

Moral Instruction in Budo

A series of Essays on the writings of Chiba Chosaku as translated by Samuel Shooklyn, from his MA thesis, 2009



A fencer is practicing in Kenjyutsu Machidojo, Japan in the early Meiji period (1870-1900)

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This book is a collection of a series of essays I wrote in 2015 concerning the various chapters of a Meiji period work by Chiba Chosaku as translated by Samuel Shooklyn in his MA thesis of 2009 at McGill University in Montreal Quebec. You will find the thesis (which contains much more than this translation) at <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/6395w777k>

To be clear, I have written comments, in an attempt to understand, on an anonymous Itto Ryu text from 1769, which is chapter 15 of Chiba Chosaku's book. At my 14th essay I started to identify this text as: (Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769) Thus, when I say "Chiba wrote" I suppose I should be saying "Anonymous wrote".

I have left the introduction and essays as they were written. As you will see, they are not very formally written.

Kim Taylor, April, 2021

Moral Instruction in Budo

A study of Chiba Chosaku with a translation of his major work.
From a MA thesis from McGill written by Samuel Shooklyn, 2009.

You gotta love Google Scholar, it's more or less what the internet ought to be, what it was meant to be. A few will remember when putting an announcement for a seminar onto an email list might get you stomped on for commercial usage. Seems to me it's time for someone to write the search engine algorithm that takes us back there, something that lets us search without finding 700 useless repetitions of a Wikipedia article just to drive ad revenue to a website. In the meantime I'll keep using Scholar with delight and in the knowledge that such an engine could actually be written should someone want to contribute to humanity rather than increase shareholder value.

Not that I'm against shareholder value, I am a retired guy after all and living on my investments and what I can make from my own commercial efforts. I'm assuaging my guilt at using the 'net to advertise by writing these wee essays. Yes I do see the irony of complaining about commercial use while writing as an excuse to advertise. I figure it's like owning 42 acres of bush and driving my car. Green offsets.

Which brings us back to the thesis. This one is a study of Chiba Chosaku and a translation of his "Budo Kyokun". Chiba, it is argued, is one of the two sources of "Bushido", the other being Nitobe who I'm sure everyone knows. Chiba's version was rather more direct than Nitobe's being very much concerned with loyalty to the Imperial cause. As Shooklyn writes, Chiba roots bushido in ancestor and emperor worship through martial arts practice. This in 1911, two decades before the 1930s when we usually assume the state shinto / state bushido era began. As with all things, if we look we can usually find roots going much deeper than we think.

Chiba went on Musha Shugyo in 1873 at 13 years old, and was at it for five years before returning home. He then travelled to Tokyo and studied with Tesshu Yamaoka. You can read more about all this on your own if you want to go get the thesis... and before you ask folks, I'm using a very old tablet and am not home so I don't have the link to hand to you. As a teacher I'm more interested in you learning how to find this stuff than handing it to you anyway.

What interests me most about Chiba's book is his Chapter 15 which is actually an earlier work written in 1769 as "Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kanmen Sho". Shooklyn points out that this is from a cluster of Itto-ryu texts from this period, something that surprised me in itself, the Itto-ryu guys were the ruffians weren't they? The Yagyu guys were the ones writing the nice scrolls yes?

The translation itself is very nice for those of you out there who are working on your Japanese reading skills, Shooklyn provides the complete transliteration of the Japanese after the English so you can check things out for yourself. With regard to the parts of the book that Chiba wrote, I found the English text rather clear and never questioned the translation. When I came to chapter 15 I found myself going to google translate and trying to figure out what that anonymous author was talking about. As with so many translations I assumed that Shooklyn had gone too far and translated terms I didn't want translated. After all, I have a pretty good grasp of "mushin" but if you start talking about "techniques from the void" I get a bit stalled. From what I can figure out, there are no such easy fixes for me here. The Itto text is actually as obscure as the English translation makes it sound.

Here's something for you to start on.

Moral Instruction in Budo – I

15.1. Views and concepts of budō.

"15.1.1 [Martial] arts practitioners need to know their losing points and no-winning points. To know these is to know the winning points. A losing point is in fact a winning point. A no-winning point is in fact a losing point.

Losing points reside in one's self. No-winning points reside in the opponent. He who attempts to win for himself does so because he does not know his losing points. He who attempts to win despite his losing points does so because he does not know his winning points.

There is no losing without a no-winning point; there is no winning without a losing point.

In perfect victory there is a perfect defeat; in perfect defeat there is perfect victory.

While winning, know the losing point; while losing know the winning point. This is the highest level of the art.

Concealing my techniques and principles, I gain insight into my opponent's techniques and principles. Observing the opponent's moves, I must make adjustments accordingly."

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OK I get the last paragraph, that's Musashi's spirit kept inside, body moving outside stuff. I even get the victory in defeat and defeat in victory stuff, that's the kendo thingie about learning by getting smacked on the head. But all that losing point, no-winning point and winning point stuff? Shooklyn suggests that the losing point is to lose one's ego and after one does that there are no more defeats. So "there is no winning without a losing point". I get that. Shooklyn says that a no-winning point is a superiority in the opponent. So "no losing without a no-winning point"

So you need to know your losing point (lose your ego) and you need to know your opponent's no-winning points (how he's better than you) in order to know the winning points (how to win). So far so good. "He who attempts to win for himself does so because he does not know his losing points." (To try to win is to have an ego). He who attempts to win despite (ignoring) his losing points (having an ego) does so because he does not know his winning points" (nope, lost it... doesn't know how to win?).

But I think I get the gist. In 1769 the Itto-ryu guys thought it was more about losing your ego than winning or losing a match. 250 years of kids figuring it's about winning and 250 years of the old guys trying to convince them it's not all that.

Shooklyn makes a fun point in his notes, he says "A no-winning point refers to a given superiority of the opponent, which can be dealt with strategically. But when it becomes apparent, it usually means that the opponent wins." I laughed out loud when I read that. Your opponent is faster than you but you don't figure that out until he's smacked you on the head. Yep. There's your lesson for the day.

Was this a secret document of the ryu? If so it became public in 1911, but I suspect it didn't need to be hidden, it's obscure and what's obscure doesn't need to be hidden.

Wait, the winning point is your no-winning point to your opponent? It's losing your ego? Philosophers never change, take something simple and obscure it up to make it profound. Of course now I need to look up when Freud was born and when the term "Ego" showed up... obviously later than 1769. No fair telling folks who have never heard of it they should have used it. How do you define the idea of ego without the definition?

You only really win if you lose the desire to win or lose? Aaaand we're back to attachment and non-attachment.

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Moral Instruction in Budo – II

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15.1.2. Stances have five elements: heaven, middle, earth, yin, and yang.

Within each of these there are yet again five variants. The transmission of antiquity divided stances into yin and yang. [The movement of] the body mediates [the movement of] the sword; [the position of] the sword mediates [the position of] the body. For instance, a yang stance contains transformation in yin, a yin stance contains transformation in yang. Therefore in stances there is no yin-yang dis-balance.

These principles should be applied regardless of what one is doing or thinking. The transmission has no preferred stance. It is one's self that decides to use one stance or another. The one who desires to make exclusive use of a stance considers only external gains, and doing so he commits an internal error. He is said "to be transfixed on a stance." Mistakenly transfixed on a stance, one might win if the position matches that of his opponent, but one will lose immediately if it does not. This is due to the lack of internality and reliance on externality.

The Stance is originally formless: it contains neither externalities nor internalities, neither matches nor mismatches, neither advantages nor disadvantages. [Formless stance] protects the whole body. This is the stage of mutual unity of the sword and the mind. Thus there is no yin in a yin stance; there is no yang in a yang stance. [Acting at the] "lightning speed," the mind takes no premeditated form. This is called "formless stance."

The learners should cherish these mysteries and train accordingly.

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Overall this seems quite consistent with Musashi's discussion of stance and no stance. There is a stance, but there are also no stances. Stances can be a problem so they deserve a bit of consideration.

This article states there are five elements in stances. Musashi says there are five positions as well. For Musashi there is high, middle, low, right and left. Here we have heaven (high), middle and earth (low). We then have yin and yang. This could mean left and right I suppose, the left side of the body is often called yin, the right yang. We meditate with the left hand over the right so that yin calms yang and unites at the thumbs. I'm pretty sure this isn't what is meant here. "The transmission of antiquity divided stances into yin and yang" it says. Then it talks of the body mediating the sword and the sword mediating the body. Yin and yang transforming and balancing. Yin being the body and yang the sword perhaps, internal and external? Defensive and aggressive? Or perhaps as Musashi says, the spirit held back and the spirit sent forth.

Musashi also talks about moving from one stance to another, chudan is the captain, the other four stances being the soldiers. One can flow from one stance to another, as Chiba (for lack of an author on this earlier text) states yin and yang transform.

We come to no-stance, as in "The transmission has no preferred stance." You pick your stance according to what you feel is best at the moment. One who desires a certain stance is only considering winning and losing and makes a mistake all on his own (as opposed to one forced on him by the

opponent I suspect). Transfixing on a stance might win if it happens to be the right one to respond to the opponent, but can be the source of defeat if it isn't. Here Chiba states this is "due to the lack of internality and reliance on externality." Lack of yin and reliance on yang I suspect. So we are talking about function and form, thought and action, kan (insight) and ken (sight).

Going back to the beginning, we're perhaps talking about stances which are high, middle and low, which also have a meaning and a shape. These are the five elements named in the first sentence. If we rely on the shape without the theory behind it we might win, we might not. No wonder the transmission has no preferred stance.

This is my problem with kata being thought of as little formulae for beating an opponent, and with iaido as hitting the grading points. It's all yang, all external form and no understanding. Going back to my analysis of Musashi's Sanjugokajo and the concept of Jikitsu, one of the Enmei Ryu sensei was said to have explained the concept in terms of responding to your opponent's stance with one of your own. In other words, stances are responses one to another, if he takes a certain stance, you should adopt one that will counter what he can do from that stance. I often have trouble with Shindo Muso Ryu jodo because there seems to be a new pair of stances for each kata, yet when we get close to each other we just drop into a middle stance and then do the kata. Of course if you examine those stances you start to see how one covers the other.

So why not a table of stances to memorize, if he does jodan you respond with seigan, match hasso with gedan, waki gamae with chudan? The final paragraph of this article gives us a clue as we move to the formless, the void, the place from which all things come. "...it contains neither externalities nor internalities, neither matches nor mismatches, neither advantages nor disadvantages." When your sword and your mind are finally united there are no dualities of yin and yang, internal and external. No tables of this for that. This is the ri of shu ha ri, where you leave the stances and the kata behind. This is the place where Musashi would yell at you "stop analyzing and just hit him."

Beginners are dangerous because that's all they can do, all they know. Take the sword and cut that guy over there. This is the return to a beginner's mind we aim for from about six months of practice until we "get it". This is what Musashi means when he says "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing". When you know a bit about the stances, about the grading points for iaido, about which technique might work for which attack, you are more danger to yourself than to your opponent. You're going to trip over your own cleverness, as granny might say "You're so sharp, mind you don't cut yourself".

Having gone through the rest of this article, I'd like to return to my thoughts about yin and yang transforming and this being the same as Musashi's captain and soldier stances, I think I might have been a bit superficial. This yin and yang transformation is more likely the analysis transforming the shape of the stance and the position of the sword (yours or your opponent's) transforming your analysis which then changes the shape to compensate.

Finally, "The learners should cherish these mysteries and train accordingly." Oh dear, are we going to have another of these scrolls where we get told to go practice it lots?

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Moral Instruction in Budo - III

15.1.3. Enticing power does not entail change. To reveal it clearly, it is said that technique and principle should not be altered.

To take advantage of the opponent without changing [one's stance] is the overpowering force. This is called "the stage of transformation." Quieting the enticing power, counter thousand-fold changes; moving the overpowering force, respond to a multitude of transformations. Thus one matches the opponent using his enticing power, and wins the battle using his overpowering force. Enticing power and overpowering force are two [different forces], but [actually] they are one and the same. They are one and the same, but [their applied aspects] are different. Enticing power contains overpowering force; overpowering force contains enticing power.

The unaltered whole body controls ten directions. Thus there will be no opponent to fear and no self doubt.

When one reaches this stage, his enticing power will issue by itself, and his overpowering force will naturally complement it.

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Enticing power and overpowering force. We speak constantly in Kendo of seme, of pressuring the opponent to freeze him and beat him. How do we deal with our opponent's seme? We should welcome it of course, we match his pressure with our absorption, we just soak it up and invite him to swing. Here Chiba says "Enticing power does not entail change". We don't stick our head out at him, simply being in range of his attack will entice him to attack. Technique and principle should not be altered, they are contained one within the other if we know what's good for us.

If we present a strong unchanging stance and take advantage of the opponent we are using overpowering force. This is our usual definition of seme. Chiba says this is called the stage of transformation. How do we deal with transformations? We move the overpowering force. How do we counter thousand-fold changes? We quiet the enticing power.

So match the opponent using enticing power and win the fight using overpowering force. Match his overpowering force with your enticing power. These are two different forces but are one and the same.

Shooklyn, in a note, says that these forces can be glossed as centrifugal and centripetal, one forces outward (centrifugal force) and one attracts (an attack, centripetal force). These can be seen through various tactics, Shooklyn suggests enticing by making a feigned opening, moving one's sword offline, and one exhibits centrifugal force simply by approaching the opponent steadily, forcing him to attack rashly.

Get good enough and these two powers work spontaneously and together to win a match.

In kata practice have you ever fallen into a hole? Have you ever approached uchidachi and swung your sword into an empty space? Uchidachi has simply refused to swing into your enticing power and you have been unable to withhold your overpowering force (or you're just on autopilot, which is why you

should never think of kata as "training a habitual response"). It is you who were enticed, simply by uchidachi not attacking when you expected him to. Uchidachi has responded (naughtily) to your enticing power with his own. He has "moved his overpowering force" to respond to your transformation of the moment. His job of course is to fall into your enticing power but perhaps you are not enticing so much as dancing through the steps. Don't panic, by dancing through the steps you are supposed, eventually, to see the moment of enticement.

In longer kata I often become angry when my partner does not continue attacking and simply waits, open for attack. If I am supposed to be moving backward to make room for their next move, I become conflicted inside, they are not using their overpowering force, they are using their enticing power and I end up stepping in to attack. This breaks the kata and I become frustrated. Instead, I ought to consider I'm teaching here. If I simply move back, shidachi will not understand they must press forward here. One can teach this in two ways, the nicer way is to move back and then look bored while shidachi gets moving again to finish their attack.

How can one welcome an attack and still overcome it? This enticing power is critical for Aikido practice, without an attack from a partner there isn't any Aikido in the classical sense of blending with the attack. You can't blend with something that isn't there, so you must invite an attack, you must entice it, you must insist on it in various ways. This doesn't mean standing there like a statue. It's actually quite hard to attack a stationary target, it fairly screams of a trap. To stand shock still is actually to "become a big rock", to become something large and immovable. It's easiest to entice an attack by moving and creating the illusion of an opening, or to press in and force an attack.

It is a discussion point in Aikido whether the technique ikkyo is received or created. My line usually treats ikkyo as; the partner cuts at your head with his hand-blade, you then receive this by moving your hand-blade to the outside of his arm, redirecting his strike to the side, taking his elbow with your other hand and then controlling him. You entice by having an open head, he swings at it.

The alternative version is to shove your hand in his face, when he tries to stop your arm you seize his elbow and control him. The enticement is the hand moving toward his face. This may seem to be the exact opposite of the first version, but in fact they are both the same, entice and then overpower. My sensei taught the first, but used the second on me when I was the "rag doll" in class.

This second version actually works better for beginners as receiving a strike from over head seems to be naturally done with a bent elbow as in a karate upper block. Yet to receive a strike and redirect it one's arm must be moving as if doing suriage men. To meet with a bent arm is to stop the strike with a bruised forearm. Worse yet is to try to do the control before dealing with the attack, to meet the centrifugal force with centrifugal force, to grab at the attacking arm. To grab the attacking arm means your grabbing arm is bent and raised in such a way that you are half way pinned at the moment of contact. This is exactly what makes the second version so much easier to learn.

As you can see, Chiba is right, one force is contained within the other and it's hard sometimes to see which is which. Musashi tells us that every defence must be the same as every attack. If you are defending it must be with an eye to attacking. Here we are told that we can think of our defence as our enticing power. I like it, one doesn't have to be back on one's heels when receiving an attack, one simply makes that attack part of our "cunning plan milord".

In kendo we pressure, we concentrate on our overpowering force. If both sides in a match are static in chudan, not attacking, we are seeing overpowering force meeting overpowering force. Perhaps we should learn to use our enticing power.

In Aikido we concentrate on our enticing power. Without a designated attacker we would see two people standing open, hoping the other will attack. Perhaps we should learn to use our overpowering force to help entice that attack.

How does an aikidoka start a bar fight? By saying "grab my arm".

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Moral Instruction in Budo - IV

15.1.4. “Projection” is like [the capacity of] the moon to project [its own image] upon the water surface. It is the stage of bōshin –the stage of contact.

“Reflection” is like [the capacity of] the water to reflect the [image of] the moon. This is the stage of zanshin –the stage of separation.

When [this principle] is explained it is called “the water-moon.” When it is taken to the level of technique, it is called “projection-reflection.” It also implies the way the eyes look about, what is called “the gaze.” To commit one’s mind to defence is called projection. To use a technique for attack is called reflection. Distance is of no concern to the water-moon. The one who attempts to deliberately use the distance for an attack will lose his projection instead. He becomes transfixed in projection. The moon projects its image upon the water surface in the state of no-mind. The water reflects the moon in the state of no-thought. If there is no thinking on the inside, the technique is aptly applied on the outside. When no interfering thoughts arise, one will aptly reach the state of the water-moon with his whole body.

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Shooklyn notes that boshin is "rod-like mind", and zanshin "remaining mind". Boshin is concentration on the attack, zanshin is alertness to a counterattack after the attack. So here we are talking about the mind during and after the attack.

It is interesting that these old essays on sword are so lacking in technical description and so concerned with mental attitude. Perhaps we "kata collectors" should take note.

The moon reflecting in water is a pretty common image, as Chiba says here, the moon projects its image in a state of no-mind (it has no intention, no desire or will to project itself, it simply does) and the water reflects that image in a state of no-thought. The water does not rationalize, it does not decide to reflect the image of the moon. The combination simply is, one hesitates to even say it happens. The speed of light is timeless, the moon projects and at the same time the water reflects. The light switch is thrown and light appears in the room... well perhaps not in these days of fluorescent lights that take a while to warm up but you get the idea.

So an attack is made (boshin) from the void, from a state of no-mind, and it is reflected, perceived, responded to instantly from a state of no-thought. We call the principle the moon in the water, we call the technique projection-reflection and when the gaze is concerned, Shooklyn notes that it's the soft vision that takes in everything, like the eyes under moonlight, unfocused and wide sighted, enzan no metsuke.

In the next phrase Shooklyn notes that the order is deliberately reversed, "To commit one’s mind to defense is called projection. To use a technique for attack is called reflection." This reversal is explained as indicating the best defence is an attack, but if either is deliberated the chance is lost. I can't argue with that, the concern here is non-deliberation. Must we though, assign attack to projection and defence to reflection? If we consider the enticing power, we must project that to our opponent in order to communicate it. So we set our mind on defence and he sees defence, which entices an attack. You

can't fake a beginner. They just don't see the fake, so they are not reflecting the projection at all. On the other hand, one can't attack without a reflection, one must attack from a true image of the situation, from a calm pond which can reflect the moon, otherwise one is just lashing out.

You can get pretty wound up in this stuff so I'll leave it as something to be discovered in kata.

Speaking of which, let's talk projection-reflection, no-mind no-thought in kata. It is not particularly safe to attack from "no mind" when starting a new kata, nor is it easy to respond with "no thought", but eventually that's what we ought to move toward. The attack comes "when it comes", at the appropriate time and the defender responds "without thought". To do this the defender must open their gaze and quiet their mind so that they can pick up the attack the instant it is made, to be able to respond at the very same time. We work on this from the first moment of practice, uchidachi leads the kata and shidachi follows as tightly as possible. The student eventually realizes the way to follow instantly is to stop thinking and to connect the body to the eyes, to be the still pond that reflects the moon. Too much disturbance and there is no reflection, too much thought and there is no sight.

Chiba talks about distance. "Distance is of no concern to the water-moon. The one who attempts to deliberately use the distance for an attack will lose his projection instead. He becomes transfixed in projection." As physical distance I can see this meaning to try and jump in from outside the opponent's distance to strike. This calculating of inches can actually prevent a good attack. "Do I go now? Can I get him from here? Oops he shifted, is he out of range?" This goes back to the earlier comment on being transfixed on a stance. Trying to force a result from a pre-conceived notion is likely to fail as often as it succeeds.

I can also see this referring to the distance that happens when one thinks, we see something, we think about it, we act. Too late. If we are thinking about a technique, a projection, we are not acting. We put a distance between seeing an opening and responding to it. By thinking we are stirring up the pond, it takes time to settle down to the reflection which allows the projection.

But "Distance is of no concern to the water-moon" could also refer to the need to start the fight from the instant one sees one's opponent. From across the room, during a kata, one should be cutting one's partner. To wait until you're in distance to get serious is a mistake.

Enzan no metsuke is also distance-independent. An unfocused gaze pays no attention to close or far.

All of which is to say I will need to think more on this comment about distance.

Chiba's final statement makes the article clear. No thought on the inside means good technique on the outside.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - V

15.1.5. When gain comes prior to the technique and when the body precedes the sword, such conduct is called “disorder.” It is caused by external benefit seeking.

Adapting [yourself] to [the opponent’s] movement should not be accomplished by thinking and calculation. When you take gain as a natural outcome, you will make adjustments without thinking, and transform without calculation. The one who receives the transmission [of the art] will not make gain his priority, and will thus gain mastery of oneness. He will pay heed only to his own response [to a given situation] as his only gain. He will not succumb to thinking and calculation. With a single-pointed mind transcending chaos, he will never doubt his victory. In so doing [the practitioner] will attain the stage of his original destiny. Once the transmission of the art is internalized, it yields a truly victorious performance. Taken to a higher level, there will no longer be any notion of single-mindedness, or any distinct single gain to pay heed to. Strike with inside and outside as one. No more good and evil. Don the armour of one-mind and counter a thousand blades and ten thousand swords. Control the ten directions and kill or grant life at will. Once single-mindedness is actualized, it is the stage of method-gain sameness.

A thousand changes stem from oneness. This oneness is the no-form, no-mind body as a whole. To take water as an example: water has no form. Therefore, it can fit into square and round containers. Practitioners should receive the transmission without prioritizing gains or their own bodies. As the oral transmission has it: “sword-and-body first-and-last.”

This art is a method of gaining a sharp blade. When there is a sword, there is a method; when there is a method, there is a gain. Mind is the source of methods. Body is the source of the sword. That hidden causes ripen into manifest ends is a fallacy. Truth is a certain victory, fallacy is a certain defeat. If gain precedes the method, even the sharpest sword will not cut down a man. Therefore, the foundations must be rectified and mastered through and through. The gains and losses of actual performance depend on the accrued merit [of successful mastery of the basics.]

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"When gain comes prior to the technique". Shooklyn notes that this gain can also imply victory, so when one thinks of victory before technique, the safety of one's body, before the sword in your hand, it is not a good thing. One is looking at the goal rather than at the process and this is disordered, the wrong way around.

The message here is to concentrate on the technique, on being one with the sword and not to think about winning or other external goals. when in a fight don't think and calculate, just adapt without thinking, like water fits into various shaped vessels. This water analogy is popular, I ran right over it the first few times I read this, didn't even realize it was here, but it's important.

How can one learn to adapt without thinking? By training without thinking of winning and losing. Remember that this essay came from 1769, a year long past the wars and into the era of shinai kendo where one could fight matches without great risk of death. To fight for its own sake, in order to learn to be spontaneous, was possible at this time. If one got caught up in the competition, in trying to win or avoid losing, one lost the chance to learn how to become one with the sword.

Once the art is internalized, once we are one with the sword, victory appears. We begin to strike with the speed of thought we might say, or Chiba might say, with the speed of sight. We see, we strike. (Shooklyn says "what you see is what you get"). We achieve single-mindedness with the result of method-gain sameness. The technique-victory oneness.

Technique is not unimportant, although many take that meaning from such advice as we have here. Technique is very important, it's how we express what is in our mind. The problem is not technique, it's thinking about technique, thinking about the goal, thinking in general. We can go into a fight all thoughtless and instantaneous movement, but if we don't use good technique it's just so much waving a stick around.

Students should understand the transmission as "sword-and-body first-and-last." Don't worry about winning or about your body, just seek to become the art, to become one with the sword, there is nothing else to be done, no external goal to be sought. Work on technique, practice technique, don't think about what you're practising for, or where you're going to use the technique. Technique is not "if he does that then you should do this".

The author obviously thinks this is an important point, he makes it again by pointing out that the art is the way a sharp sword appears. You have a sword, you learn a method, then gain appears. The mind produces the method, the body produces the sword. Nothing mysterious about this. If you think of gain first, you can't cut, even if you've got a sharp sword. Your likelihood of victory in a match corresponds to how much training you have done.

Please note that all this is in reference to the usual way of things. If you feel you can go into a sword fight with an indomitable will to win and no training, you might, by accident, be correct. The idea that your "samurai spirit" will prevail, your dedication to the cause and determination to overcome the enemy might work, you never know. I remember a quote from an Australian vet from the second world war who suggested that the first time they saw a sword charge it was a bit startling but "after that, they made pretty good targets".

Last evening I read a quote from the western sword tradition of about the same era as this essay, where the sword master commented that one should teach one's son wrestling because a mediocre swordsman will be defeated by a good wrestler who is also a mediocre swordsman, and the best one could hope for in most gentlemen's sons is mediocre sword, unless they are spending all their time in the salon.

Training, make the important thing the process, not the end goal. Make training the point, not winning a match. So say the folks in 1769, so said Musashi a hundred years earlier.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - VI

15.1.6. The one who concentrates on the outer aspects of a technique reacts to what presents itself from the outside. The one who uses the internal aspects concentrates on the inside. Then controlling the internal aspects, he uses the external.

In this manner, the causality of internal to external is maintained, and favoured techniques tend to ensue while the disliked ones are likely to be avoided.

Depending on how the opponent engages and feigns, [one should] put pressure on the centre to win at the periphery, or else put pressure on the periphery to win at the centre, or even put pressure on both the centre and the extremity to win at the both spots. Thus putting pressure on the technique, one protects the gains, putting pressure on the gain one protects the technique.

If one attacks both internally and externally, the error will arise in front; if one defends both externally and internally, the error will arise in back. Therefore, attack while defending, defend while attacking. Attack is not merely attacking, defence is not just defending. There is no victory without both present simultaneously. In the transmission this is called "remaining and not remaining." The learner should rectify the centre and peripheries with this point in mind.

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We continue here with the will and the technique, mind and body, internal spirit and external spirit and such descriptions. In other words, thought and deed. If you concentrate on technique, you will respond to technique from the opponent, there won't be anything else for you to respond to. If you use the internal aspects, your insight, the internal analysis of the situation, you will be looking for insight into your opponent as well. Then, controlling the inside you will use the external. Analyzing the situation with your mind, you will use your sword.

By now, I am starting to think that this is too simple, am I missing something? I keep reminding myself that for many years I figured it was about looking at what technique he was using and then picking one to counter it. Outer aspects reacting to outer aspects. How, after all, can you read someone else's intentions? With practice I am starting to pick up more subtle clues and my reactions are, if not yet spontaneous in sword-work, at least more subtle. I'm starting to see how, by looking inside my own mind I can see inside his.

If you look inside and use the external to react, you maintain the correct direction of causality. Going from external events to internal would mean being led around by the opponent's actions, which is not healthy.

I'm not sure about "favoured techniques tend to ensue while the disliked ones are likely to be avoided." Is this a good thing? Does Chiba recommend this? I would have thought not if he refers to a student having favourite techniques. One would think that favour and dislike were words weighted toward the subjective rather than the objective. Is it that we are talking here of favoured techniques as ones that are favoured for victory and disliked ones headed toward defeat? In whose opinion? If the instructor, or the advice of the texts concerning the art, that would be good. We recommend (favour) this technique, we

don't like that one so much because it isn't very strong in this situation. Think about it and you'll pick a good response rather than a poor response.

Shooklyn suggests that centre and extremity in this next passage refers to the internal and external aspects of technique. I am afraid I read it more literally, as centre-line and edge. Attack toward do, the side, and the opponent will respond leaving his centre open to attack. Press down the centre-line and then attack the sides, or alternate between centre and periphery and you will confuse his defence. I say this because Chiba tells us that putting pressure on the centre or periphery is the result of how the opponent engages and feigns. I think we're talking some here, if he is pressing your centre, move his attention to the periphery to disrupt him. All of this reminds me of advice not to attack a position of strength, don't oppose strength with strength, especially if you are not the stronger. I remember well an aikido class where I decided I'd demonstrate that one could avoid strength by moving underneath it, but at the time my knee was useless and I didn't get under my attacker who got a good shove through my wrists into my shoulders. I stood there for a good three seconds with screaming pain in my shoulder before I finally convinced myself to give up the attempt to get under and moved to the side instead. By that time my arm was hanging useless and took many months to recover as much as it has (which is not completely).

"Thus putting pressure on the technique, one protects the gains, putting pressure on the gain one protects the technique." While previously this gain was best read as victory, here Shooklyn suggests the gain should be read as preferences, favoured places to attack and well-guarded weak spots. Thus we press the technique and protect the attack (by keeping the opponent on his heels), or we guard the weak spots and protect the technique (by denying the opponent the chance to disrupt it by pressing that weak spot).

The last paragraph seems to be embodying the concept of Sei Chu Do, Do Chu Sei. If the body is active the mind should be still, if the body is still the mind should be active. If you are attacking with the sword, you ought to be defending in your mind (looking for counterattacks, keeping your body in a good posture so that bits aren't hanging out to be hit). If you are defending with the sword you ought to be searching with the mind for the attack which must be appended to the defence.

If you attack with both the mind and the sword (internal and external) you have nothing left to defend with should your attack fail. Cannon fodder. The error arises in front, at the beginning, all out attack only works if you catch the opponent unprepared, if not, you are defeated "before you start".

If you are defending with both the sword and the mind you are going to be back on your heels and even if you ward off the attack you won't have one of your own. Your mistake is at the back, after you've defended and have nothing to respond with.

In both cases there is a hole in the technique. There must be attack in defence and defence in attack. This concept is a bit more complex than "the best defence is a good offence". Look after the centre-line and the periphery, your line of attack with the sword and your arms and legs which might be hanging out to the sides, where they are not protected by your attack line. We were practising a kata last evening which includes swords meeting and stopping between the two partners as they both strike at the same time. The question arose as to what was happening, are the two people clashing swords together? No of course not, that would mean that one of the attacks is coming from the side (periphery) which would leave the centre open for the other swordsman. No, both swordsmen are attacking down the centre-line and as a result you get the stalemate with each strike as two swords are moved into the same place at the same time. The uselessness of attacking into the attack. What caused my rotator cuff to fail.

“remaining and not remaining.” When you attack, keep part of your spirit back, when you defend, send part of your spirit forward. "The learner should rectify the centre and peripheries with this point in mind." This final statement makes most sense if we use Shooklyn's suggestion that centre is the internal and periphery the external. Think of your mind as the centre of a circle, the techniques exist on the periphery. Of course it could also mean, work on your kamae, don't leave bits hanging out when you attack, don't attack off balance, don't forget the other people in the room who might also attack you...

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Moral Instruction in Budo VII

5.1.7. To gain directly using a technique is called “guarding the beginning,” while to present a gain as a means is called “guarding the end.” If one pauses in the beginning, it means there is a gain at the end. If the end is protected, it means that there is no gain in the beginning. The important point in swordsmanship is not to stop either at the beginning or the end or to have beginnings and ends depend upon the opponent. One does not stick to either of them.

The stage of “sameness of the beginning and end” is one of the absence of beginnings and ends. When there is a beginning, an end is simultaneously present. When there is an end, a beginning is there, too. It does not matter whether the movement is strong or weak, light or heavy. This is how the technique is one yet makes two. While the gains are two, they are one all the same. Whenever you gaze into the sky, the sky is there instantaneously. Liken yourself to an unmoving mountain.

When you make a move, do so like sparks from a flint. Stopping neither at the beginning nor at the end even for a single moment of thought, reach ten thousand things. Since neither the beginning nor the end is sought, transformations will happen spontaneously. Moreover, since the technique issues from one’s whole body and mind, the one who takes advantage of the beginning, gains the beginning, while the one who takes advantage of the end, defends the end and gains the end regardless of how strong or weak, light or heavy the technique might be, or whether it is done while advancing or retreating, or whether the range is long or short. Therefore the one who makes the technique a part of body and mind has nothing to look for outside. When it is not sought elsewhere, one’s mind moves not an inch. This is called not stopping at the beginning or end. The one who achieved mastery over this art does not stop at the beginning and let the initiative be taken; while defending he does not stop inside, and as he defends the gain, the gain of the technique is not stolen [by the opponent.]

Revealing no form when form is sought, revealing form when no-form is sought is called “the stage of unity of crooked and straight.” The one who gains victory by abandoning the notions of “technique” and “gain” is the true master of the art. This is the quintessence of the art of war. Ultimately, without leaving a trace, it is obtained within one’s heart-mind; the hand moves accordingly. Mind is mind, technique is technique, one’s self is one’s self, and opponent is opponent. Whatever one faces, one seeks nothing. With only spontaneous merit, he uses the art when there is need, and abandons it when there is none. He attains “the wondrous stage” of the art.

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Here we are talking of beginning and ending. Think of this as a passage between you and the opponent, someone moves, things happen and then you separate. Shooklyn suggests that a gain at the beginning is to attack while the opponent is beginning to execute his technique. Sen no sen. The end is to counterattack after parrying. Go no sen.

With this in mind, "To gain directly using a technique is called 'guarding the beginning'". Your guard being a successful attack as the passage begins, to get in there faster. It could also mean striking before the opponent twitches, sen sen no sen, I suspect. In this case also, our offence is our guard.

"to present a gain as a means is called 'guarding the end'. If one pauses in the beginning, it means there is a gain at the end." Gain being victory or a point, if you hesitate as the opponent begins to strike, your

chance for gain is after you have defended. On the other hand, if you guard at the end of the passage there is obviously no gain at the beginning (or at the end if you have defended then broken contact). Chiba moves from here to his main point, don't think about beginnings and endings, there are no passages, the fight is continuous. Don't "stop either at the beginning or the end". Don't leave beginnings and endings to the opponent to define. Beginnings have ends, ends imply beginnings so they are the same.

"This is how the technique is one yet makes two. While the gains are two, they are one all the same." Shooklyn suggests this means the targets are multiple while the technique (taking advantage of openings at beginning or end) is one. I agree, as Musashi says, look to the strike no matter what you are doing. Find the opening and use it.

"Whenever you gaze into the sky, the sky is there instantaneously. Liken yourself to an unmoving mountain." I love these things. Remember our discussion of projection and reflection. You don't need to think up the sky to see it, you look and it is there. The unmoving mountain is your 'body of a big rock', it's your immovable mind. Don't let yourself be dragged around by your opponent's beginnings and endings, don't let your mind be dragged about by thoughts of why the sky is blue. There it is, deal with it.

We come to the spark and flint, another image that Musashi also uses. Your reaction to the appearance of an opening ought to be the same as a spark which happens as steel strikes flint, without any space, instantly. Put any thought in there and you have a space. Think about a beginning and an end (a technique) and you have a space. Don't seek after beginning and end and transformations will happen spontaneously. The rest of that paragraph ought to be clear once this is understood. Become the art and whether beginning or end, you gain, strong or weak, near or far, you gain.

The "stage of unity of crooked and straight" is to reveal no form when form is sought and reveal form when no-form is sought. This stage means that you are not searching for the proper technique to respond to the technique your opponent is using, and to use technique when there is none opposing you. By simply reacting to what is happening in the moment it happens, one has abandoned thoughts of winning and losing and technique.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - VIII

15.1.8. There are body and function in an initiative. Attacking without preliminary movement and form is called "the body of an initiative." Attacking when preliminary moves are made and forms are revealed is called "the function of an initiative."

To take the body initiative is to attack from an empty spot and to defend with a given form stealing the opponent's gain, breaking through his setup. Doing thus means using the apparent gain while keeping a technique hidden.

To take the function initiative is to attack with a given form and to defend from an empty spot breaking through the opponent's setup, stealing his technique. One makes the technique apparent while the real gain remains hidden [until the definitive blow.]

If someone acts haphazardly trying to win without knowing the principles and techniques of body-function attack and defence, he will stick out his head only to be hit and stretch out his hand only to be cut down. This point should be well practised in training.

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You cannot always just hit your opponent. He is not a stationary target, he moves, he defends. Here Chiba is talking of two ways to take an initiative. The first is the body of an initiative, to simply attack from an empty spot, to swing at a target and then defend with your technique to disrupt your opponent and steal his gain. Use an apparent gain, a strike to an opening to trigger his reaction while keeping your own technique hidden.

The second way is the function initiative, to show the opponent a technique and as he tries to counter that, strike at whatever opening appears.

Of course what is being said here is that form and formlessness, technique and striking from the void are one, are "two sides of a coin". Chiba clarifies by saying that if you simply flail about, sticking out your head or your hands you will be defeated. You have to understand this body-function, attack-defence, principle-technique, all the pairs Chiba has been describing in order to avoid defeat.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - IX

15.1.9. There are two kinds of counterattack: one using the empty spot, the other one using a given form.

When you wish to win over the opponent's empty spot, you have to kill the opponent's intended form [or technique]. In order to take advantage of the opponent's assumed form, you have to discern his aim and destroy his empty spot. When the attack comes, counter at the moment he is recovering his balance while his move stops at the periphery.

If he does not regain balance, control the movement of his centre. The opponent who moves from his centre with extremities at rest should be taken advantage by controlling his centre. When the opponent's centre is upright yet his extremities are in disarray, he has to be cut down at the extremities. When the opponent's centre and extremities are both in motion, which is a big mistake, take advantage of this bluff. When his centre and extremities are both at rest, which means he does not reach out, take advantage of his [actual] state of engagement.

There is engagement in feigning and feigning in engagement. The great bluff is the same as not reaching out; not reaching out is like the great bluff. The oral transmission says: "he follows forms and chases manifestations." In other words, one gets stuck in a form. One loses to an initiated attack. Whatever follows is of no use. Therefore, counter the form and kill the manifestations. There are two types of counters. One has to do with an empty spot; the other one has to do with a manifested move. The prior is to counter with a kill, while the latter is to kill with a counter. At this juncture, the distinction between the initiative and the counterattack cannot be made. The initiative becomes a counterattack.

The counterattack becomes the initiative. The distinctions between the sword and the body, between the strengths and weaknesses, centre and periphery all become obliterated in one beneficial action. Having arrived at the sameness of technique and principle, one becomes equipped with a technique that breaks through the circle of initiatives and counterattacks. This wondrous principle is hard to learn. It truly belongs to the mind-to-mind transmission.

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In article 15.1.8 we talked about two kinds of attack, one without preliminary movement and form, the body of an initiative, in other words, spontaneously, and one with preliminary movement and form, the function of an initiative, with a complex, planned technique.

Here we talk of the counterattack and again we speak of a counter into the empty spot, and another using a form. To counter into an empty spot you have to stall his own form. Musashi called this holding down the pillow. The idea is to forestall your opponent's technique by striking into the space created as he starts it. By striking into this empty spot you will stall his attack outside your body and disrupt the opponent's balance, strike as he tries to recover his balance.

Chiba talks next of controlling the opponent's centre or periphery. If he has not recovered his balance, attack his centre. Step in and cut.

If he is moving from the centre and his sword is at rest, you have to control the centre, do not allow him to achieve his desired distance.

If his centre is stable and strong, but his arms and sword are not coordinated, attack his arms.

If both centre and arms are moving, strike. Both arms and body moving are a mistake according to Chiba, a bluff. This is also what Musashi says when he warns against moving in and striking at the same time. The body must get to the distance first and then the sword can strike.

If neither his body nor his arms are moving, he is not attacking, not reaching out, so strike before he is prepared. Chiba says there is engagement in feigning and feigning in engagement, misdirection must be part of any attack and an attack has (may be) misdirection. Chiba then warns that the great bluff is the same as not reaching out and reaching out is like the great bluff. An immobile enemy may be feigning rather than immobilized.

Again we are warned about becoming trapped in form. If you do you will lose to your opponent's initiated form. You have to disrupt his form, his attack, and then kill whatever moves follow, the manifestations. At this point Chiba repeats that there is a counter to an empty spot (counter with a kill) and there is a counter with a manifested move (kill with a counter). At this point it's hard to tell whether you are attacking or counterattacking.

When you unify technique and principle, attack and counterattack, all the other pairs, your sword becomes wondrous.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - X

15.1.10. Distance is important in a match. When I want to make use of it, the opponent does so, too. As I distance myself, he approaches. Whether one is brave or cowardly, slow or fast, in his initiative and counterattack is a matter of life and death. Hence, proper distance cannot be compromised even for the space of a single hair breadth. Without regard for peril one must take advantage of proper distance thus arriving at the stage of single-handed control over life and death.

I do not breach the distance, nor do I stall in waiting [for the opponent to do so]. I establish the proper distance and remain at this level. This is called "life taking blade and life giving sword." There is no difference between being close or far in terms of distance. There is no difference between breaching the distance and anticipating. The practitioner of the art should maintain proper distance without waiting for changes to occur. Nor should he let others reach him. Instead he should quickly gain control of proper distance.

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It's a plain-spoken article for a Sunday morning. Distance is important in sword, so important that in a Kendo match we start the opponents at issoku itto, one step distance, and in kata we spend hours working on the exact pace that takes us to the correct distance as we approach each other.

A big part of any match is to set the distance, too long for him, just right for you. In Jodo we use a stick that is, in fact, only an inch or two longer than the sword which opposes it, but we use that distance to full advantage. (Check the distance from tip to grip rather than just measuring the two weapons). As I suspect some of my students have heard me say "close only counts in horse shoes and hand grenades". A miss with a sword is a miss, whether from two inches or two miles.

Chiba says "I establish the proper distance and remain at this level. This is called 'life taking blade and life giving sword.'" Satsunin to and katsujin ken generally refer to the intent with which one uses the sword, in a killing or a life-preserving manner. I don't know what Chiba is thinking of here, perhaps the fine control of distance that lets you kill or prevents the opponent from killing you. However, he goes on to say that there is no difference between being close or far, breaching the distance or waiting for the opponent. One should control the distance. Shooklyn notes that we aren't talking strictly of distance here, but of the combination of distance, timing and control of technique. Add to that, anticipation, reading the opponent, controlling the rhythm and all the other aspects of a fight and you start to understand how Chiba can say that there is no difference between close and far, your physical distance is not the only factor to consider.

Speaking of distance as this combination of things, the important message here is to "establish the proper distance and remain at this level."

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Moral Instruction in Budo – XI

15.1.11. I turn my opponent's techniques into my own techniques. I turn his gains into mine. This is called "the mocking bird stage". Strength for strength, weakness for weakness, a strike for a strike, a thrust for a thrust: counter each and every one of a thousand changes this way. This is called "facing the opponent's technique."

Weakness for strength, strength for weakness, a block for a strike, an empty spot for a block: accommodate each and every one of the manifold transformations of gains in this manner. This is called "accommodating the opponent's gains."

Face a committed advance by engaging in return, and accommodate a feigned advance by feigning. When the opponent deftly feigns an impossible technique, do likewise.

The mastery of the art is to turn a committed move into a feigned one [immediately, should it miss the target], and to show a feigned move, but turn it into a committed one [immediately, should an opening present itself]. Therefore, facing an opponent, first pretend to be a fool and appear [as if you are about] to lose. This is a stratagem. Truly, as the saying goes, "warfare is the way of deceit."

When you consider merit to be a spontaneous outcome –feigning and engaging are two sides of the same coin, and so are deceit and truth. This knowledge must be obtained only through self discovery.

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We continue with the analysis of strategy in a sword fight. This article deals with types of response to the opponent's actions. First, we discuss the "mocking bird stage" or "facing the opponent's technique". We copy his moves. Come on, you remember your little brother copying everything you said, it made you lose it didn't it? Think about a life or death fight where the opponent copies every move you make. If you don't do something risky by the third or fourth passage you aren't human. It's either take a big gamble or run away, this guy is meeting you strike for strike and thrust for thrust, he's obviously reading you.

Next we have "accommodating the opponent's gains" which is to meet every technique with it's balance. He strikes, you block. He blocks, you aren't there to be blocked (an empty space, you are, one hopes, in the act of striking somewhere else).

To explain the first point further, if the opponent is attacking, attack in return, meet him strongly. Look for a chance to strike a neglected point from an empty spot. If he is feigning, you feign too, don't get taken in by a fake.

Now combine these two ideas. If he fakes and you fake and he's open you turn your fake into a strike, now you are responding to a fake with a strike.

Therefore the next step is to learn how to switch from feigning to attacking at need. If you attack and fail, don't think of it as a failure, think of it as a fake. Now he's reacting to what you're doing, find another place to strike. If you fake, and he doesn't fall for it, strike. I remember Ohmi sensei trying to explain maai to a class practicing Uke Nagashi from the Tachi Uchi no Kurai set of Muso Jikiden

Eishin Ryu. The movement involves a threat by a thrust which uchidachi must strike down, at which point shidachi does uke nagashi and strikes to finish the technique. The class was essentially touching shidachi's chest before doing uke nagashi. Sensei explained over and over that the movement must take place at issoku itto, at the awase position, not where the class thought it should be. "If he is that close he will simply kill you with the thrust!" Chiba is saying the same thing here, feign a movement but if you find your fake within range and your opponent hasn't reacted to it, strike him. If you aren't in position to strike, he won't react to the fake. Ohmi sensei went on to explain that uchidachi must react to the thrust as it crosses the maai, as it comes into range. If he doesn't, it's too late, he is struck.

Act like you are a fool, like you don't know what you're doing and are easily defeated, "This is a stratagem. Truly, as the saying goes, 'warfare is the way of deceit.'" This may seem to indicate that Chiba is recommending this as a 'plan'. However, in the last sentence Chiba says "When you consider merit to be a spontaneous outcome...". Remember that we are working toward "the void", toward the "empty spot", toward being able to react without rationalization leaving technique and strategy behind and simply striking. Chiba says that when we consider that, feigning and engaging are two sides of the coin, as are deceit and truth. Sure we have technique, we have strategy, and they may well work. In fact they often do work, but they are not the goal. The goal is to go beyond all that. Musashi had 60 duels before he was 30 and he thought that he was lucky or perhaps that his opponents were not as skilled as he was. He decided that this was not a profitable way to spend the rest of his life. He went on in search of the void, of the spontaneous outcome. The place where technique appears at need rather than where it is forced upon the situation.

All these techniques and strategies are a stage, not the end. There is no 'end' there is only unbecoming, only the empty spot, the void.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XII

15.1.12. The gain of such as art comes of using one of my [techniques] and two of the opponent's. It is, for instance, to strike [in proper timing] having the opponent miss the target while I raise the sword to strike. This is called using one out of two. To cut after having parried is called one for one or two for two. When you use the one-out-of-two, it is certain victory. Using one-for-one and two-for-two you sometimes win and sometimes lose. Trying to do both at the same time, you lose in a moment.

Thousand-fold variations should be thoroughly covered in practice.

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If I remember right, the western tradition speaks of beats here. A strike down is one beat, to block and strike is two beats. Chiba here is saying that if you have one beat while your opponent has two you are more likely to win, provided of course your beat is a strike.

At least that's what it seems like he is saying. Unfortunately it doesn't actually read that way. I raise my sword while the opponent strikes and misses and then I strike. This he calls one out of two and you win.

To parry and then cut is one for one or two for two and you win sometimes and lose sometimes.

Try to do both and you lose in a moment.

I'm assuming that to lift and then to strike is one. This would make striking from Jodan 0.5? The opponent missing is two? Regardless of this, the situation is what Musashi called stamping on the sword, you will hit him just after he's cut and missed. This is a good strategy, well represented in many schools. Shooklyn notes the modern kendo example of kote-nuki-men, expose your wrist, avoid his strike by lifting your sword and hit his head.

The second situation where you parry and strike gets into the ton-ton, back and forth fight where you take turns striking and blocking. Chiba seems to be saying that the winner is a random event. I'd tend to agree, and it's best not to get into this sort of thing. Musashi would say you ought to disentangle or change the situation with a sudden movement before it occurs to your opponent to do it.

But the third, are we trying to parry and cut at the same time? Cutting and knocking the opponent's sword aside as you cut is said to work. Are we trying to use one for two and two for two at the same time? I'm not sure what that would be.

I suspect Chiba means don't get confused trying to decide what to do. If you decide to block and to cut at the same time your body will be locked in confusion as two different signals are sent together. A sure way to lose.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XIII

15.1.13. When one abandons manifold transformations of techniques, one relies instead on the gain of one single course of action. In other words, one reaches the stage of unchanging heart-mind. It is called “undistracted thought.” Thus, maneuvers are made depending on the opponent.

The secret of countering a thousand blades with one sword lies in making use of the accumulated merit of practice. When the time comes to put this [knowledge] to the test, one ought to rely on the spontaneous manifestation of technique. This secret thereby obtained is thereby mastered only in one’s mind. From the outset, let all the maneuvers happen naturally and strive to ascend to the stage of “a hundred battles and a hundred victories” with your whole being. What is called the stage of the single blade in kendo lies in selecting no particular skills, nor in getting involved with principles and technical nuances of manifold changes and transformations. It consists in the total victory before the opponent even conjures his principles and techniques, by making use of the single blade of unchanging one-pointed mind.

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This is the summation of all that we have discussed before. Chiba gives us numerous pairs of concepts and tells us that they are actually the same, two sides of a coin. Here he tells us to abandon technique, abandon all thoughts of principles, all planning. Let the encounter unfold, allow yourself to fight from the place of undistracted thought, the unchanging heart-mind, use the single blade to overcome a thousand blades and all that.

In other words, use spontaneous action to defeat whatever is thrown at you.

Heck, I've known that since my first days in the martial arts. I read lots of books and they all told me to just 'do it'. What's the big deal, you have faith and swing and somehow a technique shows up and you win. I've seen the movies.

But does faith have anything to do with it? Only if you figure Fudo Myoo will somehow guide your arm. Thing is, the gods may also be on the side of the other guy, despite you being a better offerer-up of worship.

No, better to respect the gods but not rely on them. The reason Chiba put this article here rather than at the beginning of the piece is that you don't get here without a lot of practice, a lot of learning of technique. Then, after years of repetition and learning you have to do the most difficult thing of all, you have to let it all go. Now that's tough.

Who wants to let go of 10 or 20 years of work? You spend a decade making sure you can cut to exactly one angle, move in exactly the correct distance and block to the cut in less than five milliseconds, now you're supposed to give all that up? Nonsense, what's the point of learning all that stuff in the first place?

The point is that you have something you can let go. A beginner knows nothing, a master knows nothing. What do you think separates them? You know the ending now, feel free to jump to the end and cut out all that hard work through the middle. Be sure to let the rest of us know how you did that.

Moral Instruction in Budo - XIV

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.1.14. There is a distinction in kendo between the long and the short [range.] At a long range I use the gap to expose [the enemy's] aim. At a short range I use that space to project my aim.

The differences of range ought to be quickly adapted to deploy projection and reflection. It applies both to my opponent and myself. It is not just a matter of who is superior at long range and who the other way round. Both conditions come down to one: assuming a given form and following through with a technique. It will be easy to maneuver if the form is mastered. The ease in maneuvering brings about a natural success. Thus left alone, the matter of distance no longer depends on the length of the sword or actual inches and yards.

That said, if I fail to make use of the long range, I gain nothing. Conversely, if I make use even of a short range, I will succeed. Going for long range, do not end up unable to change your technique into a short-range cut; going for a short range do not [become unbalanced or overextend] if you have to adapt a long range. This is called “the sameness of the long and the short.” However, if you end up consciously choosing one of the conditions and “measure” with your blade, your mind will become entangled in calculation, and you will thus lose the original heart-mind of the art.

Your heart-mind is the sharpest sword. What does it have to do with range? For instance, even if you wield a dull sword that cannot cut flesh you will break bones with it. In this manner, even the dull sword finds its use. For the one who sharpens the sword of one-pointed calm and pure heart-mind, it matters little what kinds of weapons he might use: all become the sharpest swords. If the original sword is never separated from the body even for an instant, taking life or giving life become spontaneous matters.

That said, the one who takes advantage of the long range wins over the one who falls short. When both are equal, one sometimes loses and sometimes wins. Yet sometimes the one who falls short wins, and the one who overreaches loses. In battles there are winners and losers, and it is all in accord [with the supreme principle]. He who does not know his limitations obstinately desires a gain regardless of whether it is for the good or evil of others. This is against the Way.

There are limitless outcomes of any given contest such are the wondrous benefits of spontaneous nature. Sometimes there is victory, sometimes defeat, and yet too, total victory where defeat seemed imminent. Sometimes both parties die, yet sometimes both survive. There are no obvious certainties, nor are there any obscure uncertainties. There is no way of seeing whether you are going to win or lose. All are the wondrous benefits of spontaneous nature of the Heavenly Way.

Thus if you do not think about the advantages and disadvantages of a contest, freeing yourself from life and death, and letting the advantages and disadvantages be decided by the will of Heaven, you will decapitate the great opponent –your own ego; and then the enemies in ten directions will disappear. When there is no opponent, how can you be defeated? Suppose there is someone who will come and challenge you. He will but destroy himself.

Knowing this is wisdom, and also, virtue. Practising it is valour, and also, art.

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We continue with the summing up of the "Mysteries of Swordsmanship" (15.1) but move to what feels a bit like a forgotten point, the close and far distance, or perhaps we should say the approach. The first sentence states that we use the long range to expose the opponent's aim, and the short range to project our own. Since modern kendo starts at the neutral point of this range, the issoku itto or one step distance, we should perhaps think of kata here. As you walk toward your partner you should be projecting in such a way as to see what he intends, then as you cross the one-step distance you perform your counter to his attack. We might also think of the WWII kendo matches which were set up to start at a large distance and finish with a single point. In that case you were expected to run toward the opponent and win in a single strike. You had the approach to analyze what he intended and then it was over.

Chiba mentions projection and reflection. This we discussed in article 15.1.4. We should project what we wish the opponent to see as we approach from long range, and reflect what he does as we move to close range. We assume a form and adapt a technique to respond to that, both opponents do this, and if the form as been mastered you will have success. Being concerned with the measured distance, having a longer or shorter sword, these don't matter as much as our appreciation of distance, to our technique. At this point (1769) in the development of kendo one could have a shinai of any length one wanted, (bokuto too, one supposes, shinken however were likely regulated by then). Chiba is saying that this isn't as important as understanding the distance during a fight.

"That said" if you don't use the approach you won't gain any advantage, but if you use any distance to your own ends you will succeed. Adapt, if you're looking for a strike from a long distance and he jumps in close, adapt. If you're striking close and he jumps out of range, don't get over-extended. If you start measuring the distances you will lose your one-pointedness (heart-mind), you will become entangled in calculation. Treat every distance as the same thing.

"Your heart-mind is the sharpest sword". We move a bit toward metaphor here with the observation that even a dull sword will break bones if it is used correctly. Keeping your concentration, your un-entangled mind, you will be able to use anything as a weapon. If you forget the "original sword" (the one in your mind) you will have a problem, keep sword, mind and body integrated (through long practice and then forgetting technique) and giving or taking life becomes spontaneous. Musashi says we must always keep the strike in mind, everything works toward the strike and if we forget this for an instant we are in trouble.

"That said" if you can strike from a long range that's better. If both are equally skilled at long range it's a toss-up. Sometimes the long range specialist over-reaches and loses. When speaking of battles, someone wins and someone loses, if you insist on trying to win, for whatever reason, you are going against the Way. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes both walk away, there's no way of knowing what will happen in a fight and this is the wondrous benefit of the "spontaneous nature of the Heavenly Way."

Leave all thoughts of winning and losing, life and death to the will of heaven and you will "decapitate the great opponent - your own ego" With this your enemies disappear and you can never be defeated. If someone attacks, wishing to kill you, he has already destroyed himself.

How many times have we heard that last and figured that means if we're "good enough" at X-ryu and someone tries to fight us they've already lost? Firing bullets at Superman, it's just asking to get your

lights punched out. It's not really that is it? When Musashi fought Sasaki and Sasaki threw his saya away Musashi said "you have lost!" Shortly after that Musashi decided he didn't get it, he figured (perhaps even correctly) that Sasaki was so upset he could be beaten and saying this would upset him even more. Tricks and a desire to win are not what it's about unless all you want is to win. In that case you're a murderer and you're using satsunin-ken.

If we have decapitated our ego and are challenged and lose our physical head, our opponent has still defeated himself. He still has to live with his ego. It is in this way that the kendo (kenjutsu, whatever you practice) gives wisdom and becomes an art.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XV

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.1.15. When both my opponent and I have discernment, both of us approach without thinking, both retreat without calculation.

He does not approach where I want him to. When I approach, he defends himself. When I am like this, he is also the same: striking at an unexpected spot, reacting in an unpredictable manner. There is no end to these infinite changes and transformations. Applying the principle through a variety of moves, both he and I are one and the same body. He thinks what I think; he calculates my calculations. The unity of technique, principle, movement and stillness is like projecting one's reflection in a mirror.

At this stage, there is no technique with which to win and no principle to be known.

Whenever you want to win, you will lose. Whenever you do not win, you will immediately lose. The fact that you do not win means you have not [mastered] the art. An adept must keep this in mind.

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When I was much younger I had an Aikido partner with whom I was in complete synch. We were equally matched physically and mentally, and we had tremendous sensitivity to each other's movements. We could change techniques in mid air and still land without damage. There was nothing like it and I remember it to this day.

It lasted for about six months and then was gone. I have been hunting for it ever since. I've come close, but never that close to dancing on the edge of disaster, that close to the absolute limits of what I could do.

For a time in Tae Kwon Do I could freestyle with a partner so that it looked a lot like Capoeira, kicks skimming the cheekbones, punches grazing the chin, sweeps barely touching the foot.

For a time in Jodo my partner and I tried, really tried, to take each other's heads off and never quite succeeded. Another partner did me the honour of trying to cave in my skull when doing sword with me.

If you and your opponent both understand the mysteries as outlined in this text, you will be a match, there will be no thought of winning and losing, only of two who are one in the art, both a part of one whole, reacting to each other like a reflection in the mirror. When you experience this you lose all interest in besting an opponent, you only want to continue in this endless winning that is the giving up of the idea of winning.

If you wish to win, you will never get to this point, you will lose. If you do not win, you will instantly lose as your opponent comes through your collapse to strike you. If you don't win you must practice until you cannot lose.

This is the end of first set of articles, 15.1, the Mysteries of Swordsmanship. There are four more sections to come but none as long as this one. I will try to break them into logical sections if possible.

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Moral Instruction in Budo – XVI

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.2. Formlessness of Swordsmanship Methods

The Great Limit is originally limitless. Water yields to square and round vessels and assumes their forms, but originally it is formless. And so it is with the methods of swordsmanship.

Although at the beginner stage one focuses on stances and learns how to perform techniques, the Stance is originally formless. Accordingly, just like the water that yields to the vessels and assumes their forms, the Stance also assumes various forms in response to the opponent. Indeed there are various examples of stances depending on a style of swordsmanship such as upper, middle (or “clear sight”) and lower level stances; side stance and its reverse; kasumi stance; yin-yang stances, and so forth. Yet they are all wondrous workings of the multitude of changes and transformations that stem from the One Function.

Furthermore, there are various names of battle formation methods –the Eight Battle Formations: Fish Scales, Crane Wings, Flock of Geese, Spear, Bow, Crescent, Yoke Swing, and Five Agents; Mutual Confrontation; Three Siege Maneuvers; Left-Right Encircling Maneuvers; Shapes of One — and Nine 九; Boar-swinging Dragon; Endless Snake, Long Snake, and so forth; and all these forms are assumed in response to the changes of the opponent formations.

However, when someone makes only forms without knowing the Principle, he is ignorant of the Principle of changes and transformations. As a common saying has it, “he makes a Buddha image without putting a soul in it.” For instance, if the formation is suddenly attacked by forces assaulting from the rear or along the right or left flanks, the head force regroups to the rear, or one flank reinforces the other. Strategists must be constantly aware of these [responses]. This is called “nipping mutability in the bud.”

Therefore, always assume a form in response to the opponent, and not by yourself.

A shōgi player has several pawns –the assaulting force –to play with. Captured pawns become part of the capturer’s force. So it is with the art of swordsmanship. Although the way the forms are used is a received tradition, these forms, too, are just like the standard moves of shogi pieces. [Ultimately] form and no-form are all the same. The one who becomes aware of this principle will spontaneously mature in his understanding of the art, and thus he will do the techniques without doing the techniques. This is verily called a “true technique”. Should you come to the realization of this principle after your hands and feet have become accustomed [to the techniques], such knowledge will surely become your shortcut to mastery.

The matter of assaulting forces and regular troops depends upon the opponent, while the matter of committing and feigning depends upon yourself –the outcome [of the battle] depends on how well the belly of each side is settled. Is this not what the ancients used to say?

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Chiba makes many things more clear in this passage, he is demystifying the mysteries. We learn where stances and techniques come from and when they should be used.

First, we are reminded that swordsmanship is originally formless. The creating of technique comes from a place of no techniques, shape comes from no shape like water, originally formless, assumes form when poured into a vessel. This is not such an obvious statement as it might seem. We teach from techniques, from shapes, and it's hard to get beyond that stage. I have read endless discussions on the 'net about the difference between one line of practice and another and it never seems to get beyond "those guys finish their cut at horizontal and we finish ours a little below horizontal". The sort of thing that one would be teaching a beginner becomes blown up into a justification for two lines of practice. When one has only a hammer... when ones knowledge extends to where the sword stops during a cut, everything seems to come down to cut-finish-height.

Form comes from formlessness. Technique gets made up, it isn't received from another plane of existence. There is no ultimate reality where techniques exist as ideal forms which we then try to approach. It may seem to be this way, when we begin to write we may copy the kanji until we learn to recognize them (to read), we may practice various kata containing various techniques until we learn swordsmanship, but ultimately it would be nice if we could write, if we could create something from nothing on our own.

When you read Chiba's list of stances above did you see it as a list of stances or did you start to wonder what kasumi stance or yin-yang stance was? The point is that these are just names for shapes, it isn't important that you know them. It's important that you know they all come from one place, from no-stance, and no, I don't want to know what mugamae looks like in your school. Think about that, you can show me what mugamae looks like. Of course you can tack a name onto anything, any shape, you can call a shape no-shape if you wish, but it might be more useful to look for a deeper meaning to a name like that.

Chiba now jumps from solo fights to the battlefield in a way that is similar to Musashi's discussion in the Go Rin no Sho. Obviously a student of the sword arts was expected to expand his understanding beyond the duel to the war. Again, the limited understanding of the beginner is often seen on the 'net, as some will claim that "this school still teaches the strategies of warfare while that one has been reduced to teaching only swordsmanship". Perhaps, yet this author gives a rather impressive list of battle formations despite being a member of a sword school which I have never heard associated with battle strategy and writing in the middle of a long age of peace. What's that you say? He might have studied beyond his school? I bet he did, yet he uses battle formations as an example while discussing his sword school. Knowing lots of battle formations is not all that useful in and of itself. You need to know which to apply to what formation your opponent uses, and then you have to know how to change your formations in relationship to what your opponent is doing... actually if you can do it before he changes his formation that's even better. Nip it in the bud.

Making formations on the parade ground or when you're leading a marching band might be entertaining, but making formations on the battlefield which are not in response to what your enemy is doing, is to misunderstand strategy altogether.

"Therefore, always assume a form in response to the opponent, and not by yourself." I am so tempted... no I will comment here on iaido. I hold a high rank in that art but I am forced to reappraise it as a martial art while reading this passage. Is iai simply making a buddha without putting a soul into it, is it

just form without function? This is worth more space than what we will give ourselves here, I encourage some reflection by my iaido students.

The text moves on to compare techniques in sword to the standard opening moves in shogi. We have the received tradition, what we were taught by our instructors, but sword techniques are no more and no less useful than standard openings in a board game. Ultimately we are looking for the principles behind the techniques, the formless knowledge that exists beyond the opening moves.

Moving your pieces, setting up your troops, depends on what the enemy is doing. Attacking or feigning depends on you. The outcome depends on who has the stomach for the fight.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XVII

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.3. Proper timing in a match

When both opponents face each other in a match, endless variations of movements may arise. Once the state of anticipation in the middle of an attack and attack in the middle of anticipation is actualized, [the practitioner] arrives at the unity of attack and anticipation. Maturing in technical skill, [the practitioner] arrives at the principle. Mastering the principle, he arrives at the [perfection of] technique. The unity of technique and principle is thus embodied. In this manner, when one's belly is settled, his hits leave no trace, his actions make no shapes. As the saying goes, it is like striding on top of the nine heavens and strolling below the nine grounds. Beyond the border of no-recollection and no-thought, no sound issues, and no odor comes forth. Ghosts and spirits would not visit this place.

As a matter of comparison, the mind is likened to a mirror in that it reflects objects. This is called the mind-mirror. If you face a mirror and try to attack, the attack cannot pass undetected. But if your mind projects itself, it can hardly be called a real mind-mirror.

There is an old poem that Hanshan once addressed to Shide:

That you are holding that broom
while there is no dust to sweep
is in itself mind's dust,
is it not?

The following poem is Shide's response:

This broom
is for sweeping the kind of dust
called "no dust to sweep."

This interesting dialogue indicates the stage when the level of no-recollection is not yet reached. When there is a thing called "mirror," it means there is still a concept of "a mirror." To get rid of the mirror that reflects, and to be able to reflect is the highest mastery of the mind. As an old poem has it:

The Pond of Sarusawa –
the moon thinks not
of casting its reflection
upon the water
that thinks not of reflecting.

While such an account is surely that of someone who has achieved an exalted level, let me also provide an account of proper timing for striking down an opponent, in a manner suited for a general audience. To wit, when the following opportunities present themselves in a match, one should definitely strike:

1. One should avoid the opponent's committed moves, but strike at feigned ones.
2. Next one should strike the opponent using the discernment of the eye, and not the mind.

3. Strike when the opponent is indecisive.
4. Strike when the opponent freezes.
5. Strike when the opponent shouts in preparation for an attack instead of waiting for him to do his technique.
6. Strike instantaneously.

Also, there is a method of the Eight Conditions for a match:

1. You must act when the opponent is in the midst of preparation.
2. In a match, you must act according to the position of the opponent.
3. You must act when you discern your opponent's habits.
4. When the sword tips come into contact, you should pressure the opponent's attacking impulses with your mental power.
5. You must put yourself in a striking position such that your opponent will consider it too far for a strike, while it will be close enough for you.
7. When the opponent is strong on the defence, you must use feigned and committed attacks.
8. Regardless of how strong the opponent's hand is, dissipate the force and attack.

In terms of military strategy, when you must attain victory over an opponent who is twice or three times stronger than you, it is a matter of great importance to retreat from the place of direct confrontation while striking at the opponent's weak spots in counterattack. In military strategy, too, there is no such thing as cutting down the opponent in a dramatic theatrical manner. You must think deeply over such matters as when to pursue and scatter the opponent, as well as when to retreat and counterattack: know these well.

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Timing. You have to unify attack and anticipation so that they aren't two separate things. You must master the technique to understand the principle and master the principle to arrive at the technique. When you unify it all you are in the place where ghosts won't go, you're in the void. We've heard this before, as we have heard of the mind-mirror that is not clouded but reflects so purely that no attack can be missed. If there is dust on the mirror it doesn't reflect truly. A mirror also reflects without thinking about it, like the pond and the moon.

That reminder given with appropriate zen poems to the superior swordsman, we ordinary folks are now told the opportunities to strike in a match. You can read those for yourself. The first two seem somewhat strange to me at first glance. Striking at feints seems a good way to fall into the trap, but if we know it's a feint we can strike at a different place than the one desired. Avoiding the committed move is also efficient, the alternative is to block it which takes more energy than avoiding it.

The second point is to strike using the discernment of the eye and not the mind. Again, it seems counter-intuitive, surely we want to use our mind and not our eye? No, your eye is the mirror, your mind-mirror is the strike that happens when you see-strike without putting the analyzing mind in between the two. The rest seem clear, if not obvious.

The eight conditions for a match are next and they seem fairly clear as well. Number seven means, I suspect, you should mix up your attacks between feigned and committed. Shooklyn suggests that against a strong defence one should feign and then strike the exposed target as the opponent reacts to the feint. Going back, we see that he on the other hand should be striking us at an exposed point as we

feign toward him. We can see how fast we get into the situation where neither can win if both are skilled.

It seems to me that this advice ought to be as applicable to kendo players today as it was in 1769. Read the points just before your next practice and see what you can do with them.

The final passage bears special attention. First, we are told that on the battlefield we do not confront superior strength directly, but retreat and counterattack to the weaknesses that are exposed. Good advice, the counterpoint would be to strike strongly and quickly before the opponent can retreat if one is superior in strength.

Next we are reminded that there is no dramatic, theatrical victory to be had. Too much style is a bad thing, just get the job done. Remember what Musashi said about flowers that have no fruits.

Be the big coconut that falls on the head, not the flower petals.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XVIII

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.4. On the unity of mind, vital force, and power

The expanse of Heaven and Earth never extends beyond the Principle and vital force. The cyclic progression of the four seasons never stops –it is caused by the configurations of vital force, which in turn depend on Principle.

Man is born between Heaven and Earth receiving both the Principle and vital force. His heart-mind is the luminous essence of vital force. Therefore the heart-mind is in union with the perfect forces of Heaven and Earth; it thus abides in utmost sincerity and ultimate beauty. As in this old poem, the fragrance of cherry blossoms comes from the heart:

Cherries of Yoshino –
year after year
they blossom.
Split the trunk and see
where the flowers' fragrance is.

Vital force fills the body. With regard to the heart-mind –as in the case of soldiers who follow their general's command and move swiftly –when General Heart-Mind is tough, Soldier Body, full of force, will follow his general's order and move at once. To describe once again the working of the heart-mind by way of an analogy to chess, tapping on the edge of the board humming a popular tune is indicative of the state of vital force, in other words, of an unsettled mind. Although it is quite normal that this so-called “vital force” should be so agile, we must understand that the heart-mind moves depending on vital force.

That which is called “power” arises where vital force gathers. When vital force is deficient, the body is weak; when the vital force is abundant, the body is strong. When the vital force of breathing is abundant below the navel, the whole body, down to a single hair, will not be short of strength. Therefore, you should know that strength is in the body, while courage is in the heart-mind.

Through continual practice of swordsmanship for several years, strength and courage will extend to the tip of the bamboo sword. This is called the “power that issues from technique.”

When the heart-mind, vital force, and power are separated, the efficiency of techniques of swordsmanship cannot be demonstrated. It is as with gunpowder: if sulphur, saltpetre, and ashes are separated, its power will weaken; but if the three ingredients are mixed, its power is so effective –it is akin to making Heaven and Earth tremble.

“No space to fit a hair;” “flint-and-sparks momentum;” “strike the opponent before he makes a move;” and “the cat catches a mouse” –all these are expressions of the unity of heart-mind, vital force, and power.

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Principle and vital force, 理氣 is Ri Ki. Shooklyn notes that this would be understood in that time as a Neo-Confucian concept of principle (emptiness) and vital force (phenomena and the energy that binds them) which echoes the Buddhist emptiness and manifestation. Today we would probably say it's the unity of theory and spirit but we must always understand the definition as the author understood it when reading anything.

Nothing extends beyond emptiness and phenomena. That's acceptable, there's not-stuff and stuff. That's not going to be argued by anyone, but of course that's not the problem for philosophers is it? The problem is stating that stuff comes from not-stuff. That the seasons depend on the movements of vital force which depends on the principle. For swordsmen, I don't think we need worry deeply about this, we can take it as a metaphor meaning that what we do is best derived as if out of nowhere, rather than at the end of a long and time-consuming string of reasoning. It's a very practical matter of prolonging life during a sword-fight.

Man is between heaven and earth and we have both ri and ki. Our heart-mind is in harmony with these and so we abide in utmost sincerity and ultimate beauty. I very much wish we understood this, unfortunately we are also greedy, grouchy and prone to ambition, all of which destroy our understanding of just how much in harmony with the universe we are. This is why we lament the passing of childhood. It's also what we need to re-capture to become better swordsmen.

Chiba uses a lovely poem to illustrate our need to understand this unity. I love this poem, I can imagine someone splitting open a cherry tree and looking for the scent of the blossoms. We do this all the time. my own reaction to the poem is to think "you're looking where the scent isn't" after all the trunk doesn't smell of blossoms, blossoms do. Of course the poet is speaking of finding the source of the smell, not the smell itself, and so we break the tree open to look. We could dig up the roots, we could grind the flowers and extract the molecules and put them through a mass spectrometer and... wait, we just found the fragrance, and we can identify how it is created too.

The poet wasn't thinking literally I suspect, if I remember right, Japan had a pretty good perfume / cosmetic / chemical industry quite early on. The point is that it's the whole that is important. It takes the entire tree to make the fragrance. We can extract it, we can likely synthesize it, but that's not the point. To look in the trunk for the fragrance is to destroy the fragrance. Break down the techniques, examine the variables too closely and you risk going too far down the chain and losing your fight. Leave the tree alone and enjoy the fragrance, leave your heart-mind unified with the principle and the vital force and enjoy... everything. Split your attention and you split the trunk of your cherry tree. Pay attention, concentrate.

Power comes from the vital force, and now we're talking about that which makes the body strong, part of which is breathing from the hara and not the chest. Strength is in the body, courage in the heart-mind. I really like this, we would say "strong mind and body", but Chiba goes on to say that power issues from technique. And where does technique come from? The principle (void). And how does the principle act? Through the vital force (ki) which acts through the heart-mind to create courage which can use the body's strength which thus creates this power.

Break any link in that chain and power decreases or disappears. You can be the strongest dude around, or have the most spectacular technique, or the deepest understanding of the philosophy, but it requires all of that together, working as an entire tree to produce the fragrance of a cherry blossom.

Dude, it's spring, go smell the Sakura, and while you're at it, have a sniff at the trunk to see what we're talking about.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XIX

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.5. Technique –Principle: Questions and Answers.

Question: There are technique and principle in swordsmanship. What is technique?

Answer: In kendo there are four roots [of technique]: size, strength, speed, and weight. However, there are four types of disadvantages associated with these four: big is slow; strong is stiff; fast is small, and light is weak. The one who does not have these disadvantages can be called “truly big, strong, fast, and light.” The technique that does not lose its direct impact is called “correct.”

Question: What is principle?

Answer: It is that which governs technique and is thus the hidden side of technique. It is called “mysterious.” Victory is attained by combining the correct and the mysterious. The correct becomes mysterious, the mysterious correct. This is called “the union of technique and principle.”

Question: What are victory and defeat?

Answer: Victory and defeat depend on the following three factors: distance, position, and vital force.

Question: What do these three mean?

Answer: When my opponent advances I retreat. This is called “distance.” When he positions himself at a certain place, I do likewise. This is called “position.” He has vital force and so do I. The two interact. This is called “vital force.”

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We come to the final section which is a series of questions and answers. It's fun that after the pains the author took to explain the value of leaving thoughts of winning and losing behind, that these questions deal mostly with winning and losing. We'll split the section up a bit as it's fairly long.

The first question is about technique and the author mentions that technique comes from four roots. Size, strength, speed and weight. Today we often say Dai Kyo Soku Kei meaning big, strong, fast and smooth. That last is interesting as Chiba uses weight rather than smoothness. Kei can mean light or flexible so without having the original kanji to look at I suspect this is the phrase we're discussing.

The four terms are usually given as the order in which you should learn. First big, then strong, then fast and finally smooth. Heaven forbid that you skip one.

It does happen that we teach beginners big movements, then they get strong. Once they give up a bit of strength they start to get faster and eventually, with enough practice they tend to smooth out. It's more of a natural progression than a curriculum and we usually keep the teaching mantra to "big". We're happy if shodan level iaidoka can go through the movements with some size. Nidans tend to have cuts strong enough to split logs, sandan and yondan get fast and finally, at about godan or rokudan we're

starting to see some smoothness. At rokudan we're still trying to get them to ease up on the grip, although the rest of the body is lovely and light.

I'm more interested in the interplay of these things, and especially in Chiba's use of weight rather than smoothness. Each of these four roots have a weakness inherent in them. Big is slow, strong is stiff, fast is small and light is weak. Good technique means having none of these weaknesses. How do we do that? Tenouchi and shibori, the grip. Ease up on the stone hands and squeeze as you hit. Oh? You know that already? Of course you do, but if you're having trouble with it think of Kei as weight rather than smoothness and see if that helps. It surely helped me.

That's technique. Interesting that we haven't had any specific physical movements described isn't it? Perhaps the author is trying to protect the secrets of the school? I doubt it. These are the secrets, the actual movements in a technique are, or should be, left behind long before you're reading something like this text.

We move on to principle, the other side of technique, and by now we know that it's the void, the space from which techniques arise. Here it's called the mysterious and victory is attained by combining the mysterious with the manifestation, the technique. "Who knows where that technique came from but it worked!"

Next we get into the nitty gritty, victory and defeat. We still don't have any physical movements described but Chiba gives us three factors to consider, distance, position and vital force.

Distance means to advance when your opponent retreats. Be in range, preferably when he is out of range. When he stops and takes a stand so do we take our position. Preferably where he is out of position. Then we interact through our vital forces, our ki, our spirit as we swing at each other and victory and defeat appear.

Simple yes? Walk up and hit him.

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Moral Instruction in Budo - XX

(Itto-ryu Kenjutsu Jiri Kuden Kannen Sho, 1769)

15.5. Technique –Principle: Questions and Answers (2)

Question: What is the decisive point in a match?

Answer: When vital force and form come forth together, it is called “the decisive point in a match.”

Question: When this happens, does it lead to a certain victory?

Answer: That which cannot be won is inside one’s self. That which can be won rests with the opponent. One has to mature [in this art] and reach the “wondrous.” When one matures, his heart-mind fully forgets his hand; his hand fully forgets the sword and spear; he does not leave the divine sphere.

Such state is the state of ease in which there is no limit to magical transformations. One maneuvers in accordance with one’s opponent’s movements and attains victory.

Question: What is the meaning of gains and losses with respect to technical form?

Answer: There are a few swordsmen nowadays who tend to assume oblique stances. This is called “linking form.” Linking form allows one to act according to circumstances: when there is contact, one rolls with it; when there is none, one stays away from the opponent. This is called “to follow what comes about.” When one follows this method and becomes proficient in this way, one makes [conscious] maneuvers. In so doing, there are gains and losses with respect to technical form.

When one learns the proper way, his maneuvers will be proper. In training one comes full circle: having gone all the way to the end, one returns to the beginning; having come to the beginning, one reaches the end. There are neither beginnings nor ends for me. The same is true of others –there are no limits to mastery. One is both divine and not. This is called “maturing in studies.”

Question: What is certain victory according to the transmission?

Answer: Certain victory is to be fully accomplished within human affairs. Which is to say, he who studies without reflection remains in darkness; he who reflects without study does not understand the truth. He who studies and reflects well can earn his bread and clothes. If one is active in studies and thorough in reflection, how can one not gain knowledge, how can one not become victorious?

Question: What is the difference between high skill and poor skill?

Answer: The sole difference is whether you can seize the crucial moment in distance and timing or not. Distance and timing are the great opportunities in a contest. When distance and timing are not properly used, even if one has done quite a bit of practical training, one is after all not yet ready to step onto the contest ground. The point of difference between high skill and poor skill is truly a matter of a hair’s breadth.

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This is the final part of the text, and we continue with questions on how to win a match. The decisive point is given as "When vital force and form come forth together". This is somewhat different than Musashi's critical point where one is on the verge of hitting or being hit. Chiba refers more to the point where we reach the unity of swordsmanship.

The next question asks if this brings certain victory and Chiba reminds us "That which cannot be won is inside one's self. That which can be won rests with the opponent" This goes back to his first article where he tells us that the losing point is in oneself and the no-winning point is in the opponent. We are to lose our ego, our desire to win. If there is a desire to win, we cannot win. Whether or not we score a point on the opponent depends largely on him. If he hits us first we will not win. Winning and losing are 'in the air'. If we lose our ego (stay in the divine sphere) and unite the heart-mind, the technique and the sword, we will fight in accord with what the opponent is doing and this will lead to victory (incidentally, regardless of whether we win or lose the match).

The questioner still wants to pin something down and asks about gain and loss with respect to technique. Chiba refuses to be drawn in. He tells us of those who use oblique stances (think of an Aikido stance, half-facing forward). This is not the usual kendo position and it allows one to roll away when struck and to keep the body out of reach by, perhaps, using a longer shinai with a longer hilt. The angled body position would allow this longer blade. Using these things one can link one's form to the opponent's form in a mechanical way, and so in a mechanical way one can have gain and loss in technical matters. In other words, if you want to restrict yourself to technical gain and loss, you put yourself into the realm of technique which, as we have been told repeatedly, is limited. No matter what stance you take, if you 'take a stance' you are restricting yourself to that stance. This may seem good for politicians but we are swordsmen and it is dangerous to be drawn into a fight of stance against stance. Instead, learn the proper way so that your movements will be proper. Have no stance, do not try to force the world into your stance in the hope that it is a good one, that way lies the war of rock-paper-scissors.

Chiba says your training will come full circle, at the end you circle back to the beginning and so there is no limit to mastery. We are all familiar with the concept, your white belt gets grimy until it is black and then threadbare to become white again. A beginner has no technique and so strikes 'from nowhere' as does the master.

When Chiba says there are no limits to mastery he means that we come back to the beginning, but not on a flat circle. Open it up to a spiral, when we get back to the beginning we are above the beginning, and each time we circle around we get higher. If you think there is something to learn you will only learn a little. If you think there is learning there is nowhere to stop. It's a process rather than a goal. "One is both divine and not. This is called "maturing in studies." When you come back to the beginning you have skills and you do not, you have something and you have nothing, but go around again and you will have more and even less. The 90 year old master says 'I think I am getting the hang of my grip'.

Our questioner then tries another tack and asks about victory according to the transmission. He is told to study and reflect. Study alone brings technical skill alone, without understanding, you swing your sword in the darkness. Reflection alone will not reveal the truth, you are a 'light under a bushel basket', there is nothing to be illuminated. If you study and reflect how can you not learn a truth and this is certain victory according to the transmission. It is ignorance that lies bleeding on the dojo floor.

In the final question our hapless student gives up on trying to learn the secret of winning and asks about good and poor skill. The difference, he is told, is in seeing the critical moment in distance and timing. "The point of difference between high skill and poor skill is truly a matter of a hair's breadth." Substitute 'literally' for 'truly' and you have our modern version of this statement. It really is a hairs breadth, the thickness of a hair, the time it takes for the sword to move the thickness of a hair.

At Ganryujima
Musashi's headband
floats to the sand

To those who have come along with me as I read through this manuscript, I hope you will go back over the text itself without my thoughts in your head. Circle around to the beginning and see what it will teach you this time.

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