

Nature of Mastery in Martial Arts and the Method of Obtaining It in Issai Chozan's Treatise *Tengu Geijutsu Ron*

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Abstract

The article considers the nature of mastery in martial arts (*bugei*) and the method to obtain it according to the treatise by Issai Chozan (1659–1741), *Tengu Geijutsu Ron* (*Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]*, 1729). This text is a unique phenomenon in the martial arts literature of the Edo period. A work written with a mass readership in mind, it was received by martial artists as an epiphany and remains a part of the canon of the Japanese *bugei* until now. The topic of mind and methods of controlling its state occupies the central place in the treatise. The sections focusing on this topic contain a comprehensive analysis of the empirical, “incorrect” state of mind (*shin*), which is juxtaposed with the state of “true mind” (*shintai*).

According to one version, these sections were actually written not by Issai Chozan, but by one of the greatest Japanese Confucian scholars of the 17th century, a representative of the Japanese Wang Yangming school, Kumazawa Banzan (1619–1691), which, probably, explains the depth in which the topic of mind is covered. The *Tengu Geijutsu Ron* persuasively shows that mastery in martial arts is the result of achieving the state of “true mind” (*shintai*), bringing in the right state the pneuma-*ki*, mastering the technique of battle, training the body, grasping the “nature” (*sei*) of the weapon used and obtaining the ability to “follow” this nature. Issai Chozan notes that, in the system “mind – pneuma – body,” mind occupies the top, commanding place, directing the *ki*, which, in turn, directs the body, but the process of achieving mastery is based on using feedback in this system.

Keywords: Japanese martial arts, *budo*, *bugei*, Confucianism, Issai Chozan, Niwa Tadaaki, Kumazawa Banzan, *Tengu Geijutsu Ron*, *Geijutsu Taii*.

In the second half of the 17th century, there was an active discussion among martial artists focusing on the essence and content of *bugei* – martial arts, on the effective methods and approaches to educating a warrior, on the very nature and essence of mastery. Masters offered their answers to these questions, which, as a rule, remained confined to the narrow circle of their followers. Against this background, in the first third of the 17th century, an author writing under the penname of Issai Chozan-shi 佚斎樗山子, published two works of great interest focusing on the said topic, one after another. The first one was titled the *Miraculous Art of the Cat* (*Neko-no Myojutsu* 猫之妙術), and it was published in 1727. The second one was the *Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]* (*Tengu Geijutsu Ron* 天狗藝術論), and it was released in 1729. I spoke about the former in my article [Gorbylev 2021]. Here, I will focus on the second work by Issai Chozan-shi.

Issai Chozan and His Work ***Discourse of Tengu on the Art of the Sword***

Referring the reader to the article on the treatise *Miraculous Art of the Cat* for more detail, here, I will provide only the briefest information about the author of the *Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]*.

His real name was Niwa Jūrōzaemon Tadaaki 丹羽十郎左衛門忠明 (1659–1741). He was a samurai in the domain of Sekiyado (Shimōsa Province, currently Chiba Prefecture), not far from the shogunate capital of Edo. He served Lord Kuze Yamato-no kami Shigeyuki and occupied an officer post of a “banner commander” *hata-bugyō* with a handsome salary of 300 *koku*.¹

¹ *Koku* – ca. 150 kg of rice, a standard measure of income in medieval Japan.

Issai Chozan received a good education. He studied military sciences, Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism, but he was particularly interested in the Taoist texts *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*, as well as Zen Buddhism. After his retirement, he was spending time conversing with men of culture from Edo and writing. He authored several educational works focusing on martial arts and rules of life for the samurai. His writing is characterized by frequent use of dialogues and parables to explain the contents, lightness of style, and humor. Scholars name him the founder of a specific literary genre, *dangibon* 談義本, which can be translated as “humorous instructions in the form of a conversation” [Nakano 1967].

The treatise *Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]* (see the text in [Issai 1995]) occupies a special place among the works of Issai Chozan.

The *Discourse* was printed with woodblock in the 14th year of Kyōhō. Despite the fact that the work was aimed at wide readership, Issai Chozan-shi touched upon issues so important for martial artists and gave such thought-out and detailed answers to them that his work was received exceptionally well by *bugei* masters. According to Japanese scholar Ooboki Teruo, the *Tengu Geijutsu Ron* was reprinted a countless number of times until the woodblocks of the first edition were completely worn out [Ooboki 1981, p. 55]. After that, to meet the unending demand, the *Discourse* was re-published in the 6th year of Kansei (1794) as *Buyō Geijutsu Ron* (武用藝術論, *Theory of Arts Used by Warriors*). It became popular once again in the early 20th century, when, in the time of booming popularity of martial arts in Japan, old works about them began to be re-published. In 1915, the treatise *Tengu Geijutsu Ron* was included in the collection of classical texts *Bujutsu Sōsho* (*Library of Martial Arts*), which was later reprinted several times and remains one of the most important collections of texts on *bujutsu* until present time.

Since the time of the first edition, the treatise was widely studied and commented upon, and new works on the theory of *bugei* were published under its influence. For example, under the impression from *Tengu*

Geijutsu Ron, a *kenjutsu* (art of swordsmanship) master of the Mugen-ryū school Otsuka Mambei Yoshioki wrote a book titled *Theory of the Art of the Sword* (*Kenjutsu Ron*) in 1743. And only four years later, the next work inspired by Issai Chozan-shi was published – a treatise *Basics of the Art [of the Sword]* (*Geijutsu Futaba-no Hajime*, 1747), authored by Kokenken Ensui. The treatise by Issai Chozan-shi is widely studied and commented upon in our days in well, and not only in Japan, but also far beyond its borders (see the references list after this article).

The *Discourse* includes a preface, written by Kanda Hakuryūshi, four scrolls of the main text, and the author's afterword.

In the beginning of the first scroll, Issai Chozan employs a characteristic literary device. He describes a fencer, who, mimicking the famous Minamoto-no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), who allegedly learned the secrets of the art of the sword from the mountain-dwelling *tengu* demons, retreats to the mountains. There, he exhausts himself with training, and after that falls either asleep or into meditation, witnessing, whether in reality or in dreams, a battle between the *tengu* and subsequently their discussion on the nature of mastery in *kenjutsu*.

The first three scrolls of the *Discourse* analyze the phenomenon of mastery, while in the fourth one the author recommends to include the *shūki-no jutsu* 収気の術, the “technique of gathering pneuma-ki” with breathing exercises, in the practice of martial arts. According to Yuasa Akira, a prominent expert in the field of Tokugawa-era martial arts, in the early 18th century, this was a novelty in the theory and practice of *bugei* [Yuasa 2003, pp. 146–149].

Tengu Geijutsu Ron and Geijutsu Taii: Who Is the Real Author of the Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]?

A crucial factor of attractiveness of the *Discourse* for the disciples of martial arts was a comprehensive coverage of the topic of mastery and the method of achieving it from the point of view of

the Confucian doctrine about the two foundations of the Universe: the principle-*ri*² and the pneuma-*ki*³ 理気論. To explain it, the author portrays a discussion, a dispute even, in which the mastery in *kenjutsu* is considered from various sides and in various aspects. For this reason, the *Discourse* is particularly interesting, as it provides a solid description of the way the Japanese of the late 17th – early 18th centuries understood mental processes and the connection of the mind and the body.

The first scroll is started with the introduction, titled “*Taii*” (大意), which can be translated as the “True Meaning [of the Book].” It clearly states that the main topic of Issai Chozan-shi’s book is the achievement of the right state of mind (*shin* 心), because this is the necessary basis of mastery in *kenjutsu* and every other business. Issai Chozan-shi calls this state *shintai* (心体) – the “true (essential) mind.” The author claims that, upon gaining it, a person “will be able to correctly follow

² *Ri* (*li* in Chinese) – “principle/law,” one of the basic categories of the classical Chinese philosophy, the ordering, structuring element, the attribute, the essential quality inherent in a particular object and everything in existence. In the teaching of Zhu Xi, the fundamental substantial element, comprising the nature of things and defining their structure. The sum of the endless multitude of “principles” of particular objects forms the “Great Ultimate,” *taiji* (*taikyoku* in Japanese), which shapes the formless pneuma-*qi* (*ki* in Japanese), causing the process of cosmogenesis and the formation of the world.

³ *Ki* (*qi* in Chinese) – “pneuma,” “vital force,” “energy,” etc. – one of the fundamental and most characteristic categories of Far Eastern philosophy and culture. In the cosmological sense, it is the universal substance of the Universe. In the organismic one, it is the “life force,” filling human body and connected to blood circulation, able to reduce itself to the condition of “seed,” “seed soul” (*jing* in Chinese). In the psychological sense, *ki* is the manifestation of the psychical center of *xin* (“mind,” “heart”), directed by will (*zhi* in Chinese) and directing the feelings (*qing* in Chinese).

the Heavenly principles contained in his own inherent nature⁴ (*jisei-no tensoku* 自性の天則) and even become “the helper of the Great Way” [Issai 1995, p. 286].

The topic of “mind” and controlling its state occupies the central place in the first three scrolls of *Tengu Geijutsu Ron*. The pages dealing with it reveal close textual semblance to another book with a similar title, *Geijutsu Taii* (藝術大意, *True Meaning of the Art [of the Sword]*), which is attributed to one of the greatest Japanese Confucians of the 17th century, a prominent representative of the Japanese Wang Yangming school Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691).

The identity of entire passages in the *Tengu Geijutsu Ron* and in the *Geijutsu Taii*, which had allegedly been created several decades earlier, leads one to believe that Issai Chozan-shi merely reproduced the work by Kumazawa Banzan, to whose fundamental knowledge and literary skill the treatise *Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]* largely owes its fame. However, not everything is as simple as it seems here. In fact, Kumazawa Banzan’s authorship of *Geijutsu Taii* is questionable. And if this text was not written by Kumazawa, it can be a forgery, which was, vice versa, produced on the basis of the book by Issai Chozan-shi. The scholars who do not consider the famous Confucian to be the author of the *True Meaning of the Art [of the Sword]* point out that the original manuscript of this work was never found, that there are no mentions of the work in Kumazawa’s documents, and that the text was published in 1936 for the first time, while its first traces only date back to no earlier than 1910.⁵ For these reasons, the text of *Geijutsu Taii*

⁴ *Sei* (*xing* in Chinese), “individual nature” – natural qualities of every particular “thing.” “Heavenly” (*ten* in Japanese, *tian* in Chinese) in the Far Eastern philosophical tradition is synonymous to “natural.”

⁵ According to some data, in 1910, the manuscript of *Geijutsu Taii* from the collection of a prominent educator and law expert Hosokawa Junjirō was demonstrated at an exhibit dedicated to the 220th anniversary of Banzan’s passing, held in the city of Koga. However, whether it was the original manuscript or some other copy which was demonstrated there, is currently impossible to determine.

was not included in the *Six-Volume Full Collection of Works by Banzan* [Ooboki 1981, p. 55].

Other researchers, with experts in the history of Japanese *bugei* most prominent among them,⁶ believe that *Geijutsu Taii* is an exceptionally valuable work by Kumazawa, which played, among other things, due to its retelling by Issai Chozan-shi, an important role in the development of the theory of martial arts.

The arguments of the proponents of this point of view were summarized by Ooboki Teruo. He notes that, in the afterword to the 1936 edition of *Geijutsu Taii*, its author, Kakuta Kanjirō, unequivocally states that this text belongs to Kumazawa and elaborates upon the origins of the copy used in preparing the publication. Kakuta writes that a certain Oohashi San'emon from Nishikinomiya, Shimotsuke Province, owned the original manuscript of *Geijutsu Taii*. Katō Shōzaburō from Shōnai made a copy of it. After that, in the 10th year of Tempō (1839), Ishikawa Shizuka made a copy of the manuscript owned by Katō. Then, in the “10th year of Ansei” (even though the last year of the Ansei era was year 7, or 1860), Nakayama Shūmei rewrote the text of *Geijutsu Taii* from the copy of Ishikawa. Finally, in the 1st year of Bunkyū (1861), Sakai Ryō copied it from Nakayama's manuscript [Ibid.]. According to Ooboki, such a detailed genealogy of the text's transmission makes Kakuta's claim that the *True Meaning of the Art [of the Sword]* is indeed a work by Kumazawa Banzan believable. However, Ooboki himself only managed to find a mention of only one of the above-mentioned owners of the copies – Oohashi San'emon, who had allegedly been the owner of the original manuscript by Kumazawa Banzan. His name is mentioned in *Kakugeki Shugyō Roku* 攪撃修行録, a work by a master of the *kenjutsu* school Ryūgō-ryū Nakayama Ikunoshin, dated 4th – 6th years of Kaei (1851–1853). However, there is no specific information about the said Oohashi in this text [Ibid.].

⁶ In particular, this position was held by Yamada Jirokichi, one of the most prominent authorities in the field of history of *kenjutsu*, author and editor of the *Collection of Works on Kendō* [Kendō sōsho 1936].

To justify the very possibility of the author of the *Discourse of Tengu on the Art [of the Sword]* gaining access to the alleged work by Kumazawa, Ooboki states where Kumazawa and Issai's ways may have crossed. He notes that, in 1676, Banzan spent seven days in the "minor" estate (*shimoyashiki*) of Kuze Hiroyuki (1609–1679), father of Kuze Shigeyuki (1659–1720), whom Issai Chozan-shi served. At the time, Banzan was about 57 years old, while Chozan was about 18. That is, they could have met, and the young samurai of the Kuze house could have listened to lectures of the prominent Confucian scholar [Ooboki 1981, p. 55].

Further on, Ooboki reminds that Kumazawa spent the last four years of his life under house arrest in the Koga Castle in Shimōsa province. Despite his captivity, Banzan was apparently teaching even in this harsh period of his life. According to Ooboki's opinion, among his followers could very well be Chozan himself, who was serving in the domain of Sekiyado, which was located not very far from the Koga Castle in the same province of Shimōsa. Ooboki believes that it was hardly possible that Issai Chozan-shi, with his interest in Confucianism, could fail to use this chance to learn from Kumazawa. Concluding his analysis, Ooboki seconds the opinion of another scholar of the history of Japanese *bugei*, Okada Kazuo, who, in a 1980 work of his, expressed the opinion that *Geijutsu Taii* was a "work by Banzan, written in the period of his arrest in Koga" [Ibid.].

There is an important question: could Kumazawa Banzan write a work dedicated to the art of the sword in principle? Did he practice *kenjutsu*?

Yes, Banzan did practice swordsmanship. Moreover, born to a samurai family, since his childhood years, he dreamt about the career of a great warrior and dedicated great effort to studying the art of the sword [Okada 1976, p. 78]. Therefore, he could in fact be the author of *Geijutsu Taii*, which elegantly combined the Confucian view of personal development with the theory and practice of swordsmanship.

As far as we can say, since Ooboki Teruo's 1981 publication, the discussion about the authorship of *Geijutsu Taii* and, ultimately, about the authorship of a significant portion of the text of *Tengu Geijutsu Ron*

hardly proceeded. The original manuscript of *Geijutsu Taii* was never found, and the authorship of Kumazawa Banzan is usually mentioned with a question mark attached [Yuasa 2003, p. 145].

Mind: Empirical, Wrong (*Shin*), and True (*Shintai*)

Issai Choizan juxtaposes the wrong mind, typical for an ordinary person, which he refers to using the character 心 (*shin/kokoro*), with the correct, “true state,” which is defined by the character combination 心体 *shintai*.

It is the state of “true mind” which is the foundation of mastery in the art of the sword: “Even though the art of the sword is a technique of battle, its ultimate principle (極則) is nothing other but the natural ‘miraculous application of the true mind’ (*shintai shizen-no myōyō* 心体自然の妙用)” [Issai 1995, p. 287]. In a different place, he says: “The art of the sword consists in the spontaneous, natural use of the ‘true mind’ 心体自然の応用” [Ibid., p. 288].

The essential characteristics of the “true mind” are tranquility, stillness, “emptiness,” that is, freedom from “things,” thoughts, ideas, selfish desires. In this state of mind, a person can naturally follow his “nature” and completely spontaneously and correctly react to all changes in the environment, effectively using their entire body. Issai Choizan writes: “When mind remains still, then the pneuma-*ki* does not move; when mind remains at rest and is devoid of all things, then *ki* remains soft and follows it, while techniques are applied naturally and according to necessity” [Ibid., p. 287]. In a different section: “Human mind does not contain evil initially. When a person is following his human “nature” (*sei* 性) and does not permit the feelings (*jō* 情) and desires (*yoku* 欲) to entice him, his “spirit” experiences no difficulty, and a person, upon encountering things, keeps the ability to respond to the developments completely freely and to act according to the situation” [Ibid., p. 290].

However, the mind of an ordinary person is not in the state of “true mind,” and it is characterized by constant change. Issai Chozan writes about this in the first lines of his work: “A human is a creature that is always in movement (動物). When a person does not move towards the good, hi necessarily moves towards the evil. If hi does not produce a thought in one place, then he necessarily produces a different thought in a different place. And the reason for this all is a person’s state of mind (*shin*), which is constantly changing” [Ibid., p. 286].

The main factors of change of the empirical state of mind, according to the text, are the feelings and desires inherent in a person, which can “entice” the mind and take it out of balance, as a result of which it ceases to follow the human “nature.” Feelings and desires make the mind turn towards “things,” because of which it ceases to “freely respond to what is happening and act according to situation,” which can have catastrophic consequences, especially in battle:

When the mind is occupied by some “things,” then the movement of *ki* becomes difficult, and arms and legs are unable to do their work. When mind focuses on techniques, then the movement of *ki* stops and it loses its wholeness and softness. When mind is used in this way and urged, then the results of its work⁷ turn out petty.⁸ When mind gives birth to an idea⁹ (*i* 意) and enlivens it, it acts like wind blowing up the fire which immediately devours firewood without leaving any trace of it. When *ki* moves ahead, it vaporizes, and when it is being locked, *ki* freezes. When you defend and wait, trying to react to your opponent’s actions, you are staring at the opponent (*miawase* 見合わせ), restrain yourself, and cannot make a single step forward. In this situation,

⁷ Lit. “traces.”

⁸ Lit “empty” – *kyo* in Japanese; *xu* in Chinese.

⁹ “Idea” (*i* in Japanese; *yi* in Chinese) – from the point of view of Far Eastern organismic theory, one of the manifestations, together with will (*zhi* in Chinese, *shi* in Japanese) of the spiritual substance *shen* (*shin* in Japanese), which regulates the psychic activity of a person. Mind-*shin* produces and “idea”-*i*, which brings the pneuma-*ki* into motion.

despite your intentions, you become a toy in the hands of your opponent [Ibid., p. 287].

From this follows the requirement to reduce the right state of mind or, as the author puts it, to “embrace the ‘true mind.’” To solve this problem, one uses *shinjutsu* (心術), the “art of mind,” which can be interpreted as the “art of managing the state of mind.” Issai Chozan claims that “only the one who is serious about striving to grasp the *shinjutsu* and studies it thoroughly can grasp the ‘true mind’ and will become able to correctly follow the Heavenly principles contained in their own inherent nature (*jisei-no tensoku* 自性の天則)” [Issai 1995, p. 286].

So, what does the art of *shinjutsu* consist in? Issai Chozan does not write about this directly. However, from the logic of his narration, it follows that the art of sword fencing *kenjutsu* can also serve as *shinjutsu*.

The Importance of Mastering the Technique of Swordsmanship

In swordsmanship, the rectification of mind begins with learning the technique. Even though the “ultimate principle” of the art of the sword is “nothing other but the natural ‘miraculous application of the true mind,’” writes Issai Chozan, “it is extremely difficult for a beginner to understand this. Therefore, the ancients only taught to follow the “nature of forms” and to master various movements... striving for their execution to be light and effortless. They instructed to strengthen muscle and bones, teach the arms and legs to work correctly, and in “application” to act according to the changing situation” [Ibid., p. 287].

As one can see from this quotation, the technique are rational ways of using one’s body and weapon, which has certain characteristics. “A sword is a thing meant to cut with it. A spear is a thing meant to thrust with it. It is impossible to use them to perform any other actions,” [Ibid.] writes Issai Chozan, reminding that a particular thing is the realization of the principle, *ri*, in matter, *ki*, by means of giving the matter a certain “form” (*katashi* 形): to give a slicing blow, there

is a technique of slicing blow, and for thrusting there is a technique of thrusting. The one who does not know the right “application” of the technique will not be able to use “things” according to their [nature]. And even if such person is strong in spirit, if the “form” [used by him] is contrary [to the principle], then he will strike where there is no target and, going against the “principle” of technique, he will be unable to reach what must be reached.” [Ibid., p. 288].

Issai Chozan attaches exceptional importance to *pneuma-ki*, which he defines as “what embeds mind in itself and uses ‘forms’” [Ibid., p. 287]. In his description, *ki* is akin to water. In its normal, right state, *ki* is a powerful water stream, with its fundamental characteristics being agility, oneness, softness, energy, hardiness. “It is required from the *ki*,” writes Issai Chozan, “that it is energetic and constantly on the move, never stopping, so that it is strong and unbending (剛健にして屈せざる) [Ibid.].

The state of *ki* directly depends on the state of mind:

“As soon as a thought (*nen* 念) is born in the mind, *ki* immediately obtains a “form,” and the opponent strikes where this “form” is located. When there are no “things” in the mind, *ki* is soft and calm. When *ki* is soft and calm, it is moving, it flows without a definite “form,” and then, without resorting to solidity, it naturally becomes solid. Mind is like a clear mirror or still water, [where everything is reflected without distortion]. But as soon as an idea (*i* 意) or a thought (*nen* 念) crosses the mind, then mental clarity (*reimyō*) is constricted, and the person loses his freedom of action” [Ibid., p. 288].

The loss of freedom of action is, among other things, the loss of control of the body. If the mind commands the *ki* in a wrong way, then the latter can “evaporate,” “freeze,” or “stagnate,” that is, lose its agility. According to Issai Chozan, it also needs “tempering” and “training.”

The above-said constitutes the following pattern: the mind directs *ki*, while *ki* directs the body. This can lead to a mistaken conclusion that the method of teaching *kenjutsu* must proceed from mastering the ability to control one’s state of mind. But Issai Chozan warns against this mistake:

“When one says that, if nothing brings mind into motion, then *ki* is also motionless, and the technique spontaneously follows

[the opponent's actions], then one merely interprets this issue from the point of view of the essence of the "principle" (*ritai-no honzen*) and points to the goal, [to which one should aspire]. This does not mean that perfecting the technique is a waste [of energy and time]. It is just that, when one explains the "principles," one moves from top to down, and when one masters the art in practice (*shugyō*), then, vice versa, one moves from down to top, and this is the normal order of things (*mono-no jō*)... When, upon meeting the opponent, you forget about life and death, about the opponent and yourself, if nothing forces your thought (*nen*) to move, if you do not intend (*i*) anything, if you keep the state of "no mind" (*mushin*) and trust your natural intuition (*shizen-no kan*), then you keep the freedom "of changes and transformations" and are able to perceive [the opponent's actions] and to freely use [your technique according to situation]... This is the supreme principle of the art of the sword. However, this is not the Way by which one must immediately climb [to the summit] without making necessary preparations beforehand.¹⁰ For the one who has not his technique, not tempered his *ki* (*renki* in Japanese; *lianqi* in Chinese), not mastered his mind (*shushin*; *xiuxin* in Chinese), not shown diligence, and not applied great effort will not climb to this summit" [Ibid., pp. 289–290].

What are the "necessary preparations" for returning the so needed state of "true mind"? According to Issai Chozan, they consist in mastering the technique, which, naturally, requires one to focus the mind on the technique.

"When one focuses the mind in the technique, *ki* immediately stops and loses its wholeness and softness. Such a state can be characterized as this: chasing the secondary and forgetting the primary. This is wrong. But it is also wrong to say that one cannot entirely dedicate oneself to perfecting the technique. The technique is the "application" (用) of the art of the sword. If one throws away this "application," then how can the "principle" [of the art of the sword], constituting its "essence" (体) be manifested?

¹⁰ Lit. "without building scaffolding."

It is through mastering the “application” that one grasps the “essence.” And, upon grasping the “essence,” one gains absolute freedom in “application.” The “essence” and “application” have one source, and there is not a slightest separation between them. Even though the “principle” can be grasped instantaneously, in one moment, the technique requires long training and ripening; if the technique has not ripened, then *ki* will freeze, and in [the changes of] the “form” there will be no freedom. The technique is born from the “principle.” That is, what does not have form is the lord of the “formed.” Therefore, with the use of *ki*, one masters the technique, with the use of mind, one masters *ki*, and this is the natural order of things. However [in practice everything goes in the opposite order]: when the technique ripens, then control of *ki* is achieved, and “spirit” achieves the state of calmness...

When a swordsman masters the art of the sword, when it enters his mind deeply, when he trains his technique, when he frees himself from doubt and fear, then his *ki* is energetic and agile, his “spirit” will remain at rest, and he will obtain absolute, unbound freedom in his ability to react to the “changes and transformations” (*henka ōyō muge jizai*)” [Issai 1995, pp. 291–292].

Why is technique so important? It “includes the supreme ‘principle’ (至理) and corresponds to the ‘nature of the vessel,’” answers Issai Chozan and proceeds:

“As one masters the technique, *ki* becomes more uniform and plastic (氣融和し), and the “principle” included in the technique manifests by itself. When the “principle” enters the mind and the doubt disappears, technique becomes harmonious with the “principle” (*jiri itchi*), *ki* concentrates (氣取り), the “spirit” (*shin* in Japanese; *shen* in Chinese) calms (神定りて), and nothing prevents one from reacting [to the changing situation] and applying the technique (*ōyō mugai* 応用無碍)...

Therefore, the mastery of the art requires training. While the technique is unripe, there is no harmony in *ki*. While there is no harmony in *ki*, “forms” do not follow it. And while mind and “forms” are separated, it is impossible to reach freedom” [Ibid., p. 287].

The mastery of technique is necessary for practical activity. Here, Issai Chozan attacks the view, which was common in his times, that the right state of mind is sufficient for effective activity:

“Even if some Zen monk reaches enlightenment of the mind, will we give him the reins of power, will we appoint him commander in the assault against the enemy? Will he be able to achieve success? Even though the mind of such monk is free from worldly dust, worldly worries, and vain thoughts, the monk does not possess the technique, and therefore he cannot be used [to solve such tasks]” [Ibid., pp. 288–289].

Using the example of archery, Issai shows that mastery is an integral product of achieving the state of “true mind,” bringing *ki* in the right state, and mastering the technique, for the purpose of which the archer must train his body, grasp the “principle,” the “nature” of their weapon, and learn to “follow” it:

“Everybody knows how to draw the bowstring and launch the arrow, but if the archer does not follow the principles [of these actions] and does not master their technique, then he will draw the bow incorrectly, he will have a hard time hitting the target, and, upon hitting it, will have a hard time piercing it. To hit the target, the archer must necessarily have the right intention (志 *shi*; *zhi* in Chinese), right form, his *ki* must fill the entire body and be active, his actions must not go against the “nature” (*sei*) of the bow, he must become one with his bow, and his spirit (*seishin*) must as if fill the entire space between heaven and earth (*tenchi*). If, in this state, the archer draws his bow as far as it will go, then his “spirit” (*shin* 神) will be calm, “thought” (*nen*) will be still, he will be in the state of “no mind” (*mushin*), and the shot will occur naturally. And after the shot the archer will once again become himself, just as he was before the shot. Upon hitting the target with the arrow, he must slowly and calmly lower the bow. Such is the teaching (*narai*) of the Way of the bow (*kyūdō*, *yumi-no michi*). If you follow this teaching, you will be able to send your arrow far and pierce a strong target with it.

Even though the bow and the arrows are made from wood and bamboo, when my “spirit” (*seishin*) becomes one with the bow and the

arrow, my “spirit” enters the bow, and then the “miraculous appearance”¹¹ that I described above becomes possible...

If the “intention” is wrong on the inside, and the body is not upright on the outside, then the muscle and bones are not strong enough, *ki* does not fill the entire body, and therefore an archer, upon drawing a strong bow, is unable to keep the bowstring drawn. If the archer’s “spirit” is not calm, if his *ki* is not active, if he uses his personal considerations and does not follow the “Path” of archery, if he pushes the bow and draws the bowstring with brute force, then he will go against the “nature” of the bow; he and his bow will be in discord and will act separately from one another. Rather than entering his bow, his “spirit” will prevent the bow from revealing its strength, will take away its power, and so their bow will be unable to send an arrow far and pierce a strong target” [Ibid., p. 289].

Conclusion

Therefore, Issai Chozan showed that, first, mastery of martial arts is the result of achieving the state of “true mind” (*shintai*), bringing pneuma-*ki* into the right state, mastering the technique, training the body, grasping the “nature” (*sei*) of the weapon used and being able to “follow” this nature.

Second, the mind occupies the commanding position in the system “mind – *ki* – body”. The mind directs the *ki*, which, in turn, directs the body.

Third, according to Issai Chozan, the process of achieving mastery is based on using feedback in the system “mind – *ki* – body” and requires one, first of all, to master the technique, i.e., the body, due to which *ki* obtains the right qualities, after which the mind comes into the state of “true mind.”

¹¹ *Myō* (*miao* in Chinese) – the miraculous external manifestation of spirit *shin*.

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