

Reflections on the 2019 Gi Yu Kyo Kai Annual Seminar

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The month of June is a special time for me as it houses my birthday and the Gi Yu Dojo Annual Seminar. June of 2019 was especially meaningful because I challenged myself to test for “GoDan,” my 5th degree black belt. As I write this essay, it has been two weeks since the seminar and I am still reflecting in my mind the sheer magnitude of it all. Please consider this my first attempt to hash out my initials thoughts.



The 12th Annual Gi Yu Dojo Seminar focus can be summarized in two Japanese thoughts. The first focus was “An,” or “tranquility” (安) which can also be relayed as “An’non,” or “tranquility of mind” (安穩). The second focus was “Diadō shōi” which translates into “small differences”. In combination, you can ascertain the interpretation as– “the similarities outweigh the differences”. Given all the political discourse and abundant social media squabbles in today’s society, I believe focusing on these thoughts is essential for budoka. Sukh Sensei practically displayed these thoughts throughout this year’s seminar by demonstrating kata, as taught to him by Manaka Unsui Sensei, and then demonstrating his interpretation of the kata as influenced by his experiences with other schools and teachers.

For example, Sukh Sensei demonstrated Do Giri (horizontal draw and cut to abdomen with the Japanese sword) from Jinen Ryu Bikenjutsu Iaijutsu and from Gi Yu Kyo Kia Iai. Within both versions, the Shidachi performs a flat draw with a katana across the abdomen of an Uchidachi. The differences between the two versions lie in the beginning stance, the ending the “NoTo” (re-sheathing of the blade) and intent of the movement. Despite the differences, Sukh Sensei stated one version was not better than the other. The two versions just teach practitioners different methods of performing the same technique. Aside from the visual difference between the two versions, Sukh Sensei was adamant about one other difference - the Jinen Ryu version carries on the tradition of the art as it was directly shared with him by Manaka Unsui Sensei many years ago. Sukh Sensei further alluded that the Gi Yu Kyo Kia version would never have existed if not for what Manaka Unsui Sensei had taught him and his experiences from other sources. These lessons, these techniques, should never be forgotten by him and/or his students. He closed his thought by instructing us to focus on the similarity of the two versions rather than the differences. Focusing on the differences will likely lead to squabbling about how one version is better than the other. Focusing on the similarities will likely lead to the further development of the art itself and the individual in an environment of tranquility which leads to mastering both techniques.



As I mentioned, during this seminar I challenged myself to test for GoDan. It was about this time last year when I decided to start preparing for the test. My first focus for prepping for the test was to complete the Densho (official scrolls). As you can only test for GoDan after you have approximately 90% of the Densho written and organized. This was quite an undertaking. I knew I had the majority of the Densho, but I did not have them typed out in an organized fashion. My second focus was to become familiar with performing the “kata” (techniques) for the test, of which there are twenty five. Third, I focused on writing my essay responses to the questions given to me by Sukh Sensei. Finally, I focused on meditating and imagining the completion of “Sakkai” test (feeling the killer instinct), the final requirement to GoDan.



Sitting here now, two weeks after testing for GoDan, I can have a sigh of accomplishment. For an entire year, I spent many late nights typing away at a computer wrapping up my notes and completing my essays; I spent countless extra hours practicing twenty five kata at the dojo and in my driveway before the sun rose; I wrote, and rewrote, the twenty five kata names, lineages, scrolls, and meanings; and I spent

many hours in a hot sauna imagining Sakkai. If someone were to ask me, “What is the secret to passing GoDan?” my attempt to a stoic and simple response would be: dedicated focus. However, to be honest, I could not have passed my test if not for all the support and patience I received from my wife. Who had to spend countless nights with me in the background as I typed away. Who had to change countless extra diapers because I was at the dojo. Who had all the patience to bear with me my often short and frazzled temper. Thank you Elizabeth!

Unfortunately, as with all tests at the Gi Yu Dojo, I do not get to relax now that I have passed a test. Passing a test is not culmination of effort; rather, it is the beginning of a newer, more arduous journey. With passing GoDan, I am now considered “Menkyo Kaiden” or licensed of complete transmission (*Glossary related to BUDO and KOBUDO by Guy Buyens*). I now have to scrutinize further my “Taijutsu” (body movement), refine my Densho, and ever further take into account how my actions reflect both the art, as it has been handed to me, and the Gi Yu Kyo Kai Dojo itself. I cannot explain with words the feeling of being in this moment and the sense of pride I have. All the years and hours on the mats. All the work, effort, sweat, blood and ego reconstruction. Most would have given up. Indeed, it is not an easy journey, though it is a worthwhile journey.