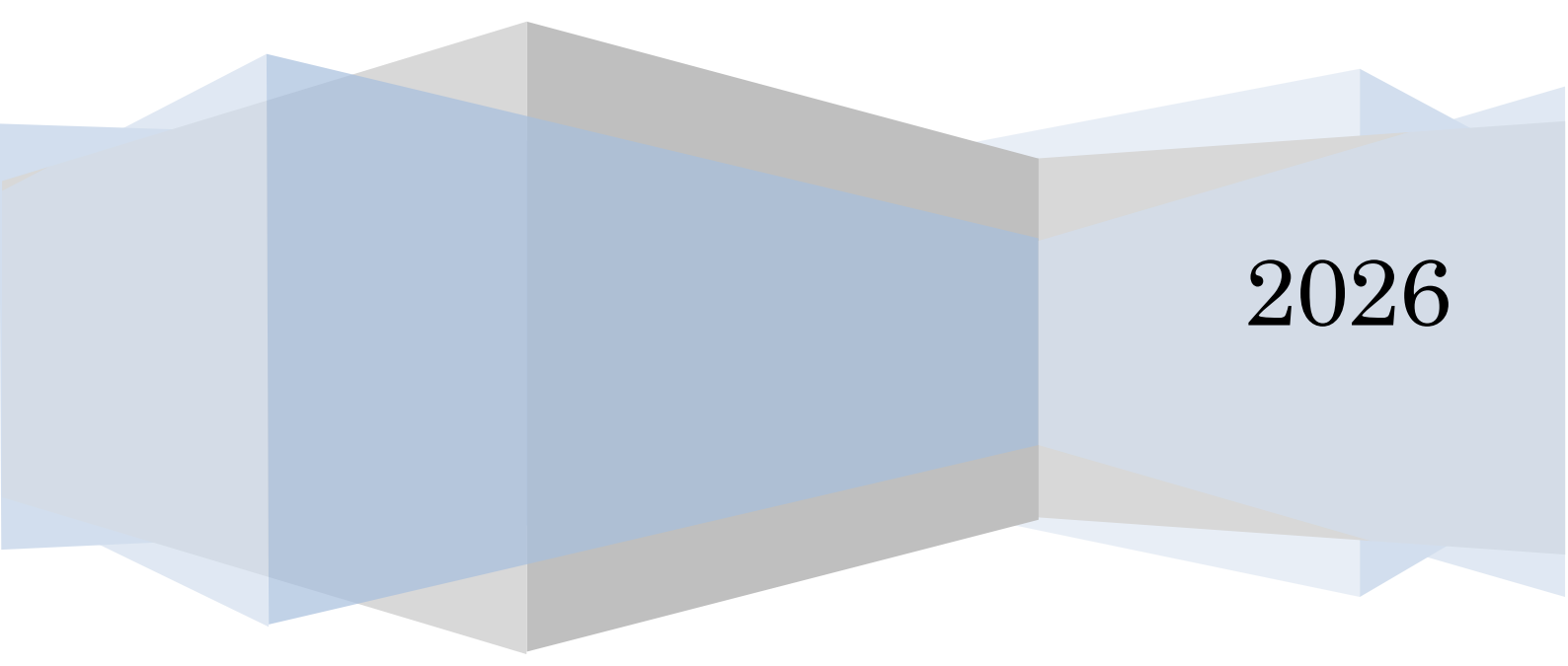


Theory of Budō Culture

Toshinobu Sakai



2026

The History of the Japanese Martial Way

Contents

'Bu' in Ancient Times	4
<i>Ancient Sumo</i>	4
<i>Primitive Beliefs and 'Bu'</i>	4
<i>Ameno-nu-boko</i>	4
<i>Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi</i>	5
<i>Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi</i>	6
<i>Ninuri-ya</i>	7
Medieval 'Bu'	8
<i>The Emergence of the Bushi and Martial Arts</i>	8
<i>The Emergence of the Japanese Sword</i>	8
<i>Archery as the Leading Martial Art of the Medieval Period</i>	9
<i>Training in Mounted Archery</i>	10
<i>The Rise of the Spear</i>	11
<i>Giving Up the Gun: Firearms and the Martial Ethos of the Bushi</i>	11
<i>The Warrior Ethos: The Origins of Bushidō</i>	12
<i>Ascetic Training (Shugyō)</i>	13
<i>The Formation of Martial Art Schools (Ryūha)</i>	14
Early Modern 'Bu'	15
<i>Swordsmanship as the Leading Martial Art of the Early Modern Period</i>	15
<i>Three Major Lineages of Kenjutsu Schools</i>	16
<i>The Transformation of Bu into Geidō — Kata (型・形)</i>	18
<i>The Sword Master Miyamoto Musashi</i>	18
<i>Mental Discipline in Gorin no Sho and Heihō Kadensho</i>	20
<i>The Idea of Katsuninken (活人剣)</i>	22
<i>Two Minds in Budō: The Influence of Zen and Confucianism</i>	22
<i>Budō as an Accomplishment of the Samurai</i>	23
<i>The Emergence of Shinai Striking Practice</i>	24
<i>Issai Chozan's Neko no Myōjutsu — Budō as a Lifelong Path</i>	24
<i>The Flourishing of Shinai Striking Swordsmanship</i>	25
<i>The Three Most Famous Dōjō in Edo</i>	26
<i>The Competitive Turn in Swordsmanship — The Ōishi Susumu Incident</i>	26
<i>The Tōshiya Competition at Sanjūsangendō</i>	27
<i>The Kōbusho</i>	28
Modern and Contemporary 'Bu'	29
<i>The Collapse of the Samurai Class and the Crisis of Budō</i>	29
<i>Gekken Kōgyō (Public Swordsmanship Exhibitions)</i>	29
<i>Yamaoka Tesshū's Theory of Swordsmanship as Spiritual Cultivation</i>	30
<i>Modern and Contemporary Budō Led by the Jūdō of Kanō Jigorō</i>	31
<i>Women's Jūdō in the Thought of Kanō Jigorō</i>	32
<i>The Establishment of the Dai Nippon Butokukai</i>	33
<i>Budō in Wartime Japan</i>	34

<i>The Prohibition and Revival of Budō after the Pacific War</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>The Emergence and Introduction of Modern Forms of Budō.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Budō in Contemporary Global Society.....</i>	<i>37</i>

‘Bu’ in Ancient Times

Ancient Sumo

Little is known about ancient martial ways due to the scarcity of historical records; however, some insights may be gleaned from descriptions found in mythology. Japanese mythology is preserved in texts such as the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*.¹

First, sumo appears to represent one of the earliest forms of combat practice.

In the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, it is recorded that the deities Takemikazuchi-no-Kami and Takeminakata-no-Kami engaged in a contest of strength, which is often regarded as the origin of sumo. This episode forms part of the Kuniyuzuri myth (the transfer of the land), depicting the conflict between Takemikazuchi—an envoy dispatched from the heavenly realm to negotiate the cession of the land from the earthly deity—and Takeminakata, who resisted this demand.

Another well-known sumo-related episode recorded in the *Nihon Shoki* is the contest between Taima no Kehaya and Nomi no Sukune. This bout, said to have been ordered by Emperor Suinin, is often regarded as the first imperial sumo match—that is, a contest held in the presence of the emperor. However, the encounter is described as highly violent, involving mutual kicking and culminating in Nomi no Sukune breaking the waist of the powerful Taima no Kehaya with a kick. In this respect, it differs considerably from the style of combat seen in modern sumo.

Primitive Beliefs and ‘Bu’

The *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* also contain references to sumo, along with depictions of spears, swords, and bows and arrows. However, the accounts of their use are extremely brief, suggesting that, as with sumo, the techniques employed were likely still rudimentary.

Technically rudimentary though they may have been, ancient forms of *bu* possessed a defining characteristic in their close connection with religion. This religion, later termed Shinto, was not a creed propagated by a charismatic founder such as Jesus Christ in Christianity or Siddhartha Gautama in Buddhism. Rather, it was an indigenous faith rooted in the veneration of nature spirits and ancestral deities, commonly described as a form of primitive religion. Ancient weaponry, in particular, appears to have borne a profound connection to this shamanistic religious tradition.

Ameno-nu-boko

Metal weapons appearing in ancient mythology include swords and halberds. Among swords, single-edged blades are referred to as *katana*, whereas double-edged blades are known as *ken*. Although swords were more

¹ Japanese mythology was originally transmitted orally across generations. Written records, however, are preserved in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*, particularly in their accounts of the Age of the Gods, which were compiled in the early eighth century. The *Kojiki*, the oldest extant historical text in Japan, was commissioned by Emperor Tenmu and compiled by Ōno Yasumaro at the command of Empress Genmei in the fifth year of the Wadō era (712 CE), based on the oral recitations of the storyteller Hieda no Are. The *Nihon Shoki*, one of the Six National Histories, was compiled by Prince Toneri and others under imperial order and presented to Empress Genshō in the fourth year of the Yōrō era (720 CE). Because both texts were produced by imperial decree, their political purpose—namely, to legitimize the imperial lineage—is evident, and they therefore require interpretation with this context in mind.

commonly used as practical weapons, those revered as sacred objects associated with religious faith were typically *ken*. This perception had already existed in mainland China, the birthplace of early metal tools. In Taoism, often regarded as an indigenous religious tradition of ancient China, the sword functioned both as a ritual implement and as an instrument of sorcery. A halberd, meanwhile, may be understood as a double-edged blade mounted on a long shaft.

The first weapon to appear in the myths recorded in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* is the halberd. Known as the *Ame-no-Nuboko*, it is said that the heavenly deities Izanagi and Izanami used this weapon to create the first land. This episode is generally interpreted as a depiction associated with the magical or sacred powers attributed to the gods.²

However, the halberd rarely plays a significant role in subsequent myths.³ In this context, the halberd—with its long shaft—may be understood symbolically as representing the separation between the heavenly realm and the earthly world.

Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi

The sword—specifically the double-edged sword (*ken*)—plays a crucial role in Japanese mythology. Two representative sacred swords frequently appear in these myths: the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* and the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*.⁴

The *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* is depicted not merely as a weapon but as a deity in its own right. This is associated with Takemikazuchi, the divine envoy who pacified the earthly realm in the Kuniyuzuri (Transfer of the Land) myth. When Takemikazuchi demanded that Ōkuninushi cede the land, he is said to have thrust his sword upside down into the seashore and sat cross-legged upon its tip while conducting the negotiations. Subsequently, in his contest with Takeminakata—regarded as the mythological origin of sumo—Takemikazuchi's arm is described as transforming into a sword. For these reasons, this deity has come to be understood as a god of the sword.

Takemikazuchi, revered as a deity of the sword, also plays an important role in the legendary accounts of Emperor Jinmu, who is traditionally regarded as Japan's first emperor. Before his enthronement, Jinmu—then known as Kamuyamato Iwarebiko—advanced eastward from Hyūga in the west, pacifying the land as he went. During this campaign, however, he and his entire army collapsed in the region of Kumano after being overcome by the noxious influence of a violent local deity. Observing this from the heavenly realm,

² The deities Izanagi and Izanami are said to have stood upon the Heavenly Floating Bridge (*Ama-no-Ukihashi*) and stirred the ocean below with the Heavenly Jeweled Spear (*Ame-no-Nuboko*). When they drew the spear upward, the brine dripping from its tip accumulated and formed Onokoro Island, which is regarded as the origin of the land. This is an overtly magical depiction and may be interpreted as a form of divine magico-ritual activity.

³ The *Nihon Shoki* (main text) records that, in the Kuniyuzuri (Transfer of the Land) myth, Ōkuninushi presented the Hirohoko of pacification—a sacred halberd—to the two deities Takemikazuchi and Futsunushi.

⁴ Some scholars have proposed that, together with the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* and the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*, the *Totsuka-no-Tsurugi* should be regarded as one of the three great sacred swords of antiquity; however, this interpretation is incorrect. The term *Totsuka-no-Tsurugi* is in fact a common noun meaning “a sword of ten handbreadths,” that is, a sword of considerable length. The representative sacred swords with proper names are the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* and the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*, which should therefore be regarded as the two principal sacred swords of ancient Japan.

Takemikazuchi came to his aid, though the manner in which he did so was rather distinctive. Takemikazuchi himself remained in the heavenly realm, but he dispatched the sacred sword he possessed to the earthly world, and through its spiritual power he aided Jinmu. According to one account, Jinmu did not defeat his enemies by wielding this sword directly; rather, the violent deities were said to have been subdued—or even slain—naturally through the sword’s spiritual potency. This sword is identified as the very one Takemikazuchi had used in the Kuniyuzuri (Transfer of the Land) myth, known as the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi*.

Jinmu subsequently completed the pacification of the land and ascended the throne as the first emperor. This achievement was believed to have been made possible through the assistance of the deity Takemikazuchi, and, in gratitude, Jinmu is said to have enshrined him at Kashima in eastern Japan. This is traditionally dated to the first year of the imperial era (Kōki), conventionally placed at 660 BCE.⁵ The shrine established there is known today as Kashima Jingū. Even now, the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* is carefully preserved at Kashima Jingū as a sacred symbol of Takemikazuchi.⁶ Moreover, the Kashima region has long been associated with the transmission of martial traditions understood as deriving from the sacred arts of this sword, and it continues to be regarded as a spiritual center of *bu* (martial culture).

Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi

The other of the two great sacred swords, the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*, has been transmitted within the imperial lineage since ancient times as one of the *Sanshu no Jingi* (the Three Sacred Imperial Regalia)⁷ and continues to play an important role in Japanese society as a symbol of imperial authority.

In ancient Japan, the emperor was understood as a sacral or shamanic ruler who communicated with the deities through ritual observances, thereby fulfilling the role of averting calamities, bringing prosperity, and ensuring abundant harvests. The implements employed in such rites are thought to have included the sword, the mirror, and the magatama jewel. These objects functioned as ritual regalia (*saiki*) and held central importance in magico-religious ceremonies. It appears natural that these sacred objects were subsequently transmitted to the succeeding emperor, and over time this practice became institutionalized and has continued across generations to the present day. Today, these three treasures—known as the *Sanshu no Jingi*—serve as symbols of imperial authority, and traditionally an emperor is not considered fully legitimate without them. Even in the modern era, during imperial succession, a ceremony known as the *Kenji-tō Shōkei no Gi* (the rite of inheriting the sword and regalia) is conducted to transfer these sacred objects to the new emperor.

For the imperial house, which has traditionally ruled Japan since ancient times, the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*—one of the *Sanshu no Jingi* and an object of exceptional importance—came to be

⁵ In reality, it is generally considered to date to around the fourth century.

⁶ The *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* is presently enshrined as a sacred object at Isonokami Jingū. According to mythological tradition, since the sword did not return to Takemikazuchi but instead came to be enshrined at Isonokami Jingū, Kashima Jingū—where Takemikazuchi is worshipped—carefully preserves what is interpreted as a second-generation sacred sword identified with the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi*. The *Hitachi no Kuni Fudoki* records that in the first year of the Keiun era (704 CE), Sabi no Ōmaro and others forged a sword from iron sand taken from the sacred mountain of Kashima Jingū, and this weapon is sometimes identified with that sacred sword. This blade, a straight sword (*chokutō*) exceeding 2.7 meters in length, has been designated a National Treasure (designation in 1955).

⁷ The *Sanshu no Jingi* refers to the three sacred treasures traditionally transmitted within the imperial house since ancient times: the *Yata-no-Kagami* (sacred mirror), the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*—also known as the *Ame-no-Murakumo-no-Tsurugi*—and the *Yasakani-no-Magatama* (sacred jewel).

surrounded by myths reflecting its profound sacredness. The sword first appears in Japanese mythology in the well-known serpent-slaying episode. In this narrative, the heroic deity Susanoo defeats the monstrous serpent Yamata no Orochi, regarded as a malevolent deity, and obtains a sacred sword from its tail. Because the sword was considered exceedingly divine, Susanoo did not retain it for himself but instead presented it to Amaterasu, the supreme deity of the heavenly realm.⁸

The next prominent appearance of the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi* in mythology occurs in the equally famous Tenson kōrin (Descent of the Heavenly Grandchild) myth. According to this tradition, the ancestors of the imperial line descended from the heavenly realm as descendants of Amaterasu Ōmikami, the ruler of the divine world. At that time, they were entrusted with three sacred treasures—the sword, the mirror, and the magatama jewel—as symbols of their mandate to govern the earthly realm. These treasures are said to constitute what are now known as the *Sanshu no Jingi*.⁹

Originally a ritual implement associated with magico-religious practices, the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi* is portrayed in mythology in the manner described above.

Ninuri-ya

Among the weapons appearing in ancient mythology, mention should also be made of the *ninuri-ya* (vermillion-lacquered arrow), an arrow painted red. Several similar myths concerning the *ninuri-ya* have been transmitted, but their general outline is as follows: a vermillion arrow, regarded as an incarnation of a deity, floats downstream and comes into contact with a shamanic woman, resulting in the conception and birth of a divine child.¹⁰

In ancient Japan, water was believed to possess a generative sacred power capable of bringing forth life. The arrow said to have floated downstream was thus understood to have produced a divine child through the combined spiritual potency of water and the deity it embodied. There also existed a belief that arrows painted red possessed the power to ward off calamities.¹¹ Against the background of such beliefs, it is thought that myths arose in which the vermillion-lacquered arrow was understood to ward off the dangers associated with

⁸ The Yamata no Orochi myth recounts how a heroic figure defeats a monstrous creature and rescues a maiden who is about to be sacrificed. Myths exhibiting a similar narrative pattern are said to be found throughout the world, and in traditional comparative mythology this type has often been interpreted as belonging to the “Perseus and Andromeda” motif. The designation derives from Greek mythology, in which the hero Perseus slays a sea monster and saves Andromeda, the daughter of the king of Ethiopia.

⁹ A clear account of the Three Sacred Treasures in the Tenson kōrin (Descent of the Heavenly Grandchild) myth appears in the *Nihon Shoki* (Book IX, the first alternative version), which states: “Therefore, Amaterasu Ōmikami bestowed upon Ninigi no Mikoto the Yasakani no Magatama, the Yata no Kagami, and the Kusanagi sword—the three sacred treasures.”

¹⁰ In the *Kojiki*, in the account concerning the selection of Emperor Jinmu’s empress, there is a tradition that the deity Ōmononushi transformed himself into a vermillion-lacquered arrow (*ninuri-ya*), floated downstream, and came into contact with a beautiful maiden named Seyadatara-hime, whom he subsequently took as his wife and by whom he fathered a child. Another related tradition appears in a fragment of the *Yamashiro no Kuni Fudoki*, which recounts that Tamayori-hime found a vermillion-lacquered arrow—understood to be an incarnation of a thunder deity—floating downriver. She brought it home and placed it beside her bed, after which she conceived and gave birth to a son.

¹¹ Arrows were originally believed to possess an apotropaic, magico-ritual power. In the case of the vermillion-lacquered arrow (*ninuri-ya*), the red coloration was understood to symbolize the sacred potency of blood, and, combined with the inherent ritual significance attributed to arrows themselves, it was thus regarded as an even more powerful ritual implement.

childbirth and thereby bring forth a divine child.

Medieval 'Bu'

The Emergence of the Bushi and Martial Arts

Those who acquired martial skills and engaged in military service were known as *bushi* (warriors). From roughly the late Heian period, such individuals formed organized groups and, until the Edo period, constituted a distinct social stratum.

The period commonly referred to as medieval Japan, extending up to the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate by Tokugawa Ieyasu, was characterized by repeated conflicts among warrior groups—a turbulent age of warfare often described as the Sengoku era. Among the most famous conflicts were the wars between the Minamoto (Genji) and Taira (Heike) clans.¹²

Martial arts in this period were essentially comprehensive in nature. Rather than specializing in a single discipline, as would later become common, warriors were expected to master a wide range of martial skills. Early medieval warfare was primarily characterized by mounted combat: opponents fought on horseback, shooting arrows, thrusting with spears, striking with swords, grappling to subdue the enemy, and ultimately taking the opponent's head as proof of victory. Medieval warriors placed few restrictions on the types of martial techniques they acquired, seeking instead to master any skill that might enable them to defeat an adversary.

The Emergence of the Japanese Sword

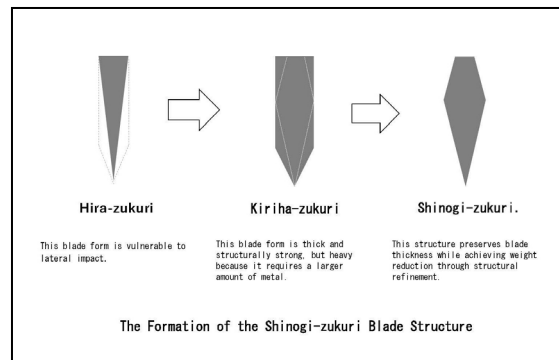
One particularly noteworthy development in this period of Japanese *budō* (the Japanese martial way) history is the completion of the Japanese sword.

It is generally believed that metal culture was introduced to the Japanese archipelago in the late third century BCE, during the early Yayoi period. As noted earlier, single-edged blades were primarily used as weapons. These swords, originally transmitted from China, were straight-bladed weapons known as *chokutō* (straight swords). Over time, however, distinctive modifications unique to Japan began to appear.

One notable development was the emergence of a curved form known as *sori* (curvature). A straight blade was more prone to breakage when striking an opponent; by introducing curvature, some of the impact force could be absorbed, resulting in a blade that was less likely to break or bend and that cut more effectively. It is also said that this transformation was influenced by the *warabite-tō*, a type of sword used by the people known as the Emishi, who held power in the northeastern regions of the Japanese archipelago. The *warabite-tō* was characterized by a straight blade but a handle set at an angle, with the junction between blade and hilt bent in a shape resembling the Japanese character *ku* (く).

¹² In general Japanese historiography, the medieval period is considered to begin with the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate. In this study, however, from the perspective of *budō* cultural history, the discussion will, for convenience, also include the conflicts between the Minamoto (Genji) and Taira (Heike) clans in the late Heian period.

A second development was the emergence of the blade form known as *shinogi-zukuri*, characterized by a ridge line running along the sides of the blade. The cross-section of an ordinary cutting blade is typically triangular, a form referred to as *hira-zukuri* (flat construction), but such a structure is vulnerable to lateral impact and may be prone to breakage. To address this weakness, the blade was made thicker and reshaped so that the cutting edge entered the target more abruptly; this form is known as *kiriha-zukuri*. While this design improved resistance to side impact and reduced the likelihood of breakage, it also increased the overall weight of the blade due to the greater volume of metal. Further refinements therefore produced a lozenge-shaped reinforced cross-section: by forming a lateral ridge known as the *shinogi*, sufficient thickness could be maintained while narrowing the back edge (*mune*) and sharpening the cutting angle. This configuration, which achieved both structural strength and reduced weight, came to be known as *shinogi-zukuri*.



Typically, two defining characteristics of the Japanese sword are cited: its curvature (*sori*) and the *shinogi-zukuri* ridge construction described above. Here, however, attention should also be given to a third aspect—its polishing (*togi*). Japanese swords are polished to an extraordinary degree, often achieving a clarity and brilliance comparable to a mirror. From a purely functional standpoint as a weapon, such extensive polishing is not strictly necessary. Yet in Japanese cultural perception, the highly polished blade was sometimes regarded as reflecting the spiritual state of the owner, and at times even as revealing the presence of the divine. This distinctive mentality may be considered characteristic of Japan, and thus may be noted as a third defining feature of the Japanese sword.

A sword possessing these three characteristics came to be distinguished from earlier blades introduced from China and was thereafter referred to as the Japanese sword (*nihontō*).

It is generally assumed that the techniques associated with the earlier straight swords introduced from China emphasized thrusting or striking down an opponent rather than cutting. With the emergence of the Japanese sword, however, techniques centered on cutting are thought to have developed significantly.

The Japanese sword is generally considered to have reached its completed form around the mid-Heian period. By that time, it had already achieved an outstanding level of functional effectiveness as a weapon. However, its prominent role in Japanese martial traditions would emerge only much later, and it is also true that during this period it remained a secondary weapon.¹³

Archery as the Leading Martial Art of the Medieval Period

Although medieval warriors were expected to master a wide range of martial skills, the primary martial discipline in the early period was archery. Medieval samurai were often described as *yumiya toru mi* ("those

¹³ Some scholars have pointed out that, during the medieval period, there was relatively little opportunity for the Japanese sword to play a decisive role in large-scale battlefield combat. Instead, it was often employed in the practice known as *kubitori* (taking heads). Bringing back the severed head of a fallen opponent served as proof of one's achievement in battle and was directly connected to the acquisition of military distinction and reward. (Suzuki, Shinya. *Katana to Kubitori* [Swords and Head-Taking]. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2009.)

who bear the bow and arrow”), reflecting the central importance of archery in their identity.¹⁴

Their reputation among contemporaries depended largely on the excellence of their archery skills.

A well-known example of an accomplished archer is Nasu no Yoichi, a warrior who fought on the side of the Minamoto (Genji) during the wars between the Genji and Heike clans. At the Battle of Yashima, a woman from the Heike faction, standing aboard a small boat offshore, raised a fan fixed to the tip of a pole as a challenge to the opposing forces. Riding his horse into the sea, Nasu no Yoichi successfully shot down the fan from a great distance. His remarkable display of archery skill is said to have drawn cheers not only from the Genji side but even from the opposing Heike forces.

Training in Mounted Archery

Warfare at the time was primarily conducted on horseback, and unlike modern *kyūdō*, in which archery is practiced from a standing position, it required the specialized skill of shooting a bow while controlling a horse. Consequently, warriors of the period undertook distinctive forms of mounted archery training known collectively as the *Kisha no Mitsumono* (“the Three Mounted Archery Practices”), referring to three specific training exercises in mounted archery.

The first of these practices is known as *yabusame*, a form of mounted archery. In warfare at the time, there existed the practice of *ikki-uchi* (single combat), in which renowned warriors engaged one another in one-on-one duels. Amid the confusion of large-scale battles, a warrior would loudly proclaim his lineage and past achievements while seeking an opponent worthy of combat, as victory over an inferior adversary carried little prestige. When such a suitable opponent was found, it is said that both armies would momentarily cease fighting to observe the duel, during which the two warriors rode past each other on horseback while shooting arrows in combat.¹⁵

¹⁴ A well-known illustration of Minamoto no Yoshitsune’s regard for reputation as a warrior in relation to the bow appears in the “Yumi-nagashi” episode of the *Heike Monogatari*. During combat, Yoshitsune (also known by the title Hōgan) rode his horse into the sea, where his bow was struck from his grasp by the enemy. He retrieved it by drawing it back with his whip, but veteran warriors criticized him for risking his life over what seemed a trivial matter. Yoshitsune, however, explained that he had not recovered the bow because he valued it as a weapon. Had it been a powerful bow, he said, he would have let the enemy take it; rather, he feared that if they obtained such a weak bow, they would mock him, saying, “This is the bow of Yoshitsune, commander of the Genji.” Moved by this sentiment, those present came to appreciate his concern for martial honor. This, in essence, is the substance of the episode.

¹⁵ Among frequently cited examples of *ikki-uchi* (single combat) is the well-known episode from the Battle of Kawanakajima, in which Uesugi Kenshin is said to have charged directly at Takeda Shingen. Here, however, as an illustration that more clearly reflects the ethos of medieval warriors, attention will be given to the account recorded in the *Konjaku Monogatari-shū* (vol. 25, no. 3), describing an instance of *ikki-uchi* between Minamoto no Mitsuru and Taira no Yoshifumi. Long ago, in eastern Japan, there were two warriors, Minamoto no Mitsuru and Taira no Yoshifumi, who competed with one another in martial prowess. Over time their relationship deteriorated, and they eventually agreed upon a day to lead their respective forces into the field for a decisive battle. According to the customary practice of warfare at the time, a messenger from each side first exchanged a *chō* (formal notice of battle). Only after these envoys had returned to their respective camps—without urging their horses or looking back, which was regarded as a mark of true courage—would the shooting of arrows begin to signal the start of combat. Between their armies, the two commanders should instead engage in *ikki-uchi* (single combat) to test their relative skill. Mitsuru accepted this proposal and instructed his troops to remain still and not intervene. The two then fought alone, repeatedly galloping past one another while exchanging arrows and demonstrating considerable skill. Eventually, satisfied that they had each understood the other’s ability, they agreed that further combat was unnecessary and withdrew their forces. Thereafter, it is said,

As warriors charged toward one another from a distance, they were required to shoot several arrows rapidly before their horses passed each other. *Yabusame* served as training to develop precisely this skill. Targets were set up at three points along a straight riding course, and the archer would shoot them while galloping on horseback. The practice emphasized the quick nocking and release of arrows in rapid succession. The Japanese expression *yatsugibaya* (“in rapid succession”) is said to derive from this practice.

The second practice is known as *inuōmono* (dog-chasing archery). Mounted archery imposes several practical constraints, the most significant being that an archer can generally shoot only at targets located on the left side. The Japanese bow is exceptionally long—often exceeding two meters in length—and is held in the left hand while the string is drawn with the right. Consequently, the bow remains positioned on the left side of the horse. Bringing such a long bow across the horse’s neck to the right side while mounted is extremely difficult, and even if it were possible, drawing the bow fully from that position would be impracticable. Thus, an archer could effectively attack only enemies positioned to the left, making skillful control of the horse to keep the target on that side essential. *Inuōmono* was training designed to cultivate precisely this skill. Dogs were released from the center of a circular riding ground, and mounted archers pursued them while shooting. The arrows were specially designed not to penetrate, ensuring that even when struck the animals would not be killed, allowing repeated practice. The exercise thus trained riders to maneuver their horses so that fast-moving targets remained consistently on their left side while shooting.

The third of the *Kisha no Mitsumono* (Three Mounted Archery Practices) is *kasagake*. This involved shooting from horseback at hats suspended at a distance as targets and served as training in long-distance mounted archery.

The Rise of the Spear

In the later medieval period, the spear emerged prominently on the historical stage. Various theories exist regarding its origins: some trace its emergence back to the Heian period, while others place its establishment around the late Kamakura period. In any case, it came into widespread use during the Muromachi period and, by the Azuchi–Momoyama period, flourished as a weapon symbolizing the warrior class.

A well-known example is the legend of the *Shizugatake no Shichihon Yari* (“the Seven Spears of Shizugatake”).¹⁶

In the Edo period, regulations stipulated that *bushi* with stipends exceeding one hundred *koku* were required to carry spears. Some households were described as *yari hitosuji no ie* (“houses devoted exclusively to the spear”), indicating families whose martial identity centered on spear use.

Giving Up the Gun: Firearms and the Martial Ethos of the Bushi

In 1543, firearms were first introduced to Japan by Portuguese sailors who drifted ashore on Tanegashima.

the two maintained amicable relations. This episode is often regarded as a typical example of *ikki-uchi*, illustrating that medieval warriors were motivated not solely by the defeat of an enemy but also by a distinctive warrior ethos.

¹⁶ In 1583, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi fought Shibata Katsuie at Shizugatake, seven of his retainers who had distinguished themselves in battle were later honored under the collective designation *Shizugatake no Shichihon Yari* (“the Seven Spears of Shizugatake”). These seven were Fukushima Masanori, Katō Kiyomasa, Katagiri Katsumoto, Wakisaka Yasuharu, Katō Yoshiaki, Hirano Nagayasu, and Kasuya Takenori.

This event brought about a major transformation in warfare during Japan's Sengoku period.

The bow and arrow, in which the *bushi* had long competed in skill, was gradually supplanted by the firearm, another form of projectile weapon. The Japanese were highly skilled craftsmen, and they soon improved upon the firearms that had been introduced, producing weapons of considerable quality and even exporting them abroad. A well-known example of the military effectiveness of firearms is the Battle of Nagashino in 1575, where the combined forces of Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu, employing large numbers of firearms, defeated the army of Takeda Katsuyori, which was renowned for its traditional cavalry tactics.

Despite this rapid adoption, however, the Japanese eventually abandoned firearms as the central weapon of the warrior class. Rather than placing firearms at the core of martial practice, the *bushi* came in later periods to seek their spiritual foundation in the sword.

The question of why the Japanese gave up firearms was famously discussed by Noel Perrin in his book *Giving Up the Gun*.¹⁷ Perrin points out an important aspect of the mentality of the warrior class. Traditionally, *bushi* had competed on the battlefield by demonstrating the martial skills they had cultivated through rigorous training. A commander who had mastered the bow through years of discipline could achieve heroic status. In contrast, firearms were often used by *ashigaru*, lower-ranking soldiers who performed various auxiliary duties. The idea that a highly trained warrior might lose his life to a single bullet fired by an ordinary foot soldier was something that many *bushi* found deeply unacceptable.

For the warriors of medieval Japan, warfare was not merely an act of killing. It was an arena in which one demonstrated martial skills acquired through discipline, facing death without fear and fighting with honor and fairness. For this reason, *ikki-uchi* (single combat), conducted while both armies looked on in silence, was regarded as the highest form of martial glory. In other words, warfare for the *bushi* contained a distinctive aesthetic dimension. This mentality later formed one of the foundations of what came to be known as bushidō.

The Warrior Ethos: The Origins of Bushidō

Medieval warriors adhered to certain codes of conduct that were expected to be observed in battle. Even amid the turmoil of the Sengoku age—when society was not protected by stable legal institutions—there existed a firmly recognized set of unwritten norms that warriors were expected to follow. In later periods, this came to be called *bushidō* (“the way of the warrior”). However, the term *bushidō* itself did not yet exist in this era. In the early medieval period, when the bow served as the emblematic weapon of the warrior class, such ideals were instead expressed in phrases such as *yumiya toru mi no narai* (“the custom of those who bear the bow and arrow”) or *yumiya no michi* (“the way of the bow and arrow”).

On the battlefield, *bushi* valued fighting openly and honorably, detesting cowardice and striving to face death without fear. To fight bravely and without fear was regarded as *buyū* (martial valor), which represented the highest form of honor for them, and it was for this honor that they fought. Conversely, acts of treachery or cowardice in battle were considered *haji* (shame) and were therefore despised above all else.

In later interpretations of *bushidō*, the ideal of the warrior's pure devotion to his lord on the battlefield is often emphasized. According to this view, the proper conduct of a warrior was to sacrifice himself without hesitation—standing as a shield before his lord's horse and dying honorably in his service. Yet, in reality,

¹⁷ Perrin, Noel. *Teppō o Suteta Nihonjin* [Giving Up the Gun: Japan's Reversion to the Sword, 1543–1879]. Translated by Kawakatsu Heita. Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 2004.

medieval *bushi* could also be quite pragmatic. If they judged their lord to be incompetent or unworthy, it was not uncommon for them to abandon him and enter the service of another lord. There are even well-known examples of warriors who changed their lords as many as seven times.¹⁸ Toyotomi Hideyoshi himself is said to have permitted retainers who wished to serve another lord to depart without objection. Moreover, the phenomenon known as *gekokuujō*—in which those of lower rank overthrew their superiors and rose to power—was also a common occurrence in the medieval period.

Unlike the later Edo period, when a stable social order had been firmly established, this era was marked by the absence of rigid and absolute hierarchical relations. Accordingly, the defining characteristic of medieval *bushidō* lay not only in devotion to one's lord but, as noted earlier, in the individual warrior's determination to avoid *haji* (shame) and to fight in pursuit of *buyū* (martial valor) for the sake of personal honor on the battlefield.

Ascetic Training (*Shugyō*)

In the later medieval period, many extraordinary martial artists emerged who possessed extensive experience in actual combat. In preparation for battle, they undertook rigorous forms of training in order to acquire skills superior to those of others. The following section will examine the kinds of discipline and training through which such abilities were cultivated.

The *Shugyō* of Tsukahara Bokuden

Tsukahara Bokuden is said to have been born in Entoku 1 (1489) and to have died in Genki 2 (1571). Having reportedly experienced thirty-seven battles and slain as many as 212 opponents over the course of his life, he is often regarded as one of the greatest masters in the history of Japanese martial arts.

Although he displayed exceptional skill in martial arts from an early age, Bokuden sought to attain the ultimate secrets of his art. To this end, he is said to have secluded himself at Kashima Jingū, where he engaged in rigorous training for one thousand days. In the end, it is said that he realized the deepest principles of his art through a revelation in a dream. The account ultimately attributes his attainment of mastery to a transmission from the deity, but this revelation was preceded by severe ascetic training carried out in seclusion at a Shinto shrine.

The *Shugyō* of Aisu Ikō

Aisu Ikō was a native of Aisu in Ise (present-day Shima in Mie Prefecture). He is said to have been born in Kyōtoku 1 (1452) and to have died in Tenbun 7 (1538). From a young age he was highly skilled in swordsmanship and was known for his bold exploits. According to some traditions, he even crossed the sea and traveled as far as Ming China. Although he must already have possessed considerable skill, at the age of thirty-six he once again withdrew from the world and undertook rigorous sword training, secluding himself at Udo Jingū in Miyazaki. It is said that on the final day of this period of devotion, a deity appeared to him in a dream in the form of a monkey and bestowed upon him the ultimate secrets of the art.

The *Shugyō* of Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami

Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami was born in Eishō 5 (1508) and died in Tenshō 10 (1582). Hearing of Kamiizumi's reputation, Takeda Shingen attempted to recruit him into his service; however, Kamiizumi declined the offer. Instead, accompanied by several outstanding disciples—among them Jingō Izu-no-Kami and Hikita

¹⁸ Tōdō Takatora is widely known as a warrior who changed his lord multiple times during his career.

Bungorō—he set out on a *musha shugyō*, a journey of martial training. Later, he secluded himself in devotion at Shimogamo Shrine in Kyoto. According to tradition, through a revelatory dream he obtained a scroll recording techniques said to have been learned by Minamoto no Yoshitsune from a monk at Mount Kurama. Based on this revelation, Kamiizumi founded the Shinkage-ryū school of swordsmanship.

The Shugyō of Iizasa Chōisai

Iizasa Chōisai is said to have been born during the Ōei era (1394–1428) and to have died in Chōkyō 2 (1488). Originally from Katori in Shimōsa Province (present-day Chiba Prefecture), he reportedly went to Kyoto in his youth, where his skill in swordsmanship was so highly regarded that he entered the service of Ashikaga Yoshimasa, the shogun of the time. Later, after returning to his home region, he undertook a period of severe ascetic training, secluding himself at Katori Jingū for one thousand days. During this time he practiced swordsmanship as a form of religious austerity while praying to the deity of the shrine. According to tradition, on the final day of this vow he received a revelation of the ultimate secrets of the art in a dream.

The *shugyō* undertaken by these four figures follows a similar pattern. Although each had already possessed extraordinary skill in swordsmanship from an early stage, at some point in life they encountered a sense of impasse. They then withdrew to sacred places—such as Shinto shrines—where contact with the divine was believed possible, and after undergoing severe ascetic training for as long as one thousand days, they attained enlightenment through a revelatory dream. This pattern is commonly referred to as *sanrō kaigan* (enlightenment attained through shrine seclusion). Such practices reflect forms of training strongly influenced by Shinto. Underlying them is the idea of divine transmission, the belief that the ultimate secrets of the martial arts are granted by a deity.

The Shugyō of Saitō Denkibō and Shugendō

During the medieval period, Buddhism gradually spread throughout Japan. In Japan, however, this new religious influence did not come into direct conflict with Shinto, the indigenous system of belief that had developed organically within the archipelago. Instead, the two traditions gradually merged and coexisted. A representative example of such syncretism is *Shugendō*, a tradition formed through the fusion of mountain-based Shinto practices and elements of esoteric Buddhism. The ascetic disciplines of *Shugendō* had a considerable influence on the development of martial arts. A well-known example is Saitō Denkibō (1550–1589), who is said to have learned techniques of the sword and spear from *yamabushi*, mountain ascetics engaged in the rigorous training of *Shugendō*.

The Formation of Martial Art Schools (Ryūha)

Toward the end of the medieval period, a number of masters of swordsmanship emerged who had accumulated extensive experience in real combat. These masters laid the foundations for the later flourishing of swordsmanship. Such figures were known as *kengō* (great masters of the sword). Among them were Tsukahara Bokuden, Aisu Ikō, Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami, Iizasa Chōisai, and Saitō Denkibō.

When a genius swordsman gained fame as a *kengō*, people naturally gathered around him to learn his techniques.

One important feature of martial arts in this period was their strict secrecy. Masters rarely taught the ultimate secrets they had acquired. In the turbulent age of civil war, a warrior's reputation depended on possessing techniques superior to those of others. If such techniques spread widely, the source of that warrior's distinction would disappear. There was also the possibility that one might be killed by techniques one had taught to others.

The world of martial arts was therefore a severe one.

However, as society gradually became more stable, the situation began to change. Some masters started to accept disciples and teach them. In this way, a special group formed around a master and his students. This group came to be called a *ryūha* (martial art school).

The formation of a *ryūha* generally required three conditions:

- the appearance of a genius founder
- the possession of highly advanced techniques
- the establishment of a system of techniques and a structured training curriculum

The last point—the development of a technical system and a training curriculum—was especially important for the future success of a school. Even if the founder possessed exceptional skill, without such a system it was difficult for the school to survive.

Among the martial arts, archery was the first discipline in which organized schools developed, probably in the early fourteenth century. The origins of schools of swordsmanship, jūjutsu, and spearmanship can be traced to the late fifteenth century, but they became firmly established as *ryūha* only from the mid-sixteenth century onward.

Early Modern 'Bu'

Swordsmanship as the Leading Martial Art of the Early Modern Period

Tokugawa Ieyasu emerged victorious from the turbulent age of civil war, unified the country, and established the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603. From that point onward, Japan entered a largely peaceful era in which large-scale warfare was absent until the Meiji Restoration of 1868.¹⁹ In Japanese history, this period is known as the early modern era and is commonly referred to as the Edo period.

Until that time, *bushi* had trained in a wide range of martial arts for use in actual combat and employed them in a comprehensive manner on the battlefield. However, as the peaceful conditions of the Edo period gradually took hold, warriors increasingly began to specialize in a single martial art. It became acceptable for a warrior to identify himself as a specialist in a particular discipline—for example, saying, “My specialty is swordsmanship,” or “My specialty is spearmanship.”

In the early modern period, martial arts were often collectively referred to as the Bugei Jūhappan (“the Eighteen Martial Arts”), indicating the wide range of disciplines practiced by warriors. Among the principal ones were kyūjutsu (archery), bajutsu (horsemanship), sōjutsu (spearmanship), kenjutsu (swordsmanship), suijutsu (swimming techniques), battōjutsu (sword-drawing techniques), tantōjutsu (dagger techniques), jittejutsu (techniques using the jitte truncheon), shurikenjutsu (throwing-blade techniques), gan-shin jutsu (the use of concealed needles), naginatajutsu (halberd techniques), hōjutsu (gunnery), torite (arresting and restraining techniques), jūjutsu, bōjutsu (staff techniques), kusarigamajutsu (chain-and-sickle techniques), mojirijutsu (techniques using the hooked pole weapon called *mojiri*), and shinobi no jutsu (ninjutsu).

However, among the many different martial disciplines practiced during this period, it was kenjutsu

¹⁹ In the early years of the Edo period, there were still several military conflicts, including the Ōsaka no Eki—the Ōsaka Fuyu no Jin (1614) and the Ōsaka Natsu no Jin (1615)—as well as the Shimabara Rebellion (1637–1638).

(swordsmanship) that came to play the leading role in early modern *bu*.

As a symbol of their status, *bushi* always carried two swords—the long and the short sword (*daishō*). These swords were not merely weapons for self-defense but also served as a spiritual support for the warrior. Looking back on the Edo period from the Meiji era, Nitobe Inazō famously described them as “the swords, the soul of the samurai.”

Why, then, did the consciousness of the warrior class come to focus on the sword? On this point, Noel Perrin offers an intriguing interpretation in his work. He argues that “the sword possessed a far greater symbolic significance in Japan than it did in Europe.” From ancient times, swords had been enshrined in Shinto shrines as symbols of the divine, and they also functioned as symbols of imperial authority, as seen in the case of the *Sanshu no Jingi* (the Three Sacred Treasures). According to this view, such symbolism was one of the factors that led the sword to assume the central role in the martial culture of the early modern period. To add a personal observation, it should also be noted that this symbolic significance of the sword is rooted in the mythological imagery surrounding sacred swords such as the *Futsu-no-Mitama-no-Tsurugi* and the *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi*, which were discussed earlier.

Three Major Lineages of Kenjutsu Schools

As mentioned earlier, schools of martial arts maintained a strict code of secrecy. What a student learned from the master was not to be revealed even to close relatives such as parents or siblings. However, unlike many other traditional arts, those who received *menkyo kaiden*—the license of full transmission, granted at the final stage of training—were permitted to take disciples and establish their own branch of the school. In other words, new offshoots of a tradition could emerge. When several talented disciples were trained, multiple branches could develop. The schools of kenjutsu, which led the martial culture of the early modern period, gradually multiplied through such branching processes. By the Edo period, it is said that there were as many as six or seven hundred different schools. Tracing the origins of these schools, scholars generally identify three major lineages from which they ultimately derived.

The origins of these three lineages can be traced to schools founded by famous sword masters of the late medieval period, including Aisu Ikō, Iizasa Chōisai, and Chūjō Hyōgo-no-Kami, whom we discussed earlier.

The first lineage traces its origins to Kage-ryū, founded by Aisu Ikō. Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami, who studied Kage-ryū, later established Shinkage-ryū, literally meaning “New Kage-ryū.” Yagyū Muneyoshi, who challenged Kamiizumi to a match, was defeated and subsequently became his disciple. He inherited Shinkage-ryū within the Yagyū family. Although the school is commonly referred to as Yagyū Shinkage-ryū or sometimes Shinkage Yagyū-ryū, its formal name is simply Shinkage-ryū. The school was later carried on in Edo by Muneyoshi’s fifth son, Yagyū Munenori. In 1594 (Bunroku 3), Muneyoshi demonstrated his swordsmanship at the request of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Tokugawa Ieyasu was the leader who later unified the country and established the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603, making him one of the most important figures in Japanese history. It is said that on that occasion Ieyasu himself took up a wooden sword and faced Muneyoshi. Deeply impressed by the technique of *mutō-dori*—the secret method of Shinkage-ryū in which an opponent’s sword is controlled without using a sword—Ieyasu immediately asked to become Muneyoshi’s student. Muneyoshi declined the request because of his advanced age. Nevertheless, this encounter led to his son Munenori later serving as a swordsmanship instructor to the shogun after the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate. Munenori eventually rose to an important position within the shogunate and was elevated to the rank

of daimyō, making him perhaps the most successful swordsman in terms of political advancement. The lineage of sword schools that runs from Aisu Ikō's Kage-ryū, through Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami's Shinkage-ryū, to the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū of Yagyū Muneyoshi and Munenori developed into one of the most prominent traditions of swordsmanship, closely connected with political authority.

The second lineage traces its origins to Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū, founded by Iizasa Chōisai. Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū is a school closely associated with Katori Jingū. Separately from this tradition, there was another group of sword schools known collectively as Kashima no Tachi, which developed around Kashima Jingū from ancient times. These traditions were transmitted by the shrine priests of Kashima Jingū. Over time, they came to be referred to as Kashima Jōko-ryū ("Upper Kashima Ancient School") and Kashima Chūko-ryū ("Middle Kashima Ancient School"). Tsukahara Bokuden, mentioned earlier, was originally born into the Yoshikawa family, a lineage of priests serving at Kashima Jingū, and was raised learning the sword traditions of Kashima. As the second son, however, he was later adopted into the Tsukahara family. From his adoptive father he studied Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū. Because of this background, Tsukahara Bokuden combined the Kashima sword traditions with Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū, one of the three major sources of kenjutsu, and created a new school known as Shintō-ryū (written with the characters meaning "new" and "to strike"). The lineage that runs from Iizasa Chōisai's Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū to Tsukahara Bokuden's Shintō-ryū developed with a strong religious character deeply connected to Shinto. This forms the second of the three major lineages of kenjutsu.

The third lineage traces its origins to Chūjō-ryū, founded by Chūjō Hyōgo-no-Kami Nagahide. Despite being an extremely important figure in the history of Japanese martial arts, surprisingly little is known about Chūjō Hyōgo-no-Kami. It is only recorded that he lived around the time of the Ōnin War (1467–1477), and even his exact birth and death dates remain unknown. The Chūjō family was originally a powerful clan from Kamakura in Sōshū (present-day Kanagawa Prefecture), and they practiced a family tradition of swordsmanship known as Chūjō-ryū Heihō. Nagahide is said to have mastered this hereditary art while also studying swordsmanship under a monk named Jion. This lineage was later inherited by Itō Ittōsai, who founded Ittō-ryū. Among Ittōsai's disciples was Mikogami Tenzen Tadaaki, who later took the name Ono Jirōemon Tadaaki and succeeded to the tradition. His line came to be known as Ono-ha Ittō-ryū, which, like Shinkage-ryū, served as an official school of swordsmanship for the Tokugawa shogunate. Although Tadaaki did not rise to high political office in the shogunate as Yagyū Munenori did, the Ittō-ryū lineage became the most prosperous school throughout the Edo period. The lineage that runs from Chūjō-ryū, through Ittō-ryū founded by Itō Ittōsai, and then to Ono-ha Ittō-ryū, is not only one of the three major lineages of early modern kenjutsu but also the one that exerted the greatest influence on the techniques of modern kendō.

The Transformation of Bu into Geidō — Kata (型・形)²⁰

In Japan, a very distinctive method came to be used for transmitting the techniques of martial arts.

Martial arts originally aim at killing or injuring an opponent. However, when these techniques are practiced, certain difficulties arise. If one were to cut down an opponent—or be cut down oneself—every time sword techniques were practiced, no one would have enough lives to continue training. A method of practice that removes the element of lethal combat is therefore necessary.

To solve this problem, martial artists adopted a training method already established in other traditional arts of the medieval period, such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and Noh theatre. This method was the practice of *kata*. In this form of training, students imitate predetermined patterns and practice according to fixed conventions.

Applied to martial arts, this means repeatedly practicing predetermined responses—for example, when an opponent strikes in a certain way, one responds in a particular way. The introduction of this training method from the traditional arts into martial practice is referred to as the transformation of *bu* into a *geidō* (artistic way). From this point onward, martial arts increasingly came to be called *bugei* (martial arts practiced as an art).

Training through *kata* (forms) has characteristics that differ from Western-style training methods. At the initial stage, students begin by imitating the prescribed form as precisely as possible, without deviating even slightly. Individual improvisation is not permitted. The method is highly restrictive and can feel quite rigid. The idea is to engrain in the body the exact form of the techniques created by the founder of the school. Through this process, the essential principles of the technique—the *kata* (型) that lie hidden within the outward form—are gradually and naturally internalized. Once this has been achieved, the practitioner can move to the next stage, where the forms can be applied more freely. Even if one moves beyond the original forms and acts more freely, one can still retain the distinctive characteristics of the school. This is because the essence of the tradition has already been deeply ingrained in the body during the initial stage of training. This way of thinking differs from the Western and modern approach in which one begins with simple techniques and gradually develops them into more advanced ones through individual experimentation. Instead, students are first required to practice thoroughly the difficult techniques created by the founder in the form of *kata*, and only later are they gradually allowed greater freedom. This sequence is known as *shu-ha-ri*. The term *shu-ha-ri* originates in the vocabulary of the tea ceremony tradition.²¹

The Sword Master Miyamoto Musashi

The most famous sword master in Japan is undoubtedly Miyamoto Musashi, who was active in the early modern period. He may be regarded as one of the two greatest swordsmen in the history of Japanese martial arts,

²⁰ The term *kata* may be written with two different characters: 型 and 形. The character 型 originally refers to a mold or template and is used to denote something intangible, such as the essence or core principles of a tradition. In contrast, 形 refers to a visible and concrete form—the outward shape in which something is expressed. For example, even after Miyamoto Musashi died, the essential principles of his swordsmanship continued to be transmitted as *kata* (型). When later disciples expressed these principles through actual techniques, they appeared as *kata* (形). While *kata* (型) itself does not change depending on the individual who performs it, the *kata* (形) that expresses it may vary according to the performer—for instance, appearing skillful or unskillful depending on the practitioner.

²¹ The concept of *shu-ha-ri* is discussed in *Fuhaku Hikki*, a work written by Kawakami Fuhaku (1719–1807), the founder of the Edo-Senke school of the tea ceremony.

alongside Tsukahara Bokuden. In Japanese swordsmanship, a single sword is normally wielded with both hands. Musashi, however, fought using two swords, holding one in each hand. This style is known as *nitō-ryū* (the two-sword style) and represents Musashi's distinctive method of combat.

Although Miyamoto Musashi is famous worldwide, he is also a swordsman surrounded by many mysteries. Musashi is generally known as the author of *Gorin no Sho* (The Book of Five Rings). However, no original manuscript of this work survives. All versions that exist today are later copies. For this reason, some scholars have even suggested that *Gorin no Sho* may not have been written by Musashi himself. This issue has long been debated among scholars. When the available evidence is considered as a whole, however, it is generally believed that *Gorin no Sho* was not a fully completed work but rather a draft manuscript that Musashi wrote and left to his disciples. Several points support this interpretation. First, the writing itself is rough and not fully polished. The work is divided into five scrolls: Chi (Earth), Sui (Water), Ka (Fire), Fū (Wind), and Kū (Void). In the Chi and Sui scrolls, Musashi refers to his school as Niten Ichi-ryū, whereas in the later Ka, Fū, and Kū scrolls he calls it Nitō Ichi-ryū. This inconsistency suggests that the text was written during a period when Musashi was changing the name of his school from Enmei-ryū to Niten Ichi-ryū, and that the terminology had not yet been fully standardized in the manuscript. It is likely that Musashi first wrote the work using the name Nitō Ichi-ryū, and later began revising it from the beginning under the new name Niten Ichi-ryū, but the revision appears to have stopped in the Sui Scroll. In other words, the work remained unfinished. If the book had been written by a disciple merely claiming Musashi's authority, such inconsistencies would hardly be expected. For this reason, although the text survives only in a draft-like form, it is most reasonable to conclude that *Gorin no Sho* was indeed written by Musashi himself.

Miyamoto Musashi is believed to have been born in 1584 (Tenshō 12). However, even his birthplace remains uncertain. Some sources claim that he was born in Harima (present-day Hyōgo Prefecture), while others suggest Mimasaka (present-day Okayama Prefecture).

At the age of just thirteen, Musashi is said to have fought his first serious duel and defeated a martial artist named Arima Kihei. At seventeen, he experienced the Battle of Sekigahara, a conflict that would greatly shape the course of Japanese history and usher in the Edo period.

At the age of twenty-one, he traveled to Kyoto, where he repeatedly engaged in matches against practitioners of other schools. He fought and defeated members of the Yoshioka family, a famous lineage of sword masters. However, this victory aroused deep resentment, leading to a series of vendetta-like duels between Musashi and the Yoshioka school.

At the age of twenty-nine, Musashi won the famous duel against Sasaki Kojirō on Ganryū-jima. From the time of his first duel at thirteen up to this point, Musashi is said to have fought more than sixty matches without ever suffering defeat.

However, Musashi abruptly stopped engaging in duels with practitioners of other schools. It is said that he came to realize that his earlier victories did not represent true mastery and therefore began a period of serious training. According to tradition, he attained the true essence of *heihō* (the Way of strategy) at the age of fifty.²²

²² In the *Chi no Maki* (Earth Scroll) of *Gorin no Sho*, Musashi writes:

“Looking back on my past after the age of thirty, I realized that my victories in strategy were not due to having attained the ultimate mastery of *heihō*. Perhaps it was simply that I possessed a natural aptitude for the Way and did not depart from the principles of Heaven, or perhaps the strategy of other schools was insufficient. Thereafter, seeking to understand a deeper principle, I trained morning and evening. In this way I came

Yet the twenty years leading up to that point remain largely unknown—there is almost no reliable information about what kind of training he undertook or how he lived during that period.

Despite his extraordinary skill with the sword, Musashi's life was not especially fortunate. At that time, masters of heihō generally hoped to have their abilities recognized and to be taken into service by a renowned military leader or daimyō. For this reason, many of them traveled throughout the country, engaging in duels with practitioners of other schools in order to establish their reputation. Although Musashi's skill with the sword was widely known throughout Japan, for a long time no lord was willing to take him into service. It was only in his later years that he was finally employed by Hosokawa Tadatoshi, the lord of the Higo Kumamoto domain. Musashi was fifty-seven years old at the time.

Musashi is said to have felt deep gratitude toward Hosokawa Tadatoshi. Out of this sense of appreciation, he presented to Tadatoshi a written record of the essential principles of his swordsmanship. This work is known as *Heihō Sanjūgo Kajō* (*Thirty-Five Articles on Strategy*). However, not long afterward Tadatoshi passed away. It is said that Musashi's disappointment at this loss was profound.

It is said that Musashi wrote *Gorin no Sho* at the age of sixty, although the accuracy of this claim remains uncertain.

At the age of sixty-two, Musashi is said to have written *Dokkōdō* ("The Way of Walking Alone"), summoning the last of his strength before his death. The famous phrase "I have no regrets about my life" comes from a passage in this work.

Mental Discipline in *Gorin no Sho* and *Heihō Kadensho*

In the early modern period, the experiences gained in actual combat during the preceding age of warfare gradually began to be systematized into theory.

During the turbulent era of civil war, there were many masters of martial skill. Yet their daily lives were uncertain, and they could not even know what the next day might bring. Under such circumstances, they were fully occupied simply with fighting in order to survive. With the coming of the Edo period, however—a time that was basically peaceful—there emerged the opportunity to reflect upon experiences from real combat and to formulate them into theoretical principles. The early modern period was therefore a very special moment in history. It was a rare time when people who had actually survived the age of warfare and possessed genuine experience of real combat were still alive and able to systematize those valuable experiences into theory. After this period, martial artists were generally raised in a peaceful environment and lacked firsthand experience of actual warfare, so their theories were developed without such direct experience. It was during this precious period that major martial treatises were written, bringing together and systematizing these ideas.

Among the most important martial texts of the early modern period are *Gorin no Sho* and *Heihō Kadensho*.

Gorin no Sho is said to have been written by Miyamoto Musashi in 1645 (Shōhō 2). As mentioned earlier, it is not certain whether this treatise was actually written by Musashi himself. However, regardless of the circumstances of its composition, there is little doubt that the ideas presented in it reflect Musashi's own theory. Although the writing is very rough and unpolished, practical techniques and tactics drawn from real combat are described in vivid and powerful language.

naturally to grasp the Way of strategy when I was about fifty years old."

Heihō Kadensho was written by Yagyū Munenori in 1632 (Kan'ei 9). As the official swordsmanship instructor to the shogun, Munenori presented a highly refined theory worthy of his position, expressed in elegant and carefully composed prose. The ideas in the work were developed through his close relationship with the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, as well as with the Zen monk Takuan. For this reason, the text frequently employs terminology drawn from Zen Buddhism. One of its most distinctive features is its emphasis on the problem of the mind. Munenori treats the state of mind as a central issue and discusses methods for cultivating and elevating it toward an ideal state.

Gorin no Sho and *Heihō Kadensho* differ in many respects.

For example, in *Heihō Kadensho*, Munenori explicitly states that swordsmanship has much in common with Buddhism and frequently cites Zen terminology. Zen is a sect of Buddhism. In contrast, at the beginning of *Gorin no Sho*, Musashi clearly states that he will not use Buddhist terminology in explaining his teachings.

Their views also differ in their understanding of sword stance (*kamae*). In *Gorin no Sho*, Musashi explains that a stance exists in order to cut down the opponent. In *Heihō Kadensho*, however, Munenori writes that a stance exists in order to avoid being cut by the opponent. The underlying ideas are therefore completely opposite.²³

However, the two works also emphasize an important point in common. This concerns the problem of the mind when facing an opponent. Both texts teach that the state of mind in swordsmanship should be the same as one's ordinary state of mind. They also stress that the mind should not become attached to anything and should not be fixed or stopped.

This way of thinking is referred to as *shinpo-ron* (a theory of mental discipline). Here, *shinpo* means the methods used to elevate one's present state of mind toward an ideal state. The theory that explains these methods is called *shinpo-ron*.

Because the writing of *Gorin no Sho* is rather rough, its ideas can sometimes be difficult to understand. In contrast, *Heihō Kadensho* presents a carefully constructed and detailed theoretical framework. In this work, the ideal state of mind is described with terms such as *byōjōshin* ("ordinary mind"), *tsune no kokoro* ("constant mind"), and *mushin* ("no-mind"). As the opposite condition, Munenori introduces the concept of *yamai* ("illness"), referring to a state in which the mind becomes attached to or fixed on a particular thought or object.

He further explains that the mind can be divided into several kinds. The central or essential mind should be placed in the *hara* (the abdomen), while the other, more flexible aspects of the mind are used freely as circumstances require. For this reason, the *hara*, where the essential mind is located, is considered extremely important.²⁴ In Japanese martial arts, great emphasis is placed on strengthening the *hara*. In traditional Japanese

²³ Takashi Uozumi has pointed out that Hosokawa Tadatoshi, the lord of the domain, had long been a devoted disciple of Yagyū Munenori and had received *Heihō Kadensho* three years before Musashi's visit. Uozumi therefore suggests that Tadatoshi may have referred to the contents of *Heihō Kadensho* in conversations with Musashi. From this perspective, he offers the intriguing speculation that Musashi might have harbored the thought, "What is Munenori to me?" in his mind. Takashi Uozumi, *Teihon Gorin no Sho* (Jinbutsu Ōraisha, 2005).

²⁴ In *Heihō Kadensho*, the concept of the mind (*kokoro*) is further analyzed into three elements: *shin* (神), *shin* (心), and *ki* (気). The *shin* (心) must remain free and flexible, for if it becomes attached to something and stops, it falls into a condition called *yamai* ("illness"). However, if the mind is allowed complete freedom, it may become disorderly. Therefore, something is required to regulate and govern it, and this controlling principle is called *shin* (神). In addition, this *shin* (心) commands and directs *ki*. Thus a hierarchical relationship is

bodily sensibility, the ideal physique is one in which the abdomen forms the firm base of a triangular posture. This is quite the opposite of the Western ideal, which emphasizes a broad-shouldered, inverted-triangle body shape.

Both *Gorin no Sho* and *Heihō Kadensho* also discuss the relationship between mind and body. In *Gorin no Sho*, Musashi writes that when the body is still, the mind should be active, and when the body is in motion, the mind should remain calm. In *Heihō Kadensho*, Munenori explains that when the mind is waiting, the body should move forward, and when the mind is engaged in action, the body should remain in readiness. In this way, both texts emphasize a similar principle: the mind and the body should function in complementary opposition to one another.

The ideas presented in *Gorin no Sho* and *Heihō Kadensho* may be regarded as highly refined theories that could only have been developed in a peaceful age. Yet many of their insights remain strikingly relevant even in modern society. In this sense, it can be said that the foundations of budō as a cultural tradition can be traced back to this period.

The Idea of Katsuninken (活人剣)

An important concept in considering the cultural dimension of swordsmanship is the idea of *katsuninken* (活人剣) in the Shinkage-ryū tradition.

What does this idea mean? Martial techniques themselves are originally instruments for killing and harming others and therefore may appear morally problematic. However, if there exists an evil person who brings suffering to many people, then killing that single wrongdoer through martial force may ultimately save many others. In this sense the sword becomes a sword that gives life.²⁵

This idea shares something in common with the theory that military force exists in order to stop the violence of an enemy.

Yagyū Munenori, who served in an important position within the shogunate, gave serious thought to what it meant to pursue the art of the sword while also serving as a governing official. The idea of *katsuninken* became an important principle within the philosophy of Shinkage-ryū.

The term *katsuninken* itself originates from Zen terminology.

Two Minds in Budō: The Influence of Zen and Confucianism

Swordsmanship in particular has a very close relationship with Zen Buddhism. A representative example is the tradition of Shinkage-ryū. As mentioned earlier, Yagyū Munenori, the author of *Heihō Kadensho*, is said to have been greatly influenced by the Zen monk Takuan Sōhō. Takuan's work *Fudōchi Shinmyōroku* shares many ideas with *Heihō Kadensho*. *Fudōchi Shinmyōroku* was written by Takuan and presented to Munenori, explaining from a Zen perspective the problem of the mind in swordsmanship.

established: shin(神) → shin (心) → ki. The most central element, shin(神), is placed in the hara—specifically the area around the navel measuring about 15 centimeters square—and this is referred to as the shinmyōken(神妙剣).

²⁵ At the beginning of the section “Satsunintō” in *Heihō Kadensho*, the following passage appears: “There is an old saying: ‘Weapons are instruments of ill omen, and the Way of Heaven detests them. Yet when there is no alternative but to use them, this too accords with the Way of Heaven.’ — If one kills a single evil person and thereby gives life to ten thousand people, then the sword that kills a person may indeed become a sword that gives life.”

In early modern swordsmanship, the problem of the mind was regarded as the most important issue to be resolved. This was because swordsmanship presupposes a situation in which one may lose one's life in the very next moment. Under such conditions, the influence of the mind upon the body becomes far more immediate and serious than in ordinary life.

The relationship between swordsmanship and Zen may be understood in two ways. In some cases, swordsmen used the terminology of Zen to describe the mental state they had attained through their own intense experience in combat. In other cases, swordsmen adopted Zen methods of training and, through such practice, reached the deeper principles of swordsmanship. It is reasonable to assume that both types of relationship existed.

However, there is another aspect of the problem of the mind in budō that deserves particular attention. This can be seen in the final part of *Fudōchi Shinmyōroku*, where Takuan admonishes Munenori regarding his conduct in everyday life. In other words, besides the state of mind when confronting an opponent, the text also addresses the state of mind in daily life. Swordsmanship thus emphasizes cultivating the proper state of mind in everyday life through the practice of the art itself. This point represents one of the most distinctive cultural characteristics of budō.

Why did such a development occur, which might at first appear somewhat unusual?

Those who practiced martial arts were *bushi*. In this period, *bushi* were not merely fighters but also rulers responsible for governing the country. In times of warfare, those skilled in cutting down enemies were highly valued. In a time of peace, however, such skill alone would only make a person a violent individual. Those who stood above others were expected to possess the character appropriate to leaders. This was the moral cultivation required of an elite class. For this reason, attention was also given to the state of mind in everyday life. This idea later became connected to the modern theory of character formation through budō. The ethical dimension of the mind discussed here is closely related to Confucianism. The Tokugawa shogunate placed great importance on Confucianism in order to stabilize moral norms, even adopting Neo-Confucianism (*Shushigaku*) as the official doctrine.²⁶

Thus, two kinds of mind may be identified in relation to budō. The mind required when confronting an opponent was strongly influenced by Zen, while the ethical and moral dimension of the mind was shaped by Confucianism.²⁷

Moreover, these two aspects were cultivated through the practice of martial techniques themselves. Technical training and the cultivation of the mind were not treated as separate matters. For Japanese warriors, the problem of technique and the problem of the mind were always considered together. This principle was expressed in the phrase *shinshin ichinyo* (the unity of mind and body).

Budō as an Accomplishment of the Samurai

For the *bushi*, the practice of budō was something that they were expected to cultivate. This was not only

²⁶ Some scholars have even remarked that “the Tokugawa shogunate placed the samurai within a cage of Confucianism.”

²⁷ Shinji Nakabayashi refers to the former type of mind as the aesthetic and quest-oriented spirituality of the performing arts (*geidō*), and the latter as ethical and moral spirituality. Shinji Nakabayashi, *Budō Ronkō* (Collected Essays on Budō), Nakabayashi Shinji Memorial Publication Committee, 1988.

because the samurai were originally warriors, but also because, as noted above, budō was regarded as a means of cultivating ethical and moral character in everyday life.

In the Tokugawa shogunate, there existed administrative domains called *han* under the authority of the central government. Each domain established educational institutions known as *hankō* (domain schools) for the training of the sons of samurai families. These functioned essentially as institutions of public education.

Well-known examples include the Kōdōkan of the Mito domain, the Meirinkan of the Hagi domain, and the Shōtokukan of the Tottori domain.

The curriculum of the domain schools varied from domain to domain, but in many cases education was conducted in both literary and martial subjects.²⁸ Literary education was centered on Confucian studies, while martial education included military science, swordsmanship, spearmanship, horsemanship, archery, unarmed combat, and gunnery. Needless to say, swordsmanship occupied the central place in this martial training.

Thus, already in the Edo period, budō was taught within institutions of public education.

It goes without saying that this development was closely connected with the role of budō as a means of character formation, emphasizing the cultivation of the proper state of mind.

The Emergence of Shinai Striking Practice

Until the middle of the early modern period, swordsmanship training consisted primarily of prearranged *kata* practice, as mentioned earlier. Over time, however, such training tended to become merely formalized movements, gradually drifting away from practical effectiveness and real combat applicability. This development was almost inevitable.

Naturally, those with a strong commitment to genuine martial skill began to question this situation. In response, a new method of training emerged: *shinai uchikomi keiko*, in which practitioners wore protective armor (*kendō* armor) and freely struck one another using *shinai* (bamboo swords).

The *shinai* used at that time was known as a *fukuro shinai*. It was made by splitting the tip of a bamboo rod into many thin strips and covering it with a leather sleeve.

Although many aspects of the history of *kendō* armor remain unclear, it is said that by the Enpō era (1673–1681) various schools were already using partial forms of protective equipment. During the Shōtoku era (1711–1716), however, Naganuma Shirōzaemon Kunisato of the Jikishinkage-ryū is said to have introduced a full set consisting of *men* (helmet), *kote* (gauntlets), *dō* (chest protector), and *tare* (waist protector). Later, in the Hōreki era (1751–1764), when Nakanishi Chūzō Tsugutake adopted this equipment in the Ittō-ryū, the practice spread rapidly. Subsequent improvements and refinements continued, and by the Tenpō era (1830–1844) the form of *kendō* armor had largely developed into the style seen today.

Issai Chozan's *Neko no Myōjutsu* — Budō as a Lifelong Path

An important text from the middle of the early modern period is “*Neko no Myōjutsu*” (*The Cat's Mysterious Art*)²⁹ by Issai Chozan.³⁰ It was written in 1727 (Kyōhō 12).

²⁸ When Tokugawa Nariaki, the ninth lord of the Mito domain, established the domain school Kōdōkan, he wrote the *Kōdōkan-ki* (1838), a document that set forth the founding principles of the school. In this text appears the phrase “*bunbu fuki*” (文武不岐), meaning that literary and martial pursuits are inseparable.

²⁹ It is one chapter from *Inaka Sōji* (*Rustic Zhuangzi*), a ten-volume work often regarded as an introductory text explaining the ideas of Daoist (Lao–Zhuang) philosophy.

This work provides insight into the specifically Japanese view of martial technique, expressing its profound ideas through an allegorical narrative. It is also known that Yamaoka Tesshū kept this book close at hand as one of his favorite readings, and even today many practitioners of budō enjoy studying it.

The story is said to be based on the episode of the “Wooden Cock” in the *Zhuangzi* (*Chapter: Dasheng*). The narrative itself concerns a mouse-catching story in which several cats appear in succession. Beginning with a young and spirited cat, the story gradually introduces older and more experienced cats, until finally an old cat demonstrates the highest level of mastery. From childhood and youth to maturity and old age, the object of cultivation changes step by step—from technique, to ki, to harmony, and ultimately to *mushin* (no-mind). In the end, the master becomes empty of all things, like a wooden cat.

The story thus depicts how the focus of practice deepens throughout a lifetime of training. In this sense, it may truly be regarded as a work that discusses budō as a lifelong pursuit.³¹ Because new and deeper challenges appear with advancing age, one can continue to pursue them throughout one’s entire life without ever exhausting the path. In this respect lies one of the essential characteristics of budō, and in this work that idea is expressed through the voice of the old cat.

Another characteristic of this text is that the more one reads it, the deeper one’s understanding becomes, suggesting that it is a work that can be studied continuously throughout one’s life.

By the time this work was written, society had already entered a stable and tranquil era. It is therefore a theory of martial arts composed under peaceful conditions.

The Flourishing of Shinai Striking Swordsmanship

Shinai uchikomi swordsmanship, in which practitioners struck freely with bamboo swords, flourished greatly across different martial schools.

Because practitioners could freely strike one another, the method naturally stimulated a strong sense of competition. At the same time, the practice itself was engaging and enjoyable, which further contributed to its rapid popularity.

Moreover, since shinai striking practice was conducted while wearing protective armor, a certain level of safety could be maintained. As a result, matches between different schools (*taryū-jiai*), which had long been prohibited, were eventually permitted again. This development encouraged interaction among various schools and contributed to the overall flourishing of swordsmanship.

In earlier times, matches between different schools conducted with real swords or wooden swords could easily lead to serious injury or death and often left deep grudges between participants. For this reason, the shogunate had long prohibited such contests. According to one view, the prohibition was lifted during the Tenpō era (1830–1844). The emergence of shinai striking practice helped bring about this change, and the lifting of the

³⁰ His real name was Niwa Jūrōzaemon Tadaaki. He served as a samurai of the Sekiyado domain and was well versed in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto, as well as deeply knowledgeable in Lao–Zhuang thought and Zen. Following *Neko no Myōjutsu*, he wrote another of his representative works, *Tengu Geijutsu Ron*, in 1729 (Tenpō 14).

³¹ In the “Wooden Cock” episode of the *Zhuangzi*, the trainer Ji Xingzi is said to have perfected the strongest fighting cock in only forty days. In contrast, the idea of “lifelong budō” described in *Neko no Myōjutsu* (“The Mysterious Technique of the Cat”)—in which one attains mastery only after prolonged training extending from youth to old age—may be said to reflect a stronger emphasis on lifelong cultivation than is found in its Chinese philosophical prototype.

ban in turn further stimulated the spread of shinai swordsmanship.

From the middle to the late Edo period, several schools that excelled in competitive shinai training rose to prominence. Among them were Shingyōtō-ryū, founded by Iba Zesūken Hideaki; Nakanishi-ha Ittō-ryū, whose first headmaster was Nakanishi Chūta Tanesada; Hokushin Ittō-ryū, established by Chiba Shūsaku Shigemasa; Kōgen Ittō-ryū, founded by Henmi Tashirō Yoshitoshi; Shintō Munen-ryū, founded by Fukui Hyōemon Yoshihira; Jikishinkage-ryū, founded by Yamada Heizaemon Mitsunori; and Kyōshin Meichi-ryū, founded by Momoi Hachirōzaemon Naoyoshi.

The Three Most Famous Dōjō in Edo

From the Tenpō era (1830–1844) to the Ansei era (1854–1860), machi-dōjō (private martial arts schools) flourished greatly in Edo, which at that time functioned as the de facto capital of Japan.

Martial arts, including swordsmanship, had originally been practiced only by the *bushi* class, and townspeople or farmers were generally not permitted to engage in them. By this period, however, such restrictions had begun to lose their force, and individuals who were not samurai increasingly took up the practice of swordsmanship. As a result, lower-ranking samurai with modest stipends, as well as people from non-samurai backgrounds, began to study swordsmanship and even teach it as a means of earning their livelihood. These schools became known as machi-dōjō.

Among these schools were three particularly prominent ones known as the Three Most Famous Dōjō in Edo.

The first was the Genbukan, operated by Chiba Shūsaku of the Hokushin Ittō-ryū. It is said that the school had as many as 3,600 students. Among them was the well-known Sakamoto Ryōma. Chiba Shūsaku had studied Nakanishi-ha Ittō-ryū, thus inheriting the lineage of the prestigious Ittō-ryū tradition. His school exerted a significant influence on the technical development of modern kendō.³²

The second was the Renpeikan, run by Saitō Yakurō of Shintō Munen-ryū. Among its students were figures such as Takasugi Shinsaku and Katsura Kogorō, who later played important roles in driving Japan toward the Meiji Restoration.

The third was the Shigakkan, led by Momonoi Shunzō Naomasa of Kyōshin Meichi-ryū.

These three schools—Genbukan, Renpeikan, and Shigakkan—were collectively known as the Three Most Famous Dōjō in Edo and flourished greatly.

In addition, other well-known dōjō included the school run by Odani Seiichirō of Jikishinkage-ryū, who later became a swordsmanship instructor at the Kōbusho (the shogunate's military training institute), as well as the dōjō of Iba Gunbei of Shingyōtō-ryū.

The Competitive Turn in Swordsmanship — The Ōishi Susumu Incident

Shinai uchikomi swordsmanship, which had emerged in response to the limitations of *kata* practice and its lack of practical realism, gradually moved further away from actual combat and developed into a more competitive, sport-like form over time.

In the late Edo period, matches between different schools (*taryū-jiai*) were permitted, and an increasing number of practitioners undertook *musha shugyō* (warrior pilgrimages) to test their skills across the country.

³² Chiba Shūsaku systematized the techniques of shinai striking swordsmanship into a set known as the “Sixty-Eight Techniques of Swordsmanship” (*Kenjutsu Rokujuhattē*).

This trend further accelerated the shift toward competition.

A well-known example is the musha *shugyō* of Ōishi Susumu Tanetsugu.

Ōishi Susumu was a martial arts instructor of the Yanagawa domain (in present-day Fukuoka Prefecture). He taught swordsmanship of the Shinkage-ryū and spearmanship of the Ōshima-ryū. He came to Edo twice for training journeys, in 1832 (Tenpō 3) and 1839 (Tenpō 10). Ōishi used an exceptionally long shinai measuring about 5 shaku 3 sun (approximately 160 cm). By comparison, the length later standardized at the Kōbusho was about 3 shaku 8 sun (approximately 115 cm), demonstrating just how long his weapon was. Because the traditional fukuro shinai bent too much at such lengths, Ōishi devised a new type of shinai composed of four split bamboo slats, similar in form to the modern shinai. Ōishi is said to have been a large man, and using his long reach and long shinai, he employed powerful one-handed thrusting techniques that defeated many of the leading instructors in Edo. His match with the renowned Odani Seiichirō is particularly famous. Odani managed to evade the thrust once, but on the following day, Ōishi, having further refined his technique, struck him repeatedly with thrusts. As Ōishi was also a master of spearmanship, he excelled in thrusting techniques. Such methods must have been highly sensational at the time. As a result of Ōishi's success, the use of long shinai became widely popular in Edo.

It is believed that the footwork seen in modern kendō originated during this period. With the long shinai, practitioners kept the right hand and right foot forward, employing thrusting techniques or small, thrust-like strikes. Accompanying this, the traditional walking step—alternating the left and right feet—gave way to the modern sliding step (*okuri-ashi*), in which the right foot steps forward and the left foot is drawn up behind it, and *fumikomi-ashi* (a forceful stamping step).³³

However, it is clear that the techniques developed through the use of the long shinai diverged significantly from those of the Japanese sword. This development can thus be understood as a shift toward a competition-oriented form of matches.

The Tōshiya Competition at Sanjūsangendō

Among the various martial arts, archery was the first to develop into a competitive form.

In the Edo period, one event that became immensely popular—rising even to the level of a major inter-domain competition—was the Tōshiya competition at Sanjūsangendō.

This contest involved shooting arrows along the entire length of the eaves corridor of a temple in Kyoto known as Rengeō-in. The distance from one end to the other is extremely long, measuring approximately 120 meters. The temple is commonly called Sanjūsangendō because there are thirty-three spaces between the pillars along the corridor. The corridor itself is relatively narrow, about 2.2 meters wide and approximately 5 meters high. In order to shoot an arrow the full distance of 120 meters without striking the ceiling, it is necessary to use

³³ Hori Shōhei describes the change as follows:describes the change as follows:

“When the shinai had a handle of no more than about eight *sun*, it was sufficient to move the feet in the ordinary manner of walking. However, when the longer shinai came into use, the handle also became longer—reaching about one *shaku* three *sun*. If one continued to walk in the same way, one's stance would become unstable; yet if one tried to keep it from moving, the posture would become constrained. For this reason, practitioners abandoned the walking-style footwork used in *kata* and instead adopted a manner of movement in which the feet are advanced alternately.”

Shōhei Hori, *Dai Nihon Kendō-shi* (History of Japanese Kendō), Taiiku to Sports Publishers, 1985.

a powerful bow and to release the arrow with great precision. It is said that even today, only a small number of people are capable of successfully completing this feat.

According to legend, the practice is said to have been initiated in the late Heian period (the Hōgen era, 1156–1159) by Kaburazaka Genta of Kumano, though this is not historically certain. As a competitive event, the earliest recorded performance dates to 1601 (Keichō 11), when Asaoka Heibē successfully shot 51 arrows through the corridor. Thereafter, the competition continued for approximately 250 years, until 1866 (Keiō 2). Its popularity became so great that similar facilities were constructed not only in Kyoto but also in Edo (Tokyo), where the competition was likewise held.

Various formats of competition existed, but the most prestigious was known as *Zendō Ōyakazu*. In this event, there was no limit on the number of arrows: participants continued shooting for twenty-four consecutive hours, competing to see how many arrows they could successfully send through the entire length of the corridor.

Wasa Daihachirō, who is said to have won the competition in Jōkyō 3 (1686), reportedly drew 13,053 arrows within twenty-four hours, of which 8,133 successfully passed through the corridor. A simple calculation shows that he released one arrow approximately every 6.61 seconds. However, since he must have taken breaks and eaten during this time, the actual intervals between shots would have been even shorter.

The shooting method was also distinctive. Archers sat on a small stool and shot from a cross-legged position. Since striking the ceiling counted as a failure, this posture was devised to secure as much vertical space as possible above the arrow's trajectory.

The competitors, representing the honor of their respective domains, are said to have undergone extremely rigorous training. Moreover, not only the archers themselves but also a large supporting staff accompanied them, including those responsible for selecting arrows, keeping records, judging results, providing encouragement, crafting bows, and managing lighting. Considerable expense was invested, and the domains as a whole committed themselves to these events.

Those who won such competitions became heroes of their domains and were granted social and economic privileges. At this point, the practice was no longer a martial art for fighting enemies, but had clearly become a form of competition.

The Kōbusho

During the Edo period, the Tokugawa shogunate maintained a policy of limiting contact with foreign countries, with only a few exceptions. Internal warfare was also largely absent, and a peaceful era continued for more than 260 years. As a result, the martial arts matured as a cultural practice, came to include the dimension of character formation, and were increasingly pursued in competitive forms as well.

However, toward the end of the Edo period, foreign pressure intensified. Most notably, the American East India Squadron led by Commodore Perry arrived and demanded that Japan open its ports. In response to this growing sense of crisis, the shogunate began reforms related to military preparedness. As part of these efforts, it established the Kōbusho as an institution for martial training.

At the Kōbusho, practical necessity for the battlefield led to an emphasis on swordsmanship, spearmanship, and gunnery. Gunnery consisted primarily of training in Western-style artillery, while swordsmanship and spearmanship focused largely on sparring matches. Odani Seiichirō of the Jikishinkage-ryū and Kubota Sugane of the Tamiya-ryū iaijutsu were appointed as instructors. In contrast, those from established hereditary lineages—such as the Yagyū and Ono families, who had traditionally served as official swordsmanship

instructors to the shogun—were not appointed.

In addition, in order to regulate the use of the excessively long shinai that had contributed to the growing emphasis on competition, Odani Seiichirō, who headed the swordsmanship division at the Kōbusho, established the standard length of the shinai at 3 shaku 8 sun (approximately 115 cm). This length was determined with reference to the length of the Japanese sword—about 3 shaku 3 sun (approximately 100 cm)—while also taking into account that practitioners wore protective armor and gloves (*kote*) when gripping the handle. For this reason, the shinai was set slightly longer than an actual sword. The standard thus reflected an intention to approximate conditions of real combat. It is also said that the chosen length and weight were intended to produce a certain training effect, contributing to physical conditioning and technical development.

Because training at the Kōbusho focused primarily on sparring matches, the previously well-defined boundaries between different schools were gradually broken down, and interaction among them increased. This development is considered to have been an important step toward the unification of swordsmanship, particularly in the period following the Meiji Restoration.

However, despite these efforts, the Tokugawa shogunate eventually collapsed, and Japan entered the Meiji Restoration, moving forward into the modern era.

Modern and Contemporary 'Bu'

The Collapse of the Samurai Class and the Crisis of Budō

After the Meiji Restoration, the domain system (*han*)—which had functioned as the administrative structure under the Tokugawa shogunate—was abolished with the abolition of the domains and establishment of prefectures (1871). As a result, the samurai, who had previously received stipends from their domains, lost their livelihoods. Under the Tokugawa regime, society had been organized according to the four-class system of warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants, but with its abolition the samurai class itself disappeared. In other words, the warrior class that had long governed Japan throughout its history ceased to exist. With the collapse of the samurai class, whose profession had been the practice of martial arts, the continued existence of budō (formerly *bugei*) came into serious question. The situation became especially critical after the promulgation of the Haitōrei (Sword Abolishment Edict) of 1876, which prohibited the wearing of swords. As a result, swordsmanship itself could no longer be practiced in its traditional form, and many swordsmen who had earned their living through teaching the art found themselves unemployed.

Moreover, as Western nations were already making extensive use of advanced firearms, the traditional martial arts lost their practical value as techniques of warfare.

This period represented the greatest crisis in the history of Japanese budō.

Gekken Kōgyō (Public Swordsmanship Exhibitions)

In response to this crisis facing budō, a man named Sakakibara Kenkichi—who had formerly served as a swordsmanship instructor at the Kōbusho—proposed a unique solution. He suggested presenting swordsmanship as a public performance. These events came to be known as gekken kōgyō (public swordsmanship exhibitions).

The idea was to have swordsmen compete against one another and attract spectators who would pay to watch

the matches. The format of these contests resembled that of *sumō*: a ring was prepared with four pillars erected around it, and the competing swordsmen were divided into east and west sides. When a referee similar to a *sumō gyōji* called them forward, they would step to the center and begin the match.

The first *gekken kōgyō* (public swordsmanship exhibitions) was held over a ten-day period beginning on April 11, 1873 (Meiji 6). The event proved to be a great success. Two main reasons can be suggested for this. First, members of the general public—who previously had little opportunity to encounter swordsmanship matches—were now able to watch them simply by paying an admission fee. Second, many of the participants were well-known master swordsmen, which greatly increased public interest.

Following the success of this event, more and more people began organizing *gekken kōgyō*, and by around 1876 (Meiji 9), it is said that there were more than twenty such venues in Tokyo alone. However, as competition for audiences increased, performers began incorporating acrobatic techniques and theatrical staging in order to attract spectators. As a result, these exhibitions gradually lost their popularity.

There are both positive and negative evaluations of Sakakibara Kenkichi's decision to promote *gekken kōgyō*.

Those who support his efforts argue that they enabled swordsmen—many of whom had lost their livelihoods—to earn a means of support, helped preserve the continuity of swordsmanship at a time when it was on the verge of extinction, and made it possible to introduce swordsmanship to the general public.

In contrast, critics maintain that turning swordsmanship—once a symbol of the honor of the *bushi*—into a public spectacle diminished its dignity and authority. Others argue that such performances distorted the essential nature of swordsmanship itself.

Yamaoka Tesshū's Theory of Swordsmanship as Spiritual Cultivation

There was, however, a swordsman who moved in a direction completely opposite to these trends: Yamaoka Tesshū. At a time in the Meiji period when martial arts themselves were increasingly regarded as outdated, he deliberately devoted himself to swordsmanship as a means of spiritual discipline and the cultivation of an excellent character.

Through rigorous training in both swordsmanship and Zen, he further developed the traditional spiritual theory of the classical martial arts. In 1880 (Meiji 13), he founded a school called *Mutō-ryū* and established a *dōjō* known as the *Shunpūkan*. Despite the unfavorable climate of the time, the number of his students reached as many as 401.

At *Shunpūkan*, Yamaoka Tesshū conducted extremely rigorous training. One well-known example is *tachikiri keiko*, a form of practice in which a single practitioner continues training successively against a series of opponents. This severe training consisted of three stages. In the first stage, the practitioner performed 200 consecutive *tachikiri* bouts in a single day, from morning until evening. In the second stage, the practitioner completed 200 bouts per day for three days, and in the final stage, this training was sustained for an entire week. Even today in Japan, events known as three-hour *tachikiri* matches are held in various places; these are modeled after the austere training methods of Yamaoka Tesshū. It is said that such extreme conditions—approaching the limits of life and death—lead to important realizations. Ultimately, this is a matter of the mind, and such experience may contribute to human development. Tesshū expressed this idea in the phrase *shinga mutō* (“there is no sword outside the mind”). This expression is also the origin of the name *Mutō-ryū*. For Tesshū, swordsmanship was not merely a matter of manipulating the sword, but rather a means of cultivating the mind.

Yamaoka Tesshū died in 1888 (Meiji 21). After his death, as competitions began to be held on a nationwide scale, it is also true that Mutō-ryū gradually declined in reputation in match settings.

Nevertheless, Yamaoka Tesshū can be regarded as the first figure in the modern period to understand budō as a form of self-cultivation. In this respect, he exerted a profound influence on the modern educational philosophy of kendō as a means of character formation.

Modern and Contemporary Budō Led by the Jūdō of Kanō Jigorō

As noted earlier, archery led the development of *bu* in the early medieval period, and swordsmanship led it in the early modern period. After the Meiji Restoration, however, it may be said that jūdō came to play the leading role in the development of modern and contemporary *budō*.

The key figure in this transformation was Kanō Jigorō. He reorganized the jūjutsu traditions of the early modern period into a modern form and established Kōdōkan Jūdō, thereby laying the foundation for the flourishing development of jūdō as seen today.

Kanō Jigorō was born in 1860 (Man'en 1) and is said to have been physically frail as a child. Motivated by a sense of inferiority about his small stature, he became interested in jūjutsu, an art in which even a smaller person could throw a much larger opponent, and he began his training. A characteristic principle of early modern jūjutsu is expressed in the phrase *jū yoku gō o seisu* ("softness overcomes hardness"), meaning that a smaller and physically weaker person can defeat a larger and stronger opponent through flexible and skillful movement. It was this principle that attracted Kanō to the study of jūjutsu.

Kanō Jigorō first studied jūjutsu in the Tenjin Shin'yō-ryū, and later trained in the Kitō-ryū. Through his training in these traditions, he is said to have made three important discoveries. First, he found that the practice was highly effective for physical development. Second, it was also highly beneficial for mental cultivation. Third, he realized that the principles of effective strategy in contest could be applied to everyday life.

What is particularly noteworthy about Kanō Jigorō is that, although he initially took up jūjutsu because of his physical weakness and later acquired considerable skill through rigorous training, he did not seek to emphasize his strength as a martial artist. Instead, he recognized the educational value of jūjutsu and went on to make his mark as an educator. In fact, he served successively as vice principal of the Gakushūin, principal of the Fifth Higher School in Kumamoto, and principal of the Tokyo Higher Normal School, among other important educational posts.

Kanō also believed that what he had created possessed a far deeper significance than traditional jūjutsu, and therefore, in order to distinguish it, he deliberately chose to use the term "dō" ("the Way") rather than "jutsu" ("technique"), and named his art jūdō. The use of the term *dō* reflected his intention that the practice should serve as a form of comprehensive human education, encompassing three dimensions: physical education (the proper development of the muscles, the cultivation of a healthy body, and the attainment of freedom in the movement of the limbs), contest (matters related to practical competition and combat), and moral cultivation (matters related to ethics and conduct in everyday life).

A distinctive feature of Kanō Jigorō's thinking was that he approached jūdō as a matter of human education.

Furthermore, in 1922 (Taishō 11), Kanō articulated two guiding mottos: *seiryoku zen'yō* ("the most efficient use of mental and physical energy") and *jita kyōei* ("mutual welfare and benefit"), the latter expressing the

ethical idea that it is important for both oneself and others to prosper together.³⁴ Whereas earlier jūjutsu had emphasized the highly technical principle of *jū yoku gō o seisu* (“softness overcomes hardness”), these new mottos clearly reflected a broader concern with social responsibility and cooperation.

Kanō also served as the first Asian member of the International Olympic Committee and maintained a close relationship with Pierre de Coubertin, often called the father of the modern Olympic movement. Through his association with figures such as Coubertin, Kanō was likely influenced by Western ideas in formulating these principles.

In the Meiji period, a time when everything Western appeared new and the martial arts of the premodern period were largely disregarded, the greatest achievement of Kanō Jigorō lay in his ability to reformulate these traditions in a manner suited to the needs of the age and, above all, to establish them firmly within the sphere of education.

Women's Jūdō in the Thought of Kanō Jigorō

In the Meiji and Taishō periods, Japan was still a time when it was generally considered inappropriate for women to participate in sports—let alone in budō. Nevertheless, Kanō Jigorō took a tolerant attitude toward women practicing jūdō, and in fact actively encouraged it, stating that “women, too, should practice jūdō as much as possible.”

The beginnings of women's jūdō are said to date to 1893 (Meiji 26), when Ashiya Sueko requested instruction from Tomita Tsunejirō, a disciple of Kanō Jigorō and one of the Kōdōkan Shitennō (the four foremost disciples of the Kōdōkan).³⁵ In response, Tomita began teaching her in the garden of Kanō's residence. On that occasion, Shimoda Utako and Sumako, Kanō's wife, are also said to have trained together with her.

The women's division of the Kōdōkan was established in 1926 (Taishō 15). Its formal inauguration was announced at the Kagami-biraki ceremony, the Kōdōkan's annual New Year opening ceremony, in 1934 (Shōwa 9). On that occasion, officials of the division were appointed, and at the same time three women were awarded the rank of shodan (first dan).

He required them to observe the fundamentals even more strictly than men, and taught them through a parallel emphasis on both *kata* and randori (free practice sparring), while prohibiting competitive matches on the grounds that the desire to win might lead to the breakdown of proper fundamentals. Admission was also influenced by considerations of family background and social standing, and as a result, many of the early female practitioners came from upper-class families.

In his later years, Kanō Jigorō is said to have remarked, “Women's jūdō is closest to the ideal of my jūdō,” expressing high expectations for its future development. He also reportedly encouraged his students with the words, “Since women's jūdō will continue to develop internationally, you should study English diligently.”

³⁴ Kanō Jigorō had already formulated a definition of jūdō earlier, in 1915 (Taishō 4):

“Jūdō is the Way of making the most effective use of the power of mind and body. Its practice consists in training and cultivating both body and spirit through exercises in attack and defense, thereby attaining the true essence of this Way. Ultimately, the purpose of jūdō training is to perfect oneself and contribute to the welfare of society.”

³⁵ The Kōdōkan Shitennō (“the Four Great Disciples of the Kōdōkan”) refers to four outstanding early students of Kanō Jigorō: Tomita Tsunejirō (the first to enroll), Saigō Shirō (entered in August 1882), Yamashita Yoshitsugu (entered in August 1884), and Yokoyama Sakujirō (entered in April 1886).

Carrying forward his vision, Fukuda Keiko worked to promote and teach jūdō in many parts of the world, including the United States, Australia, the Philippines, France, Canada, and Norway.

The Establishment of the Dai Nippon Butokukai

In 1895 (Meiji 28), the Dai Nippon Butokukai was established as a central organization for the administration of budō.

The Dai Nippon Butokukai carried out activities such as the promotion, dissemination, and instruction of martial arts, the organization of tournaments, and the recognition and commendation of martial artists. In 1899 (Meiji 32), the Butokuden was completed within the precincts of Heian Shrine. In 1902 (Meiji 35), the Dai Nippon Butokukai instituted a system granting the titles of hanshi and kyōshi to practitioners who met specified qualifications; those awarded the rank of hanshi were further granted a lifetime stipend, reflecting a policy of preferential recognition for distinguished martial artists. In 1905 (Meiji 38), in anticipation of the incorporation of martial arts into the regular school curriculum, the organization established a training institute for martial arts instructors.

One of the most significant undertakings of the Dai Nippon Butokukai was the establishment of standardized *kata*. In jūjutsu, the *Butokukai Jijutsu Kata* was formulated in 1906 (Meiji 39) under the leadership of Kanō Jigorō, incorporating the views of practitioners from various schools. In the same year, three *kata* were also established in swordsmanship. However, dissatisfaction among swordsmen remained strong, and beginning again in 1911 (Meiji 44), figures such as Naitō Takaharu and Takano Sasaburō became involved in a renewed effort that resulted in the formulation of the *Dai Nippon Teikoku Kendō Kata*. This later became what is now known as the *Nihon Kendō Kata*. The important point here is that, through the establishment of standardized *kata* by the Butokukai, the integration of martial arts schools that had previously existed separately was effectively achieved.

Another noteworthy achievement of the Dai Nippon Butokukai was the establishment, in 1912 (Meiji 45), of the Bujutsu Senmon Gakkō (Martial Arts Specialized School) as a professional institution for training martial arts instructors. In 1919 (Taishō 8), Nishikubo Hiromichi was appointed Vice President of the Dai Nippon Butokukai and concurrently served as principal of the school. Nishikubo argued that the term *bujutsu* (martial techniques) should be replaced with *budō*, emphasizing that *budō* signifies not merely technical skill but the martial Way. On this basis, he renamed the institution the Budō Senmon Gakkō (Martial Arts College). At the same time, the designations jūjutsu, kenjutsu, and kyūjutsu were changed to jūdō, kendō, and kyūdō, respectively, and the collective term budō came to be used as an umbrella term for these disciplines. From this period onward, the use of *budō* as a comprehensive designation for the various martial ways became firmly established.

Naitō Takaharu, who served as Chief Professor of Kendō at the Budō Senmon Gakkō (Martial Arts College), was another figure of outstanding importance in the history of modern budō. A well-known episode recounts how he was deeply moved by a telegram sent by Kusunoki Shōi, then a director of the Dai Nippon Butokukai, in response to a request from Mitsuhashi Kanichirō, a renowned master of nitō (two-sword technique). The telegram read simply: “Come for the sake of the Way” (*Michi no tame kitare*). Moved by these words, Naitō traveled to Kyoto—an episode that has since become famous in kendō history. Another celebrated event was his match with Takano Sasaburō at the 6th Butoku Festival Grand Demonstration Tournament held in 1901

(Meiji 34), which has been remembered as one of the classic bouts in the history of modern swordsmanship. Naitō strongly opposed the excessive sportification of kendō and instead emphasized the rigorous practice of fundamentals such as *kirikaeshi*, *uchikomi*, and *kakarigeiko*. The intensity of his austere training methods became widely known. Among his students were later 10th-dan masters such as Ogawa Kinnosuke, Mochida Moriji, and Saimura Gorō, all of whom went on to play major roles in shaping modern kendō.

Budō in Wartime Japan

With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 (Shōwa 12), Japan as a whole moved increasingly toward militarism.

In disciplines such as kendō, greater emphasis came to be placed on practical effectiveness for the battlefield, and training methods even included outdoor field matches (*no-jiai*) intended to approximate combat conditions. Furthermore, the Dai Nippon Butokukai revised its match regulations to reflect the assumption of real combat with live blades: contests were changed from the conventional three-bout format (*sanbon-shōbu*) to a single decisive bout (*ippon-shōbu*), and the standard length of the shinai was shortened from 3 shaku 8 sun (approx. 115 cm) to 3 shaku 6 sun (approx. 109 cm).

In 1941 (Shōwa 16), with the promulgation of the National School Order (*Kokumin Gakkōrei*), budō training in the subject of physical and spiritual training (*tairenka budō*) became compulsory for boys in the fifth grade of elementary school and above.

As the primary teaching policy stated:

“In physical and spiritual training, the body is to be disciplined and the spirit refined so as to cultivate vigorous and resolute character, to foster the practical capacity for selfless service and devotion, and to strive for the development of the fundamental abilities required of imperial subjects.”

Thus, the ideal human character promoted through budō education during this period came to be strongly oriented toward militaristic values.

In December of the same year, the Pacific War broke out.

Although budō instruction within the physical and spiritual training curriculum (*tairenka budō*) was implemented for less than five years, it clearly came to symbolize the militarism of wartime Japan. It is also undeniable that this experience subsequently contributed to the formation of a strongly negative image of budō in the postwar period.

On the morning of the day Japan accepted defeat, General Anami Korechika, the last Minister of War, left the testament:

“With my death, I humbly atone for my great crime,”

and then took his own life by seppuku. It has been reported that two days before his death, he made a special request to Saimura Gorō—who at the time was instructing kendō at the Imperial Japanese Army Academy and the Army Ministry—and received a final session of kendō training. It is not difficult to suppose that through this practice he sought to bring his mind into order before his death. Thus, it may reasonably be said that budō under wartime conditions, and kendō in particular, functioned less as a practical combat technique than as a powerful

means of shaping the spiritual and psychological state of Japanese people—especially military officers.

The Prohibition and Revival of Budō after the Pacific War

Following its defeat in 1945 (Shōwa 20) at the end of the Pacific War, Japan entered a period of occupation by the Allied Powers, led primarily by the United States, which lasted until 1952 (Shōwa 27).

As part of efforts to eliminate militaristic influences from Japanese society, budō was completely prohibited, and the Dai Nippon Butokukai was dissolved.

Kendō in particular was subjected to especially strict measures, as it was regarded as having played a significant role in supporting the wartime regime.³⁶ By contrast, jūdō and kyūdō were viewed relatively favorably—partly because many Allied officers were themselves enthusiasts—and were therefore able to make a smooth recovery. In 1949 (Shōwa 24), the All Japan Judo Federation and the All Nippon Kyudo Federation were established. In contrast, kendō faced considerable difficulty in its revival. It initially resumed activities not under the name of kendō, but as shinai kyōgi (shinai competition). This form, modeled in part on sports such as fencing, emphasized a sport-oriented image through modifications to its rules and equipment.

“Shinai kyōgi” (shinai competition) took the following form:

- The shinai used was not the conventional four-slat bamboo shinai, but rather a fukuro-shinai, made by finely splitting the tip of the bamboo and covering it with a cloth or leather sleeve.
- Light protective equipment was used.
- Practitioners wore trousers and shirts instead of keikogi and hakama.
- Matches were conducted within a designated competition area.
- A time-limit scoring system was adopted, with victory awarded to the competitor who scored the most points within a fixed period.
- Fouls were formally defined, and penalties were imposed on those who committed them.
- Leg entangling techniques and body-checking (taiatari) were prohibited.
- Three referees were appointed, and points were awarded by majority decision.

After introducing these modifications, the All Japan Shinai Kyogi Federation was first established in 1950

³⁶ **Kendō at the Final Moments of Class-A War Criminals — An Oral Account by Jifuku Yoshihiko**

Jifuku Yoshihiko was born on November 4, 1914 (Taishō 3). He pursued a career as a professional kendō instructor, serving, among other positions, as an assistant instructor at the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. He was a devoted disciple of Mochida Moriji, who was known as a *Showa no kensei* (“sword saint” of the Shōwa period). Jifuku later competed in the 2nd All Japan Kendō Championship after the revival of kendō, and was widely recognized for his skill with the sword. The following is based on his recollection:

I was told to go to Sugamo Prison, so I carried my bogu (kendō armor) and went there. An MP was present and told me to go inside. There was a Quonset-hut-style barracks, and the interior had a clean wooden floor. There, I believe more than a dozen Class-A war criminals were present, including Tōjō Hideki, who were awaiting the imminent execution of their sentences. In front of them, I had a kendō match with another practitioner who had been called in from a different police organization. I was told that they had requested permission from GHQ to watch a kendō match before being hanged. I won the match by scoring a *kote* strike. After the match, I shook hands with Tōjō Hideki.

This event took place during the period after the war when Japan was under occupation by Allied forces led by the United States, and when kendō had been prohibited under directives issued by the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) of GHQ. It may be regarded as a remarkable and little-known episode in the history of Shōwa-period kendō—one that would normally have seemed almost unimaginable.

(Shōwa 25). This was followed, in 1952 (Shōwa 27)—the same year the Treaty of San Francisco came into effect—by the founding of the All Japan Kendo Federation. In 1954 (Shōwa 29), the All Japan Shinai Kyōgi Federation was absorbed into the All Japan Kendo Federation and ceased to exist.

Thereafter, Japan's traditional martial arts, having been restored, became firmly established both as competitive activities and within the framework of public education.

The Emergence and Introduction of Modern Forms of Budō

Among the disciplines practiced today as budō, some possess traditions dating back to before the Edo period, while others were established in the modern era, and still others were introduced from overseas.³⁷

Among the disciplines that emerged in the modern period, aikidō may be mentioned first. The founder of aikidō was Ueshiba Morihei (1883–1969). Although the art centers primarily on throwing techniques and joint-locking techniques, it generally does not employ competitive matches, and training is conducted mainly through the practice of *kata*-based forms.

Ueshiba Morihei studied for a time under Takeda Sōkaku (1860–1943), a remarkable martial artist who lived through the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa periods and who was the leading figure of Daitō-ryū.³⁸

Another discipline that may be mentioned is Shōrinji Kempō, which was founded by Sō Dōshin (1911–1980). Drawing on the Chinese martial arts (*kenpō*) he had studied on the Chinese mainland, he adapted and reorganized them to establish this art in 1947 (Shōwa 22), after the end of the Pacific War. Its techniques center primarily on strikes, kicks, and joint-locking techniques. Although it shares the same name as the martial arts of the Shaolin Temple in China, it has no direct historical connection with them.

Among the disciplines introduced from overseas is jūkendō. Jūkendō is a competitive martial art in which practitioners wear protective equipment similar to kendō armor and use a wooden training rifle fitted with a mock bayonet (*mokujū*), striking at designated target areas—specifically the left side of the chest and the throat. It is generally explained that jūkendō developed through the combination of Western-style bayonet techniques, transmitted from France, with traditional Japanese techniques derived from the spear and the sword.

In addition, although it remains open to question whether it should properly be regarded as a form of Japanese budō, taijiquan (Chinese *taiji quan*)—a martial art of Chinese origin—is also widely practiced in Japan. Today, taijiquan has spread primarily not as a martial art intended for defeating opponents, but rather as a discipline with a health-promoting and therapeutic character. Although much about its historical development

³⁷ The Japan Budō Association currently consists of nine member organizations: jūdō, kendō, kyūdō, sumō, karatedō, aikidō, Shōrinji Kempō, naginata, and jūkendō (bayonet fencing).

³⁸ Takeda Sōkaku (1860–1943), sometimes referred to as a modern-day Bokuden (*im Bokuden*) in reference to Tsukahara Bokuden, developed the technique known as aiki, which neutralizes an opponent's power, systematized its methods, and founded Daitō-ryū Aiki-bujutsu. Among his most outstanding disciples was Sagawa Yuki Yoshi (1902–1998), an extraordinary martial artist who inherited and further developed the techniques of aiki. Although Takeda Sōkaku did not establish a permanent dōjō and instead traveled throughout Japan teaching in various locations, Sagawa Yuki Yoshi was the only disciple who accompanied him and assisted in instruction across the country. In January 1954 (Shōwa 29), upon the recommendation of Takeda Sōkaku's eldest son Takeda Munekiyo and third son Takeda Tokimune, Sagawa Yuki Yoshi was appointed the 36th headmaster (*sōke*) of Daitō-ryū Aiki-bujutsu. Subsequently, in January 1956 (Shōwa 31), he exchanged a written agreement with Takeda Tokimune, returning the hereditary position of *sōke* to the Takeda family and assuming instead the title *sōhan*, meaning one who transmits the technical tradition of aiki. Thereafter, the technical tradition of aiki continued to be preserved within Sagawa-ha Daitō-ryū.

long remained unclear, it has in recent years begun to be clarified through excellent scholarly research in budō studies and related fields.³⁹

Budō in Contemporary Global Society

Budō that originated in Japan is no longer something belonging solely to Japan in today's global society. It has spread throughout the world and continues to develop within the cultural contexts of many different countries.⁴⁰

When budō spread beyond Japan to the wider world, a variety of unexpected developments emerged, shaped by differing local cultural backgrounds—developments that would have been difficult to anticipate within Japan itself.

First, there is the difficulty that the educational function of budō is not always readily accepted in a straightforward manner outside Japan. It goes without saying that this educational function involves an influence on the mind and aims at the formation of character. In Japan, all budō disciplines explicitly emphasize character formation, and we accept this educational aspect of budō without question, believing it to be one of its defining features. However, this perspective is difficult to understand overseas, particularly in Christian societies. In such cultural contexts, the primary institutions responsible for moral education and character formation have traditionally been the major religious traditions represented by Christianity. Viewed from within this cultural and intellectual background, it becomes easier to understand why it may be difficult to see how practices such as throwing another person, striking the head with a bamboo sword, or punching and kicking an opponent could be connected with the formation of character.

It has been reported that when an instructor teaching budō overseas was asked by local practitioners why he taught budō in their country, he replied—using what has become a conventional expression in Japan—that it was for the purpose of character formation. His answer was immediately rejected. He was told, “I want to learn the techniques of budō, but I do not want to become Japanese.”

³⁹ Qu Guofeng, *A Study on the Formation Process of Health-Preserving Martial Arts: Focusing on the Transition from Folk Martial Arts to Taijiquan* (PhD diss., University of Tsukuba, 2007).

⁴⁰ International federations have been established for the following disciplines and are functioning actively:

- International Judo Federation (IJF), established in **1951**
- International Kendo Federation (FIK), established in **1970**
- International Kyudo Federation (IKYF), established in **2006**
- International Sumo Federation (ISF), established in **1992**
- World Karate Federation (WKF):
 - The **World Union of Karate-do Organizations** joined the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in **1985**
 - Renamed the **World Karate Federation** in **1993**
- International Aikido Federation (IAF), established in **1976**
- World Shorinji Kempo Organization (WSKO), established in **1972**
- International Naginata Federation (INF), established in **1990**
- **Jūkendō**: there are plans to establish an **international jūkendō federation**.

In order to understand this reaction, it is necessary to recognize that the process by which budō—originally a set of techniques of combat—came to be positioned as a form of education was supported by a long historical accumulation of ideas cultivated within Japan over many centuries.

Another important point is that conceptions of the relationship between mind and body differ fundamentally across cultures. Another important point is that conceptions of the relationship between mind and body differ fundamentally across cultures. As discussed earlier, Japanese budō, drawing on experiences of life-and-death combat, developed a strong awareness of the close connection between mind and body. Emphasizing this relationship, it came to regard the mind and body as a unified whole. This idea is expressed in the concept of *shinshin ichinyo* (“the unity of mind and body”), which may be considered one of the most distinctive characteristics of Japanese budō. However, this way of thinking has been particularly difficult to accept in Western contexts. Since the time of René Descartes, Western thought has generally been grounded in mind-body dualism, which treats the mind and body as separate entities. Within such a worldview, the budō concept of *shinshin ichinyo* is understandably difficult to grasp.

As noted above, when budō entered societies shaped by Christian traditions and by a dualistic understanding of mind and body, it inevitably encountered forms of cultural and intellectual friction.

In recent years, however, as budō has spread overseas and time has passed—and through the sustained efforts of instructors working in local contexts—the situation has gradually begun to change.

In 2007, in Hungary, a national project was proposed that sought to make use of budō for the moral education of young people. This initiative was connected to developments following the political transformations in Eastern Europe that began in 1989, when the rapid influx of capitalist economic systems from Western countries contributed to the widespread perception among young people that money alone constituted value, leading to a marked decline in moral awareness. Out of concern over this situation, the project attempted to find a solution not in existing religious traditions but in budō transmitted from Japan. Although the project itself was later discontinued due to changes in the political situation, this case nevertheless suggests the emergence of a growing recognition overseas of the educational value of budō.

Next, I would like to introduce a case that the author personally experienced and later examined as the subject of a research study.⁴¹

At an event known as the Hungary Cup, held in Budapest, Hungary—a gathering that brought together approximately 200 kendō practitioners from more than twenty countries, mainly from Eastern Europe—I delivered a cultural lecture on kendō. During the event, a Croatian budō practitioner who had been in attendance approached me and spoke to me very actively. The theme of my lecture that day was *Great Swordsmen and Their Unique Mentality*.

According to him, he had served as a sniper during the Yugoslav Wars. He explained that when he lay in ambush at a mountain pass and attempted to take aim at an enemy soldier, it sometimes felt as if a white blind-like screen suddenly appeared before his eyes, preventing him from pulling the trigger. He then remarked, “Today’s lecture was about how to overcome exactly that kind of problem, wasn’t it? I found it extremely interesting.”

⁴¹ Sakai Toshinobu, Abe Tetsushi, Ninomiya Kyōko, and Horikawa Takashi, “Research into the educational power of budō in Eastern Europe: A focus on a former soldier from the Yugoslavia Conflict,” *Research Journal of Budō*, 54(2), 2022.

I was deeply perplexed and shaken by his comment. I found myself wondering whether I had come to a foreign country to teach techniques for killing people. It was at that moment that I became acutely aware, perhaps for the first time, that the budō we practice belongs to a peaceful age rather than an age of war.

After this encounter, I conducted a case study focusing on him. Following the war, he continued to suffer from recurring nightmares and developed sleep disorders; he struggled deeply and even attempted suicide. Although he had sustained severe psychological damage, he felt that seeking treatment at medical institutions would be meaningless and did not turn to religion for support. Instead, he ultimately devoted himself to the practice of budō, specifically iaidō. He engaged in extremely rigorous, discipline-centered training—for example, repeatedly performing the first *kata* of iaidō, *Mae*, as many as one thousand times in a single night. Through this sustained practice, he gradually overcame his psychological difficulties and recovered his sense of personal integrity. This case suggests that the educational and restorative effects of budō can function effectively even outside Japan.

Further interesting insights also emerged. As noted earlier, the state of mind sought in budō can be understood as having two dimensions: one is the mindset required when confronting an opponent, and the other is an ethical and moral disposition. Immediately after the war, he stated that the mental qualities cultivated through budō were concerned primarily with practical effectiveness in combat, that is, with its lethal aspects. However, in a memoir he wrote fifteen years later, after continued training, he came to find meaning in the very process of practice itself. He began to speak in terms of ethical and moral consciousness, and described budō as a system for becoming a good person or a better person. In other words, when one stands close to the boundary between life and death, the first of these two mental dimensions—the mindset for confronting an opponent—appears initially. Over time, however, the second dimension, which leads to character formation, gradually emerges. In Japan, these two aspects of mind are often perceived as if they exist simultaneously. Yet the fact that there is a sequence in their manifestation, as seen in this case, is something that cannot be fully understood through the practice of budō confined to a peaceful age alone. It may be said that he, in a sense, re-experienced the process once undergone by the great swordsmen of the past.

This episode may be regarded as a highly suggestive case for reconsidering the meaning of budō in contemporary global society.