

Fusion, Hybrid, Mash-up 2

The innovator in me is all for fusing the ideas and techniques from different martial arts. In fact, my in-house style, Takeshin Seiken Budo, does just that.

The traditionalist in me says, “Yeah, but just because it is a new fusion/hybrid/mash-up, that doesn’t mean it’s a good fusion/hybrid/mash-up.”

As an innovative traditionalist, therefore, I want to use traditionally proven martial arts and apply innovative teaching methods to enrich more people by introducing them to a higher skill level earlier in their studies — but not before they are ready for it. (This does not mean I rank more quickly — rather, I rank more slowly, demanding more detail at each level). I also want to use traditional concepts to invent new and different innovations that will prove their value in self-defense, or at least in fast, hard, simulated self-defense, so that students can learn a rigid traditional technique and use it to expand into several variations, each of which may not be rigid at all but will work in an unexpected situation.

In other words, I am fusing the ancient world with the modern, but in a way that would, I hope, satisfy the sensibilities of the great masters of the past, not the frivolity of today’s consumer. Fusing is either a haphazard game or a studied science. If you are a cage fighter, you mix your martial techniques with the idea of emphasizing not only what is allowed by the rules, but also what is needed for your next opponent. You train for a specific situation that you know will occur on a specific date at a specific place in a specific type of ring or cage. This is a rational, but necessarily limited, kind of fusion. As a traditional martial artist who sees the applicability of various arts for various contexts, you could spend your whole life fusing skills until you blow a fuse when it becomes too confusing to apply even a few of them. The traditional martial artist, his art hybridized to handle any likely or unlikely situation, has to find a way to both broaden and narrow his concentration.

There are several ways he can go about this. First, he can study his kata and waza in depth so that he gets multiple meanings from each (see, for example, our [Transmutation](#) videos or any of our Karate Kata Comparison Series.) Second, he can study the history and development of arts and their techniques. A sample of this method is shown in [The Chinese \(Martial\) Connection](#). Third, he can study various arts at such a depth that he begins to understand principles rather than techniques that manifest them (see both [The Road to Mastery](#) and also [The Principles of Advanced Budo](#).)

What will result from the study of fused martial arts is something that, at any given time, may look like any of its component parts or none of them. When visitors with karate experience view one of our karate classes, they are confident that what we do is familiar to them. I get a lot of “Oh, yeah, we do that.” Once they get on the mat, however, they realize that they never did what we do; it only appear to be familiar. A similar thing happens in aiki. A visiting ju-jutsu person watched one of our aiki classes, disappointed that one of our

average size guys could not easily throw down one of our bigger guys despite my advice. To him, it was clear that either my student was poorly trained or that my advice was unsound. He was sure he knew how to dump the heavy fellow, and did not want any part of such obviously poor instruction. Had he suited up and tried the technique, I am afraid he would have quickly switched his objections to “Aw, he’s just resisting me because I’m from another system.” If he finally succeeded in throwing the big guy with a lot of effort and muscle, he probably would have been satisfied, expecting his cohorts to then buy him a congratulatory beer. But at Bushido-kai, a technique is not accepted if it does not work with minimal effort. We know we can always strike, scream, and muscle the mass in front of us, but that sort of success is, in my humble opinion, overrated. We can always return to the basic slam-dunk method if we want to, but our interest is more on understanding the principles by which a technique works so that we can apply those principles in other techniques against other hardy heavies. Our idea of fusion, therefore, is not just “do what you have to do to win”, a viewpoint born of competition, but learn what you can learn by solving training problems.

It is the solution of training problems that requires a martial art to be flexible and to evolve. It is the solution of training problems that produces a hybrid technique that, at least in some contexts, is better than its traditional default. And thus a martial art does not just maintain itself as a traditional art, not just change as an innovative art, but improves as an innovative traditional art.