



Eastern Philosophy and the Rise of the Aikido Movement

Yuji Ueno

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Abstract

One of the fundamental questions of this thesis concerns the origin and nature of "religion phenomena." Are such phenomena related only to emotion, psychology, or society? Can they essentially be explained within the conventional framework of the discipline of anthropology including functional, structural and symbolic analyses? If not, what would be the other possibilities? This study explores these questions, focusing on the rise of the aikido movement, based on a martial art that emerged in modern Japan and spread to North America. The basis of the art is related to the Eastern philosophical/religious idea of ki . ;The research aims to understand the nature of the movement and the idea of ki in such a way one can share a horizon with the people concerned. For this purpose I take seriously the insider's view that the art is based on the actual experience of ki and consider that an experiential approach to the "reality" in question is a valid one. My interpretive framework is based on Eastern philosophical thought indigenous to the society where aikido originated. ;This study consists of two parts: a literature survey of the movement providing its historical and social/cultural background, and my fieldwork conducted both in Japan and in Canada. The fieldwork is oriented to investigating the nature of ki both through personal experience and interviewing those who claimed to have an experience of the phenomenon. The other aspect of my fieldwork is oriented to investigating practitioners' motives for joining and remaining in the movement. ;Findings of my research indicate that the rise and persistence of the movement are related to the social/cultural conditions of the societies in question. At the same time, my research indicates that the rise and persistence of the movement also owe much to the actual experience of ki. "Suffering," both physical and emotional, as well as religious methods incorporated into aikido, are important factors

predisposing people to experience deeper levels of "reality."

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