

Article

# New Concepts of *Budo* Internalised as a Philosophy of Life

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**Abstract:** Traditional martial arts continue to be interesting and inspiring to many people around the globe. Some of their contemporary adaptations attract enthusiasts for whom they are especially important. In this article, the author bases his observations on his own long-term participation. The analysis takes into account the influence of the perspectives of Jigoro Kano and several other creators of modern varieties of Japanese budo. It can be concluded that regular, even daily, practice—cultivating martial arts and internalizing its values—co-creates the lifestyle of instructors and advanced students.

**Keywords:** traditional martial arts; educational system; *shinbudo*; *karate-do*; self-perfection

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese word *wushu*, or Japanese *bujutsu* (武術), literally means “martial technique” [1], without specifying exactly which martial arts are involved. It has been assumed that we refer *wushu* (or *kuoshu*—national arts) to the Chinese tradition, and *bujutsu* or *budo* (or *budō*) to the Japanese one [2,3]. Here, however, in the title of the article, we adopt the concept of *budo* in its broad sense—as “ways of martial arts”, that is, various methods, educational systems derived from traditional martial arts, and their ideological and axiological basis, and not only of Japanese origin. So, while we focus our attention on the most historically, organisationally, and institutionally developed Chinese, Japanese, and Korean varieties, the issue concerns various manifestations of this specific, cultural phenomenon that function today.

Also, for example, *Muay Thai*, associated in the West with hard fighting and perceived as a combat sport, is originally treated as a way of improving the human character [4,5]. In martial arts, understood to be a fragment of the art of living, the main goal is to improve one’s humanity.

We will look again at the contributions of Grand Master Jigoro Kano and the famous Bruce Lee. Both, albeit in different ways, revolutionized the existing martial arts tradition, enriching their philosophical reflections. J. Kano’s ideas were followed by the Japanese new *budo* and its Korean counterparts. Other modernizers followed in the footsteps of B. Lee and created new martial arts systems. Only *karate* is the focus of sometimes contradictory concepts, and its orientation in terms of values and goals, and ways of achieving them, depends on the main master, who is usually responsible for the ideological sphere. Let us briefly compare these few concepts as they function in the real world of martial arts [6].

Especially, these are concepts internalized by practitioners and influencing their daily activities. They are combined with the lifestyles, hierarchies of values, and even the life philosophies of martial arts enthusiasts, especially master-teachers and instructors [7–9]. The author mainly bases this article on his own 40-plus years of participation and observation in the international martial arts community.

## 2. Towards an Educational System and Modern Sport—Jigoro Kano and *Jita Kyoei*

The Professor and Grand Master Jigoro Kano (or *Jigorō Kanō*) revolutionized the world of martial arts by introducing the concept of an educational system. He initiated the modern *budo*—a set of combat paths, that is, methods of self-improvement by practicing



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traditional forms of combat. Essentially, these are traditional sports—examples of physical culture with sports competition, as is the exercise with wooden dummy bayonet fights (*jukendo*), glaive (*naginata-do*), leather-bamboo *shinai* fights (*kendo*), etc. The introduction of sports competition by J. Kano resulted in a change in the curriculum (techniques useful in self-defense were emphasized less, while techniques that were relatively safe for those exercising were chosen for sports combat). The transformation of *judo* into a combat sport, and then into one of the Olympic disciplines, resulted in the global spread of *judo*.

However, while the attitude to sports competition in the world of martial arts is different—from affirmation, through tolerance, to complete rejection—the idea of the path to improvement by practicing martial arts has found many supporters. In Japan itself, barely any schools teach “*jutsu*” (killing techniques), unless they are called *kobudo*, with an emphasis on their historical, cultural, and national heritage value. Where the name *jutsu* has been preserved, as in *Nihon jujutsu* according to *meijin* Shizuya Sato (10 dan), there is a strong emphasis on educational values and the imitation of J. Kano’s concept [10,11]. Kano’s concepts continue to inspire educators who use judo values for the proper education of children and adolescents [12]. Also, representatives of other martial arts, not only Japanese, use the achievements of Master Kano and the experience of *judo* practitioners for the promotion and institutional development of their martial arts.

The principles previously known in *jujutsu* (or *jūjutsu*) schools and related martial arts concerned mainly the strategy and tactics of combat—using the attacker’s momentum, hitting his sensitive places, the economical use of force (maximum effect with minimum effort), maintaining balance in combat, and flexibility; thus, they were the essence of a pragmatic approach to solving the task of fighting. As such, they can be, and are, also used in general life, for example, in business and management. The novelty, however, was the introduction by Kano of the pro-social principle *Jita Kyozei* (“by doing good to each other for the general good”, and also “cooperation is necessary for mutual improvement”). This meant that one cannot improve in *judo* without a cooperating or resisting training partner. So, the *judoka* does not train selfishly for himself, but to better serve society. The *judo* adherent learns politeness and courtesy, respect for other people, humility, obedience to elders, and emotional control. In a sports fight, the competitor’s training and character are tested. The educational goal was, according to J. Kano, superiority in the sport (victory in competition) or technical perfection itself (master skills) [13,14].

Two excellent *judokas*—Dr. Waldemar Sikorski and Prof. Dr. Stanisław Tokarski [2]—aptly characterize the philosophical concept of *judo* in the words of the founder of *Kodokan*:

*“Kano wanted a compromise in many dimensions, considering the golden mean to be the best choice. He wanted to harmonize tradition with modernity. To reconcile the West with the East, combine the spirit with the body in one common action, physical culture with the civilization of the mind, gymnastics with meditation. The same applies to judo, the strength of the toner with grace, the dynamics reconciling with softness”.* [2] (p. 159)

This is similar to the philosophy of Taoism and (perhaps unknowingly) to the concept of Aristotle (more: [6]).

### 3. *Shinbudo* and Related Varieties (In and Outside Japan)

In different varieties of *shinbudo*, i.e., the new, modern *budo*, sport competition was adopted, or allowed, following the patterns of *kendo* and *judo* [1]. This even applies to *aikido* (schools of the Kenji Tomiki and Hisashi Nakamura masters [15] (pp. 113–114, 173). In general, however, *aikido*, especially in the *Aikikai* (late Morihei Ueshiba) version, rejects sport, combat, and aggression. Grand Master M. Ueshiba’s *aikido* is more of a religious concept (such is the cult-like nature of this art) than an idea in the field of the philosophy of physical culture. Rather, it is to be a path of love, peace, and harmony [16,17], and the practiced techniques constitute a certain kind of ritual convention. In some schools (*Daito-ryu*, *Takeda-ryu*, *Yoseikan*, and *Yoshinkan*) where classical combat techniques and forms of combat are practiced, or also *randori* (a type of sparring), *aikido* has retained its value as a self-defence tool. Here, however, the classic technique and method are referred to

using historical names: *aikibudo*, *aiki-jujutsu*, or *aikijutsu* (more: [15] (pp. 21–22)). *Aikijutsu* evolved from military training in the aristocratic families of Minamoto, Takeda, and Aizu to the different versions taught today as regards the evolution of the curriculum and the ideological realm [18–20].

Korean *hapkido* and *hwarangdo* come from the stem of *aikijutsu*, although they try to reference their own national cultural traditions. The martial arts of Korea, Vietnam, and some Chinese varieties have adopted a system of student and master grades modeled on the Japanese *kyu-dan*. The student is encouraged to gain subsequent ranks and their respective colored belts, and the master degrees and their corresponding black belts usually confirm the mastery of the required canon of skills or the fulfilment of other requirements. In many cases, this ranking process is determined by the commercialization, extension, and monetization of teaching. However, these successive steps are, in fact, steps on the way to mastery, the meaning of which is completely different to that of sports. In many martial arts organisations, there are still requirements for adherence to moral principles, and this applies not only to the training room or behavior during competition. The person primarily responsible for the students is their direct teacher.

Also, in *taekwondo*, which is understood to be a martial art, we find the idea of a road of “self-cultivation” that leads to “self-perfection” and the idea of “responsibility to self and others” by Johnson [21] (p. 5). This, however, requires a certain maturity. *Mudo* (or martial way) is a stage of transcending physical skills into a philosophy [21] (p. 6). John Johnson refers to the vision of J. Kano, to whom the world of martial arts owes the dissemination of the term “do” in the names of subsequent varieties and systems. He also offers the next meanings of *mudo*—spirituality and “societal improvement” [21] (pp. 7–9). Is not linking the educational process to moral improvement and spiritual development an original achievement of this practical philosophy of martial arts? Actually, *mudo* is an idea borrowed from Japanese *budo*.

Jacek Wasik [22] also combines the philosophical dimension with education, without explaining the essence of this philosophy, the principles, and educational activities functioning here; however, he states that this educational process helps overcome the syndrome of “youth maladjustment” in adherents. On the other hand, in the *wushu kung-fu* tradition, the emphasis today is mainly on physical and health education [23,24].

Among the new disciplines of *budo* there are *kendo* and *iaido*, which continue to refer to the pride of the Japanese *bushi*, popularly known as *samurai* [25]. The Japanese national tradition is cultivated here, teaching patriotism; however, outside of Japan, they are only a small group of enthusiasts, known as “spiritual samurai”. One can love this captivating tradition, weapons, and armor, especially considering that in many European countries less and less is said about honour, nobility, self-discipline, duty, and a special duty called *giri*. The humanitarian version of *bushido* rejected the order of revenge and the ritualistic suicide of *seppuku* (also known as *harakiri*). As the noble way of the sword, *kendo* and related forms of fencing educate young people, being more than just another sport.

The educational potential of martial arts has been preserved especially where sports goals have not dominated the sense of the moral path and broadly understood perfectionism. Sports rivalry, treated as a method of improvement and a test, does not have to contradict the ideas of the Way. As Zbigniew Bujak [26] points out (pp. 5–43), some martial arts, such as ITF (International Taekwon-do Federation) *taekwon-do*, despite their inclusion in sports competition, retain the priority of the traditionally understood path and remain more a martial art than another sport discipline.

In turn, Bruce Lee [27] approached the truth about martial arts and the truth about life, overturning the traditionalist approach, finding a new sense of exercise, methods, and goals. In his Road to Truth, he lists 10 stages: (1) seeking the truth; (2) awareness of the truth and its existence; (3) the perception of truth; (4) the understanding (or comprehension); (5) the experience of truth; (6) mastering it; (7) forgetfulness; (8) forgetting the development of truth; (9) the return to the sources of truth; and (10) resting in nothingness. It is a typical Buddhist path towards the state of emptiness, nothingness. This language was used by [27]

(p. 8) to describe the path to the Absolute through martial arts. The path leading to the truth about martial arts is to be “knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the value of the acquired knowledge” [28] (p. 41). When describing values, Lee recommended adherents “throw away all that is irrelevant” [27] (p. 34). Contrary to Funakoshi and traditionalists, he believed that imitation of the classical patterns in various movements was wrong; “nothing can be limited; a soft thing cannot be broken” [28] (p. 32). In this thought of Bruce Lee, we find a reference to the philosophy of flexibility. Lee [27] also refers to the “art of flexibility” by praising the economy of movements and incorporating techniques derived from *jujutsu* into his *Jeet Kune Do kung-fu* style [27] (pp. 45, 113–116). In the book *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, he wrote that “*Jeet Kune Do* is a step towards self-discovery ... for the martial artist’s individuality, but also for his life as a human being” [27] (p. 185). Bruce Lee’s ideas influenced a whole generation of related martial arts masters of higher degree, such as Peter Jahnke, Keith Kernspecht, Dan Inosanto, Abel Figueiredo, and Harald Weitmann [15].

#### 4. From the Idea of *Karate-do* to *Zendo karate*

Okinawa is the main island of the Ryukyu archipelago. The Ryukyu kingdom was under the cultural influence of the Chinese Empire for a long time. Then, *karate* was born there, originally known as the “Chinese hand” (唐手 *kara-te* “Tang hand”, changed by Funakoshi into 空手 *kara-te* “empty hand”) [29,30]. Chinese influences meant that the people living there mainly professed Confucianism. Another Confucianist was Gichin Funakoshi (1868–1957), a teacher from Naha and founder of the idea of *karate-do* [31–33]. He was one of those who co-created Japanese *karate*, modernized from the Okinawan original. Confucian philosophy is primarily social ethics; thus, Funakoshi taught *karate* (by practicing forms, the so-called *kata*) and ethical principles—avoiding violence, adopting politeness (etiquette, courtesy), staying alert, and pursuing continuous spiritual improvement. He recommended persistent practice and also defend the way of truth.

It was only in Japan, where *karate-do* was incorporated into *budo*, that it began to be associated with Buddhism and the *bushido* code. After the death of G. Funakoshi, a sports competition was introduced in his school, to which he had not previously agreed. Currently, however, also in the cradle of *karate* in Okinawa, *karatekas* organize sports competitions. This “sporting” *karate* has little to do with the traditional, classical way of practicing it. It used to be used mainly for self-defence. Funakoshi tried to create a specific educational system without sports rivalry, which makes him significantly different from Jigoro Kano. Today, it is becoming more and more a sport, in different varieties—according to various competition rules (from non-contact to full-contact formulas).

What has survived from the Confucian canon in *karate* philosophy? Mieczysław Künstler [34], describing the work and thought of Confucius (pp. 118–156), indicates that science (Chinese: *hüe*) is to imitate what is perfect. So, in *karate*, Funakoshi consistently recommended practicing technical forms (Japanese *kata*, Chinese *taolu*), actually first one, then another, etc. Learning should consist of following a perfect pattern; the teacher is one who knows these patterns. Confucius recommended that power fall into the hands of the “aristocracy of the spirit”, that is, people who managed to achieve a certain perfection (regardless of origin) [34] (p. 131). In this concept, he overtook Florian Znaniecki by hundreds of years. Virtue is based on custom (Chinese: *li*), common and community action (*jüe*), and the resulting balance, or order (*tao*). Therefore, one should respect the tradition and the achievements of previous generations, acting pro-socially and following ethical principles. A noble person should be *ren*, that is, humane, and maintaining dignity in all situations. One should always function in accordance with the Will of Heaven, taking care of the family and proper hierarchical interpersonal relations. These are fundamental dependencies: children on parents, wife on husband, younger on older. The teacher and legitimate authority must be respected. One of the main virtues is *hiao*, that is, filial love. Its derivative is sincerity, which consists of displaying those feelings and thoughts that should

be expressed in a given situation. In turn, fidelity and loyalty (or *chung*) are the duties of the son and pupil, as well as of every human being towards his state.

The *hiao* virtue, as well as other social relations resulting directly from Confucianism, were promoted by both G. Funakoshi and Masutatsu Oyama. M. Oyama (1923–1994, 10 dan, founder of the *Kyokushin karate* style), however, mainly propagated his own philosophy of *Kyokushin*, or the ultimate truth, which he derived from various directions of Far East thought (mainly Buddhism and Taoism) and identified it with the Way of the Warrior, or *bushido*. The means to learn the Truth were the asceticism of hard training and *karate* contact fighting, as well as Zen meditation [35]. After M. Oyama's death, his school and style were divided between about 10 organisations, which, in various ways, continued the master's work [36].

As sports *karate* loses its deeper meaning and reduces the martial art to the form defined by sports rules, some champions have decided to reject all sports competition. This applies, for example, to Peter Knut Jahnke and Sergio Mor-Stabilini. Mor-Stabilini [37] emphasizes "*do*" as the development of spirituality based on methods and ideas of East Asian origin. On the other hand, P. K. Jahnke created the concept of the *karate* way based on in-depth reflection, compatible and complementary to the Confucian idea of G. M. Funakoshi [38]. *Sensei* Jahnke and *Zendo karate Tai-te-tao* ("The Way of Karate Meditation—The Way of the Hand of Peace or Power of the Great Way") allude to the ideas of Taoism, Zen meditation, and the spirituality of the great universalist religions, albeit selectively. The principle is cooperation, which excludes negative cooperation, thus, also sports competition. Even a training fight is supposed to provide mutual learning, with mutual responsibility for the person exercising. His idea of the basic principle of Great Love, which he equates with the Tao, and the idea of God love is akin to Whitehead's concept [38,39].

Thus, outstanding *karateka*, such as Jahnke and Oyama, created competing ideas of the path of personal improvement and transgression, specific philosophies of life, and the human path. Their successors, such as Lothar Sieber (Munich, Germany) and Wiesław Gwizd (Tarnów, Poland), as continuators of their concepts, developed and implemented noble ideas of the moral way of self-improvement. The outstanding Polish *karateka*, *sensei* Gwizd is dead, while *meijin* Sieber still teaches martial arts [40]. It can be assumed that the family home, the church, the school, and other social institutions have a greater impact on the internalization of a given value system; most likely, however, the axionormative systems present in martial arts have a significant influence on the internalized hierarchy of values. Also, people of the Catholic faith respect the ethical principles of the ways of martial arts [9,41].

The way of *karate* is a life-long pursuit, and full mastery and perfection are unattainable for man. The philosophy of similar martial arts, traditionally understood as "moral paths", is based on the practice of specific axionormative systems that define the lifestyle (broadly understood as perfectionism), which may prevent consumerism, the pressure of commercialism, and utilitarianism. Jan Szmyd [42] calls martial arts homocreative, that is, those that create man and create him through their own efforts. Homocreativity is about developing the personality, self-education, and self-creation of a self-aware person. It can help overcome a crisis of values because it is based on a specific axionormative system (more: [42–44]).

Homocreativity, the potential of martial arts, is an opportunity to change relations on two levels. It is an adoption of the achievements created in a culture that is foreign to the Western world. It is also an opportunity for a change in interpersonal relations—moving from competition to a mutually enriching dialogue. This brings the philosophy of martial arts closer to the philosophy of the dialogue of Emanuel Levinas [45–47].

## 5. Conclusions

The ideological concept of G. M. Masutatsu Oyama is completely different from the humanist-oriented concept of G. M. Jahnke [48] (pp. 39–43). Yet others are the philosophical or ideological views of many other martial arts teachers, leaders, or researchers. So, there is



no one *karate* way (*karate-do*) that is universally accepted. There is also no one established philosophy of *aikido*, *taekwondo* or *taekwon-do*, an unequivocal interpretation for today's *judo*, or for *kung-fu* and martial arts derived from the Chinese tradition. There are also eclectic creations with the sticky natures of both techniques and ideological foundations.

In many cases (for educational systems), the common idea is to educate a good person according to noble patterns, to have an open, pro-social personality. However, for pragmatic or utilitarian schools, the goal is to learn self-defence or combat, and the school does not interfere with the views and world of values of students and instructors and teachers. The liberal approach results from adapting to the conditions of commercial operations and is typical especially for large organisations.

Martial arts promote self-defence, but, in addition to fighting techniques, they introduce their students to specific axiological, normative, and educational systems; more specifically, "Varieties of martial arts are forms of asceticism, i.e., the practice of a psycho-physical character, which is focused on the moral and spiritual development of the practitioner (. . . ). Through training in fighting techniques they lead to multi-dimensional self-improvement and self-realisation. At the same time these are processes of educational and positive asceticism combining physical exercise with conscious self-discipline and focused on moral and spiritual progress (. . . ). The way of martial arts is associated here with the concepts of self-discipline and self-control, of transgression and self-transcendence (. . . ) and the transgressive accomplishments include crossing borders (. . . ), whereas transgression applies to transcending beyond material reality and manifests itself in the implementation of widely understood principles of perfectionism and crossing the borders of one's own weakness (. . . ). The main objective of martial arts is self-perfection" [49] (p. 229) and [50] (p. 61).

In particular, many martial arts teachers follow the noble path of a warrior, with their own lives and conduct, setting an example that it is also possible today. Probably few martial arts teachers reflect on the philosophical meaning of their own way of life. However, it can be concluded that this kind of practically applied philosophy of life is similar to its interpretation by Francois Jullien [51,52], being a kind of eclectic idea espousing aspects of Western and Chinese thinking. Despite differences in symbolism and mentality [6,53], it is also a kind of synthesis (or attempted synthesis) of Western and East Asian thought, pursuing the path between morality and the needs in the spheres of health and spirituality, involving physical and ascetic practice.

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