

Understanding

BUDO

- Definition and Fundamental Ideas

On December 11, 2005, the inauguration of the Japan Budo-Martial Arts Council of the USA was celebrated in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. The text below is a summary of the speech given by Hidetaka Nishiyama, Chairman of the International Traditional Karate Federation, for this event.

Over the centuries Budo has sought to develop martial arts systems that do not depend on physical strength, but rather, on psychological and physical techniques which maximize one's energy and power. Budo practice enhances a person's mental strength, scale and class in a manner that potentially enables practitioners to control an opponent without physical confrontation. Budo is the foundation of physical disciplines that pursue victory without fighting.

History of Budo development

In Japan, civil wars frequently broke out following the Tenryo Revolt in the 940's A.D. During periods of internal conflict several fighting techniques, including horseback riding, archery, naginata, swordsmanship, spears and battlefield combat were developed.

The introduction of firearms in 1543 boosted the evolution of combat systems. The traditional lacquered wood and leather armor was rendered obsolete and, without such heavy outfits, warriors were able to use quick and sophisticated techniques when engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

In the early 17th century, Ieyasu Tokugawa founded a unified government in Japan, thereafter avoiding serious warfare for some 250 years. While Japanese fighting techniques originally were developed for group fighting, during the Tokugawa shogunate they were studied as a form of individual combat. Prominent experts of the various fighting systems established highly developed techniques that employed not only muscle strength but mental and physical strategies and techniques within systematically organized training regimens. As a result, these bodies of knowledge evolved into different schools of martial arts.

These fighting techniques then were applied to fundamental education mainly for samurai families, while the benefits of martial arts training were studied in various academic fields. During the Kan'ei era (1624 – 1643), religious scholars focused on martial arts' spiritual benefits, which they regarded as philosophy. Confucians considered martial arts a way of preparing people who would contribute to building a strong nation. Medical researchers discovered the value of martial arts training as a form of physical education. Academic approaches became a part of martial arts study. Through this process, martial arts became more than the sum of their techniques. They were refined as the way (DO) to complete human character through the study of fighting techniques (BU). At this point, martial arts developed as a cultural phenomenon.

Budo as Art

Techniques of Budo are executed when “kyo” – one’s mental and physical unguarded fluctuation – occurs in relation to an opponent between moves. This opens up an opportunity for interception, which can be realized only by one trained to sense such moments. In order to “catch” this small window of opportunity and apply a technique, one must eliminate all unnecessary movement. Power for an effective technique must be generated by a motion as small as possible. Perfect and sophisticated moves that meet these conditions are the product of the effective application of a body of knowledge and skills that are recognized as art when viewed by the public.

* Aristotle (BC 384-322), a philosopher and biologist who established kinesiology, stated that the act of creating great power with small motion was indeed beauty in concept and form.

Budo and Competitions

While several schools of Budo do not include competition, judo, kendo and karate conduct national and international competitions. Among the Budo systems, judo has been an Olympic event since the Games were celebrated in Tokyo, Japan in 1964. Consequently, major competitions of judo, including in the Olympic Games, have been televised and attracted considerable public attention. On the other hand, some people believe judo has lost its Budo foundations.

Judo first attracted the attention of people around the world for its enigmatic Budo characteristics such as the ability of a small person to throw a much larger person. However, when judo competition adapted to the requirements of a sports environment, such mysterious elements were lost. The declining number of judo practitioners may be attributed to this loss.

There are many differences between Budo and sports competition, including the following:

1. Competitive sports generally are understood to release physical energy through exercise under prescribed rules. In contrast, Budo competition has its roots in “shiai,” a training method practiced since the early stages of Budo development, which does not involve “play” as in sports. In practice combat, practitioners fight each other under certain guidelines (occasionally in a serious fighting match until one opponent dies). The point of this practice is to test one’s skills while being given an opportunity to learn mental and physical techniques from the other. A shiai places individuals in an extreme position that would allow virtually only two choices: survive or die. This setting makes the learning experience significantly more effective. Through sports competition, athletes develop positive mental effects such as feelings of achievement, friendship and so on, while Budo practitioners enjoy a sense of gratification in a shiai that affords them a valuable learning opportunity.
2. Many competition sports have different categories such as weight class systems. Often a winner is announced according to a total of itemized points. These features are reasonable for participants to enjoy the play component that is the nature of sports. On the other hand, in a Budo match, every unnecessary condition and technique should be eliminated because all Budo systems were originally developed to beat an opponent as quickly as possible so that a warrior could fight against multiple attacks on a battle field. The final goal is to destroy an opponent’s power with one ultimate move. This Budo principle contrasts considerably with sports competitions that include variations added to make the event enjoyable.

3. Sports for competition helps athletes release pent-up energy. This beneficial aspect aids in the control of stress and is well appreciated. On the other hand, in a Budo performance, the energy built up in a human body is applied in an instant, at which point the body must be recharged immediately to meet the next opponent or confront a surprise attack in any aspect of one's daily life. (This recharging action is called "zanshin" and is considered a very important element of Budo.)
4. As already described, in a shiai the opponent is not an enemy but acts as a teacher providing the opportunity to test one's abilities and skills. For this reason, proper etiquette is an essential requirement that can not be omitted in any shiai. In contrast, good manners in sports competitions demonstrate respect and friendship to the competitors who play the sport while following the rules of the game. Such manners are not prescribed or enforced elements as taught in Budo.
5. In competitive sports, the rules function as a definition of the sport itself. In the case of Budo, rules must encompass the spiritual component and sophistication of techniques. Compiling proper rules and regulations for a Budo system is a challenge that can be accomplished only by its foremost practitioners, who not only have understood but also mastered both the spirit and techniques of that system.

It was Dr. Jigoro Kano, the founder of modern judo and the first Japanese member of the International Olympic Committee, who saw the threat of turning Budo into sports competition. After returning from Stockholm where he had served as director of the first Japan team in 1912, he observed that, "Judo will be destroyed if it becomes an Olympic Game event." With this recognition, Dr. Kano revealed his deep understanding of the differences between sports competition and shiai in Budo systems.

Budo's World Attraction

After World War II, Budo quickly captured public attention on an international scale, primarily because of features not found in general sports, but also because it encouraged people living under post-war hardships. The values of Budo were then understood as the following:

1. The impression that Budo provides mysterious powers that allow smaller individuals to overcome larger and stronger opponents.
2. Budo was regarded as cultivating the spirit because it allows people to study methods with which to control an opponent without resorting to physical confrontation.
3. While athletes of general sports practice to surpass their competitors, the objective of Budo study is the development of the self, regardless of physical strength, age and gender.

While some Budo systems conduct numerous competitions, it is estimated that not more than 5% of practitioners are interested in tournaments. It therefore can be assumed that these practitioners engage in training not to be winners in competition, but to seek the authentic Budo spirit and would be uninterested in training if the Budo system followed general sports at the expense of losing its original qualities.

Bushido and Budo

Bushi (the samurai tradition) involves the concept of the hereditary soldier within Japanese feudal society. During times of peace, a bushi served as a general officer either for the Shogunate or for a local state government. While these professional soldiers studied Budo, most completed only elementary levels, mastering

no more than a few high-level techniques. Meanwhile, not only bushis, but also regular citizens studied Budo, with some reaching truly high levels of skill. Because Budo is a physical art suitable for anyone who pursues the fulfillment of one's human potential by consistent training in martial arts, it is not directly related to Bushido.



Master Hidetaka Nishiyama Profile

Born in Tokyo, Japan in 1928, Nishiyama began his karate training in 1943 under Mr. Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of modern karate. In 1951, he became co-founder of the Japan Karate Association (JKA) and was elected to the JKA Board of Directors. In 1961, Nishiyama organized the All American Karate Federation (today the American Amateur Karate Federation, or AAKF) as a nationally based amateur Karate organization, and in 1974 founded the International Amateur Karate Federation (IAKF). In 1985, the IAKF changed its name to the International Traditional Karate Federation (ITKF). In 2000, he was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Rosette by the Emperor of Japan for his promotion of Japanese culture through his lifelong teaching of traditional karate. In 2001, the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland was bestowed upon him.

International Traditional Karate Federation

Members of the International Traditional Karate Federation continue striving to preserve the spirit of Budo in traditional karate training and promote its development worldwide for the benefit of succeeding generations dedicated to learning this true martial art.