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CUTTING SERPENTS: ESOTERIC BUDDHIST DIMENSIONS OF THE CLASSICAL MARTIAL ART OF DRAWING THE SWORD

1. Introduction

Japanese classical martial arts (*bujutsu* 武術, or *bugei* 武芸), such as archery (*kyūjutsu* 弓術) and swordsmanship (*kenjutsu* 剣術), were established in the ancient and feudal era as part of the combat skills of warriors¹. In the course of time, many of these skills were codified into formal practices within various martial schools or lineages (*ryū* 流), some of which are still transmitted today. These classical lineages mostly involved the instruction of various practical combat methods and techniques, but they were also often embedded with a certain religious or ideological rationale providing meaning to the forms. Since the time of their foundation the arts naturally absorbed various beliefs, the beliefs of those who practiced and transmitted the techniques.

In modern books on martial arts dealing with such beliefs one often finds reference to Zen Buddhism. This is no doubt due to the influence of Daisetsu T. Suzuki's essay on Zen and swordsmanship included in his *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1938), a work which inspired many an author discussing samurai culture, such as Eugen Herrigel (1884–1955), the writer of the well-known *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1953). Historically, the connection between *bugei* and Zen can be traced back to the writings of the Zen priest Takuan Sōhō 沢庵宗彭 (1573–1646) and Yagyū Munenori 柳生宗矩 (1571–1646), founder of the prestigious sword lineage Yagyū Shinkage-ryū 柳生新陰流. Takuan, in his *Fudōchi shinmyōroku* 不動智神妙錄 (Mysterious Record of Unmovable Wisdom) explains that the ideal mind of a swordsman is one that is on par with the Buddhist mind of “unmovable wisdom”. This is a mind that is at all times non-attached and unmovable, i.e.,

¹ The classical martial arts as a distinctive body of combat techniques are usually designated with the term “*bujutsu*”, modern martial arts as a way to cultivate the self with “*budō*” 武道, and martial arts incorporating both aspects with “*bugei*”. However, the arts designated today as “*bujutsu*” were in fact also composite structures combining martial, moral, and spiritual aspects. On this, see Friday 1997, 6-8.

not affected by disorder or instability, which is obviously an important advantage in sword combat. Munenori, who received instructions from Takuan, equally recognizes the compatibility of Zen and swordsmanship in his *Heihō kadensho* 兵法家伝書 (Book of Clan Traditions on the Martial Arts, 1632)². Like Takuan, the Yagyū-ryū master values the notion of non-attachment, and in particular employs the Buddhist term “Emptiness” (*kū* 空) as a secret word for the mind or the intentions of an opponent³.

Besides Zen, however, the various classical *bugei* lineages established in feudal and Edo-period (1603–1868) Japan naturally adopted many other different ideas, both of a religious and a non-religious nature. Among the non-religious lines of thought one may count Neo-Confucianism, which is gaining attention today as an important factor in the formation of the ideological framework of Edo-period martial arts. Among the religious sources of thought, then, there is Esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō 密教), which brings us to the main topic of this article.

As scholars of martial arts such as Friday (1997) have already indicated, Mikkyō is another form of Buddhism that had a substantial impact on classical *bugei*. To give one example, the “unmovable wisdom” emphasized by Takuan is in fact none other than the wisdom of the wrathful sword-bearing Fudō Myōō 不動明王 (Unmovable Wisdom King), a well-known esoteric Buddhist deity. Additionally, in the texts related to Tenshinshō-den Katori Shintō-ryū 天真正伝香取神道流, the oldest martial lineage still transmitted today, or Kashima Shinryū 鹿島神流, Mikkyō is also often mentioned (Imamura 1982; Friday 1997).

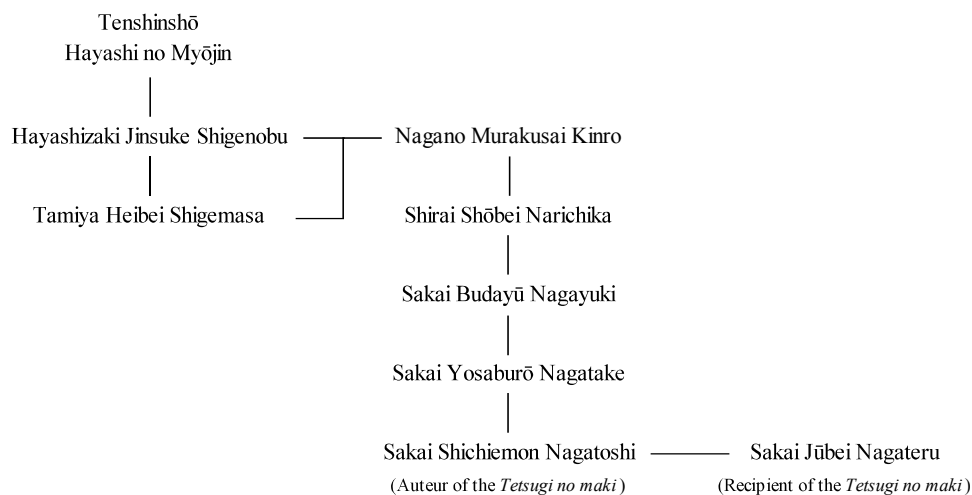
To be sure, the references to Esoteric Buddhism in pre-modern *bugei* texts are a major point of interest, but the fact is that they are mostly rather succinct or superficial. They simply concern the invocation of a divinity, the implementation of a charm, or the adoption of a symbol related to Mikkyō. Although these features show a great interest of the classical martial specialist in Mikkyō, they do not per se reveal a spiritual dimension of the practice of the arts. In this article, however, an early Edo-period document pertaining to the art of drawing the sword (*iaijutsu* 居合術) will be introduced which espouses esoteric Buddhist principles in a rather profound way, a way which suggests a relatively deep impact of these principles not only on the general mentality of the *bugei* master but also on the very nature of the practice of the combat techniques. The purpose of this article is to make the contents of this document known and to discuss its significance to the history of the art.

² Watanabe 1985, 111: “There are many aspects of martial arts which conform to the Buddhist Law and which can be found in Zen Buddhism.”

³ *Ibid.*, 87-88: “With Emptiness, we mean the mind or intentions of the opponent. (...) The mind of the opponent manifests itself in his hands that are holding the sword. One has to strike the opponent’s hands, as they are, when they have not yet started to move (*teki no nigittaru kobushi no imada ugokazaru tokoro wo sono mama utsu nari*).”

The document in question is called “*Tetsugi no maki*” 手次之卷 (Scroll of Transmission). It is one of the oldest extant documents pertaining to the *iaijutsu* style established by a man named Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu 林崎甚助重信 (1542?-1621?)⁴. Dated 1706, the scroll was written by Sakai Shichiemon Nagatake 酒井七右衛門長利, who handed it on to his son Sakai Jūbei Nagateru 酒井十平長照 together with other texts containing various instructions⁵.

The Sakai clan served the Tokugawa shogunate as the samurai ruling elite of the Shōnai 庄内 domain, in the western part of present-day Yamagata Prefecture. The domain itself was not far removed from the area where Hayashizaki Jinsuke founded his *iaijutsu* style, which was near present-day Murayama 村山 City in the east of Yamagata Prefecture. The style had been transmitted to a member of the Sakai clan by Shirai Shōbei Narichika 白井莊兵衛成近, a disciple of Nagano Murakusai Kinro 長野無楽斎權露. The latter received instruction from Hayashizaki Jinsuke and from Tamiya Heibei Shigemasa 田宮平兵衛重正, another disciple of the founder of the style⁶.



⁴ The *iaijutsu* style of Hayashizaki Jinsuke, later referred to as Shinmusō Hayashizaki-ryū 神夢想林崎流, or simply Hayashizaki-ryū, is just one of the many *iaijutsu ryū* that developed during the late feudal period in Japan. For a short overview of the history of *iaijutsu* schools, see Taniguchi 1997, 38-53.

⁵ The texts are assembled under the title *Hayashizaki ryūke gabutsu* 林崎流家画物 (Illustrated Documents of the Hayashizaki-ryū) and are kept at the city library of Tsuruoka. The *Tetsugi no maki* itself is partly reproduced in HSKI 1991, 61-65. In this paper, the entire text is included. I would like to thank the city library of Tsuruoka for sending me digital photographs of the text, without which it would have been difficult to make the transcription.

⁶ See HSKI 1991, 34, and Imamura 1982, 449, 493. The *iaijutsu* lineage transmitted at the Shōnai domain itself was referred to as “Hayashizaki Tamiya-ryū” 林崎田宮流.

As can be gleaned from the contents of the scroll, the *Tetsugi no maki* was probably a text given by an *iaijutsu* master to a disciple when the latter had received full transmission of the art. The scroll is still transmitted today in certain schools. For example, it is still passed on in Musō Jikiden Eishin-ryū 無双直伝英信流, a branch lineage of the Hayashizaki-ryū, under the title of “*Kongen no maki*” 根元之巻 (Scroll of the Source).

The *Kongen no maki* lists a samurai called Momo Gunbei no Jō Mitsushige 百々軍兵衛尉光重 after the name of Nagano Murakusai Kinro in the line of transmission, instead of Shirai Shōbei Narichika. This fact shows that the contents of the scroll were known to Nagano Murakusai and that he had passed it on to at least two of his disciples, Momo Gunbei no Jō and Shirai Shōbei. It further suggests that the core instructions of the scroll stem from the founder of the art himself: Hayashizaki Jinsuke.

It would be useful to elaborate more on the history of the scroll, but such details will be dealt with elsewhere⁷. Instead, let us look now through the scroll's contents and examine its characteristics.

2. The *Tetsugi no maki*

Note of the translator: The first part of the Sino-Japanese text below corresponds to the main body of the scroll, the second part to the notes (numbered from *a* to *s*) which Sakai Jūbei Nagateru—they are probably his—left in the spaces between the vertical lines of the original text. In order to facilitate reading, I have decided to separate the notes from the main text. It is the notes that make the document rather interesting, although some of them, especially the ones related to technical details, are elliptical and therefore difficult to interpret. They are mostly translated literally with only a minimum of interpretational additions. Also, a few Sino-Japanese characters in the notes could not be transcribed (they are indicated with a square), despite the invaluable help of my colleagues at Kyoto University, to whom I express my sincerest gratitude. Needless to say, all mistakes or misinterpretations in the translation are mine.

抑居合者、奥州林之明神夢想傳之、

夫兵法者、上古中居雖有數多、此居合末世相應之太刀、手近ノ勝負一命之有無極此居合、恐於粟散邊土之境不審之儀不可有之、依唯靈夢也、尋此始、或時奥州林崎甚助云者、依望兵法、林明神百ヶ日參籠、滿曉夢中告曰、汝以此太刀常胸中憶持、怨敵勝事得云々、則如靈夢成得大利^a、腰刀之三尺三寸^b

⁷ The author is currently working on a French monograph concerned with esoteric Buddhist influences on the *iaijutsu* lineage established by Hayashizaki Jinsuke, in which the history of the scroll will be discussed in more detail.

以九寸五分^〇勝事、柄口六寸^〇勝之妙不思〔議〕極意、一国一人^〇相傳也、腰刀三尺三寸三毒^〇現、脇指九寸五分九曜^〇五古^〇之内證也、敵味方成事又前生之業感也、生死一體^〇戰場浄土^〇也、如此現則現世蒙摩利支天^〇加護、来生成佛之縁成事無疑、此居合、雖出千金^〇、非眞實之人^〇輒不可授、天罰^〇有恐、志之人^〇傳之、古語曰、百棟構在則如茅茨之莊鄙^〇、兵利心懸者、晝夜思之、祈神明忽得利方見、依心濟身耳、默然、

天真正^〇

林明神 林崎甚助重信
宝永三歳 酒井七右衛門
戌八月十二日 長利〔花押〕
酒井十平長照

	金剛部	フトウ・イタ〔テ〕ン・マ リシテン、トウシ諸佛ノ事
三部	佛部	アマタハシメ 諸佛ヲノ事
	蓮華部	如来ハシメ諸佛ヲ 申、□ハキヨキナリ
	貪	ムサホル、ヨ クヲモウス
三毒	瞋	イカル、マコトナ ラサルマコト也
	痴	オロカ、シヤ 知ヲ申ナリ

- a. 一心悟ナリ、言〔重〕信サトリタナリ、
- b. 「五尺二・三寸ノ」(見せ消し)ツウレイノ人ハ三尺三寸迄ハ実ノ所ヌカル^〇也、
- c. 九寸五分ハ九寸五分ノ間合ナケレハヌケ不申トノ事、
- d. ウケ處ヨリ六寸ハナレ柄手出サル處、則九寸五分ニ勝ナリ、
- e. トハ重信ヲ云ナリ、
- f. ナメクシリ・ヒツキ・ヘミ也、又曰、「ウタカイハ」(見せ消し)マヨウハ酒色ヨクノミツ成、又イロ^〇ノモウネ念ヲサレト也、三毒ノアラソ〔イ〕ニタトエ、ニクムナナカレトヲシヘナリ、
- g. 佛金蓮ノ事ナリ、キヨキヲ申ナリ、三毒ヲサツテ無形ニ至ナリ、
- h. 星ナリ、

- i. シン□天タイニ有、ソウレイノ致ニ付、コレヲナラス、死ヲイサキヨクチウフツセヨトナリ、一心ノケツタンノ事ナリ、九寸五分ニ至本也、
- j. 無ヨリ出テ無ニカエテ生死大トタイナリコトヲサトリ、
- k. 死スルハ我一人ノケツタンセヨト也、為儀与志死ネト申ナリ、
- l. 生テ人前ニ顔ノムケラレヌヨリハシタテコクラクト思ヘト也、
- m. 如此ノ志テコソ神佛モカコアルヘシナリ、生ヲウル事アルヘシトノ事ナリ、
- n. 得タル処千金ニモトメタイハレテモユルスヘキヨウナキナリ、
- o. 儀を不知、先ノ趣ニ不合ニ、三毒ノ道理ヲワキマエヌ者ニ免スナトナリ、
- p. 其人悪ヲナセハ我モハチナリ、天ハツト知ヘシ、
- q. 前條ノ趣ヨクソナハリタル人ヲ云、
- r. 明心ヲウルノトコロニテ筆紙ノヘカ[タ]シ、
- s. 不義ヲニクミ悪ヲ恥ル物之我ニ有ヲ天真ト云、是ヲ主人公友云、天真ヲ正スル之林明神ニ而マシマス也、

To begin with, *iai[jutsu]* is an art transmitted in a dream by the kami (deity) called Hayashi no myōjin⁸ of the Ōshū region⁹. Although many different martial arts have been established since ancient times, this art is particular as it is like a sword that perfectly fits this degenerate age¹⁰. In this art, in which one faces an opponent at close distance, there is only one outcome: life or death. In this small and remote country that is like one of the grains of millet scattered about (*zokusan hendo*)¹¹ there should be no dubious matters. One should with confidence have faith in what the kami said in the dream.

The origin of the art is as follows. One time, there was a man named Hayashizaki Jinsuke of the Ōshū region, who, desiring to discover a secret martial art technique, prayed for a hundred days to Hayashi no myōjin. In the morning following the completion of his prayers, the kami appeared to him in a dream saying: “If you hold this sword in your heart at all times, you shall certainly defeat

⁸ “Hayashi no myōjin”, literally translated “the sublime kami (deity) of the wood”, actually refers to the kami of Kumano (see *infra*). Note that, at the time, the term *myōjin* often implied that the kami designated was seen as the manifestation of one or more Buddhist deities.

⁹ “Ōshū” refers to the ancient province of Mutsu 陸奥, the north-eastern part of the modern Tōhoku region.

¹⁰ The word used in the text is “*masse*” 末世, which means “degenerate age”, but which may also refer to “*mappō*” 末法, the “Age of the End of the Buddhist Law”. As is well known, the duration of the effectiveness of the Buddha’s teachings is marked by three periods, one in which the teachings bear fruit (*shōbō* 正法), one during which the effects are variable (*zōhō* 像法), and a final cycle, two thousand or a thousand five hundred years later after the passing of the Buddha, in which there are no more benefits (*mappō*). The latter period is said to last for ten thousand years.

¹¹ “*Zokusan hendo*” 粟散辺土 is a term indicating a small state, more precisely, one of the more than two hundred kingdoms that existed during one time in ancient India. The image stems from a man dispersing grains of millet on a plate, the grains scattering to all corners. In Japan, the term was often used to denote the smallness or insignificance of the country vis-à-vis India or China.

your worst enemy (*onteki*)¹².” As the divine dream predicted, Hayashizaki Jinsuke obtained a great victory^a. And so it was that the kami, regarding the question of how to win with a sword measuring three *shaku* and three *sun*^b (approx. 1m) against a [*wakizashi*] measuring nine *sun* and five *bu*^{13c} (approx. 28.5cm), taught the marvelous secret called “victory of *tsukaguchi rokusun*”^{14d} to that one man of the country^e. However, at the inner level of concentration, the long sword of three *shaku* and three *sun* long and the *wakizashi* with a length of nine *sun* and five *bu* refer respectively to “the transformation of the Three Poisons^{15f} into the Three Sections^{16g}” and to the “Nine Luminaries^{17h} and a five-pronged Vajra [Bell]¹⁸ⁱ”. Enemies and friends are made as the result of past actions in former lives^j. Truly, life and death are one^k, and the battlefield is no different from the Pure Land^{19l}. If one sees things in this way, how can there be doubt about Marishiten’s^{20m} protection in this life and the promise of Buddhahood in the next?

¹² The term *onteki* 怨敵 naturally means “enemy”, but it should be noted that in pre-modern Japanese religious contexts such as Esoteric Buddhism it was often taken in the meaning of “delusions” or “passions” (*bonnō* 煩惱), the obstacles to awakening. As the scroll clearly plays on the double meaning of the word “victory” (in the sense of winning against a real opponent and in the sense of being victorious against the foes of awakening), it is likely the term *onteki* as well as interpreted as having a double connotation.

¹³ According to the *Wada-ryū iai seigo* 和田流居合正誤 (Correction of Erroneous Iai Traditions within the Wada-ryū, 1725), Hayashizaki Jinsuke would have tried to find a way to block an attack from someone carrying a *wakizashi* of about 28cm with a sword measuring about one meter. Not being able to block the attack, he would have decided to pray for inspiration to the kami (HSKI 1991, 35). Whether this was the real reason for Jinsuke to pray to the kami can of course not be ascertained.

¹⁴ The term *tsukaguchi* 柄口 indicates the opening in the hilt in which the tang of the sword is inserted. *Rokusun* 六寸 means “six *sun*”, or about 18cm. Following the note left by Sakai Nagateru (note *d*), the technique called “victory of *tsukaguchi rokusun*” would involve cutting at a point about six *sun* away from the opponent’s body before he has started to move out the right hand to draw his sword.

¹⁵ The Three Poisons (*sandoku* 三毒) are the three most important obstacles to awakening according to the esoteric Buddhist tradition. They are Desire, Anger, and Ignorance.

¹⁶ The Three Sections, as is also explained in the *Tetsugū no maki* itself, are the Buddha, Lotus, and Vajra sections of the esoteric Buddhist tradition.

¹⁷ I.e., Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu (a deity representing solar and lunar eclipses), and Ketu (a comet deity). It was commonly believed that heavenly bodies represent the root of human life and that their movements reflect or impact human fate.

¹⁸ A *vajra* (J. *kongō*), sometimes translated as “diamond club”, and originally an ancient Indian weapon, is used by esoteric Buddhist priests in ritual as the symbol of the imperishable wisdom of the Buddhas. There are various types and forms of *vajra*. The Vajra Bell (*kongō-rei*) consists of a bell and a handle ending in a five-pronged *vajra*. The five points usually represent the Five Buddhas (Five Wisdoms) of Esoteric Buddhism. The Vajra Bell itself used to be rung during funeral ceremonies.

¹⁹ The saying that life and death, or *samsāra* (cycle of birth, life and death) and *nirvāna* (extinction of karmic bonds), are one is an often recurring refrain in Mahāyāna and Esoteric Buddhism and is closely related to the notion of Emptiness.

²⁰ Marishiten, the deification of mirages, was a deity popular among warriors in feudal Japan. For a study of this deity in relation to *bugei*, see Hall 1997, 87-116.

One should not transmit this art to someone who is not a “true person”^o, even if one is given a thousand pieces of gold for it²¹ⁿ. If one does, one should fear divine punishment^p. One should only transmit to someone who has the right mind for it^q.

According to an old saying, if one continuously strives to gain an advantage in martial arts while residing in a small village of no more than one hundred houses^r, praying day and night to the kami, one will obtain the advantage. It is with the mind that one saves the body. Silence.

[Transmitted by] Tenshinshō^{22s}, Hayashi no myōjin, and Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu.

Conferred in the third year of Hōei (1706), the twelfth day of the eighth month, by Sakai Shichiemon Nagatoshi {seal} to Sakai Jūbei Nagateru.

The Three Sections: Vajra Section {this section regroups martial Buddhas such as Fudō, Idaten²³, and Marishiten}; Buddha Section {this section regroups Buddhas such as Amida}; Lotus Section {in here are regrouped the Nyorai Buddhas; [they represent] purity}.

The Three Poisons: Desire {or greed}; Anger {or passing off lies as truth}; Ignorance {or using knowledge for wrong purposes}.

- a. “Victory” should be understood as “awakening to the One Mind (*isshin*)^{24p}”. Shigenobu, in other words, attained awakening.
- b. A man of average height, about 160cm tall, should be able to draw a sword measuring three *shaku* and three *sun*.²⁵
- c. “Nine *sun* and five *bu*” refers to an interval. If there is no interval of nine *sun* and five *bu*, one does not draw the sword.

²¹ Since medieval times, “esoteric knowledge” such as secret rituals and initiations was often passed on in exchange for coin.

²² Tenshinshō is the appellation used to denote the kami of the Katori and Kashima shrines, located on the border of present-day Chiba and Ibaraki prefectures (Imamura 1982, 8). The fact that the name appears here in a scroll of a lineage established by a samurai who founded his art at a different shrine is rather significant. It suggests that Hayashizaki Jinsuke had entertained some connection with the two celebrated shrines, or that “Tenshinshō” and “Hayashi no myōjin” are two names for the same deity. In fact, the latter conclusion can be sustained by the contents of note s.

²³ Idaten 韋駄天 is one of those armor-clad Buddhist deities prized by warriors at the time. According to a popular Buddhist tale, Idaten was agile enough to capture demons who had stolen the relics of the Buddha.

²⁴ *Isshin* is a term with extensive meaning in the context of pre-modern Japanese religions. Simply speaking, it is a term indicating a human person’s mind in perfect union with the mind of the kami and the Buddhas.

²⁵ Hence, a sword measuring about one meter is the longest sword that a man 160cm tall is able to unsheathe.

- d. A point six *sun* away from the opponent's body; when his right hand has not moved out yet; in other words, one should obtain victory against "nine *sun* and five *bu*"²⁶
- e. "One man of the country" refers to Shigenobu.
- f. The "Three Poisons" [also] refer to mollusks, toads and serpents. Furthermore, it is said that an unstable, wavering mind falls into the three poisons of alcoholism, licentiousness, and greed. One has to overcome the various delusions. Comparing it to a struggle against the Three Poisons, the principle teaches us not to bear feelings of hatred.
- g. The Three Sections are the Buddha, Lotus, and Vajra Sections. They represent purity. One has to overcome the Three Poisons (i.e., Desire, Anger, and Ignorance) and reduce them to a state where they have no longer any fixed form.
- h. The Nine Luminaries are planets and stars.
- i. [Human?] are in heavenly bodies. During a funeral, one rings it [i.e., the five-pronged Diamond-Bell]. The ringing indicates the idea of letting [the deceased enter] death peacefully and become a Buddha. It also refers to the determination to realize awakening to the One Mind. This aspect constitutes the basis [to understand the principle of] nine *sun* and five *bu*.
- j. One has to realize that all things arise from Emptiness and return to it, and that life and death form one large unity.
- k. It means that dying should be one's own resolve. One has [to be prepared] to die for *gi* 儀 (propriety) and for *shi* 志 (personal volition).
- l. Rather than continuing living while not being able to show one's face to others [because of shame], one should choose death and think of it as paradise.
- m. The kami and the Buddhas also had the same determination in the past. One has to realize that one will receive life after this one.
- n. One should not transmit the art to a person who says he wants it in exchange for a thousand coins of gold (i.e., a great amount of money).
- o. This refers to a person who does not know *gi* 儀 (propriety), who does not understand what is mentioned here, and who does not know the principles of the Three Poisons.
- p. If the person to whom you transmitted this art commits evil, you will incur shame, and you will receive divine punishment.
- q. It refers to a person who is fully endowed with the qualities described in this scroll.

²⁶ It is interesting to note the peculiar similarity with the Yagyū-ryū instruction mentioned in footnote 3. Both Yagyū-ryū and Hayashizaki-ryū instruct that the sword strike should be initiated when the opponent has not yet begun moving his hands. This probably involves reading the mind or intentions of the opponent and initiating the strike exactly at that subtle moment between immobility and action of the hands.

- r. In other words, a place where one can obtain a serene mind (*myōshin*). It is difficult to express on paper.
- s. “Tenshin” is the name given to that particular aspect in our mind which detests unrighteousness (*fugi* 不義) and brings forth the feeling of shame for wrongdoings. It is also called “the heroic friend”. [Tenshinshō] is [equal to] Hayashi no myōjin who redresses “Tenshin” in our mind.

3. The esoteric Buddhist flavor of the *Tetsugi no maki*

The *Tetsugi no maki* is a text with some rather peculiar content, for reasons that should be clear if one reads through the translation. The contents convey a number of features that may be considered significant to the study of Edo-period *bugei*, religion, and samurai culture. For a full comprehensive understanding of these features, however, one would have to elaborate at length on each of them through various explanations, but as there is no room for such extensive commentary, the discussion below will limit itself to indicating the esoteric Buddhist flavor of the scroll.

The influence of Esoteric Buddhism in the scroll is most manifest in the line which explains that the three *shaku* and three *sun* long sword with which one faces a *wakizashi* of nine *sun* and five *bu* long—one of the key formal techniques of classical Hayashizaki-ryū—should be associated with the principle of “transforming the Three Poisons (*sandoku*) into the Three Sections (*sanbu*)”. The scroll clarifies that the Three Poisons are Desire (*ton* 貪), Anger (*jin* 瞋), and Ignorance (*chi* 痴), and that the Three Sections are the Buddha (*butsu* 仏), Lotus (*ren* 蓮), and Vajra (*kon* 金) sections of esoteric Buddhist tradition.

The scroll explains this Buddhist principle to be the inner characteristic of the long sword. Naturally, this is probably not just the characteristic of the long sword, but also of the mind of the person grasping it. The scroll thus suggests that while outwardly executing the secret sword technique of the *kami*, one is inwardly activating at the same time a form of mind produced when the Three Poisons are transformed into the Three Sections.

The reference to the Three Poisons and the Three Sections is remarkable, for if one were to define the essence of pre-modern Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, one could come up with the same notion. In fact, the concentration involving the transformation of the Three Passions into the Three Sections is a most fundamental practice in Esoteric Buddhism or other pre-modern form of Japanese religion incorporating this type of Buddhism.

Basically, Esoteric Buddhism, brought to Japan in the early ninth century, emphasizes that a human being can reach Buddhahood in this very lifetime. This goes directly against the traditional Buddhist doctrine that it is impossible to

become a Buddha without going through three *kalpa* (J. *kō* 劫), or three immeasurable eons of time. Esoteric Buddhist priests, however, explain that behind the Sanskrit word “*kalpa*” is hidden the meaning of “*vikalpa*”, which means “delusion”. Hence, one has to overcome not three eons of time but three forms of delusions (*sanmōjū* 三妄執) to become a Buddha. These three delusions are of course associated with the Three Poisons, which lie at the basis of all other forms of passions and delusions.²⁷

The secret way to overcome the Three Poisons is by using the method of the Three Mysteries (*sanmitsu* 三密), i.e., hand gestures (*mudra*), incantations (*mantra*), and visualizations, with which one transforms one’s three basic actions of body (Desire), speech (Anger) and mind (Ignorance) into awakened forms of action. Concretely, through the practice of *mudra* one transforms the poison of Desire into the great concentration of the Buddha, with incantations one alters Anger into the compassion of the Lotus, and through visualizations one transforms Ignorance into the imperishable wisdom of the Vajra. The result of such a concentration is Buddhahood in this lifetime, and that is what Esoteric Buddhism is all about.

Desire (body)	→ <i>mudra</i>	→ Buddha (concentration)
Anger (speech)	→ <i>mantra</i>	→ Lotus (compassion)
Ignorance (mind)	→ visualization	→ Vajra (wisdom)

In pre-modern times in Japan, the above principles were often associated with various symbolic ideas and practices related to serpents, dragons, and swords. There are many reasons for that, the most fundamental reason being the obvious analogy between the poisonous nature of the passions (*bonnō*) and the venom of serpents or dragons. Buddhist discourses regarding the path to awakening indeed often employ the metaphor of subduing serpents lying dormant in the mind. A Buddha, as one influential Mahāyāna scripture puts it, is “someone who subdued the serpent-passions²⁸”.

Esoteric Buddhism, with its emphasis on the Three Poisons, naturally adopted the same principle. For example, one concentration practice which used to be performed every day in the early morning by medieval Shingon 真言 esoteric Buddhist priests includes the following symbolic notions.

²⁷ The teaching that the term *kalpa* includes the meaning of “delusion” is stated in the *Commentary to the Mahāvairocana-sūtra (Dari jingshu, T no. 1796, 39.600c19-29)*. The association of the three delusions with the Three Poisons is mentioned in the same *Commentary* (601a2-3) and in the *Hizōki* (SZ vol. 9, p. 23b). Both texts were considered essential in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism.

²⁸ The *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra (Da banniepan jing)* says: “An awakened person is someone who has cut off the four serpent-passions. He who has cut off the passions is a truly awakened one. A truly awakened one is a Tathāgata (Buddha).” (T no. 374, 12.395b6-7)

The meaning of the “ritual of subduing the serpents” (*byakuja-hō*) relates to the placation of the Three Poisons. It is about forming the sword mudra of Fudō with both hands and inserting [the erect index and middle fingers of] one hand into [the circle formed by thumb, little finger and ring finger of] the other hand. “Subduing the serpents” means “understanding the interdependence between passions and awakening” (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提). The fruit of awakening is never without its cause, the passions. That is why one should realize that with “subduing the serpents” is understood the “arrest of the thought of attachment to the passions”. Following the principle of the “interdependence between passions and awakening”, it is taught that one inserts the sword of wisdom into the scabbard of the passions. One inserts the object with which one cuts into the very object that one desires to cut off. The scabbard is the necessary ornament of the sword. The plane of ordinary living beings and the plane of the Buddhas are one and the same. That is why one forms the sword mudra with both hands, one expressing the Vajra Realm (plane of the Buddhas) and the other the Womb Realm (plane of ordinary living beings), and inserts [the erect fingers of] one hand into the [finger circle of the] other hand²⁹.

The concentration practice itself is called “*byakuja-hō*”, which, depending on what characters are used to express the term “*byakuja*” 百蛇, 避蛇, 避邪, means “ritual of the white serpent”, “ritual of subduing the serpents”, or “ritual of subduing defilement”. Basically, it is a concentration on the sword-mudra of Fudō Myōō—a mudra obtained by stretching index and middle fingers and connecting the tip of the thumb with the tip of the little and ring fingers—with the purpose of subduing the Three Poisons. In fact, it is a concentration on the image of the sword and the serpent, which coils around the blade and intends to swallow the tip, an image which is better known as the dragon Kurikara 俱利伽羅, the alternative form of Fudō. The objective of the meditational practice seems not to simply cut off the serpent-passions but to annihilate any form of attachment to the thought of the existence of the passions (and thus, of awakening as well). For that reason, one inserts the index and middle fingers of one hand into the circle formed by thumb, little finger and ring finger of the other hand, which is the symbolical expression of the union of the Vajra Realm (J. *Kongōkai* 金剛界), or the plane of the Buddhas, and the Womb Realm (*Taizōkai* 胎藏界), or the plane of living beings ordinarily subject to various passions³⁰.

²⁹ *Himitsu kudenshō*, by Hōkyō, fl. 1270 (Kanazawa Bunko archives 82.5). The contents of the original text have been simplified to facilitate reading. See also *Kakugenshō* (SZ vol. 36, p. 364), a later version of the same text which conveys a similar but slightly different instruction.

³⁰ The Vajra-realm mandala and the Womb mandala are the two fundamental mandalas of Japanese esoteric Buddhist tradition. The former is the expression of awakened Buddha-mind, said to have unfolded itself at the highest heaven in the Buddhist cosmos, the latter, which is constructed around a large eight-petalled lotus (the human heart), the expression of awakened human mind. At the center of both mandalas is the cosmic Buddha Dainichi 大日 (Mahāvairocana),

To be true, the details mentioned above were perhaps strictly speaking only part of the secret knowledge of medieval esoteric Buddhist priests. But the *Tetsugi no maki* talks about the Three Poisons and the Three Sections, and mentions Fudō among the Buddhas representing the Vajra Section. It even mentions, in one interesting note, mollusks, toads, and serpents—hence, vile, venomous creatures—as alternate forms of the Three Poisons. The scroll, furthermore, specifies that the Three Poisons have to be reduced to a state where they no longer have any form when executing the secret sword technique of the kami, an instruction which resonates well with the abovementioned teaching that, not simply the passions, but the attachment to their existence has to be cut off.

All these indications show that early Hayashizaki-ryū masters had likely been influenced by traditional symbolic esoteric Buddhist notions regarding passions, serpents, and swords. In fact, the *Tetsugi no maki* is not the only textual source indicating esoteric Buddhist influence on the martial lineage. Tamiya Heibei Shigemasa, a disciple of Hayashizaki Jinsuke, is accredited with having created a series of “secret poems” (*hika* 秘歌) regarding the art, and in one of them the following message can be read:

金胎の両部の二つ見へにけり、兵法あれハ居合はしまる
*I have seen the two mandalas of the Vajra and Womb realms. When there is
 [such a] martial art, Iai truly begins*³¹.

Although it is clear that early masters of Hayashizaki-ryū absorbed esoteric Buddhist principles into the art, one may wonder why this came about and whence they got their inspiration from. To answer that question, it is necessary to have a clearer picture of the cult of the deity said to be the source of the lineage: Hayashi no myōjin.

The “kami of the wood”, which is the literal translation of “Hayashi no myōjin”, was the name of the kami worshiped at the local shrine of the Hayashizaki village (Jinsuke probably acquired his family name from the title of the village)³². The shrine was attached to a Buddhist temple and administered by ascetic monks (*shugenja* 修験者) who traditionally seemed to have adhered to Tendai 天台 Buddhism, which is a form of Buddhism espousing esoteric Buddhism among its various teachings.

thus showing that both realms are two manifestations of the same principle.

³¹ *Tōda-ryū tachi narabi ni iai/bō gokui no maki* (dated 1778), 101. The *iaijutsu* style transmitted in the Hirosaki 弘前 domain was known as Hayashizaki Shinmusō-ryū 林崎新夢想流. The style was founded by Ichinomiya Sadayu Terunobu 一宮左大夫照信 (?–1600), a disciple of Nagano Murakusai, and later incorporated in the Tōda-ryū of the Hirosaki domain. Within the styles derived from Ichinomiya Terunobu the scroll was also passed on. However, instead of esoteric Buddhist terms, the scrolls of these styles show notions typical of Sōtō 曹洞 Zen Buddhism.

³² The information on the history of the shrine is taken from HSKI 1991, 2-10, 12-29.

“Hayashi no myōjin” is not the name of a specific deity, in fact, but merely the local appellation of a kami called Kumano myōjin 熊野明神. The mountains eastward from the Hayashizaki Shrine had been, since fairly ancient times, the abode of ascetic monks who venerated the kami of Kumano, the cult of which originally developed in the area called Kumano, in the south of present-day Wakayama Prefecture. In the course of time, the kami of Kumano came to be enshrined in a wood located in the village of Hayashizaki, where it was henceforth locally referred to as “the kami of the wood”. It is not clear from what period exactly the kami had been enshrined there, but there are indications that the Kumano deity had been worshiped at Hayashizaki from as early as the fourteenth century.

The cult of the Kumano deity is a rather rich and complex belief system, the details of which cannot be entirely discussed here in this article. To make a long explanation short, the Kumano deity, as it was worshiped at Kumano in Wakayama Prefecture, regroups three divinities: Ketsumiko, the main kami, Fusumi (Musumi), and Hayatama. The origin of these three kami is rather obscure, but from ancient times onward, they were often respectively associated with Susanoo, Izanami and Hayatama-no-o (or Izanagi) of classical Shinto mythology.³³ One of the central kami in the cult was thus identified with Susanoo, the fierce deity who according to Shinto mythology found the Sacred Imperial Sword in the body of the Great Serpent, who initially ruled over the land and the ocean plain, but who eventually became lord of the Nether Land, the land of the dead.

The cult, however, did not merely build on Shinto deities. Since the late Heian period, the area of Kumano came under the supervision of esoteric Buddhist priests, and as a result, the Kumano kami was reframed in an esoteric Buddhist context. Concretely, Ketsumiko was commonly connected to the Buddha Amida 阿弥陀, Fusumi to the Bodhisattva Kannon 観音 (mostly, the Thousand-armed Kannon), and Hayatama to the medicine Buddha Yakushi 薬師. The whole area of Kumano, moreover, was mostly identified with the Womb realm.

Although the above applies to the cult of Kumano in Wakayama Prefecture, we may assume that the Kumano beliefs transmitted in and around the village of Hayashizaki inherited some of its features. When the monk-priests of the Hayashizaki Shrine were asked in the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912) to specify the nature of the deities worshipped at the shrine, they reported on different occasions either the name of Susanoo, Izanami, or Izanagi. This fact suggests that these were the deities originally enshrined at the shrine as the result of the influence of the Kumano cult.

Thus, although we have no ancient documents on the nature of the beliefs surrounding “Hayashi no myōjin”, we may be fairly certain that the deity was endowed

³³ The explanations on the Kumano cult in this article are based on Gorai 1990, 33-57, and Gorai 1976, 155-178.

with various Shinto as well as esoteric Buddhist features deriving from the Kumano cult. Hayashizaki Jinsuke, the founder of the art, when praying at the local village shrine for divine inspiration, must have been instructed on these features by religious specialists of various kinds operating in and near the shrine.

The divine source behind the secret methods of the Hayashizaki-ryū, however, was not only Hayashi no myōjin. Although the *Tetsugi no maki* underscores Hayashi no myōjin as the deity who passed on the secrets in the main body of the text, in the line of transmission mentioned at the end of the scroll Tenshinshō is placed first before the latter deity. This shows that, ultimately, the teachings of the art were believed to go back to Tenshinshō.

“Tenshinshō” is strictly speaking an appellation used to indicate the martial deities of the Kashima 鹿島 and Katori 香取 shrines (located at the border of Chiba and Ibaraki prefectures; Imamura 1982, 8). The deities are respectively Takemikazuchi and Futsunushi, two heavenly kami who according to Shinto mythology pacified the land by subduing the violent earthly kami. However, in pre-modern times the two shrines were set in a much larger religious framework of symbolic imagery. Indeed, an important determining factor in the formation of the Tenshinshō cult is the nearby presence of Mount Tsukuba 筑波山, which holds a central position in pre-modern Japanese religion. According to Shinto mythology, Izanagi and Izanami lowered the Jeweled Spear from Mount Tsukuba into the ocean to create land and earthly life. Naturally, the area was given extensive meaning by religious practitioners and administrators alike, both near to and far from that sacred locality.

The pre-modern Tenshinshō cult thus naturally included the figures of Izanagi and Izanami, but besides these two kami there were probably many other deities that had a place in the belief system. This fact is illustrated by a medieval Shinto text, the *Nihongi Miwa-ryū* 日本紀三輪流 (*Miwa Traditions of the Nihongi*), which includes a section discussing the secrets of the Kashima and Katori shrines. The text itself belongs to a Shinto lineage not directly related to Kashima and Katori, but may be considered useful for having a better idea of the larger religious web spun around the two shrines in pre-modern times.

The text specifies that the area of Kashima and Katori is the exact place where the tip of the spear held by Izanagi and Izanami touched the ocean and from which were born all kami and Buddhas. It is also the place where the two mandalas of Esoteric Buddhism (the two shrines) come together to form a dual and yet non-dual universe. Interestingly, the text further mentions the following details:

The kami of Katori, in fact, is Susanoo. Susanoo takes note of all good and evil actions of human beings. He is the king of hell, Enma 閻魔. (...) This kami is the source of righteousness. That is why it is capable of destroying any evil person immediately. (...). The kami are the divine in us, human beings. There is not

a single difference [between us and the kami]. When one is blinded, one is just an ordinary human being. When one is awakened, one is a kami. Human beings and kami form one body and not two. This principle stems from the teaching of the “One Mind” (*isshin*). It is this Mind that creates everything. All religious schools are based on this fundamental teaching. (*Nihongi Miwa-ryū*, 479)

According to the text, the kami of Katori (Tenshinshō) is none other than Susanoo, another form of King Enma, the Buddhist lord and judge of hell, and the source of righteousness.

It can thus be observed that in certain religious circles Tenshinshō was seen as a religious principle uniting Izanagi, Izanami, and Susanoo. As we have seen, these three kami are also the deities forming the core structure of the cult of Hayashi no myōjin (Kumano). Therefore, concerning the question why Tenshinshō precedes Hayashi no myōjin in the *Tetsugi no maki*, one possible reason might be because the two cults share the same core triad of deities. In fact, the *Tetsugi no maki* mentions that Tenshinshō is “Hayashi no myōjin who redresses Tenshin in our mind”, thereby suggesting that the two deities were indeed considered similar or equal. Since they are similar, Tenshinshō could have been added to the scroll to elevate the luster of the relatively unknown Hayashi no myōjin. Of course, another reason why Tenshinshō appears in the scroll might simply be that Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu had received initiation into the martial art lineage associated with Kashima and Katori prior to establishing his own style.³⁴

Due to the lack of sources, it is not possible to determine to what extent sword masters of Hayashizaki-ryū knew the religious details of the cult of Tenshinshō. However, since they placed Tenshinshō at the very pinnacle of the art, they must have picked up some notions of the larger religious tradition built around the deity. That tradition at the time was almost certainly of a Shinto-esoteric Buddhist nature.

For this reason, it can be argued that the references to Esoteric Buddhism in the *Tetsugi no maki* have roots not only in the beliefs surrounding Hayashi no myōjin but also in the cult of Tenshinshō. At least, it is tempting to assume that the reference to Tenshinshō as a kami “detesting unrighteousness” stems from the larger tradition developed around Tenshinshō that associates the latter deity with the judge of hell, Susanoo, alias King Enma. Besides that, the idea of “awakening to the One Mind” also, which Hayashizaki Jinsuke is said to have realized through the guidance of Hayashi no myōjin, might derive from that same tradition.

³⁴ This possibility is argued in more detail in HSKI 1991, 170-171.

4. The significance of the *Tetsugi no maki*

Hayashizaki Jinsuke founded his art in an area that was heavily influenced by Shinto-esoteric Buddhist beliefs. Moreover, before creating his style, he had in all likelihood practiced martial skills near the Kashima and Katori shrines, which at the time attracted many religious practitioners sharing a rich variety of Shinto and esoteric Buddhist imagery. The fact that the *Tetsugi no maki* refers to esoteric Buddhist principles is therefore in itself not surprising. They are the echoes of the voices of the people worshipping the cultic deities from which the art is said to originate.

However, the echoes do not just reflect the personal religious convictions of the founders of the martial art. What is surprising is that the religious terms in the *Tetsugi no maki* touch upon the essence of the techniques and the practice of the art. Indeed, the religious tone of the scroll is to such an extent that it raises important questions as to the exact nature of the practice of classical *iaijutsu*.

The scroll says that Hayashizaki Jinsuke received a “sword” (*tachi*) from the kami with which he was able to overcome his “worst enemy”. One would immediately assume that it is about a wondrous, technical skill that allows any swordsman to beat an opponent in flesh and blood. It is hard to imagine that this was not the principle message of the phrase. However, a note in the scroll specifies that the “victory” achieved by Jinsuke was the “awakening to the One Mind”, and that the “worst opponent” is therefore not to be exclusively interpreted as a person of flesh and blood but also, in addition, as an obstacle in the mind. A little further in the scroll the text mentions that the kami gave Hayashizaki Jinsuke the secret technique called “victory of *tsukaguchi rokusun*”. This is without doubt a technical form, but it should be noted that it is a form intrinsically tied to the esoteric Buddhist meditational practice of subduing the Three Poisons in the mind. The “sword” given by the kami is not simply a martial technique, it is additionally, or one should say ideally, a mental skill (*shinpō* 心法).

Needless to say, the combat techniques and methods of the art established by Hayashizaki Jinsuke served practical purposes suitable for warriors. However, as the scroll suggests, it would not be right to separate these methods from a state of mind that is undeniably of a Buddhist nature. As the scroll says, the techniques have to be carried out with a mind in which the Three Poisons are transformed into the Three Sections. In order to obtain “a great victory”, like Hayashizaki Jinsuke, one has to attain this state, which is alternatively defined as the “One Mind”, a term indicating perfect union of the human mind with that of all the kami and all the Buddhas.

In other words, the art devised by Hayashizaki Jinsuke had a double nature, an external and internal, or an obvious and a hidden nature. In fact, this kind of double nature was a feature shared by many other pre-modern Japanese religious traditions. Another well-known example of a traditional art that possesses

such a double nature is *ikebana* (flower arrangement). In this art, one outwardly cuts branches and flowers from the roots that channels life force into them, but also, inwardly, cuts the thought of attachment to enable the flower and one's own inner self to live "authentically" in the present.³⁵ In a similar way, in *iaijutsu* one outwardly performs sword techniques, but inwardly, at the same time, a Buddhist concentration with which one transforms deluded mind into awakened mind to allow that mind to achieve its most authentic potential.

It is of course impossible to fully understand with what kind of mindset exactly samurai like Hayashizaki Jinsuke or Sakai Nagateru were practicing and transmitting such an art. Nevertheless, the *Tetsugi no maki* gives us a glimpse of the peculiar world they were living in. The scroll captures a moment in the past and reflects that past, like a picture of a long gone-by mindscape, in which are shape-shifting various apparitions of Buddhas, kami, serpents, swords, human weaknesses, real and mental foes, toads, rice wine cups, flashes of awakening, and effective sword techniques, a fantastic kaleidoscope of images joined together through irrational thinking of the finest sort. And yet, this seems to have been the world samurai like Hayashizaki Jinsuke and Sakai Nagateru were living in. For them, the notion of *iaijutsu* as an art with a double nature must not have been irrational. They probably thought it only natural that techniques such as the one called "victory of *tsukaguchi rokusun*"—which seems to involve cutting toward the area around the sword hilt right before the opponent starts moving his hands—when executed effectively, is not merely a human act but a marvel accomplished through union with the mind of the kami and the Buddhas.

Still, it is questionable whether masters of the art, even in the early phases of its history, actually understood the deeper meaning of the Buddhist principles. Perhaps they only knew them vaguely. It is also doubtful whether the Buddhist dimension of the art had always been valued and appreciated with the same degree of importance throughout the Edo period. Maybe it is true that throughout most of its history, the message of the scroll was simply seen as an "ideal world" hardly ever emphasized by the masters practicing and transmitting the art.

Even though that may be so, it does not take away the fact that during the early phase of development the art of drawing the sword founded by Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu had been regarded as a "spiritual art" in the sense that the practice of the forms and techniques were seen as having both a martial and a religious dimension. The *Tetsugi no maki* is the testament of that fact. Even though perhaps the double nature of the art has long since been forgotten, it is still there, like an insect fossil trapped in hardened resin, in the words of that peculiar scroll.

³⁵ On this, see Carter 2007, 103-108.

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Abbreviations

SZ *Shingonshū zensho* 真言宗全書, 44 vols. Kōyasan: Shingonshū Zensho Kankōkai, 1933–1939.

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 85 vols. Takakusu Junjiro 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 (eds. and comps.). Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.

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論文概要

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スティーヴン・トレンソン

煩惱の蛇を断つ — 古武道、居合術の密教的側面 —

本論では、林崎甚助重信 (1542?-1621?) により大成された日本の古武道、居合術における密教の影響を論述する。封建時代に成立した武道の理論的根拠が仏教の枠組みに求められることはよく知られている。特に禅はこの分野において重要な位置を占めているように思われるが、実は他の仏教の形態、すなわち密教も、古武道の身体と関わりがあるのである。本論では、庄内 (山形県西部) に伝わる林崎田宮流が所蔵し、成立初期の時代を偲ばせる、1706年奥書の『手次之巻』に焦点を当てる。型の伝承を認定するため書かれたこの書物は、古武道の全般的な思考方法のみならず、技術の修練の本質にも密教の深い影響があることを示すものとして、特に注目に値する。具体的に、当資料は武術の本質が密教の集中状態と関係するとし、修行の最終目標の一つは悟りを得ることであると説明する。それゆえ、武道に関する現代以前の数々の資料に様々な密教の要素が見られる中でも、当資料はそれがはっきりと抜刀術の修行における二つの本質、すなわち実践的・精神的本質を示すという事実から特別であると言える。論文の中で述べられるように、この二つの本質はおそらく、密教と神道の思想が混交した修行の、長く豊かな伝統を持つことで知られるこの地域において、この武術が大成した結果だったのである。このようにして、本論では居合術の歴史と本質に更なる光を当てる。

Keywords: *iaijutsu*, Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu, Esoteric Buddhism, *Tetsugi no maki*, *Kongen no maki*, Tenshinshō, Hayashi no myōjin