

## *Definitions*

By comparison, I teach a traditional martial art, but I am not so much interested in maintaining the tradition as drawing from it.

People visiting Bushido-kai would recognize a traditionalist approach to be sure, unless they came in on a night on when we were practicing *henka* (variations) or minimal motion waza. Then they would say I was *creating* a tradition rather than following one.

There are striations of traditionalism: some schools approach a rigid, never-to-be-changed classicism; others call themselves traditional, have students wear the uniform, and perhaps bow at the beginning and end of class, but practice whatever is currently cool. Got to keep them students paying dues, after all.

So what's traditional, what's non-traditional, what's anti-traditional, and what is innovative? Over the last half-century, we've mixed and matched, adjusted and tweaked tradition so each school tends to categorize themselves because people walking in can't possibly do it accurately. Both the marketplace and iconoclastic movements have influenced Asian martial arts so they have adjusted to the changing times, the cultural vogues, and what seems to fill the current bill, as well as mix and match methods to capture the best of all methods. Not only has kung-fu and ninjutsu made its mark on karate and ju-jutsu training, but also tae kwon do and escrima have left an influence. How many "traditional" karate schools break out the batons and practice sinawali just because Remy Presas visited their school for a seminar in 1980? How many formal TKD schools finish a session with self-defense closer to Small Circle Jujitsu because Wally Jay did a seminar for them in 1985?

The idea of a "traditional" martial art rooted in Asia and unsullied by time and variation is nearly non-existent even among those schools who strictly adhere to what they were taught. Sure, there are "classical" schools of martial arts in Japan meant to preserve a national treasure in their formal practice of an ancient art, but they never intend that art to be practical either for exercise, personal development, or for self-defense. Some of those benefits may accrue to the practitioners of those classical arts, but to a large extent, they occur incidentally. Because "traditional" (as against classical) Asian martial arts are meant to provide training in self-development and self-defense, they need to check their methods regularly to make sure that their self-defense is functional. Only by striving toward functional self-defense are we motivated to work at the physical, mental, and spiritual training that produces self-development. "Traditional" martial arts steal...er...borrow from each other because their practitioners see self-defense value in other arts that complements their own, thus balancing out an imbalanced art.

So when you hear the term "traditional" applied to a martial art (yours or anybody else's), don't immediately assume white uniforms without markings, straight lines of students at rigid attention, or formal techniques that look like slow motion drills for a motion picture action sequence. Instead, think, "came from

Asia originally, but has been Westernized for a half-century.” For some people, Westernization of an Eastern art is automatically a bad thing. The same criticism would not be leveled against Asian cultures that Easternized baseball, private enterprise, or movies. There is a range of traditionalism in the marketplace, some aspects of which fit nearly everyone. In fact, many students have taken the idea of being personally suited to a martial art so seriously that they study 12 martial arts, each for a year, thus creating their own customized fashion.

Traditional martial arts are no longer strictly traditional partially because, the student/consumer wants what he wants, not what is offered. So what is offered tries to be what he may want in some proportion at least. Whether your or I like it or not, this keeps traditional schools a little less traditional, but a lot more in business.