The Formation of the Warrior’s Status Through Physical Techniques in the Early Modern Period Based on a Review of the Koshu-ryu Heiho Series

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Abstract:

**Design**

Various Japanese *budo* have evolved into their modern form since the Meiji era (1868–1912). The brutal early modern martial arts have been transformed into a combination of skills acquisition and the cultivation of personal moralistic values. Several recent studies have indicated that combat techniques in the early modern period (1603–1868) were not necessarily focused mainly on killing or inflicting injury. We cannot fully understand contemporary *budo* without a clear grasp of the meaning of “*bushido*” (“martial”) in the early modern times and how it connects to Japanese martial arts in the late modern era.

I will discuss the establishment of the concept of Japanese *budo* and its origins as a physical art in the early modern times, which is when its core elements are thought to have arisen. This study identifies the formation of the warrior’s status through physical techniques in the early modern period. The concrete aims of this study are to clarify (1) the Yamaga-Ryu *Heiho* mindset (military strategy) as the ideal *bushi*, (2) the kind of *Heiho* practice and (3) the process of forming the warrior’s status through physical techniques in the early modern period, by referring to the *Heiho-sho* (military text books), which classifies the battle and combat techniques of the middle ages and the early modern period.

**Main Findings**

As the world grew stable in the early modern period, a Confucian view of the warrior grew popular, and the combat techniques known as the *Heiho* were redefined as the “art of government.” However, the premises of the warrior as a combatant were also retained, and many promoted the view that warrior can be statesman and a combatant at the same time. “*Bukyo-shogaku*”, the Yamaga-Ryu military strategy textbook, on how to instruct beginners in combat techniques has instructions for students, which they have to observe at all times as a statesman/warrior, before receiving instructions from the textbook on combat techniques. These are organized into instructions for a warrior as statesman and a warrior as a combatant.

It is the role of the *bushi* as the governing class to learn civil and military theory. The education of the *bushi* with both the character of a statesman and a combatant, was carried out through the practice of everyday acts and military arts. Although such practice was thought of as cultivating a warrior, the creation of the ideal *bushi* also required him to keep his eyes fixed on becoming a statesman. This was one of the ways of acquiring ideas and morals through practicing physical techniques. The practice of the military arts was one of the characteristics of the Japanese traditional physical arts, such as *budo*.