

## Trends of the Half-century

Excuse me for being overly simplistic in trying to be succinct. Here are the trends in the martial arts, roughly decade by decade, since 1950. No, trends do not change each decade just as the ball falls in Times Square, but we tend to measure them that way to ease the refreshing of our memories.

**The 1950s:** sport judo, and a comic book advertised judo then considered to be a self-defense art;

**The 1960s:** sport judo, emerging sport karate (TKD, kempo, etc.), later aikido;

**The 1970s:** kung-fu made popular first by the chop-socky Hong Kong flicks and then by Bruce Lee and the Kung-fu TV series;

**The 1980s:** ninjutsu: a counter-cultural art from traditional Japan, bridging the gap between traditional and innovative; full-contact karate or kickboxing comes to the fore;

**The 1990s:** full contact kickboxing gives way to no-holds-barred fighting made popular by Brazilian Jujitsu; and

**The 2000s:** traditional martial arts fade except for kids' classes; UFC and other NHB fighting come to the fore.

Do we see a pattern here? It seems to me that self-defense gave way to sport (1950s to 1960s), which then returned to martial arts as self-defense and a way-of-life (1970s), which was countered by a semi-traditional art (ninjutsu) that was more tactical, less regimented, and less philosophical in nature, but still had the cachet of coming from the ancient East. In the 90s and 00s, self-defense peaked and sport resurged, but it was a sport based on fewer rules so that it would seem more like real fighting (which most people mistook for real self-defense.)

What does this tell us about what people want in their martial art? And can we predict the future based on the above trends? I am not so wise as to think that I can prognosticate future events even if my succinct recollection of past events were perfectly accurate. Too many unexpected things can happen to throw a Monkey-style elbow-wrench into the mix. Yet, having come this far, I am obliged to attempt a little crystal ball action. A crystal ball from the coffers of Isis and Osiris: Oooohmmm! Is that your Aunt Em I see in the doorway?

It is difficult to imagine sport martial arts getting more violent or wider spread. The trend will therefore continue in popularity as a spectator sport, but only to a lesser degree as a participation sport. We are due for a nostalgic retake of the good old days. While kids traditional martial arts will continue, it will not have the popularity it once had because (a) it does not have the flash of TV cage conflicts, and (b) it no longer has an adult class to graduate into. It will continue only because parents do not have much choice about where to send their kids, a place that is both physically good for them (getting them away from their games and gadgets) and ethically instructive (getting them away from the thugs in the neighborhood and at school.)

For adults, the traditional martial arts will recoil into the garage schools, and small clubs they grew out of. Certain large schools will retain their dominance and incorporate smaller schools within their walls offering their arts as alternate classes. A few senior martial artists will visit other schools and teach advanced material that the schools may never receive otherwise because they don't have enough people to support a vibrant senior level class. I plan to be one of the latter, by the way, attempting school by school and seminar by seminar, to show what traditional budo can and should be.

If the crystal ball of the Great Marvell holds accurate, the trends of the next quarter-century will therefore be as follows:

**The 2010s:** cage-fighting still popular, traditional martial arts declining, their schools concentrating on kids; and

**The 2020s:** although they maintain a steady position in professional athletics, cage-fighting begins to look both too nasty for common consumption and too inaccessible to the average person; traditional martial arts has recoiled into smaller clubs or into classes within bigger clubs. A resurgence of traditional martial arts occurs, but only for the high-level material like minimal motion throwing, subtle power, interceptions, and group defense. A few will see value in spending time learning traditional arts from the beginning, but most will want to jump to the advanced, having never learned the value of investing time for a more quality, deep-seated result. Certain seniors will go where asked to light the fire again, teaching from the familiar beginning, but this time at a greater depth and in a more holistic way. Plan your future seminars now. The schedule will fill up quickly.