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JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS AND THE SUBLIMATION OF VIOLENCE

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SHINKAGE-RYU

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ABSTRACT

In Japan, the study of Japanese martial arts is rooted in historiography. Other approaches are comparatively rare. Yet, it would be extremely enlightening to undertake fieldwork on the classical Japanese martial arts, and to ask a broader range of questions. In this spirit, this study is interested in exploring the issue of violence. The martial arts are understood by researchers to fundamentally be fighting techniques, but the aspects of martial arts that have attracted the attention of researchers in the past have been the psychology of fighting and the pedagogy of the martial arts. I wish to argue that one of the objectives of the classical Japanese martial arts was to learn, through the practice of the martial arts, the wisdom that could be used to overcome violence. This study, then, proposes that martial arts are motivated by the 'sublimation of violence'. Through an ethnographic study of shinkage-ryu, this study explores how the sublimation of violence is practiced in the dojo and elucidates the structure and practice of classical kata that have largely remained hidden.

INTRODUCTION

In Japan, the study of Japanese martial arts as a social science is rooted in historiography. There are two major reasons why historical methodologies came to dominate the field. The first is the fact that there is an abundance of reference materials on the subject of Japanese martial arts. This is because in the pre-modern era (until 1868) those who practiced traditional Japanese martial arts tended to be wealthy, whether they were statesmen from the educated *bushi* (warrior) class, farmers, or merchants. They left to posterity an abundance of materials related to the Japanese martial arts. Such materials are still being discovered throughout Japan, and it is no exaggeration to say that there is an almost endless stream of new documents.

In the modern era (beginning in 1868), there were so many materials related to the Japanese martial arts that it was almost impossible to organize them all. Since Japanese martial arts were incorporated into governmental administrative bodies in Japan (education, police, and the military), the various ministries and agencies in charge of these functions created numerous documents on the topic. In addition to newsletters published by organizations such as Kodokan Judo (founded in 1882) and Dai-Nippon Butokukai (founded in 1895), which were the largest pre-WWII Japanese martial arts organizations, there are also numerous books as well as newspaper and magazine articles on the topic of Japanese martial arts. This has recently been augmented by data made available on the Internet.

The second reason for the prominence of historiographical approaches is that the major topic taken up by Japanese martial arts studies has been the long road to modernization (or 'sportification'). Japanese martial arts researchers have expended a great deal of energy elucidating the various phases in the changes that took place in the culture of the Japanese martial arts between the 17th and 20th centuries. In particular, much of their discourse focuses on the changes that took place in pedagogical methods, and the form and content of classes; they discussed the course around the sportification of Japanese martial arts from the establishment of kata, or forms, in the various martial arts schools in the 17th century, the advent of matches in the 18th century, and finally the various developmental phases of competitive matches that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. These studies have typically focused on judo and kendo. Since judo, in particular, is an Olympic event, studies have emphasized the fact that it underwent more intense sportification than kendo.

There is another reason that research into the modernization or sportification of the Japanese martial arts has been so prevalent: Traditionally, most research into the history of the Japanese martial

arts has been conducted by experts in judo and kendo. During the occupation of Japan immediately after World War II, teaching Japanese martial arts in schools was prohibited. However, the ban on judo was lifted in 1950, in the latter part of the Occupation Period. This was followed by the lifting of the bans on kendo in 1952 and sumo in 1958. All of these were then included as elective activities in physical education classes. Consequently, there was also the need for people able to teach these Japanese martial arts in schools and other facilities of education (physical or otherwise).¹

In 2012, Japanese martial arts became compulsory in school physical education curricula. These arts include judo, kendo, kyudo (Japanese archery), sumo, karate, aikido, shorinji-kempo (modern Japanese-style Chinese martial arts), naginata ('pole sword'), and jukendo (modern martial art using the bayonet). However, according to survey statistics gathered immediately before their inclusion as compulsory subjects, judo (67.3%) and kendo (26.3%) accounted for a total of 93.6% of all Japanese martial arts taught at schools [Kitamura 2010]. This trend remains unchanged at present. The specific Japanese martial arts taught by instructors at Japanese universities are believed to mirror those taught at the compulsory education (public school) level. The high percentage of researchers at university level who are involved in these particular martial arts (judo and kendo) is believed to have a major effect on the content of social science research conducted into the Japanese martial arts.

This polarization in research has led to two problems. First, research into martial arts other than judo and kendo have largely been neglected. Research into classical Japanese martial arts, which have been practiced continuously since the Edo period (1603-1868), has been particularly neglected. Since the classical martial arts have not been adopted for use in physical education classes in secondary schools, it is difficult for academics who are specialists in the study of classical martial arts to obtain posts at universities. Within Japan, there are two organizations that supervise classical martial arts. Several times a year, they hold *enbukai* (public demonstrations of martial arts kata) and release videos of their various styles.² In addition, the classical martial arts schools operate dojos around the world. Yet, the almost exclusive focus on judo and kendo in Japanese martial arts research has led to a wide variety of data in the field being overlooked.

1 For more in-depth discussion and analysis of these issues, see Yasuhiro Sakae's article in this issue.

2 These are the Societies for the Promotion of Japanese Classical Martial Arts (founded in 1935) and the Nihon Kobudo Association (founded in 1979).

Naturally, there is some research on classical Japanese martial arts. Documents and papers written by martial artists in the Edo period have been used in Eastern philosophical thought, and a large number of studies of documents and materials related to the classical Japanese martial arts have been conducted in Japan as part of that field of research [e.g. Yuasa 1987; Minamoto 1989; Uozumi 2002; Kato 2003; Maebayashi 2006; Sogawa 2014]. Nevertheless, since the materials associated with the classical Japanese martial arts were usually transmitted within specific martial arts schools, they were originally intended to be read only by people associated with those particular schools. As a result, many nuances of the texts associated with specific classical martial arts could be lost on other readers.

The second problem is the fact that, since so much research into the Japanese martial arts has utilized historical methods (involving different kinds and degrees of bias), other research methods have been largely ignored. Although anthropologists and sociologists have previously studied the Japanese martial arts, most of this research has been dominated by historical studies that rely on reference documents from the past [Inoue 2004; Sogawa 2014]. Fieldwork in particular has almost never been employed in the study of Japanese martial arts in Japan.

However, fieldwork on classical Japanese martial arts is much needed and would be extremely informative. Even when a specific school of martial arts has inherited its own body of documentation and authoritative textual materials, in many cases, the actual martial art that is practiced differs from what is recorded in these materials. Moreover, specific differences can emerge in and across different dojos. Fieldwork offers perhaps the most effective way to explore and examine the current features of traditions in ways that exceed historical focus on records and written archives.

Participant observation studies are thriving in the field of martial arts studies overseas [e.g. Zarrilli 1998, Downey 2005, and Wacquant 2006]. These studies share with ethnography the methodology in which the researchers themselves are practitioners of the martial art under discussion, as is the case with the present study. This study is an ethnographic study in which the researcher participated in the practice of the martial art. The following section provides a description of the objectives of this ethnographic study.

LOCATING THE PROBLEM

As discussed in the Introduction above, due to the failure of researchers to address the classical Japanese martial arts as practiced in the present day, classical Japanese martial arts remain something of a conundrum. This study reports on part of the results of fieldwork conducted at a dojo of the *shinkage-ryu*, one of the schools of classical Japanese martial arts, over a 12-year period.

This study is focused on the issue of violence. When one hears the word 'violence', one may think of one person punching (or stabbing, or shooting, etc.) another person/other people. However, the term 'violence' as used in this study has two meanings. One is the broad meaning that includes any attack intended to kill another person; the other is a narrower meaning that refers to sword-fighting techniques. This particular issue is not generally taken up in most research on the Japanese martial arts. The martial arts are understood by researchers to be, fundamentally, fighting techniques; but the aspects of martial arts that have attracted the attention of researchers in the past have included the psychology of fighting and the pedagogy of the martial arts [Minamoto 1982; Yuasa 1987; Chan 2000].

Regarding the psychological aspects of the Japanese martial arts, Sogawa's *Japanese Martial Arts and Eastern Thought* [2014] is a work that is representative of recent research. Sogawa argues that the reason martial artists in the Tokugawa period utilized ideas from Buddhism and Taoism was because they needed to construct a theoretical system – one designed to psychologically prepare them to kill their enemies – that could be used in training. Shinkage-ryu is a classic example of the use of such ideas in its training. Of course, since there is social resistance to characterizing the martial arts as merely being for and about *killing*, martial artists also utilized the virtues of Confucianism to sugarcoat the techniques. Hence, today, discussions that claim some kind of moral or educational value in martial arts practice have been colored by Confucianism. Indeed, Confucianism has exerted an increasing influence over such discourse since the start of the modern age. The strategy of Kano Jigoro, the founder of judo, exemplifies this attempt to offset the violence of martial arts by referring to notions of Confucian virtue. Sogawa's analysis of such references to different philosophies has helped to pave the way for martial arts researchers in this direction.

However, Sogawa conducted his research exclusively using written materials and he conducted no fieldwork at actual classical martial arts dojos. Previous researchers (not only Sogawa) tacitly assume that the classical martial arts were learned only or exclusively as a technique for killing (battle). However, such a tacit assumption may have worked to conceal the actual status of the classical martial arts in all previous

research on the topic. If we focus on the world of actual practice, then it could challenge the premise that these martial arts are (or were) practiced solely for the purpose of training in the techniques of battle. In addition, as mentioned above, if the actual conditions of practice are known, then the significance of the statements recorded in written materials on the classic Japanese martial arts might become clearer.

I wish to propose that one of the objectives of the classic Japanese martial arts was to learn through the practice of the arts the wisdom that could be used to overcome violence. This study, then, is anchored by the concept of 'the sublimation of violence', or the utilization of an opponent's attack to positively cancel out violence. In this study, the hypothesis is that kata is what leads to the sublimation of violence in the classical martial arts.

The concept of kata has been described as follows:

This Japanese concept identifies a prearranged, or choreographed, activity in which the basic techniques of a certain fighting style are acted out by one or up to hundreds of participants.
[Jones 2002: xi]

In Japanese martial arts, kata refers to the practice of technical patterns of movement that, as a general rule, are performed by one or two people. In this study, the proposition is that the structure of kata itself may be a contrivance designed to induce the sublimation of violence. The overarching objective of this study was to ascertain how the sublimation of violence is practiced at one dojo and to elucidate the structure and practice of classical kata that have largely remained hidden. In carrying out the field research, although I utilized the statements of people at the fieldwork site, I handled these statements as resources that would help us understand the circumstances of their practices.

OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY LOCATION

A Description of Shinkage-ryu

Let me begin with an overview of the fieldwork site, which is a shinkage-ryu dojo near Tokyo. Shinkage-ryu is a school of swordsmanship founded by Kamiizumi Ise-no-Kami Nobutsuna (1508-1573). Yagyu Munetoshi (1529-1606), one of Kamiizumi's students, added his own unique aspects to the style of shinkage-ryu, which he learned from his teacher. He founded one of the best-known styles of shinkage-ryu, known as 'Yagyu shinkage-ryu'. After receiving the formal protection of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the shinkage-ryu of the Yagyu clan was thereafter passed down through the generations of the Tokugawa family as part of the education of the Shogun. In addition to the Tokugawa family, who produced the Shoguns of Tokugawa Shogunate during the Edo period, Yagyu-shinkage-ryu was also passed down in the Owari Domain, which was headed by relatives of the Tokugawa family. The Tokugawa style is known as Edo-Yagyu and the style practiced in the Owari Domain is known as Owari-Yagyu.

Kodama (a pseudonym), the head of the dojo surveyed in this study, traces his lineage back to the Owari clan. He explains that his ancestors assisted in the passing down of the Owari-Yagyu style through the generations. Kodama's shinkage-ryu was passed down from father to son, starting with an ancestor in the Owari clan who was a student of shinkage-ryu.

I began visiting Kodama's dojo on October 30, 2005, attending practice twice a month, on the second and last Sunday of each month. Practice sessions were from 2pm until 6pm and were held in Kodama's personal dojo. Normally, the senior pupils serve as practice partners, and the practitioners participating on a given day have the pupils take turns practicing with them. In other words, rather than practicing in the same groups of two, since there are around five participants in each practice session, each pupil practices in turn with all of the others. On some occasions, Kodama himself served as the practice partner when a participant practiced kata but, in most cases, he only provided guidance by offering advice during practice and by demonstrating kata to senior pupils. There was also time set aside for reading old shinkage-ryu documents. However, this study did not include that component of the practice sessions. The following – except for the sections quoted from reference works – is a description of the basic fieldwork conducted.

Etiquette, Equipment, and the Dojo

The etiquette practiced at Kodama's dojo differs from the etiquette practiced at judo and iaido dojos, which consists of the students forming straight rows and bowing their heads. At Kodama's dojo, first the students face the teacher, sit down, and bow without forming straight rows. This is because the practice of forming straight rows entered Japan in the modern era and was modeled after the practice followed in the French military. The style of seated bowing practiced at Kodama's dojo is also unique. It consists of sitting in the *seiza* position (with the lower legs folded under the thighs and the knees facing forward), placing the tips of the thumbs and forefingers against the sides of the knees. When bowing, the head is lowered only slightly and the gaze remains on the person seated opposite [Figure 1]. As mentioned above, the modern practice of martial arts has been influenced by Confucianism and thus places special importance on etiquette. However, at Kodama's dojo, etiquette deemed superfluous is avoided. The focus remains firmly on practicing the martial art itself.

In shinkage-ryu, a bamboo sword approximately 39 inches in length, known as a *fukuro-shinai*, is used [Figure 2]. It is constructed by splitting a bamboo vertically into eighths or sixteenths and covering these in leather. The leather is sewn together to form a sheath, and the stitching along the length of the sheath represents the blade of the sword. However, since the sword itself is round, no matter which part of the sword makes contact, the effect is the same. Actual Japanese swords, of course, are not round, therefore the position of the blade is

unmistakable. Thus, the line of stitching is used to represent the blade in order to ensure that the student learns how to manipulate an actual bladed sword.

Since the kata learned during practice sessions are intended to be swordsmanship techniques for use with actual Japanese swords, the *fukuro-shinai* is normally referred to as a 'sword'. However, naturally, even a full-power blow from a bamboo sword would not result in the death of one's practice partner. In shinkage-ryu, blows are exchanged with the bamboo swords, using the utmost care to ensure the safety of one's partner. Thus, in the following description, I will follow the practice of referring to the *fukuro-shinai* as a 'sword' or 'bamboo sword'.

'Actual battles are not fought in prepared spaces such as a dojo', Kodama told me. 'However, since I would like to ensure that the traditional dojo is passed down to future generations, I intentionally had a dojo of this type constructed'. The floor of Kodama's dojo is flat and made of wooden boards. The geometric environment created by this type of dojo is designed to ensure that what the teacher wants to pass on to his students is passed on in an easily understandable way. If there were unevenness on the ground, issues such as tripping or stumbling could affect the success or failure of a technique. In such an environment, it would be difficult to determine the skill level of the practitioners. A detailed reason for this will be given below, but it is important first to understand all of this in terms of the aim of creating stable environmental conditions that will result in the sublimation of violence.



Figure 1: seiza position



Figure 2: fukuro-shinai

THE STRUCTURE OF THE KATA: PARADIGMS AND FUNDAMENTALS

This section provides a description of the structure of the kata used in shinkage-ryu. The practice of kata in shinkage-ryu can be compared to learning grammar through the use of example sentences in a language class. In shinkage-ryu, practice is known as *kumitachi* and, therefore, *kumitachi* is synonymous with kata. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, hereafter in this paper the term *kumitachi* will be referred to as kata.

In shinkage-ryu, the objective is to learn ‘the art of the sword’ (*toho*) that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Swordsmanship refers to the fundamentals behind the method of using the sword according to the teachings of shinkage-ryu, and the kata represent the paradigm of that method. Hereafter in this paper I will refer to ‘fundamentals’ rather than the technical term ‘the art of the sword’.

There are two main fundamentals. These are *tachisuji*, which is ‘swordsmanship’, and ‘moving in under the opponent’s sword’. First, *tachisuji* refers to the trajectory of the sword; in other words, the direction in which the sword moves and the amount of power behind it. In shinkage-ryu, the ideal movement is to move straight toward the center of one’s opponent. However, in actual practice, the movements that can be performed when both practitioners are in battle stances are limited; as a result, one must adjust one’s body movements in order to obtain the proper trajectory for a successful attack. Thus, the movements of the kata do not necessarily encourage a perpendicular attack. Here, it is important to mention that the fundamentals do not consist solely of learning how to strike one’s opponent. The art of swordsmanship (*kenjutsu*) is the fundamental behind sword skills such as when and where to brandish the sword in response to the movements of one’s opponent. According to Kodama, the most important aspect of this is moving in before the tip of the opponent’s sword is dropped into an attack position. This is the second of the two main fundamentals. Taking advantage of this move, the attack is performed in a single motion. Of course, when one is close enough to attack one’s opponent, one is simultaneously close enough to be vulnerable to the opponent’s attack. Thus, one must take the initiative to move in before the opponent has a chance to attack. If this is delayed, the opponent will launch an attack.

Many of the kata in shinkage-ryu consist of movements designed to strike the opponent’s hands (*ken*, i.e. the fists gripping the sword) or forearm. This is because there is an equal distance between the hands of the two practitioners when both are brandishing their swords in front of their bodies [Figure 3]. In addition, since both practitioners

use swords of the same length, if one aims for the hands, the distance is the same regardless of the individual practitioner’s battle stance. Even if the two practitioners are of different body types and heights, it is completely fair to aim for the hands. In other words, as long as one is able to ascertain a sense of the distance between the swords when one moves in toward the opponent, the only aspect that one needs to pay attention to is the trajectory of his sword. As the practitioners become more skillful, they become able to focus solely on the position of their opponent’s hands, which is how they ascertain the trajectory of the sword. As they further increase in skill, they become able to predict where their opponent’s sword tip will drop simply by observing their stance.

Through the kata performed at every session, instruction is provided in *tachisuji* and ‘moving in under your opponent’s sword’, which is a critical aspect of shinkage-ryu. Kodama explains that his dojo is constructed to create a geometric space that facilitates understanding of these two fundamental concepts. However, he also cautions that one must make sure to avoid the opponent’s sword.

When I first began taking lessons at the dojo, I was hesitant to strike Kodama and the senior pupils at full power. Instead, I struck blows on locations that did not make direct contact with their bodies. This led to me being told: ‘That will never work. Let’s see a real attack!’ My problem was that I was not moving in accordance with the fundamentals of shinkage-ryu. When my movements did not correspond to those of my opponent, I was given instruction in the various sword trajectories. Since there were differences in the body types and physical senses of the practitioners, it was necessary for me to adjust to each individual opponent.

What follows is a description of what takes place during actual practice sessions.



Figure 3: an equivalent amount of distance between the hands of the two practitioners

ACTUAL PRACTICE SESSIONS

Practice in Receiving Counterattacks

(1) Figures 4-5 show a sidelong stance with the left shoulder facing the opponent. It is known as the *wakigamae*, with one's own sword tip pointed toward the rear on one side (hilt toward the opponent).

(2) Figures 6-7 show one practitioner judging the distance to his opponent, shifting his stance so that he is facing his opponent squarely, and moving his sword upward.

(3) Figures 8-9 show the practitioner advancing one step toward his opponent, sword raised above his head, and striking directly in front. The opponent also swings down his sword, but it is parried by the sword of the practitioner.

(4) Figures 10-11 show that the opponent has retreated diagonally to the right and has assumed the *hasso* stance (brandishing the sword diagonally as if it is being supported by his right shoulder).

(5) Figures 12-15 show the practitioner once again facing off squarely toward his opponent and raising the sword above his head. He steps toward his opponent with the left then right foot and strikes his opponent's left forearm with his sword. The move shown in (3) and (4) is known as *ni-no-tachi*, the 'second attack'.

This section describes actual practice sessions using *itto-ryodan* ('cleaving an opponent in two with a single sword blow'). This is the first technique taught to beginners.

Figures 5-16: Itto-Ryodan



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

In shinkage-ryu, the beginner is taught the ideals of the school from the master in the first lesson. It is reflected in an itto-ryodan that strikes straight. After practice with Kodama and receiving the description provided in (1) - (4) above, I practiced itto-ryodan. At first, this consisted of learning by watching Kodama practice itto-ryodan. The senior student who played the role of opponent ensured the success of the practice with his superb skill. Then, after practicing several times, the senior student said, 'Let us test your skill'. With that, I began practicing with him. The first time I attempted the 'second attack', the senior student landed a blow on my hands.

In shinkage-ryu, when one's moves appear to be ineffective, the opponent can launch a counterattack. Although I am an instructor of judo, the kata in judo are intended to be performed by both practitioners according to set procedures, and thus unexpected counterattacks by one's opponent do not occur. The only time an opponent in judo will make an attack that is not according to a set procedure is when sparring or during a match. So, for the author – who took it for granted that practice of kata consists of both practitioners repeating a set procedure – the notion that the opponent would launch a counterattack was very surprising indeed.

According to the senior student, when I brandished my sword, he could clearly see my hands gripping the handle of the sword [Figure 16-17].

When utilizing the 'second attack' in order to prevent your opponent from striking, after moving toward your opponent with the right foot, as shown in (1), you must position your body side-on to the opponent and raise the sword above your head, stepping out with the left foot into a wider stance, as shown in (2) [Figures 14-15]. This action hides the hands holding the sword, positioning the sword at an angle and creating a blind spot. If you are able to adjust the trajectory of your sword in this way, your opponent is unable to see your hands in your counterattack due to the angle formed by the two swords, thereby preventing your opponent from blocking your sword. Once I started practicing with these points in mind, I was able to avoid getting hit by the senior pupil after only a few attempts.

Thus, the practice of kata in shinkage-ryu is not simply a performance. Naturally, beginners are not subject to counterattacks at first, but after repeating the kata two or three times and committing the actions to memory, practice in handling counterattacks begins. Through this style of practice, the student learns the physical movements that are appropriate to the fundamentals of this art.

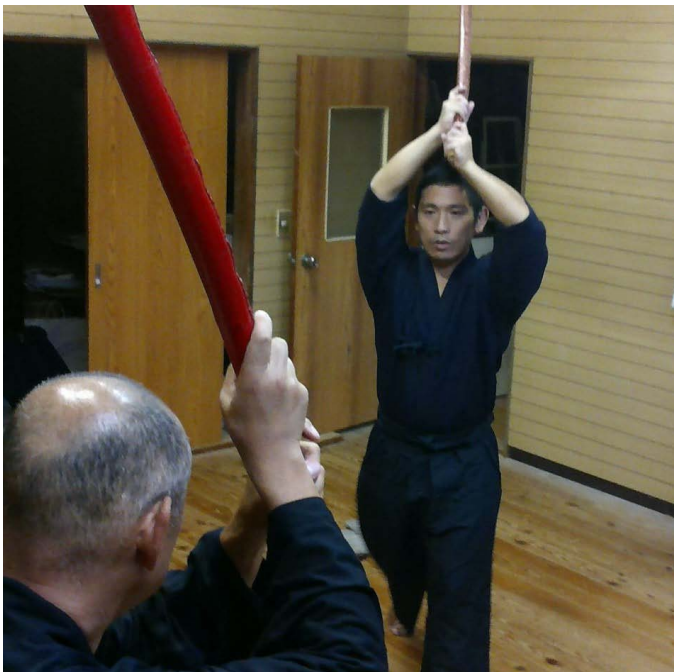


Figure 16



Figure 17

Figures 16-17:
Counterattack by
the opponent

Figures 18-26:
An example of itto-ryodan
during kudaki practice



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26

Kata without Set Actions

In shinkage-ryu, there is a practice known as *kudaki* (literally 'breaking-down') that one engages in after a certain amount of practice. *Kudaki* is a form of practice in which the student attempts their own moves without regard for the movements they learned during kata practice. For example, in the abovementioned itto-ryodan, practitioners start at the wakigamae stance then raise their swords above their heads. However, during *kudaki*, your opponent does not raise their sword above their head and, instead, delivers direct blows aimed at your left shoulder from directly in front. In response, you take a step forward from the wakigamae stance and, with your sword held diagonally above your right shoulder, you aim for a strike on your opponent's hands [Figures 18-26]. Once again, using the above metaphor, this type of practice is akin to learning how to engage in a conversation, or write a composition, using the grammar previously learned.

As long as one follows the fundamentals, one can modify the movements made after the opening stance in a variety of ways, and one's opponent does the same. Thus, sometimes one loses to one's opponent. Through a process of winning and losing, one trains in how to move, according to the fundamentals, in any situation. Generally, in Japan, it is thought that practice of classical martial arts is only

iterating the formalized kata [Futaki, Irie, and Kato 1994: 216]. In fact, the movement of the kata may change within the range controlled by fundamentals.

Of course, there are limits to the changes that can be made to the kata by changing one's stance in the ways mentioned above. In the dojo, we are taught several variations for each stance we learn. The following is recorded in one of the old shinkage-ryu documents: 'For each kata there are three *kudaki*. If you become skilled at *kudaki*, they become limitless' [Yagyū 1637]. In other words, if we understand the sword a practitioner brandishes to be the 'centerline', then one can either attack from the right, the left, or from directly in front. If one maintains the space between oneself and the opponent and remains constantly aware of that space, then one is able to deal with all situations, even those in which it is unclear if your opponent will attack.

In shinkage-ryu, the practice of kata that have no set actions is intended to give the student knowledge of practical fundamentals. Although kenjutsu matches were first established in modern dojos in the 18th century, shinkage-ryu – which was founded prior to that time – teaches students to master the fundamentals through practices that blend kata and matches.

The Innermost Secret of Shinkage-ryu: Marobashi

Kodama explains that the fundamentals of Shinkage-ryu are techniques designed to manifest *marobashi*. Marobashi is a word that refers to the innermost secret of shinkage-ryu and to actions that respond to the opponent's sword trajectories. For example, when using the itto-ryodan technique, the practitioners face each other, then step toward each other to attack perpendicularly. However, if one attacks a little later than one's opponent, then one's sword will parry one's opponent's sword. A formal description of this phenomenon would be that the trajectories of one's sword and one's opponent's sword combine into one, which results in one's opponent's sword missing one's body. In order to ensure this result, you need to advance in such a way that your own centerline overlaps the point located between yourself and your opponent.

This is what is taught at the dojo. Of course, even in patterns such as kudaki, in which the attack is from an angle, the main point of advancing is the same as the *pattern* mentioned immediately above. In this case, one's left shoulder rotates behind, caused by the way in which one swings the sword, and the trajectory of the opponent's sword aiming at one's left shoulder is dodged [Figures 19-22]. After that, one is hitting the opponent's fists.

Shinkage-ryu kata are organized to hit the opponent's body after responding to the opponent's attack. It happens in one action, but if you disassemble the move, then it is in that order. In other words, shinkage-ryu kata are designed to produce marobashi. Marobashi, 'the innermost secret', is implied in everything from the first itto-ryodan learned until the very last kata that a student learns.

However, marobashi is not a prescribed movement. In other words, since the opponent's stance and movements change how one must respond, marobashi is ultimately amorphous. It can only be ascertained through one's intuition; no one can teach a student beforehand the exact location where marobashi will manifest. As a result, the issue of how to move so that the point between oneself and one's opponent overlaps the centerlines, and therefore when and where to move in under the opponent, has to be tested by individual practitioners every time they face an opponent. This requires each practitioner to adjust the way they use their body to ensure that their sword manages to get under their opponent's sword. Kodama states:

While only receiving instructions to 'move in there' or 'go there' when an opponent makes a move, we students learn through repeated practice. This type of 'contradiction' is provided by the dojo; which is to say, it is the thesis, or 'challenge', that they issue to their students. In time, your opponent adjusts their attack to your movements and this, in turn, causes you to further develop your own marobashi.

The fundamentals that actualize marobashi, which are latent in the kata, reveal an aspect of the dojo's 'thesis', as described by Kodama. The 'thesis' might be reworded as 'subject' or 'problem'. The movements of the kata that manifest in an instant are the solution to this problem; that is, they are the practical form of the art. Practitioners practice repeatedly, in a trial-and-error fashion, in order to find a suitable solution to this problem. As a result, rather than 'practicing' kata, it is more correct to say that they are 'experimenting' within the kata. Through repetition of these experimental practice sessions, one refines the intuition required to ascertain the timing of one's marobashi.

This concludes our discussion of the practice of shinkage-ryu. Although there are many other detailed issues related to the movements, the above represents a summary of the basics. Next, I wish to discuss the issue of how violence is sublimated through these practices.

THE SUBLIMATION OF VIOLENCE

The Searcher 'Under the Sword'

In this section, I wish to argue that the sublimation of violence in shinkage-ryu is marobashi itself. It is, I realize, difficult to understand how marobashi manifests as the sublimation of violence, because marobashi has traditionally been viewed as a sword technique used to strike one's opponent. To understand how this relates to the sublimation of violence, it is useful to consider the circumstances under which the concept of marobashi was established, which will reveal how marobashi leads to the sublimation of violence.

In practice, the students must be close enough to strike each other with their swords. When looked at simply, this seems like a strange movement to make. This is because, normally in battle, the more rational course would be to attack your opponent from a position where they cannot attack you. Above, Kodama mentioned the apparent 'contradiction' in the fact that one moves in under his opponent's sword. He also said: 'One doesn't become strong by practicing Shinkage-ryu. Most of the kata are designed so that, if one's opponent attacks with full force, you will lose'. Such a claim may seem extreme, but Kodama seems to view an 'actual battle' as a *secondary* objective of training. This provides a clue that will lead us to the sublimation of violence. However, first I would like to take a detour to consider the meaning of 'moving in under the opponent's sword'.

As stated above, the action of moving in under the opponent's sword is puzzling. This is because it is dangerous to move into a position that leaves one vulnerable to attack. Since they use a bamboo sword as a representation of an actual sword, any strike by the bamboo sword is

tantamount to death. Also, although they do pay the utmost attention to safety, a strike with a bamboo sword certainly hurts. So why practice in this way?

Bamboo swords are instruments designed for engaging in a sword fight. That is, the fact that they ensure one's safety means that they are instruments designed to place oneself into a violent space, rather than being instruments designed to avoid violence. As an example, we can compare bamboo swords to the oxygen tanks used for scuba diving. We can only stay underwater for very short periods when just wearing swimsuits. However, if we have oxygen tanks, we can stay underwater for longer periods of time.

If we used actual Japanese swords in shinkage-ryu, sword fights would result in death; since we use bamboo swords, we can engage in sword fighting under conditions that ensure our survival. The fukuro-shinai is a piece of equipment that was invented by Kamiizumi, the founder of shinkage-ryu, and it constituted a technological innovation in the martial arts. As a result of this innovation, we are able to enter into the extraordinary space of the sword fight.

The invention of the oxygen tank allowed humans to be active under the sea for longer periods of time. The result was a wealth of academic data that we were able to discover in the sea. In the same way, the bamboo sword is an instrument designed to help the user to comprehend marobashi in the space of a sword fight. In the art of sword fighting, if one maintains enough distance from one's opponent to ensure that one is not attacked, then the opponent's attack does not represent 'violence' to the sword fighter. Thus, it is difficult to say that violence has been sublimated, unless the practitioners are close enough to ensure that their attacks could result in a hit. So, given this context, how is it that marobashi sublimates violence?

Ending Immediately Prior to a Sword Strike

Above, I discussed how marobashi is manifest when one abides by the fundamentals of sword use. Thus, it is a phenomenon that appears when the trajectory of the opponent's sword misses your body. At that moment, you are in an overwhelmingly advantageous position. But you still have not struck your opponent with your sword [Figure 9, Figure 22]. You are winning, but you haven't yet struck a blow, and your opponent is losing, but has yet to suffer a blow. Shinkage-ryu places great importance on marobashi as the way to create this condition.

In modern Japanese martial arts like kendo and judo, how to attack a specific body part of the opponent is measured – for example, what kind of posture and how much momentum you put the bamboo sword in the face of the opponent, or how the opponent's back was attached

to the tatami.³ On the other hand, the movement just before attacking the opponent's body is evaluated in shinkage-ryu.

Of course, even if you move into a position in which marobashi is manifest, if you don't take action, then your opponent will attack. Ultimately, you must strike your opponent. It is difficult to talk about the movements required to achieve this as facilitating the sublimation of violence. However, marobashi is directing that the opponent seems to have lost, and the possibility of finishing the fight without striking the opponent's body. If you think that violence is an evil and you suppress your violence, then you will be unilaterally attacked by the opponent; taking overwhelming initiative while letting the opponent attack, however, creates a moment and choices that can be peaceful or ethical. Kodama explains that the moment in the heat of the sword fight, in which the violence disappears and the winner is determined, is the moment of marobashi: 'You often refer to kata as an action, but our actions are nothing more than emancipation from sword fighting'.

Through repeated experimental attempts at performing all the techniques of sword fighting, finally one finds a way to determine the outcome of the contest before one strikes one's opponent's body. The shinkage-ryu kata are a collection of marobashi for the purpose of guiding the practitioner in the devices before cutting the opponent's body.

CONCLUSION

Why is it that the practitioners of shinkage-ryu attempt to sublimate violence? This question cannot be answered merely through the study of one dojo. Rather, despite this article's initial critique of exclusively historical approaches, we must in fact remain aware of complex historical matters and processes as well. History is a valuable supplement to research.

For instance, it seems relevant to note that the latter half of the 16th century, when shinkage-ryu was founded, was a time of war in Japan. The first firearms entered Japan in 1543 and, thereafter, gun battles

³ In judo, it is regarded as the principle of skill to break the balance while adapting to the movement of the opponent. Kano got inspiration from modern science, especially physics, and conceptualized it as 'kuzushi (break the balance)'. The phenomenon that the opponent's balance was broke should have occurred, but kuzushi was not clearly conceptualized in Japanese jiu-jitsu before judo was founded in 1882. This is a technique to make the opponent immovable just before throwing, and the concept resembles marobashi in this point. However, in current judo competition, the aspect of kuzushi is not taken into consideration in judging the performance of throwing techniques.

became the major method of waging war. The *bushi* (samurai warriors), who were experts at warfare, found themselves in an age in which even lowly foot soldiers could now easily kill them *en masse* using firearms. Under these conditions, it became impossible for experts in warfare to maintain their former identities. In such an age, experts in the art of swordsmanship realized that, as *bushi*, their expertise in swordsmanship would have to be deployed in a different way for it to maintain social value.

Kamiizumi, the founder of shinkage-ryu, was a member of a prestigious family of *bushi*. The problem of how to maintain the distinctive status of the *bushi* class would have been of particular concern for Kamiizumi and his Yagyu clan if they wished to stay relevant and pass on their teachings. Thus, it is likely that shinkage-ryu was consciously intended not as technical training for warfare, but rather as a way to cultivate the idea of *noblesse oblige* among the *bushi*. As Kamiizumi said: 'If it is not a great man, why will I pass down my school for him? Doesn't the old saying run that the sword that punishes the dragon does not swing to the serpent?' [Kamiizumi [1566] in Yagyu 1957: 249-255].

Of specific interest here is the fact that this school of swordsmanship emphasizes that *bushi* are to be prepared to face an opponent's attack head-on, not run from it, and actually maintains that this is what distinguishes *bushi* from all other social classes. In this specific cultural sense, the *marobashi* of shinkage-ryu becomes elevated as an ethos through which the *bushi* could maintain peace without losing their identity as warriors, in a way that did not demand a kind of non-violence that would force them to renounce their weapons. As Yagyu Toshitoshi, the founder of Owari-Yagyu, stated: 'If people practice shinkage-ryu, their behaviors will cultivate moral excellence, and, if the lord practices it, the country will be at peace' [Yagyu [1649] in Yagyu 1996: 166].

Ikegami Eiko [1997] adds further historical factors that seem relevant here. Immediately after the formation of the Tokugawa shogunate, there was great political instability, which resulted in two civil wars in the early 17th century [Ikegami 1997]. Furthermore, outlaws also became a social problem in the early 17th century; it was only in the second half of the 17th century that the Tokugawa shogunate stabilized. Shinkage-ryu was established in the first half of the 17th century, in a socially and politically unstable context – one in which there was a pressing need to find ways to reduce violence. It is against this backdrop that injunctions such as Toshitoshi's and the formation of shinkage-ryu are to be understood.

Finally, I would like to consider some areas for further research. First, more investigations could be carried out to establish whether the practices used at Kodama's dojo are also practiced at other dojos. In a book written by Yagyu Toshinaga, who taught shinkage-ryu to Kodama's father, *marobashi* is described only as follows: 'It is the origin of all movements ... One moves freely in accordance with the movements of one's enemy' [Yagyu 1957: 256-257]. Toshinaga also passed down the aforementioned words of Toshitoshi, but the relationship between *marobashi* and the sublimation of violence remains unclear.

Second, ethnographic studies can be used to test arguments about history and historical assertions, such as those of Norbert Elias, for instance. Elias is a key figure in terms of the way his work captured the complex relationships between civilization and sports [Elias and Dunning 2008], in which (among other things) the practice of sports itself is intimately connected with controlling violence and 'managing' civilization. The practice of shinkage-ryu is in precisely this sense to be considered a way of civilization.

However, shinkage-ryu is not an 'enclave-like' sport, designed purely to release violence. As Kamiizumi said: 'As the basket that catches fish, we can forget the basket after catching fish. Just like that, you can forget kata if you learn key points of shinkage-ryu' [Kamiizumi [1566] in Yagyu 1957: 13]. I have argued that shinkage-ryu practice is a method to promote the *qualitative change* of violence. Sports may be an Eliasian way of quantitatively managing violence, but shinkage-ryu is a way to *bend the existence* of violence.

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