

BOOK REVIEW

Kindai Nihon no budoron - <budo no supotsuka> mondai no tanjo [Discourse on Budo in Modern Japan - The Origins of the 'Sportification of Budo' Problem]
Tetsuya Nakajima
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REVIEWER

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If one were to translate the Japanese word 'budo' into English, a simple rendering might be 'Japanese martial arts', or 'the martial ways of Japan', or perhaps even 'the martial arts and ways of Japan'. But for most Japanese people today, the concept 'budo' is too profound to be reduced to a mere Japanese version of what Tomlinson refers to as a 'sub-category of combat sports' [Tomlinson in Abe et al. 2012 [2011]: 72].

In other words, while the conceptual categories of 'budo' and 'martial arts' are very close in meaning, they are not perfectly interchangeable. Of course, strictly speaking, few concepts are amenable to perfectly equivalent translations into another language. But the concept of budo, which signifies a particular historical formation that emerged in modern Japan, must be clearly distinguished from universal concepts, such as 'sports', that Japan imported from the West.

In contemporary Japan, the question of what constitutes 'the original budo' is not confined to practitioners alone; it has been the subject of lively debate in the broader realm of social critique. As someone who has practiced both karate and kendo, I have engaged in my own share of heated battles over the nature of budo. And at my university, where I teach courses such as 'Traditional Japanese Culture' and 'The History of Sports', I have occasion to lecture about the historical development of budo, which has given me a sense of the different views of budo among today's students.

One issue that invariably generates debate is the 'sportification of budo'. For example, judo and karate are recognized as competitive sports on an international scale, as evidenced most clearly by their inclusion in the Olympics. People are divided into two seemingly irreconcilable camps in response to this situation. On one side are those fiercely critical of such internationalization and sportification and who argue that this trend trivializes budo's traditions, including its distinctive spiritual, martial, and cultural facets, which they insist should be a source of pride to the Japanese. On the other side are those who accept this trend, which they approvingly view as part of an increasingly globalized world.

Yet, according to Nakajima Tetsuya's¹ *Discourse on Budo in Modern Japan*, the debate around the 'sportification of budo' is hardly new: he argues that it can be traced back to well before World War II and has its roots in the 1920s (the late Taisho and early Showa eras). Nakajima eschews the essentialist inquiry that seeks to identify 'the original budo' and instead aims to provide a foundation for generating a richer discursive field for considering the history of debates surrounding the

1 Translator's note: Throughout the body of review, names appear in Japanese order, with surname first.

sportification of budo. I should note that (unlike many books on budo) *Discourse on Budo in Modern Japan* is a rigorous academic work, based on the author's doctoral dissertation at Waseda University's Graduate School of Sports Science, and it meticulously examines a vast trove of historical documents.

Nakajima is a judo practitioner who is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Education at Ibaraki University, where he specializes in the anthropology of sports and in discourses on budo. He begins his book by describing budo as follows: 'A form of physical culture that originated in Japan, budo today has two identities – as a sport and as a tradition' [1]. He then discusses the discourse of key figures in modern Japan who sought to identify the essence of budo and offers a detailed account of the emergence of this discourse. Specifically, he focuses on two issues: first, the process by which the 'sportification of budo' emerged as a discourse in its own right; second, how those involved in budo participated in, and responded to, this discourse [15]. *Discourse on Budo in Modern Japan* exceeds 600 pages in length and is divided into five parts consisting of sixteen chapters, as well as an introduction and a conclusion. Below, I offer an overview and an assessment of the book.

Parts One through Three focus on the concept of budo and the emergence of 'the sportification problem' in the years between 1868 (the first year of the Meiji era) and 1937. These sections are entitled (1) 'From *jutsu* to *do* – Kano Jigoro and the Formation of Kodokan Judo', (2) 'The Emergence of the Concept of Budo – The Formation of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai and Nishikubo Hiromichi's Theory of Budo', and (3) 'The Emergence of the Problem of the "Sportification of Budo" – The Popularization of Budo (1918–1937)'. Nakajima does not adhere to the common postwar 'modernization narrative' that posits a transformation from *bujutsu* in the early modern era (*kinsei*) to budo in the modern era (*kindai*). Instead, he notes that Kano Jigoro, founder of Kodokan judo, and Nishikubo Hiromichi, of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai, played a central role in establishing the modern concepts 'judo' and 'budo' from the words '*jujutsu*' and '*bujutsu*' [521–523]. Both men viewed the popular *gekken* swordsmanship performances of the Meiji era as fostering an impression of *bujutsu* as antiquated and base, and they used the slogan 'from *jutsu* (skill/technique) to *do* (a way)' in an effort to overcome such negative images.

In 1925, when the second Meiji Jingu National Sports Festival was held, the question of whether the Dai-Nippon Butokukai should be included suddenly emerged as the subject of debate. This, in turn, drew attention to the relationship between budo and sports in terms of their respective 'spiritual qualities' (*seishinsei*) and 'suitability to competition' (*kyogisei*) or lack thereof. Nakajima refers to these developments and argues that, between 1918 and 1937, sports in Japan increasingly emerged as objects of popular consumption as they underwent greater popularization, internationalization, and became more oriented toward competition.

It was at this time, he notes, that those advocating the 'sportification of budo' began to gain prominence, and he identifies this as a key moment in the formation of a discourse about budo's sportification [238–239]. Significant historical research has emerged in recent years that sheds light on the process behind the founding of Meiji Jingu as well as on the role of the Meiji Jingu National Sports Festival in advocating physical education on a national scale. Unfortunately, Nakajima does not engage with this research [Takashima 2012, Fujita 2013, Fujita et al. 2015]; notwithstanding this weakness, Nakajima offers extremely valuable insights on budo-related discourses.

Parts One through Three of the book basically reexamine well-known issues that have been addressed extensively in historical research on budo, Japanese sports, and physical education. From this perspective, I would argue that Parts Four and Five, which feature detailed analyses of the varied responses to the sportification of budo, showcase the book's true value.

Part Four, titled ‘Responses to “the Sportification of Budo” Problem (1) – Fujio Yasutaro and the Making of Budo as National Policy’, focuses on Fujio, a member of the House of Representatives from Saga Prefecture, who proposed that a national policy on budo be established. Fujio was critical of the internationalization of judo and the sportification of budo; he subscribed to a view of ‘Kokutai’² that saw ‘the Japanese spirit’ (*Nippon seishin*), ‘Shin’ (*kami*, referring to Shinto), and ‘bu’ (budo) as inseparable. Nakajima argues that this perspective on ‘Kokutai’ informed Fujio’s legislative efforts in the Imperial Diet in February 1938, which aimed to establish a national policy on budo [413, 417-418]. I happen to have in my possession Fujio’s major book, *Sumo as Budo and National Policy (Budo toshite no sumo to kokusaku)*, published by Dai-Nippon Seifukai. My copy is the sixteenth edition and was published in November 1939 – only one year after the first edition, which attests to the book’s best-selling status and to the persuasiveness of Nakajima’s arguments with respect to the importance of Fujio’s work.

Nakajima documents how budo was steadily incorporated into the wartime system through the establishment of the Budo Shinko Linkai (the Budo Promotion Committee, established in December 1939) and the Ministry of Health and Welfare Population Division’s Section for Budo Administration (*Jinkokyoku Renbuka*, November 1941). Additionally, in March 1942, the Dai-Nippon Butokukai was reorganized and newly established as a comprehensive budo organization under the joint auspices of the Ministry of the Army, Ministry of the Navy, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Home Ministry. Nakajima argues that, while these agencies largely shared the goal of adapting budo for combat use, they differed in terms of their respective conceptions of budo and were unable to establish a centralized administrative structure for budo. Ultimately, this multifaceted administrative approach was clearly far removed from Fujio’s ideal solution, which entailed the establishment of the Jinmuin under the direct control of the Home Ministry and dedicated to overseeing budo. This was to be merged with the Jingiin (an external bureau of the Home Ministry established in November 1940 in charge of administering jinja (Shinto shrines) [417].

Part Five, titled ‘Responses to “the Sportification of Budo” Problem (2) – The Birth of Kobudo’, offers a detailed account of the thought of Matsumoto Manabu, who was active in the House of Peers and who served as Chief of the Bureau of Jinja (Shinto Shrines) Affairs and as Chief of the Police Bureau in the Home Ministry. Matsumoto was influenced by Yasuoka Masahiro’s ideas of ‘the Japanese Spirit’ (*Nippon seishin*) and ‘shinkenmi’, a concept that Yasuoka maintained he discovered through his kata practice with a real sword (*shinken*) and that entails a willingness to face death. Matsumoto was also an advocate of the legitimacy of kata practice and criticized the growing sportification of budo as embodied in match-based competitions. This led him, in February 1935, to form the Japan Kobudo (Traditional Budo) Promotion Society (*Nippon Kobudo Shinkokai*), in which the term ‘kobudo’ (literally ‘old budo’) was coined in opposition to the new, sportified budo, such as judo and kendo [526-527]. He claimed that bujutsu (disparate traditional styles of budo) could still be found in regions throughout Japan. The concept of ‘kobudo’ posed a contrast with ‘shin budo’ (new budo), which emerged in 1941 under the auspices of national defense (*kokubo kokka*) and its goal of orienting budo and physical education toward wartime use. Nakajima argues that some of these styles of bujutsu have survived to the present day due to the Japan Kobudo Promotion Society [527-528].

Nakajima acknowledges the valuable contributions of other scholars who have written about the history of the Japanese concept of budo. He refers to the research on the Dai-Nippon Butokukai and Kodokan judo by Kinoshita Hideaki (1970), Sakaue Yasuhiro (1998), and Inoue Shun (2004), as well as the work of Sogawa

² Translator’s note: ‘Kokutai’ is written with the characters for ‘nation’ and ‘body’. It encompasses various meanings that often overlap. For example, the word can be rendered as ‘national character’, ‘national polity’, ‘national principle’, ‘national constitution’, ‘national form’, etc.

Tsuneo (2014), who has examined the concept of budo from the 12th century to the present day. While building on this body of research, Nakajima focuses on the history of budo during the 'interwar period' (1918–1937), which has received less attention in extant scholarship [24–25]. As a comprehensive study of the major developments shaping budo's modern history, *Discourse on Budo in Modern Japan* is at the forefront of research on this topic. It offers a unique contribution by virtue of its attention to the history of the relationship between the concept of 'sports' and specific physical cultures related to martial arts in other countries. In this regard, *Discourse on Budo in Modern Japan* is a valuable comparative cultural study with an international scope.

Although it is not a central issue in this book, the Showa Imperial Inspection Match (*Showa tenran jiai*) is referred to many times, and we can discern from the fact of the Emperor (*tenno*)'s presence that this event considerably elevated the social status of budo in general [Fujita 2017]. The relationship between the Dai-Nippon Butokukai and both Heian Jingu in Kyoto and Meiji Jingu in Tokyo, and the fact that the many of the Japan Kobudo Promotion Society's demonstration matches took place on the premises of jinja (Shinto shrines), attest to the historical connection between budo and jinja. Meticulous research in this area from the perspective of bridging the histories of Shinto and budo will be required in the coming years.

The historical conflict between the concepts of 'budo' and 'sports' as illuminated in this book further serves as a powerful reminder of the complex historical relationship between the concepts of 'Shinto' and 'religion' in modern Japanese society [Fujita 2018]. Both pairs combine a particularistic Japanese concept and a foreign one. Of course, these pairs are not perfectly analogous, but, in the temporal space of modern Japan, both budo and Shinto have been identified as important elements in discourses on 'Nippon seishin' and the 'Kokutai' during times of national crisis. While budo and Shinto have occasionally been theorized in relation to each other, a careful comparative study of the history of each concept promises to broaden our understanding of Japanese cultural history in general.

*Note: This review is an expanded and revised version of a book review published in *Jinja shinpo* [No. 3375, 23 Oct. 2017].*

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