Transmission, Inheritance, Emulation 5 by Peter Goldsbury

NOTE: Though to some extent speculative and without the space to quote or cite sources and secondary references, these columns are really intended as a sort of preliminary sketch for a history of aikido as a martial art. No such history has ever been published, though I know that at least one person is planning to write one. The biography written by Kisshomaru Ueshiba offers the most detailed evidence of the actual life of Morihei Ueshiba, but this was written as a biography or monument to a great man (admittedly with the occasional warts and blemishes allowed to appear) and not as a dispassionate record of the creation of aikido. Even so, these columns have a slightly different focus than a general history. I am concerned to study the dynamics of the evolution of the art, how it changed from being an expression of the personal training of one individual to becoming a self-standing entity in its own right. I think that Morihei Ueshiba and aikido is a prime example of what Pierre Bourdieu called a *habitus*: a complex disposition to behave in a certain way, viewed from the viewpoint of both the individual and the social context in which the individual is embedded.

The last column discussed the seeming irresponsibility of Morihei Ueshiba in being relatively unconcerned about whether or not his students understood what he had been showing them. How much better things would have been if he had behaved like his son and grandson, for example, and produced detailed teaching material—and also had taken the trouble to make sure that his students did exactly what he showed them.

By contrast, I visited the Aikikai Hombu recently and met the present Doshu. He gave me his latest book, published in Japanese with an accompanying DVD. The book is a training manual in the martial art called aikido. That is, it is a book about an established art, not about the personal training methods of any one person: this is the point of the book. It is written as efficiently as any written training manual could be, with color photographs and arrowed explanations of the key points and is supplemented by the DVD, where the key points of each technique explained in the book are demonstrated. The contrast with his grandfather, and even his father, is striking.

From all the evidence I have read, Morihei Ueshiba did not think at all like his grandson does. What primarily occupied him from the time he started practicing martial arts as a youth was his own training as an individual. (The present Doshu no doubt also thinks about his own training as an individual, but the context is entirely different and both Moriteru Doshu and his father have occasionally stressed this to me in private conversations.) After meeting Onisaburo Deguchi, Ueshiba eventually came to see himself as a pioneer: as having a mission that was unique in its originality and exclusivity. Of course, the concept of Morihei Ueshiba as a pioneer also needs to be seen in a certain context. He was a student of Sokaku Takeda (about whose place in the history of Daito-ryu similar questions may be asked) and the core art in which he was training was Daito-ryu. Right up to the time of *Budo Renshu* (discussed further below), his students, at least, believed that this was the art being practiced. Nevertheless, at this time, too, other names were also used, such as Ueshiba-ryu or Aioi-ryu.

There was a gradual evolution going on here, not a sudden change of art, and the association with Onisaburo Deguchi was crucial in the evolution. My point here is that the evolution has to be seen as a *habitus*: an evolution of Morihei Ueshiba himself; and an evolution of what he believed he was creating, which gradually took on a life of its own.

Morihei Ueshiba's mission was expressed in several powerful metaphors, mainly taken from the *Kojiki*. One was to be the *ubuya* or birth hut, mentioned in a very serious discussion between the two deities Izanagi and Izanami in *Kojiki* Chapter 10 (Donald Philippi's translation). Another was to be the famous bridge connecting heaven and earth, also depicted in the *Kojiki*.

His creation as a birth-hut and Morihei Ueshiba as a bridge is, of course, also an example of metonymy as well as metaphor. A birth-hut is a place, but the expectant mother usually needs a midwife or helper. Similarly, a normal bridge functions best of all when traffic going over it passes safely: it has an essentially transient relationship with what passes over it. Ueshiba, on the other hand, was not only the birth-hut, but also the midwife. He was not only the bridge, but also the messenger passing over the bridge and in one direction only—downwards. As Ellis Amdur recently suggested in an article in *Aikido Journal*, Ueshiba cast himself in the role of being a conduit to others. However, his roles and ours are somewhat different. We are brought into our 'aikido-existence' in the hut and by the midwife, but we have no pretensions to becoming either the hut or the midwife. Similarly, like the prisoners in Plato's *Republic*, we see reality only to the extent that we are shown. We ourselves never pass over the bridge: we simply receive what the messenger who has crossed over the bridge reveals to us.

Of course, to practice most martial arts one needs a partner, but in this case the partner is seen as a means to the development of one's own technical skill: in fact one can argue that training with one or more opponents or partners (the Japanese word is *aite* 相手) simply represents the icing on the cake, the cake itself being rigorous personal, private, training. Without the latter, the former is rather pointless. This is actually a controversial point, to which I will return in a later column.

Like all masters of Japanese martial arts, Morihei Ueshiba accepted uchi-deshi and, as the last few columns have been concerned to show, taught them according to the traditional model: the Master allowed these disciples an intimate share in his own life as a Master, so that they would be in a position to 'steal' what they could of his knowledge. As Ueshiba became more famous and taught more widely, however, and as the Pacific War being waged by Japan grew more intense, these live-in disciples became fewer and fewer in number and were replaced by more ordinary soldiers or students.

The deshi with whom I have talked about these things have all made it a point of dogma, almost, that Morihei Ueshiba did not teach in a way that we are used to nowadays. His way was fundamentally 'teacher-centered', not 'technique-centered' or even 'principle-centered', and

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was designed to tease and challenge, rather than clarify. Nevertheless, there are several pieces of evidence that, even in the Kobukan period, Ueshiba was coming to see his brainchild as a distinct art: a self-contained entity that he had created, and not simply as the expression or residue of his own personal training regime. In the rest of this column I will briefly discuss these pieces of evidence in chronological order.

The first is the work made in 1933, under the title of *Budo Renshu*. This book is a technical manual for those who already have some proficiency in the art. It is a collection of line drawings of some 200 *waza*, the drawings and the introduction both made by students: the drawings by Takako Kunigoshi and the introduction by the 'brains' of the dojo, Kenji Tomiki. (The introduction is required reading for those who believe that a sophisticated martial art like aiki-budo or aikido is of no use in a 'real' situation.) The book appears to be the result of one of those intensive training sessions called *gasshuku*, much loved in Japan for their focus and 'spiritual' intensity. It was made with Morihei Ueshiba's approval and he even held special training sessions to make sure that the waza depicted were correct. The book was hand-bound in traditional Japanese style and circulated privately. An English translation was made when Kisshomaru Ueshiba was the second Doshu and this edition, with the translation alongside the original handwritten Japanese, is now a rarity.

The second piece of evidence is the Noma Dojo archive of photographs. There is a crucial discussion about this archive on pp.139-142 of Stanley Pranin's *Aikido Masters*, from which the extracts that follow are taken. (A two-volume revised edition of the Japanese original of this book appeared in 2006, entitled *Morihei Ueshiba to Aikido: Kaiso wo Kataru Jiki-deshi-tachi*, and the relevant sections are on pp.123-126 of Vol. I.) The discussion forms part of an interview with Shigemi Yonekawa, who was Ueshiba's uke when the photographs were taken. Yonekawa gave his explanation why the photographs were taken:

> *I believe the reason that the Noma Dojo photos were taken was that Hisashi Noma, the only son of Seiji Noma, suggested to Ueshiba Sensei that some photos be taken in order to preserve his techniques for posterity. Ueshiba Sensei would not himself have suggested that photos be taken at the Noma Dojo… They weren't taken every day, but they were taken in a series of intensive sessions. I still don't know even today why they were taken.*

The Noma Dojo archive was made in 1936 and covered a vast range of waza.

> *The techniques start with basic seated techniques and cover all the way to advanced techniques—variations are included too. They were the techniques we practiced in my time. I think the techniques have changed considerably since then.* (The interviews were originally published in 1979 and 1992.)
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> *(Ueshiba Sensei) was in a very good mood when the photos were taken. When Ueshiba Sensei was in a good mood, he would show many variations of techniques. He was a wonderfully talented man. He could execute techniques spontaneously. He shows a splendid face in these photos.*
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> *The photos were not taken consecutively but one at a time. We had planned to make a complete series progressing from suwari-waza on to hanmi-handachi, tachiwaza, ushirowaza and, finally, multiple attacks, but for some reason we had to break off before we could finish.*

Stanley Pranin briefly discusses the Noma Dojo archive in the second of his two seminal articles dealing with the Kodokan Dojo era. Actually, Stan is the person I referred to earlier as planning to write a history of aikido, and his *Aiki News / Aikido Journal* articles constitute a substantial foundation for such a history. In this article Mr Pranin discusses the Noma Dojo archive as evidence that Morihei Ueshiba was still practicing Daito-ryu and I agree that the evidence for this is very strong. Incidentally, this might also explain why the Nomo Dojo archive has never been published.

However, my focus in these columns is a little different. I want to focus on the question to what extent Ueshiba saw himself as the centre of a creative process and also to what extent he saw himself as creating something new (the two questions are not quite the same). This leads to the further question, also relevant to Daito-ryu, to what extent this creation becomes a freestanding entity in its own right, with its own internal principles, quite separate from the mind of its creator. This question, in turn, leads to yet another crucial question: that of the creator surrendering this entity, still as yet inchoate, to someone else with completely different aims and objectives from those of the creator.

The third piece of evidence is the work made in 1938, with the title of *Budo*. In his edition of this work Stanley Pranin has given an illuminating explanation of the book's provenance: it was a manual of essential *waza* compiled at the request of a member of the Japanese imperial family who was the head of the Toyama military school. It is reasonable to assume that the *waza* illustrated and explained therein were considered suitable for soldiers who were fighting the Pacific War. Again, the Japanese original of this work has never been published, but there are two English translations available.

Budo Renshu and *Budo* are separated by only five years, but it is clear from a comparison of the waza shown in the two volumes that they had changed somewhat. Of course, there is plenty of evidence that Morihei Ueshiba changed technically, even during the relatively short Kodokan period, and that he was aware of the changes. Here is an illuminating statement from Rinjiro Shirata (*Aikido Masters*, pp.154-155):

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> (Beginners) *learned techniques from the uchi-deshi starting with the ikkajo of Daito-ryu jujutsu. Techniques like ikkajo, nikajo shiho-nage… There wasn't any irimi-nage then, only techniques which, on later reflection, can be considered to be the antecedents of irimi-nage. Irimi-nage was originally developped by O Sensei. Sensei's techniques were always changing. Techniques which had their origin in Daito-ryu were transformed into aiki and as he trained gradually his techniques changed as well. That is why the techniques Tomiki Sensei learned, and the techniques we learned, the techniques Shioda Sensei learned and the techniques that Murashige Sensei learned before that, were all completely different. Sensei himself sometimes said to me, "Shirata, my techniques have changed. Look!" So I watched him. They became circular in a way completely different from his earlier techniques. Doshu [Kissomaru Ueshiba] systemtized and perfected those techniques.*

On the other hand, there is the story of the amazement shown by the late Morihiro Saito, when was first shown the book by Stanley Pranin. The techniques shown in the book were what he had been practicing with the Founder in Iwama from 1946 onwards. So the changes were more like the gradual infusion of a chemical in a liquid, rather than an immediate transformation.

The fourth piece of evidence is the creation of the *Zaidan Houjin Kobukai* in 1940 and the designation of the name *aikido* in 1942. The first is discussed by Kisshomaru Ueshiba at the beginning of the sixth chapter of his biography of the Founder (pp.230-235). Morihei Ueshiba is fondly pictured as giving his all for us on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, totally unblemished and unencumbered by the murky business of running organizations and engaging in 'politics', which business was left to his supporters—and especially his hapless son. I think this picture is an unduly romantic one and does not take account of the actual context of the martial arts in prewar Japan, especially the power of the military in the 1930s and their influence on the Dai Nippon Butokukai.

Ueshiba had powerful supporters right from the time he began his association with Omoto-kyo and even more so when he moved to Tokyo. Most of these supporters trained under him and some became his students. It was these supporters who advised Ueshiba to create an organization that was a legal entity (a 'legal person', in Japanese). In Japan, one does not walk into a government office and simply request that one's art become a *zaidan houjin*. The process is complex and time-consuming and, given the weight attached to status in Japan's vertically structured society, can be advanced or hindered by the presence or absence of powerful sponsors. Ueshiba clearly had these and these supporters were the ones who actually ran the organization, in the sense that there was a 寄付行為（Constitution) with a purpose, directors and rules of operation. So the dojo officially ceased to be a band of disciples gathered round the Master.

Mention of Kisshomaru Ueshiba leads to the last piece of evidence: the efforts that Morihei Ueshiba himself made to find a successor. It is sometimes stated that Kisshomaru Ueshiba became Doshu because he was a good administrator, rather than a good aikido technician, but we need to step back a little and consider what options Morihei Ueshiba had.

The interviews in *Aikido Masters* show that Ueshiba approached Mochizuki, Nakakura, Sugino and perhaps others, to marry into his family and become his heir. This suggests that Ueshiba already saw himself as an *iemoto*: the head of an *ie* (or house). Ueshiba had two sons who died in infancy and Kisshomaru was only ten years old when the Kobukan Dojo was founded in Ushigome, Tokyo, and who appears to have shown no interest in training until he was older. He did show interest—much interest, and so when he was still a student in 1942, Morihei Ueshiba made Kisshomaru head of the Tokyo dojo, giving him an order to maintain the dojo on pain of his life, and moved to Iwama. I think this act effectively marks the transmission from father to son.

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