

The Five-Fold Way of the Sword

—Translation Problems in Miyamoto Musashi's *Gohō no Tachi no Michi*—

Jeff BRODERICK*

Abstract

Towards the end of his life in Kumamoto, Miyamoto Musashi wrote a brief article in *kanbun* (classical Chinese style) on his *hyōhō* or martial arts “way.” Evidence indicates that this work, dubbed *Gohō no Tachi no Michi*, was intended as a preface to his final, culminating martial treatise *Gorin no Sho* (*The Book of Five Rings*). Few English translations of this work have been produced. In this work, I utilize a Functionalist framework to analyze the various translation problems encountered in producing a new English version of this important document.

Keywords : Translation, Miyamoto Musashi, *kenjutsu*, *bujutsu densho*

1. Miyamoto Musashi

Miyamoto Musashi (宮本武蔵 1582?-1645) is widely renowned as the foremost swordsman in Japanese history. Born into a samurai family in Harima (Hyogo Prefecture) he was adopted by his uncle, an outstanding martial artist known as Shinmen Muni. Musashi decided to pursue the way of swordsmanship from an early age, and fought his first duel at age 13. After participating in battles in Kyushu under general Kuroda Jōsui, Musashi embarked on a *musha shugyō* (warrior pilgrimage) during which time he fought many of the country's strongest martial artists. His most famous duel took place when he was 29, when he fought the swordsman Kojirō on the island of Ganryū in the straits of Shimonoseki.

Musashi describes how, upon reaching the age of 30, he reflected on his past duels and realized that they had been won by luck, by the failings of his enemies, or by his own natural ability, but

not due to his having grasped the ultimate, essential truths of *hyōhō* (兵法), a term he used to mean the path followed by soldiers, generals, and martial artists, encompassing everything from battlefield strategy, troop management, individual *kenjutsu* (swordsmanship) and personal conduct. He then set about training himself in the way of *hyōhō* with the aim of pursuing it to its utmost conclusion. He himself states that he reached this final truth around the age of 50.

Throughout his career, Musashi wrote several *bujutsu densho* (martial arts treatises) in which he set out his thoughts on *hyōhō*. These included *Heidōkyō* (*Mirror of the Martial Path*, 1605), written for his students in his Enmei-ryū, *Hyōhō Kakitsuke* (*Writings on Hyōhō*, 1638), *Hyōhō Sanjūgo Kajo* (*35 Articles of Strategy*, 1641) and his magnum opus, *Gorin no Sho* (*The Book of Five Rings*, 1645), written for the students of his Niten Ichi-ryū in Kumamoto.

* 理工学部共通教育群講師 Lecturer, Division of Liberal Arts, Natural, Social and Health Sciences, School of Science and Engineering

2. Background and Significance of *Gohō no Tachi no Michi* – The Five-Fold Way of the Sword

Towards the end of his life, Musashi lived as a guest of the Lord of the Higo Kumamoto Domain, Hosokawa Tadatoshi. During this time, Musashi practiced Zen at Taishō-ji, the family temple patronized by the Hosokawa. According to an account written by Toyoda Masakata (*Niten Ichi-ryū Hyōhō-Sho Joshō*) Musashi wrote a work on the martial arts in *kanbun*, the difficult and formal classical Chinese style, which he brought to Shunzan, the priest of Taishō-ji, requesting that the cleric check his writing. It is said that Shunzan was impressed and, having no wish to change the meaning of Musashi's work, limited himself to adding certain classical turns of phrase and to correcting mistaken *kanji* characters (Uozumi, 2005). This account may be correct in its outlines, but an important correction to note is that it was not Shunzan Harusada Gentei (then a monk in training). Rather, it must have been his teacher, Musashi's contemporary and the head priest of Taishō-ji, Daien Genkō. Daien came to Kumamoto in the 9th month of Kan'ei 19 (1642) so this work must have been written after this date. Musashi submitted his final work, *Gorin no Sho*, in the 10th month of Kan'ei 20. The present work therefore was likely written in this interval (Uozumi, 2008). The original text survives in the Kumamoto Prefectural Art Museum and appears to have been written in Musashi's own hand. Careful comparison of numerous characters in this work with those in Musashi's known letters, artworks, and documents confirms that this work too was written by Musashi himself (Uozumi, 2002).

The timing of Musashi's writing *Gohō no Tachi no Michi* and its content strongly suggest that it was initially conceived as a prologue for *Gorin no Sho*. It was common for *bujutsu densho* of that

period to contain a *kanbun*-style prologue, as it was thought to lend an air of scholarly authority to the work. (This is somewhat analogous to the continued use of Latin by European scholars well into the 18th century.) The content of *Gohō no Tachi no Michi* matches closely with the structure and content of *Gorin no Sho*: the former is written as a single piece in two blocks of text, but it can be subdivided into five logical strands of thought, corresponding to the themes expounded upon in the five scrolls (*Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Emptiness*) comprising *Gorin no Sho*. Musashi concludes *Gohō no Tachi no Michi* by referring to it as "this prologue." Furthermore, it was regarded by Toyoda Masakata and others within the Kumamoto branches of the Niten Ichi-ryū as the original prologue to *Gorin no Sho* (Uozumi, 2008). As such, the *Gohō no Tachi no Michi* is an important summary of Musashi's thinking on *hyōhō* as well as providing overwhelming evidence that *Gorin no Sho* was in fact written by Musashi, contradicting the doubts of some who point out that no copy of *Gorin no Sho* has ever been found in Musashi's handwriting.

If the *Gohō no Tachi no Michi* was, in fact, intended as the original preface for *Gorin no Sho*, why did Musashi change his mind and decide not to use it? As he states in the opening of *Gorin no Sho*, "I write this without quoting Buddhist scripture or the proverbs of Confucius, nor using the old war tales or military writings" but "as an offering to the heavens and to Kannon" (Uozumi, 2005, translation mine). Musashi seems to have decided to abandon the high-flown stylings and academic pretensions adopted by other *bujutsu densho* and chosen instead to make his final work frank, straightforward, and accessible. He must have felt that quoting traditional Chinese sources and indeed, writing his preface in the classical Chinese style did not suit the explicit and logical writing he was undertaking.

3. Equivalence in Translation, Functionalism, and Translation Problems

Equivalence in translation, as described by Eugene Nida (1964) is the principle that a good translation should produce in the Target Language (TL) readers the same effect as the Source Text (ST) did in the Source Language (SL) readers. Nida further outlined two kinds of equivalence: *Formal equivalence* where the Target Text (TT) message matches as closely as possible the ST; and *Dynamic equivalence* where the TT has been tailored to its new audience in order to produce an equivalent response (Munday, 2001).

Functionalism is a movement within translation studies that grew out of the *skopostheorie* developed by Vermeer and Reiss (Venutti, 2001) and greatly advanced by Cristiane Nord (2014). The key concept of Functionalism is the idea that translations are created for a specific *skopos* or purpose, influenced by a multitude of factors including the cultural background of the ST, the wishes of the publishers, the intentions of the translator themselves, the interests and cultural background of the TT consumers, and others. Functionalism views the translation as inseparable from its *skopos*. Thus, it is crucially important to examine the purpose of any translation. This is often done in reference to a translation brief (a summary of the background and guidelines presented by the publisher or *initiator* to the translator) and further analyzed in a *Text-Analytical Model* (a matrix of socio-cultural and literary factors) developed by Nord. For purposes of this essay, I present a somewhat streamlined Text-Analytical Model, omitting some irrelevant factors, in Appendix A.

4. Translation Problems in Rendering *Goh ō no Tachi no Michi*

In Nord's (2005; 2006) Functionalist approach, any translation project must overcome various inherent translation problems which arise between the existing ST and the production of the desired TT. Nord describes four basic kinds of translation problems: Pragmatic, Convention-Related, Linguistic, and Text-Specific. Let us examine each of these in turn with examples from the present work.

(i) Pragmatic Translation Problems

PTPs are those extratextual problems that arise because of the particular context, such as differences between the ST and TT audiences. In our case, this gulf is a huge one: Musashi was writing to an audience of 17th-century Japanese samurai, and in particular to a very limited audience of his own students, highly-trained martial artists of his Niten Ichi-ryū style of swordsmanship who were familiar with his teachings and techniques. This gulf is bridged, in part, by the fact that this TT is intended for a small subset of 21st-century readers, namely those who are familiar with Musashi's other writings. In particular, the assumption is that readers have read and understood the concepts explained in his *Gorin no Sho*. It may be helpful, however, to explain highly specific references, such as those made to *kenjutsu*, with parenthetical insertions and also footnotes.

(ii) Convention-Related Translation Problems

CTPs are, like PTPs, those that arise due to receptive cultural differences between the readers of the ST and the intended audience of the TT. The important difference, however, is that CTPs are due to elements within the ST itself. One such problem is Musashi's use of allusion to classical Chinese literature. He references Zhao

Kuo, Zhang Liang, “a general” (Xiang Yu), and the Marquis of Sui. A deep knowledge of these topics is not necessary to understand Musashi’s references, however, so footnotes probably suffice to inform modern readers of Musashi’s meaning.

In other places, Musashi uses colorful idiomatic expressions. One interesting example is 噬臍 or, rendered into Japanese 臍を噬む (*hozo wo kamu*; literally, to bite one’s navel). This is an expression meaning “to regret something bitterly, to be sorry.” Retaining the literal expression, the meaning would be completely lost so rather than introducing more footnotes it is rendered into English simply as “regret”.

(iii) Linguistic Translation Problems

LTPs arise because of a lack of correspondence between the SL and the TL. Even translating between contemporary Japanese and English would present significant problems, but the case is further complicated by the ST being written around 1642. It thus contains many instances of archaic vocabulary and *kanji*. Examples of the former include 吾儕 (*gosei*, myself), 偶敵 (*gūteki*, to confront and attack) and 諄諄然 (*junjunzen*, to repeat until thoroughly understood). There are also many instances of archaic *kanji* use, such as 迪, (*susumu*, to advance or proceed; now 進) 噬, (*kamu*, to bite; now 嚙) and 勵 (*hagemasu*, to encourage; now 励). These problems, however, are primarily problems for the translator and differences between these *kanji* and their modern equivalents need not concern English readers.

Of greater difficulty is the fact that the ST is written in *kanbun*, the quasi-Chinese classical style used from the Nara period until the Edo-period in Japan, even surviving in limited use until the 20th century. *Kanbun* uses a Chinese-style Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) grammar, instead of Japanese-style SOV grammar. Musashi wrote in *hakubun*, an unpunctuated

style which also excludes the *okurigana* present in Japanese which serve to indicate verb tense and other particulars of a given sentence (Komai & Rohlich, 1988). This translation project made use of a punctuated version, an intermediate version (called *kakioroshi* which rearranges the original *kanji* into a grammatically Japanese form with *okurigana* added) and a modern translation into Japanese (Uozumi, 2005). Wherever possible, however, this translation is made with reference to the original *kanbun* text.

An example of the considerable difficulty in performing this translation is the following sentence from the ST (with punctuation by Uozumi, 2005):

鬻邪貪名之儔、舞法術術、眩曜世人。

Indexing each character in this sentence and providing its literal meaning gives the following:

1	鬻	sell, deal in
2	邪	wrong, evil
3	貪	lust, crave
4	名	name, renown
5	之	(of)
6	儔、	alike, similar
7	舞	dance
8	法	way, method
9	術	show off, pretend
10	術、	skills, arts
11, 12	眩曜	‘false glitter’
13, 14	世人	the people, all

Rearranging the order, making some different lexical choices, and adding some words to create a grammatical sentence, the final version is rendered as:

“They Deal In Falsehoods as they Lust after Renown, Showing Off Pretend Skills and False Glitter to All.”

In similar fashion to how the King James Bible used italics to indicate words inserted by translators to make the text comprehensible in

English, with regular text for those words from the original scriptures, in this translation I have rendered words corresponding to the *kanji* in the original *kanbun* with capital letters and all other words with miniscules. This choice serves to foreignize the translation but also adds a certain weight to those content words from Musashi's original.

(iv) Text-Specific Translation Problems

TTPs are those unique problems which arise from characteristics of the ST itself. One of the striking features of Musashi's original is its extreme terseness and poetic sense. Many sentences consist of brief clauses of only four or five *kanji* which ideally, in a formally equivalent or word-for-word translation, would correspond to sentences of four or five words. While striving for this ideal, it is next to impossible to achieve. Furthermore, Musashi's text concerns some highly abstract and esoteric concepts which only became apparent to him after a lifetime's study. They are by no means easy to grasp, let alone to translate. For example, in one frustratingly brief line Musashi writes:

目撃可存。

This corresponds to 目 (eyes) 撃 (strike, attack) 可 (can, possible) 存 (know, feel, be aware). In context, it seems that Musashi is indicating the possibility of knowing the enemy by “attacking with the eyes” (i.e., by penetrating the opponent's defenses with the full power of one's perception, a topic he deals with further in *Gorin no Sho*.) But is it not equally possible that the sentence implies that a skilled swordsman can perceive an attack (i.e., the one coming from his enemy) by using his full vision? In keeping with the vagueness of the original, this sentence was translated as “Look Penetratingly and you May Know this.”

This line in particular highlights the difficulty

of translating the *Gohō no Tachi no Michi*. It was a secret text written for Musashi's inner circle, about highly esoteric and sometimes ineffable aspects of *kenjutsu*, in an academic and allusive style; one which Musashi himself ultimately set aside, possibly because it did not match his intention of creating a straightforward and concrete treatise on swordsmanship with *Gorin no Sho*.

5. Conclusions

The finalized English translation is presented in Appendix B. In producing this translation, it was necessary to make many difficult judgements in order to overcome the translation problems encountered in this project. It is my hope that readers will appreciate the amount of subjectivity that is necessary in such an undertaking. It is also hoped that readers will enjoy Musashi's words, or at least some flavor of them, which reach us today across a span of some 380 years.

References

-
- Bennett, A. (2018). *The Complete Musashi: The Book of Five Rings and Other Works*. Tokyo: Tuttle.
- Komai, A., & Rohlich, T. H. (1988). *An Introduction to Japanese Kanbun*. University of Nagoya Press.
- Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing translation studies: Theory and applications*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Nida, E. (1964). Principles of correspondence. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (pp. 141 – 155). Oxon: Routledge.
- Nord, C. (2005). *Text analysis in translation: Theory, methodology, and didactic application of a model for translation-oriented text analysis*. New York: Rodopi.
- Nord, C. (2006). Translating as a purposeful activity: A prospective approach. *TEFLIN Journal* 17 (2), 131 – 143.
- Nord, C. (2014). *Translating as a purposeful activity: Functionalist approaches explained*. New York: Routledge.
- Uozumi, T. (2002). *Miyamoto Musashi: Nihonjin no michi*. Tokyo: Perikansha.
- Uozumi, T. (2005). *Teihon: Gorin no sho*. Tokyo: Shin Jinbutsu Ōraisha.
- Uozumi, T. (2008). *Miyamoto Musashi: Hyōhō no Michi wo Ikiru*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Venuti, L. (Ed.). (2012). *The translation studies reader (3rd edition)*. Oxon: Routledge

Appendix A: Translation Brief and Text-Analytical Model

TRANSLATION BRIEF			
<p>Only one other English translation of Miyamoto Musashi's <i>Gohō no Tachi no Michi</i> (Bennett, 2018) exists. The publisher wishes to produce a new, more literal version which preserves some of the sense of antiquity and opaqueness of the original version while still being comprehensible. The text is to be included in a book about Musashi so the target audience is assumed to be those martial artists and history buffs with a pre-existing knowledge and interest in samurai, medieval Japan, and Musashi himself.</p>			
	SOURCE-TEXT ANALYSIS	TRANSFER	TARGET-TEXT PROFILE
EXTRATEXTUAL FACTORS			
INTENTION	Historical documentation; martial arts <i>densho</i> ; preface to a longer work	Retain foreign and historical elements but maintain readability	Historical, foreign literature, non-fiction
AUDIENCE	The top students in Musashi's own school of swordsmanship	Maintain an esoteric "flavor" but add explanatory notes where necessary	English speakers who are interested in the history of martial arts, and samurai
MEDIUM	Vertical text, hand-brushed characters on paper	Space restrictions may apply; text and font size choices	(Standard English book; Exact format undetermined)
MOTIVE	To educate future generations of students; to preserve the body of taught knowledge; to create a historical record	Retain foreign and historical elements ; retain Classical references ; retain Terse sentence structure	To educate; to inform about early Edo-period martial arts writings; to capitalize on interest in Musashi
FUNCTION	Non-fiction; insight into early Edo-period martial arts thinking	Give a sense of the cross-cultural relevance of Musashi's teachings	Same as ST
INTRATEXTUAL FACTORS			
SUBJECT MATTER	The <i>kenjutsu</i> of Musashi's Niten Ichi-ryū style of swordsmanship	Cultural and temporal distance creates numerous problems	Same as ST
CONTENT	The value of Musashi's Way; problems with other schools	Convey this content as literally as possible	The translation will follow a Formal Equivalence as much as possible (i.e., favoring word-for-word translation)

	SOURCE-TEXT ANALYSIS	TRANSFER	TARGET-TEXT PROFILE
PRE-SUPPOSITIONS	Extensive pre-existing knowledge of the author, his teachings, and standard Classical references	Cultural terms and references will be retained to maintain foreign sense; where necessary elements will be explained with notes	Readers have a basic familiarity with medieval Japan, martial arts, and Musashi's main work, <i>Gorin no Sho</i>
COMPOSITION	Two blocks of text in a scroll. Handwritten vertically-brushed Chinese characters, no punctuation	Change division of paragraphs where necessary; change text orientation to horizontal, left-to-right.	A short chapter in a book. Horizontal text with paragraph divisions.
NON-VERBAL ELEMENTS	The artistic qualities of Musashi's handwriting	A photograph of the original document will be reproduced alongside the English text	(See Transfer; No certainty about the receptivity of the audience to this factor)
LEXIS	<i>Kanbun</i> making use of Chinese vocabulary	Take care to choose words which convey a foreign or historical feeling without being jarring or bizarre	Standard English with some archaic expressions and Japanese terms where they add flavor but do not impede understanding
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	<i>Kanbun</i> utilizing Chinese-style grammatical structure; extremely short sentence length	Maintain short sentences to retain impact; add subjects, prepositions, verb tense for clarity	Terse but complete English sentences; archaic structures acceptable
EFFECT			
EFFECT	Use of <i>kanbun</i> creates a sense of gravity, esotericism and timeless authority; the unquestionable wisdom of a true master being passed down to his students	Take care to render in language that is faithful to the original while being as comprehensible as possible; avoid subjective interpretations	In so far as possible, same as ST

Appendix B

The Five-Fold Way of the Sword

Hyōhō is a Way; when Sword Fighting, its Principles will guide you to Victory; so too upon the Battlefield with Three Armies¹. Why should there be a Distinction? Nor is it when Armies come Face to Face that Battles are Decided. Victory is Settled by Prudent Forethought; why Wait? Follow that Way; never Depart from it. Conform to that Method; do Not become Stuck to it. Secret matters shall Not remain Hidden; One after another they will Become Clear. Difficulties Improve After a Time. Only by Entering the Inner Sanctum is one Able to Strike the Temple Bell.

In Our Country, Since Ancient Times, Scores of Houses have Proclaimed their own Methods for Pursuing this Art. What they take as the Way is a Reliance on Strength Alone, or a Preference for Softness and Delicacy. Some are Biased towards Long Swords; or Prefer Short. Their Methods Claim Many *Kamae* as Pretense; this one *Omote* and that one *Ura*. Alas, there Are Not Two Ways. How they Err Again and Again! They Deal In Falsehoods as they Lust after Renown, Showing Off Pretend Skills and False Glitter to All. When they Defeat a Weak Opponent, it is Only that one with Little Skill may Defeat one with No Skill; a Sliver of Goodness Beats None at all. It does Not Suffice to Call this the Way. Not a Single Thing can you Take from it.

Myself, I have Long Immersed my Spirit and Sharpened my Mind Here; Thus I First Became One with [the Way].

We Samurai, whether Walking or Sitting, Always Wear Two Swords. It is Desirable to Make Good Use of them. Thus the Way is Founded on Two Swords. So are there Two Bodies [Sun and Moon] in the Heavens. My Way is Built upon Five Directions [Upper, Middle, Lower, Left, and Right]. The Five Stars [Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, and Mercury] Revolve Around the Pole.

Thus in Orderly fashion the Years Pass, Abhorring Disruption. Therefore there Are Five *Kamae*.² Each has Advantages at Times. Wield the Sword as you Must; there are No *Omote* or *Oku* Stances. Should I have Occasion to Fight, I will Immediately Draw Both Long and Short Swords Together; If I have a Short Sword but no Long Sword, I shall Fight with Short Sword. And Fighting with No Short Sword, Though I should Die I Immediately Seize him by Hand. Victory Can Always be Mine. Not Only That, When a Span of Both Arms is Not Enough, there Are Times when a *Sun* [one inch] is Too Much. There are times when you Should Engage a Strong enemy, and Hold back against a Weak enemy. In All things, without Partiality, adapt to Circumstances and Take the Center. The Center is the Correct Way Under Heaven. My Way Obeys This.

A Man Said “What difference, to Know [the Way] or Not?” Zhao Kuo³ Lost to Qin; Zhang Liang⁴ Helped Build the Han Kingdom. To Compare Knowing [the Way] and Not Knowing is Like Comparing a Fish’s Eye to the Marquis of Sui’s Pearl!⁵ Long Ago, a General Said, “The Sword is for a Single Enemy; So I Would Learn how to Attack Ten Thousand enemies.”⁶ Again, this is a Narrow View! Viewed with the Eyes of one who has Mastered [the Way], Victory against Ten Thousand or Razing a Full-guarded Castle, Each Appears as Plain as the Palm of your Hand. How Deplorable, those Who think This [Way] to Be a Small thing! It is Great.

Anyone Who Learns, Following [the Way] Step by Step, Can Master these Skills. That is Not to Say it is Easy. In Seeking It, Throw off Wrong Ideas and Right your Thinking; Train Daily and Practice Nightly; be Diligent in Accumulating Your Achievements; Thus will you be As One with the Gods. Look Penetratingly and you May Know this. Conform to the Way in your Daily Life; even in Unknown things you will Not Err. Thus you

will Have No Regrets. And In Time you will Attain these Skills. Though One Possesses Excellent Skills, Is Unusually Adroit, and Pursues Technique to its Utmost, Passing this on to Others will Be Like Passing Broth [by hand].

It is Only My Way whereby mastery is Acquired with the Mind and Manifests Physically. Thus You would Surely be Master to One Hundred Generations. Any Successor who Speaks of the Way, Surely it will Be My Way he Follows. There is but One Way; Why would there be Many Paths? If there are Those who Boast of a New [Way] and Decry the Old, this is but a Divergence and Abandonment of the Level Path.

This I say by the Laws of Heaven, not out of Pride or Self-aggrandizement. The Way is As I Here Decree: There is Only a Sincere Heart and the Direct Path. And Thus I Conclude this Preface.⁷

¹ Three Armies refers to the Vanguard, Middle Guard, and Rear Guard, each composed of 12,500 men. In other words, a mighty host.

² Five *Kamae*: *Jōdan*, *Chūdan*, *Gedan*, *Hidari-wakigamae*, *Migi-wakigamae*

³ Zhao Kuo (趙括 d. 260 BC) A general of the state of Zhao who lost his kingdom to the state of Qin. He was notoriously considered to have only a superficial understanding of warfare and serves as an example of one who does not understand the Way Musashi is elucidating.

⁴ Zhang Liang (張良 c. 3rd C. BC – 186 BC, Musashi refers to him as 留侯) A military strategist and possibly author of the martial treatise *3 Strategies of Huang Shigong*, he contributed to the establishment of the Han dynasty and is exemplary of someone who has mastered the Way.

⁵ The Marquis of Sui's Pearl (*Suihouzhu* 隋侯珠) In Chinese folklore, an exceptionally beautiful pearl given to the Marquis of Sui by a serpent whose life he had saved. Musashi's allusion to this gemstone and a fish's eye is to say "two things that could not possibly be more easily distinguished."

⁶ This quote is attributed to Xiang Yu, (項羽, c.232-202 BC) a ruthless and cruel noble and warlord of the Chu state.

⁷ As stated, this provides strong support for the notion that this work was written as the preface to *Gorin no Sho*.