

# 2004 GSJSA Position Paper

**General Topic:** Culture in the Martial Arts

**Position Paper Topic:** “Culture & Koryu Bujutsu”

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This paper will discuss the necessity of learning about various aspects of traditional Japanese Culture when one is involved as a serious student of Koryu Bujutsu. This paper will propose the following: that in order to fully understand the form of Koryu Bujutsu one studies, a correlative form of Japanese Culture (such as Calligraphy, Tea Ceremony or Flower Arrangement) must be chosen to supplement one's pursuit of their Koryu Art. Examples will be given from both an historical and a practical standpoint to further support the premise of this paper. The primary example used will be that of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu, wherein the student (or Deshi) of *laijutsu* is eventually encouraged to take up the study of Chinese Poetry Recitation (*Shigin, or Ginei*) and Traditional Sword Dance (*Kenbu*) as these three arts have formed a comprehensive course of study, dating back many centuries, in the Tamiya School of Swordsmanship.

## **The Path to Cultural Awareness**

In order to provide a clearer understanding of the position taken in this paper, I would first like to provide some historical background as to how this whole way of thinking came about, and how it eventually evolved into a formal

policy of the Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu Michigan Dojo. The example cited here is based on personal experience, going back to 1987 and my initial introduction to Iai through training in Toyama Ryu Iaido.

When I first took up the Way of Iai some years ago, the general approach of my fellow students to the practice of this unique Japanese art was quite “Americanized.” The general consensus of thought in the Dojo was that: “We are in America, not Japan, so we should try to make this Japanese martial art more American and therefore more appealing to people in this country.” This way of thinking is fine for many American practitioners of this more modern style of Iai, who tend to view it as more of a “sport oriented” or “diversionary” pursuit. Something about this approach perplexed me, however, as it seemed that my study of this art didn’t quite have the sense of balance it seemed it should have.

When I finally came to read **Go Rin no Sho (A Book of Five Rings)**, by Miyamoto Musashi, for the first time, I found a voice for the thought that had previously been difficult to put into words. In the opening paragraphs of ***The Ground Book***, Musashi states: “It is said that the warrior’s is the twofold Way of pen and sword, and he should have a taste for both Ways.” (Victor Harris translation, p. 37). After careful consideration of the meaning of this statement by Musashi, I approached my Sensei about the possibility of arranging for persons to visit our Dojo who were adept at other aspects of Japanese culture in order to broaden the horizons of the Dojo members and help them see the inter-relatedness of these arts.

Sensei approved this course of action and experts in the arts of Shodo (Calligraphy), Ikebana (Flower Arranging) and Sado (The Way of Tea) were invited to visit the Dojo and do a demonstration and/or class on these topics. Although many of the students still held to the mode of thinking mentioned earlier, many others found a whole new perspective to their training in Iai and began to branch out and study other Japanese cultural arts as a supplement to their Iai training. Soon they began to realize a key element: that the same attention to form and detail, the same focus and the same spirit that is used in Shodo, Ikebana and Sado is identical to that used in the practice of Iai. This new awareness began to manifest itself in their approach to training in the Dojo, as well as in their individual Iai technique.

### **The World of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu and Japanese Culture**

When I first became a Deshi (student) of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu in 1993, one aspect of my long-term training that was emphasized from the very beginning by my Instructor, Assistant Headmaster Tsumaki Kazuo Genwa Sensei, was the necessity of becoming involved in the study of other Japanese cultural arts in order to enhance and supplement my course of study in Iaijutsu. Under the tutelage of Tsumaki Sensei and his Father (our current and 14<sup>th</sup> Soke, or Headmaster), I was taught that, from the very beginnings of the Tamiya School of Iaijutsu, three arts formed the basic curriculum of the Ryu and that all Deshi of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu are required to set aside some time for their study during the

course of their training. These three arts are: 1) ***laijutsu*** (Classical Sword Drawing); 2) ***Shingin, or Ginei*** (Recitation of Chinese Poetry) and 3) ***Kenbu*** (Classical Japanese Dance with Sword and Fan).

The merging of these three arts into a single curriculum makes perfect sense as they provide a way for the Koryu (Classical Style) arts to not only provide the *laijutsuka* with related cultural arts to study, but also help to preserve the history of the Koryu and Samurai traditions. This preservation of history and tradition can be seen, for instance, in poems that are written and recited in the Chinese style that discuss the history or philosophy of a particular Koryu system. Likewise, the performance of Classical Dance with Sword and Fan also tells stories that are rooted in the history of the Samurai, such as the example cited below that combines all three of the elements introduced above:

### **Ginei: Fushikian Kizan o Utsu no Zunidaisu by Rai Sanyo**

#### **1. About The Poem: A Translation of the Poem: *Kawanakajima for Kenbu*.**

After we crossed the river in the night by paying attention, even to the sounds of whips, we found that the banner of the general of our enemy was surrounded by a great number of soldiers. Thinking back to the past, it has been more than ten years since this hatred started. However, in spite of the fact that we prepared ourselves for this opportunity of beating our enemy by polishing our swords, we lost this wonderful opportunity. We cannot help regretting it.

**2. Focus:** Be precise on each movement, such as moving your feet.

**3. Posture:** Face to the front with Hidari-Hanmi. Hold a fan with your forefinger and thumb like holding a calligraphy brush and put it on the middle of the Tsuka of the sword.

**4. Each movement according to a part of the poem**

**Bensei shukushuku** = Paying attention to the sounds made by whips

Stretch your torso; make a strong step with your left foot. At the same time, hit with the fan backward and look at the edge of the fan. Make a strong step with your right foot ahead of your left foot. At the same time, make a half circle behind with the hand holding the fan. While stepping forward with your left foot, hit with fan in your right hand.

**Yoru kawa o wataru** = Crossing a river in the night

Face the front with the fan in your right hand, hit high with the fan forward. Hit your right thigh with the fan; hold your hakama with both hands, and retreat one step with your right foot. Step backward with your left foot, hold the pivot of the fan with the thumb and forefinger of your right hand, and make a half circle with the fan from your left shoulder to the front.

**Akatsuki ni miru** = Look at the dawn

Open the fan powerfully and swiftly, open your palm and put it high. Put the pivot of the fan on the palm. When doing this movement, stretch your right knee and bend your left knee. While putting your left foot aside to your right foot, hold the fan high from your head to up your right shoulder.

**Senpei no** = Thousands of soldiers

While stepping to the front with your right foot powerfully, hit with the fan in your right hand.

**Taiga o Yosuru o** = There was a great group of enemy troops

Throw the fan back ward, hit your right knee with your hand, and hold hakama with both of your hands. Make a big step backward with your right foot; make a backward step with your left foot, move your focus from the backward to the front. While stretching your right knee and bending your left knee.

**Ikon** = Regrets

While stretching both arms to both sides, face to the front with your body slanting halfway to the left, put your left foot aside to your right foot.

**Jyunen** = Ten years

Grab your hakama with both hands and make a strong step with your left foot toward 45 degrees to the left. Bend your right knee and stretch your left knee.

Count numbers with your forefinger around the right side of your waist with your left hand halfway to the front at 45 degrees to the left.

**Ikken o migaki** = Polish a sword

Make a backward step with your right foot, and draw your sword horizontally. Immediately put your left foot aside to your right foot, and turn around the right hand with the sword. Put the sword on your left knee. While putting your left hand on the sword, wipe the sword by making a backward step to 45 degrees to the right.

**Ryusei** = Shooting stars

Put the Mune (back) of the sword on your left hand, hold high Tsuka on your head, bending your left knee and stretching your right knee, put your left hand to the Tsuka, move upward (Kiriageru) with your sword while making forward step with your right foot to 45 degrees to the left.

**Koutei** = Bottom of the lake

Move your sword upward as well as backward to the right.

Traditionally, **laijutsu** is the first art pursued as it teaches several of the fundamental principles required for the study of **Shigin** (i.e. proper timing and rhythm in relation to breathing) and **Kenbu** (i.e. the proper use of the sword as an extension of one's self and, through the study of laijutsu kata, to become

accustomed to learning prescribed sets of movements necessary for the dance). While it may be many years before the Deshi of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu is actually given their first introduction to these other two correlative arts, this interim time is when the Deshi is required to begin their exploration of another Japanese cultural art, and choose one to become immersed in.

### **In the Dojo...Practical Application**

The discussion above ultimately begs the question: "Should the study of other Japanese cultural arts be a required element in the study of the traditional Japanese martial arts?" This will depend on several important factors. First and foremost it should be considered ***whether the Japanese martial art being studied is a Koryu (Classical Style) or Genzai (Modern) martial art.*** For while an argument can easily be made that the Koryu Arts, by virtue of their being classical traditions, necessarily require the study of other classical forms of culture to be truly understood and appreciated, the same does not necessarily hold for the more modern versions of these traditional arts.

For example, while a familiarity with Sado (Tea Ceremony) or Shodo (Calligraphy) will undoubtedly be of value to the Koryu practitioner, it may not hold the same significance for the person practicing Judo or Kendo (or in some circumstances, Iaido) who may be studying it more as a form of physical exercise, hobby, etc.

Secondly, whether the students of a given Dojo will be required to delve into other traditional Japanese cultural arts will depend to a large extent upon ***the mindset of the Instructor***. If the Instructor feels that studying other forms of Japanese culture will help the student have a more complete understanding and appreciation for what they do in the Dojo, then it should be made a definite requirement and begun when the prospective student is formally initiated as a member of the Dojo. Other Instructors who feel that the study of related forms of Japanese culture might be helpful, but not necessarily need to be a requirement in their Dojo curriculum, may simply want to have a bulletin board or message board available to post opportunities for their students to experience or become involved in other types of Japanese culture. These could be local exhibitions and demonstrations, or ones nearby that could become a field trip of sorts for Dojo members.

Finally, the determination of whether or not the members of a given Dojo will be required to study other forms of Japanese culture ***will depend on the Ryuha itself***. In the case of Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu, as noted above, the study of ***Shigin*** and ***Kenbu*** becomes mandatory when a certain level of Iai training is achieved. This is not an arbitrary decision on the part of individual Instructors, but rather one that has been a part of the Tamiya Ryu tradition for centuries and is perpetuated to maintain the integrity of the Ryuha.

## **Conclusion**

From the discussion above, there are several conclusions that can be reached about making the study of other aspects of Japanese culture a requirement in the study of the Japanese martial arts. First, by making it a requirement for Dojo members to immerse themselves in another form of Japanese culture, the student will be able to see the world of the Dojo in more than a one-dimensional perspective. As the saying goes in reference to Japan, "It's not all sushi!"...the same could be said of the Dojo: "It's not all martial arts!" Secondly, and in relation to the previous statement, the meaning of the word "Dojo" is, literally, "a place where you study the/a Way." By extension then, couldn't the Dojo also be a place to study "Ways" other than just the martial ones and keep it all interrelated by having just one place to study everything? Finally, whether or not the members of a given Dojo will be required to study other types of Japanese culture will depend on what requirements the Ryuha itself may already have in place and the level of their insistence on those requirements being followed by all members.

It may be the case that some forms of Koryu Bujutsu will decide to relax such requirements in order to accommodate Western practitioners, simply encouraging them to pursue other Japanese cultural interests when (and if) they have some free time. Others, like Tamiya Ryu Iaijutsu, are very clear on what is expected of their Deshi, and hold them to it. It is the final opinion of this paper that, in whatever way it is accomplished, some kind of exposure to other forms of Japanese culture is critical if the practitioner of the traditional Japanese martial arts is to have a deeper and more meaningful understanding of what they do in the Dojo.