



International Workshop of the Two Swords School, France 2011
Stage International de l'Ecole des Deux Sabres, France 2011

兵法二天一流

Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu

Musashi's principles

Iwami Toshio Harukatsu soke, 11th master of the Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu School, founded by Miyamoto Musashi, was recently visiting France, having been invited by his disciple Philippe Nguyen Thanh Thiên. We made the most of his visit by asking him about the traditional schools, the so-called Koryu, and about Musashi's teachings.

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English translation Jouanah Ghori

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: Iwami Soke, we are very glad to welcome you back to France for a second visit, thank you for being here with us. You are the 11th Master of Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu which is one of the ancient traditional Japanese schools, also known as koryu. In the West, we are familiar with modern martial art schools such as Judo, Karate or Kendo, which are 125 years old. For adepts of these arts, it is difficult to grasp the specificities of koryu teaching. We would be obliged if you would talk to us on this subject.

Could you tell us what the criteria are to distinguish a koryu from the other schools?

Iwami Toshio soke: What is important in "koryu" traditional Japanese martial art is the traditional way of practising the "keiko", the training. This is the keiko that deals with the "katas"; the training procedure has been preserved with three levels: "shu", "ha", and "ri".

"Shu" means the repetition of the keiko to learn the kata which has been passed down over generations. At this level the master can be asked no questions, one must only repeat the kata without being tempted by the slightest inner thought about the kata. By learning the kata this way, one's inner self will develop and even in the repetition of the same kata, the posture can be attained. After many more keiko accompanied by spiritual training, the "ri" level is reached. At this stage, regardless of the form, the kata can be freely carried out and still perfectly performed. Nowadays we speak of "koryu", in order to distinguish it from sports such as judo or kendo, which were altered after the restoration of the Meiji.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: Your koryu, traditional school, has inherited the teaching elaborated by MIYAMOTO Musashi and has been updated over the centuries. How do you manage to strike a balance between required evolution and the necessity to preserve the heritage of the art of Musashi, as each generation evolves and adapts to its own time?

Iwami Toshio soke: To pass on Musashi's teachings and seiho faithfully to the next generation without forgetting or losing anything, this is the tradition, this is the Japanese kokoro.

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Nguyen Thanh Thiên: The work of MIYAMOTO Musashi is studied in many schools in various disciplines. Several declare themselves heir to these teachings and sometimes even to his school, Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu. Could you tell us what your connection is with these schools?

Iwami Toshio soke: In Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu the successor needs to be devoted to training and prove to his contemporaries, through his example, that the teachings and the founder's kokoro are absolute and authentic. This is my mission as Soke.

Those schools you mention have absolutely no connection with our school Niten-Ichiryu.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: One way to record the past is to put it down in writing. Could you tell us whether the history of Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu, its events and its science, has been transcribed and if so, to what extent these documents are accessible?

Iwami Toshio soke: Musashi wrote the "Book of Five Rings" in order to keep a trace of the Hyoho Way which he reached and adopted, having spent his whole life on it. It is crucial to read and re-read over and over again this "Book of Five Rings" until the contents become part of one; and also to keep practising the "seiho" (kata). Training is called "tanren" in Japanese. In his "Book of Five Rings", Musashi writes that "tan" was the training for a thousand days and "ren", the training for ten thousand days. That is to say one must strive to pursue the keiko or training for three years, ten years, one's whole lifetime. He taught that the only truth is in the earnest heart and the straight way.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: The ancient schools, or koryu, are the subject of a few specialised books. Whilst these do shed a certain light on them, it seems difficult to imagine the studying within a koryu - especially within Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu - solely founded on writings and remaining removed from the wise leadership of the Master. In your opinion, what is the point of resorting to theoretical, historical and academic sources for a student? What value do you ascribe to the role of the authentic Master in Musashi's study of the sword? And more generally to the Way of the Sword?

Iwami Toshio soke: For a student to study the theoretical, historical, and academic sources efficiently, he will need to read the following excerpts from the "Book of Five Rings":

"This is the way for men who want to learn my strategy":

1. Do not think dishonestly.
2. The Way is in training (not in thinking).
3. Become acquainted with every art (not only with one).
4. Know the Ways of all professions (not only one's own).
5. Distinguish between gain and loss in worldly matters.
6. Develop intuitive judgement and understanding for everything.
7. Perceive those things which cannot be seen.
8. Pay attention even to trifles.

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9. Do nothing which is of no use.

It is important to start by setting these broad principles in your heart and to train in the Way of strategy.”

“Step by step, walk the thousand-mile road. Study strategy over the years and achieve the spirit of the warrior. Today is victory over yesterday’s self; tomorrow is victory over lesser men. Next, in order to beat more skillful men, train according to this book, not allowing your heart to be side-tracked. Even if you beat an enemy, and you did it contrary to the principles, it is not the true Way. You must develop by a thousand days of study, and perfect yourself by ten thousand days of study. You must study this thoroughly.

The teacher is the needle, the disciple the thread.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu is a school where there is no competition and where combat (incidentally always formalised) is not sought. Could you clarify the reasons for this?

Iwami Toshio soke: As I said previously, we repeat the “seiho” (kata) through three levels, “shu, ha, ri”. Then one’s inner self blossoms and even in the repetition of the same kata, a worthy posture will be reached even when ignoring the details of the form; this is thanks to the freedom given by the hands, the eyes, the body and the spirit reacting perfectly to the demands of the will. At this level of physical and spiritual transcendence, there is no more defeat, whatever the way we take, whether we hire staff or govern a country.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: The roots of your school in Europe can be found after the first course you ran in 2004. Could you explain what you were expecting from your students? Could you tell us a word about the relation between master and student? Can one talk of rights and duties? What would you say differentiates your European students from your Japanese students?

Iwami Toshio soke: “The master is the needle, the disciple the thread.” The disciples’ mission is to conform to what the master has imparted to them, and to endeavour to practise the keiko and yet more keiko. The teachings of Musashi are universal. There is no distinction between Europe and Japan.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: Your school has decided to open up to Europeans, and you yourself, through the mastery of your art, support their efforts. The sharing of such a heritage could be unnerving for us Westerners, but in the light of this cultural discrepancy, what do you think is possible to convey through your teaching?

Iwami Toshio soke: The meaning of the “seiho” in Niten-Ichiryu (the keiko) is: “Whether the attack is a stab or a cut, make sure you risk your life in your attack.” That is where the genuine stabbing or cutting attack is found, regardless of any distinction between East and West; this is also where an earnest heart lies. Musashi’s martial art embodies the Japanese

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kokoro, but at the same time it is a universal teaching. What I offer to do is to move forward together in this Way, and to broaden this exceptional encounter with Musashi.

Nguyen Thanh Thiên: Your school teaches Kenjutsu. What is Kenjutsu compared to Kendo, which is somewhat better known to Westerners?

Iwami Toshio soke: Kenjutsu (koryu) is at the very basis of modern-day Kendo. One has to learn to know oneself when practising a keiko. Then one needs to overcome the weaknesses we find within ourselves. Here is the way for Mankind, and here lies the distinctive culture of Japan.