

## Creative Budo

Another aspect of my recurring theme of Innovative Traditionalism is the nature of creativity in traditional budo.

To the extent that an art is to remain an art, creativity in rendering the appearance of the art through techniques and forms must be limited. If you start doing high-flying TKD kicks after applying a Wing-chun *bong-sau*, you might be a creative martial artist, but you are no longer doing either TKD or Wing-chun. This seems to imply that no creativity can exist in budo/mudo/ch'uan-fa without endangering the style or art that one is performing. Well, not exactly.

Although creativity in budo can gradually develop into another style, much like Bruce Lee's creativity drew Jeet Kune Do out of a base of Wing-chun, one can use quite a bit of creativity in teaching and drilling even a classical art in a way that does not veer toward inventing a new one. Recently a martial artist wrote me about an innovative method he had "invented" for practicing judo throws. I am sure it was original to him since he had not seen it before in any of his practices; however, the method had been used for decades (perhaps longer) in karate drills, albeit not with throws but with free retaliations. Although he was not strictly an inventor, to his credit, the gentleman was being creative without approaching any sort of change to his art. One method of creativity is to apply a detail, commonly used in one field, to another field that simply has not considered it. My Shotokan karate instructor's instructor "invented" a drill in which students react, in a give-and-take manner, to each other's attacks. Shotokan generally does not do that sort of thing, but in judo we called it *sute-geiko* (exchange practice).

Often when students have a problem with a technique or a concept, I try to "back them into it" by creating a drill on the spot that encompasses the skills they need, but in a way that avoids their preconceived notions about the technique or concept in question. That unique sort of training, not traditional at all, results in the development of skills that will manifest themselves in a traditional art.

One can also be creative in the interpretation or application of solo training like kata. Since no one knows for sure what certain solo movements mean, one can imagine that any movement can be a lock, a block, a blow, or a throw (see our DVD [Transmutation](#)). However, in order for creativity not to run amok, some restraint has to be considered. Asking a student to come up with an application for a kata movement when he is inexperienced often results in a forced application. Frequently students (and other human beings) do not see that proper creativity (in my humble opinion) must not only be original, but also beneficial or useful in some way.

Step out of budo for a moment and consider modern art. The Impressionists were creative in their approach and many critics disliked what they were doing, but they had a good reason for doing it, and their paying attention to the effects of light changed art forever. Their work was not only creative but also beneficial/useful. Had they just thrown paint at a canvas and said, “Hey! That’s how my personal artistic genius sees light”, they would have been implying that their unique vision was all that was needed for creativity. But would it have been beneficial or useful? Would it have communicated their joy at seeing light to others who saw the painting?

*More on this subject next time.*