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Buddhism and Martial Arts in Premodern Japan: New Observations from a Religious Historical Perspective

Steven Trenson

School of International Liberal Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo 169-8050, Japan; st_trenson@waseda.jp

Abstract: This article investigates two issues regarding the Buddhism of premodern Japanese martial arts. The first issue concerns the historical channels through which Buddhist elements were adopted into martial lineages, and the second pertains to the general character of the Buddhism that can be found in the various martial art initiation documents (*densho*). As for the first issue, while previous scholarship underscored Shugendō (mountain asceticism) as an important factor in the earliest phases of the integration process of Buddhist elements in martial schools, this study focuses on textual evidence that points to what is referred to as “medieval Shinto”—a Shinto tradition that heavily relied on Esoteric Buddhist (Mikkyō) teachings—in scholarship. Regarding the second issue, although numerous studies have already shown the indebtedness of premodern martial schools to Buddhist teachings drawn mainly from the Esoteric Buddhist or Zen traditions, this article sheds more light on the nature of these teachings by drawing attention to the fact that they often emphasize the Buddhist thought of *isshin* or “One Mind”. The article illustrates how this thought was adopted in premodern martial art texts and in doing so clarifies the reasons why Buddhism was valued in those arts.

Keywords: martial arts; *densho* (martial art initiation texts); Buddhism; medieval Shinto; Esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō); Zen; *isshin* (One Mind)



Citation: Trenson, Steven. 2022.

Buddhism and Martial Arts in
Premodern Japan: New Observations
from a Religious Historical
Perspective. *Religions* 13: 440.
[https://doi.org/10.3390/
rel13050440](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050440)Academic Editors: Tsunehiko Sugiki
and Akira Nishimura

Received: 30 March 2022

Accepted: 5 May 2022

Published: 13 May 2022

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1. Introduction: Brief Overview of the Subject and Purpose of the Present Article

It is well known today in the field of scholarship on martial arts that there was a connection between Buddhism and martial disciplines in premodern Japan. Japanese schools or lineages (*ryū* 流) of martial arts existed already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (e.g., the Ogasawara-ryū 小笠原流 school of horsemanship and archery) and their number gradually increased in the fourteenth century (e.g., the Nen-ryū 念流 fencing school founded by the former Zen 禅 monk and mountain ascetic Nen'ami Jion 念阿弥慈恩). Most of the renowned martial schools, however, including the famous Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū 天真正伝香取神道流 and Shinkage-ryū 新陰流 fencing lineages, were established in the period between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, which forms the golden age of premodern martial arts. While these *ryū* naturally involved the practice of combat-effective techniques, many of them also integrated religious elements. These elements were derived from different traditions, including Shinto, Chinese cosmology, and Confucianism, and frequently from Buddhism.¹ A quick look at the numerous martial art initiation documents (*densho* 伝書) published in the *Nihon budō taikai* 日本武道大系 (Compendium of Japanese Martial Arts; Imamura 1982) suffices to support that fact. A number of modern studies on traditional martial arts, such as Ōmori (1991), Friday (1997), Haskel (2013), and Hall (2014), to name but a few, have also clarified this point.

As Kuroki (1967) has argued, it is likely that the early process of the integration of Buddhist elements in martial arts occurred under the influence of Shugendō 修験道, the Japanese tradition of mountain asceticism. This tradition consists of a mixture of different religious currents, especially Shinto and Esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō 密教), and is characterized by “martial-like” features, such as shouting while sitting under a waterfall

or cultivating spiritual power to overcome fear (of evil spirits). Kuroki focuses on the fact that in many a case the founder of a traditional martial lineage (like Jion of the Nen-ryū) is said to have trained under a mountain ascetic or performed ascetic practices himself near a shrine or sacred place, and he identifies the various Esoteric Buddhist symbols, terminologies, and thoughts that one can find in some of the oldest *densho* as proof of the influence of Shugendō on the early formation of those arts.

Besides Esoteric Buddhism, another form of Buddhism that one often encounters in the premodern *densho* of martial arts is Zen. About this, much ink has already flown in past and more recent years. Indeed, as is well known, Yagyū Munenori 柳生宗矩 (1571–1646), Shinkage-ryū master and fencing instructor to the Tokugawa shoguns, held correspondences with Takuan Sōhō 沢庵宗彭 (1573–1646), a Zen Buddhist priest of the Rinzaï 臨濟 school. Two texts attributed to Takuan, the *Fudōchi shinmyō roku* 不動智神妙録 (Record of the Marvelous Power of Immovable Wisdom) and the *Tai'a ki* 太阿記 (On the Sword Taie), provide several expositions on the equivalence between Zen and fencing. Munenori himself wrote the *Heihō kadensho* 兵法家伝書 (Family-Transmitted Book on the Art of the Sword, 1632), which also underscores Zen Buddhist aspects. Takuan, together with Munenori, thus laid down the foundation of the interrelationship between Zen and fencing, which in Japanese is commonly referred to by the idiom “*ken-Zen ichinyō*” 劍禪一如, or “the art of the sword and Zen are one” (Haskel 2013).²

Takuan’s ideas further inspired martial artists throughout the Edo period (Kasai 2016) and became widely known in the West in the modern era through the writings of Suzuki ([1938] 1959) on Zen and the art of the sword. Suzuki’s work influenced the German Neo-Kantian scholar Eugen Herrigel (1884–1955), who wrote two essays on Japanese archery, in which he had been instructed by Awa Kenzō 阿波研造 (1880–1939) when he was working as a visiting professor at Tōhoku Imperial University in Japan between 1924 and 1929.³ In these essays, and especially in the second one, Herrigel suggests that archery is a form of spiritual practice in which the practitioner can experience Zen enlightenment.

Recently, however, the perceived connection between Zen and martial arts has drawn sharp criticism from scholars. Yamada (1999, 2001), for example, argues that Herrigel is likely to have exaggerated the religious nature of the instructions received from Awa and to have been responsible for inventing the “myth” that there is a strong connection between Zen and Japanese archery. To be more precise, Yamada does not deny that traditional archery had been influenced by Zen or that Zen was integrated into the mental attitude of the premodern warrior, but he refutes the thought that there had been a direct link between the official Zen establishment and archery.⁴ A similar but more nuanced position is taken by Bodiford ([2005] 2014). Limiting the scope of the word “Zen” to “institutional Zen”—i.e., the Zen Buddhism that is founded on *kōan* 公案 initiations and transmissions and which is legitimized by the passing on of a lineage (*kechimyaku* 血脈 or “bloodline”)—he argues, like Yamada, that there is no indication of there ever having been a strong connection between that kind of Zen and martial arts.⁵ He further notes that besides Zen, Takuan also used thoughts that are generic to different sects of Japanese Buddhism or which are derived from other traditions such as Confucianism. Bodiford does, however, indicate a case of an orthodox Zen-lineage teaching being adapted and simplified by an ordained Zen monk for the ears of a warrior in 1664. The case that he discusses is that of the “Sword Blades [Facing] Upward” (*kenjin-jō* 劍刃上) *kōan* phrase, which, to the warrior, involves a type of mindset that enables him to overcome fear, avoid rebirth in hell, and execute a sword technique effectively even in the direst circumstances.⁶ As one account puts it, it is also simply about striking with all one’s might, and without disturbance, as soon as the enemy is about to attack (Bodiford [2005] 2014, p. 94).

Yamada and Bodiford together make an important point, but their criticism should not detract from the fact that some martial artists in the premodern period did learn about Buddhist thoughts and beliefs and integrated them into their art. This is evidenced by the numerous Buddhist elements in the *densho*. While it is of course impossible to confirm that all those who received the *densho* truly cared about those Buddhist teachings—many of

them perhaps did not—since the teachings are encapsulated in the texts of those *densho*, it is possible to say that there was a “Buddhism of the premodern martial artist”. This Buddhism has a specific place in the larger framework of Japanese Buddhism, and as such, as a topic in the history of Japanese religions, the article would like to examine two basic questions related to this.

The first question concerns the socio-historical channels or sources through which martial artists obtained their Buddhist knowledge. It seems evident enough that Buddhist elements slipped through the chinks of the martial armor due to warriors receiving instructions from mountain ascetics or Buddhist monks, but recent findings in the field of Japanese religious studies may shed more light on the exact circumstances or contexts in which this occurred. One of the purposes of this article is to introduce these new findings, which point to the relevance of what is called “medieval Shinto” in scholarship to the process of the integration of Buddhist elements in premodern martial arts.

The second question concerns the nature of the Buddhism that was adopted by the martial artist in premodern Japan. Despite the numerous studies already existing on this matter, only a few of them have investigated how this Buddhism relates to the doctrines espoused by the institutional Buddhist sects. It may be assumed that martial artists embraced an adapted form of Buddhist thought, a fact that can be illustrated by the *kōan* case discussed by Bodiford ([2005] 2014); but what exactly was this adapted form about, or to what extent was this Buddhism in a Buddhological sense different from the Buddhism of the established sects? In regard to this question, this article would like to clarify that, in essence, the Buddhism of the premodern martial artist was on par with a form of thought that was generally shared by many, if not all, Japanese Buddhist sects (including Zen) during that period. This thought concerns the concept of *isshin* 一心 or “One Mind”, which constitutes a view of enlightenment that takes an all-inclusive outlook on the world of phenomena by subsuming them under one mental principle. This article intends to show that the Buddhism of premodern martial arts texts was greatly indebted to this strand of Buddhist philosophy.

2. Mandalic Weapons: Premodern Martial Arts and Medieval Shinto

As was noted in the introductory section of this article, it has been proposed by Kuroki (1967) that one of the factors behind the integration of Buddhist elements in some of the earliest martial arts lineages had been mountain asceticism (Shugendō). For example, Kuroki focuses on the presence of symbols related to the Esoteric Buddhist deity Fudō 不動 (*Acalanātha*), a quite popular deity among mountain ascetics,⁷ in the early *densho* and regards this as a sign of the influence of Shugendō on martial arts. This conclusion, however, can be put in a different light.

In a recent book, Itō Satoshi dedicates a chapter to the discussion of what he calls *zassho* 雑書 or “miscellaneous texts” (Itō 2016, pp. 129–44). These are texts related to various aspects of mundane culture (martial arts, medicine, pharmaceuticals, divination, and other crafts) which include a mix of different religious interpretations (Shinto, Buddhist, and Daoist) about these aspects. Although often ignored in scholarship, they offer valuable clues about the “lived” religion in the late medieval and early modern periods. In the chapter, Itō focuses on a group of *zassho* which relate to the classical archery of the Ogasawara-ryū and discusses the Buddhist elements that can be encountered in them.⁸

One of the texts discussed by Itō is the *Kyūhō kanjō no maki* 弓方灌頂卷 (Scroll of Initiation in [the Secrets of] Archery), which was passed on in 1504 by Ogasawara Masakiyo 小笠原政清 (d.u.) to one of his disciples. In the opening section of this document, it is said that the bow has its origin in the tala (palm) tree which grows on “Mount Wisdom” (Hanniyasan 般若山) in India,⁹ from which seven different types of bow are made: the egg-shape bow (*rangyōkyū* 卵形弓), the serpent-shape bow (*jagyōkyū* 蛇形弓), the three-powers (heaven, earth, man) bow (*sansaikyū* 三才弓), the yin-yang bow (*in'yōkyū* 陰陽弓), the felicitous-store bow (*fukuzōkyū* 福蔵弓), the progeny bow (*shisonkyū* 子孫弓), and the peace-bringing bow (*heiseikyū* 平世弓). The first two types will be explained shortly below.

The “three-powers bow” is a bow that is used in a ceremonial event for the sake of a three-year-old child. The “yin-yang bow”, despite its abstract appellation, is used at the occasion of a marriage to pray for a happy married life and many children. The “felicitous-store bow” is wielded in ceremonies for the protection of a family or for increasing luck and long life; the “progeny bow” at the occasion of passing on one’s possessions and property to one’s progeny; and the “peace-bringing bow” to pray for the pacification of the realm and the well-being of all living beings.

Each of these seven bows was associated with various intricate Buddhist meanings and interpretations. Concerning the “egg-shape bow” and the “serpent-shape bow”, the following is said:

The first type, the egg-shape bow, is the primordial [life] bow that exists before one is born; it is the bow that is put “inside the receptacle”. With “bow inside the receptacle” is meant [primordial life inside] the mother’s womb, the august seat of the “original shrine” (*hongū* 本宮). That is the reason why the mother’s womb is called “receptacle” (*fukuro* 袋). That one speaks of “putting the bow in the receptacle” is related to the same thought. Then, the meaning of the term “egg shape” is the following. After a man and a woman marry, they exchange the red and white fluids (*shakubyaku* 赤白; menstrual blood and semen), and then [the primordial life-spirit] remains for nine months inside the mother’s womb. During the first month, the state of being inside the womb is like that of a silkworm [inside a cocoon]. That is why one speaks of “egg shape”; it is how a [human life] is made in the initial phase. This is the bow inside the mother’s womb.

About the second type, the serpent-shape bow, there is a precious sword (*hōken* 宝劍) in the human realm that is called the “sword of six serpents”. Based on this aspect of six serpents, a bow is made that is called the “serpent-shape bow”. When talking about the source of life, it first assumes the shape of an egg during the first month. Then, in the second and third months, life takes on the shape of a single-pronged *vajra* club (*tokkoshō* 独鉗杵), and for that reason, it is referred to as *ha-ra* (*kara* 加羅). During the fourth and fifth months, [life] assumes the shape of the five agents (*gogyō* 五行). In this phase, one refers to it as *a-vi-ra-hūṃ-khaṃ*, that is, earth-water-fire-wind-space.¹⁰ Afterward, the realm made up by the six sense-organs, the six sense-objects, and the six consciousnesses, as well as the six *zō* 臟 and six *fu* 腑 viscera, all of which carry the number six, develop. Therefore, within Shinto, the bow with which an arrow is shot at the target in ceremonies related to kami (Japanese gods) is this bow that is called the “bow in the shape of [six] serpents. [...]” (Itō 2016, pp. 134–35)

From the citations above, it appears that both bows—which are, incidentally, not mere concepts but real, physical bows—are associated with religious (Shinto, Buddhist, and Daoist) theories about the origin of life and the formation of the fetus inside the mother’s womb. The egg-shape bow represents the pre-natal primordial source of life, which enters the mother’s womb and then further develops in the ensuing nine months, assuming different shapes (egg, *vajra*, five agents). From the fact that the text refers to the “red and white fluids” (menstrual blood and semen), it can be surmised that the author knew the basics of Buddhist embryology as described in such scriptures as Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmaśāstra* (Commentary on the Treasury of the Abhidharma). According to this treatise, upon death, the “intermediate being” (Skt. *antarābhava*, J. *chūu* 中有)—consciousness and accompanying karmic seeds—enters the womb of one’s mother in the next life, intermingles with the menstrual blood and semen of one’s parents, dies, and then immediately, like a sprout coming forth from a germinating seed, acquires the six sense organs (eyes, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind).¹¹ The *Kyūhō kanjō no maki*, however, quite different from the orthodox Buddhist perception, replaces the intermediate being with the “primordial bow”, which assumes the shape of an egg or silkworm cocoon in the first month.

About the serpent-shape bow, the *Ichchōkyū no maki* 一張弓卷 (Scroll of the One Bow), which was passed on in 1819 by a man called Okuno Tatewaki 奥野帯刀 (d.u.) to Uesaka Hayata 上坂隼太 (d.u.), also depicts a bow that is said to be the embodiment of two serpents whose tails are interlocked around the position of the grip (Figure 1). The various parts of this bow (the nocks, the rattan bands, etc.), moreover, are symbolically interconnected to various Buddhist elements, such as the Nine Luminaries (*kuyō* 九曜), the seven stars of the Northern Dipper (*hokuto shichisei* 北斗七星), the Twenty-eight Constellations (*nijūhasshuku* 二十八宿), and the Thirty-six Animals (*sanjūrokkū* 三十六禽), which are associated with the thirty-six followers of Fudō. Additionally, the inner and outer (bamboo) faces of the bow, colored black and red, are said to represent the twin mandalas (*ryōbu mandara* 両部曼荼羅), i.e., the Womb Mandala (*Taizō mandara* 胎藏曼荼羅) and Vajra-realm Mandala (*Kongōkai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅), the two fundamental cosmograms of Japanese Esoteric Buddhist tradition.

Furthermore, the text in the scroll explains that the serpent-bow is said to have appeared at a time when a kingdom (in India) was attacked by an enemy force and when a poisonous serpent called *tsutsuga* 恙 (calamity, disease) began roaming the country, killing many humans and horses. It is further added that the double-serpent bow embodies heaven and earth and the myriad things in between and has the power to drive away evil birds and animals, foul spirits, and the Demon (J. Maō 魔王), that is, Māra, who assailed the Buddha before his ultimate awakening. Interestingly, the scroll cites a Buddhist scripture saying that “the bow is [nothing but] the clear moon which holds, as if in a womb, the life of all sentient beings”.¹² No such instruction can be found in the scriptures, however, which could indicate that the thought had been derived from extra-canonical or popular Buddhist discourses.¹³

Incidentally, it should be noted that the association of the bow with Buddhist aspects is not unique to the abovementioned scroll. For example, the *Takeda-ryū yumitsuruya no zu no maki* 武田流弓弦矢弓卷 (Scroll Containing Images of the Bow, String, and Arrow [Transmitted in] the Takeda-Ryū, 1704) mentions a bow called *jaōkyō* 麝形弓 (musk-deer bow), of which the nocks are associated with the Buddhist jewel that grants all desires (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠) and the bowstring with the notion of the subjugation of the three poisons (*sandoku* 三毒), i.e., desire, anger, and ignorance, which are the three basic afflictions obstructing Buddhist awakening. The text also shows a forked arrowhead (*karimata* 雁股) of which the two ends are connected to Fudō and Aizen'ō 愛染王 (Figure 2a).¹⁴ Another interesting bow introduced in the same text is the *fukuzōkyō* 福造弓 (fortune-making bow), of which the upper nock is associated with the wish-fulfilling jewel and the lower nock with Ugajin 宇賀神, a deity closely associated in premodern Japan with Benzaiten 弁財天, the Buddhist goddess of wealth and good fortune.¹⁵ Interestingly, the drawing shows Ugajin in the shape of two small serpents, one male and one female (Figure 2b).¹⁶

As Itō argues, the *Kyūhō kanjō no maki* offers important clues for better understanding the way through which Buddhist elements were adopted by warriors at the time. Indeed, drawing the attention to the word “*kanjō*” (consecration, initiation, or unction) in the title of that scroll, Itō surmises that the instructions about the seven bow types mentioned therein were passed on through an initiation rite. Initiation rituals (*kanjō*, Skt. *abhiṣeka*) are one of the cornerstones of Esoteric Buddhism, used by a master to pass on esoteric knowledge to his disciple. In the medieval period, however, such initiation rituals were also conducted in the worlds of poetry and Shinto, and, as can now be confirmed, apparently in the world of classical archery as well.

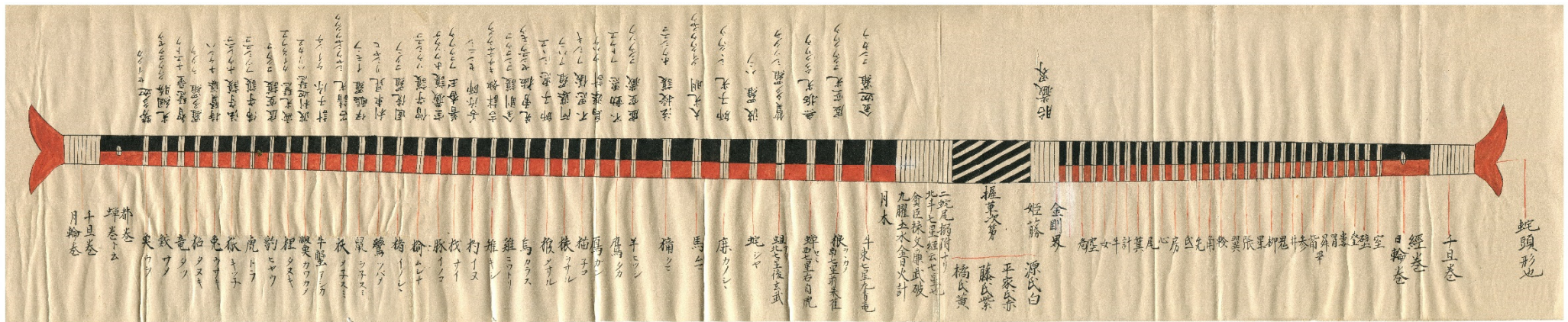


Figure 1. Serpent-Headed Bow. *Icchōkyū no maki* (Scroll of the One Bow, 1819). This bow is also referred to in other sources as the “mandalic bow” (*mandara-kyū* 曼荼羅弓). Author’s private possession.

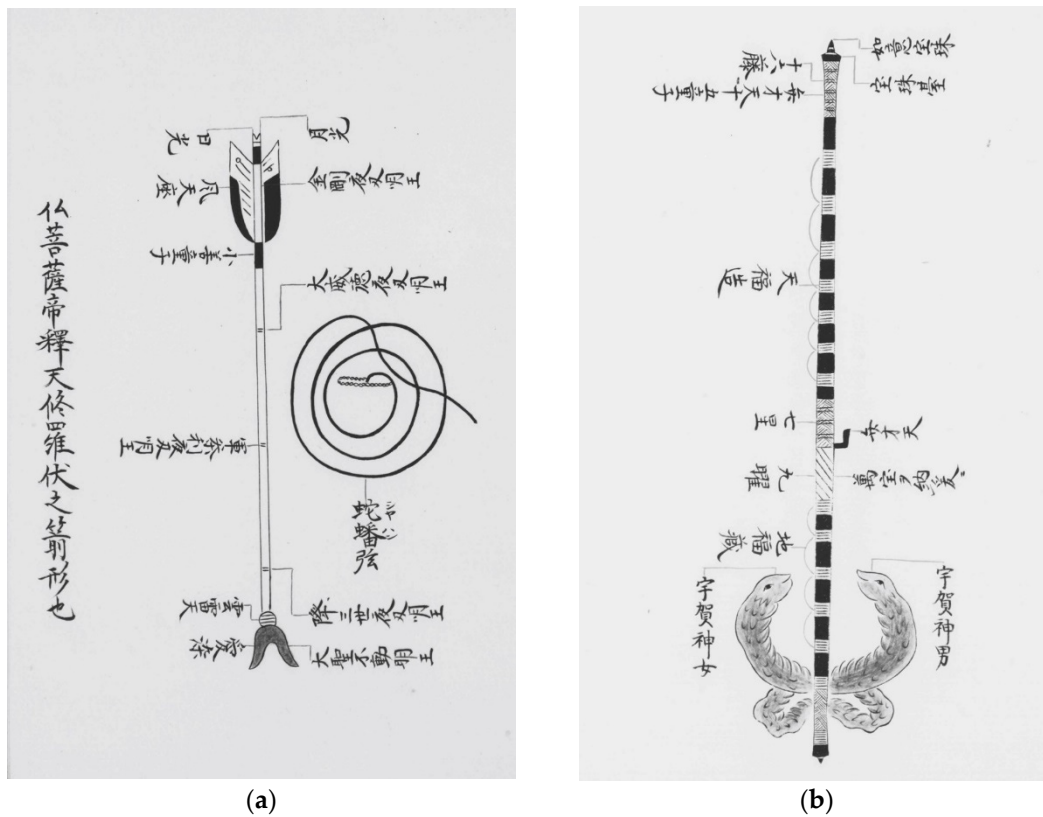


Figure 2. Bow and arrow. *Takeda-ryū yumitsuruya no zu no maki* (Scroll Containing Images of the Bow, String, and Arrow [Transmitted in] the Takeda-Ryū, 1704). (a) Image of the arrow used with the *jagyōkyū* (musk-deer bow), of which the forked arrowhead is associated with Fudō and Aizen'ō. (b) Image of the *fukuzōkyū* (fortune-making bow), showing two Ugajin serpent deities at the bottom. Courtesy of the Kōchi Castle Museum of History.

As for Shinto, the two major kami-related cultic sites where esoteric initiations (*jingi kanjō* 神祇灌頂) were formed are Mount Miwa 三輪山 and Mount Murō 室生山, both dedicated to the worship of a serpent-kami (resp. Ōmononushi and Takaokami). The initiations created at those sites transmitted secrets about Buddhahood, the kami of Japan, and the three imperial treasures (*sanshu no jingi* 三種の神器): the sacred sword, the mirror, and the jewel. Although called “medieval Shinto” in scholarly writings, much of the form and content of these initiations was derived from Esoteric Buddhism. Indeed, the “Shinto” traditions of both cultic places—referred to as the Miwa-ryū Shintō 三輪流神道 and Goryū Shintō 御流神道 lineages—assembled a great variety of Esoteric Buddhist thoughts and imageries related to the serpent, the wish-fulfilling jewel, and the twin mandalas, which are often associated with Fudō and Aizen. Nonetheless, despite its indebtedness to Esoteric Buddhism, medieval Shinto was a tradition centered on the kami with a distinctive identity separate from the orthodox Esoteric Buddhist schools. The hybrid Shinto–Esoteric Buddhist teachings of this tradition, moreover, were carried on until the separation of Shinto from Buddhism in the modern period.¹⁷

By the late Muromachi period (1336–1573), as Itō has shown, medieval Shinto consecration rites, which were hitherto kept secret, had come to be increasingly passed on to laypersons, male and female, including warriors and peasants. A remarkable and, for the purpose of this article, crucial characteristic of these “laicized” initiation rites is that adapted versions of the three imperial treasures were handed down to the lay initiate, their form varying according to the class or gender to which the initiate belonged. For example, in the *oyashiro kanjō* 父母代灌頂 (father–mother unction),¹⁸ an initiation rite for laypeople derived from the Goryū Shintō lineage, warriors received the three regalia in the form of a

tachi 太刀 sword, a *katana* 刀, and a bow; peasants received them in the shape of a sickle, plow, and pot; while women received red and white powder foundation (or *tatōgami* 畳紙 paper) and a mirror (Itō 2016, p. 135).

From such facts, Itō surmises that the world of classical archery was likely strongly influenced by medieval Shinto traditions. In fact, in his study he even provides concrete proof of that influence. Citing the *Jingi hiki* 神祇秘記 (Secret Notes of the Heavenly and Earthly Kami), an exegetical medieval Shinto text which records various explications on the *oyashiro kanjō*, he focuses on the following instructions mentioned in a section related to the secrets of the three regalia (which here appear in the form of a *tachi*, *katana*, and bow):

The Three Jewels (*sanbō* 三宝) for warrior families are the *tachi*, *katana*, and bow. Originally, [these three weapons are derived from] the precious [imperial] sword. In a remote past, during the age of the gods (*kamiyo* 神代), when the Demon (Maō) came down [from the sixth heaven] to rampage on earth, the [imperial] sword split into two [halves], [each] becoming a *katana* sword. [With this sword], the Demon was swiftly subdued, and as a result, the whole land prospered. This is the origin of the *katana* sword.¹⁹

About the origin of the bow, there is a mountain in India called “Tsukui-yama” 付山 on which *tala* trees grow. This tree has seven branches. These seven branches are cut to make the seven types of bow out of them. (Then the text enumerates the seven bow types already mentioned above). The first bow type (in the shape of an egg) is the primordial bow, which constitutes our original nature. [...] The second bow type, in the shape of a serpent, is the bow that is used in kami-related events. It is [the bow used in] *yabusame* 流鏑馬 (horseback archery) at the occasion of a Shinto ceremony. (Itō 2016, p. 136)

As the text mentions the seven bows that are also discussed in the *Kyūhō kanjō no maki* passed on by Ogasawara Masakiyo, there seems to be no doubt that this particular aspect of the classical Ogasawara-ryū archery school had been inherited from the secularized Goryū Shintō tradition.

The embryological details associated with two of these bows—the egg-shape and serpent-shape bows—mentioned in the same *Kyūhō kanjō no maki* were probably also derived from medieval Shinto. Indeed, as Itō (2016, pp. 137–39) further argued, during the medieval period in Japan, Buddhist embryology was enriched with various Esoteric Buddhist thoughts and images which do not appear in the canonical Buddhist texts. This process occurred within orthodox Mikkyō circles but also within the world of medieval Shinto.²⁰ The *Tainai kugatsu kaeyō no zu* 胎内九月替様図 (Images of the Changes of the [Fetus] During the Nine Months of Gestation in the Womb), for example, which belongs to the Goryū Shintō tradition, describes an embryogenesis in which the first seven-day period of development of the embryo is said to take the shape resembling that of a full moon, the second seven-day period the shape of a single-pronged *vajra* club, and the third the shape of a bow to which a bowstring-like thread (the umbilical cord) is attached. The idea of the bow as the embodiment of primordial life mentioned in the *Kyūhō kanjō no maki* was likely adopted from such medieval Shinto elaborations of Buddhist embryology.

That the premodern archery lineage of the Ogasawara-ryū had integrated Buddhist elements from medieval Shinto traditions is thus not to be doubted, but perhaps this phenomenon was not restricted to this specific archery school. Indeed, it is striking that the *densho* of the Takeda-ryū mentioned above underscores the serpent, the twin mandalas, the jewel, and the deities Fudō and Aizen. Although many of these elements are stricto sensu Esoteric Buddhist in nature, they also characterize medieval Shinto. It is possible, therefore, that the elements were integrated in the Takeda-ryū *densho* through medieval Shinto and not through orthodox Esoteric Buddhism. Additionally, although further research must confirm this, it could be that medieval Shinto influenced premodern martial arts other than archery as well. It is not known how many warriors received initiation in the Goryū Shintō or Miwa-ryū Shintō traditions and to what extent the teachings of these traditions

affected the development of martial arts in the late medieval and early modern periods. Future studies may shed more light on this and perhaps reveal that the degree of influence is higher than one would expect.

3. The Buddhism of the Premodern Martial Artist

As noted in the beginning of this article, there is what we may call the “Buddhism of the premodern martial artist”. What is this Buddhism about, and how does it relate to the Buddhism of the established Buddhist sects? This is the question that will be examined in the second part of this article.

3.1. The General Character of Premodern Japanese Buddhism

Let us first begin with a discussion of the general nature of premodern Japanese Buddhism. The Buddhist schools established in Japan since the sixth century CE naturally each had their specific doctrines and curricula. However, the two Buddhist currents that may be said to have had the greatest influence on martial arts—Esoteric Buddhism and Zen—are similar in that they share a form of thought that values the idea of a permanent principle, not separated from mind, out of which all phenomena arise. This is thought to go against the fundamental premise of traditional Buddhism (*nikāya* Buddhism and early Mahāyāna). Indeed, the Buddha is thought to have rejected the existence of a permanent self, core, essence, or basis—the *anātman* theory—and the Mahāyāna philosophy of emptiness (Skt. *sūnyatā*, J. *kū* 空), systematized in the second century CE, is a description of what phenomena in truth essentially are (i.e., essenceless) and does not constitute a basis or source for those phenomena. Thus, the general character of traditional Buddhism is believed to be antithetical to, for example, the pre-Buddhist Upanishadic philosophy of the *Ātman*, i.e., the suprasensory, eternal, immutable essence that pervades and sustains the world.²¹

However, something happened on the way to *nirvāṇa*, for ideas of eternalism eventually found their way into the Buddhist fold.²² This is not the place to discuss the complex process of how this occurred in detail, but the tendency to express enlightenment in terms of something eternal can be conveniently illustrated with the characteristics of perhaps one of the most influential texts in East Asian Buddhism: the *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith* (Ch. *Dasheng qixin lun*, J. *Daijō kishin ron* 大乘起信論; hereinafter, *Treatise*).

Although attributed to Aśvaghōṣa (c. first century CE) and said to have been translated by Paramārtha (499–569) in 550 CE, the *Treatise* was more than likely created in China. It is famous for describing the human mind in terms of the “One [Absolute] Mind” (Ch. *yixin* 一心, J. *isshin*). This One Mind subsumes all phenomena (*dharmas*) and therefore forms the basis of all human experience, even of physical things. The One Mind, furthermore, is said to unify two different mental modes: the mind of “suchness” (Skt. *tathatā*, Ch. *zhenru* 真如, J. *shinnyo*) and the mind of “arising and ceasing” (*saṃsāra*; birth-and-death). The mind of suchness is the enlightened mind of emptiness, which is pure, unconditioned, immutable, and permanent, and is identified with the *tathāgatagarbha*, the “seed” or “repository” of a buddha (*nyoraizō* 如来藏). Originally, the *tathāgatagarbha* denoted the potential for awakening in human beings, but in the context of the *Treatise*, it came to stand for the enlightened mind of suchness, which is perceived as not merely a potential but as something that abides eternally and immutably. The mind of arising and ceasing, then, is the deluded mind, which is impure, conditioned, and subject to birth-and-death, and is associated with the store consciousness (Skt. *ālayavijñāna*; J. *zōshiki* 藏識), which contains defiled karmic seeds, of Yogācāra tradition.²³

These two minds, according to the *Treatise*, are “One Mind”. They are not separate but “move together”, so to speak, with the understanding that the enlightened mind of suchness, while always moving along with the unenlightened mind of arising and ceasing, is never affected by the latter.²⁴ The *Treatise*, however, further explains that the mind of suchness (*tathāgatagarbha*) constitutes the ground of the unenlightened mind (the defiled store consciousness; Hakeda [1967] 2006, p. 43). This is a most problematic proposition since it implies the incoherent thought that the conditioned, deluded, and defiled nature

of the mind arises from something that is intrinsically unconditioned, enlightened, and pure. This proposition also problematizes the essential nature of the One Mind: is it the mind of suchness (*tathāgatagarbha*) or not? Since it is asserted that the unenlightened mind is grounded on the mind of suchness, the *Treatise*'s position seems to be that it is.²⁵

Finally, the *Treatise* further explains the enlightened mind of suchness to be empty like space. This “space” is not nothingness—since the mind of suchness, like the mind of arising and ceasing, contains all phenomena—but a state of mind that is all-pervasive and free from obstructions. This mind is also referred to with the term “original awakening” (*hongaku* 本覺), which is said to be equal to the initial awakening (*shigaku* 始覺) obtained when non-awakening (*fugaku* 不覺) is overcome.²⁶

The *Treatise*, thus, suggests that the One Mind, the foundation of which is the enlightened mind of suchness (*tathāgatagarbha*), constitutes the source of all phenomena. The tenets of this text were valued in all Sinitic Buddhist schools, but especially in the Huayan 華嚴 and Chan 禪 lineages. In Huayan, which had a great influence on Chan, the tendency grew to conflate the One Mind with the *tathāgatagarbha* (see Note 25) and to regard the latter as the only real existing entity. This school thus came to denigrate the deluded mind and all conditioned phenomena it apprehends as unreal and lacking any substance (Jorgensen et al. 2019, p. 49; Tamura 1973, p. 491).

In Japan, the tenets of the *Treatise* were integrated by both the Shingon 真言 and Tendai 天台 Esoteric Buddhist schools established in the early ninth century and was central to the Zen schools formed in the early thirteenth century as well. Shingon adapted the *Treatise*'s notion of the eternal mind of suchness (*tathatā*) in terms of the harmony (interfusion) of the six elements (*rokudai* 六大; earth, water, fire, wind, space, and mind) and conceptualizes this as the *dharmakāya* (dharma-body; *hosshin* 法身) Mahāvairocana (Dainichi 大日) Buddha. This *dharmakāya* is fundamentally consciousness and the ontological basis of existence. This basis, however, is “originally unproduced” (Skt. *anutpāda*, J. *honpushō* 本不生) and is not a first cause. Yet, just like the letter A (*A-ji* 阿字), another symbol for the mind of suchness (*tathatā*), it is the source of all things and subsumes all phenomena (Kiyota 1978, pp. 60–74).

In Tendai, the thoughts of the *Treatise* eventually gave rise to what is called “*Tendai hongaku ron*” 天台本覺論, or “*Tendai hongaku theory*”, in scholarship. This theory should be distinguished from the tenets propounded by the *Treatise*, where awakening is still something that needs to be revealed. In contrast, the *hongaku* thought which developed in Tendai from the eleventh century and which matured in the thirteenth century is more radical in postulating awakening as manifested reality just as it is, and in asserting that all phenomena are the expression of the living Buddha. This view translated itself in such peculiar and disturbing thoughts as the real Buddha being the ordinary worldling who eats meat and fornicates, or the passions and hell being manifestations of the ultimate Buddhist reality.²⁷

In Japanese Zen Buddhism, the notion of the One Mind was prevalent as well. The founder of the Sōtō 曹洞 Zen sect Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), for example, wrote the following in the *Bendōwa* 弁道話 (Negotiating the Way) fascicle of his *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye): “All dharmas—the “myriad forms dense and close” of the universe—are alike in being this one Mind. All are included without exception. All those dharmas, which serve as “gates” or entrances to the Way, are the same one Mind. In this one Dharma [one Mind], how could there be any differentiation between body and mind, any separation of birth-and-death and nirvana?” (Waddell and Abe 2002, p. 23).²⁸ As these phrases show, Dōgen valued the thought of all phenomena being subsumed in One Mind.²⁹

He did not, however, endorse the following thought, which is brought up in the same *Bendōwa* fascicle a few paragraphs before the abovementioned statement:

“Hence, the body, being only a temporary form, dies here and is reborn there without end, yet the mind is immutable, unchanging throughout past, present, and future. To know this is to be free from birth-and-death. By realizing this truth, you put a final end to the transmigratory cycle in which you have been turning. When your body dies, you enter the ocean of the original nature (*shōkai*

性海). When you return to your origin in this ocean, you become endowed with the wondrous virtue of the Buddha-patriarchs". (Waddell and Abe 2002, p. 21)

Such a thought, says Dōgen, is equal to the "Senika heresy" (*senni-gedō* 先尼外道), i.e., the view that the body dies but that the mind becomes one with an original source—an immutable Self (*Ātman*)—that does not arise nor perish. The right view, according to Dōgen, as was mentioned above, is that body and mind cannot be separated since they are alike in being One Mind; hence, the implication is that body and mind (and the phenomena experienced through them) arise and perish together. This is also expressed by the Zen monk Ikkyū Sōjun 一休宗純 (1394–1481) in his *Skeletons* (*Gaikotsu* 骸骨, 1457), where he writes: "To the eye of illusion it appears that though the body dies, the soul does not. This is a terrible mistake. The enlightened man declares that both perish together" (p. 177). Thus, the correct view is that the enlightened mind is not a mental essence distinct from the impermanent world of forms, but a mind that always moves along with birth-and-death (*saṃsāra*). Therefore, for Dōgen, the ultimate "unborn" is about the total dynamism of birth-and-death, about effortless (actionless) and natural being in birth-and-death, and about entrusting oneself to the vicissitudes of *saṃsāra* without being affected by them (Abe 1992, pp. 157–61, 176–77).

Yet at the same time, as we saw above, Dōgen considered all phenomena to be subsumed in One Mind. As a matter of fact, in Zen the mind of emptiness (on which the One Mind is grounded) was generally envisaged as a source or basis of phenomena. For example, in *Skeletons*, Ikkyū writes: "In vain are all things of this world brought up from emptiness and manifested into all forms. Since it is free of all forms, it is called the 'original field' (*honbun no denchi* 本分の田地). All the forms, of plants and grasses, states and lands, issue invariably from emptiness, so we use a metaphorical figure and speak of the original field" (p. 176). Takuan likewise spoke of an "original home" (*furusato* 故郷) to which one "returns".³⁰ Not only ordained monks but many a layperson knowledgeable of Buddhism as well expressed the ultimate in terms of a source. A good example is Matsuo Bashō's 松尾芭蕉 (1656–1715) famous haiku about the "old pond" (emptiness) and the "sound" (phenomenon) made by the frog jumping into it,³¹ in which the idea of a phenomenon arising out of a source is clearly implied. Many other examples of Buddhist monks and laypeople emphasizing the notion of a mental basis for phenomenal existence can be provided, but the above cases suffice to illustrate this general trend in premodern Japanese Buddhism. The point is, if even monks and poets often expressed their understanding of Buddhism in such terms, one should not be surprised to find that martial artists, too, as will be shown below, did the same.

3.2. Three Aspects of the Ideal Mindset of the Premodern Martial Artist

Ōmori Nobumasa, in his *Bujutsu densho no kenkyū* (A Study of Martial Art Initiation Documents), points out that the *densho* sometimes employ Buddhist terms to express the ideal mindset of the martial artist when executing a technique and argues that this is done from the understanding that the warrior's ideal mind is similar to the enlightened mind (Ōmori 1991, pp. 70–71). But what was this mindset concretely about?

Basically, there are three aspects characterizing this mindset that can be gleaned from the premodern martial arts texts. The first aspect is that it is a mind that is said to be not tarrying, i.e., not clinging onto a particular sense-experience or action. Oftentimes, this is explained to be no different from the state the mind is in when doing the things that one does in daily life without effort (*byōjōshin* 平常心), as in that state the mind is naturally flowing. In a practical sense, such a mind is considered essential to overcome wavering, doubt, or fear—including fear of rebirth in hell—which could bring about defeat and death. Concretely, this is sometimes said to translate in the calm, undisturbed execution of a deadly technique. Below follow a few examples from the *densho* in which this aspect is addressed.

- I. As for the two aspects [of combat] that are attack (*ken* 懸) and defense (*tai* 待), [one should] not [let the mind] linger on one aspect but [always] adjust oneself freely

from moment to moment in accordance with the opponent's movements. This [free, moment-by-moment adjustment] is like [the natural and swift] manipulating of a sail in accordance with the change of the wind [at the precise moment when the change is felt] or the [immediate] releasing of the hawk as soon as the rabbit is detected. Usually, one defines attack to be attack and defense to be defense, but [in our lineage] attack is not attack and defense not defense; when attacking, the mind is in defense, and when defending, the mind is in attack. It is like the cat sleeping under the flowering peony tree.³² (*Densho* handed down from Kamiizumi Hidetsuna 上泉秀綱 [c. 1508–1577], founder of Shinkage-ryū, to Yagyū Munetoshi 柳生宗嚴 [1529–1606]; cited in Ōmori 1991, p. 15)

- II. The mind of a man of the Way is like a mirror; because it has nothing and is clear, it is “mindless” and is lacking in nothing. That is the mind in a natural state. Someone who does everything with his mind in a natural state is called a master. Still, in time your achievements add up, and as your training continues, the mindset to do well what is being done will recede into the distance, and whatever you do, you will do without thinking, without intending, regardless of yourself, just like a wooden puppet. That is when you are not aware of yourself, and your arms and legs do whatever they are supposed to without your mind contriving things—that is when you do right whatever you do, ten out of ten times. Even then, if you allow your mind to interfere if only slightly, you will miss it. If you are “mindless”, you hit it every time. “Mindlessness” does not mean having no mind whatsoever; it simply means the mind in a natural state. (*Heihō kadensho*; translation by Sato 1986, p. 75).
- III. “When the mind is relaxed and at ease, that is when the true self appears”. With “when the mind is relaxed and at ease” is meant that when a person is sleeping, there is nothing in the mind. That state [of having nothing in the mind] is the Buddha-mind (*busshin* 仏心). That is the expression of one's true self. When something suddenly arises [in the mind], that is [having a] mind. That is also [what is meant by] bodily Buddhahood (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛). With [the idea of] “flavor” (*aji* 味) in our martial arts is meant [a state where] the mind is everywhere [i.e., not stopping at one place]. When striking [the opponent], the mind attains all places [i.e., is everywhere]. At the moment of the impact of the strike, there is nothing in one's breast. One must reflect well on that. (*Jigen-ryū heihō kirigami* 示現流兵法切紙 [Secret Initiation Documents of Jigen-Ryū Martial Arts], Imamura 1982, vol. 3, pp. 156–57).
- IV. [The main *kōan*:] An ancient virtuous monk asked: “What is the critical phrase, ‘Sword Blades Upward’?” The teacher replied: “The sword aimed between the eyebrows, there is no turning away; Fresh blood sprays up to Brahmā's Heaven”. [...] [The commentary:] [...] The reply, “The sword aimed between the eyebrows, there is no turning away” refers to raising a sword over your head, instantly entering, and cutting with all your strength. Herein is the critical phrase of attaining life within “Sword Blades Upward”. At that very moment there exist neither hells nor heavens. But, if you even slightly start to turn away and retreat, then from where you are standing you will enter hell. [...] (*Kenjin-jō honsoku sanzen* 劍刃上本則參禪 [Investigating Zen Via the Main *Kōan* of Sword Blades Upward], translation by Bodiford ([2005] 2014, p. 88).

The common thought shared by all these quotes is that of the importance of non-attachment of the mind when attacking or defending. The mind should move freely and spontaneously from one moment to the other, as swiftly or as naturally as one would move a sail at the same time as the direction of the wind changes. This natural mind that has “no mind” or is “mindless” (*mushin* 無心) is like the mind of the sleeping cat (see Note 32); it is the Buddha-mind; it is the mind of bodily Buddhahood (the ultimate state of awakening perceived in Esoteric Buddhism); it is the expression of one's true self. It is also, let us

not forget, the mind of the warrior who cuts down with all his might, without thinking of anything.

It is also, however, a mind that was thought necessary to overcome fear of rebirth in hell. This aspect is shown in quote IV above and in quote XIII that follows below, but it can be illustrated with other examples. Takuan, for example, said: “It is from this attaching mind that the mind of clinging arises, and transmigration arises from there as well. This attaching mind constitutes the fetters of birth and death”. (*Fudōchi shinmyō roku*, [Haskel 2013](#), p. 43). Although not referring concretely to hell, Takuan’s words clearly imply that an unenlightened attaching mind results in rebirth, which in the case of a warrior in combat could easily mean falling into a hellish state. From this logically follows that if one has a non-attaching enlightened mind during a fight, one can avoid such a predicament. In the *Palace of the Long-Nosed Goblin* (*Tengu no dairi* 天狗の内裏), too, a story probably first committed to writing in the beginning of the sixteenth century, we find the famous warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune 源義経 (1159–1189) being told that in order to avoid rebirth in the *ashura* realm (a hellish world of constant fighting and suffering), he must kill his opponent while visualizing his enemy as a Buddhist temple bell and his own sword as the wooden clapper that strikes it ([Kimbrough 2006](#), p. 282). This is as much as saying that a warrior should ideally have an enlightened mind when striking to avoid a hellish rebirth in case one should die during the martial encounter.

The second aspect of the ideal mindset of the premodern martial practitioner is that it is a mind which is “empty” so as to be able to read the intentions of the opponent. There are many examples that can be brought up to illustrate this idea, but let us provide only a few:

- V. The tarrying of the mind is called a disease. *Ikkyo* 一去 is to make a single bundle of all such diseases and throw it away. You cast off various diseases in a single bundle, lest you fail to see the “only one”. Now, the “only one” (*yuiichi* 唯一) refers to the “void” (*kū* 空). The void is a code word that is to be secretly transmitted. It refers to the mind of the opponent. This is because the mind has neither form nor color, and is void. To see the void, or the “only one”, means to see the mind of the opponent. [...] You strike before the opponent’s gripping fists move. *Ikkyo* is meant to facilitate discernment of the movement before it takes place. (*Heihō kadensho*; translation by [Sato 1986](#)).
- VI. In our lineage, when gaining enlightenment [about the original face], the mind and one’s nature [then] are called “flavor” (*aji*). When approaching an opponent, there is nature, and there is mind. At that moment, one should discard one’s deluded mind [and make it empty] leaving behind no trace of it. The nature and mind [of the opponent]³³ that remain then is called the “original face” (*honrai no menmoku* 本来の面目). The sword that strikes at the original face is called “flavor”. [...] The original face is also called the sharp sword that cuts [through the bonds of] life and death. Needless to say, in this “flavor” there is no round of rebirth, no deluded mind, and no life nor death. There are people who, wrongly comprehending this, believe there exists not a single world. Their awakening is far from complete. (*Heihō sakken* 兵法察見 [Insights into Martial Arts], [Imamura 1982](#), vol. 3, pp. 137–38).
- VII. For one who has completely realized the great matter of Buddhadharma, even before one thing is spoken of, even before three things are understood, without revealing any sign of his intentions he has already thrust and cut his opponent into three (*Tai’a ki*; [Haskel 2013](#), p. 55).

As these quotes suggest, actualizing the mind of emptiness creates a “void”, the all-pervasiveness of the mind, by which one is able to conceal one’s own intentions and, at the same time, since “void” does not mean the absence of phenomena, make visible the mind of the opponent. In this “void”, the opponent’s mind does not become visible as something “external” to one’s own mind, but as something that is felt to be “internal”, as one’s “original face” (*honrai no menmoku*). The latter Buddhist term is often used to indicate one’s true self or being, which is characterized by the nonduality of perceiver and perceived.

In this way, the dichotomy between self and other, a condition which would in fact make one a fraction of a second too slow to respond to any action by the opponent, is overcome. In the context of martial arts, the ability to conceal one's own intentions and read those of the opponent is naturally quite vital. This ability is of course achieved as the fruit of long and sustained practice, and yet, when it is actualized while facing an opponent, it is said to be like the mind that has discarded illusion and attained the state of emptiness. What remains in that state is one mass of self-less mental experience in which the intentions of the opponent (in theory) appear as clear and as bright as images moving on a mirror.

The third aspect of the warrior's ideal mindset, finally, which is for the sake of this study the most important one, is the belief that the ideal mind is an "original source", the *fons et origo* of all psychophysical phenomena and of all life. Below follow a few examples from premodern martial arts texts to illustrate this aspect.

- VIII. The essence of our lineage lies in [the concept of] "flavor" (*aji*). The mind is the Buddha, and the [Buddhist] *dharma*. Flavor is the mind. The *dharma* transmitted [in our lineage] is one's "original face" (*honrai no menmoku*). The original face is that unmoving "something" that exists before one's mother and father are born. To stand face-to-face with that original face, people practice Zen and study the (Zen) Way, and when still a beginner, they value the practice of *zazen*. *Zazen* means sitting with the legs crossed in the full or half lotus position, keeping the eyes only half opened, trying to picture that "something" which exists before one's parents are born, that state when heaven and earth are not yet separated, or when, needless to say, oneself has not taken human form yet [in the mother's womb]. It is a vast void. This void is the mind. Therefore, it is said in the scriptures: "The true *dharma*-body of the Buddha is like void". This is one's original face. Originally, this original face did not have a name. Since old, however, one has called it "original self" (*shujinkō* 主人公), "buddha", "mind", "nature", or "*dharma*". It is like a person answering when you called them by the name that they have been given at birth. However, even if one answers all the *huatou* 話頭 phrases in the *Thousand Seven Hundred Kōan* (Ch. *Jingde chuandenglu* 景德伝灯録; The Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp) correctly, there is nothing [to learn] besides [this original face]. They are all meant to lead one to discover one's original face. [...] This body is [like] a house. In this house, there must be a master (*shujin* 主人). This master is the original face. Differentiating between hot and cold, or to cling with desire to various things is the delusional mind. This delusional mind fades with each instant and is easy to discard, but its reappearance is also fast. (*Heihō sakken*, Imamura 1982, vol. 3, p. 137; after this follows the phrases cited above in quote VI).
- IX. The physical sword is the primordial source, without beginning and without end, of the life of myriad plants and trees since the separation of heaven and earth. It is the unified form from which all phenomena [arise] and return. At one time, [an enlightened one] (Dainichi) held this sword, turned it into a three-*shaku*-long precious sword (*hōken*), and sat down [in the middle of the] eight-petaled lotus [of the Womb mandala]. (*Shintō-ryū kendō ōgi* [The Secrets of Shintō-Ryū Fencing]; Ōmori 1991, p. 260).
- X. In the world, there is a bow called the "One Bow" (*icchōkyū*). Today, one calls it the "serpent-headed bow". It is also [sometimes] called the "mandalic bow" (*mandara-kyū*). [...] The One Bow is the primordial and first bow ever made [in the world]. A bow of which the outer bamboo reinforcement is red and the inner one black is called the "One Bow". It is also called "serpent-belly bow". This One Bow is [in reality] a formless bow. It is an object [representing] the round (perfected) shape of the One Mind (*isshin*). This round-shape, perfected-mind bow eventually transformed into this physical [bow].³⁴ (*Kyūdō denjusho* 弓道伝授書 [Record of Secrets Received Related to Archery], fol. 6).
- XI. Now, about this One Sword (*ichi-no-tachi* 一之太刀), at one time an old man appeared to [Asari Ihei] Tadayoshi 浅利伊兵衛均禄 (1655–1718) in a dream, [saying,] "You

- have now practiced the *iai[jutsu]* style of Hayashizaki Shinmusō-ryū 林崎新夢想流 for many years, and since you deeply desire to acquire the ultimate secret of this sword art, I will pass onto you this marvelous technique. This [One] Sword is about having the mind in defense when attacking and in attack when defending; it is a secret technique in which the twin aspects (*ryōbu* 兩部) of attack and defense (*kentai* 懸待) are unified. Therefore, although called the “One Sword”, this is a wondrous technique which allows the free enactment of all [martial methods] and the ability to respond to any of the opponent’s movements or attacks. You can obtain a great victory with this Sword”. The old man [in the dream] continued, “When facing an opponent, what is of the uttermost importance, and the ultimate secret, is a mental technique (*shinpō* 心法). This technique is nothing more than that which is conveyed by the following simile: inserting a pearl (*tama* 玉) inside a shell and wielding two swords”. Tadayoshi, in the dream, replied to the old man, saying, “The matching of the right and left valves of the shell refers to the mind that understands that the opponent and oneself form one whole, and ‘wielding two swords’ is about victory (life) and defeat (death) [being one]. In the end, the primary point in a sword fight lies in nothing else but this One Mind (*isshin* 一心)”. The old man replied, “That is right, that is right”. (*Tadayoshi musō iai gokui no maki* 均祿夢想居合極意之卷 [Scroll of *Musō Iai* Secrets Passed on by Tadayoshi]; Hayashizaki Shinmusō-ryū; Ōta 1989, pp. 83–84).
- XII. The Buddha-mind (*bushhin*) arises from the primordial source [which existed when] the sun and the moon formed one whole [and were not separated yet]. An oral transmission about the great matter of the one principle of life and death says: “The Buddha, all sentient beings, all plants and trees, all animates and inanimates arise from the Buddha-mind. Since the mind of the one path [of enlightenment] is nondual, the [enlightened] *dharm*-world and the world [experienced by the unenlightened mind] are not two separate [worlds]. When all sentient beings, all plants and trees, and all phenomena perish, the mind of the three buddhas, i.e., the three souls [of *kon* 魂 (yang), *haku* 魄 (yin), and *shin* 神], return to the sun disk of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺). They become the three-legged crow that lives in the sun disk. (*Inka-jō* 印可狀 [Initiation document]; Sōtō Zen initiation document passed on in 1727 in the grappling school of the Hongaku Kokki-ryū 本覺克己流; Ōta 1992, p. 47).
- XIII. [The main *kōan*, continued:] The teacher commands: “Try to say a critical phrase concerning “facing the [enemy’s] weapon”. Answering in place [of the student], the teacher says: “Keep your feet firmly on the originally existing farmland (*hon’u no denchi*); do not fall into past or present affairs”. [The commentary, continued:] [...] [“Originally existing farmland”] indicates attaining the same sense realm as that of a newly born baby. It is not necessarily that of a baby. It is the realm of [your original] mind before the Buddhas and ancestors were born. Therein there is no good or evil, no suffering or bliss. [...] At that moment [i.e., when newly born], there are no hells to fear and no heavens to admire. How could the three poisons of greed, anger, and stupidity appear? [...] As a newborn baby develops its senses, year by year it grows further away from the Buddhas. Sadly this point is of interest. The six consciousnesses (visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and waking) possessed by a newborn baby without intellectual faculties is known as the originally existing *tathāgata* (*nyorai*; i.e., Buddha). Therefore, if warriors fail to concentrate on resolving (*nentei*) the critical phrase of Sword Blades Upward, when they die they will fall into the Avīci Hell. (*Kenjin-jō honsoku sanzen*, translation by Bodiford ([2005] 2014, pp. 89–90).
- XIV. The self of true self is the self before heaven and earth were divided and father and mother were born. It is the self that exists in all things—in ourselves as well as in birds, beasts, grasses, and trees. In other words, it is what’s known as Buddha nature. It is a self that has no shape, no form, that is neither born nor dies. It is not the self seen with the everyday physical eye. It can be seen only by one who has realized enlightenment. One who has glimpsed it has seen his own nature and realized Buddhahood. [...] The famous sword, the sword Taie, [...] is none other than mind. This mind isn’t born

- at the moment of birth, nor does it die at the moment of death. That's why it's called one's original face. Even heaven can't cover it, even earth can't support it; fire can't burn it, water can't wet it, wind can't pass through it. That's why it's said that there's nothing in the world able to withstand its blade. (*Tai'a ki*, Haskel 2013, pp. 50, 54).
- XV. In the morning following the completion of his prayers, the kami appeared to him (Hayashizaki) in a dream saying: "If you hold this sword in your heart at all times, you shall certainly defeat your worst enemy (*onteki* 怨敵)". As the divine dream predicted, Hayashizaki Jinsuke obtained a great victory. [Interlinear note:] "Victory" should be understood as "awakening to the One Mind (*isshin*)". [Hayashizaki] Shigenobu, in other words, attained awakening. [...] Enemies and friends are made as the result of past actions in former lives. Truly, life and death are one, and the battlefield is no different from the Pure Land. [Interlinear note:] One has to realize that all things arise from emptiness and return to it, and that life and death form one large unity. (*Tetsugi no maki* 手次之巻 [Scroll of Transmission]; Hayashizaki Tamiya-ryū 林崎田宮流; Trensou 2015, pp. 36–39).
- XVI. (Instructions related to the expression "I directly realized the originally unborn nature [of all phenomena]" [*ware honpushō wo satoru* 我覺本不生].)³⁵ It means that the self, if one gets to the truth about it, is originally unborn. In this way, it thus means that one's own awareness is [in reality] unborn and undying. (*Heihō sakken*, Imamura 1982, vol. 3, pp. 134–35).

The great number of quotes mentioned above were deliberately included to illustrate that premodern martial artists valued the Buddhist enlightened mind not only as a "mindset" but also as a "source", "basis", or "topos" (place) out of which all phenomena arise and to which they all return, a fact that has not been fully underscored in previous scholarship. This source is expressed with different terms, mostly taken from either the Esoteric Buddhist or Zen traditions: original self (*shujinkō*), master (*shujin*), original face (*honrai no menmoku*), one mind (*isshin*), buddha-mind (*busshin*), originally existing farmland (*honnu no denchi*), original nonproduction (*honpushō*), flavor (*aji*), and Taie. As the last term suggests, sometimes the enlightened mind *qua* "original source" was not only associated with the mind of the warrior but also with a weapon (sword, bow, etc.), which thus serves as the symbolical embodiment of that same ultimate source.

Regarding quote XI, it is hard to fail to see the similarity between the expressions *kentai no ryōbu* 懸待の両部 ("two aspects of attack and defense") and *kontai no ryōbu* 金胎の両部 ("twin Womb and Vajra-realm mandalas"). In fact, the same can be said about the word *aji* ("flavor"), the central idea in the Jigen-ryū school of fencing (see quote VIII), which recalls the Esoteric Buddhist term *A-ji* (the "letter A" of nonproduction of all phenomena). Regardless of whether these Esoteric Buddhist notions were truly imagined behind the words *kentai* and *aji* or not, from the instructions in both quotes it can be clearly deduced that the enlightened mind was regarded as a source to which one may return, provided one realizes enlightenment during a martial confrontation. Quote XIII gives us a hint about why this aspect of enlightenment as a source was so much valued: out of fear for rebirth in hell. The implication is that the only way a warrior, who transgresses the Buddhist prohibition against harming or killing living beings, can avoid a hellish rebirth is by realizing awakening at the moment of striking an opponent.

Thus, putting together all three aspects of the ideal mindset of the premodern martial artist discussed above, we can conclude that the realization of enlightened mind during combat was considered essential for the following reasons: to maintain the necessary *sang-froid* in the face of imminent death and enable natural and effective movement, to know the intentions of the opponent, and to avoid a hellish rebirth by instead returning to the "original source" in case one would die in combat.

There is, however, one important unresolved problem. In the premodern martial arts texts there is no explanation at all about how the warrior could acquire this enlightened mind practically through the art. Perhaps it was assumed that this mind would automatically arise together with one's progress in the art, or that it is experienced each time

when a technique is executed to perfection, with each perfect accomplishment bringing one closer to the final realization of enlightened mind.³⁶ The texts, however, do not mention anything of this sort. Martial artists in the premodern period were naturally concerned with technical mastery and energetic vitality, which is necessary to be able to defend and attack effectively. The premodern texts refer to this active component of the arts with the Zen Buddhist term *ki* 機 (“sudden flash of realization”) or the homophonous term *ki* 気 (“life force”) derived from Chinese cosmology (Ōmori 1991, pp. 66–67). However, as Ōmori (1991, p. 72) pointed out, the premodern texts do not clarify how these active aspects relate to the passive sounding Buddhist notion of enlightenment. He therefore surmises that the aspect of enlightenment likely only pertains to the inactive phases of combat.

The absence of any explanation about how Buddhist enlightenment may enhance technical efficiency is an issue that obscures the exact role of Buddhism in premodern martial arts. The objection has been and still is often raised that it is inappropriate to think that a martial artist would become better skilled by cultivating Buddha-nature (Bodiford [2005] 2014; Keenan 1989). The premodern texts also do not suggest that martial artists became more skilled after having cultivated Buddha-nature, although aloofness toward the threat of death or the supposed ability to read the intentions of the opponent may have been considered practical benefits of realizing enlightenment. The fact, however, that there is a strikingly high number of premodern texts that associate Buddhism with the notion of an ultimate source of all existence may perhaps indicate that the premodern martial artist valued Buddhism more out of a concern with the afterlife rather than because of any perceived practical benefit.

4. Conclusions

In this article, an attempt was made to shed more light on the Buddhism of premodern martial arts from the perspective of the history of Japanese religions. It was shown that as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, masters of some martial arts lineages had inherited Buddhist teachings from a current called medieval Shinto, in which Shinto and Esoteric Buddhist notions were associated with swords and bows. When later specialists of martial arts turned to Zen monks for instruction, they were not doing something new but simply extending the older custom of integrating Buddhist teachings in their art. However, what the premodern martial arts masters acquired from their religious teachers was a thought that can perhaps be best summarized by the term “One Mind” (*isshin*). This term denotes a form of Buddhist thinking that posits the idea of enlightened mind as an eternal source or ground of all psychophysical phenomena (conceptualized as *tathāgatagarbha*, *tathatā*, *dharmakāya*, etc.). Many religious practitioners in the premodern period, especially if their specialization was medieval Shinto, Esoteric Buddhism, or Zen, generally valued this concept. Martial artists receiving instruction from them naturally came to embrace the same worldview. In this sense, while ordained monks and martial artists naturally operated in two different segments of society—a monk usually does not go to war or handles weapons—it is justified to claim that institutional Buddhism and the Buddhism of premodern martial arts were “of the same flavor”.

Modern studies have pointed out the problematic nature of the Buddhist thought represented by the term “One Mind”. As Faure (1991, pp. 57–59) mentioned, a theory of nonduality (between enlightened and unenlightened mind) easily regresses to a form of monism or abstractionism that emphasizes either nihilism or immanentism. Or as Tamura (1973, pp. 491, 501) has put it, if one adopts the idea of one pure mental principle subsuming all phenomena, there are only two conclusions that one can take: either negatively denigrate the phenomenal world experienced through deluded mind as a provisional, unreal, phantasmagorical dream—the position often taken in Huayan and Chan/Zen—or positively accept all phenomena, including evil, as part of that single mental principle—a view that was emphasized especially in Tendai *hongaku* thought. Both conclusions are rather problematic, as they lead to the idea that violence and evil are either ultimately non-existent or absolute manifestations of Buddha-nature. They thus also help sustain the

paradoxical double nature of premodern martial arts, in which the sword may serve to kill enemies and at the same time be a means to experience enlightenment and feel pure *tathāgatagarbha* Buddha-nature flow through the world experienced by the senses.

In recent years, therefore, scholars defending a position called Critical Buddhism have denounced all forms of Buddhist thought that posit an eternal source, ground, or *topos* as non-Buddhist. They only consider the thought of a temporal sequence or causality without an underlying or transcendental *locus* or reality as orthodox Buddhist. Hence, to them, Japanese Buddhist sects such as Esoteric Buddhism and Zen are not Buddhist (Hubbard and Swanson 1997; Swanson 1997). From this perspective, the Buddhism of the premodern martial artist, therefore, is also not to be regarded as true Buddhism either. The Critical Buddhist scholars emphasize this criticism out of concern that the Buddhist idea of an “eternal basis” underlying all phenomena could be abused to defend social injustices or to justify war or killing.

Obviously, the integration of Buddhism in martial arts presents a difficult ethical problem. Keenan (1989) has downplayed the possibility of gaining Buddhist spiritual or moral benefits from martial arts, emphasizing instead, from a Buddhological perspective, the inherent defiled nature of these arts since they belong to the realm of the conventional truth, which is impure and unenlightened. This critique, however, is countered by McFarlane (1990), who argued that there is room for finding a moral dimension to martial arts, by underscoring the fact that today as well as in the past Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist values have been highly esteemed by martial artists to enhance such virtues as humility, patience, or self-control through martial art practice.

A thorough discussion of the ethical problems posed by the integration of Buddhism into martial arts is beyond the scope of this article, but in the light of what this study has revealed, it seems that any future inquiry into this matter must reflect on the ethical or unethical nature of not only the Buddhism of martial arts but also of the Buddhism upheld in medieval Shinto, Mikkyō, or Zen from which martial artists often derived, or still derive, their religious perspectives, since both forms of Buddhism are founded on the problematic view that all phenomena are subsumed within a pure consciousness.

Although it would seem that the result of such an inquiry would often turn out negative in the end, surely that should not always be the case. Besides the moral virtues that can be cultivated through the practice of martial arts, as pointed out by McFarlane, the religious idea of the One Mind is also not without merit or appeal. Fundamentally, the One Mind is a thought that considers the phenomenal world to be infused with a “consciousness” or a “conscious life-force” that is essentially of a pure nature. In the premodern period of Japan, the hearts and minds of many a Buddhist priest and martial artist alike were animated by the belief in such an eternally abiding consciousness. Many of them probably found solace in the thought that there is a common source for all things. It probably also inspired many of them to try to achieve unity with this powerful source in this life and feel a positive and strength-giving oneness with nature and all things. To others it may have given the hope of returning to this source, which is said to be tranquil, pure, and eternal, when the present life ends. Premodern martial artists who embraced such religious sentiments are thus the precursors of an Awa Kenzō or an Ueshiba Morihei 植芝盛平 (1883–1969)—the founder of Aikidō—who during the formative period of modern *budō* each taught in their own way that unity with the universe, or, in the case of Ueshiba, with the divine procreative life-spirit (*musubi*), could be achieved through the practice of martial arts (Suzuki [2005] 2014).

Funding: This research was funded by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C), Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and the grant number is 18K00964.

Acknowledgments: The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 For a general discussion of the religious aspects of premodern martial arts, see [Bodiford \(2010\)](#).
- 2 As [Omori \(1991, p. 19\)](#) has pointed out, however, the integration of Zen teachings in Shinkage-ryū predates Munenori and goes back to the founder Kamiizumi Hidetsuna 上泉秀綱 (c. 1508–1577).
- 3 The essays are “Die ritterliche Kunst des Bogenschiessens” ([Herrigel 1936](#)) and “Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschiessens” ([Herrigel 1948](#); Eng. tr. *Zen in the Art of Archery* ([Herrigel 1953](#))).
- 4 Awa Kenzō did not receive official Zen training and was not an ordained monk, but that does not mean he was entirely ignorant of Zen. He often used Zen expressions such as *kyū-Zen ichimi* 弓禪一味, “the bow and Zen are of the same flavor”, and *shari kenshō* 射裡見性, “seeing one’s true [Buddha-]nature in the shot” ([Yamada 2001](#), pp. 10–11; [Morooka 2008](#), pp. 9–11). Moreover, Morooka, who investigated the notebooks written by Awa himself (*Awa Kenzō ibun* 阿波研造遺文, unpublished, kept at Tōhoku University), cited the following words from them: “When one forgets the [ordinary] self, all phenomena in the whole universe confirm the [true] Self” ([Morooka 2008](#), p. 10). As Morooka also noted, these words clearly recall Dōgen’s 道元 (1200–1253) famous saying in his *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye): “To forget one’s self is to be confirmed by all dharmas (phenomena)” ([Waddell and Abe 2002](#), p. 41). In another statement cited by [Morooka \(2008, p. 10\)](#), Awa asserts that the moment when the sound of the arrow hitting the target and the self are one is that sacred moment when the whole universe is manifested. This also sounds like Zen (see also [Suzuki \[2005\] 2014](#), p. 26). The crucial point not to overlook, however, is that Awa, even though he knew Zen, was critical of it. Indeed, the master is notorious for having established a new religion called “Daishadōkyō” 大射道教 (Great Doctrine of the Way of Shooting), in which he underscored various religious thoughts drawn from different sources (Zen Buddhism, Shinto, and the Neo-Confucianism of Wang Yangming 王陽明 [1472–1529]; [Suzuki \[2005\] 2014](#)). Awa considered his own Daishadōkyō religious archery a better means for bringing about the unity of body and mind than Zen, which he criticized as being not enough engaged in the cultivation of physical health or strength ([Suzuki \[2005\] 2014](#), p. 28; [Morooka 2008](#), p. 11). [Morooka \(2008, p. 12\)](#), probably rightly so, thus argues that Awa only used Zen terms as a convenient means to give expression to his own mixed religious perspectives. However, to repeat, that does not mean he did not know Zen or did not value or adopt it to some degree.
- 5 That is, prior to the period between roughly the 1920s and the end of WWII, when many eminent Zen monks developed various interpretations on Zen and the Way of the Warrior (see [Victoria 1997](#)).
- 6 To Zen monks, the *kōan* was well known to refer to a hell where beings reborn there are forced to climb up and down trees of swords. When going up, the blades face downward, and when climbing down, they face upward. In either case, the bodies of the beings are lacerated to pieces. For Zen monks, the *kōan* also meant that they had to reflect on life and death and face their fears of the afterlife (see [Bodiford \[2005\] 2014](#), pp. 81–83).
- 7 Premodern mountain ascetics modeled their actions and goals on this fierce-looking deity ([Blacker \[1975\] 1999](#)), which is often depicted holding a double-edged sword and noose ([Faure 2016a](#), pp. 115–66).
- 8 The Ogasawara-ryū is known for having taught ceremonial archery as well as a martial form of archery (see [Futaki 1985](#); [Yuasa 2001](#), pp. 252–61).
- 9 It is a cane, as mentioned by [Emeneau \(1953, p. 77, note 5\)](#), that bows in India used to be made from palmyra (tala) palm wood, as well as cane and horn and other types of wood.
- 10 The syllables *a-vi-ra-hūṃ-khaṃ* stand for the five different “ultimate truth” aspects of the solar Buddha Dainichi 大日 (Mahāvairocana) and earth-water-fire-wind-space (also called the “five wheels” [*gorin* 五輪]) for the five “conventional truth” aspects of the same Buddha. On this, see [Sakai \(1957\)](#).
- 11 After that, the fetus is said to gradually grow in five different seven-day phases called *kalalaṃ*, *arbudaṃ*, *peṣī*, *ghana*, and *praśakha*. For a detailed discussion of Buddhist embryology, see [Andreeva and Steavu \(2016\)](#).
- 12 The original sentence is: 経ニ云、弓者清月情孕化生、故ニ三日月也。
- 13 Incidentally, the *Sangoku sōden meigen no zu* 三国相伝鳴弦之図 (Image of [the Bow Used to Perform the Ceremony of] Resounding Bowstrings Transmitted in the Three Countries, 1767) shows an image of the bow identical to the one depicted in the *Ichōkyū no maki* except for the upper and root nocks, which are drawn in the shape of two beautiful serpent heads. This document was passed on in 1767 by the head priest of the Tōzenji 東漸寺 (Yokohama), a temple affiliated with Shingon Esoteric Buddhism ([Kanagawa Kenritsu Kanazawa Bunko 2011](#), p. 13). Additionally, there is a scroll entitled *Yumi no koto* 弓之事 dated 1652 (not yet verified by the author), which seems to contain the same contents as the *Ichōkyū no maki*.
- 14 Aizen’ō (Rāgarāja), the “King of Lust”, often abbreviated as “Aizen”, was a very popular Esoteric Buddhist deity in premodern Japan, often paired with Fudō (see [Faure 2016a](#), pp. 167–234). It is usually depicted holding an arrow and bow (*ibid.*, pp. 179, 181). Interestingly, according to the *Yumi no hatsu no koto* 弓之発之事 (On the Origin of the Bow, 1837), the bow was originally made by Aizen to subdue evil demons (the passions obstructing awakening) (夫弓者愛染明王之為作之、而持惡魔於射弘給). This text also mentions the double-serpent bow, adding that the red part represents the serpent’s lower body and the black part its upper scales (赤漆胴黒漆蛇之鱗ヲ表; fol. 4). The colors red and black, however, also easily recall Aizen, who is usually depicted with red vermilion skin, and Fudō, who has blackish dark-blue skin.
- 15 On Benzaiten and Ugajin, see [Faure \(2016b\)](#).

- 16 Many other examples of martial arts texts associating weapons—not only the bow but also the sword or the spear—with Buddhist aspects can be brought up. For examples related to the sword, see *Shintō-ryū kendō ōgi* 神道流剣道奥義 (The Secrets of Shintō-Ryū Fencing; Ōmori 1991, pp. 260–85) and *Tetsugi no maki* 手次之巻 (Scroll of Transmission, dated 1706; see Trenson 2015). In premodern Japan, not only weapons but also professional tools such as ropes, scales, flutes, and plows were often regarded as embodiments of the sacred. On this, see Rambelli (2007, pp. 179–87).
- 17 On “medieval Shinto”, see Rambelli (2002), Itō (2011), and Andreeva (2017).
- 18 This is an initiation rite in which one’s mother and father are taught to be the embodiments of the Womb and Vajra-realms, respectively, and one’s own body and mind the nondual product of these two entities (Itō 2016, p. 122).
- 19 Similar instructions can be found in the tradition of Miwa-ryū Shintō as well. For example, the *Miwa-ryū shintō gōju hachi* 三輪流神道合聚八 (Assorted Texts on Miwa-ryū Shintō, Fascicle Eight) notes: “The two *tachi* swords to the left and right [of the mirror placed on the altar] are the Sacred Sword. This is a treasure that legitimizes royal authority. When [this Sacred Sword] was passed on to the samurai, it split into two *tachi* blades. This [*tachi*] is a treasure which punishes the enemies of this country. It is the Sword of Wisdom of the Buddha Dainichi. In the phenomenal world, it appears as the Sacred Sword of the emperor. Inwardly, with the Wisdom-Sword of Dainichi one destroys the evil delusions and passions. The sword of the samurai [does the same and,] moreover, outwardly subdues the enemies of this country” (pp. 352–53).
- 20 For the development in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, see Dolce (2016). In Esoteric Buddhist texts, the second of the five phases of gestation (see Note 11) is often depicted in the shape of a crescent moon.
- 21 On Upanishadic philosophy, see Ranade (1926). For a discussion of the absence of a transcendent *Ātman* in Buddhism, see Lamotte’s expositions on emptiness in vol. 4 of his *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse* (Lamotte 1944–1980) and Collins (1982).
- 22 Good examples are the teachings of the Pudgalavāda early Buddhist school, which defended the existence of a permanent self as the recipient of karmic consequences, and the *ātman* theories mentioned in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (see Lusthaus 1997, pp. 42–49).
- 23 On the theories of the *ālayavijñāna* of Yogācāra tradition and *tathāgatagarbha*, see Snellgrove (1987, pp. 94–115). In Yogācāra, which was systematized in the fifth century CE, the awakened mind is equivalent to the *ālayavijñāna* devoid of karmic impurities. It is the stream of essenceless phenomena (*dharmas*). The *Treatise* concretely associates this stream with the *tathāgatagarbha*.
- 24 The *Treatise* uses the wetness of ocean water as a metaphor to explain this. Regardless of whether the water (mind) is still (enlightened) or moves in waves (unenlightened), its wetness (i.e., the mind of suchness) is never altered or destroyed. Yet, that wetness always pervades whatever state the ocean water may be in (Jorgensen et al. 2019, pp. 19–20).
- 25 (Jorgensen et al. 2019, pp. 15–16). The *Treatise* does not clearly state that the *tathāgatagarbha* (mind of suchness) is the One Mind; it only implies it. However, Fazang 法藏 (643–712), the famous Huayan patriarch, whose commentary on the *Treatise* was most authoritative, identified the One Mind with the *tathāgatagarbha* (Hakeda [1967] 2006, p. 38).
- 26 On the *Treatise* and its philosophical contents, see Hakeda ([1967] 2006) and Jorgensen et al. (2019).
- 27 On *hongaku* thought, see Tamura (1973, 1990) and Stone (1999). In this theory, even evil acts such as killing living beings are accepted in cases where one has realized awakening and when carried out “naturally and without attachment” (Tamura 1973, pp. 541–42). This echoes the following troubling assertion in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (*Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經): “For one who realizes the eternal [*nirvāṇa* or *Ātman*] (*jōken* 常見), killing is not existent”. (T no. 374, 484b9–14). On Buddhism and violence, see also Demiéville ([1957] 2010).
- 28 As Waddell and Abe (2002, p. 22, Note 53) point out, some sentences before this passage, Dōgen uses an expression that is quite similar to a statement appearing in the *Treatise*. This supports the fact that the Zen master was likely inspired by this text.
- 29 Dōgen shows a tendency to agree with a radical *hongaku* type of view by famously declaring that “whole-being is the Buddha-nature” (*shitsuu ha busshō nari* 悉有は仏性なり; Abe 1992, p. 35). However, he criticized radical *hongaku* thought as a form of “naturalist heresy” (*jinen-gedō* 自然外道) by stressing that when one actualizes the state of an ordinary worldling, one is exactly that, an ordinary worldling and not a buddha. One must actualize Buddhahood in the present moment by following in the Buddha’s footsteps. In this way, Dōgen revalorized the relevance of practice, which in the face of radical *hongaku* thought had become compromised (Tamura 1990, pp. 400–2).
- 30 “Brought into this world by our parents, we came as temporary guests, so we can, without attachment return to our original home” (*Ketsujōshū* 結繩集 [Knotted Cords], Haskel 2013, p. 58).
- 31 The haiku, in full, is: “The old pond, ah! A frog jumps in; The water’s sound!” (Suzuki [1938] 1959, p. 238).
- 32 The Zen *kōan* of the “sleeping cat” refers to the fact that when approaching a cat that seems to be in deep slumber, it often suddenly jumps up and swiftly runs away, making one wonder whether it had been sleeping at all. As one commentary to this Zen riddle says: “The mind of the cat dwelled in [that of] the fluttering butterfly nearby” (Ōmori 1991, pp. 15, 32).
- 33 Ōmori (1991, p. 214) interprets the words 其跡に有性心 in the original text as 其跡に有性の心, singling out the word *ushō* 有性 (possessing [Buddha-]nature). However, I read them as 其跡に有性と心, since previously there is the phrase “When approaching an opponent, there is nature, and there is mind” 敵に近付時は、性、心有て.

- 34 The original text is: 世ニ又一張之弓ト云有、今云蛇頭弓也、曼荼羅弓トモ云、(中略)或ニイハク、一張弓ハ是根本初製ノ本弓也、故ニ外竹ヲ赤色ニシ内竹ヲクロスリニスル弓ヲ一張弓ノ拵ト云也、蛇腹弓トモ云也、一張弓ハ非有形ノ弓、是一心円相製器也、其円相之心弓又竟ニ成形ヲ。
- 35 These words occur in the following phrases of the *Da piluzhena chengfo shen bian jiachi jing* 大毘盧遮那成仏神變加持經 (J. abbrev. *Dainichikyō* 大日經; T no. 848, 9b16-19), one of the fundamental scriptures on which Shingon Esoteric Buddhism was founded: 我覺本不生、出過語言道、諸過得解脫、遠離於因緣、知空等虛空; “I [Mahāvairocana] directly realized that the originally unborn (*honpushō*) is beyond the range of words, is free from all faults, and separated from karmic conditions. I came to know that emptiness is like space”.
- 36 As Lusthaus (1997, p. 40) pointed out, “enlightenment” in East Asian Buddhism, especially Chan/Zen, is often not regarded as one final single event but as something that can be experienced multiple times—each one superior to the previous one—during one’s lifetime.

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Abbreviations

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭, eds. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.
- DPJW Database of Pre-Modern Japanese Works of the National Institute of Japanese Literature.

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