

## Diversity and Multiple Martial Artists

If too much diversity in budo produces wishy-washy quality and too little produces a narrow spectrum of expertise, one solution is to sincerely study more than one martial art.

Way back when I was but a youth of 18 summers with two years of judo under my not-yet-brown belt, I refused to believe a friend who told me that his buddy held black belts in two styles of karate. Since in those days judo was a unified art, I figured karate was organized the same way. Why would they need two styles? Besides black belts in any martial art were rare back then so I figured that the friend of my friend was engaging in a little friendly exaggeration in order to make himself the dominant friend among friends. Little did I know that less than a decade later, I would hold black belts in judo, aiki-ju-jutsu, and karate, and then later in two styles of karate.

I began my teaching career when my judo instructor graduated our university. As a white belt, I became the senior in the little dojo (a.k.a. the university's wrestling room) on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. By the time I was dan-ranked in aiki and karate, I had been teaching for quite a while. When I opened my own school, I was one of the few in the state to offer instruction in three different martial arts, following the lead of one of my mentors, Master Larry Garron (more known for his experience as Patriots running back than his substantial martial arts experience).

I made sure to teach each martial art separately and in detail to avoid the problem of teaching watered down budo in an attempt to offer variety. Students studied one, two, or in rare cases all three of the arts, but the standards were high so only a few became dan-ranked in more than one art. Just being in such a diverse environment allowed students of one martial art to respect (and even pick up a thing or two) from students of another.

In a karate class, I could show how an aiki student might handle an attack; in an aiki class, I could show how a similar throw was done in judo; in judo, I could show throws from karate kata. The idea was to train students well in a principal art while simultaneously making them knowledgeable and respectful of other arts.

To make ends meet (and to add a little more diversity), I rented time in my dojo to students of Shihan Albert C. Church, Jr. of South Carolina. Once again, I refused to believe them when they told me about his high ranks in Chinese, Korean, Okinawan, and Japanese systems. But truths are sometime stranger than our personal fictions. After a year of doubting, I sought out Shihan Church who, at the time, was teaching karate, kempo, and aiki-ju-jutsu. Training under Shihan Church encouraged me to keep up the diversity of my teaching even though, when I returned home, it meant working out six days a week to keep up the quality.

A multiple martial artist is more likely to think, not in terms of cultural biases, but in terms of technical principles. Both Shihan Church, and later Soke Don Angier of Yanagi-ryu, emphasized principles the importance of which I had recognized early on.

If you are cooking Boeuf Bourguignon, you might want to have French beef and French burgundy to make it taste authentic, but unless you are in Provinces, it is more likely you will use local beef and a decent cooking burgundy. The quality of the resulting meal will be less the result of the nationality of and more from the quality of the ingredients (influenced by the quality of your cooking skills). If you are going out for dinner in Paris, Boeuf Bourguignon may temp your taste buds, so you head over to Chez Jacques sur la rue des Invalides for some authentic stuff. But if you are going out with a group of martial artists in Framingham, Massachusetts, each with different tastes, a nice fusion restaurant offering an array of Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Thai options might better fit the bill.

*More next week in "Diversity vs. Bias"*