



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery* by G. Cameron Hurst

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stream Japanese culture. Regarding, for example, the director's tendency to proffer autobiographical material for critical evaluation, she claims that "such revelations of self and psyche are not common in Japanese culture" (p. 8). Elsewhere she writes: "Displays of desire are attractive to a Japanese critic of his own society, as they cut through prohibitions in Japanese custom against directly expressing personal preferences" (p. 34). Or again, she asserts that in *The Realm of the Senses*, Sada and Kichi's "obsession with sex leads them to abandon any modicum of cleanliness and the decorous Japanese tendency to keep all sexual activity private, behind closed doors, away from public display" (p. 141). It is not clear that the Japanese are more reluctant than others to make self-revelations or express personal preferences, nor that they are more inclined to keep intimate matters private. Turim's sustained critical dexterity and polemical stance, however, supersede such lapses, and, it must be admitted, Ōshima's own critique of Japanese conformity, however stereotypical, has motivated much of his work.

The book's only significant flaw pertains more to its production than its substance. For a work of this caliber and scope, there are far too many misspellings of romanized Japanese names and words. (Karatani may indeed be a *kijin*, but his name is Kōjin.) The quantity of mistakes is unacceptable and one hopes that the publishers will better proofread subsequent editions, since this study will undoubtedly serve as a valuable reference guide to Ōshima's work. In the end, what is perhaps most appealing in Maureen Turim's *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast* is the sense of an attitude shared between author and auteur, as if Turim (who utilizes no footnotes), has allowed her writing to be haunted by the force of Ōshima's iconoclasm.

Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery. By G. Cameron Hurst III. Yale University Press, 1998. 243 pages. Hardback \$30.00.

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In this pioneering study, G. Cameron Hurst fills a lacuna in English-language scholarship by recounting how the battlefield skills of archery and swordsmanship became codified into schools of martial arts. His informative monograph reveals that Japan's armed martial arts possess broader historical significance than has commonly been realized. One can, for example, trace the development of a "civilizing process" in seventeenth-century Japan through the lens of swordsmanship and archery. Until the 1640s, "men's spirits remained violent" (p. 80), and armed competitions were brutish affairs designed to incapacitate an opponent as soon as possible. When Yagyū Muneyoshi, armed only with a wooden sword, faced off against the peerless horseman Suwabe Bunkurō, no rules of decorum or sense of fair play prevented him from simply smashing Suwabe's mount square on the head and then easily dispatching Bunkurō, who lay dazed on the ground (p. 59). As peace spread throughout the land and came to permeate state and society, however, attitudes gradually shifted. In contrast to Yagyū Muneyoshi, a certain Marume Nagayoshi believed that "it was not the purpose of martial arts . . . to injure one's opponent in practice" (p. 62). Most schools

of swordsmanship accordingly adopted lightweight bamboo practice swords instead of heavy wooden blades.

Hurst's sympathies are with those fiercely competitive individuals of the early seventeenth century who were not overly bound by formalized rules. From the 1640s onward few could "enjoy the freedom" (p. 213) of these desperadoes. Nevertheless, the process by which combat techniques became codified into schools of martial arts, a ritualized cultural form designed to promote self-cultivation more than competition (p. 78), proves equally interesting. Each school invoked "some form of authority from the past" to establish its reputation (p. 181). Accordingly, the martial accomplishments of the seventeenth-century founders were glorified in carefully written biographies, some of which strain the limits of credulity. An example is the description of the prowess with the bow displayed by Ishidō Chikurin (d. 1605) in 1558 (p. 135), a time when guns were superseding bows in combat. Likewise, the nature of competition evolved. Instead of disabling opponents, and risking defeat, competitors strove to establish insurmountable records. For instance, Wasa Daihachirō managed to shoot 8,133 "clearing arrows" through the veranda of the Sanjūsangendō temple in 1686, while the eleven-year-old Oda Kingo, competing at a temple half the length, cleared 12,780 out of 12,910 arrows in 1810 (pp. 137–39).

One of the most original and intriguing aspects of Hurst's analysis is that he situates schools of martial arts in a broad context, as a "specialized cultural form" whose particulars were controlled and transmitted by corporate groups—*ryūha*. As the martial arts became institutionalized, instructors became specialists—"professionals"—who hereditarily transmitted their skills (pp. 71–72). The accompanying shift from the goal of self-protection to one of self-perfection led practitioners of these schools to emphasize spiritual cultivation and formalism (p. 75). In such a cultural milieu, Zen Buddhism flourished, but its influence on the martial arts has been grossly exaggerated. As Hurst trenchantly observes, "the spirit of Zen [did not] pulse in the blood" of every swordsman or archer (p. 175).

Hurst offers a fascinating new vista of early modern and modern Japanese history. In the Tokugawa period, not only did martial arts schools provide an important outlet for social mobility (pp. 183–84), at the end they served as a forum where opponents of the status quo congregated to plot the overthrow of the bakufu. After the fall of the Tokugawa regime, the leaders of the Meiji state, in their westernizing zeal, had little interest in promoting the martial arts. Official attitudes changed, however, in the nationalistic atmosphere that pervaded Japan after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895. Martial arts became increasingly linked with nationalistic indoctrination, although swordsmanship was not incorporated into the educational curriculum until 1941. Despite their near-fatal association with extreme nationalism, the martial arts managed to survive Japan's defeat in 1945, and in the postwar period, archery and swordsmanship were reorganized under the aegis of national organizations with uniform standards, which contributed to their current popularity.

Although Hurst offers incisive coverage of the Tokugawa and modern periods, his analysis of the pre-1600 era lacks the richness of his subsequent narrative. For example, he describes a case where a captured Taira warrior was made a vassal to Minamoto no Yoritomo simply because of his skill in archery (p. 118), but offers little analysis as to why Yoritomo accepted this man into his service. Some scholars, such as Takahashi Masaaki, have surmised from this and other incidents that skilled warriors

tended to congregate in the capital, where they honed their training. Yoritomo attempted to entice such warriors to the east so as to boost the battle-readiness of his forces. Even in the mid-thirteenth century, many eastern warriors were criticized as being effete and unskilled in horsemanship and archery (*Azuma kagami* 1254.5.1 and 1254.5.5). We still have insufficient knowledge as to how martial skills were taught and disseminated during the early medieval era.

Impeccably researched, Hurst's rich cultural history contains few factual errors. After an exhaustive search, I could find only two. The warrior pictured on page 30 is not Ashikaga Takauji, but rather, to judge from the family crest emblazoning his accoutrements, a member of the Kō family, hereditary retainers to the Ashikaga. And, the Ogasawara Sadamune document that Hurst mentions on page 120 is generally known as a *meyasujō*, not a *mokuanbumi*.

In discussing the relative importance of swords and guns, however, Hurst's monograph could have been better organized. Although he vigorously criticizes Noel Perrin's *Giving Up the Gun* (pp. 147, 220–21), he still adopts the latter's curious comparison of swords and guns in battle (pp. 37–41). Hurst states: "Ironically the introduction of the technologically superior gun did not toll the death knell for the sword" (p. 39), but in fact there is no irony. The sword was not the critical battlefield weapon in the late sixteenth century. The weapon that the gun superseded was the functionally similar bow, a point acknowledged by Hurst elsewhere in this book (pp. 122–23, 174–75). While Hurst claims that firearms hastened the decline of mounted warfare (p. 38), military historians since Hans Delbrück have asserted that the decline of cavalry stemmed more from the development of the pike, wielded by foot soldiers in mass formation, than from the adoption of firearms (see Delbrück's 1923 magnum opus, *History of the Art of War*, Lincoln, Bison Books, 1990, vol. 3, pp. 649–56). It is no coincidence that in sixteenth-century Japan, as one Tokugawa scholar noted, "use of the spear had become the supreme military technique: consequently, the warrior . . . was never without [it]" (p. 39).

Future scholars, drawing on Hurst's work, would do well to further analyze the complex relationship between "combat sports" and war (see pp. 20–22 and pp. 196–97). Hurst characterizes archery and swordsmanship as "sports"—organized, rule-bound competitions that are "at least symbolically separate from the serious aspects of life" (p. 1). Many matches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were waged with an intensity that belies their classification as "sport." Martial training might spawn acts of murder, as in the case of an instructor killed in his sleep by a disgruntled student (p. 63), while competitions generated feuds, as when a warrior slaughtered the rival of his martial arts teacher in a public bath (p. 44).

Conversely, although Hurst claims that "the Japanese [did] not revel, like the Romans, in spectacles designed to produce the slaughter of humans" (p. 21), people from all stations of life crowded onto bridges and climbed hills, eager to view the spectacle of war (see, for example, *Gen'ishū*, *Daitō* [*Ōtōnomiya*] *monogatari*, and *Taiheiki*). Was "survival on the battlefield . . . all that mattered" (p. 78) to the warriors of Japan's medieval era? These men, after all, wore brightly colored armor and festooned their helmets with crimson fans and artificial plum branches. Some fourteenth-century warriors even dyed their horses in hues of deep purple, crimson, magenta, or sky blue, and embellished this color scheme with leopard-like spots or tiger-skin saddle blankets (see *Taiheiki*). War was brutal; lives were lost; and yet combatants and observers wallowed in the spectacle of the moment. Perhaps one can characterize war

in medieval Japan as a “sport” of deadly earnestness—a symbolically distinct act, pervaded with “real” violence that nevertheless entertained warriors and non-warriors alike.

These minor criticisms should not, however, detract from this important and intriguing work that should be read by both practitioners of martial arts and students of Japanese history. May further research continue on the trail that Hurst has so boldly and enjoyably blazed.