

The Tradition of Innovation 3

If a small school can survive by recognizing that high quality needs to incorporate innovation and variation, a large school or...federation can survive the same way. But how?

For small schools:

1. Offer a curriculum that not only focuses on exam requirements, but also the deeper art from which the exam requirements are derived;
2. Show variations within the training and train on the variations as well as the orthodox techniques;
3. Offer specialty seminars that concentrate on subjects outside the curriculum; these can be taught by Sensei or by guest instructors;
4. Create breakout sessions in which instructors can observe the problems (and perhaps innovations) that students have run into;
5. Create instructor training in which both instructional problems can be shared and corrections can be offered;
6. Create instructor training in which the ideas of both instructors and students can be shared and experimented with.

For federations:

1. Structure each school to function in the “small schools” mode above;
2. Create an annual instructor conference geared sharing technical and instruction innovations;
3. Create semi-annual seminars in which instructors from other styles and arts teach their specialties to students openly and without judgment.
4. Create upper level requirements (either for high *dan* rank or for honor titles) that include research and innovation, either technically through skill demonstrations, or intellectually through research papers.
5. Create a path in which experienced, higher ranked members can break away and form associated bodies with different emphases.

The larger the group, the more difficult it will be to organize and maintain such a method. There will always be those who will be more conservative and will balk at new variations, feeling that what was good enough for them should be good enough for everyone. There will also be those, not senior enough to take advantage of #5 above, for whom the amount of variation or innovation offered is not enough. They will no doubt break away as others have before them. This suggested structure does not prevent refugees nor guarantee either quality or popularity; it does, however, go a long way to harmonizing the conflict between the two.

If the need for a dojo or kai to survive compels innovation and variation, both innovation and variation must serve the role that tradition served before them. Traditions develop so that valuable practices could be passed on. Without traditions, one innovation supplants another until history becomes merely a series of fads, fashions, trends, vogues, and crazes. But when traditions do not adapt to those who practice them, they risk becoming as irrelevant as foot-long cell phones or eight-track cassettes. The deeper tradition that holds the

value is not cell-phones but communication, not cassettes, but personal entertainment. In martial arts, to the extent that the tradition offers a value, it can adapt to what the society around it values, thus causing a relationship between continuing the *proven* and experimenting with the new for the sake of *improvement*.

Perhaps clashes will occur about exactly how much innovation and how much tradition is ideal. That is to be expected. But a holistic view of budo that recognizes innovation as part of tradition will go a long way to securing both respect for the old and interest in the new, continuity as well as diversity in the traditional martial arts.