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STANDARD ABSTRACT

Stealing knowledge: Observation in qualitative research of a classical Japanese martial art

This presentation will explore what observation means in researching Takenouchi-ryū Bitchūden, a *koryū bujutsu*¹ dating from 1532. It is based on reflections from fieldwork carried out using an ethnographic approach to studying the current head *dōjō* in Kyoto. Until recently, information in English about the *koryū* has been limited outside of Japan. By their nature, the *koryū* have remained secret, unlike modern martial arts which have spread worldwide. Studies using participant observation in martial arts are concentrated almost exclusively on modern forms and there are very few in-depth explorations of the *koryū*, as academic studies have been largely confined to historical treatments. Observation is itself a key element of learning in the transmission of traditional activities in Japan. The *koryū* are impenetrable, even for Japanese, however, a longstanding association enabled participant observation and interviews with *dōjō* members.

This paper will reflect on understanding of what observation means from three perspectives I brought to the project: as a martial artist using observation as a learning technique; as an education professional experienced in observing teaching and learning; and as a fledgling researcher using observation as a research method. Through developing a thick description of the life of the *dōjō* and its members, my research aims to contribute to research on the martial arts and the sociology of sport; the anthropology of Japanese cultural and leisure pursuits; and pedagogical approaches to self-development. The focus of this presentation on

¹ *koryū bujutsu* = 'old' style pre-Meiji (1868) classical martial traditions in Japan

observation should serve as a useful example for comparison and contrast with observation in other settings, particularly where the researcher already has insider status.