

Inquire Carefully

Study extensively, inquire carefully, ponder thoroughly, sift clearly, and practice earnestly. --Zhu Xi

In order to study extensively, there will be times when you will have to do some research. From personal interviews to Internet exploration, you must take care not to be deceived either by those who are trying to deceive or those who have unwittingly been deceived themselves.

A political commentator on TV bemoaned the idea that no longer do reporters care to seek out two independent sources for their stories. It seems that a Google search or even hearsay is enough. I remember my junior high school English teacher stating that good reporting means finding three (not just two) separate sources for one's "facts". So, over the last 50 years we have gone from three sources, to two sources, to four sources pretending insurmountable certainty. Biased sources = careless inquiry.

When I first began to study *budo* (1964), there was no Internet, no videos, very few books on any martial art, and most instructors were either unknowledgeable due to their low *dan*-ranks or inscrutable due to their Asian dialects. Besides, you were taught not to inquire about your own art, let alone other arts. "Inquiring carefully" took on a different meaning than it might today. In current times, "careful" means trying not to get it wrong. In those days, "careful" meant trying not to get kicked out of the school. The idea of not being too inquisitive kept students studying the one true art (whichever art that might have been), listening to the reasons why it was the best of all possible arts or why other arts were the least of all possible alternatives.

But inquisitiveness could not be kept down, so we fledgling *budoka* read books, watched videos when they became available, and attended seminars about other arts. At first we needed to be surreptitious, and later we could investigate more openly, yet we "inquired" no more "carefully" than a bull released from a pen inquires about the placement of its hooves. All we knew is what we liked, not what worked for our body types or our concept of self-defense. The new amalgam arts that Westerners created were, for the most part, the result of careless inquiries when the gates of the pen were finally opened.

Today there is more information available to us on one screen than in all the books, videos, or seminars in which we could have indulged only a few decades ago. But there is also more bull than ever before. Spend 20 minutes watching a set of YouTube clips on any martial art. The comments will be as enlightening as the selections themselves. Either you will come away with an appreciation for a martial performance not knowing if it was truly functional or phony, or come away wondering if the commentators really know something you don't know or if they are in dire need of a reality check and several weeks in a sanitarium.

A careful inquiry not only seeks out three independent sources (sources that do not rest on the same meta-source), but also cares about being as objective as possible about its conclusions. The Internet gives us the library, but we still have to choose the authors, and that ain't easy. Most sites that have definitive knowledge about their art have no incentive to be objective. Most sites aren't there to be objective, after all, but to inform

those who chose the site in the first place. Have you ever witnessed a partisan political site that will give the opposite side its due? In other words, the Internet requires exercising care as much as does a state of ignorance. Sadly, there is no Snopes.com for martial artists, which means a martial artist doing research has to find a balance of books, videos, and seminars on several subjects in order to come to his own careful conclusions.

Once you have inquired carefully and studied extensively, you need to reflect on what you have learned.

Time to Ponder Thoroughly.