

Aspects of Dual Symbolic Classification: Right and Left in a Japanese Kyū-Dōjō

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“No effective position may be defined by itself; its definition calls for comparative references to some other position.”

PORKERT

INTRODUCTION

Whoever hears the word *kyūdō* 弓道 (traditional Japanese archery) and knows a little about Japan is instantly reminded of the classic book *Zen in the Art of Archery* which was published in 1948 by Eugen Herrigel, a German professor of philosophy who spent five years at the Tōhoku Imperial University, Sendai, in the 1920s. It is largely due to this book that Japanese archery is often related to mystical experience, or whatever is taken to be one, by the layperson. Thus general or introductory essays on *budō* 武道 (martial or military arts) often point out *kyūdō* as “an unspoken religion,” (MASLER 1987, 70), or the art of “shooting without aiming,” or as “arrows of pure spirit” (*The Imperial* 1987, 2–3).

Should these theories be extended any further they might finally end up concluding that “archery is the art of shooting without shooting”—a result that some enthusiasts might even consider to be ultimate *mu* 無 (nothingness).

However, there are more concrete things to be said about *kyūdō*. They might not seem quite so attractive at first glance but can put *kyūdō* and its secondary phenomena into a different perspective that allows for, or at least hints at, a different interpretation of this ancient tradi-

tion. Like all martial arts today, *kyūdō* is a highly ritualized activity and as such gives plenty of opportunity for anthropological interpretation. The following study gives a brief cosmographic introduction into the meaning of right and left in a *kyū-dōjō* 弓道場 (hall of the way of the bow.)¹

It is well known that much of Japanese culture and tradition is based on Chinese patterns, a study of which by the eminent scholar Marcel GRANET stimulated me to investigate the possible similarities of Chinese cosmology with the etiquette of the Japanese *kyū-dōjō*. Through his major publications *La Civilisation Chinoise* (1929) and *La Pensée Chinoise* (1934), Granet presents one of the most complete pictures ever drawn of Chinese culture. He does not aim at merely giving a philosophical history but at showing the patterns which constitute the very basis of Chinese thinking. Through studying his work we can understand the meaning of two important aspects of Chinese logic, one of which has been pointed out by Joseph NEEDHAM as "correlative thinking" (1950, 279-291), the other by C. G. JUNG as "synchronicity" (1973, 445-457).

This term designates a mode of being in which "the connections of events may in certain circumstances be other than causal" (JUNG 1973, 447) and therefore different from "Western thinking . . . which persists in the habit of making causal connections first and inductive links, if at all, only as an afterthought" (PORKERT 1974, 1).

In the present paper I should like to show the tradition of the *kyū-dōjō* in comparison to Chinese cosmology and give an idea of the function of synchronicity in architectural, social, and physical patterns of Japanese archery.²

THE COSMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE IN CHINA

In China both cosmography and physiology are governed by etiquette, which in turn expresses the mythological structure of the universe. The world, macro- and microcosm alike, is regarded as a great system of bipartite classifications, namely of innumerable combinations of *yin* and *yang*. Every existing thing can be classified in these terms (*I Ching*, 1924) and is either considered to belong to the category of *yin* or that of *yang*. Table 1 lists but a few examples of absolute oppositions relevant to our study. Although the category of *yang* can generally be regarded as the preeminent one of the two, the values attributed to either domain are always unequal and relative to circumstances, so that a *yin*-entity can also be preeminent.

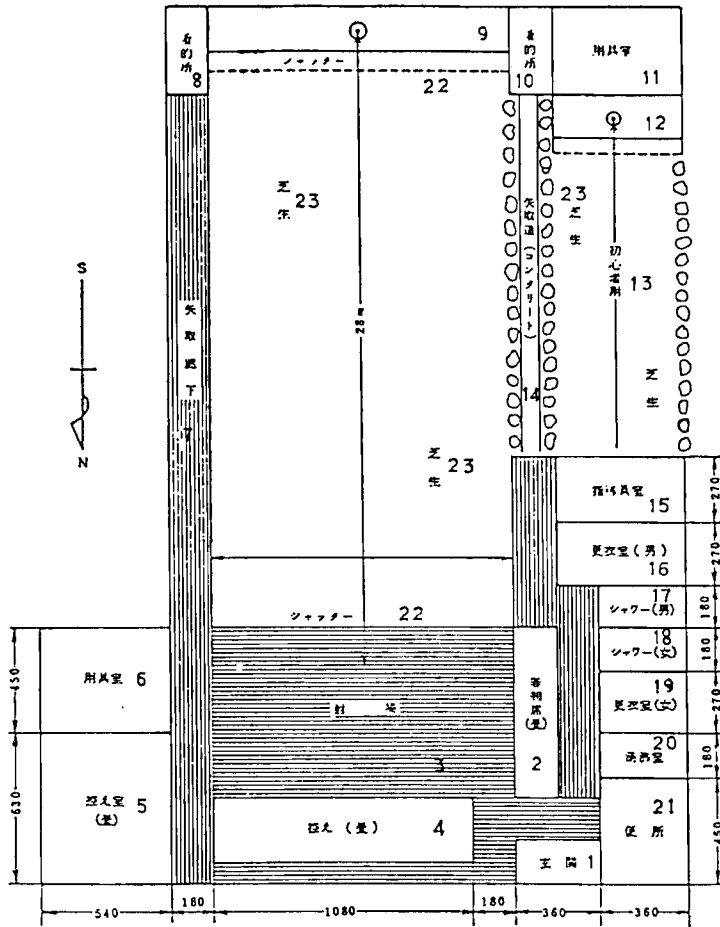
TABLE 1
Yin / Yang Oppositions:

Yang	Yin
sky	earth
above	below
father	mother
breath	blood
chest	back
heart: (simple vital organ)	kidneys: (double vital organ)
active	passive
odd	even
south	north
east	west
left	right
red	blue
sun	moon
spring	autumn
fire	water

RIGHT AND LEFT IN KYŪDŌ

Kyūdō takes place in a hall, *dōjō*, a semi-open building especially designed for this purpose. Like other examples of Japanese architecture and town-planning, we can discern certain features in the *dōjō* that are based on the Chinese system of geomancy, *fen shui* 風水, as described by P'ENG (1961). This system can, perhaps, be termed the methodical fitting of architecture into the compound of the universe, i.e. architecture represents a number of units that mirror the macrocosm as a microcosm. Each unit is located in such a way as to allow for optimal balance with the cosmic energies. Complementary to this "earthly," practical system of balancing the primary forces of *yin* and *yang* is the divination depending on the heavens, called *onmyōdō* 陰陽道 (the way of *yin* and *yang*), which is concerned with mental and spiritual aspects of life. This system was brought to Japan during the 7th century and originally referred to the world-view and practices found in the "Book of Changes" (SONODA 1983, 103).

Individuals or institutions intending to build a *dōjō* are not necessarily aware of the above implications and correlations of architecture and cosmology. They mostly derive their information from already existing examples or "ready-made plans" which are to be found in instruction books, edited by the Ministry of Education or other authorities. The following example (Figure 1) is from a "Research Report of the Public Society for the Planning of Gymnasiums" (NIHON TAIKU SHISETSU KYŌKAI 1981, 138-155) and represents an ideal lay-out of a



Legend of *dōjō* lay-out

- 1) *genkan* 玄関 (entrance)
- 2) *kamiza* 神座 (altar, god's seat) and/or *shinpan seki* 審判席 (judges' seat)
- 3) *shajō* 射場 (arrow hall)
- 4) *hikae* 控え (waiting area)
- 5) *hikae shitsu* 控え室 (waiting-, sometimes caretaker's room)
- 6) *yōgu shitsu* 用具室 (storeroom)
- 7) *yatori rōka* 矢取廊下 (path for collecting the arrows)
- 8) *kantekijō* 看的場 (room for observing the targets)
- 9) *azuchi* 檠 (target area)
- 10) *kantekijō* 看的場 (room for observing the targets)
- 11) *yōgu shitsu* 用具室 (storeroom)
- 12) *azuchi* 檠 (target area)
- 13) *shoshinshayō* 初心者用 (exercise-ground for beginners)
- 14) *yatori michi* 矢取道 (path for collecting the arrows)
- 15) *shidōin shitsu* 指導員室 (teacher's room)
- 16) *kōi shitsu* 更衣室 (changing room for men)
- 17) *danshi shower shitsu* 男子シャワー室 (shower for boys)
- 18) *joshi shower shitsu* 女子シャワー室 (shower for girls)
- 19) *kōi shitsu* 更衣室 (changing room for women)
- 20) *yuwakashi shitsu* 湯沸室 (room for boiling water)
- 21) *benjo* 便所 (lavatory)
- 22) shutter シャッター
- 23) *shibafu* 芝生 (lawn)

FIG. 1. Ideal *Dōjō*-Layout. (NIHON TAIYU SHISETSU KYŌKAI 1981, 151)

kyū-dōjō.

This plan is ideal in so far as it contains all compulsory elements of a *dōjō* as well as a number of non-obligatory rooms that are used for social purposes. Let me begin with an explanation of the compulsory section.

The whole complex is based on the cardinal directions such that in the south there is the *azuchi* 梁 (target area), which was formerly called *minamiyama* 南山 (mountain of the south).

In the east there is the *makiwara* 巻藁 (straw target), for shooting at from a short distance and the *yatori rōka* 矢取廊下 (path for collecting arrows), along which people move south to the target area to collect arrows that have been shot.

In the north there are the waiting/resting area and the social rooms, which are always placed in this direction either directly north or else northwest or northeast. In the above plan, they are suggested to be placed northwest, i.e. they are adjacent to the entrance and the judges' seat. If they were to be placed north, they would be "behind" the arrow hall and resting area.

In the west there is the *kamidana* 神棚 (altar), the *shinpan seki* 審判席 (judges' seat), and the entrance.

The distance between the *shai* 射位 (shooting position) and the *azuchi* is fixed at 28 m, whereas other parts of the *dōjō* may differ in size or length. Thus the width can vary considerably from one *dōjō* to another and is planned according to financial and practical requirements.

Since there are no rules without exceptions, there are *dōjō* which are not built exactly according to the above regulations. At Waseda University, for example, the *dōjō* is turned at an angle of 180°, i.e. the *azuchi* is in the north and the social area in the south. The members of that "club" are quite aware of "things being upside down" and sometimes blame the weakness of the team or quarrels on this fact.

Generally, the architecture of the *dōjō* is not characterized by one single spatial center, but an overlapping of two directions and systems, each with a point of reference which varies according to the respective activity: When shooting, the point of reference is the target (not the whole *azuchi*); when members of the *dōjō* are engaged in other activities such as greeting, assembly, or festivities, it is the altar. An argument to the existence of these two systems will be given later.

In Chinese cosmology—which is not merely a theoretical concept, but a practical pattern of behavioral and other norms—time (*yang*) is symbolized as a circle, due to its cyclic nature, whereas space (*yin*) is conceived of as a square. This square resembles the cardinal direc-

TABLE 2
Correlation of cardinal directions, elements, colors and seasons

north	south	west	east	center
water	fire	metal	wood/air	earth
black	red	white	green	yellow
winter	summer	autumn	spring	—

tions, each of which is related to a certain element and quality, which is, in turn, correlated to time (see Table 2).

A later development is the fifth element corresponding, in spatial terms, to an abstract center in the domain of the “earth,” to which the color yellow is attributed.

The theory of the five elements with its correlation to cardinal directions and the consequent implication of respective qualities governed the construction of Chinese towns, houses, and military camps as it governed the entire social order (GRANET 1980, 67). This interaction of energies, as also represented in the *I Ching*, supplies the basic ideology for the elementary square, which is considered sacred and a representation of the universe, a reflection of which can be found in the concept that “the word for ‘set square’ means ‘art,’ especially ‘musical art.’ All the arts, with magic in the first place, are evoked by the set square” (GRANET 1973, 57). Its establishment is an essential ritual prior to the construction of any building, a phenomenon which can also be observed in contemporary Japan where a sacred square is marked off in the ceremony of *jichinsai* 地鎮祭 (pacifying-the-earth ritual.)

The tradition of the sacred square is also apparent in some of Japan’s ceremonial architecture: The “arena” for *sumō* 相撲 (wrestling) consists of a ring which in turn is placed in a square, the four sides of which are marked by four tassels (formerly pillars), in red, green, black, and white which are directed to their respective cardinal points, as shown in Table 2.

Another example of ritual space is that of the Noh stage, which originates from a *hai-den* 拜殿 (worship pavilion of a shrine) and the *kagura-den* 神楽殿 (dance pavilion of a shrine), both of which are square and directed toward the south (KOMPARU 1983, 112–123).

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

As has already been shown in the section on architecture, the structure of the microcosm is to be correlated with the structure of the macrocosm. This principle is also expressed by the social structure which in turn is ordered by two great principles: 1) the opposition resulting

from the hierarchical organization of society, and 2) the opposition of sexes.

Let us start with the hierarchical organization as observed at the *dōjō* of Waseda University, Tokyo. The organization here can be regarded as existing according to social patterns in other fields of Japanese society.

Each member of the *dōjō* is ascribed his/her position according to age and/or date of entrance to the group. There is little diversity inside the various grades because most people take up *kyūdō* as a so-called club-activity when entering university, i.e. people of a certain grade are about the same age. Students who have practiced *kyūdō* before entering university, are, nevertheless, classed as first graders, despite the fact that they might already have taken a *dan* 段 (grading-examination).

Generally speaking, the basic social structure of the *dōjō* runs parallel to that of the university, where students are classified as from first to fourth year. Should somebody join the "club" in his/her second year of studies, he/she would first engage in beginner's activities, which applies to shooting as well as to the responsibilities ascribed to first graders in the *dōjō*, for example cleaning or carrying the equipment when visiting another *dōjō* for a match or an examination. After acquiring the basic technique, they will become "full members" of their age- and grade-group and will engage in the respective activities. In short: age is prevalent to grade.

It is therefore obvious that the fourth grade students assume the highest responsibilities: not only do they instruct the younger members during the absence of the teacher, but they also organize activities. Captain, sub-captain and manager come from this rank; they are elected by members of their own grade as well as by elected representatives of the lower grades.

The relationship of students of different grades is ruled by strict patterns, the most eminent example being the use of *keigo* 敬語 (honorific language), which the *kobun* 子分 (younger), have to use when addressing an *oyabun* 親分 (older person). The etiquette of *kobun* to *oyabun* and vice versa is continued after graduation and resembles a similar set of social norms as observed in *dōjō* which are not attached to universities (see LYRTON 1987, 155-156).

The opposition of superior and inferior is not only expressed through language and modes of behavior but also through the actual place that people assume in the *dōjō*, relative one to another. Due to the existence of two points of reference, as discussed in the chapter on architecture, two kinds of patterns can be discerned with regard to

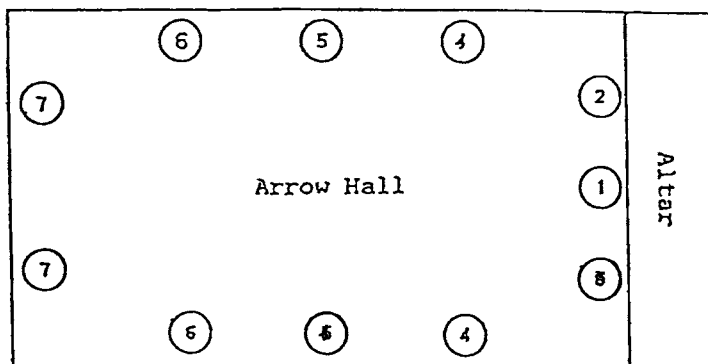
position: One is the pattern observed when people are actually shooting with the target as point of reference, the other is observed for non-shooting activities where the *kamiza* represents the point of reference.

This overlapping of two patterns can perhaps be considered as constituting a dyad—activity and passivity or battling and politeness—and corresponds to the two traditions which generally overlap in martial arts, namely that of the *bushi* 武士 (warrior) and that of the *kizoku* 貴族 (nobility).

During exercise, i.e., when engaging in the same activity as other group-members, the teacher or otherwise most superior person present shoots at the target on the far left, from where the hierarchical position declines to the right.

When members of the group gather for theoretical instruction the point of reference is the *kamiza* to which the teacher stands nearest and with his back to it, facing east: he is thus opposed to the group (Fig. 2). The group, on the other hand, stands in rows facing west and its members decline in hierarchy from west to east. During festivities the same pattern is observed, although in such contexts people sit parallel to the walls, and the sliding-doors of the arrow hall are shut. This system is also observed when feasting outside the *dōjō*.

An exception to these rules are the games played at the end and beginning of the year. During these games the usual hierarchical



- 1) *shihan* 師範 (master)
- 2) honorable guest
- 3) *kantoku* 監督 (coach)
- The following circles indicate the position of the age-groups:
- 4) fourth year students
- 5) third year students
- 6) second year students
- 7) first year students

FIG. 2. Formal Seating Arrangement

order is abandoned, i.e. the members of a certain group are of different grades and sexes, and the order in the *hikae* 控え (resting-area) is reversed: The women sit on the left and the men on the right.³ The above patterns coincide with the following rules of Chinese etiquette:

The place on the left is the place of honor; left=superior=*yang*;
The chief or person of honor stands to the north and has the east to his left.

When holding a reception the chief faces south, being opposed to the collectivity of his vassals. (GRANET 1973, 51)

However, resulting from the two points of reference in the *dōjō* the teacher is not placed north during a reception as in the Chinese diagram, but west, which nevertheless allows him to face the domain of *yang*, namely east. He is opposed to the collectivity of the group which is inferior to him and concomitantly faces west.

The opposition of the two sexes is based on rather much the same pattern as the hierarchical structure: here the female position equals that of the inferior in a purely male group because both are considered *yin*. The women shoot at targets on the right hand side which is also where they are placed in the resting-area.

SHOOTING

We have already seen that right and left play an important role in the architecture as well as in the social organization of the *dōjō*. Last but not least I should like to analyze the implications they have on the process of shooting. Generally speaking, both Chinese and Japanese are right handed but the honorable side is the left. The opposition of right and left is not as absolute as, for example, in Christian cultures but the preeminence of either side depends entirely on circumstances. Assuming that what comes first is generally preeminent to what is second, the left is certainly preeminent in *kyūdō*, a pattern which is followed in the "basic steps" of one shot, as exercised in the Hekishō:

ashibumi 足踏 (to pose the feet/legs);

dōzukuri 胴造 (to balance the torso);

yugamae 弓構 (to be prepared), consisting of three sub-steps: *torikake* 取懸 (the right hand holding the string), *tenouchi* 手の内 (the left hand holding the bow), *monomi* 物見 (directing the eyes toward the target);

uchiokoshi 打起 (to lift the bow);

sanbunoni 三分の二 (second of three steps of opening the bow);

tsumeai 詰合 (to put wedges into the joints);
nobiai 伸合 (to stretch simultaneously, to expand);
hanare 離 (to release);
zanshin 残身(残心) (the remaining form of mind and body);

In the process of shooting, all movements are begun with the left: To start with, the archer steps from the *honza* 本座 (waiting line), in four small steps forward to the *shai* shooting position, which is followed by the individual steps as mentioned above. The sole exception is *uchi-okoshi*, which is induced by the right (see INAGAKI 1983).

Moving backwards, however, always begins with the right foot. These practices are called *shinsa taiu* 進左退右 (step forward left, step backward right), and can be discerned not only in *kyūdō* but also in festivals at Shinto shrines as well as in other rituals. Matsunaga suggests the following reason: Looking south, the direction of the sun and life, the east and the place of the rising sun, the origin of all things, is on the left. Therefore south and east are correlated and the left is esteemed higher than the right (MATSUNAGA 1986, 147).

The above practices resemble the following points in Chinese cosmology: Mythologically speaking, the chief is the rising, victorious sun, and the chief's title is "Archer." He must be directed toward the south which is associated with the left which, in turn, is correlated with the male principle as well as with religious and prestigious activities. For protection, the chief is accompanied by archers and swordsmen, the latter being on his right. The archer is on the left which is the side where he carries his bow (GRANET 1980, 277). In joyful ceremonies or rites of greeting and showing respect it is the left shoulder which is uncovered whereas the right one is uncovered for punishment.

Also in *kyūdō* the left shoulder is uncovered for special ceremonies (Fig. 3).

The inferiority of the right is further demonstrated by the chronological subordination of its activity: Releasing the arrow, although apparently caused by simultaneous action of right and left, is induced by a twist of the left hand which is a fraction earlier than the movement of the right.

The *yin*-nature of the right hand is also indicated by its name, which is either *tsuma* 妻 (wife), or *mete* 馬手 (horsehand), i.e. the hand that formerly held the bridle.

However, all thoughts and theories about the right and left ultimately raise the question of a center,⁴ against which the relative or lateral values are established, the importance of which was made apparent above in the basic steps of *kyūdō* which place great emphasis on the



FIG. 3. Ceremonial shooting. Inagaki Genshirō in the phase of *nobiai* and the shooting style *hada nugi* 肌ぬぎ.

balance of the body. Also, in order to establish and insure this balance there must necessarily be a center.

To stabilize the posture through ideal proportions, the feet are set at a distance apart in *ashibumi*, which equals half the stature of an archer.

Dōzukuri is the balancing of the torso which is set in an upright position building a vertical line from the top to the bottom of the spine. The center of the body and (life-) energy is assumed to be just under the navel, from where all movement is to evolve. This center, *tanden* 丹田 (abdomen) is also the point where the archer is to control the activity of his mind i.e. where he is to concentrate his thoughts. Putting the right hand near the *tanden* one confirms abdominal breathing.

Concerning the center of the body, we can discern a similar concept in Chinese cosmology, which is also reflected in Chinese medicine: Here, not only the same theory is held as to the position and function

of the center, but it also carries the same name, *tanden*. In this center of the microcosm, the archer is to grasp the cosmic energy and transform it into his own:

Ch'i, active or activated configurational energy, synthesized in the orbis pulmonalis from the ch'i caeleste is drawn in with the breath (PORKERT 1974, 207).

The orbis pulmonalis essentially represents what Western medicine defines as the sphere of respiratory function: today it appears that respiration has repercussions not only upon the rhythm of the pulse but on all energetic processes in the body. . . . The orbis pulmonalis stores the individually specific structuring configurative forces, in other words the structuring components of the forces maintaining individuality and even the existence of a being (PORKERT 1974, 139-140).

Secondary to the center in the abdomen is the one in the back, the spinal cord, whose stabilization is essential for achieving the physical balance of the torso. Its complex effect on the whole state of being is presented in the *I Ching* as follows:

In human life this (the hexagram "The Mountain") corresponds to the problem of achieving peace of mind. . . . While Buddhism aims at calmness through a recess of all movement in Nirvana, the standpoint of the Book of Changes is that calmness is merely a polar condition which is complemented by constant movement. . . . The back is mentioned as the center of the neural cords which transmit all movement. Bringing the movement of these spinal cords to a stand-still is, so to say, equal to a disappearance of the ego and its unrest (*I Ching* 1924, 192-193).

During all individual steps of a shot the two centers are to be kept motionless; it is the extremities alone that carry out the movement. Ideally speaking, physical balance is to result in mental balance and ultimately produce the peace of mind that attracts so many people to the tradition of *budō*.

CONCLUSION

In this study I have related the architecture, social structure, and actual practice of *kyūdō* to Chinese cosmology, especially to its notions of the right and the left. Although the values attributed to these domains are unequal and relative to circumstances, the etiquette of the *dōjō* is characterized by a clear preeminence of the left which is coordinated

with the south as the direction of life which, in turn, is correlated with the east. It is Granet again whose interpretation characterizes the present aspects of duality very clearly:

This assemblage of facts regarding the mythology of the Right and Left brings out the structural correlation which is established in China between the universe, the human body and society; all of this, the morphology and physiology of the macrocosm and the microcosm forms the domain of etiquette (GRANET 1973, 57-58).

The same interpretation seems to apply to *kyūdō*.

Naturally, it would be ideal to combine the etiquette of *kyūdō* directly with the knowledge of the system of symbols by which it is inspired. In the present age, however, the etiquette serves largely as a frame which is, apart from a few exceptions, acted upon without full recognition of the cosmological implications.

This paper cannot, as yet, deliver empirical proof of the cosmological background of *kyūdō*, the investigation of which will be subject to further study. Future research will not only have to deal with the historical development of *kyūdō* but also with the influence of Taoism on Zen-Buddhism, which is acknowledged as one of the prime sources of Japanese martial arts.

NOTES

1. The data on which the present essay is based were collected during the course of two years of fieldwork in various Japanese *dōjō*, between 1984 and 1986, at which time the author was a Visiting Scholar at Keio University, Tokyo.

The author has practiced Japanese archery for about ten years under the guidance of the eighth *dan hanshi* master of Heki School, Insai Branch, Inagaki Genshirō, and has generously been allowed to practice at the *dōjō* of Waseda University, Tokyo, where Professor Inagaki holds the position of *shihan* 師範 (teacher and master).

An earlier and different version of this study was presented as a lecture to the Asiatic Society in Tokyo, 12 September 1988.

2. The author is greatly indebted to Manfred Speidel for discussing matters concerned with this paper. She is also much obliged to Andrew Duff-Cooper who read this study in draft and gave valuable comments and advice.

3. As for the style of drinking parties of the *kyūdō*-club, similar patterns can be discerned as those shown by Moeran: 1) formal gathering, 2) immobile cup exchange, 3) mobile cup exchange, 4) song drinking, 5) informal separation (MOERAN 1986, 239).

4. As for the employment of the notion of "center" in the analysis of aspects of human life, see NITSCHKE 1966.

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