

REVIEW ARTICLES

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The culture of Japanese *kenjutsu* as presented in the book by Sergio Mor-Stabilini

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Abstract

Aim. To review the book *The Ancient Art of the Japanese Sword. The ancient school of Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu along historical, cultural and spiritual path*, and to reflect on the state of research in this area.

Method. The method of analysing the content of the literature of the subject was used, as well as a deductive and comparative method. In addition, the author of this article used the *shugyo* method – his own long-term study and observation.

Results. The article contains a theoretical introduction, information about the author, reference to the content of the book, reference to the methodological part – sources and bibliographies editorial and aesthetic sides, a discussion with reference to the literature on the subject and a summary with assessment. This rating is very positive.

Conclusion. The particular value of the monograph being reviewed is the synthesis of knowledge and the large number of photographs. The conclusion is this book is a valuable addition to the traditional martial arts publications market.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to review the book entitled *The Ancient Art of the Japanese Sword. The ancient school of Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu along historical, cultural and spiritual path* by Sergio Mor-Stabilini [2016, photo 2] and to reflect on the state of research in this area. This is therefore mainly a critical qualitative analysis of the content of this monograph.

The method of analysing the content of the literature of the subject was used, as well as a deductive and comparative method. In addition, the author of this article used the *shugyo* method – his own long-term studies and observations [Cynarski 2012: 229-231].

Theoretical perspectives for the issue raised was provided by the anthropology of martial arts [Cynarski 2012]. Consequently, the conceptual language of the Humanist Theory of Martial Arts and Holistic Martial Arts Anthropology were adopted for describing and analysing the content [Cynarski, Skowron 2014; cf. Cynarski 2016, 2017].

From this perspective it can be assumed that: *bujutsu* means “martial art/martial arts, especially classical Japanese schools (including *buhei*, *kobudo*)”, and *kobudo*, – “literally old *budo* schools before the Meiji

Restoration (1868), especially teaching techniques using weapons. The most popular is *kobudo* from Okinawa island, and little is known (*nihon-den*) *honshu kobudo* from central Japan”; *ko-ryu* – is an old school or method; *ryu-ha* – is a “traditional school of *bujutsu* (classical *ryu-ha*)” [Cynarski, Skowron 2014: 60-64].

The school Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu is the *ko-ryu* and classic *ryu-ha* for *kenjutsu* (sword technique, the art of sword) and *kobudo/kobujutsu* (old martial arts, with traditional weapons). Earlier *jujutsu* techniques, strategy, medical and psychological aspects were taught here, too.

About the author of the book

Sergio Mor-Stabilini [photo 1] is a martial artist. He has achieved master degrees in several Japanese styles/forms (8 dan *karate*, 7 dan *kobudo*, 3 dan *kendo*, 1 dan *judo*) and Chinese (5 toan in *taiji quan* and *yiquan*). He is an honorary member of the Shibu Kobudo Idokan Poland Association (IPA) [Sieber, Grzywacz 2015]. He works with *kenjutsu* and *kobudo* experts from Japan including Goro Hatakeyama, *hanshi* (1928-2009) [cf. Cynarski, Szajna 2012], and from Europe [Pawelec et al. 2015;



Photo 1. Sensei Sergio Mor-Stabilini (8 dan), and his new monograph (**photo 2**).

Sieber, Pawelec 2016]. He works with the editorial staff of “*Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology*”, as author [cf. Mor-Stabilini 2013] and consultant/reviewer.

In 1981 he founded Jitakyoei Budo. This is actually the International Association of Jitakyoei Budo. He also founded the European University of Martial Arts and Oriental Culture, for the training of martial arts instructors. And he is still teaching, among other things, *karate* (the style of “Three Energy Roads” – Sankido [Mor-Stabilini 2013]) and *kobudo* Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu. In this fifteenth-century classical school of fencing sensei Mor-Stabilini holds a licence of *menkyo okuden*.

In 2014, during the 3rd World Scientific Congress of Combat Sports and Martial Arts and 3rd IMACSSS International Conference in Rzeszow sensei Sergio Mor-Stabilini led workshops on *kenjutsu* / *kobudo* Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu, and also gave a demonstration of *karate* Sankido, and *kenjutsu* and *iaido* Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu at the Gala of Fighting Arts [Rut 2014; Pawelec *et al.* 2015]. The European Martial Arts Committee awarded him the title of Professor-Expert and Medal for Extraordinary Achievements in Martial Arts.

In 2016 a book appeared in the milieu of martial arts which in the martial arts environment is called a treaty: “Mor-Stabilini Sergio (2016), *The Ancient Art of the Japanese Sword*. (...), 384 pp. The author is a teacher of martial arts and leader of the International Association Jitakyoei Budo, and the European University of Martial Arts and Oriental Culture. His book is a big monograph – effect of 28 years of author’s own experience. It may be called a Treaty, rich in interesting research content and high-quality illustrations.” [Sieber, Swider 2017: 53]. It was also listed on the Recommended Literature IMACSSS [www.imacssss.com].

Book’s contents

The structure of the book is correct. In general, descriptive fragments are interspersed with the presentation of technical forms on numerous pictures of very good quality. The aesthetic side (paper and photo quality) deserves a very high rating.

The beginning of the book coincides with historical background and introductory information (Japanese timeline and chronology) and Introduction. In the Introduction [Mor-Stabilini 2016: 17] we learn that in 1987 thanks to Alain Floquet *kobudo* Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu came into existence in Italy (*nota bene* quite like in Poland [Cynarski, Szajna 2012]). At that time the author of the book studied consistently under the guidance of masters Yoshio Sugino (10 dan, *hanshi*) and Goro Hatakeyama (9 dan, *hanshi*).

Chapter I. “The Founder” refers to GM Iizasa Choisai Ienao, the founder of the Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu, but not only. It is devoted to the method of Goro Hatakeyama [Mor-Stabilini 2016: 42-45], fencing attitude (pp. 46-49), and strategy of fighting – *heiho* (50-51).

Chapter II. “The History of Japan” is about the *bushi* culture (art, architecture and ideologies). It contains concepts of *kata* and *kajo* (79-82), and *reishiki* ceremonies (82-83). Later we can find here *Itsutsu-no tachi* (“5 swords”, or maybe “5 positions”) (pp. 84-87), and 3 next technical forms of *kenjutsu*.

Chapter III. “Shinto” contains information about this old Japanese religion. This description is an introduction to *bojutsu* (the art of stick) – main positions/standings (114-115) and 6 forms (116-137).

Chapter IV. “Buddhism” is generally about Buddhism in Japan. It contains also some paragraphs on Confucianism and Taoism in Japan (155-157). After that we find presentation of techniques and forms of *naginata-jutsu* (the art of *naginata* glave).

Chapter V. "Sutras" has basic information on Sanskrit – the language of Aryas. Mandalas and mudras (magic hand gestures) are performed in many cultures as a psychological strengthening or amulet [cf. Malinowski 1990]. This chapter contains presentation of forms *ryoto-no tachi* – combat with two swords [Mor-Stabilini 2016: 207-212], too.

Chapter VI. "The Buddha and Bodhisattva" is also connected with Buddhism and old Indian legends (e.g. the Goddess Marishiten). After this description the *sojutsu* forms are presented.

Chapter VII. "The Japanese sword: Nipponto" shows mythology, manufacturing technology and variety of samurai swords (sabres). This chapter and the next are related to hoplology.

Chapter VIII. "Sword mountings – Japanese armour" presents the weapons and armour, and also 11 basic forms of *iaijutsu*.

Chapter IX. "Martial tradition of Japan" – 34 arts/methods of *bujutsu* are listed here: from archery to the use of the bayonet. We find here connections with *kendo* (pp. 332-333), secret forms of *gogyo-no tachi* (334-343), and *kodachi-jutsu* (348-351).

Conclusion (pages 353-357) contains only a short reference to Christianity (the Jesuit Francis Xavier, etc., p. 355). Next, in the *Epilogue* (p. 358) we can read, that "do" is a pathway towards a universal truth.

As a supplement or appendix the Glossary (pp. 359-380) is added. It is followed by Bibliography. The whole book is supplemented by notes about the author and the executive institution (Jitakyoei Budo) and pictures – reproductions of works of art.

Methodology

What is the research methodology used by the author? This is in particular, long-term observation of participants and *shugyo*. The author has gained practical knowledge through his long-term *kobudo* studies in Europe and Japan. This method also researches the sources of old manuscripts. Some of them are shown in the publication.

Reproduction of works of art and other cultural artefacts, cited in the book are also sources of knowledge, and help to describe and understand the cultural context of the functioning of martial arts schools. This is, in a sense (whether or not intentionally) the Visual sociology method [cf. Sawicki 2016].

There are no references to articles in scientific journals, as papers. In the Bibliography there are only links to editions of books. But there are also no references to the important book by Sugino and Ito [2010], which after the Japanese editions, has already been published in German and Russian.

On the other hand, showing the next steps of forms (*kata*) through the series of photos has been well devel-

oped in the publication, and can help in teaching or learning these forms.

Discussion

Martial arts cultures are different. In the case of classical and traditional varieties, these are in particular cultural heritage items – Chinese, Japanese or Korean [cf. Friday, Humitake 1997; Cynarski 2013b; Lin 2016]. In the case of this book a reference to *kendo* culture has taken place [cf. Bennett 2015; Mor-Stabilini 2016: 332-333], but the classical *kenjutsu* has its peculiarities within the *bushi* culture phenomenon. This is due to the fact that the Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu School of Shintoism was founded.

What is the relationship between Mor-Stabilini's monograph and previous books devoted to the Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu school? It is probably better illustrated and contains some new content [cf. Reid, Croucher 1983; Otake 2007; Sugino, Ito 2010].

What new content does this monograph bring to the state of knowledge? These are in particular descriptions of technical forms – basic and some advanced. These are quite willingly practised by the martial arts enthusiasts [Panczyk, Cynarski 2006; Cynarski 2013a]. It is a pity that there is no description nor photos of *yawara / jujutsu* techniques: the 36 techniques of Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu.

It is clear, however, that the Aryas and their Indian descendants indirectly influenced the ideological underpinnings of classical martial arts in Japan as well. For example, the Goddess Marishiten (woman warrior Marici) is the main deity of Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu. Interestingly, Anatole Klyosov believes that Scythians and today's Slavs are from the Aryas [Klyosov 2015; cf. Cynarski, Maciejewska 2016]. Similarly, Indra, who was probably the chief of the Aria, is today the main figure of Hinduism.

Who is this publication recommended for? It is useful as a textbook both for beginners in the practice of *kobudo* Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu as well as advanced students and practitioners. The reason for this assessment is the well-illustrated description of the technical forms and the compendium of knowledge (Japanese terminology, history, etc.). For similar reasons, this publication may be recommended to martial artists, and ideological and anthropological-cultural students interested in classic martial arts schools.

Summary

The article contains theoretical introduction, information about the author of the book, reference to the content of the book, reference to the methodological part: sources

and bibliographies, editorial and aesthetic side, discussion with reference to the literature of the subject and a summary with the assessment.

The particular value of the monograph reviewed is the synthesis of knowledge and the large number of photographs. The conclusion is this book is a valuable addition to the traditional martial arts publications market.

E-sources

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Kultura japońskiego kenjutsu według traktatu Sergia Mor-Stabiliniego

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, studia kulturowe, kobudo, ko-ryu, ryu-ha

Abstrakt

Problem. Celem jest recenzja książki pod tytułem *The Ancient Art of the Japanese Sword. The ancient school of Tenshin Shoden*

Katori Shinto Ryu along historical, cultural and spiritual path, oraz refleksja nad stanem badań w tym zakresie.

Metoda. Przyjęto metodę analizy treści literatury przedmiotu, oraz dedukcyjną i komparatystyczną. Ponadto autor tego artykułu stosuje metodę *shugyo* – własnych długoletnich studiów i obserwacji.

Wyniki. Artykuł zawiera kolejno teoretyczne wprowadzenie, informację o autorze książki, odniesienie merytoryczne do jej treści, odniesienie strony metodologicznej – do źródeł

i bibliografii, do strony edytorskiej i estetycznej, dyskusję z odniesieniami do literatury przedmiotu i podsumowanie z oceną. Ta ocena jest bardzo pozytywna.

Wnioski. Szczególną wartością tej recenzowanej tu monografii jest ujęcie syntetyzujące wiedzy i wielka liczba dobrej jakości zdjęć, ilustrujących opisy form technicznych. Można podsumować, że ta recenzowana książka (traktat) jest wartościowym przyczynkiem do stanu wiedzy o tradycyjnych sztukach walk i znaczącą pozycją na rynku wydawniczym z tej tematyki.
