

Creative and Recreative 2

I would suggest that we, the nouveau riche of budo, begin to think of developing the skills it took Miyagi to create Goju, Funakoshi to create Shotokan, and Uncle Tanoose to create his wealth, rather than show up just often enough to get a rank in some re-created version of their original creations.

There have been many modern martial artists in our lifetime who have sought to create their own system using aspects of other systems. Ed Parker's Kenpo took a rudimentary Kosho-ryu as taught by William "Thunderbolt" Chow (later Kara-ho Kempo), refined it, and added some concepts from the Filipino arts that were being practiced, albeit not openly, in California. Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do was obviously built upon a foundation of Wing Chun and influence by any number of Western and Eastern arts, fencing and boxing among them. Since Bruce Lee's death, there has been no shortage of qualified and less-than-qualified individuals who tried their hand at founding an art. In each case, they have built their teachings on the creations of others. In doing so, some have contributed a great deal to the martial arts. Others have tried to re-create the wheel, the driveshaft, the chassis, and the fuel only to find that most vehicles look and act alike. They quickly learn that creating an art is not simply rearranging someone else's curriculum, adding a few *tokui-waza* (favorite techniques), and making up a cool patch. Arts like these usually find few adherents because they either have no depth or because they do not delineate themselves from other arts.

Most students of traditional *budo*, however, do not try to be founders. Instead they find themselves in the strange role of representing and maintaining a tradition they do not really understand. Why should a white belt, a green belt, or a brown belt be charged with representing his art? What does he really know about it? Even a black belt, competent at the basics, may have no idea how he may integrate various aspects of the art. Only around *godan* (fifth degree) does the student begin to see the whole picture. And yet, even these students are likely to take all they have learned at face value, seldom understanding its depth and never understanding what it took to put the art together, teach it, or maintain it.

Most students are, after all, consumers. They pay for lessons and take away what they want for as long as they want. Even though they are interested in this Asian fighting tradition to some degree, loyalty will always be sacrificed for personal expediency since they do not live in a society that values membership, apprenticeship, or fidelity. Having been enriched by the traditional art that one of those guys on the wall created a hundred years before, they feel it is their right to spend his riches as they see fit. And, they have a point, just as you have a right to use your smart phone technology as you see fit, even if you haven't the foggiest idea how your finger makes the icons move, or calls up a new app.

I advocate that we, to the extent that we are serious traditional martial artists, try to develop the creative skills of the founders, not so that we can re-create what ancient masters have already done, but so that we can appreciate fully what they have left us. Unconsciously we recreate their arts every time we use them. Some

people are locked into recreating them perfectly accurately. Others understand that arts adapt and adjust to the times then push that adaptation until it no longer represents its own roots. In either case, our understanding the art from the outside in would help us either replicate it or modify it from a more rational, aware, and respectful point of view.

Another aspect of this theme next week.