

An Honest Man

[Itsumomanabu](#) has left you a message:

you are so full of crap anessi

you stole the techniques from Okamoto Shihan. You have no real background in Daito Ryu. You are not an honest man.

A few months ago, this very informative message was delivered from a YouTube denizen. Although he did not know how to spell my last name nor the words “technique” or “background”, and although he did not reference the video clip which stimulated him nor bothered to note that I do not claim a Daito-ryu background, he did manage to inspire an interesting question: When can you realistically be accused of “stealing” a technique and thus appropriately deserve the moniker “dishonest”?

If you learn a Shorin kata from your teacher and then tweak it somewhat in your own study, are you dishonest or are you Kenwa Mabuni? Or Gichin Funakoshi? Or Tatsuo Shimabuko? If you learned a Daito waza from a teacher in a private class or open seminar, are you allowed to use it? To teach it? To incorporate it in other things you do? If you do, are you dishonest? Or are you Morihei Ueshiba? Or Ryuho Okuyama? Or Horikawa Kodo?

It seems to me that whatever you learn becomes your knowledge to do with as you will, unless (1) you are taught under clearly stated restrictions, or (2) you teach the technique in a manner that represents it as your own invention.

I have had several students “steal” my entire curriculum. I can only hope they gave me credit for it, but I have no doubt that they tweaked it to their own uses. I doubt if they understood its intricacies and how one section links with another—something I spent many hours developing—but that is no longer my business. An arrangement of techniques and requirements, a.k.a. a curriculum, is usually not considered intellectual property unless copyrighted in print or used as part of a franchise agreement. Certainly it would be preferable for a student, going off on his own, to ask his sensei’s permission to use the curriculum with the understanding that it will be changed over the years, but even if this little aspect of *reishiki* is ignored, the student is not dishonest unless he claims to have come up with the requirements himself.

I have made it clear over the years that my karate curriculum begun in the mid-’70s was founded undeniably on Sensei Lou Demas’s Shotokan requirements, at least through shodan, and that my aiki curriculum, also from the ’70s, was founded on the two sets of requirements that Shihan Church employed in his Kamishin Aiki-ju-jutsu. What I have not emphasized, because I thought it would be taken for granted in any proper dojo, was that I asked Sensei Demas’s permission to teach in my own school what I learned from him and that I cleared in writing my adjusted aiki curriculum with Soke Church. Soke Church responded by, not only accepting my curriculum, but also making my illustrated handbooks the official handbooks of the style at that time.

Since having resigned the position of soke-dai of KSKI Kamishin-ryu martial arts in the late 1980s, many other part-time teachers both in aiki and karate have, of course, influenced me, helping me develop more details and variations within the arts we now call Takeshin Sogo Budo. Did I steal their techniques? Watch a few Bushido-kai DVDs—not YouTube clips, but our full DVDs: you will find that I refer to the sources of the techniques I teach. How many times have I said, “I was taught this by Soke Don Angier,” or “This type of work is a specialty of Hanshi Bruce Juchnik”?

Sometimes there exist several versions of the waza I show. I remember Sensei Roy Goldberg commenting in a seminar we did together, that the technique I performed for the DVD (he was not allowed to record his Kodokai Daito-ryu waza on video) was not the accurate Kodokai version. No doubt that was true, but I did not claim it was. In fact Kamishin had a similar technique, so I showed that instead. Viewers would have been very disappointed if both he and I were not allowed to show techniques on video, so one of us had to show something!

One art comes from and is associated with another. Aikido does ikkyo while Kamishin does Ude Otosu Odori and Hakkoryu does Ude Osae Dori. Each of them comes from Daito, but none can be said to be an accurate representation of the Daito root. “Mater” is Latin, “Mutter” is German, “Mare” is French, and “Mother” is English. They all are recognizable versions of the same thing, but English did not steal from Latin any more than Portuguese (Matriz) stole from Spanish (Madre). Imagine my kind YouTube commenter calling European languages dishonest.

More about Honesty and Technique Theft next week.