CHAPTER I

WHAT IS KENDŌ?

1 KENDŌ AND SPORT

Modern kendō equipment includes the shinai, a split bamboo stick just under four feet long (Plate 1), and the bōgu, a set of light armor (Plate 2). The object in kendō combat is to deliver a strike or thrust with the shinai to prescribed targets on the bōgu: viz., the men (head), including the forehead, the right and left sides; the right and left sides of the kote (forearm); right and left sides of the do (torso); and the tsuki (throat). Sometimes a thrust to the chest is also permitted. A strike or a thrust is counted only when accompanied by speed, force, accuracy, physical coordination and concentration.

With its special equipment and precisely defined rules, kendō fits the modern definition of a sport—a structured human activity1 carried out in leisure time for the purpose of recreating the human personality. Leisure-time activities are those in which coercion is absent and which bring about a change of attitude in minds ordinarily focused on making a living.2 Those who practice kendō make no money from it, unless they instruct students through affiliation with an institution which offers kendō as a part of its curriculum, or who operate a private kendō gym. Accordingly, the primary value of kendō is not economic: it enhances physical and mental growth.

Other martial arts—e.g., judō, karate, aikidō, etc.—may have a certain value as weaponless forms of self-defense, but kendō requires a shinai, or for that matter a sword, something not normally carried on city streets. Kendo is basically designed to perfect the kind of discipline necessary to cultivate alertness, speed of action, and, most important of all, direct cognition. All these qualities are
required to cope with the flashing attacks of an opponent’s shinai in the course of intense combat practice. These qualities require concentration rather than physical strength. Thus, kendo can be practised by young and old, male and female.

Although kendo is a sport, it does have aspects that differentiate it from Western sports: swordsmanship, from which kendo evolved, developed under actual battlefield conditions where the issue of life and death was at stake, and under the influence of Buddhism.

2 MUSHIN: AN ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

When a samurai faced his opponent, sword drawn, fear was inevitably aroused. What was the source of this fear? The opponent? The sword that was thrust toward him? The Buddhist response is that fear is created by one’s own mind. One must conquer the fear within oneself before one can conquer the opponent. Of course, conquering the fear within is easier said than done. And so the kendo practitioner attacks, for he is taught that the best defense is offense. He ponders: ‘What shall I hit, men, kote or do? Shall I thrust a tsuki?’ But when he attacks, the shinai may miss the target. Frustration arises. He becomes confused. This is an unproductive and potentially dangerous state of mind.

Here it should be noted that the conscious mind gives rise to the ego. The ego is that aspect of the mind which takes the self as the measuring stick of the world and ultimately seeks self-preservation. Hence, it is the ego which breeds fear, frustration and confusion. Under these circumstances the most effective move to make is an all-out ‘go for broke’ attack, which is referred to as a sutemi (literally ‘body-abandoning’) attack. It is in this kind of an attack – an attack in which there is no intrusion of the ego-based intellect – that a kendo practitioner is apt to discover mushin.

Mushin is a term which D. T. Suzuki, the Zen master, translated as the ‘mind of no-mind.’ Simply put, it refers to an altered state of consciousness, a state of mind freed from an ego-clouded vision that cannot be swayed by external distractions. Because it refers to a state of mind freed from an ego-clouded vision, it is also referred to as the true-self; and because it cannot be swayed by external distractions, it is also referred to as that which produces the flow-
state which in turn enables the body and mind to function most effectively.*

Of course, mushin is realized in many Western sports as well, for example, baseball, basketball, swimming, etc. But kendō is unique because it requires meditation (see Plate 3) to realize mushin. Why? 

Whereas the foremost concern in Western sports is to respond to an external challenge and to defeat the opponent (or to break an existing record), the foremost concern in kendō is to tame the ego by internalizing challenge.† Why is it necessary to tame the ego? Taming the ego prevents the mind from being swayed by external distractions, enables the practitioner to develop concentration and alertness, and provides the reflexive mechanism necessary to develop sword skills. It also enables the practitioner to channel that discipline to realize personal growth. Personal growth, in this instance, refers to the absence of ego-based arrogance and of emotional swings.‡ Thus whereas Western sports emphasize relaxation – the absence of attention and effort – to control anxiety, kendō emphasizes meditation to tame the ego. Though both are designed to bring about a mental state conducive to nurturing concentration, the difference in approach stems from a different cultural orientation. Kendo cultivates its norm of ethical behavior in the practice of the art itself and claims that practice and ethical behavior are inseparable because both stem from taming the ego.

Let us further elaborate on mushin by examining actual situational cases.

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* The term ‘mushin’ is frequently used as a compound, muga-mushin. Muga literally means no-self (derived from the Sanskrit anatman) and mushin ‘no-mind’ (also from the Sanskrit acitta). What is negated is the empirical body-mind as an ontologically independent state of existence. Muga and mushin point to the same thing – the state of egolessness – but from different perspectives. The former refers to the negation of the physical state, the latter to the mental state of empirical existence. The Buddhists conceive of the physical and mental entities as inseparable. In this work, to simply matters, the term ‘mushin’ will be used to indicate muga-mushin.

† Diving also internalizes challenge. It is assumed, therefore, that those who have engaged in diving contests would readily understand the state of mind expected of a kendō practitioner.

‡ The term ‘personal growth’ will be elaborated upon in Chapter V from the perspective of integrating martial and liberal arts.
Mushin and Experiential Philosophy

The kendō practitioner engages in a brief meditation before and after practice. But mushin is not realized in a brief moment of meditation. It is realized through strenuous practice involving sweat, bruises and blisters. It is realized experientially over a long period of time, not instantly as one accustomed to a ‘fast-food’ culture might anticipate. Kendō meditation follows the same rationale observed in Zen: the anticipation of instant realization, e.g., enlightenment, through meditation is a delusion. The goal of both is to build a new mental configuration experientially.

Mushin and Violence

Though one not accustomed to kendō may associate its practice with violence, practice is actually designed to tame the ego and to realize mushin. What this means is that the attribute which kendō practice cultivates must be internalized. What is internalized is called discipline.∗ Granting that there are other ‘non-violent’ ways to realize the same state, the fact remains that because of the influence of Buddhism on the development of swordsmanship, Buddhist thought underlies the manner in which kendō attempts to realize discipline. Whether the manner in question represents violence or not is a relative question, a question which involves a personal judgement of what violence means. Let us take an example. A Zen master would hit a novice with a hard blow to awaken the human potential within him. In this case the blow is not an act of violence. It is an act of compassion. Likewise, the kendō master who renders a hard blow on the student does not consider it an act of violence but an act designed to enable him to realize human growth by internalizing the discipline cultivated through practice. Malicious intent is involved in violence. It is absent among Zen and kendō practitioners.

∗ The term ‘discipline’ has already been defined (p. ix). It will further be elaborated in Chapter V from the perspective of integrating martial and liberal arts.
**WHAT IS KENDŌ?**

*Mushin* and its Relation to Study Habit and Sport

Though *mushin* can be realized through *kendō* as well as through other human activities, there is a slight difference between what the two attempt to realize. Compare, for example, the *mushin* (in this case the flow-state) required in *kendō* practice with that required in studying math, science, or a foreign language. Both require perseverance and alertness, but in the former, these attributes are designed to develop the speed necessary to cope with an opponent. The attribute involved in cultivating *mushin* in *kendō* can be implemented in studying math, etc., but not *vice-versa*. That is simply because, as said, in addition to perseverance and alertness, *kendō* requires speed.

The implication here, however, is not that all *kendō* practitioners excel in academic discipline. There are many Western sports which, like *kendō*, also require perseverance and alertness. This may be the reason why some young athletes, who take part in the Olympics, go on to and are successful in graduate or professional schools. They have developed the elements necessary to cope with an academic discipline. And so, just as some Western athletes are capable of implementing the discipline cultivated in sports in their academic work, so too is it in the case with some *kendō* practitioners. But in *kendō*, the cultivation of attributes described above requires meditation.

*Kendō* meditation will be dealt with in detail in Chapter II. What is important to note here is the kind of meditation *kendō* involves. It is not meditation designed to flee from worldly reality, to realize a state of trance, or to enter the realm of *nirvāṇa*. *Kendō* meditation is designed to tame the ego and to realize body-mind integration. *Ki-ai* is the verbal evidence of this integration.

3 *KI-AI AND BODY-MIND INTEGRATION*

There is no adequate English translation for *ki-ai*. A Japanese-English dictionary renders the term as 'yell, shout, etc., to hypnotize or mesmerize another person with will power.' But this is absurd. Etymologically the term is a compound, *ki* referring to energy and *ai* to integration.

Historically, the term '*ki*' is of Chinese origin (*ch'i*). In the context
of Chinese philosophy, it is conceived of as a source of life, regarded as a material element, and believed to pervade the universe. But ‘ki,’ when used in the compound (ki+ai), and in particular when used in the limited context of kendō, refers to a verbal outflow of a synergistic energy derived through ‘body-mind integration.’

It is not clear how ki-ai originated or when it began to be used in swordsmanship. According to a story, it was conceived of and practiced in late seventh-century Japan by the Yamabushi or Shugendo, members of a Shinto-Taoist-Buddhist cult who roamed about the mountains and allegedly acquired supernatural powers. Ki-ai might have been originated by the members of this cult. But the term began to be understood in a rational context after the founding of Shingon Mikkyō Buddhism in the ninth century.

In kendō, the basic forms of ki-ai are ya (pronounced ‘yah’) and to (pronounced ‘toh’). Ki-ai that announce the intended targets (e.g., men, kote, do, and tsuki) are also used. These were formulated after the protective gear was popularized in the eighteenth century and provided referees with a basis for judgement in a match. They are the popular ki-ai observed in kendō practice today. But a kendō ki-ai is not simply a shout meant to ‘startle or mesmerize’ the opponent. It is the verbal revelation, demonstration and evidence of a synergistic energy issuing from the body-mind integration which produces the most important element in kendō combat – namely, decisiveness.

Decisiveness was held to be the most significant factor in battlefield combat. When the samurai was confronted by multiple opponents, there was no time to deal exclusively with any single individual. Instead the samurai had to be instantaneously decisive in order to survive. Decisiveness characterizes many forms of Japanese martial arts (e.g., karate, sumō, and jūdō).

Let us elaborate on this issue by comparing Western and Japanese martial arts. Boxing differs from karate in that boxing requires repeated blows – in karate the first thrust is decisive.* Hence boxing matches last many rounds, while a karate match basically consists of just one ‘round.’ Western wrestling also takes considerable time,

*Japanese karate originated in Okinawa where the natives, deprived of offensive weapons by the Satsuma samurai, created a system of empty-handed self-defense. Karate's theory – decisiveness expressed through a ki-ai – is derived from swordsmanship. Therefore, karate practitioners, like kendō practitioners, also honor meditative discipline. Sumō does not use ki-ai. Jūdō and aikido (both of which evolved from jūjitsu) also do not use ki-ai.
while a sumō match is over in a few seconds. A jūdō match does 
last longer, but it too is determined by the waza ari, the decisive 
throw. Likewise, in kendo, the practitioner's shinai requires speed 
and control which together produce the decisive snap or thrust. A 
sword is not a carpenter's saw going over and over the same cut.† 
A decisive hit of a kind demanded in kendo requires precision and 
precision requires synergistic energy. But it should be noted that 
body-mind integration, not ki-ai, brings about this kind of energy. 
Ki-ai is the product of this integration. As such, it is the mind 
(mushin), not ki-ai, that needs to be nurtured. An effective ki-ai 
emerges from one's gut. Shouting in a frenzy is not a ki-ai.‡

Ki-ai should be used sparingly. It is most effective when used in 
the following three situations: (a) in the initial moment when one 
comes face-to-face with an opponent, (b) when attacked by the 
opponent, and (c) at the time of attacking a specific target. Its 
purpose is to eliminate fear, doubt and hesitation – matters which 
will be subsequently elaborated – and to implement one's synergistic 
energy.

4 KAMAE AND MA-AI: POSITIONS AND SPACING

In kendo there are three basic stances or kama-e: jōdan, chūdan 
and gedan (i.e., upper, middle, and lower levels). Other forms are

* A kendo novice tends to slam his shinai down on the intended target. In such a 
case, he is incapable of instantly making second and third attacks. A snap supported 
by a ki-ai is much more effective in combat. A snap is produced by wringing the 
shinai handle with both hands, like wringing a towel, and slamming the right foot 
on the floor as one leaps, accompanied with a determined ki-ai. Hence, in kendo, 
a synergistic energy derived from body-mind integration rather than physical 
strength needs to be cultivated.

† Many schools of swordsmanship are called Ittō-ryū, 'one-sword school.' Some 
may conceive of this term as a contrast to Nito-ryū, school of 'two swords.' But the 
term 'ittō' refers to a style designed to create a devastating effect with one decisive 
slash, though admittedly this is not always possible.

‡ Ki-ai must emerge from one's 'gut.' This statement, expressed in the vernacular, 
requires the understanding of three elements: (a) The 'gut' is the center of gravity 
of the practitioner, and thus the ki-ai emerging from one's 'gut' means that one 
needs to maintain physical coordination; (b) the practitioner cannot attack an 
opponent when inhaling, but at the moment of exhaling; and (c) an effective ki-ai, 
emerging from perfect physical coordination and at the moment of exhaling, 
constitutes the proper attack. Needless to say, (a) and (b) must be accomplished 
simultaneously. This simultaneous action is derived from mushin.
variations of these basic three. In jōdan (Plate 4), the practitioner holds the shinai above his forehead, poised to strike at the opponent's head, wrist or body. In chūdan (Plate 5), the practitioner holds the shinai in the middle position, aimed for a thrust to the opponent's throat, eyes or chest, while at the same time maintain enough maneuverability to leap forward to hit the opponent on the head, wrist or body, or to receive the attack. In gedan (Plate 6), the practitioner holds the shinai tilted forward and down, making it difficult for the opponent to leap forward but totally exposing his head for an attack.

Jōdan is the aggressive kama-e: the practitioner cannot retreat, there is no effective defense – the only real option is to take the offensive. Chūdan is the standard kama-e: the practitioner can either attack or receive an attack. Gedan is the defensive kama-e:* the practitioner parries the invited attack and, using the opponent's own force, strikes the opponent's body, for example, on a rebound. But gedan can also be an aggressive kama-e, thrusting at the throat from underneath the opponent's defense. In all cases, however, the practitioner must be mindful of the following three elements: the speed of the opponent's attack; one's own attack speed (including the speed with which one can receive an attack, then transform defense to offense instantly); and the proper judgement of the 'distance' between oneself and the opponent. The third element needs some explanation.

The term 'distance' is a rough translation of ma-ai, the root of which is ma, space. As such, the term 'distance' can be misleading. As a background for understanding the ma-ai concept, let us briefly examine two forms of Japanese arts.

The term 'ma' is used in the tea ceremony in the sense of the term ma o toru, literally space-evaluation. Actually, the term refers to the host's awareness of the relationship between the principal guest and the environment in which the ceremony is observed. Specifically, it refers to furnishing the tea room with a picture scroll, a vase of carefully arranged flowers, ceramic ware of excellent

* In the gedan kama-e, one usually puts the right foot forward, points the shinai at the opponent's left knee; and keeps the body straight. But in swordsmanship, one puts the left foot forward, points the shinai toward the floor, and slightly tilts the body forward. This stance is referred to as shumoku no ashi and is discouraged in modern kendo because it hinders leaping speed. But in swordsmanship, it is one of the acceptable stances because it provides one with stability and the force to cut through.
make and design, and other accoutrements tastefully chosen and set out to reflect the personality of the principal guest. Items required for the ceremony, such as cups, kettle and ladle, are strategically placed to minimize the movements that the host must make in executing the prescribed steps of the ceremony. Ma then is a term that implies the creative utilization of space, that is, the ability to control space.

The art of flower arrangement, like kendo, employs three levels of position. Here high, middle and low levels represent heaven, humans, and earth, the human dimension serving as a bridge between heaven and earth and so gives an overall harmony to the composition. This human dimension is, however, not fixed. After all, each individual has his/her own personality, so that there are no limits to creativity. Ultimately, though, the person must merge with nature, with heaven and earth, to bring about total harmony. Hence, when a master of this art speaks of an overall harmony, he/she is not speaking only about the flower arrangement, but also about the shape of the vase appropriate to the flower design, and the entire context which determines the choice of vase and design (e.g., the size and style of the alcove in which the flower arrangement is to be placed, the size and style of the room, and the nature of the occasion for the display). The art of flower arrangement too requires the creative utilization of space and the ability to control it, although the term ma is not employed.

Ma, however, is not uniquely Japanese. In modern ballet, for example, an accomplished ballerina has total control of space. She has the ability to project the movements of the dance from a perspective which display perfect harmony and elegant style. It is this overall pattern of movement that elicits the undivided attention of the audience.

In kendo, ma-ai generally refers to the distance between the tips of the opponents’ shinai when both are in chudan position. Theoretically, the shinai should cross each other about two or three inches below their tips. However, this basic definition cannot be applied if the opponent takes a jodan or gedan stance, or a variation of basic forms. For example, the wakigama-e, Plate 7, in which the shinai is held in gedan but to the rear, concealing the shinai tip; or the hassô, Plate 8, in which the shinai is held in jodan but to the side, like a baseball bat. In these cases the opponent cannot judge the distance by the shinai tips and so must take into account the opponent’s degree of alertness and speed as well as the moment
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and the angle of charge. And, of course, when a practitioner faces multiple opponents, the general definition of ma-ai, 'distance,' would hardly have any meaning at all. Ma-ai then involves more than just the judgement of distance between opponents.

Ma-ai actually refers to space. Like a ballet dancer, a kendô practitioner needs to control space – to develop the ability to size up the situation in which he finds himself and to place himself in a strategically advantageous position.

But though ma-ai literally refers to space-evaluation, it is also associated with the ability to read the time – a fraction of a second – it will take for the practitioner to leap forward before the opponent's charge. The ma-ai between two experienced kendô practitioners is, therefore, frequently stretched out in order to accommodate the unexpected. This brings us back to the term kama-e, previously defined as stance.

Kama-e indicates the degree of control the practitioner has over space 'and' time. As such, kama-e and ma-ai are correlated: an effective kama-e reveals an effective ma-ai control. Interestingly, though, because kama-e requires the proper 'reading' of ma-ai, many skilled swordsmen in the past spoke of the kama-e of no kama-e. To those men, kama-e did not involve the manner in which one holds the sword. It was a mental attitude. Hence, Yagyu Sekishû-sai (sixteenth century) emphasized the importance of Muto-ryû (the school of no-sword).* To him, the sword existed only in the mind. And Hayashizaki Chôsuke (seventeenth century), who contributed much in developing i-ai (tentatively translated as 'quick-draw skill'; see p. 20 for details) spoke of conquering the opponent while the sword remains in the sheath.

To be sure, kama-e, to a large extent, is a state of mind, but to master the art of the kama-e of no kama-e first requires the mastery of kama-e, which involves the proper reading of ma-ai. Muto-ryû and i-ai also require mastery of ma-ai. It is dangerous for a novice

* Chûjô-ryû (also called Tomita-ryû or Toda-ryû), founded by Toda Seigen (sixteenth century) in the present Fukui Prefecture, also referred to his school as Muto-ryû. Seigen first trained himself in short sword fighting, which requires the instant reading of the opponent's intent as well as ma-ai and changing in at the moment before the opponent's attack. He later became blind but still managed to defend himself. Perhaps it was his blindness which enabled him to read the opponent's intent intuitively without being distracted. Yamaoka Tesshû (1836–88), whom we will discuss in Chapter III, also identified his school as Muto-ryû. Swordsmen, who have developed considerable skill, seem to have preferred Muto-ryû.
to use the kama-e of no kama-e or to engage in Mutō-ryū or i-ai in actual combat.

Kama-e then refers to a stance. But because kama-e requires the proper reading of ma-ai (the ability to control space) and also because ma-ai constantly changes according to the opponent's movement, kama-e actually is more than a stylized stance. It involves direct cognitive ability. In this context then, kama-e involves a mental attitude – alertness of a kind derived through intense concentration. This mental attribute contributed to the development of the kama-e of no kama-e, Mutō-ryū, and i-ai.

5 SUKI AND ZANSHIN: OPENINGS AND ALERTNESS

An effective kama-e (either kama-e itself or the kama-e of no kama-e) leaves no opening for the opponent to attack. In the kendō lexicon, an opening is referred to as suki. A kendō practitioner with no suki projects an intimidating kama-e. The term, however, has another meaning. There is no suki in an accomplished ballet dancer, that is, no futile, wasteful or meaningless movement. It is the same with an accomplished kendō practitioner. Each movement, no matter how minute, is distinct and has meaning to the practitioner's overall strategy.

A perfect kama-e leaves no suki, and a kama-e without suki is evidence that the practitioner is capable of combat without futile movements. The practitioner's potential for subsequent movements is therefore condensed and epitomized in his kama-e, a kama-e without suki, just as the ballerina's potential for subsequent movement is condensed and epitomized in her opening stance, a stance without futile movements. But an effective kama-e of a kendō practitioner (or a perfect opening stance of a ballerina) represents the crystallization of consummate effort over the course of years, during which the practitioner coped with the issue of ma-ai through intense combat practice.

Though the practitioner may have perfected a kama-e through years of combat practice, there is always the chance that he may miss a target. What position should he then take? Let us take two examples.

In the first case, the attacker attacks and misses a target. The receiver of the attack would have the advantage. He would be in a
position to calmly observe the attacker’s opening. So after the attack, the attacker must get away from the receiver’s range of attack, turn quickly, and transform defense into offense instantly. In the second case, though the attacker had missed the first target, normally he would be able to see a second opening in the receiver’s defense but would not be able to carry through the second attack. These two examples lead us to examine zanshin.

The term literally means sustained alertness. Inherent in this kind of alertness is, however, a determined attitude never to ‘abandon ship’ (never leave an opening and constantly seek the opponent’s openings) and to instantly launch a second or third attack by transforming defense into offense. The term ‘instantly’ is crucial because zanshin requires alertness — even after the completion of an attack — of a kind that would enable the attacker to cope with an unexpected situation in a split second.

What position should a practitioner take if the initial attack succeeds? He should still maintain zanshin. For in actual combat, a samurai was trained to be ready to launch a sutemi attack (see p. 2) with the last drop of his energy even if seriously wounded. Moreover, even if the first attack dealt a mortal blow, the samurai assumed that he is surrounded by other opponents on all four sides.

Zanshin then is sustained alertness with the aim of assuring strategic victory. It is also an attitude that applies to work: complete a task beyond what is expected, and expect the unexpected. The practitioner, therefore, is expected to implement the attributes cultivated in practice even when not facing the opponent. For example, before practice, his bōgu should be placed in front in an orderly manner, each piece of bōgu placed in proper (ma-ai) position so that the practitioner can put them on without wasted movement (no suki). Even during a break, his shinai should be placed in a strategic position (on his left with the handle close to the knee) to indicate sustained alertness (zanshin). The practitioner is also expected to practice this outside the practice hall, for example, while working or studying. In these cases, mushin refers to concentration, ma-ai to a well planned strategy so that there will be no-suki (no wasted movement’), and zanshin to ‘sustain attention span.’
The term ‘sutemi,’ used previously, now needs elaboration. *Sutemi* is an attack based on desperation when, for example, the practitioner encounters a superior opponent – an opponent with an intimidating *kamae*. In such a case, a novice would find that *sutemi* is the only effective form of attack. Nevertheless, because it is born of desperation, this kind of attack is rarely employed by a skilled practitioner. A skilled practitioner is expected to maintain mental calm at all times. Mental calm, in this case, is called *heijō-shin* (literally, mental ‘evenness,’ that is, the absence of emotional swings).* One without emotional swings is in control of himself. As such, that person is capable of reading the intent of his opponent – the opponent’s potential movement and the moment of his attack.

Let us take one *kendō* skill example and elaborate on *heijō-shin*. The cultivation of *heijō-shin* produces what is referred to as *go-no-sen*, landing a hit by allowing the opponent to attack first, leaving only a fraction of an inch between the opponent’s sword and the practitioner’s own body. The expression ‘leaving only a fraction of an inch’ is significant. Though *heijō-shin* connotes the absence of emotional swings, it specifically refers to the absence of fear, doubt and hesitation. Absence of fear enables the practitioner to move according to one’s will. Absent of doubt enables the practitioner to face the opponent with confidence. And absence of hesitation enables the practitioner to render a decisive hit. As apparent, these skills cannot be developed without *heijō-shin*. But *go-no-sen* is a skill cultivated only through years of training in *ma-ai* spacing and grueling practice.

To simplify matters, *go-no-sen* is a term used in swordsmanship to indicate a ‘counter-blow.’ Modern *kendō* refers to the same as *debaran*, landing a hit just as the opponent attacks. Here a swordsmanship term is used in order to indicate that modern *kendō* concepts have their origin in the past. But there is a distinct difference.

* Both *sutemi* and *heijō-shin* emerge from *mushin* in that the absence of intrusion of intellect characterizes both. What differentiates the two is the psychological basis from which *mushin* is derived: *sutemi* is derived from desperation; *heijō-shin* from calmness.

† *Go-no-sen* is also referred to as *gashii-uchi*, concomitant hit. But, as in the case of *go-no-sen*, implicit in that term is hitting the opponent first, ‘leaving only a fraction of an inch.’
between go-no-sen and debana. In the former heijō-shin is strongly emphasized; in the latter, timing is emphasized. But time-consciousness was considered a delusion in swordsmanship. Instead, it strongly emphasized reflexive action derived from mushin — the emptying of the mind. Though kendō does not ignore the merits of mushin, on the issue discussed here, swordsmanship more strongly emphasized mental discipline. What this means in terms of strategy is that whereas kendō is concerned with the ‘particular’ (timing), swordsmanship was concerned with the ‘general’ (intuitive response associated with overall strategy). It was this kind of overall strategy which the Yagyū-ryū implemented to enhance personal growth — not to be distracted and swayed by the particular but to develop an overall vision — a matter which will be discussed in Chapter II.

Though go-no-sen is a swordsmanship term, heijō-shin is a Zen term.* In the Zen context, heijō-shin means to maintain mental/emotional evenness in every walk of life. A kendō practitioner is expected to do the same.

7 DŌJŌ: THE HALL OF DISCIPLINE

The kendō hall of practice is called a dojō. It is a sacred site and should be kept clean. Usually a Shinto deity is enshrined in a dojō as a symbolic representation of purity, that is of the ‘pure’ mind or mushin. (Though a deity is a Shinto term and mushin a Buddhist term, Shinto-Buddhist syncretism characterizes Japanese religion.)* Because dojō is an important term in Japanese martial arts, the term’s etymological origin and the manner in which it has been assimilated need to be described.

The term ‘dojō’ is derived from the Buddhist Sanskrit, bodhimanda, meaning the site of enlightenment. When rendered into Sino-Japanese characters, the term is a compound (dō, the ‘way’ or ‘path,’ and jō, the ‘site’). It then connotes a different nuance than what the Indians (South Asians) originally had in mind. Thus, these

* Heijō-shin is a Zen term initially conceived of in T’ang China where it was referred to as ping-ch’ang hsin. There is no Buddhist Sanskrit equivalent of this term. Heijō-shin is an attribute of mushin. The fact that the Chinese and Japanese prefer to use the term heijō-shin, rather than mushin, indicates that they preferred the concretization of abstract terms, terms which can be understood and implemented in daily life.
two terms – ど, the etymological root of どう, and どじょ, the compound – need clarification.

Specifically, the ど is derived from the Buddhist Sanskrit mārga (meaning the 'path' to enlightenment). The term refers to the idea of formulating propositions, subjecting them to philosophical critique and then following a 'path' to realize them. But in the Japanese context, the term is often used as a suffix: e.g., ぶどう (bu+ど, the way of life of those who practice martial arts), さど (sa+ど, the way of life of those who practice tea ceremony), かど (ka+ど, the way of life of those who practice flower arrangement), etc. The term 'ど', signifies a 'way of life.' Thus kendo (ken+ど) does not only mean the development of skill; it ultimately means the way of life shaped by the discipline cultivated in the process of learning that art. ど, in the Japanese context, is an experiential term, experiential in the sense that practice (the way of life) is the norm to verify the validity of the discipline cultivated through a given art form. In kendo, then, discipline refers to kendo practice which is designed to cultivate mushin (and revealed as heijō-shin). But since the term 'ど' is an experiential term, kendo requires the implementation of heijō-shin in every walk of life.

The term 'どじょ' does come a bit closer to the original term ('bodhimanda'), i.e., 'the site of enlightenment.' Hence, a どじょ in Sino-Japanese Buddhism refers to the site of practicing meditation (as in the case of Zen), or the site of worshipping Buddha Amitābha (as in the case of Pure Land), etc. But when that term is used in martial arts, it refers to the site of cultivating the way of life (ど) by exposing the practitioner to the discipline involved in learning that art.

In any rate, when considering both the etymology of the terms 'mārga' and 'bodhimanda', the impact of Buddhist thought on kendo is clear. A kendo どじょ, therefore, though not a site of enlightenment, is nevertheless, a sacred site – a site of cultivating discipline. Therefore, while in どじょ, the conduct of a practitioner of a Japanese martial art closely follows that established in Japanese Buddhist monasteries.

In spite of the great impact Buddhist thought has had on swordsmanship, many such schools were founded at Shinto shrines. One of the greatest medieval swordsmen, Iizasa Chōsai (c. 1387–1488), is said to have developed his skills under the inspiration of the Katori Shinto deity. Interestingly, though, it is also said that Miyamoto Musashi (1584–1645), on his way to battle a crowd of opponents,
passed by a Shinto shrine and was tempted to pray for his victory, but did not, saying, 'Gods and buddhas should be honored and respected, not depended upon.' This practice continues today as novices are taught to honor and respect a Shinto deity enshrined in the dōjō, but not depend on it.* More will be said about these two skilled swordsmen later.

Because the dōjō is the hall of discipline, the kendo practitioner bows as he/she enters. There should be no small talk among the practitioners and no bombastic commands from the instructor. A skilled kendo instructor therefore does not teach in words, but only through body-to-body crushing combat practice.

Because the purpose of kendo is to realize mushin, the kendo practitioner bows to his opponent before and after practice and takes a position known as sonkyo, stooping down with knees bent (see Plate 9). This demonstrates the highest respect to the opponent, because the opponent is the means through which the practitioner realizes the true-self – just as a Zen monk pays homage to the Dharma, the truth, through which he comes to realize the true-self.

The popularity of Zen, however, has contributed to a trend of making Zen formalized, ritualized, and commercialized. In kendo there is no such empty practice. True, the kendo practitioner may find it difficult to enter the dōjō and put on the bōgu; he may face a slump, and ask himself why he has to push himself and subject himself to such strenuous practice.

But those who survive these attacks of slacking motivation know that neglect of practice leads only to despair. So the practitioner makes the effort, pushes himself, enters the dōjō, puts on his bōgu, faces his opponent, attacks and is attacked – and suffers bruises. He looks straight into his opponent's eyes. He is exhausted, sweat stings his eyes and pours down his face. He knows that he cannot

* An intriguing question arises: Is it possible to become a skilled kendo practitioner without adopting the religious aspects of Shinto and Buddhism? The development of a skilled kendo practitioner is not contingent on whether he/she adopts these religious aspects or not. It is contingent on practice, just like any other sport. But just as an effective sport instructor needs to understand sport psychology, so does an effective kendo instructor needs to understand mushin, heijō-shin and so on. What is important to note here is that Shinto and Buddhism (particularly Buddhism) were the dominant systems of thought during the period of development of swordsmanship and played a significant role in establishing the philosophical infrastructure of swordsmanship. But these concepts – mushin, heijō-shin and so on – can be interpreted from the perspective of modern psychology (e.g., flow-state, controlling emotional swings, and so on).
WHAT IS KENDÔ?

retreat, for if he does he will be attacked. In this state of exhaustion he develops one-pointed concentration, attacks and hits his target. There is a moment of silence – then a sense of accomplishment. He has conquered himself. He reverently takes the sonkyo position.

There is no hypocrisy when one faces an opponent and looks straight into his eyes; for at that moment he is in fact looking into himself. Perspiration has washed away the superficial mask one wears to walk through life. It is this self – the ego-suppressed self, the naked self, the true-self, what has been referred to as mushin – with which one confronts the opponent.

The kendô practitioner who has experienced this kind of practice tilts his head – a sign of respect to the hall of discipline – as he leaves that hall. Arrogance and pompousness are absent in a true practitioner. Humility and respect are the marks of a true practitioner. The practitioners who reveal these attributes are called those who abide in the ‘way of the sword,’ ken+do, in every walk of life.