

I Don't Want All This Oriental Mumbo-Jumbo

An extension of the Westerner's hesitancy to bow is his/her hesitancy to accept anything Eastern. He or she wants to learn the Asian martial arts, but resists the cultural aspects that go with it. Well, the short response is: change schools. There are plenty of schools around that minimize Eastern cultural traditions for the very purpose of appealing to a Western sort of sensibility. The longer response is, of course, to explain why some Westerners actually find *value* in "all this Oriental Mumbo-Jumbo."

Especially egregious to the culturally insular are the art's history (being dominantly Asian) and those foreign terms used in class or required for exam. Although no one expects students to master Chinese, Japanese, or Korean just because they are studying Chin-na, Judo, or Hapkido, still there are advantages to learning martial terms in their original language. It gives Westerners a culturally universal language (despite variants in terminology) with which to train in their art. Martial artists of different tongues (like people in Europe for instance) can communicate regarding their art and simultaneously be better prepared to understand techniques not indigenous to their own style, the universal language serving as an overlay to other martial arts of the same culture.

Asian terminology also gives a "distancing" and thus a reverence for the techniques it names. This inspiring of awe, based on initial ignorance, is important. Although it should not be understood to continue endlessly into one's martial arts career, it is partially the awe of a technique that first makes one suffer to learn it. It is the pulling away of the foreign shades that makes learning exciting. It is breaking through that feeling of awe that makes one own the technique. When *oi tsuki* cannot be thought of by any other term, you have spent enough time on it to start getting it right. This does not mean that people who call it "lunge punch" cannot learn the technique; it simply means that they are learning *only* the physical technique, not also the spirit. People who assume that a punch is just a punch, a kick is just a kick, are missing the middle step. One needs to believe that a punch is more than a punch, a kick much more than a kick, before one is ready to revert to one's first notion. Foreign terminology helps place that technique on someone else's property. You may purchase a piece of that property by training hard enough and by understanding a little Asian vocabulary.

To assume the property is just like what you have in your backyard is a mistake often made by those eager to get tough quick, those impatient with the slower, more thorough, more traditional process of training. Once you fully understand various uses of terms, you will see that the English translation is often a weak approximation of the native word. This will tell you something about the technique it describes and also about the original concept of that technique. *Oi tsuki*, for example, does not literally mean "lunge punch," rather it suggests "chasing thrust," which gives a different sense of the context where the technique might best be used.

This is studying in depth as well as breadth and is part of what makes the traditional arts so holistic in emphasis.

The American student who regards Asian cultural exposure as useless will have a limited reason for martial arts training — just to fight, for example. Traditional arts instruct not only the combative aspects but also the self-defense (which is not necessarily the same as combat), the self-development, the self-control, the spiritual, and the cultural aspects of training, as well.

No, you do not have to learn the language to learn the terms, but learning the terms in the native language will make you better understand the language a little better, and therefore the native speakers, and therefore the art.