

Koryu Bujutsu as a Transformative Learning Experience

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine koryu bujutsu, primarily through the lens of Japanese swordsmanship, as a transformative learning experience through the archival study of 1) the scant information available to outsiders on the teaching scroll of the Katori Shinto-ryu as part of an obscure pedagogical tradition that is sensitive to facilitating learning through egalitarian instruction and acknowledgement of different types of learners, and 2) other historical texts on Japanese swordsmanship. The study provides insights into the transformational states achievable through educational experiences. A considerable amount of information on the Katori Shinto-ryu, specifically, will be presented as a means to understanding koryu bujutsu, generally, and how koryu has survived into the modern age. While this study is not limited to Katori Shinto-ryu, it is used as a representative model of the workings of a koryu.

Keywords: koryu bujutsu, transformative learning, Katori Shinto-ryu, swordsmanship

Understanding Koryu

Kendo (the Way of the sword) is a subject of cursory popular interest. Cursory, in that while many are enthralled by the techniques of swordsmanship, very few go beyond Walter Mitty-esque fantasizing and actually enroll in a dojo (a school for studying a particular Way) and begin the study required to learn the techniques of Japanese fencing. To learn the proper handling of the sword requires more than finding a collegiate kendo club and learning to strike with a shinai (a bamboo sword). This sort of kendo is a sport that is as divorced from practical swordsmanship as Olympic fencing is from dueling with an epee. To learn proper handling and use of the sword, one may search out an iaido (the Way of drawing the sword) school. This is a little closer to the goal, as iaido may be a component part of a more complete martial system, but this will still not teach the essence of swordsmanship as a budo (the martial Way). Those who study budo are known as bugei or bushi. The traditions of the bushi were encoded in bushido (the Way of the warrior). In order to study the sword in its context as an instrument of war, one must find a koryu (old martial arts), where the techniques of using the sword and other battlefield weapons have been preserved and remained unchanged. Koryu are Japanese martial arts that were systemized prior to the Meiji restoration (1868), many by hundreds of years. Gendai budo (modern martial arts) are those formed after the Meiji restoration (Draeger, 1974). Alas, however, for koryu do not exist outside of Japan. While some branch schools for koryu exist in the United States and other countries, the hombu dojo (home schools) remain in Japan. This has always been the case, as many of the koryu and practitioners of the koryu are considered living national treasures. In order to understand the essence of the system, one must study in Japan.

This makes knowledge of koryu rare. Even within Japan, koryu are not well known outside of the small number of people who train in them. Contrary to the *Kill Bill* movies, not everyone in Japan carries a sword. The All Japan Budo Association recognizes 78 koryu budo traditions with clear lineages and affiliated with the Nihon Kobudo Kyokai (Japan Classical Budo Association). This is in comparison to various koryu catalogued at the end of the 17th Century which included “fifty two ryu of archery, around

seven hundred schools of swordsmanship, more than one hundred styles of spearmanship, and around two hundred schools of for close unarmed and armed combat” (Rafolt, 2014, p. 541). The reason for the vast number of koryu during this period is that koryu training was provided for military retainers, i.e., samurai, who served the feudal houses of Japan. The term, samurai, referred to one who served one of the military houses (Friday, 2005). This military tradition is the essence of Japanese culture:

According to Japanese mythology, some thousands of years ago the gods Izanagi and Izanami created the first island of the Japanese archipelago from a “heavenly floating bridge.” This they did with a spear. From that time there developed a martial tradition that has been intimately bound up, in one degree or another, the country’s culture in terms of literature, art, and ethics, and is a living heritage even today (Wilson, 1982, p. 14).

The essence of the military tradition is that bushido and the emblem of bushido, for the Japanese warrior, was and is the sword. Although it was only one of a considerable arsenal of military weapons used by the samurai, including muskets, the importance of the sword to the Japanese martial tradition cannot be underestimated:

Bushido made the sword its emblem of power and prowess. When Mahomet claimed that “the sword is the key of Heaven and of Hell,” he only echoed a Japanese sentiment. Very early the samurai boy learned to wield it. It was a momentous occasion for him when at the age of five he was appareled in the paraphernalia of samurai costume, placed on a go-board and initiated into the rights of the military profession, by having thrust into his girdle a real sword instead of the toy dirk with which he had been playing.... What he carries in his belt is a symbol of what he carries in his mind and heart, loyalty and honor. The two swords, the longer and the shorter, called respectively daito and shoto or katana and wakizashi, never leave his side. When at home they grace the most conspicuous place in the study or parlour; by night they guard his pillow within easy reach of his hand. Constant companions, they are beloved, and proper names of endearment are given them. Being venerated they are well-nigh worshipped (Nitobe, 1901, pp. 131-133).

To understand koryu, therefore, one must understand the sword and, more importantly, the education of the swordsman in the koryu that defined him. The study of swordsmanship is a transformational experience. It is this educational process that transforms the man (being a samurai was an exclusively male occupation) into the warrior, just as the sword forging process transforms the crude tamahagane (a Japanese base steel) into a functional blade and instrument of service. And as sword becomes more functional in the complexity of its construction, so the samurai becomes more useful in the complexity of his training. This complex training, the nature of which is closely guarded by the various koryu, transforms a man into a swordsman; and the transformative process has, until relatively recently, remained a mystery. Much like the transmission of the Dharma in the practice of Zen Buddhism, which is passed “from enlightened mind to enlightened mind,” the transmission of how a koryu transforms its practitioners is passed from person to person through the context of the training: “The lessons of traditional budo from teacher to student normally took place from heart to heart without words. Or words were used which were not written down. To speak about it with others or to permit other styles to watch the lessons was strictly forbidden” (Sugino & Ito, 2007, p. 42). Recently however, the world was given a brief glimpse into the pedagogical practices of one of the oldest extant koryu, Katori Shinto-ryu, when the chief instructor of the koryu (Risuke Otake Shihan) deigned to talk about one of the most secret of their teaching kata, the Shinan-kata.

Statement of the Problem

There exists a lack of literature examining the pedagogical methodology of martial arts systems. Indeed, most martial arts systems, especially modern gendai systems but including traditional koryu, do not have a tradition of teaching pedagogy as a part of their curriculum. In most schools, students receive

ranks and titles based on proficiency in the techniques taught within the school, but not on teaching, itself. Students pick up the teaching style of their instructor or develop their own style based on their own experiences. In traditional styles, instructors may leave coded transmissions to pass along technical, psychological, and philosophical concepts within their schools. These documents are often passed down to successors and act as the bonifides of the new heads of the systems. Scrolls of this sort include the treatise, *Heiho Koden Sho (Family Transmitted Book of Strategy)*, of the Yagyu Shinkage-ryu school of swordsmanship, and composed by Kamiizumi Hidetsuna (1508-1588), Yagyu Muneyoshi (1529-1606), and Yagyu Munenori (1571-1646) (Sato, 1985), as well as, *Go Rin No Sho (Book of Five Rings)* of Miyamoto Musashi's (1580-1645) sword system, the Niten Ichi-ryu (Tokitsu, 2004), and philosophical texts such as the *Tengu Geijutsuron (Demon's Sermon on the Martial Arts)* (Wilson, 2006) by Issai Chozanshi (1659-1741). The Tenshinsho-den Katori Shinto-ryu (also, Katori Shinto-ryu), however, contains not only written instruction on its weapons and strategy, but also on the psychology of education applied to teaching its students.

Risuke Otake, the Shihan (master teacher) of the Katori Shinto-ryu gave a brief glimpse into the 400 year old pedagogical training within his system in his book, *Strategy and the Art of Peace* (2016). This rare glimpse into the transmission scrolls of this ancient martial arts system allows us to examine these teaching methods and to compare them with contemporary thought in educational psychology. This is especially exciting because these teachings have both survived and thrived into the present day.

The thriving traditions of koryu, specifically, and Japanese martial systems, generally, continue to provide a fertile training ground for the training of swordsmen. In Japan, and across the globe, students undertake arduous physical, mental, and spiritual training regimens in the study of what may seem to most observers to be anachronistic systems of dueling and warfare. These pursuits can only be understood in the deeper meaning of exercises which transform the learners and provide meaning to their contemporary existence. This study seeks to understand the nature of the transformation that takes place through the study of koryu bujutsu. This study will be archival research into the nature of koryu bujutsu as a transformational learning experience.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine koryu bujutsu, primarily through the lens of Japanese swordsmanship, as a transformative learning experience through the archival study of 1) the scant information available to outsiders on the teaching scroll of the Katori Shinto-ryu as part of an obscure pedagogical tradition that is sensitive to facilitating learning through egalitarian instruction and acknowledgement of different types of learners, and 2) other historical texts on Japanese swordsmanship. In order to do this, a considerable amount of information on the Katori Shinto-ryu, specifically, will be presented as a means to understand koryu bujutsu, generally, and how koryu has survived into the modern age. While this study is not limited to Katori Shinto-ryu, that system is one of the oldest extant koryu in the world, and one that has been more open about its practices than others. As such, it is used as a representative model of the workings of a koryu. This is done with the knowledge that specific koryu each have their own traditions that separate and define them as distinct pedagogies with their own philosophical underpinnings. The koryu system, however, is a model that is replicated throughout martial culture. It is also acknowledged that participants who study koryu may also study other martial arts, and there may be overlap in the experiences between koryu budo and gendai budo as pedagogical practices.

The Research Question

The shoji walls (shoji are Japanese sliding doors made of paper) of the koryu dojo have, for hundreds of years, proven to be formidable barriers to inquisitive intrusions into the secrets of koryu traditions and the transformations that occur within those walls. This study seeks to penetrate those walls and asks the question: In what way is the study of koryu bujutsu a transformative learning experience? Mezirow's (2000) framework of Transformative Learning will be used in this analysis. This framework was proposed by Mezirow to explain how individuals modified their belief systems through their learning experiences. This particular lens is appropriate for this study because it is cognitive in nature, as is the

transformation that occurs in koryu training. The research question prompt is, “In what way has the study of koryu bujutsu and Japanese swordsmanship transformed your thinking, perceptions, or beliefs?”

Katori Shinto-ryu

Tenshinsho-den Katori Shinto-ryu is a koryu (an old martial art). Created in approximately 1447 by Iizasa Choisai (1387-1488), Katori Shinto-ryu has been passed down to the present day in an unbroken line of transmission through the Iizasa family and its heirs (Otake, 2016). To say that Iizasa Choisai created the Katori Shinto-ryu, however, is incorrect. The history of the ryuha (system) states that at 60 years of age, Choisai retired to Baikizan Fudansho near Katori Jingu where he underwent a 1,000 day period of prayer to Futsunushi-no-Kami and engaged in shugyo (period of intense training). At the end of 1,000 days, the deity, Futsunushi-no-Kami, appeared to him in the form of a small boy seated in a plum tree near which Choisai trained. The deity praised Choisai for his dedication and told him, “Thou shalt be the master of all swordsmen under the sun” (Otake, 2016, p.18), and presented him with the scroll which contain the essence of the Katori Shinto-ryu and trained him in the manner of the arts contained therein. Due to the manner of its divine origin, the school was named Tenshinsho-den (direct and authentic transmission from the deities) Katori Shinto-ryu (system of the divine way of Katori).

Choisai died in 1488 at the age of 102 (Japanese tradition adds one year to a person’s age, accounting for the time the child is in the womb). The teachings of the Katori Shinto-ryu have been transmitted through an unbroken line of 20 generations of the Iizasa family. The current Soke (head of the family tradition) is Iizasa Yasusada. The family dojo (school) is 300 years old and is one of the oldest in Japan. It has been designed as a cultural asset by the city of Katori in Chiba prefecture.

In its position as one of the oldest martial arts in Japan, Katori Shinto-ryu has influenced, directly and indirectly, many other martial schools, including the Shinkage-ryu, Ippa-ryu, Jigen-ryu, and Tennen Rishin-ryu (Otake, 2007). In 1960, Tenshinsho-den Katori Shinto-ryu was the first martial art to be named an intangible cultural asset by the Chiba Prefectural Government, due in no small part to the efforts of the current chief instructor of the ryuha, Risuke Otake.

The Menkyo System in Katori Shinto-ryu

Koryu do not give kyu/dan ranks. Kyu (literally, “boy”) denotes a junior, and dan (literally, “man”) designates a senior practitioner. The familiar kyu/dan ranking system that permeates modern martial arts, represented by the ubiquitous colored belt system, was developed by Jigoro Kano, the creator of judo, as a method to promote his system (Green, 2010). The practice was later adopted into karate by Gichin Funakoshi, an Okinawan school teacher and karate-ka, who worked with Kano to promote karate as a Japanese sport. Kendo later adopted a system of rankings. This is different from traditional martial arts, which designate authority and proficiency based on family lineage and menkyo.

In Katori Shinto-ryu “students and teachers are simply expected to learn from one another (much like the interdependent relationship of yin and yang)” (Otake, 2007, p. 41). “With the communion of mind with mind [ishin-deshin] the essence of the education [or fruits of the education – kyoiku no jitsu] will be achieved” (Sugino & Ito, 2007, p. 199). Both physical and mental skills are evaluated, and students are awarded mokuroku at the appropriate stage of development. A menkyo may be awarded after further training. The teaching scroll, the Shinan-kata (teaching methods) gokui kaiden transmission scroll, is only awarded to those at least 42 years old, regardless of development (Otake, 2007). Mokuroku is a handwritten scroll used in koryu that contains the name of the ryu, lineage of the teachers, catalogue of the techniques possessed by the recipient of the mokuroku, and the signature and stamp of the soke (head of the ryu) issuing the mokuroku. A menkyo is a license to teach within the educational system issuing the license. While menkyo are used in koryu, they are also used in other systems, e.g., sumi-e (ink painting), chado (tea ceremony), shodo (calligraphy). There are different types of menkyo, usually between two and nine, with the license of full transmission being the menkyo kaiden (Draeger, 1976).

The idea that students and teachers work together should not be construed as a constructivist paradigm. Truth, in a koryu, is not constructed between the interaction of teacher and student. That is not what Otake means in his statement, above. Positivistic truth is measured by the length of the sword (i.e.,

what has worked in the past to preserve life), and whatever one's personal thoughts and feelings on a subject within the ryuha, the training is designed to bring them in line with the ryuha's heiho. There is no deviation from the truth of the koryu.

Heiho of Katori Shinto-ryu

Katori Shinto-ryu has always practiced egalitarianism, in that instruction was available not only to the warrior class, but also to the farming and merchant classes. "Turn no one away, nor rope them back in" (Otake, 2007, p.41) is a maxim of the ryuha. This suggests that the focus is more on the ryuha and less on the student. The ryuha system of koryu is designed to preserve and transmit the teachings of the ryuha, itself; teachings which have been handed down unchanged for generations. Unlike modern martial arts systems, which seem to thrive on innovation and change, koryu train in the battle-tested techniques and strategies developed by the founders and that have allowed their practitioners (and the ryuha) to survive into the present age. For Katori Shinto-ryu, the guiding philosophy of the ryuha states that "the art of war is the art of peace; one who prevails over his opponent without force is superior to one who strikes his opponent down" (Otake, 2016, p.248). The term for both war, i.e., strategy, and peace is heiho, and is differentiated by the kanji (i.e., logographic Chinese characters) used to write the word, itself (Otake, 2016, p. 3). It is this philosophy that the ryuha takes to be its guiding *raison d'être*. The ryu exists to propagate itself and its philosophy. Students are a vehicle for the ryuha to do that.

It is interesting, therefore, that the Katori Shinto-ryu also contains instructions on pedagogy, the ostensible function of which is the teaching of students. Why does a ryuha, therefore, which is interested only in the promotion of itself, have a section on how to teach students; a subject that is practically ignored by other systems? It is a stratagem that is intimately connected with the survival of the ryuha. In Katori Shinto-ryu, the heiho of the ryuha is that "the art of war is the art of peace." By taking its focus off of external conflict, it forces the student to focus on internal change. And through this internal focus, the student is transformed into a carrier of the ryuha:

My [Otake Shihan] decision to disclose a portion of our transmission scrolls, protected until now as secret, and not to be shared with outsiders, has been based on a desire to warn society of the social conditions currently before us. I sincerely hope that this volume serves to spread the philosophy of heiho in which people can learn to achieve objectives without conflict, and enable the people of the world to live safe and healthy lives in harmony with each other (Otake, 2016, p. 248).

This paper will examine various historical treatises on the transformational aspects of swordsmanship, and the recently exposed transmission scroll of the Katori Shinto-ryu, treat the transformational process of the swordsman, both from a philosophical standpoint and a practical tradition.

Literature Review

A Google Scholar search for "transformative learning koryu bujutsu" returned no hits; neither did searches for "transformative learning martial arts," "transformative learning Japanese fencing," "transformative learning fencing," or "transformative learning combat arts." The term, "transformative learning" returned 37,400 hits, which was not surprising considering the status of TL in educational psychology, generally, and adult education, specifically. The lack of relationship between the search terms indicates the gap in the research literature.

The term, "koryu bujutsu" returned 56 results. Of interest in these results was Rafolt's (2007) socio-anthropological examination of differences between koryu budo and gendai budo. Reguli, Vit, and Cihounkova (2016) asked 57 aikido practitioners about their spiritual perception of the dojo using the Spirituality of Movement Activities Questionnaire. Their findings indicated that there was no evidence that aikido practitioners developed "environmental spirituality" (p. 121); however, they noted that the construct of "motivation for personal change" was rated higher than other dimensions on the survey.

Roberts-Thomson (2014) looked at various empirical studies that showed studying martial arts led to reduced aggressiveness, increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and hopefulness. None of these studies, however, indicated critical reflection brought about through the study of martial arts, or a change in belief systems that would designate them as transformative learning experiences. The best examples of transformative learning in koryu bujutsu are the historical texts from the various ryuha, themselves.

Historical Texts of Other Ryu

Katori Shinto-ryu is not the only system that seeks to perpetuate itself, or bring about a transformation in its practitioners that allow that to occur. As has been stated, the function of any ryuha, what distinguishes it as a ryuha, is self-propagation. The heiho (strategy) of the ryuha however, varies in how it accomplishes this task. In the Yagyū Shinkage-ryū (New-Shadow system of the Yagyū family), as well as other sword systems, both ancient and modern, the strategy is to create a practitioner that has total freedom of movement. When such a state is reached, all other things being equal, the practitioner should be able to withstand any opponent. Being undefeatable, the student, and the ryuha, survive. While generally translated as “shadow,” in relation to the system, *kage* means “rejection of offense in favor of defense, of outward manifestations in favor of inner working [hence, shadow], of the body in favor of the mind” (Sato, 1985, p.13).

This optimal performance through the interaction of mind and body is known as flow (Csikszentmihayli, 1997); and while Eastern religious thought may view this as a transcendent state, it may also be characteristic of the autotelic personality, i.e., a personality type predisposed to achievement of a flow state. Characteristics of this personality include, “a general curiosity and interest in life, persistence, and low self-centeredness, which result in the ability to be motivated by intrinsic rewards” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihayli, 2002, p. 93).

The goal of the Yagyū school is to focus on training the mind of the student in a specific way and to achieve a specific result. The training in the teachings of the ryuha creates a way of thinking peculiar to the ryuha, itself. The Yagyū family passed its general tenets down through the written text of the *Heiho Kaiden Sho* (*Family Transmitted Book of Strategy*), with the secrets of the ryū being passed down in verbal teachings. Notes on the *Shuji Shuriken* (*Life-Giving Sword*), the third volume in the *Heiho Kaiden Sho*, states of one particular technique that, “because it is to be secretly transmitted, we do not give the correct ideographs for the term in writing, but use ideographs that sound the same” (Sato, p. 82).

Such secrecy was a normal part of the transmission of koryū bujutsu (techniques of war from ancient martial systems). It must be remembered that these teachings were applied in actual combat during warring periods and in personal duels in times of relative peace. To publish a treatise that clearly revealed the techniques of one’s style would be to invite personal defeat and the possible extinction of the ryuha.

Miyamoto Musashi (1580-1645), likewise passed his secrets through oral transmission. The *Go Rin No Sho* (*Book of Five Rings*), written by Musashi shortly before his death in 1645 CE, was originally destroyed by him after having his top students read the document in his presence. It was later copied down from memory by one of the students, Furuhashi Sozaemon, and transmitted as the *Ihon Go Rin No Sho* (Tokitsu, 2004):

A little before his death, on the twelfth of May, he called Terao Maganojo, Motomenosuke, and me and told us: ‘You must attain in practice everything that I communicated to you day by day without having any need to note anything down. There is no written text for my school. Once you have read what I have written, you must make an end to it with fire.’ (p. 246).

Tokitsu notes that, “in Musashi’s time, in the realm of the arts, the transmission of written texts was rare, and taking notes during teaching and practice – and even afterward – was forbidden” (p.252). This was partially because of the reasons given, above, concerning protection against enemies, but it was also because the essence of the ryuha could only be learned through daily effort and rigorous training in the system. The philosophy of the ryuha became embedded in the unconscious and embodied in an adept’s

every action, a mind-body fusion which created a living exemplar of the strategies, tactics, and philosophy of the ryuha, itself.

This mind-body fusion, i.e., embodiment, while largely alien to Western philosophical dualism which separates the two, is common in Eastern traditions (Light & Kentel, 2015) and it is becoming a more popular idea in Western science. Modern neuroscience has a popular expression known as Hebb's Postulate of synaptic plasticity that says, "neurons that fire together, wire together," derived from the work of Löwel and Singer (1992); meaning that through repeated cognitive activity, behavioral patterns are imprinted at the level of automaticity, i.e., unconscious habit, through synaptic association.

Oral transmission of the ryu's secret doctrines and techniques was the usual custom in koryu bujutsu, and remains so in the extant koryu today. The philosophy of the Katori Shinto-ryu is that "the art of war is the art of peace," and emphasis is placed on winning through non-violence, so there is no need for secret techniques. In this way, the restrictions placed on access to the scroll become not so much a matter of learning secret techniques, but of working through mental frames of reference to understand the final teachings. They become markers of transformations in mental paradigms, and reveal themselves as another tool in the educational psychology of the ryuha.

One of the characteristics of Transformative Learning is the idea of transformation, itself. "At the core of Mezirow's conceptualization of transformative learning theory is the process of critical reflection. We transform frames of reference through critical reflection on our own and other's assumptions and beliefs" (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p.88). These cognitive processes only come about through both dedicated physical practice in the ryuha and intellectual maturity, hence the Shinan-kata scroll is not passed on until a practitioner is 42 years old, regardless of physical development in the system.

Contents of the Katori Shinto-ryu Teaching Scroll

The glimpse within the Shinan-kata (teaching methods) scroll reveals that the text is a treatise on educational psychology. The scroll begins by examining the psychological state that students should take when facing an opponent. This state is called *suigetsushinmyoken*, meaning the mind must be like the moon's (*getsu*) reflection on the water's surface (*sui*), a perfect reflection of the mind-state of the opponent; and the students should be able to instantly fill an opening (*tsuki*) in an opponent's defenses like the moon is immediately reflected in droplets of water splashed from a pool: "Suigetsu Shinmyoken refers to taking the opponent's freedom to attack through the application of techniques and tactics based on the opponent's combative posture" (Otake, 2016, p. 240). The explanation of *shinmyoken* is given:

- *Shinmyoken* involves reflecting the opponent without reflecting oneself; waiting without expectation to reflect the opponent's true nature. One must wait should one's self come to the fore; the sword serves as a tool with which to protect the self. Adopt this mental outlook. In Buddhism this is sometimes referred to as "*fudochi*," written with the characters for "motionless/immutable wisdom." *Fudochi* does not refer to an unconscious state like that of a stone or a tree, but instead to one maintaining a state of immutability while conscious of the eight and ten directions.
- *Fudochi* refers to the state where one causes someone to respond "Yes?" when one calls them. It does not refer to a state where the person wonders what one wants before answering when one calls them. The quintessence of strategy is the implementation of the heart.
- *Kannon* is sometimes said to possess a thousand arms and a thousand eyes, but in reality does not. *Fudochi* should be used to strike opponents.
- In strategy, as in any matter, the state where one calls out and the other person responds "Yes?" is the same as where the opponent moves, and one's technique naturally emanates, and as such is indicative of the activity of the mind's eye. A thousand eyes refers to the state of observing and acting in accordance with the opponent's *ki* (Otake, pp. 240-241).

The excerpt goes on to discuss the teaching of different types of students. That this explanation on *suigetsu shinmyoken* immediately precedes the section of how to approach different types of students appears to indicate that the teacher should adopt this state when facing his pupils. It suggests that the teacher himself maintain a mind that is focused on reading his student's dispositions and responding to

them according to their various learning needs. This suggests that the educational concept of differentiation, i.e., proactively adapting teaching styles to address the diversity of student learning preferences and stages of readiness to learn, was acknowledged and codified in pedagogical practice centuries ago in the Shinan-kata of the Katori Shinto-ryu. This acknowledgement of the need for flexibility in approach is striking within the cultural context in which it is found; a cultural context that demands strict adherence to the paradigms of the ryuha. The Japanese adage, “the nail that stands up will be hammered down,” indicates the emphasis placed on conformity over differentiation. The concept and practice of *suigetsu shinmyoken* thus presents itself as one of those paradoxical circumstances, where only through differentiation of instruction can the *heicho* of the ryuha be successfully transmitted.

The Shinan-kata recognizes several different types of students and, along with the types of students, gives the way to instruct each type:

- The impatient student should be taught in an unhurried manner. He should be corrected through practice.
- The insensitive student’s technique should be corrected to give him confidence.
- The student who asks about principles should be made to practice, and taught the principles through training.
- The student who likes to rush should be taught to focus on their practice through learning the forms in detail.
- The talented student wants to learn more advanced teachings. He should not be taught advanced teachings, but nurtured skillfully by carefully observing his heart, and showing him his weaknesses in practice.
- The awkward student, if sincere, should be corrected repeatedly, and shown how to achieve victory through practice.
- All student’s [sic] true natures should be brought out. Some students may be incompetent. They can become skillful through focusing on their weaknesses and working sincerely on them (Otake, 2016, p. 241).

It will be noted that the instructions for the different types of students stress the importance of practice. This practice in the traditions of the ryuha brings the student into line and transforms him into a living embodiment of the ryuha. As the Shinan-kata states, the students’ natures must be brought to the surface, that is, their inherent beliefs and propensities must be exposed, so that they can be trained and brought into line with the paradigms of the ryuha. It is this educational process that creates the battlefield of the mind on which the transformational campaign is waged.

Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory

As one of the major learning theories in adult education, Transformative Learning (TL) has a considerable reference database. TL is a concept that has itself undergone transformation (Hogan & Cranton, 2015). On a fundamental level, TL states that all individuals make meaning of their experiences to form a set of perceptions about the world, a set of beliefs. Mezirow (1990) defined learning as “the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action” (p. 1). TL may be defined as “a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated” (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 87). In essence, this belief system is examined, questioned, and revised to assimilate and accommodate new experience. TL presents itself as a lens through which to understand learning as a transformation of belief systems. Studies that have examined transformative aspects of active engagement include Taylor’s (1998) review of TL, as well as his (2007) follow-up on TL research. As noted above, while TL has now become one of the pillars of adult education research and practice, there have been no studies about how restrictive systems, such as *koryu butjusu*, systems which encourage adherence to the structure of the ryuha with a *keppan* (blood oath), act as a TL experience.

Mezirow (2000) listed ten phases in his TLT: disorienting dilemma; self-examination; sense of alienation; relating discontent to others; exploring options for new behaviors; building confidence in new

ways of behaving; planning a course of action to sustain new behaviors; acquiring new knowledge to implement plans; experimenting with new roles; reintegration. Dirkx (1998) points out that, “for Mezirow, the outcome of transformative learning reflects individuals who are more inclusive in their perceptions of the world, able to differentiate increasingly in its various aspects, open to other points of view, and able to integrate different dimensions of their own experiences into meaningful and holistic relationships” (p. 4). Mezirow’s initial presentation of TL has often been criticized for being too cognitively focused (Taylor, 2008). It is this focus, however, that recommends it as a frame through which to view koryu bujutsu, because the transformation which takes place within the practitioner is a transformation of mind.

Discussion

Issazi Chozanshi’s (1659-1741) was a member of literati and a samurai of the Sekiyado fief. He included in his text, *Tengu Geijutsuron (Demon’s Sermon on the Martial Arts)* (Wilson, 2006) a learning story used in many martial arts schools called, “The Mysterious Technique of the Cat.” In the story, a vexing rat overcomes all of the cats sent to kill it by a samurai, and it even chases the samurai about his house. A particular cat is finally called in and easily dispatches the rat as it cowers in fear in a corner. Later that evening, all of the previously unsuccessful cats come to praise the victorious feline and ask for instruction in its way of rat catching. The samurai listens to the discourse and understands that of which the cat speaks is intimately connected to the way of the sword. He finally asks the cat to reveal to him the deepest mysteries of swordsmanship:

[T]here is something I heard in secret. That is that the art of swordsmanship is not exclusively in making efforts to defeat others. It is the art of dealing with the Great Transformation, and being clear on the matter of life and death. A man who would be a samurai should always maintain this kind of mentality and should discipline himself in the art. For this reason, you should first of all penetrate the matter of life and death; make no particular adaptations to the mind; have no doubts and no vacillation; do not use your own wit, contrivances, or prejudices; harmonize mind and ch’i; rely on nothing; and be as serene as a deep pool. If you are always like this, you will be completely free to respond to any change.... Because I exist, my opponent exists. If I do not exist, neither will my opponent. “Opponent” is the name we give to someone who stands against us. Yin and yang, water and fire, are of this sort. For the most part, something that has form will surely have something in opposition to it. However, if there is no form to my mind, there will be nothing opposing it. When there is nothing in opposition, there is no contentiom (Wilson, p. 185, 189).

The story of the swordsman and the cat reflects the same basic interests as the previously introduced systems, “the transformation of the martial artist vis-à-vis mental stance, and the ease of facility of his own body” (Wilson, p. 21). The transformation of the mind, through rigorous physical training, is the penultimate goal of these schools. The ultimate goal is the preservation of the ryuha. If there is no contest, one cannot be defeated, and the ryuha is preserved. The internal, psychological quest to transform oneself into a figure so indomitable that an opponent does not have an opening to strike provides practitioners with a lifetime of study and an almost impossible goal. Once again, the battle is focused inward, rather than outward. The opponent becomes whatever internal restrictions prevent one from achieving this superhuman state. Otake clearly states, “budo is a path for polishing the self” (2016, p. 227), and “through austere training, the practitioner awakens to the concept of *katsujin-enken* (the sword as life-giving and fulfilling), and is fulfilled as a human being” (2007, p.15).

Jennings (2010) looked at the transformation that occurs through long-term practice of Chinese martial arts, and while not a treatise on koryu bujutsu, the themes are similar: “martial artists are travelers; their martial development is a journey; progress through the journey is transformation” (p. 318). This idea of being a traveler evokes the koryu practice of shugyo (austere training), an intense period of training in which a martial artist would leave his own dojo (school) and visit other schools and teachers against

whom he would engage in combat as a way of learning. Training in martial arts acts as a form of self-discovery for practitioners, much the same as described by Magolda (2004) for transformation through epistemological reflection. These warrior journeys, both through internal reflection and external combat, represent Mesirov's disorienting dilemma, the first step in the transformation process. A practitioner must first confront the sword and it is then that s/he faces the first dilemma, i.e., how to get past the sword to strike the opponent without being struck. In this respect, it is similar to a Zen koan. The koan is a paradoxical riddle used to facilitate enlightenment in Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The koan is specifically designed to create a disorienting dilemma, challenge rational assumptions, and create a new, higher understanding (enlightenment). A koan given to the author while studying Zen in Korea was, "Who are your mother and father." The solution to the riddle isn't a straightforward genealogical response. It is the form of a famous koan which is also stated, "Show me your face before your parents were born" (Suler, 1989, p.222). For the practitioner of the sword, the koan of the sword is more than a practical problem. The kendo master Morita Monjuro talks about the similarity between kendo and Zen:

Holding the sword with the principle of manipulating it perfectly is synonymous with attuning oneself to the universal principle. The effect is similar to that sought by Zen masters through sitting zazen facing the wall. The technique of the sword becomes the practice of the universal principle, and this practice is equivalent of the koan in Zen (Tokitsu, 2004, p.264).

This enlightenment that is gained through the practice of swordsmanship creates a transformation in the practitioner. Each physical pattern of movements within the koryu is designed to bring about a corresponding mental pattern. As the physical movements transform the body, they also transform the mind. That such a transformation is possible, is verified by the teachings of the ryuha. Katori Shinto-ryu has an oral tradition known as kumazasa-no-taiza, or, "dialogue atop the bamboo grass" (Otake, 2016, p. 4). Tradition states that the founder, Iizasa Choisai, was never beaten in combat and was, therefore, a magnet for swordsmen wishing to make names for themselves. When confronted by a challenger, Choisai would invite the swordsman to sit with him atop a thin stalked bamboo known as kumazasa. Unable to accomplish this task, the swordsmen would leave in defeat. Chosai's unique ability was gained through his understanding and mastery of the sword. His enlightenment, i.e., transformation, through the study of the sword was what allowed him to perform the feat. Anyone who was unable to duplicate the act had not achieved the same level of transformation. In a koryu, the transformation of mind is validated by the feats of the practitioners who embody the teachings of the ryuha.

The inward journey and transformational goal is not just sought in koryu, but in modern business and military endeavors. Kotler and Wheal (2017) examined the search for the ability to create the peak experience and flow state, which they called extasis, i.e., "step outside oneself" (Chapter 1, Section 1, para. 11), in various forms, from microdosing with hallucinogenics in Silicon Valley to more martial group training in the Navy SEALs. They found that these states were re-producible and highly sought after, not only by counterculture psychonauts but by business and military operatives as a way to go beyond the normal experiences and tap into creative states of enhanced performance. The same transformation that was sought by practitioners in the koryu is still being sought after in more contemporary activities. While koryu fostered these states through the creation of mental and physical paradigms, modern practitioners seek to understand the transformation on a chemical level and hack the results in less than a lifetime of focused study.

Extasis is transformation, and may represent one aspect of TL. Wettrick (2017) suggests that TL is possible in the classroom through various practices designed to create the flow state: "creating an environment that would allow my students to take more risks (safely), flush out stress, increase creativity, and drive deeper feelings of awareness and empathy" (para 6). While opening college courses with a round of sword practice may be impractical, Wettrick suggests using skills such as mindfulness (also fostered in koryu bujutsu) to help create the appropriate setting for flow to be experienced and transformative learning to occur.

The study of koryu bujutsu, which has as a practical aim the forced submission of an opponent through martial means, seems cursorily opposed to the idea of TL and expanding one's beliefs to have more holistic relationships. But this dichotomy is only understood through TL. The death-dealing sword (satsujinken) is transformed into the life-giving sword (katsujinken). As the learner is the living representation of the sword, the learned is transformed from one who uses the sword to bring death to one who uses the sword to bring life.

Miyamoto Musashi is revered in budo (warrior arts) as kensei (sword saint). This is because he was recognized (by many) as having achieved the plateau of being an indomitable force. Tradition states that Shinmen Musashi No Kami Fujiwara No Genshin (Miyamoto Musashi) killed his first man in a duel at the age of 13. By the age of 30, he had engaged in over 60 episodes of single combat and killed all of his opponents. He fought in two major battles, including the Battle of Seikigahara (1600 CE). At some point in his life, believing himself to be invincible, he stopped using a shinken (live blade) and, instead, used wooden weapons, to avoid killing his opponents. He eventually retired to a cave, where he died in 1645 CE (Harris, 1974). In his writings, Musashi states, "When I reached thirty I looked back on my past. The previous victories were not due to my having mastered strategy [heiho]... After that I studied morning and evening searching for the principle, and came to realize the Way of strategy when I was fifty" (Harris, 1974, p. 34).

Through the study of the sword in the traditions of the ryuha, the practitioner confronts his beliefs and examines them through the processes of kata and combat, both being types of mental and physical koans. The practitioner reflects on his training, and the new experiences are assimilated into new paradigms. The entire process is facilitated by the ryuha to mold the thinking of the practitioner and make the practitioner an extension of the ryuha. In order to facilitate the perpetuation of the ryuha, the transformation of the mind through austere training of the body in the martial techniques of the system became the ostensible goal of koryu. Examples of these techniques are given as a video link in the references (Gonzales, 2011). Through this training, the heiho of the ryuha becomes embodied within the practitioner. The practitioner then becomes the living vehicle through which the essence of the system is preserved and transmitted. The paradigms that define the koryu are validated within the practitioner.

The Shinan-kata of the Katori Shinto-ryu gives us a glimpse into the educational strategies that are designed to bring about a transformation within the practitioner of the koryu. This is partly accomplished through teachings about what frame of reference a teacher should adopt, i.e., shinmyoken, and also through recognition of different types of learners and differentiation of instruction for each type. This gives the outward appearance that the ryuha is a closed system that discourages thinking outside the lines and encourages paradigm paralysis; the very opposite of the heart of transformative learning. Paradoxically, however, it is through this strict adherence to the mental paradigms of the ryuha that true freedom is achieved; freedom to move both mind and body in any manner necessary for the survival of the individual as a living embodiment of the ryuha. Only through adherence to the mental and physical paradigms of the ryuha can a paradigm shift be achieved and a transformation occur.

Conclusions and Opportunities for Future Research

Phenomenological interviews with practitioners of koryu bujutsu to examine the lived experience of the individuals studying koryu would give more in-depth insight into the transformative aspects of the experience. Once these interviews have been conducted and the eidae inherent in them brought to light, they can be compared with the historical record represented in this study. This comparison will provide insight into the transformations that occur (if any) through the strict training paradigms of the ryuha.

Historical documents of the type examined in this study are often rife with folklore, stories designed to serve the continuation of the ryu by creating a context conducive to the perpetuation of the ryuha. Such stories are esoteric in that they define the ryuha to its members and are understood only to those within the ryuha; and exoteric in that they define how the group wants others to understand them. This is one reason the Shinan-kata is interesting, in that it plainly gives instruction on the esoteric training of its adherents. It is hoped that future research with active practitioners of koryu bujutsu will help

distinguish esoteric, transformative learning from exoteric propaganda. This may also lead to a clearer understanding of common themes that exist in different types of learning.

More research of the Shinan-kata as a treatise on educational psychology and a guide to help facilitate a transformation of mind may prove useful, however, as a menkyo of the highest order in the Katori Shinto-ryu, access to it is off limits to anyone outside the ryuha. An interview with Otake Risuke, Shihan-dai of the Katori Shinto-ryu, was sought in an effort to find out more about the scroll and its instruction on teaching. The interview was denied. This is unfortunate, as much might be learned about historical teaching practices within the koryu, as well as how these practices may facilitate transformational learning.

While the idea of learning styles is passé in educational psychology, the Shinan-kata does indicate that learners within the Katori Shinto-ryu were recognized by their particular approaches to learning, and teaching was/is individualized to the student. In a time when educational theories are often transient, the Shinan-kata indicates that individualized approaches to education designed to create peak, transformative learning experiences can have longevity.

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