JAPANESE BUDO: AN EAST ASIAN RELIGIOUS PARADIGM FOR SELF-CULTIVATION, MORALITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to counter misconceptions with respect to the martial arts and their purpose. These misconceptions view martial arts as violent, militant and aggressive, or as arcane methods of violent self-defense. I contend that the long-standing relationship between religion and the martial arts led to the creation of an intricate system of ethics and morality and that the martial arts are, in fact an ancient form of self-cultivation and practical conflict resolution, as well as a source of moral teachings.

Through an etymological, as well as historical, study of the East Asian (mainly Japanese) martial arts, I illustrate the connections between martial arts, religion and conflict resolution in a new and unique way. According to our earliest records, the East Asian martial arts have been highly influenced by, and have in turn influenced, the religions of that region of the world. The following analysis begins by exploring the historical connection between Buddhism and the martial arts, revealing the long and rich history of the association of Buddhism with martial arts and militarism in East Asia, particularly Japan. Next, the discussion turns to the Eastern use of physical practice and discipline aimed at spiritual self-cultivation as a means of attaining
religious understanding and enlightenment, rather than simply as a form of physical exercise or as a way of becoming a more effective combatant. The martial arts, at various times throughout history, have been viewed in this way. I argue that it is these connections with religion that have created within the martial arts an inherent system of warrior ethics and morality, characterized by an emphasis on the pursuit of peace and the avoidance, or transformation, of conflict. This raises the question of whether a system of warrior ethics and morality entails a paradox or a logical and inherent consistency and where conceptually and practically one finds the religious, or specifically the East Asian philosophical, principles in the martial arts. Lastly, the analysis shifts slightly to a discussion of the relationship between martial arts and conflict resolution, which has, as a field, largely ignored the possible benefits of the lessons and teachings of the martial arts. This is because the field has mistakenly viewed these as contrary to their philosophies. However, conflict resolution and martial arts have more in common than many practitioners of either pursuit realize, and actually have much to learn from each other. Though the martial arts have an obvious potential for much violence and destruction, I maintain that this potential can be mitigated by strengthening the relationship between martial arts and the field of conflict resolution in various ways.

This paper will hopefully lead the reader naturally to the conclusion that martial arts, conflict resolution and religion have in the past, and should again in the future, engage each other in a symbiotic relationship.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Popular views of both academics and non-academics, generally consider the martial arts as violent, militant and aggressive (if they consider the martial arts at all). Many others consider the martial arts as arcane, or archaic, methods of violent self-defense. The purpose of this paper is to dispel, or at least argue against, these misconceptions with respect to the martial arts. I will argue that the martial arts are, in fact an ancient form of self-cultivation and practical conflict resolution, or peacemaking, as well as a source of moral teachings. However, conflict resolution, as a field, has in the past largely ignored the possible benefits of the lessons and teachings of the martial arts, which are erroneously viewed as contrary to their philosophies.

In this paper, I contend that the long-standing relationship between religion and the martial arts led to the creation, or inclusion, of an intricate system of ethics and morality and that martial arts can be a peaceful pursuit. In addition, I will argue that conflict resolution and martial arts have more in common than many practitioners of either pursuit realize, and actually have much to learn from each other. Though there is much scholarship on the relationship between religion and martial arts, as well as much more recent scholarship on the relationship between religion and conflict resolution, and there is even a small amount of extremely recent work on martial arts and conflict
resolution,¹ I am proposing in this paper that the martial arts, which were heavily influenced by religion, are, in fact, a form of conflict resolution. I will argue that there is ample historical evidence showing that in the past these fields have not been so disparate in many parts of the world and that these relationships should be re-examined, explored and utilized in the present and future.

It is not my intent to fully expound on or explain the connections between the martial arts and religion, as this would be an enormous task requiring several volumes and lies beyond the scope of this discussion. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the East Asian (mainly Japanese) martial arts; there are multiple reasons for this decision, not least of which is practicality. There are over 700 Japanese martial lineages, many of which have extensive records and reliable information available in English. This information makes it possible to trace the evolution of these arts more clearly than other martial arts which may have not kept such extensive records or whose records may not have yet been translated into English. Also, I believe that the Japanese martial arts, more than any other that I have come across, have retained a greater degree of authenticity due to their culture’s focus on tradition and historical continuity. This focus on tradition has kept the core principles and goals of some of these ancient martial arts relatively intact. Unlike other arts, they have not been reduced to mere sports or

¹ Most of this scholarship deals with the art of Aikido, a much more recent Japanese martial art. Aikido was created in the mid-20th Century from teachings that were distilled from older arts similar to those I discuss in this paper. I would argue that a discussion of aikido has a much smaller historical scope and would be of limited use in this paper.
competitions. And lastly, having studied some of them from both an intellectual and physical perspective for over twelve years, I believe I can offer an insider’s view born from experience, if not quite mastery.

Before I begin my discussion, I feel it necessary to provide the reader with some important background with regards to understanding what exactly I mean when I say “the martial arts.” The Western phrase “martial art” is a principally European construct that should not really be used to describe many Asian “martial arts.” This term is far too monolithic and ignores the vast differences between unique arts. However, lacking a better phrase as a descriptive, I will continue its use after a brief investigation of its meaning. The word “martial” is derived from the Latin root Mars, the Roman God of War. The term “martial arts” was already in standard use in the Western World by the 1430s, referring to training for warfare, actual warfare, as well as sports.

However, the phrase “martial arts” is a little more difficult to impose on Eastern traditions. The Japanese term, Budo, often translated as “martial arts” can also be translated as “martial way” or “path.” This is where many practitioners, as well as

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2 In this paper, I will limit myself mostly to Japanese ‘martial arts’, as those are the most familiar to me. However, I will also draw from other traditions, when applicable.

3 I think this is analogous to the term ‘religion’, which is a vague umbrella term that is difficult to define, and does not take into account the vast differences between distinct “religions”.

4 When applicable, I will use more appropriate terms that will be discussed below.

many scholars, stop their investigation into the etymology of the *kanji*. However, I believe that stopping here is a mistake and has led to widely-held misconceptions about the true nature of the East Asian martial arts. In fact the true, or original, nature and intent of the East Asian martial arts is only discernible when one looks more deeply at the character, or *kanji*, for *budo*. When one does this, one sees that it is made up of two characters: “*Bu*” (武) and “*do*” (道). “*Bu*,” read as “wu” in Chinese, and often translated as “martial” or “warlike,” is made up of 3 radicals: one meaning “to stop,” another meaning “one,” and the last meaning “spear/halberd,” giving a possible meaning of “stopping the spear.” The kanji for “*do*” comes from the Chinese word "*Tao*" meaning "the way" and has a connotation of a path of learning. Thus, *budo* can be understood as “the way of stopping the spear.” The character for spear, the epitome of the Asian battlefield weapon, can also be used to denote weapons in general, or war/violence. Thus, *budo* can be translated as “the way of stopping conflict,” or “stopping the use of weapons,” i.e. war. This translation can be found in many sources.

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6 *Kanji* are Japanese written characters, generally composed of compound logograms (similar to ideograms).

7 Radicals are small ideograms which are components of *kanji*. Several radicals often combine to make up a *kanji*.

8 Literal translation of Japanese characters to English is extremely difficult (some would argue impossible). Since it has been said that all translation is, in fact, interpretation, I will avoid giving the impression that any of the translations in this paper are definitive, or perfect.
and plays a major role in the philosophies of many Chinese and Japanese martial arts, which emphasize nonviolent solutions as the best method to resolve conflict.  

Though *budo* is sometimes thought of as a modern term, which came about in the time of peace of the Edo period (c.1600-1867 CE), there is evidence of its use that dates much farther back. Regardless, it is said that before the term *budo*, two other terms were commonly used: *Bujutsu* and *Bugei*. It is important to note that though the second characters for *budo*, *bujutsu* and *bugei* are different, the first character in all of these terms is “*bu,*” meaning stopping the spear. The character for “*jutsu*” can be interpreted to mean “method” or “technique” (similar to “*do*”, but apparently with no spiritual connotations), whereas the character for “*gei*” can be interpreted as “art,” “skills,” “disciplines,” or “techniques.” Similarly, the Chinese term for martial arts, “*wushu,*” is composed of two characters, “*Wu*” and “*Shu.*” The character read as “*wu*”

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9 The information in this paragraph was taken from the author’s more than ten years of experience in study of the martial arts and their philosophy, as well as the following:


11 Friday (p.7) dates the first use of “*budo*” in print to a text “compiled” in the Thirteenth Century. However, “compiled” in the Thirteenth Century suggests that it may have existed beforehand. Furthermore, I have read of older accounts of the use of the term.
is the same character as the Japanese “bu” and has the same meaning. The character read as “shu” means “art.” Therefore I will argue, for the purposes of this paper, that the terms *budo*, *bugei*, *bujutsu*, and *wushu* all have similar meanings. Consequently, the use of the term “martial arts” in the remainder of this paper will not be referring to the term “martial” in the sense of its etymological meaning of “warlike,” but rather the ideas of “bu” discussed above. This is an important distinction to make, completely tenable and supportable when one considers the history of the East Asian martial arts, as will be done briefly in this paper. This reading is not stretching the meaning of the *kanji* in any way, rather it is, in my opinion, the original intention of the kanji. Therefore I am trying to inspire a fundamentalist look at the martial arts, rather than one which has gone far astray from the intentions of the arts’ founders. This understanding of the term “*budo*” is pivotal to my thesis of a symbiotic relationship between the martial arts and conflict resolution.

Given the above-mentioned connection between the martial arts and conflict resolution, I hope to take the reader on a journey which will lead naturally to the conclusion that martial arts, conflict resolution and religion have in the past, and should again in the future, engage each other in a symbiotic relationship. I begin my analysis by exploring the historical connection between Buddhism and the martial arts in East Asia. I will suggest that there is a long and rich history of the association of Buddhism with martial arts and militarism in Japan. I will then discuss the Eastern use of physical practice and discipline as a means of attaining religious understanding and
enlightenment rather than simply as a form of physical exercise or as a way of becoming a more effective “fighting machine”. Then I will move to a discussion of the question of whether a system of warrior ethics and morality entails a paradox or a logical and inherent consistency. This exploration will further consider where conceptually and practically one finds the religious, or specifically the Buddhist, principles in the martial arts. Lastly, I will shift my analysis slightly to a discussion of the relationship between martial arts and conflict resolution. Though often neglected in the field of diplomacy, I will argue that martial arts can be an important resource for conflict resolution theory and techniques. However, I also note that martial arts have an obvious potential for much violence and destruction, but maintain that this potential can be mitigated by strengthening the relationship between martial arts and the field of conflict resolution in various ways.
CHAPTER 2

THE ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHISM WITH JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS AND MILITARISM: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

Though the Japanese martial arts may have more historical records and information available and accessible than other arts (as I stated in my introduction), it must be made clear that this information is far from clear and well-defined. Their origins, like the origins of religions, are obscured and blurred with mythical accounts and cryptic tales, and their evolution over time is very difficult to trace definitively. According to Karl Friday, the Japanese martial arts “have a long and complex history, one befogged by myth and legend and made further inaccessible by documentation that was either never produced, has not survived, or was made deliberately obscure.”

Despite a lack of concrete evidence, there is much value to be gained from a historical exploration of the martial arts. Friday describes the study of classical martial arts today as comparable to looking through a window to the past, which “enriches our knowledge of …[ancient] warrior education and…culture.”

However, despite the obfuscated nature of martial arts history, I will argue in this chapter that it is clear that the martial arts of Japan have always had religious and

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1 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 161-162.
spiritual associations. These associations have evolved over time and various philosophical or religious systems have influenced, and in turn been influenced by, the martial arts at different stages of history. Though the nature, as well as degree, of this influence has differed historically, the connection between martial arts and religious thought and activity is consistent in that it has, in my opinion, always existed. I hope to illustrate this association during the course of this chapter, despite the lack of incontrovertible proof.

**Historical Examples of the Relationship Between East Asian Martial Arts and Religion**

The origin of the East Asian Martial arts with their religious and philosophical elements possibly lies in the area known as the Fertile Crescent (ancient Mesopotamia). It is believed that a primitive martial art began in this area as early as the 26th Century BCE, and was further developed in India and later China and then Japan. An interesting parallel between the East Asian martial arts and the religions of the Middle East and Far East can be found in their emphasis on and use of the breath.

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2 One could argue that incontrovertible proof does not exist and that there is an element of doubt and/or belief involved in all arguments, despite the amount of, or lack of, evidence.

3 The origin of warfare and fighting lies beyond the historical and ideological scope of this paper. I will be concentrating on martial arts that seem to be in line with the idea of ‘*bu*’ and have connections to religion.

4 Evidence of this martial art can be seen in the “War” panel of the Standard of Ur, which, according to [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard_of_Ur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard_of_Ur) (accessed October, 2008), is a Sumerian artifact depicting a Sumerian army in battle and dates from roughly 2600-2400 BCE.
The importance of breathing is stressed in many ancient traditions including, among others, the Indian traditions of Buddhism, Yoga, and meditation, all of which were practiced in East Asia, as well.\(^5\) According to Howard Reid and Michael Croucher, however, it is also important to Middle Eastern religions, though it is unclear if what they are referring to is an ancient emphasis or a newly-introduced innovation.\(^6\) Though the significance of this parallel emphasis on breathing is definitely debatable, it is important to note that one cannot simply dismiss this idea by suggesting that all physical activities or art forms emphasize the breath. It is not simply the fact that breathing is involved in these activities that is significant, but rather the importance of specific uses of, and techniques for, breathing. Therefore, the presence of this emphasis in both the East Asian martial arts as well as the religions of the Middle and Far East could point to possible lines of influence. Though it is impossible to determine, based on historical evidence, the direction and extent of these lines of influence, the presence and degree of similarity suggests some historical connections.

Little to nothing is known of the origin of these lines of influence or the aforementioned “primitive” Mesopotamian ancestor of the martial arts. However, some Indian martial arts claim a history back to before the time of the Buddha. The Buddha himself, Gautama Siddhartha, who lived in India in the sixth century, BCE, was a prince from the Warrior caste (*Kshatriya*). Legend has it that he studied and excelled at

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\(^5\) Though there is evidence of a native and ancient Chinese Taoist tradition of *Neidan*, or inner alchemy, which also utilized the breath, Indian forms of meditation also gained popularity in China.

martial arts, as was common practice among the warrior class. Whether or not his studies in the martial arts influenced Buddhism in any way is very difficult to ascertain, as is whether or not these ancient martial arts influenced and were influenced by the prevalent religions in the region at that time.

More information is available on the history of Chinese martial arts, though their origin also reaches back to the time of legends. The history of wushu, perhaps the oldest of the Chinese martial arts, is difficult to pinpoint due to its ancient origins and the well-guarded nature of ancient martial traditions. However, wushu is believed to have begun in the Shaolin Monastery in the Song Mountains of Henan Province in China more than two thousand years ago. Around the sixth century CE, an Indian monk, named Bodhidarma (known in Japan as Daruma, the patron saint of the martial arts and in China as Ta-Mo), introduced meditation as well as exercises to strengthen the monks physically. Bodhidarma’s teachings also gave rise to the dhyana, or meditative school of Buddhism (from which Chinese Ch’an and Japanese Zen were born). Afterwards, the monks created self-defense applications (Shaolin Temple Boxing or ch’uan fa) from his exercises and these applications are thought to be the ancestors of many Chinese and Japanese arts.8

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However, though Bodhidharma is thought to have been a huge influence, the Chinese martial arts predate him and were also influenced by the earlier theories and teachings of Confucius (~500BC) and Lao Tsu (~300 BC), which addressed the nature of the world and man’s place in it. Nevertheless, Bodhidharma is credited with introducing key concepts into these arts and transforming them into true “wushu” (“stopping the spear”). Whereas before his arrival, the Chinese martial arts were devoted to teaching people how to fight, Bodhidharma instilled into the martial arts the ideas of spiritual development and refinement. Over time, elements from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism were adopted as the philosophical bases of East Asian martial traditions.

But some scholars argue that the legend that ties the origins of Shaolin martial arts with Bodhidharma is “highly questionable.” Stewart McFarlane states that he suspects that many stories of martial arts or techniques originating with Buddhist monks or Taoist priests were attempts to “invest these styles with authority and legitimacy …and… an aura of magical and mystical power” by aligning the martial arts with the

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10 Reid and Croucher, The Way of the Warrior, 81.

11 Ibid., 30.

divine world of the gods.\textsuperscript{13} While this is definitely an interesting and compelling argument, I believe there is also another possibility. Besides lending authority and divine power to these martial arts, their religious origin may have had the effect of enticing non-religious warriors to learn more about these religions and cultivate themselves spiritually. Devoted students of the martial arts have always been curious about the origins of their tradition and its particular methods. Even during times when martial arts were in use in battle, there were some who researched and studied their origins.\textsuperscript{14} The idea was most likely that the origins of the arts would yield deeper insight, even several centuries removed from their founding.

This focus on origins is somewhat similar to the fundamentalist movements within religion, which seek to “get back to the fundamentals”, or original expression, of that ideology. The idea was to strip the art, or ideology, of all extraneous, or added, material that concealed its true essence. If in their studies, the devoted students came to realize that the origins of the martial art were religious, they would be motivated to study the influential religion, so as to gain even more insight into their art. In this way, the teachings of the religion would continue to be infused into the martial arts and would propagate through the martial arts as well. This is an example of the spread of religion through the use of the Buddhist doctrine of \textit{Upaya}, or “skillful means”. This


\textsuperscript{14} The presence of historical documents from these early periods of warfare discussing the origins of the martial art indicate it must have been an area of study.
doctrine emphasizes the idea that a bodhisattva or practitioner may use any expedient methods in order to help ease the suffering of people, introduce them to the dharma, or help them on their road to enlightenment.

David Hall argues that "the cult of Marishiten\textsuperscript{15} is a prime example of the way in which Tantric Buddhist upaya (compassion, skillful means) was used to bring warriors and other combatants away from suffering and onto the Buddhist path, not by rejection of the most meaningful experience in their lives, but by ultimately redirecting that very experience toward selflessness and compassion."\textsuperscript{16} In fact, it was not uncommon for warriors to become monks and priests later in life. Therefore, there seems to be evidence of a historical symbiotic relationship between religion and martial arts and of mutual benefit derived from claiming a religious origin to the martial arts.

Yet another example of the relationship between religion and the East Asian martial arts can be seen in the craft of the swordsmith. According to our modern, Western ideals, a career in weapons production would not seem to be in-line with a code of religious ethics. Any individual in this profession who claimed to be religious would probably be considered a hypocrite. How could the creation of weapons used to cause suffering, pain and death be reconciled with a religious ideology?

However, in Japan, even before the Kamakura Period (1192-1333), Japanese swordsmiths were either Tendai Buddhist priests or Yamabushi (mountain ascetics,

\textsuperscript{15}To be discussed in detail on pages 31-34.

most likely followers of Shugendo, a uniquely Japanese blend of Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism and other Japanese native folk religions). The Tendai monks adopted sword-making as an ascetic practice, and often placed designs associated with gods and Buddhas on their swords. Sword-making later became ‘Shintoized’ and was considered “pleasing to the gods.” It was critical that the swordsmith lead “a more or less religious life, abstaining from excesses of all kinds.”\textsuperscript{17} Even the actual forging of a Japanese sword was a semi-religious ritual. It took place only after the workshop had been purified and prayers had been offered to the kami (gods) and the deity of the sword. Swordsmiths would even dress in the ceremonial robes of Shinto priests during their forging of a blade.\textsuperscript{18} Thus we see that it was not only swordsmanship and the arts of combat that had long-standing ties to religion in Japan. Even related disciplines had connections to Buddhism and the other prevalent religious traditions.

In another example illustrating the relationship between Japanese religion and budo, Hall describes the martial shrines at Katori and Kashima, as well as Buddhist temples such as the ancient Tendai temple on Mount Kurama, as being places of divine martial revelations which formed the foundations of several ancient martial arts systems.\textsuperscript{19} Reid and Croucher also discuss Katori and Kashima shrines and their connection with two of Japan’s oldest remaining martial arts, Katori Shinto ryu and

\textsuperscript{17} Winston L. King, \textit{Zen and the Way of the Sword: Arming the Samurai Psyche} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71-73.

\textsuperscript{18} Reid and Croucher, \textit{The Way of the Warrior}, 141.

\textsuperscript{19} Hall, “Marishiten”, 103-105.
**Kashima-Shinryu.** These are two specific examples of this relationship in which Japanese *budo* was heavily influenced by the prevalent religions of Japan, especially Buddhism and Shinto (literally “The Way of the Gods”). *Katori Shinto ryu* and *Kashima-Shinryu* were founded at, and have been associated with, the large Shinto temples since their inceptions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The founders of both of these arts are said to have experienced moments of divine, or revelatory inspiration, which greatly influenced the creation of their arts. These arts remained connected to, and associated with, the shrines for much of their histories, and the practitioners (warrior-monks) generally served as guardians over the temple and other monks.\(^{20}\) In his discussion of this idea of the monk-warrior, Thomas Cleary states, "since ancient times there has been a tradition of monk-warrior, and there are indeed similarities between monks and warriors.” Cleary then goes on to list the many similarities between the religious and warrior classes of Japan, including but not limited to a comparison of the hierarchical structures of the Zen monastic schools and the military forces.\(^{21}\)

Winston King insists that “Buddhism teaches harmless benevolence even toward animal life.” According to him, this would negate the possibility of warrior-monks. He argues that in Japan, “the ‘facts of life’ overcame doctrine.” To protect their sizeable estates, the larger monasteries and temples kept their own private armies of *sōhei*

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(warrior-priests/monks), who were famous for their swordsmanship and mastery of the spear. These warrior-monks didn’t hesitate to interfere in court life and policies through the “demonstration of their military muscle.” However, I believe King’s description of Buddhism to be an over-simplification; Buddhism is not a purely pacifistic religion. While nonviolence would be a respected viewpoint in Buddhism, I do not agree that complete passivity is an absolute belief to be reified. That seems contrary to the fundamental ideals of Buddhism, including the Four Noble Truths and upaya, which seem to leave room for the possibility of “the benevolent taking of life”. Also, the very fact that there is one term for “warrior-priests/monks” in Japanese (sōhei) seems to argue against the Western, dualistic view that this idea is a contradiction-in-terms.

Karl Friday argues that these sōhei, were basically private fighting forces, or “hired muscle” employed by temples, and “few if any of them…had any direct involvement with the temples’ religious orders.” McFarlane disagrees, arguing that “over the centuries, Chinese and Japanese military forces, including the infamous sōhei of Mount Hiei, have employed Buddhist symbols, banners, mudras, and mantras to support their military exploits and intimidate their opponents.” Though from some perspectives, this may be seen as an illegitimate, or “un-Buddhist” use of Buddhist concepts, it is historically significant. And these forces that claimed Buddhist (or in

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23 This topic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

24 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 121.
some cases Taoist) justification and divine support would not have cared what these detractors would have had to say.\textsuperscript{25}

Though both Friday and McFarlane make valid points, I believe that the connection between the monk-warriors and the temples actually goes much deeper. It does not seem plausible that the monk-warriors were completely removed from temple life. Many famous warriors chose to become monks in their later years. One example of this is Yagyu Muneyoshi, the semi-deified founder of the famed Yagyu Shinkage Ryu (one of the best-known Japanese martial arts schools), who retired to a monk’s life in his old age. Some may argue that these warriors became monks in an attempt to avoid a steady stream of young challengers who would seek them out in order to make a name for themselves. Others believe that these warriors did this to atone for the suffering they caused during their lives as warriors. Though I think there is probably some truth in both of those views, I believe that there is an element of inseparability to the relationship between the martial arts and religion. After all, even if one rejects the idea of Bodhidharma’s teachings being the origin of Chinese \textit{wushu} (and thus Japanese martial arts), history still points to the \textit{Shaolin} (Buddhist) monks playing a vital role in the development of the martial arts for centuries.

In contrast to the East Asian martial arts, which throughout their history have both influenced and been influenced by Eastern philosophical and religious systems, the European martial arts seem to have developed without any deep connection to religious systems.

\textsuperscript{25} McFarlane, “Mystique”, 358-359.
or philosophical ideals. Hall discusses one exception, the medieval Spanish schools of fencing, which were very highly regarded by other combatants. However, the psychological and metaphysical approach of the Spanish was criticized by other Europeans as being impractical and overly complicated as compared to the Italian, French, German and English schools, which focused on "simplification leading to perfection." This tendency to simplify and focus only on techniques and strategy, ignoring all else (including religion, compassion, and the humanity of one's opponent) stands in stark contrast to the East Asian martial arts.

However, there are opinions that maintain that European swordsmanship (fencing) was indirectly tied to religion. For example, Stephen Voss notes that the knight, or swordsman, “was bound to his feudal lord and to the church that the lord professed faith in.” Be that as it may, he argues that this relationship “eroded over the years, leaving today’s fencing without a deep religious or philosophical infrastructure.” Voss maintains that European fencing lost its emphasis on mental discipline when it became a leisure activity due to the decreased importance of the sword in European warfare upon the rise of firearms. He contrasts this erosion with the history of Japanese swordsmanship, in which “mental discipline is more strongly emphasized”

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due to the relationship between Buddhism and swordsmanship, which began early in the history of Japanese swordsmanship and continues to this day.\(^{29}\)

**The Relationship Between the East Asian Martial Arts and Buddhism**

One account which illustrates the close relationship of Japanese swordsmanship with Buddhism is told of the famous sixteenth century swordsman Kamiizumi Hidetsuna (also known as Kamiizumi Ise no Kami), the founder of the famous Shinkage ryu style of swordsmanship (and spearmanship). In this account, while Kamiizumi was passing through a village on his travels, a brigand had taken one of the village’s children hostage in a barn and threatened to kill the child with his sword if anyone came near the barn. According to the story, Kamiizumi borrowed a robe from a Buddhist monk onlooker, shaved his own head, relinquished his sword and approached the barn with two rice balls, one in each hand. When the brigand threatened to kill the child, Kamiizumi, posing as a Buddhist monk, calmly replied that he had heard that the brigand had not eaten since the day before and offered him the rice balls. He then offered to throw the rice balls to him so that he wouldn’t even have to approach closely. Kamiizumi then threw one rice ball to the brigand, who released the child’s neck in order to catch the rice ball. Kamiizumi threw the second rice ball to the brigand, who let go of the sword in his other hand in order to catch this rice ball. Kamiizumi instantly jumped into the barn, kicked the sword away, and subdued the brigand. The Buddhist

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 26.
monk was impressed when he saw that Kamiizumi, a swordsman, deliberately relinquished his sword and subdued the armed brigand bare-handed. He presented Kamiizumi with his monk’s robe “as a symbol of Kamiizumi’s attainment of *kenzen ichi*, the state in which swordsmanship and Zen are perceived to be one.”

While it may not seem like Kamiizumi’s action was anything more extraordinary than an act of great heroism, there is a subtlety here that may be lost on the reader. In samurai culture, the sword was described as the soul of the samurai (and was often a family heirloom). While on the one hand this alludes to the fact that parting with one’s sword could mean physical death in such a turbulent and violent society, it also suggests the strong connection between the samurai and his sword as a tool for attaining enlightenment. After all, it was through training with the sword that the samurai purified himself and eventually attained enlightenment (see Chapter 3). Samurai simply did not part with their swords except in the home, or audience, of their feudal lord. An interesting correlation to note here is that one of the key principles of Buddhism is that of *anatman*, or the lack of an immortal, immutable soul. Possibly related, the highest attainment in *Shinkage ryu* (and the arts which descended from it including *Yagyu Shinkage ryu*) is the concept of *muto dori*, or no-sword. The premise of *muto dori* is to defend against an armed swordsman while unarmed. Kamiizumi’s relinquishing of his sword and use of ingenuity, could therefore show his mastery of both *upaya* and *anatman*.

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30 Hiroaki Sato, *The Sword and The Mind* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1986), 2-3 (A variation of this story can be found in Akira Kurosawa’s 1954 film *Seven Samurai*).
Kenzen ichi is also referred to as kenzen ichinyo (‘the ‘way of the sword and the way of Zen are one’) and is central to both the 17th Century Heiho Kadensho of swordsman Yagyu Munenori, and the 17th Century Fudochi shinmyoroku of Zen Priest Takuan Soho. But even the very fact that there was such a state recognized in both Chinese and Japanese Buddhism and budo as early as the Sixteenth century suggests that a much larger connection exists between budo and Buddhism. If this phrase was in use by the sixteenth century by both monks and martial artists to describe a level of attainment, one can infer that this idea has a longer history. But one might argue that this state is particular to swordsmanship and is not associated with other martial arts. Though this argument may be compelling, the word for sword in Japanese (“ken”) is sometimes used to refer to the fist (also “ken”), and by extension, all weapons. Also, the sword was considered to be the extension of one’s body, as seen in the popular martial saying “ken-tai-ichi”, or “the sword and the body are one”. This concept is often used to explain that the sword, like any weapon, is simply an extension of one’s body and must be used in that way. In ancient Japanese martial arts, or Kobudo, the presence of a weapon (any weapon) did not significantly alter the nature of one’s movements. Though each weapon had its unique characteristics, the underlying principles of movement did not change whether one was unarmed, had a sword, a spear, a chained weapon, or a projectile weapon. This is also known as sogo bujutsu (composite, or comprehensive martial techniques), or ichi no tachi (literally "the one
sword" or "the one technique" or even “the sword of oneness or unity”) both of which imply all-encompassing techniques and the unity of all weapons (including fists and other body weapons).

These concepts of *sogo bujutsu* or *ichi no tachi* can be found in the oldest and most influential of *ryuha*, or Japanese martial lineages, which have inspired the vast majority of martial styles in use to this day (including the *Nen ryu*, the *Kage ryu*, the *Shinto Ryu* and *Kashima no Tachi*). While it may or may not be readily apparent, the concept of unity pervades these ideas of *kenzen ichi*, *ken-tai-ichi* and *ichi no tachi*, and it is perhaps only once one realizes the state of *kenzen ichi*, that one can embody the concepts of *ken-tai-ichi* and *ichi no tachi*. The concepts of the unity of all weapons or all movement as well as that of the unity of Zen and *budo* are concepts that pervade most old martial lineages and have even influenced the philosophies of new styles.

Furthermore, though one could argue that the state and concept of *Kenzen ichi* only referred to Zen Buddhism, and not other branches of Buddhism, this is decidedly not so. While this might seem like a solid argument, after all it is the state where “the way of the sword and the way of Zen are one”, Zen comes from the Chinese word *Ch’an*, which in turn comes from the Sanskrit *Dhyana*. It simply refers to meditation. Therefore, *kenzen ichi* is the state where meditation and martial arts are one. Thus, because meditation is a major part of Buddhism, this would seem to point strongly to a connection between the martial arts and Buddhism.

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31 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 27,142
The Influence of Buddhism on the East Asian Martial Arts: Zen vs. Mikkyo

Though a connection between Buddhism and the martial arts seems to be discernable, many scholars debate the extent, nature, and chronology of this influence. One fascinating argument seems to be between King and Friday as to which of two types of Buddhism actually had a greater influence on the martial arts. While King seems to maintain that it is predominantly Zen teachings that pervade the martial arts, Friday argues for a more subtle influence from Mikkyo (Japanese esoteric Buddhism). I believe this is important to establish, as it will better elucidate the chronology and nature of the influence of Buddhism on the martial arts. As we will see, Zen gained popularity in Japan much later than Mikkyo, therefore the Zen vs. Mikkyo debate affects the timeline of the Buddhism-budo connection. Also, because of the different nature of these two branches of Buddhism (Mahayana vs. Vajrayana), I believe this will also help to refute some of the more commonly-held and trite misconceptions about Buddhism and the martial arts. These misconceptions are two-fold and stem from the mistaken belief that prior to Zen’s influence during the Edo period, the connection between Buddhism and budo was minimal. I argue that this is incorrect both with respect to chronology as well as which branch of Buddhism (Zen or Mikkyo) exerted primary influence. Lastly, this discussion will inform our discussion of morality in the martial arts in later chapters.

Zen, a late twelfth century Japanese derivative of the Chinese form of Mahayana Buddhism known as Ch’an, focuses primarily on meditation, mindfulness
and the use of *Koan*, or word-mind puzzles. *Mikkyo*, while also of Chinese origin, was founded in the beginning of the ninth century, nearly four hundred years before Zen. This esoteric form of Buddhism also known as *Vajrayana* in Sanskrit features the heavy use of *mantra*, *mandala*, *mudra*, and other ritual tools to achieve enlightenment. While *Mikkyo* also emphasizes meditation, its meditation is often of a slightly different character than that of Zen meditation. The main Japanese school of *Mikkyo* is *Shingon Mikkyo*, whereas Japanese *Tendai* Buddhism also contains many related practices which could be considered *Mikkyo*. The different approaches of Zen and *Mikkyo* make for a very different character with regards to the influence Buddhism had on the Japanese martial arts.

According to King, it was during the Kamakura Period (1185 – 1333) that Zen Buddhism became an important part of the life and training of the Samurai.\(^{32}\) King dates the close relationship of Zen and the warrior-rulers of Japan to the fourth Hōjō regent, Hōjō Tokiyori (1227-1263). King states that at this time, “clan leaders of the military ruling class” sent their “fighting men to Zen monasteries for Zen training and discipline to make them into better warriors.”\(^{33}\) He calls Zen “far and away the preeminent samurai religion, speaking more directly and forcefully to the warrior than any other faith or practice.”\(^{34}\) He cites a proverb from the Kamakura era as saying, “Tendai is for

\(^{32}\) King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 27.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 176-178.
the imperial court, Shingon is for the nobility, Zen is for the warrior class, and Pure Land is for the masses.”

King argues that Tendai Buddhism was too heavily steeped in its “scripturalism” and Shingon Buddhism in its “elaborate ritualism” to appeal to the warriors. Even though these warriors were practitioners of Zen, King suggests that their goal was not enlightenment. Rather, the samurai’s goal was to transcend all fear of death, and thus maximize his effectiveness in combat. King points out that Zen monks (some of whom were formidable warriors) even became advisers and tutors to the warrior-class.

But King’s view of the relationship between Zen and the martial arts seems a bit myopic. Hiroaki Sato offers a slightly larger perspective, namely that “Zen is thought to have had a special appeal to the warrior because of its stress on a highly regulated way of life, simplicity, discipline, and the equation of life and death.”

It is thought that this equation of life and death would make the prospect of dying in battle more palatable to the samurai, thus increasing his combat effectiveness, similar to King’s argument above. However, unlike King, Sato is arguing that there was more to Zen’s appeal than simply the ability to overcome fear of death. Rather, the regimented daily practice and the discipline, both mental and physical, associated with this practice, combined with a focus on simplicity seemed to complement a warrior’s lifestyle quite well.

36 King, 27-31, 159-178
37 Sato, The Sword and The Mind, 16.
In his work, King often cites Kanzan Sato’s discussion of Yagyu Munenori’s (1571-1646) philosophies with regard to Buddhism and swordsmanship. In Munenori’s philosophy, “swordsmanship agrees with Buddhism and is in accord with Zen in many ways.” Most notable is their shared enemy: “attachment.” If, in the midst of combat, a warrior, or swordsman, lost his mental concentration and was “captured” mentally, even briefly, he would become vulnerable to any skilled opponent. Thus, a martial artist’s mind must be completely unattached and clear, able to respond, but unable to be captured. Opponents would square off against each other and carefully observe each other awaiting a brief lapse in the other’s concentration, or mental defense. As soon as one combatant sensed a lapse in his opponent, he would instantly strike so as to defeat him. Often feints or small movements were used in order to get one’s opponent to “attach” and thereby become vulnerable. The mind which was unattached, and perfectly calm was also known as Zen’s “mind-of-no-mind”, or munen-muso in the martial arts. D.E. Tarver says it quite succinctly: “There are many principles of the sword that are also found in Buddhist and Zen teachings. Chiefly, there is the avoidance of attaching the mind to any one specific thing. This is a central concept and vitally important.”

During his lifetime, Munenori developed a close friendship with Takuan Soho, a famous Zen Buddhist Monk. Takuan even wrote a series of three short letters to

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38 Ibid., 106

Munenori, and these can now be found translated into English in a book entitled *The Unfettered Mind: Writings of the Zen Master to the Sword Master*. In fact, William Scott Wilson describes Yagyu Munenori’s *Yagyu Shinkage-ryu* as “a middle-ground between Zen teachings and [martial] technique.” But the significance of the time period during which Munenori lived must not be overlooked. He lived nearly 250 years after the Kamakura period ended. And the fact that he even had to argue for the relationship of Zen to the Martial arts in his time (during the Edo period) leads me to believe that the dominating influence of Zen on the martial arts was not a development of the Kamakura period, but rather an evolution which reached its zenith in the Edo period.

It seems that initially *Mikkyo*, and especially *Tendai*, greatly influenced Japanese *budo*, its development and philosophies. It was only in the *Edo* period that Zen began to exert such great influence over *budo* and the samurai culture and class. In fact, the origins of Zen itself stem from Tendai Buddhism. The supposed “founder of Zen Buddhism” in Japan, Eisai (1141-1215), was a Tendai monk who traveled to China to deepen his understanding of Buddhism. In China, he was ordained as a Rinzai Zen master, but he considered himself a *Tendai* monk until his death (even though the *Tendai* leadership at *Enryakuji* on Mount Hiei, would have nothing to do with him). Eventually Zen broke off from *Tendai* and *Shingon* influences. However, ultimately,

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40 King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 237-238.

one cannot divorce Zen from the formative influences of these esoteric forms of Buddhism.

According to some scholars, though much of Japanese *Budo* was strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism in later history, *Katori Shinto Ryu* and other old forms of *budo* incorporated *Shingon Mikkyo* along with their Shinto origins. Friday expounds on this, noting that most schools of *bugei* are not “direct expressions or outgrowths of esoteric Buddhism; but many schools, including the Kashima-Shinryu, have borrowed heavily from the *mikkyō* tradition.” He adds that many medieval masters of *bugei* were “intimately involved in esoteric Buddhist practices.” Friday criticizes King’s work as being “based entirely on popular sources” and as devoid of any scholarly foreign language texts, or ancient primary sources.

Many other scholars agree, maintaining that tantric Buddhism, or *Mikkyo*, played a large role early in the development and training of the Japanese warrior arts. Hall discusses at length one goddess of the *Mikkyo* pantheon, known as *Marishiten* (sometimes depicted as male, as well). Marishiten was the patron goddess of the Japanese warrior class for over nine hundred years. She is described as a selfless, compassionate protector of sentient beings facing any number of calamities. In the fourteenth century, Marishiten was known as one of the *sansenjin* (three war gods -

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42 Reid and Croucher, *The Way of the Warrior*, 137-146.

43 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 156.

44 Ibid., 139.
*Marishiten, Fudo Myou, and Aizen Myou* who were displayed on battle flags. The use of Marishiten by individual combatants as well as by commanding officers and martial systems to engender confidence and morale is only part of the goddess's influence on warriors and combat. Hall says "in becoming fully empowered by the goddess, the warrior transcends that which we normally think of as wariorship, and enters a more spiritual realm.” This realm is characterized by selflessness or "egolessness - giving up on the ideas of self and other, winning and losing - in order to unfetter the mind" and gain a freedom in combat sometimes known as the 'flow state'.

Though this seems analogous to Zen practice, in *Mikkyo*, this state is attained through ritual practice in which “the warrior becomes identified with and empowered by the goddess.” The performance of "Marishiten-oriented *shugyo* (austere training aimed at honing and refining [a warrior's] spirit and character)," which focused on the goddess, was used to reach the highest level of swordsmanship. This was characterized by "a non-grasping state of selflessness" which transcended all dualities and afforded the warrior a state of complete imperturbability. One of the most important concepts/strategies of the samurai, and of martial arts in general (especially in Japan), is this idea of equanimity. The idea of remaining mentally unshaken, or calm, regardless of what is happening in one’s environment, or to oneself, is certainly another common point between the East Asian martial arts and Buddhism. This idea, known as the

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45 Hall, “Marishiten”, 87-90.

46 Ibid., 110-115.
‘immovable mind/heart’ (or fudoshin), relates very closely to Buddhist (both Zen and
esoteric) meditation (‘dhyana’, in Sanskrit) as well as other Mikkyo practices.\textsuperscript{47}

Some posit that it was even later that Zen Buddhism began to exert a strong,
dominating influence on Budo - during the Edo Period (1600-1867), a long era of peace.
This idea is echoed by the late Donn Draeger, considered by many to be the twentieth
century’s greatest western authority on the Japanese martial arts. Draeger says as
follows:

Classical Japanese swordsmanship borrows its understanding of nature from
philosophical Taoism, is ethically conditioned by the precepts of Neo-
Confucianism, and gains its aesthetic values from Shinto. It is Mikkyo, Esoteric
Buddhism, that determines its tactical and strategic bases. Zen had hardly any
direct influence on the development of classical swordsmanship until the
Tokugawa era, when some swordsmen began openly to advocate the study of
Zen as an introspective art compatible with swordsmanship. This in no way
diminishes the fact that some individual warriors in pre-Tokugawa times had,
since the twelfth-century inception of Zen in Japan, been advocates of Zen
methods for personal reasons involving self-discipline.\textsuperscript{48}

This seems to be somewhat in accord with recent scholarship that suggests that
Zen did indeed begin to inform budo somewhat in the Kamakura period, under the
shoguns of the Minamoto family (1185-1333), but it did not truly proliferate and begin
to hold sway on the warrior arts until the Edo period, as Reid and Croucher argue. This
influence apparently changed the emphasis of budo in the Edo period to spiritual

\textsuperscript{47} King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 54.

\textsuperscript{48} Gordon Warner and Donn F. Draeger, *Japanese Swordsmanship: Technique and Practice* (New
refinement and development, through martial training.\textsuperscript{49} In fact, McFarlane suggests that it was only during this relatively peaceful era that martial arts training began to be called “\textit{shugyo},” which was originally a term referring to training in Buddhist disciplines.\textsuperscript{50} So, it seems that Zen may have been a predominating influence later, but before that, I will argue (together with Friday, Hall, and Reid and Croucher) that Japanese esoteric Buddhist sects dominated, along with Shinto and other sources, exerting heavy influences on the martial arts. This is important not only because it allows one to push the connection between Buddhism and the martial arts back four hundred years, but also because it expands the influence of Buddhism on the martial arts to include esoteric forms of Buddhism. These esoteric forms of Buddhism are not well-known or popularly studied in the West, but have significantly influenced the morality of the martial arts. Through their use of martial deities, or warlike emanations of the Buddha, such as \textit{Marishiten}, the \textit{sansenjin} and the five \textit{Myou} (Kings of Light) they also significantly expand the sometimes myopic Western view of Buddhism enough to allow for a different understanding of how to reconcile the peaceful religion of Buddhism with the practice of the martial arts.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} Reid and Croucher, \textit{The Way of the Warrior}, 137-146.

\textsuperscript{50} McFarlane, “\textit{Mushin}”, 405.

\textsuperscript{51} This topic will be discussed in further detail in chapters 2-4.
The Connection Between Martial Arts and Religion in the Twenty-First Century

But lest one think that the influence of religion on the martial arts is relegated to the past alone, when Toshitsugu Takamatsu (1887-1972), recognized as one of the greatest martial artists of the 20th century, retired in 1970, he announced that he was doing so to devote all his time to spiritual training after fulfilling his obligation to pass on the teachings of the lineages he had been given. After that, his previously non-religious students “thought a long time about the importance of balance between religious study and martial arts practice.”

Another example that the connection between martial arts and religion still exists in some ancient Japanese martial arts today can be found in the Kukishin ryu. In this martial tradition, the soke, or headmaster of the school, also functions as the head of the Kumano grand (Shinto) shrine, and this tradition been in place for nearly seven hundred years. Even late nineteenth and early twentieth century martial sports such as karate and judo show some signs of this link to religion. Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957), the twentieth century founder of Shotokan Karate, though not explicitly religious, was “an avid poet and philosopher who would go for long walks in the forest where he would meditate and write his poetry.”

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53 [http://www.shinjin.co.jp/kuki/hyoho/index_e.html](http://www.shinjin.co.jp/kuki/hyoho/index_e.html) (History Section and Geneological Section) (accessed October, 2008).

after immersing himself in the study of Confucianism in his youth, Jigoro Kano, the twentieth century founder of *kodokan judo*, founded his art at the Eishoji Buddhist Temple in Kamakura.\(^55\) This would seem to suggest that he too had some spiritual leanings.

Lastly, Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969), the founder of the modern Japanese martial art of aikido, was another of the greatest martial artists of the twentieth century with strong spiritual ties and convictions. Ueshiba and the art he created were highly influenced by Shingon Mikkyo, Shinto and its derivative the new Japanese religion of *Oomoto*. He founded the art of aikido after experiencing a series of three religious awakenings. In 1925, after defeating an armed opponent while himself unarmed, Ueshiba returned to his garden and described his experience as follows:

...I felt the universe suddenly quake, and that a golden spirit sprang up from the ground, veiled my body, and changed my body into a golden one. At the same time my body became light. I was able to understand the whispering of the birds, and was clearly aware of the mind of God, the creator of the universe. At that moment I was enlightened: the source of *budo* is God's love - the spirit of loving protection for all beings.... *Budo* is not the felling of an opponent by force; nor is it a tool to lead the world to destruction with arms. True *budo* is to accept the spirit of the universe, keep the peace of the world, correctly produce, protect and cultivate all beings in nature.\(^56\)

Ueshiba had a second spiritual awakening after in 1940 while he was performing Shinto spiritual ascetic practices, and a third in 1942 during the worst fighting of World War II.


In this third experience, Ueshiba had a vision of the "Great Spirit of Peace." The Way of the Warrior has been misunderstood as a means to kill and destroy others. Those who seek competition are making a grave mistake. To smash, injure, or destroy is the worst sin a human being can commit. The real Way of a Warrior is to prevent slaughter - it is the Art of Peace, the power of love.

William Gleason describes Aikido as “a spiritual discipline... that embodies the essence of Shinto, the indigenous religion and spiritual foundation of Japan.” He continues that “Shinto and aikido are tied together by their common foundation ... and aikido, practiced with the correct mentality, leads to spiritual understanding and personal transformation.” Thus we can see from many modern examples that the connection between East Asian martial arts and religion continues even to the modern day.

Some scholars actually go so far as to suggest that perhaps the martial arts can be thought of as a form of Buddhism. Dirck Vorenkamp, a professor of religious studies, posits that the influence of Buddhism on the development of swordsmanship as a means of personal, spiritual growth, led the practice of this martial art to also become the practice of a form of Buddhism. Although he is not alone in this claim, most experts and scholars consider this to be an oversimplification of a much more complex

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and nuanced relationship. But the art of Shorinji Kempo seems to be one example of a martial art supporting Vorenkamp’s idea. This Japanese tradition was highly influenced by Chinese Shaolin martial arts, and contains an element of Buddhist fundamentalism (I mean this literally. It was an attempt to return to the fundamental teachings of Gautama Siddhartha). Shorinji Kempo stresses that martial practice should be “the equivalent of prayer.”\textsuperscript{61} Winston King quotes Doshin So, the headmaster of Shorinji Kempo in Japan, who states that its purpose is the alleviation of suffering and the securing of happiness on earth, “not the cultivation of strength and power to be exhibited in competitions or to be used to initiate violence of any sort.” In fact, Shorinji Kempo is registered in Japan not as a martial art or sport, but as a religion with monks and lay practitioners. But I should make it perfectly clear that Shorinji Kempo is very much an exception to the norm. Though martial arts practice may be religious for some people. I would caution against a sweeping generalization that they are a form of Buddhism. This would have to depend on both the practitioner and the particular martial tradition, whether discussing today’s martial arts or the evolution of those arts throughout history.

Conclusion

Similar to King above\textsuperscript{62}, Friday speculates that spiritual training in the martial arts probably originally came about as a practical military consideration. Fear of injury

\textsuperscript{61} Reid and Croucher, The Way of the Warrior, 210-212.

\textsuperscript{62} See above discussion on page 27-28.
or death can severely decrease one's combat efficiency; therefore the ability to set aside one's fear and achieve a level of detachment from the possible outcome of combat is of great benefit.\textsuperscript{63} King goes one step further and asserts that Zen was used as a tool by the rulers to improve the performance and efficacy of their samurai retainers.\textsuperscript{64}

However, aside from Buddhism, other important studies of the ancient Japanese warriors that influenced their martial arts included music, calligraphy, painting, prose, and the teachings of Confucius, Lau Tsu (Taoism) and even elements of ancient Japanese nature religions.\textsuperscript{65} It is important to note that in Japanese culture, as in most other cultures, religion, as one of the prevalent philosophies of the day, exerted a large influence on the artists (painters, poets, musicians, etc) of that society, so when martial artists studied these arts, they were further (indirectly) influenced by religion.

But according to Friday, even though the vocabulary of the \textit{Kashima Shinryu} was influenced by Buddhist, Confucian, neo-Confucian, Taoist, and Shinto terms, it would be a mistake to associate the art with any religious tradition. He states “the \textit{bugei} are fundamentally secular arts in which pietistic-sounding locutions often mask entirely down-to-earth pieces of information. While spiritual conditioning…is an essential aspect of \textit{bugei} training, in most [arts] the religious context of this spiritual conditioning is a personal matter, to be decided upon by each individual practitioner.” He goes on to

\textsuperscript{63} Friday, \textit{Legacies of the Sword}, 15.

\textsuperscript{64} King, \textit{Zen and the Way of the Sword}, 184-186.

\textsuperscript{65} Reid and Croucher, \textit{The Way of the Warrior}, 137-146.
say that *Kashima Shinryu* is compatible with almost any religious affiliation, or lack thereof, and cites examples of adherents of Shinto, Zen Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, State (nationalistic) Shinto, and modern-day agnosticism. However, Friday does recognize the influence and infusion of these religions on Japanese culture and society, and therefore on the martial arts (especially with regard to their vocabulary). Furthermore, Friday does point out that the origins of *Kashima Shinryu* do lie in the founder’s revelatory (or religious) experience at the Kashima (Shinto) shrine and the direct teachings of a Shinto deity.\(^6\) The fact that the art was based on a religiously revelatory experience would seem to me to suggest that religion was an inherently connected and important aspect of the tradition.

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\(^6\) Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 58-61.
CHAPTER 3

TRAINING THE BODY-MIND: THE USE OF PHYSICAL PRACTICE AND THE MARTIAL ARTS AS A MEANS TO ATTAINING RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Introduction & Budo as Religion

Shorinji kempo, which as discussed in the previous chapter, is uniquely registered in Japan not as a martial art or sport but as a religion, is highly critical of Japanese Buddhism. It takes issue with what it considers to be the purely academic and physically inactive nature of Japanese Buddhism, especially its focus on seated meditation (particularly in the case of Zen). Shorinji kempo combines meditation with physical activity, supposedly along the same lines as the Buddhism that Bodhidharma taught at the Temples in the Song Mountains of China. But perhaps this idea of the martial arts as religion can be applied even beyond Shorinji kempo. Winston King argues that from a Mikkyō (esoteric Buddhist) point of view, “pattern practice in the bugei can also be seen as a kind of mudric exercise, a form of spiritual cultivation in and of itself, either within or without the specific context of esoteric Buddhism.”

But not all would agree with this assessment. John Keenan asserts that “there is no particularly close connection between martial arts and the practice of the Mahayana

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1 King, Zen and the Way of the Sword, 245-246.

2 Ibid., 157.
path.” In fact, he maintains that in the Western world, “the martial arts mystique often leads away from Mahayana understandings of life and truth,” not toward them.³ But Stewart McFarlane contends that Keenan fails to account for the diversity of martial arts practice in both the East and the West. In fact, he argues that there has been a greater degree of mystification and obfuscation in the East than in the West. McFarlane also states that many people, particularly Westerners, have gone on to study Zen and other forms of Buddhist practice (Mahayana and Hinayana) through initial interest in and study of East Asian martial arts.⁴ But though the study of martial arts has led many to study Buddhism, and the martial arts contain elements of religious practice and cultivation, it is still quite a stretch to consider budo analogous to, or a form of, Buddhism.

In this chapter I hope to discuss and further clarify the connection between budo and religion. I begin by discussing the possibility that budo, like religion, is one of many paths to enlightenment, or self-actualization. I then briefly examine the origins of, and the arguments for, the use of budo as a form of self-cultivation and mental-spiritual training. Finally, I examine whether contemporary budo has changed, or can still be seen as a form of self-cultivation and mental-spiritual training.

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Budo as One of Many Paths to Self-Actualization

Although many practitioners of Buddhism have found their way to Buddhism through the martial arts, to say that martial arts and religion are synonymous is an overstatement. In fact, Karl Friday wisely cautions against broad generalization of over 700 unique Japanese martial lineages (to say nothing of non-Japanese martial lineages).\(^5\) As we have seen and will continue to see, most of the bugei were heavily influenced by the religions of their time periods and geographic settings. But religions affected more than just the bugei, in fact, according to Friday, within medieval Japanese culture, influences from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism led to the belief that "concentrated specialization in any activity [was] an equally valid route to ultimate attainment of universal truth. Complete mastery of even the most trivial of pastimes was believed to yield the same truths as can be found through the most profound."\(^6\) Because of this belief, though the warrior has been "venerated and ennobled" by many diverse cultures and peoples throughout history, only in Japan have the warrior arts reached the same level of regard as the fine arts.\(^7\) This veneration would not have been possible if Japanese society had not regarded the martial arts (along with many other pursuits such as calligraphy, the tea ceremony, poetry, painting, theatre, etc.) as a legitimate path to self-actualization, or enlightenment. It is quite common in the East to view the study of


\(^6\) Ibid., 16-17.

\(^7\) Ibid., 3-4.
martial arts as “training for living life,” as “a means of working toward self-perfection or self-realization.”

This too is not unique to the martial arts, but is a common thread among all the arts. Herman Kauz maintains that all Eastern philosophical and religious systems have influenced the philosophy of the martial arts as they developed over the centuries. The teachers of the martial (and other) arts attempted to create training methods that would teach students to directly understand the essence of these philosophical and religious systems intuitively (not only intellectually). This brings up another important point; in these systems, it was crucial that one not separate the intellectual from the intuitive, the mind from the body, rather that one view the organism holistically and realize that the goal of training was neither purely physical, nor purely mental/spiritual, but rather a melding of the two. This philosophy has remained very much a part of Japanese society even up to today. In fact, in Japan, sports are still commonly viewed as methods of mental or spiritual training or discipline for the purpose of self-improvement and self-actualization.

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9 Ibid., 93-94.

The Origin of Budo as Cultivation

However, Friday makes an important distinction, contending that “while the bugei purport to lead ultimately to goals similar to those of Buddhism – enlightenment and transcendence of worldly cares – they seek those goals, or at least they originally sought them [for their own reason] …to achieve proficiency in combat.”¹¹ In other words, meditation and other techniques for self-cultivation were originally incorporated into the bugei simply as tools to improve the warrior’s skills. But this motivation seems to have changed during the Tokugawa era (the Edo period, 1603-1868); in the 250 years of relative peace, “martial training came to be seen as a means of self-cultivation” rather than the reverse. “The bugei thereby took on a whole new identity as an elaborate form of nonreligious asceticism.”¹² This opinion seems to be shared by many scholars. For instance, according to Winston King, “the conscious, deliberate use of the martial arts for the development of personal character” began in Japan when the Tokugawa peace was established in the early seventeenth century.¹³ But Joe Hyams disagrees slightly. While he agrees that “the martial arts began to develop this emphasis on personal

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¹¹ Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 3-4.

¹² Ibid., 152.

spiritual growth” during a more peaceful time, when there was less need for fighting skills, he states that this occurred during the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{14}

Whether Hyams’ timeline is more correct than King’s is difficult to ascertain and whether this was a shift back to the original intent of Bodhidharma rather than an innovation in and of itself, is also somewhat obfuscated. However, it does seem clear that at some point before the mid-seventeenth century martial training did become a means of spiritual self-cultivation. The writings of the famous Yagyu Munenori, (1571-1646) stress the cultivation of mind and spirit together with the body and constantly reinforce the notion that swordsmanship and the study of budo goes well beyond pure physical training. He writes “It is missing the point to think that the martial arts is solely in cutting a man down.”\textsuperscript{15} To argue that Munenori’s ideas were completely revolutionary and not shared by his contemporaries would be difficult considering the example of Miyamoto Musashi. Considered by many to be the greatest swordsman in Japanese history, Musashi (1584-1645) was a contemporary of Munenori. In his famous sword treatise, “The Book of Five Rings,” Musashi argued that swordsmanship and the discipline and lessons gained from swordsmanship extend far beyond martial arts and could and should be applied to all aspects of one’s life.\textsuperscript{16} Stephen Voss uses Musashi as an example, arguing that the Japanese concept of bunbu-ryōdō, or the integration of


\textsuperscript{15}Munenori Yagyu, \textit{The Life-Giving Sword}, 49.

martial and liberal arts, allowed the discipline cultivated through swordsmanship to be applied to all other aspects of life. And, in fact, Musashi was also quite the artist. His sculptures and paintings are well-known and highly regarded.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Budo as Cultivation}

Even so, what does Musashi’s prowess as a swordsman have to do with his talents as a painter/sculptor/calligrapher or strategist/writer/philosopher? These skills seem unrelated and Musashi could simply have been talented in many different areas.\textsuperscript{18} But according to Voss, Musashi was simply one example of a samurai artist, other samurai created many “paintings, sculptures, poems, and other works [of art]”. In his own words, Musashi explains this phenomenon as follows: “When you have attained the Way of strategy there will be not one thing that you cannot understand and You will see the Way in everything.”\textsuperscript{19} Musashi further argues that his talents in the fine arts are a result of his mastery of the martial arts. In the introduction to his famous treatise \textit{Go Rin No Sho} (“The Book of Five Rings”), he says: "When I apply the principle of strategy to the ways of different arts and crafts, I no longer have need for a teacher in any domain."\textsuperscript{20} This seems to be based on the Japanese belief that "concentrated

\textsuperscript{17} Voss, “Kendo and Fencing”, 27.

\textsuperscript{18} For more information on Musashi as an artist, see Musashi, \textit{A Book of Five Rings}, 22; Voss, “Kendo and Fencing”, 27; and William Scott Wilson, \textit{The Lone Samurai: The Life of Miyamoto Musashi} (New York: Kodansha International, 2004), 114-146.

\textsuperscript{19} Musashi, \textit{A Book of Five Rings}, 22.

\textsuperscript{20} \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miyamoto_Musashi}, (accessed October, 2008).
specialization in any activity [was] an equally valid route to ultimate attainment of universal truth” and "complete mastery of even the most trivial of pastimes was believed to yield the same truths as can be found through the most profound." An outgrowth of these beliefs was the idea that once one fully mastered any pursuit and reached the level of self-actualization, mastering other skills and pursuits was easily accomplished. But what does this have to do with the concept of bunbu-ryōdō? To answer this question, we must explore what the meaning of this concept of bunbu-ryōdō, or the integration of martial and liberal arts. How are the martial arts and liberal arts related?

The whole concept of Bunbu-ryōdō, was not new to 16th Century figures like Musashi and Munenori. This concept had been part of samurai tradition since the 11th century; samurai were expected to study literature and the arts together with the martial arts. According to Minoru Kiyota, this broadening of the warriors’ education was adopted once it became clear to the samurai leaders that demonstrating their cultural refinement, not only their skills in the martial arts and battlefield strategy, could command the respect of their retainers. Thus the mastery of cultural arts seems to have been originally utilized as a tool by the samurai (this argument seems reminiscent of some of the utilitarian opinions regarding the infusion of Buddhism and religion into the

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21 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 16-17.

martial arts discussed in the previous chapter). But, as Kiyota argues, “mental discipline is the basic ingredient in developing both martial and liberal arts in order to enhance personal growth.” While this seems understandable with respect to the liberal arts, it would seem a bit odd to make the same claim for the physically-based martial arts. However, it must be noted that this viewpoint is inherently based on a Western mindset of dualism and the separation of the mind and body as well as the compulsive need to categorize and compartmentalize all things. Japanese philosophy, on the other hand, had a more holistic approach. It did not believe in either the separation of the mind/spirit and body, nor the complete distinctiveness of all arts. Thus if one gained a level of mastery over his body/mind/spirit, he could apply this mastery to all of his endeavors.

Thomas Kasulis, in his introduction to Yuasa Yasuo’s book *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, argues that “Eastern thought traditionally tends to emphasize the inseparability of mind and body.” He posits that in Eastern traditions, “wisdom must be physically as well as intellectually developed … knowledge of the truth is a psychophysical awareness beyond mere intellection.” This is true of the

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23 Ibid., 78


martial arts as well according to Kauz. He maintains that the teachers of the East Asian martial (and other) arts attempted to create training methods that would teach students to directly understand the essence of their philosophical and religious systems intuitively (not only intellectually). Therefore, according to Yuasa, “personal cultivation in the East takes on the meaning of a practical project aiming at the enhancement of the personality and the training of the spirit by means of the body.”

However, Kasulis and Yuasa argue that “the degree of integration between mind and body is variable and can be developed through various methods of personal cultivation.”

But although the degree of integration is variable, a lack of integration is unacceptable. As Yuasa himself argues in his introduction, “in the East, physical training that is not accompanied by the training of the mind as well is regarded as an aberration, for the mind and body cannot be essentially separated. Consequently, the Eastern martial arts have been regarded since ancient times as an outward-moving form of meditation” aimed at gaining mind-body knowledge. This mind-body knowledge is contrasted with pure intellection in that “true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through ‘bodily recognition or realization’ (tainin or taitoku), that is, through the utilization of one’s total mind and body. Simply

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28 Yuasa, The Body, 85.
29 Kasulis, Introduction to The Body, 12.
30 Yuasa, The Body, 24
stated, this is to ‘learn with the body’ not the brain.”

Perhaps this is why the Buddha himself was silent when asked metaphysical questions. Watsuji Tetsuro, in his book *The Practical Philosophy of Early Buddhism*, claims that “the Buddha’s silence teaches us that cognition through practice is alone truly deserving of the name ‘cognition’.”

Yuasa concludes that the Buddhist form of cultivation encapsulates both the intellectual study of precepts as well as the practice of meditation. He characterizes meditation as “an inward-looking practice [that] faces the self’s inner world, the interior of one’s mind.” This meditation, he contends, is the only way to attain “the ultimate goal of Buddhism – prajna, the wisdom accompanying satori [(enlightenment)].” Accordingly, all of the concepts and theories imparted in the sutras and commentaries are the products of prajna gained through meditation practice. But, in Japanese Buddhism, the practice cannot be divorced from theoretical, or doctrinal, study of the precepts and sutras. According to Dogen (1200-1253), the founder of the Soto sect of Japanese Zen Buddhism, studying “The Way” through seated meditation is the key to “the molting of the body-mind,” which is the prerequisite to correctly understanding the world. However, this ‘molting of body-mind’ is not a normal, everyday experience, rather, it is “extra-ordinary or supra-everyday.” It can only be experienced “through a specific, practical means of personal cultivation” (seated meditation). One other

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32 Ibid., 86.

33 Ibid., 113-114.
interesting point is the choice of word order in Dogen’s phrase “body-mind” (as opposed to “mind-body”). This was apparently carefully chosen to emphasize that the body is more important than the mind in terms of personal cultivation.  

But the precedence of the body over the mind predates even Dogen. Kukai (774-835), the founder of the esoteric Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism, also stressed the precedence of the body over the mind “because cultivation corrects the mind’s mode of being by first placing the body into a ‘Form,’ enabling the mind to be directed towards the base of the body.” It seems that Dogen was actually influenced by Kukai in giving precedence to the body over the mind. Yuasa posits that “in the field of ordinary experience we think the essence of human being lies in the fact that the conscious mode regulates and controls the bodily mode; the mind is put ahead of the body” and Dogen’s practice reverses this everyday understanding. Both Kukai and Dogen argue that by cultivation beginning with the body, one can transcend the commonly-held self-centered viewpoint of self-as-subject, and other-as-object and thus, by extrapolation, mind-as-subject and body-as-object, and reach satori and prajna.  

The teachings of the Kashima-Shinryu do not quite go so far as to discuss the attainment of satori and prajna with respect to these ideas, but they do support Yuasa’s premise in that “the Kashima-

34 Ibid., 115-122.

35 Ibid., 154-156.
Shinryu’s [and other bugei’s] approach to self-cultivation emphasizes entering the mind and spirit through the body – training the spirit by training the body.”

Now this idea that the physical training of the body may result in the cultivation of the mind may seem strange, far-fetched or “New-age” to some people, but Yoga, an Indian practice which dates back between 1500 and 2,500 years is based on exactly this idea. In fact, the word ‘Yoga’ is derived from the Sanskrit root “yuj”, meaning to “control”, “yoke”, or “unite” and refers to ascetic and meditative techniques and disciplines aimed at the attainment of “spiritual experience and profound understanding or insight into the nature of existence.” Yoga is used to restrain, control, or “yoke” the mind and the senses, allowing one to transcend the ego and experience the self’s “true identity.” According to some, the ultimate aim of Yoga is spiritual purification and self-understanding leading to union with the divine. This union is accomplished through physical practice composed of stretches, poses and meditative practices.

Similar to the ideas discussed above, Yoga is another physical practice whose aim is self-cultivation and dates back thousands of years. In fact, by the time of the writing of

36 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 156-160.

37 The historical origins of Yoga are unclear, and elements of the practice may date back to the early Harappan period (3300-1300 BCE). Evidence of Yoga postures were found on artifacts that date back to 3000 BCE. Evidence of Yoga can even be found in the Rig-Veda, considered by some to be the oldest-existing text on earth. The basic text of Yoga, according to Yuasa, is Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*, which was written in the fifth century C.E. (Yuasa 249) Though this is debated and could actually have been as early as the second century B.C.E.


the present form of the *Bhagavad-Gîtā* (500-600 BCE), Yoga is described as “archaic” (*purātana*).40

Therefore, this idea of cultivating the mind through physical practice and training is, in fact, an ancient one that has been prevalent in Eastern traditions for thousands of years. It predates the dualistic tendencies of Western society to train the mind through solely intellectual pursuits. In fact, this would seem to be apparent if one considers ancient religion. Religions are made up of both practices and rites as well as philosophical and intellectual ideas. It is the combination of these two inseparable parts that make up the religion and its pursuit.

But the inseparability of the body-mind manifests itself in other ways as well. The bidirectional character of the interactions between body and mind illustrate that the “mind-body” pathway exists as well. When one considers psychophysiology and the mind’s relationship to the nervous system and body, one sees that not only can the mind be cultivated through the physical training of the body, but that the mind can affect the body in both positive and negative ways as well. The deleterious physiological effects of psychological stress and psychosomatic illnesses have been well-documented, even if their mechanisms are as of yet poorly understood. This paucity of information as to the mechanism of influence is true for the idea of cultivating the mind through the body as well. But what exactly is this idea of “cultivation” in Eastern religious traditions?

Yuasa describes it as an “attempt to go beyond the standards of normality in its everyday (ontic) sense.” He says that “cultivation aims at enhancement and perfection of the personality by elevating various capacities of the body-mind from average normality to a supranormal standard.” He maintains that in the arts (including the martial arts) the process of training and learning is/was considered to be “cultivating human perfection.” Furthermore, whatever approach one chooses in cultivating oneself, the training and enhancing of mind-body capacities must be directed towards the perfection of the “nucleus of one’s personality” as the point of convergence in “a holistic unity of mind and body.”

Yuasa later describes the “nucleus of the personality” as “the capacity to bring peace of mind and harmony to human relationships as preached in the ancient religions in terms of love and compassion.”

But what do love and compassion have to do with the training of a martial art which teaches techniques of hurting and killing? Yuasa states that “training solely for technique without concern for the perfection and enhancement of the personality has usually been regarded as heretical in Eastern cultivation theories.” Focusing only on technique is seen to be dangerous and no matter how much one excels in bodily skill or scholarship, respect is not gained so long as one’s human sentiments are flawed. He

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42 Ibid., 210,
maintains that the central ideal which unifies all forms of cultivation is the Eastern tradition of religious cultivation.  

And, in fact, the training of many different forms of martial arts have been described as a form of meditation which teach one how to focus the mind in order to change the way in which one views the world. Kauz asserts that similarly, “over the centuries, both Eastern and Western religious and secular groups have engaged in [meditative] practices which they variously claimed achieved union with God, enabled them to see life in its wholeness and instilled tranquility.” Meditation has both physical and mental elements which teach one to focus the mind. He contends that martial arts training utilizes these elements to affect changes in how students view the world.  

One example of this can be found in the idea that correct training in the martial arts will result in the gradual dropping of the participant’s center (both physical and allegorical). Kauz (and others) argue that this dropping further manifests itself in a “settled, composed and tranquil way of doing things.” He further posits that learning to physically settle the body and relax unnecessary muscles leads to a quieting of the analytical, reasoning portion of the mind, which allows one to expand one’s perceptions, heighten one’s awareness, and help one become increasingly conscious of more of the world around oneself.

43 Ibid., 209.


Budo Today as a Form of Cultivation

As has been briefly discussed above, it is not an uncommon experience that after years of training in the martial arts, though a practitioner’s initial reasons for studying the martial arts may be based on self-defense and competition his emphasis may change to “training as a preparation for, or an aid in, living as fully and completely as possible.” This unexpected inner development is not uncommon and occurs because the martial arts of today, derived from combat forms, were also a form of physical and mental training. Though the type of combat that took place hundreds of years ago when these arts were founded no longer occurs, Kauz posits that “the martial arts have lost none of their potential for physical and mental development.”46 He identifies six major philosophical themes that are present in nearly all East Asian martial arts. These themes include: a respect for life and all of nature, a refraining from disturbing nature or asserting oneself and one’s influence too much, moderation and balance, character building, respect for authority and proper conduct, and spiritual development or enlightenment.

However, this claim seems to me to be a bit lofty and it must be stated that not all practitioners of the East Asian martial arts will gain all, or any, of these traits. It seems to me that Kauz is extrapolating much too broadly from his own personal experience. While this may be the experience of some, or even many, practitioners of

46 Ibid., 10-11.
the martial arts, and may even be present in “nearly all East Asian martial arts”, I do not believe this necessarily means that the majority of practitioners will grasp and embody these themes. In fact, Kauz suggests that Western students often feel uncomfortable with the mental and psychological approach to the martial arts and wish to focus largely on practical application. This would seem to suggest that these themes and the mental and spiritual development associated with the East Asian martial arts are lost on many Western practitioners. However, Kauz argues that martial arts can and should be as concerned today with inner development as with outer/physical development.47

But this does not necessarily seem to be the case with today’s martial arts practitioners. Judo, for example, is a modern martial art which was developed in Japan in the 1880s by Jigoro Kano. It was designed to strengthen the Japanese populace both physically and mentally. However, as Judo’s popularity spread around the world, the focus became winning judo sporting contests and “the idea of working toward mental and physical perfection gradually became of secondary importance, when it was not altogether forgotten.”48 In my opinion, this situation is not particular to judo. The same trend can be seen in modern martial arts schools and mixed martial arts systems. The focus tends to be on techniques/forms, so-called “effectiveness,” competitions, developing confidence, or the students’ progression through the ranks (usually for business reasons). There is very little focus on developing discipline and cultivating

47 Ibid., 28-29.
48 Ibid., 35-36.
character through physical and mental training. Still, though this unfortunate concentration may be the focus of many students and some teachers, Kauz idealistically says that many martial arts teachers “look upon their calling as a method through which they help students bring about beneficial changes in themselves.” They “are not concerned primarily with training fighters, although their students usually demonstrate considerable ability in this area.”\textsuperscript{49} Friday agrees, pointing out that if proficiency in combat were the only benefit of martial arts study, they would have little use today, in an age of guns and advanced weapons systems technology. However, according to him, these arts "are held to foster fighting skills not just for their own sake, but as a means to a more sublime end: the completion, the fulfillment of one's human potential."\textsuperscript{50}

Later, in his conclusion, Kauz’s point seems congruent with Friday’s. He asks why an individual would study the martial arts, and what are the ultimate benefits of studying them? The answer is that the study of martial arts not only contains elements that can enhance the quality of our lives, but, through the cultivation of mind and body together, can give one a sense of wholeness and contribute to the realization that one is not incomplete, or lacking.\textsuperscript{51} Kauz argues that “the various outcomes of martial arts training, summed up as self-realization, can also be of universal benefit.”\textsuperscript{52} How exactly the self-realization gained from studying today’s martial arts can be of universal

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 95-96.

\textsuperscript{50} Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{51} Kauz, *The Martial Spirit*, 141.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 105.
benefit (rather than just individual benefit) will be explored a bit more in the next chapter, but the fact that self-realization or the fulfillment of one’s human potential are considered to be the outcome of martial arts training clearly illustrates the idea that the martial arts go beyond purely physical training. The cultivation of the mind and spirit through the vehicle of the body is yet another way that martial arts and religious practice are congruent.
CHAPTER 4

WARRIOR ETHICS AND MORALITY: PARADOX OR LOGICAL CONSISTENCY? WHERE ARE THE RELIGIOUS, OR SPECIFICALLY THE BUDDHIST, PRINCIPLES?

Introduction & Budo’s Universal Value

How exactly can the study of the martial arts be of “universal benefit”, as Kauz describes?¹ It is possible that since the ultimate aim of the East Asian martial arts is self-realization (see above), one could argue that the attainment of self-realization by any individual could be of universal benefit if that individual acted in a way so as to benefit society on a large scale. Another possibility is that one could suppose that Kauz is proposing that these martial arts be taught universally in order to achieve universal self-realization. However, I believe that the universal benefit of the martial arts can be along different lines altogether; East Asian martial arts include within their framework an ethical system, which indeed can be of “universal benefit.” This is not to say that everyone should study the martial arts so as to learn this system of ethics, but rather that those who wish to study the martial arts and may have a predisposition towards violence may be positively affected by this system of ethics. While this ethicizing of violently predisposed individuals may not pacify them completely, a greater awareness of ethical

and moral considerations even during combat and warfare would, in turn, be of universal benefit. But what is the origin of this ethical system?

**Budo’s Intrinsic Morality**

According to Shifu Nagaboshi Tomio, even back as far as the time of the Buddha, the martial arts contained ethical teachings which prohibited the teaching of the martial arts to people of questionable moral character.\(^2\) Going back farther still, the *Bhagavad Gita* stresses the obligation of the warrior to “fight without cruelty and to protect others unselfishly.”\(^4\) Some have posited that the Indian martial art *Kalaripayit* is a descendant of the same art, or arts, that the Buddha studied approximately 2500 years ago. Vasudevan Gurrukal, a master of the Northern style of *Kalaripayit*, discussed the lessons of forgiveness that form a part of the teachings of his art: “We must forgive our enemy. … we must think of our families, and our enemies’ families, and avoid fights, forgive enemies.”\(^5\) These teachings seem to be in line with my earlier investigation of the character “bu.” Forgiveness is also a key element in many religions and a central concept in the resolution and transformation of conflicts. There is a story recounted in

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\(^2\) It is important here to note that the Buddha himself came from the *Kshatriya* caste in India, which was the warrior caste, and as such, most likely had some familiarity with some form of warfare or martial art or strategy.

\(^3\) Even today, many martial arts contain this prohibition. In my studies, this has been repeatedly stressed.


\(^5\) Reid and Croucher, *The Way of the Warrior*, 42.
the post-canonical *Mahavamsa* in which the Buddha interrupts a war between two parties by inspiring them with a sermon.⁶ In this way, the Buddha was a practitioner of conflict resolution, or possibly transformation. He “stopped the spear” or spears from clashing (see above description of Japanese “*bu*”).

But what is the relationship of the Martial arts, Buddhism, and morality/ethics? As we have seen above, while in their East Asian context, martial arts “entail a spiritual discipline and inculcate a warrior ethos of strength and compassion”. However, when they are taken out of their East Asian native environment, they can be easily separated from all spiritual and humanistic value and practiced merely for athletic prowess or street-fighting. This can be seen in the Western world where martial arts are almost always separated from their Mahayana context. But what about the moral and ethical system of the martial arts while in their East Asian context? Do they truly include the concept of compassion described above? The central tenet of Samurai Zen, often called “no-mind” (or *mushin*) can be described as “the absence of thought that results in a spontaneous and creative response to life situations.”⁷ This is similar to the counsel of Yamamoto Tsumetomo (1658-1719), the author of the famous samurai treatise *Hagakure*. Yamamoto advises that there should be no hesitation when one decides to

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“strike someone down …the martial arts should not involve deliberation.” Is he truly suggesting that one should kill another without deliberation? This sounds awfully cold-blooded and cruel to me; I sense no compassion, humanity, or ethics in this attitude.

John Keenan similarly argues that Takuan Soho’s influential writings on no-mind, Zen, and swordsmanship dispense “with any awareness of ethical action in the world.” He accuses Takuan of creating a Zen devoid of human concern and neglectful of the need for compassion. But Stewart McFarlane disagrees, arguing against Keenan, that Takuan’s works are a “characteristic blend of Buddhist and Confucian ethics and methods.” If McFarlane is correct, they cannot, by definition, dispense “with any awareness of ethical action in the world” as Keenan suggests.

I believe that Keenan’s moral criticism of Takuan is an oversimplification, or misunderstanding of Takuan’s ideas. After all, how do we square this accusation of moral vacuity with Takuan’s idea from *The Unfettered Mind* that “the accomplished man uses the sword but does not kill others. He uses the sword and gives others life. When it is necessary to kill, he kills. When it is necessary to give life, he gives life.” Takuan is discussing the concept of *katsujinken*, or the “life-giving sword” (to be discussed later in this chapter), which hinges on the Buddhist concept of *upaya*, or “skillful (or ‘expedient’) means”. This concept entails the idea that any practice can

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8 King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 137.


10 McFarlane, “Mushin”, 397-420.
potentially be helpful in a being’s progression towards enlightenment. Practically, this allows a *buddha* or *boddhisattva* to utilize any number of (skillful/expedient) means to help people. This includes lying, and even killing. Though seemingly paradoxical and ethically questionable to some, this concept relies on the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, or emptiness, which states that all things are intrinsically empty and devoid of inherent quality. It is the intent, motivation, and mindset of the individual utilizing the practice that determines the quality of the practice. Thus, since all practices and things are empty, or devoid of inherent quality, anything may be used skillfully to help beings gain enlightenment, including weapons such as the sword, lying, stealing, and even killing. Though at first thought this may seem contrary to the Western concept of ethics, it is well within the Buddhist framework, and as will be discussed later, perhaps it is truly not so foreign to Western ethics when viewed in a certain light.

Thus contrary to Keenan’s accusation, Takuan is in fact, quite far from dispensing “with any awareness of ethical action in the world.” By discussing *upaya*, Takuan is well within the bounds of Mahayana ethics. And as to the accusation that he is “creating a Zen devoid of human concern and neglectful of the need for compassion,” it is important to note that Takuan was not recommending swordsmanship as a spiritual path for everyone, but rather addressing those swordsmen already committed (by birth) to the warrior path.\footnote{McFarlane, “Mystique”, 360-361.} While it is true that compassion forms the basis of Mahayana Buddhism and is one of its highest goals and ideals, this is not incompatible with
Yamamoto’s idea of killing without hesitation. It is not a hesitation in the decision that Yamamoto is speaking of; rather once the decision has been reached that an attacker is deserving of death (and there is no alternative), hesitation must not enter into the swordsman’s mind because a moment’s hesitation could very well lead to one’s own death in a battle against a skilled attacker.

However, Friday describes mushin (“no-mind”) as “utter objectivity and detachment at every stage of a confrontation.” He argues that by maintaining this state, “the warrior separates himself from any moral responsibility for its outcome…In the ethics of traditional bugei, he can no more be blamed for injuries brought about by actions with which he has no volitional or emotional involvement than can a rock be blamed for rolling off a hill and striking someone.”12 I find this suggestion profoundly disturbing because it totally absolves the warrior of any moral responsibility and completely ignores the idea of compassion. I do not agree with this interpretation of the warrior’s "no-mind.” The warrior does not become an automaton; this is not the true meaning of mushin. Underlying the idea of mushin, or combined with it, is the ever-present emphasis on karuna (compassion) and sati (mindfulness). Another important part of mushin and detachment is that the mind stays completely void of any harmful intent. There is not even an inkling of hate or anger in the mind of the warrior and this helps prevent the use of any excessive force. Thus the warrior causes only as much

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12 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 67.
damage as needed in order to defuse a situation. In this, I believe there is an inherent compassion.

This is very different from some of the more popular modern self-defense courses, which encourage students to use their fear and rage against attackers. Though some psychologists recommend such practice for those immobilized by fear or trauma from previous attacks, according to Claudio Iedwab and Roxanne Standefer, “this technique is a distortion of the desired mind-set of the martial arts.”

Along similar lines, the Ōgi (or Okugi, “a statement of the guiding principles or paramount teachings of the school”) of the Kashima-Shinryu (Friday’s own martial tradition) seems to argue against Friday and Keenan when it states “if the heart is not pure, he who willfully attacks will only be destroyed. Destroying evil, establishing righteousness: the principle [of the martial tradition] is clear.”

Similarly, according to the “sword philosophy” of Kintayu Hori (1688-1756), the true samurai avoided conflicts and fighting. This spirit appears to be very widespread within the martial arts, even some known for their deadliness and brutality (arguably due to misrepresentation). Among these are Japan’s ancient ninja traditions, whose practitioners were popularly thought of as among the coldest, most brutal, deadliest warriors on earth. Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, the current lineage holder of several

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14 Friday, Legacies of the Sword, 99.

15 King, Zen and the Way of the Sword, 181-183.
ancient schools of ninja arts, states “The truly accomplished ninja always works to avoid fighting.”16 Furthermore, he states, “The most vital techniques in Budo are those which preserve life. That is why the ultimate secret of the martial arts are said to be ‘to win without fighting’.”17 Hatsumi goes on to quote “The great British general” Wellington (1769-1852), who crushed Napoleon’s resurgence at Waterloo. Wellington said, “Next to a battle lost, the greatest misery is a battle gained”. Why, if as Friday argues, a warrior was not morally responsible or culpable for his actions, should a battle won be a great misery? It may be argued that Wellington was a Western general, and that it is only in the East that warriors were not viewed as culpable for their actions. However, it is Hatsumi (a Japanese grandmaster of several ancient East Asian martial arts), not I, who applies general Wellington’s quotes to the East Asian context. I argue that though warriors in the East Asian context may have tried to avoid guilty consciences and moral responsibility, the concept of mushin without the concepts of compassion and awareness would not have sufficed. And even with all of these things, as General Wellington points out, war is misery. “He evidently understood that the secret of happiness is not to fight at all.”18


18 Ibid., 17.
**Budo as Promoting Peace: An Inherent Contradiction**

But what is the point of studying a martial art that teaches one how to do battle, only to learn that one should avoid combat and battle? This seems contradictory, if not praxiologically confusing. According to King, the formalized “way of the warrior” (*bushido*), which was codified in the seventeenth century, contained Confucian principles that had been introduced to “provide more generalized ethical supports.”¹⁹ Thomas Cleary agrees; he states that *bushido* contains a moral code, which demands a knowledge of right and wrong and states that a warrior should strive to act righteously and avoid wrongdoing, or evil.²⁰ Risuke Otake, the current *shihan*, or teaching master, of the *Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu*, states that *bushido* is “concerned with the spirit of self-sacrifice” and making an effort to help people and do good in the world, even to the point of sacrificing one’s life for a good purpose.²¹ An example of this can be seen in the work of Yamaga Soko, a seventeenth-century samurai philosopher who wrote, "Within his heart [the samurai] keeps to the ways of peace, but without he keeps his weapons ready for use."²² But is it enough for the warrior to “keep to the ways of peace” “within his heart” alone, and outwardly sharpen his weapons? Should one not preach peace outwardly as well?

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¹⁹ King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 53.


²² Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 2.
According to King, Hori believed that the sword should only be used to kill when unavoidable, and when used, “it ought to be the sword that gives life\textsuperscript{23} and not the sword that kills.”\textsuperscript{24} This is an interesting and nuanced idea, what exactly is “the sword that gives life”? There exists in the martial arts a concept of dualism with respect to the sword as both “the sword that gives life” (\textit{katsujinken}) and “the sword that kills” (\textit{satsujinken}). This is a very old concept possibly influenced by, or connected to, Taoism. The second volume of the \textit{Heiho Kaden sho\textsuperscript{25}} of Yagyu Shinkage Ryu, entitled ‘The Death Dealing Blade’ begins with a possible allusion to Chapter 31 of Lao Tzu’s \textit{Tao Te Ching\textsuperscript{26}}. Munenori writes, “Here is what was said in the past: ‘weapons are unfortunate instruments. Heaven’s Way hates them. Using them when there is no other choice – that is Heaven’s Way.’” This would seem paradoxical; if Heaven’s Way hates weapons, how is using them when there is no other choice also Heaven’s Way? The author then states that Heaven’s Way is the way of life and giving life, and thus weapons (that kill) are contrary to Heaven’s Way. How, then, are we to understand this seeming paradox? The author appears to answer this contradiction a few sentences later when he says: “because of one man’s evil, thousands of people suffer. So you kill that one man in order to let the thousands live. Here, truly, the blade that deals death could

\textsuperscript{23} This phrase is also known as \textit{katsujinken}, or “the life-giving sword” and will be explained below

\textsuperscript{24} King, \textit{Zen and the Way of the Sword}, 181-183.

\textsuperscript{25} A famous 17\textsuperscript{th} Century Japanese treatise on swordsmanship written by Yagyu Munenori,

\textsuperscript{26} Sato, \textit{The Sword and The Mind}, 55.
be the sword that gives life.”[27] In this way, the weapon, though it may be hated by Heaven because of its use for violence and the ending of lives, may be employed to give or sustain more lives, and thus be an instrument of Heaven’s Way.

Although most people think of the martial arts as a way to increase the efficiency of one’s acts of violence, Munenori argues against this. He proposes that it is a prejudice which misses the point to think that swordsmanship is meant solely to cut an opponent down. It is not meant to cut people down, but to kill evil. It is a way of giving life to ten thousand men by killing the evil of a single man.”[28] This is related to the Buddhist concept of upaya, as mentioned earlier, whereby an object or concept may be used in many ways (often seemingly contradictory ones) in order to achieve a sought-after (usually surprising, yet benevolent) goal. Similarly, Friday cites the Ōgi of the Kashima-Shinryu, which states that the essence of the school “lies not in savoring the unavailing joy of felling an enemy… it nurtures in those who practice it the will to kill one only to save ten thousand.”[29] This seems reminiscent of the accounts in which the Buddha killed one person to save five hundred (discussed in more detail below).[30] In this way, one’s sword is actually saving (or ‘giving’) life, not killing. The Ōgi also says “destroying evil, establishing righteousness: the principle [of the school] is clear.”[31]

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[27] Ibid., 55-56.

[28] Ibid., 58 and Yagyu Munenori, The Life-Giving Sword, 72.

[29] Friday, Legacies of the Sword, 99.


[31] Friday, Legacies of the Sword, 99.
Now, while it may seem like rationalization, or weak apologetics, to argue that in the above case one is actually saving lives by killing an individual, this is not necessarily the case. It is through the use of skillful means (Upaya) that compassion is exercised by buddhas and bodhisattvas. In other words, in applying compassion and skillful means, it may be necessary for the buddhas or bodhisattvas to step outside “moral and doctrinal norms in order to effectively teach beings and lead them out of suffering.” This can be clearly illustrated by the famous example of skillful means from the third chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In this story, a father lies to his children by saying that he has brought them toy carts, in order to lure them out of their burning house. McFarlane argues (and most would agree) that lying is justified in this example, even though Buddhism teaches that lying is wrong (in most cases). Therefore, just because a buddha or bodhisattva may have to resort to violence as upaya, this does not mean that Buddhism preaches violence. McFarlane discusses another example from the canon: one in which the Buddha kills a bandit to save the lives of five hundred traders and to save the bandit from the (karmic) consequences of his intended actions. So we see that even the sword which appears to be “the sword that kills” (satsujinken), could in actuality be the “sword that gives life” (katsujinken) through the use of upaya (skillfull means).

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32 McFarlane, “Mushin”, 408.
33 Ibid., 408-409.
Some argue that these philosophies were a later development during the peaceful times of the Tokugawa shogunate and a unified Japan. Many believe that the goal of the East Asian Martial arts is the ability to use “the sword that gives life” rather than “the sword that kills”. D.T. Suzuki seems to be of this mind; he stresses that the warrior should “be a spiritual man, not an agent of brutality.” He believed the sword “to be an instrument to kill the ego, which is the root of all quarrels and fighting.” Suzuki believed that it was the duty of the samurai to preserve peace and order, and reputable samurai did not go about seeking fights. Suzuki also states that:

The sword is generally associated with killing, and most of us wonder how it can come into connection with Zen, which is a school of Buddhism teaching the gospel of love and mercy. The fact is that the art of swordsmanship distinguishes between the sword that kills [(often referred to as satsujinken)] and the sword that gives life [(often called katsujinken)]. The one that is used by a [mere] technician cannot go any further than killing. The case is altogether different with the one who is compelled to lift the sword. For it is not he but the sword itself that does the killing. He has no desire to do harm to anybody, but the enemy appears and makes himself a victim.34

So it seems that Suzuki holds that the key difference between satsujinken and katsujinken is the swordsman’s motivations. If one is compelled to use the sword, this constitutes katsujinken, or the sword that gives life, whereas if one uses the sword by one’s own volition, the most he can hope for is satsujinken, or the sword that kills. I would argue that though this is part of the difference between the sword that kills and the sword that gives life, it is neither the root difference, nor the most important to examine, rather, it is a product of the root difference. For if this were indeed the root difference, it would be important to examine it further.

34 King, Zen and the Way of the Sword, 181-186.
difference, then it would follow that anyone compelled to use a sword against his best wishes would be considered katsujinken. I don’t believe that this is true. Rather, katsujinken is a rather advanced concept in swordsmanship that usually involves a high degree of mastery. As we shall see, it is exactly this level of mastery, combined with a peaceful motivation that allows one to attain the level of katsujinken.

But what exactly is katsujinken and how can a sword, which is an instrument of violence and warfare, give life? This very old concept is present in many, if not all, of the older Japanese sword arts. Katsujinken has been translated as the “life-giving sword”, or the “sword that gives life”, or even the “living sword”. It is the sword wielded by a skilled practitioner who, through much practice, has achieved the level of skill with the blade which allows one to be free. This freedom with the sword is what gives the sword “life” and this is the sword that is “alive.” It is only when one possesses the ability to remain calm when attacked and the necessary skill to inflict only the minimum necessary damage to stop one’s opponent, that one can truly use one’s sword benevolently. When this sword is used by someone who has pursued the martial arts in order to achieve a high level of self-cultivation and self-realization, this has the potential to be the “life-giving sword”, or katsujinken. Such a person would likely act compassionately and attempt to inflict the least amount of damage possible on an attacker. Hatsumi seems to agree with this when, in discussing the essence of the martial arts, he says “In war, prepare your body and show courage, the true [essence] is the mind. Win without drawing your sword. If you draw, do not cut down; bear
patiently, and know that taking a life is a grave thing.” He also writes, “even if armed with a blade, [a ninja] would find a way to win without staining it.”

The ability to do this requires a great deal of both compassion and skill. In fact, “the idea of muto [(no sword)], fighting an armed opponent when you are unarmed, which the Shinkage school held to be its ultimate goal, was largely a result of its rejection in principle of destruction of the opponent. In that sense the Shinkage school of swordsmanship was pacifist,” paradoxical as it may seem. I must stress, however, that this was “the ultimate goal,” or technique, of the famous Shinkage school and was aspired to by many but attained only by the few who reached the level of mastery.

On the other hand, contrasted with a master who has the freedom to inflict minimal damage and the teachings of compassion discussed above, an unskilled and/or frightened practitioner would be more likely to panic and attempt to stop an attacker at any cost, without much restraint or presence of mind. If this person survived the encounter, it would be unlikely that they embodied the concept of katsujinken. Therefore we see that the idea of compassion with the sword, or in combat, can be used in several different contexts. Whether it is killing one person (or few) to save many, or deciding to incapacitate rather than kill, we see that the sword, which is an instrument of death and violence, can indeed be an instrument of life and compassion.

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Conclusion

Though this idea of a sword that gives life might seem alien to a Western audience, I argue that the concept exists in the Western paradigm as well. German Protestant theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s involvement in the July 20, 1944 failed assassination attempt of Adolph Hitler could be seen as a Western analogue of the idea of katsujinken. Though involved in the attempted tyrannicide and coup, Bonhoeffer did not see this as antithetical to his commitment to a Christian peace ethic. In fact, for Bonhoeffer, peace was at the center of the gospel and his understanding of the church and its role in the world. Tyrannicide was very much a last resort.\textsuperscript{38} Clifford Green summarizes Bonhoeffer’s “ethic of resistance” as follows:

In extreme situations where life itself is at stake, the killing of a tyrant may be wagered. This is a particular act, done in freedom, not the application of a general principle; it occurs only in a specific case of extreme necessity and as a last resort. The act is one of vicarious responsibility, and its purpose is healing and the peace of the human community. It is not justified by any principle of human ethics, but is a wager, with its risk, about the will of God. It is done in freedom, with appropriate analysis of the situation, and with a willingness to take on guilt. This free, responsible action is an act of faith.\textsuperscript{39}

One of the main differences between this instance and the above-mentioned canonical story of the Buddha killing a bandit to save the lives of five hundred traders is that Bonhoeffer never claimed to have achieved enlightenment and thus, for him, this act was a theological and moral wager, whereas for the enlightened Buddha it was not.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 45
According to Bonhoeffer, he was compelled to take up the metaphorical sword in order to end a culture of death and murder and attempt to “give life” to the war-torn world. The idea that this act was done “in freedom” also relates to the idea of katsujinken in that it is only the blade which is free that can give life. Had Bonhoeffer and his co-conspirators succeeded, I believe they would have embodied the true meaning of katsujinken within the Western paradigm.

In his discussion of people’s motivations for studying martial arts, Friday touches on the consequences of their studies as well. He says that while some people are attracted to the martial arts for “psychospiritual development,” many “begin training because of a perceived need for self-defense skills or a simple love of combat.” Regardless of their initial motivations, however, many soon realize that “ultimate martial skill must take them beyond the physical into the realm of the spirit.” He concludes that in this way the paradox of the martial arts - “the notion of creating peace, non-violence and spiritual harmony through mastery of the arts of violence – becomes understandable and even logical.”\(^{40}\) Thus the concept of a system of ethics and morality that is predisposed towards peacemaking and conflict avoidance is inherent in the martial arts. I believe this to be paradoxical and yet inherently consistent with Buddhism, as well as the essence of bu and East Asian martial arts. In this light it is possible to understand how the claim can be made that the study of martial arts can be “of universal benefit.”

\(^{40}\) Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 164.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF MARTIAL ARTS AS AN IMPORTANT (AND OFTEN-NEGLECTED) RESOURCE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORY AND TECHNIQUES

Introduction

Although the philosophical basis of *budo* and the long-term practice of East Asian martial arts may help assuage the bloodthirstiness of violently pre-disposed individuals, does *budo* have anything else to offer that may be of “universal benefit?”

I believe that the answer to this question can be found in the words of Leo Tolstoy, who believed that the arts are capable of bridging faiths, religious traditions, and diverse cultures. In his 1896 treatise entitled “What is Art?”, he writes:

> The task facing art is enormous: art, genuine art, guided by religion with the help of science, must make it so that men’s peaceful life together, which is now maintained by external measures – courts, police, charitable institutions, workplace inspections, and so on – should be achieved by the free and joyful activity of men. Art should eliminate violence. And only art can do that.¹

Though some might limit Tolstoy’s comments to the fine arts, it is especially true for the martial arts, which not only have been historically influenced by religion and have interacted with science, but which deal directly with conflict and pacifying man’s aggressive, or conflictual, nature.

And though some might disagree with the idea that man has a conflictual nature, and argue therefore that martial artists are unnecessary, the need for warriors in society is discussed in an excerpt from an ancient martial arts treatise known as the *Ryu no maki* (“Dragon’s Scroll,” authorship unknown probably mid-17th to early –18th Century). The author says, “there are none who are completely outside the need for military readiness.” Karl Friday posits that the scroll’s author is criticizing as foolish those who seek to avoid violence by pretending that it does not exist. He further states that “confrontation and strife…are a part of the order of nature, an order from which man is not exempt.”

But the practical need for military readiness and the inevitability of conflict does not mean that we should not strive for peace. It only means that we should not ignore the reality of conflict in the world. Working for peace is a large part of what the martial arts are truly about. According to Friday, “*bu*” can have the connotation of “to end conflict” or even “to bring forth peace.” Nevertheless, Friday recognizes that “peace cannot be created through military affairs alone.” Martial arts, as a solely physical pursuit, do not create peace in the world. However, when the philosophical underpinnings of the martial arts are embodied by the martial artist, it can pacify even people who originally had a violent orientation or inclination. Along similar lines, Friday discusses the term “*shinbu,*” an ambiguous term, which can be translated or

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2 Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 147.
interpreted as “divine valor”, “true martial art”, “spiritual martial power”, or “sacred martialism.” According to him shinbu represents the goal and essence of Kashima Shinryu. He cites a famous phrase popular in the Tokugawa era “shinbu ni shite fusetsu,” which he translates as “to attain shinbu and kill not.” He goes on to say that the “highest expression of shinbu is tatazu-no-kachi (“victory without a stand”): to defuse a confrontation or subdue the opponent without recourse to the clash of arms.”

Thus we see that the fundamental and most valued teachings of the martial arts are to avoid conflict, or resolve it peacefully. Croucher and Reid suggest that if a master of the martial arts was obliged to use his skills, even for the best of reasons, that master would be gravely ashamed at his failure to uphold the deepest and most treasured values of his tradition, that being the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Martial Arts as Peacemaking Tools for Individuals: Practice and Principle

In yet another important example illustrating that the teachings of the martial arts are those of peace, the founder of Katori Shinto Ryu, Iizasa Choisai Ienao, left behind a pun as one of the tradition’s central teachings. He stressed the importance of the word “heiho,” which in Japanese characters can mean (and is usually translated as) “the method of the soldier,” or “the method of war,” but written with other Japanese characters, or in Chinese characters, can also mean “the method of peace.” He also

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3 Ibid., 63-65.

4 Reid and Croucher, The Way of the Warrior, 200.
taught that the ideal form of victory was that which was obtained without resorting to combat or violence. When challenged to a duel, he was victorious through the use of an interesting method of conflict transformation. This method included an awe-inspiring demonstration of physical mastery, making it clear to the challenger that he truly was an extraordinary master. He sat on a straw mat supported only by a stand of miniature bamboo, which did not collapse under his weight, then invited the challenger to do the same. This demonstration, which the opponent could not duplicate, forced the opponent to concede defeat, at which time Choisai came down from the mat and offered him the hospitality of his dojo (the training hall, or literally, “the place of the way”). In this way, he transformed an adversarial relationship into one of friendship and mutual respect. The current martial headmaster of Katori Shinto Ryu, Otake Risuke, expounded on this seeming paradox in an interview with Reid and Croucher. He said “the martial method is a way of fighting, and yet, if we are able to master the entire curriculum (of Katori Shinto Ryu), we will find that it becomes a way of peace.”

Risuke is stating both the most fundamentally basic teaching of the martial arts, as well as its most advanced principle: The martial arts are, in fact, a form of conflict resolution. The correct practice of the martial arts leads to both the internal and external pacification of students. This is accomplished through various means (physical,

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5 My description cannot do this demonstration justice in the space allotted. Needless to say, this was an extraordinary feat, demonstrating supreme physical mastery.

philosophical, psychological, etc.) over an often extended period of time. For example, karate (Japanese for “empty hand”), a martial art of Okinawan origin, uses mental training to teach the student "the importance of not fighting," while the body is being built into a "complex weapons system." One interesting lesson, and the first one taught to many a novice karate practitioner, is "If you attack, never be angry. If you are angry, do not attack." This principle seems to have played into other modern arts such as judo and aikido. The basic premise of aikido is to use an attacking opponent's force against him by not resisting, but rather adding to his force and unbalancing him further (the mental state of anger in which he attacked is also considered to be a state of unbalance).

A possible flaw that has been pointed out to many a karate or aikido practitioner is that if one is not allowed to attack in anger, when is one allowed to attack? For who would attack when they are happy, content, or emotionally centered? Anger is the emotion that is most likely to lead to violent actions. However, this is exactly the point; one should not attack at all based on one’s emotion. Rather, one should only use the martial arts as a means to defend that which is in need of, and worthy of, protection. Thus in these disciplines, the student must either learn to control, or dissipate their anger, or how to control their actions while angry. Ultimately, the goal is to learn to 

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7 Reid and Croucher, The Way of the Warrior, 165.

8 Ibid., 177-179.

9 According to Reid and Croucher (page 192), this principle is drawn directly from the Taoist philosophy, which, along with Confucian and Buddhist ideas, influenced the Chinese martial arts, which in turn, influenced these Japanese arts.
control both one’s actions as well as one’s emotions. This, in and of itself, is a form of conflict resolution, both internal (resolving emotional conflicts within oneself) and external (resolving conflicts between oneself and others). In fact, as was discussed in Chapter 2, Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, described how the goal of the martial arts had been misinterpreted as follows:

The Way of the Warrior has been misunderstood as a means to kill and destroy others. Those who seek competition are making a grave mistake. To smash, injure, or destroy is the worst sin a human being can commit. The real Way of a Warrior is to prevent slaughter - it is the Art of Peace, the power of love.¹⁰

Ueshiba was not speaking only of his art of Aikido in this statement. He was speaking of the bugei as a whole, including some of the most seemingly-vicious varieties of budo.

Perhaps the most feared and vilified of Japan’s martial artists, the infamous ninja warriors, were often portrayed as ruthless spies and assassins in Japanese history and folklore. According to Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, the current grandmaster of several lineages of ninjutsu, this is an unfortunate and major misconception. He maintains that the ninja actually had a strong moral code and a true ninja embodied peace.¹¹ There is a poem called Ninja Seishin, which translates to ‘correct/right/pure mind/heart of the ninja’. This traditional ninja poem, whose origins are unknown, is indirectly cited in an


ancient, multi-volume text of secret-transmissions on ninjutsu called the

Bansenshukai. In the poem Ninja Seishin one finds the following verses: “The true
meaning of ’Nin’ [(忍)] is Kajo Waraku, having a heart as peaceful, joyful, and lovely as
that of a flower. One should never place the blade before the heart”. “Nin” is also the
first character of “ninjutsu” (忍術) and “ninja” (忍者). Therefore the true ninja were
the ones who embodied “nin,” and whose hearts and minds were as lovely, joyful and
peaceful as a flower. But though some might argue that this is speaking only of
“internal peace”, or equanimity, and not external peace, or nonviolence, and the ninja
could be violent and ruthless while remaining mentally and emotionally unattached, this
is incorrect. Though the ninja were often called upon to use their skills as expert
tacticians and martial artists, they did so only out of necessity and tempered their
actions through the exercise of their strong moral code and hearts that valued peace as
paramount. 

12 The second volume of the Bansenshukai is called ‘seishin’, or ‘correct/right/pure mind/heart’. This
text was written by Fujibayashi Yasutake (or Yasuyoshi) in 1676.

13 This is a play on words as the character for “Nin” is a compound kanji using two radicals. The
radical for “ken,” or sword/blade and that of “kokoro,” or heart.

14 The second character, 術 or “jutsu” means “method” or “technique.”

15 The second character 者 or “ja” (also read as “mono”) means “man,” or “one who embodies.”

16 Masaaki Hatsumi, “Hatsumi: The Guiding Force Behind Ninjutsu” Black Belt Magazine
However, Hollywood martial arts movies convey an atmosphere of mystery and violence surrounding *ninjutsu* and the martial arts, rather than a tradition of peace, which would not sell as well in the box-office. Croucher and Reid lament this and state that, in truth, the long years of training and practice which are required to become proficient in a fighting art also have a pacifying effect which drains aggression out of the students.¹⁷ One long-time student of *kendo* stated that before beginning his training he was very aggressive and would occasionally get in fights. He characterized aggression as based on fear, which is lost after a few years of serious training. It is this student's belief that *kendo* transformed his fear and aggression into something more constructive.¹⁸

I can truly say that as a student of the Japanese martial arts for over twelve years, I have found this (gradual pacification of students) to be true for me and nearly all of the students with whom I have trained.

However, aside from this idea of draining fear-based aggression out of people (which would have no proactive effects), the martial arts also instill compassion into practitioners. According to David Hall, this idea dates all the way back to the earliest inception of the Marishiten cult in the fifth century, CE. Apparently, this cult was unique among the groups that worshipped warrior deities because it required its adherents to be compassionate and rid themselves of all traces of malice.¹⁹ But


¹⁸ Ibid., 202-203.

¹⁹ David A. Hall, telephone interview by author on 05 May 2004.
according to Winston King, the structure of martial arts practice itself, without any religious or cultic aspects, can also instill within practitioners this sense of compassion. In Shorinji Kempo practice, students train in pairs, alternating between the role of attacker and that of defender. King argues that this practice, which is not unique to Shorinji Kempo (it is common to many martial arts), allows both practitioners to experience each side of the combat relationship and gain “from such experience fellow-human feeling and sympathy.”\(^{20}\) The switching of roles allows both practitioners to experience pain and realize that they are inflicting this same pain on their partner. When one feels the pain oneself, one generally wishes to minimize the pain inflicted on one’s partner, both out of sympathy and out of practicality. I say ‘practicality’ because the more pain one inflicts on one’s partner, the more pain one will experience oneself when it is his/her turn to have the technique done to him/her. In other words, one learns first hand that violence breeds more pain and violence, and this situation is easily avoidable. Thus, by actually experiencing another’s pain (walking in their shoes) and out of self-preservation and even selfishness, one learns to empathize with others and minimize the amount of pain one inflicts on them. This can even lead to a wish to alleviate the unrelated pain of others, since one has an intimate knowledge of pain, and the needlessness of inflicting it.

\(^{20}\) King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 247.
Martial Arts as a Paradigm for Macrocosmic Conflict Resolution

By extrapolating the lessons of martial arts training from the microcosmic level to the macrocosmic level of large-scale conflict, one begins to see how over time martial arts training can create peacemakers, even of those with a proclivity for violence. One interesting example of this can be seen in the story of a Japanese battle that took place between two leading generals in 1584 (nine years after witnessing the results of the introduction of firearms into Japanese warfare). The armies seemed to be evenly-matched and the result was an impasse. Neither general wished to risk his cavalry, therefore neither attacked. After some time, the two generals formed an alliance. \(^{21}\) But how is this story relevant to our current discussion?

The self-preservation instinct in animals (including humans) usually deters them from provoking a fight with a stronger, or evenly-matched opponent. \(^{22}\) This is analogous to the argument that the prospect of “mutually-assured destruction” can serve as a deterrent to attack. In any case, if one is discouraged from attacking one’s perceived enemy, and thus dissuaded from entering into a conflict with this enemy, the opportunity for amicable relationship-building is greatly increased (as we see in the above example). However, if one’s enemy is not strong enough to be a threat to one’s

\(^{21}\) King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 91.

\(^{22}\) One notable exception is when ideologies, especially religious, are a motivating factor in a conflict. These ideologies can be elevated to greater importance than the adherents’ life, which (I argue) alters the notion of survival from biological survival to ideological survival.
own forces, then what (outside of a compassionate ideology) would deter one from attacking?

I believe that what is necessary to avoid war is a combination of martial skill and a compassionate/humanistic ideology (or religion). This synthesis can produce a formidable combat force (or individual) that is non-aggressive. The reason for the requirement for a high level of martial skill is to decrease the likelihood of being attacked. However, a high level of martial skill without a compassionate ideology can easily lead to acts of aggression and conquest. Well-ingrained ethics and morals and a compassionate outlook will decrease the likelihood of indiscriminate killing, conquest, or acts of aggression. This is curiously analogous to the situation of the East Asian martial arts, where I argue that the relationship between religion and the martial arts provided this ethical, moral, compassionate framework. Therefore I am left with the idea of a double-pronged approach to ensuring peace, (or deterrence of war). The first part is that one must have a redoubtable combat force (or at the very least a fearsome reputation). The second part requires an ideology of humanism or compassion, or a realization of the advantages, or perceived advantages, of peace over war.

Despite my discussions of the peaceful nature of the martial arts, I do not wish to mislead the reader. The martial arts have also contributed to much suffering and violence over time. Aside from their obvious contributions to the fatalities in many wars throughout history, the peace that martial arts have also contributed to has not always been positive. Budo has also been used to quell uprisings and revolts and as a

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way for the samurai and military to keep the masses subjugated.\textsuperscript{23} This idea of maintaining law and order and the status quo is an example of what is called a “Negative Peace”.

In another example which besmirches their record, the martial arts contributed to the jingoistic and militaristic attitudes leading to many of the wars in Asia in the last 150 years, especially the Second World War. In 1945, during Japan's occupation by allied forces, a commission was set up to investigate the contribution of Japan's martial systems to the nationalism and militarism that had incited Japanese colonial expansion and led to war. The commission concluded that "the national martial systems had played an important role in the development of nationalistic and militaristic attitudes" and for a time all martial arts, except karate,\textsuperscript{24} were outlawed.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite the findings of the commission, the martial arts were not directly responsible for the rise of Japanese imperialism during this period. The surge of jingoism had more to do with the political and cultural milieu of late 19\textsuperscript{th} to mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century Japan than with any inherent violent nationalistic tendencies within the martial arts. With the \textit{Meiji} Restoration of 1867, and the resignation of the shogunate, temporal power in Japan was restored to the Emperor, who was once again regarded as the divine ruler of Japan. During the \textit{Meiji} era, all sectarian loyalties were distinguished, and all

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{24}] The reasoning for the exemption of Karate was largely political in nature. For more on this, see Reid and Croucher, \textit{The Way of the Warrior}, 196.
\item[\textsuperscript{25}] Reid and Croucher, \textit{The Way of the Warrior}, 196.
\end{itemize}
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religious traditions (Shinto, Buddhist, Confucian, even Christian) were fused into one superceding loyalty to the "Sacred Emperor of the Sacred Nation". The Meiji government demanded complete loyalty and usurped all spheres of influence over the general populace. Through the infusion of nationalistic pride and racial/cultural superiority into all forms of cultural expression including religion and both the fine arts and the martial arts, they exercised control over the hearts and minds of the general population. The result was a jingoistic, imperialistic cultural environment in which the Japanese martial arts were used as a tool to both increase nationalistic pride and impart the skills and spirit of combat into the Japanese people. This also involved the downplaying of all ethical and moral teachings within the martial arts.

Another result of the huge rise in Japanese nationalism can be seen in the Japanese religious milieu. The surge in jingoism led to the creation of “nationalist Shinto”, which appeared to have no problem with the militaristic, imperialist ambitions of Japanese colonial expansion. In fact, most of the warships in the Japanese navy had a Shinto shrine room. According to King, even Zen Buddhism, an unlikely candidate for adopting jingoistic attitudes, seemed to support the rising Japanese militant nationalism. Though like the martial arts, King argues that it had very little choice in the matter. Any organization, group or sect which did not show complete loyalty to the “Sacred Emperor” was persecuted and dissolved. But it is surprising that the 1945 commission


27 Ibid., 195-201.
did not investigate, inculcate and outlaw the Japanese religions for their “role in the development of nationalistic and militaristic attitudes”.

It seems that the martial arts were singled out in this case, possibly in an attempt by General MacArthur and the allies to disarm and pacify the Japanese populace so that the allied occupation and rebuilding efforts could proceed peacefully and without civil disturbances.

The Meiji government’s usurpation of the martial arts, as well as the outlawing of the martial arts by the occupying allies led to a decreased emphasis on the ethical and moral teachings within the martial arts. But these teachings of the martial arts have been an integral part of bushido, or “the way of the warrior,” throughout budo’s long history. Though some believe that the “way of the warrior” might be synonymous with the way of violence, this is not the case. In fact, Buddhist Vice Abbot Genjo Marinello wrote:

Bushido does not mean the way of the aggressor or the way of the militarist. Bushido might be better translated as ‘the way of life with dignity,’ where dignity implies the most sincere faithfulness and deepest possible benevolence. At the core of Bushido, Zen, and the Martial Arts is the readiness to live a life of dignity and integrity to the fullest extent possible.

But the way of the warrior is not only a benevolent way, it is a way that breeds compassion. Abbot Marinello explains that because a warrior in battle faces death at any moment, he is more aware of, and better able to appreciate, the preciousness and fragility of life. This heightened appreciation leads to increased “compassion towards ourselves and others.” Thus as a result of his frequent brushes with death, the warrior

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should possess greater compassion towards himself and others as well as an aversion
towards violence and the destruction of precious life.\textsuperscript{30}

But this is not simply a personal aversion. According to Abbot Marinello, the
arts contain the means for establishing universal peace. In the art of serving tea there is
the practice of \textit{Cha-no-yo}, “a ceremony that is said to open one to the spirit of
harmonious blending of Heaven and Earth and provide the means for establishing
universal peace.” He explains (similar to Tolstoy) that every art has an analogous
practice with the potential to establish universal peace, and for the warrior, \textit{bushido}
filled this role.\textsuperscript{31} There is a famous saying by \textit{Soto Zen} Master Dogen (1200-1253)
stressing that “the Way” (“\textit{do}” of \textit{budo}) is a path to enlightenment and recognition of
the unity of humanity and creation. Dogen says,

\begin{quote}
To study the Way [Zen, martial arts, tea, flowers…] is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self.
To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things.
To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between one’s self and others.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

It is these barriers between oneself, or one’s group, and the Other that often lead to fear
and xenophobia, which can be manipulated to cause violence. Thus a removal of these
barriers, both in perceptions and practice, can be an important step in conflict
resolution.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
Martial Arts and Conflict Resolution: Similarities of Respective Requisite Skills

Stephen Kotev, in his unpublished paper entitled “Aikido and Conflict Resolution: Connection and Similarity of Approaches to Violence,” provides some examples of similarities in skills learned from martial arts and the best-practices of conflict resolution. Among them he lists the following guidelines: refocusing the conflicting parties on key issues, rather than “tit-for-tat banter”, “focusing on the problem, not the people”, viewing the conflict in a larger context so as not to allow the conflict to “engulf or overwhelm the practitioner” and to allow for “efficient investigation of root causes and creative solutions”. 33 Due to the presence of these similarities, the study of the martial arts could enhance the training of peacemakers. The core principles of certain martial arts “could be integrated into existing conflict resolution training programs to provide powerful physical metaphors of how interveners could approach conflict”. 34

Furthermore, in my twelve years of studying Japanese Budo, none of my teachers have taught how to attack. In fact, in nearly all of the kata, or techniques, that I have practiced, the attacker is the eventual loser of the confrontation. The martial arts have taught me that there is no perfect attack, just as there is no perfect defense; in a confrontation, the outcome is generally unknown, and usually unpleasant. My studies

33 Stephen Kotev, “Aikido and Conflict Resolution: Connection and Similarity of Approaches to Violence” TMs p.15-17, Manuscript provided by author.

34 Ibid., 21.
have actually taught me that there is only one way to guarantee victory in a confrontation, and that is to avoid confrontation in the first place, or to diffuse it well before it becomes violent. Even Sun Tzu, in the ancient treatise *The Art of War*\(^{35}\), says that to win every battle is not the height of skill rather "to subdue an enemy without fighting [is] the highest skill".\(^{36}\) Some people might ask then why bother studying martial arts? My answer is that it is one of the crucial two elements in my above theory on how to avoid war and without knowing how to effectively defend oneself, one is, in fact, inviting violence from those with less compassionate ideologies. As I stated above, the *Ryu no maki* ("Dragon’s Scroll") states “there are none who are completely outside the need for military readiness.”\(^{37}\)

In an interview with Professor Marc Gopin, Director of The Center for Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Gopin suggested that this is perhaps a new perspective on John Burton’s Human Needs Theory within the greater field of conflict theory. Human Needs Theory is based generally on Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which states that human beings require certain essentials which they are innately driven to

\(^{35}\) *The Art of War* is considered by many to be the consummate book of military strategy. It is still widely studied by military strategists today, approximately 2500 years after it was written.

\(^{36}\) Tomio, *The Boddhisattva Warriors*, 205.

\(^{37}\) Friday, *Legacies of the Sword*, 147.
attain. These essentials include basic physical needs (food, water, procreation, etc.), safety needs (physical as well as emotional and spiritual safety), social needs (love, belonging, friendship, family, etc.), esteem needs (self-esteem, respect, achievement, etc.) and self-actualization (higher level needs such as morality, creativity, etc.).

Although the heirarchical structure of Maslow’s model has been challenged successfully, the needs that he identified are generally accepted and used by Human Needs Theorists. Human Needs Theory postulates that conflict arises when non-negotiable human needs are threatened (or perceived to be threatened). Gopin and I believe that this relates to my above theory in the following way. Martial arts practice breeds skill and confidence in one’s ability to defend one’s self or one’s country. This confidence will then help to combat the feeling that one’s basic human need for safety or security is being threatened. Therefore, one will not feel the need to engage with others in a conflictual manner. Thus budo training, when taught together with its moral and ethical framework, can help to combat some of the theorized causes of conflict. Whether or not it can be used as a technique for conflict resolution once a party already feels that its basic human need is being threatened is another story.

Another important idea that Gopin suggested is the importance of patience, empathy, problem-solving skills and active and fully-engaged listening in the field of


40 Dr. Marc Gopin, interview by author, 20 October 2008, Silver Spring, MD.
conflict resolution. These same skills are both necessary to one’s success in the martial arts and are developed through martial training. Martial arts training cultivates patience through the teaching of patiently waiting for an attacker to expose their weak points and then capitalizing on them. Empathy, listening and problem-solving skills are stressed as an important issue in budo training because the ability to be sensitive to the attacker’s mood and to read subtle signs in an attacker’s body language, could reveal valuable life-saving information. Other similarities between peacemaking and the martial arts include the importance of trying to transcend one’s ego, or entrenched personal perspective, biases and projections. Ultimately, the cultivation of the above traits and skills will not only increase one’s effectiveness in combat, but will also allow one to attain the highest levels of martial technique as discussed above, the ability to win a confrontation by transforming conflict using non-violent means.

**How the Study of the Martial Arts Can Be Beneficial to the Field of Conflict Resolution**

But there is yet another reason to study the martial arts. I believe that some people who have seen the possible effects of violence will value peace all the more. These people are willing to “fight” for peace and work towards it throughout their lives. However, it sends a different message to people when a man known to be a man of war, a man who has known what war truly is, works for peace with his whole heart. He is known to be a man capable of taking the violent road, but choosing the peaceful one, not out of fear, but out of experience. This is not to say that these are the best of
peacemakers, just that they are valuable ones and their experience should be utilized as a tool for peacemaking, not ignored, or used to exclude them from the peace process.\(^{41}\) As an example of this, I propose the legendary Indian King, Asoka (circa 269-232 B.C.). Asoka was a warrior monarch who, after being sickened by the mass slaughters in many of the battles he had participated in, became a devout Buddhist and outlawed the execution of people and the slaying of animals.\(^{42}\) Asoka is heralded as one of the greatest kings in Indian, and Buddhist history. I believe he was so loved and respected because his compassion came from the wisdom gained through the experience of war and suffering; it was not simply academic rhetoric. Asoka was able to reach even the warriors in his kingdom because he was a respected and revered warrior. In order to achieve peace, one has to reach the people who are opposed to peace, the people who wish to fight. If one ignores these people, they may sabotage any peace process so that true peace cannot be achieved. I believe sometimes the best way to reach people like this is to enlist the aid of people they can relate to and respect.\(^{43}\) A warrior has walked in their shoes and learned from experiences that speak to these people. He can more easily gain their trust, confidence and respect in a way that is perhaps more difficult for non-warriors. In this way the warrior can serve as a bridge between pacifists and those calling for violence and help lead them down the road of peace together.

\(^{41}\) Though I will argue that one should remain somewhat wary regarding the motivations of some of these individuals, until they have proven the sincerity of their “changes of heart”.

\(^{42}\) Tomio, *The Bodhisattva Warriors*, 173.

\(^{43}\) Some militants or warriors may view pacifist peacemakers as weak and be unable to relate to them.
In fact, it was my study of the martial arts that inspired me to study conflict resolution and peacemaking, particularly religious conflict resolution and peacemaking. Personally, I have found that when one comes face to face, time after time, with the horrors of violence, one recognizes the absurdity of its use in all but the very gravest of circumstances (to “take one life to save ten thousand” is sometimes a necessary evil). One learns to value peace and begins to understand that nearly any compromise must be made for its sake. But one also learns that when violence is necessary, it should be performed with a minimum of damage inflicted and absolutely no hate in one's heart, and when it is over, one must let go of any residual animosity towards the 'other' and continue to seek peace with that party. These are very important ideas in the martial arts. With physical training, one develops mastery over one’s own body and an increased awareness of the effects of one’s physical actions on one’s adversaries. In this way, when confronted with a violent physical altercation, a trained martial artist can choose how much destructive force to apply and can minimize (or maximize) injury to his adversary. Thus the warrior who follows the moral teachings ingrained within the martial arts, will embody compassion and act compassionately, disabling his adversary in a non-lethal, minimally-destructive way. However, the untrained individual will only react instinctively, out of a desire for self-preservation and will be unable to control the extent of the damage he inflicts. Thus he will be unable to protect himself efficiently while exercising compassion.
On a macrocosmic level, a highly advanced and trained military force has the ability to attack specific targets and thus subdue, or defeat, its opponent without inflicting as much unnecessary damage. As to the second part of the above lesson, which deals with not hating one’s adversary and letting go of any residual animosity once the altercation has ended, I believe this too is not a natural human reaction. Therefore, the untrained individual will be hard-pressed to live up to these ideals in the heat of the moment of a physical altercation. However, a martial artist has trained to maintain equanimity and avoid anger at all costs under conditions replicating this very situation. Thus, he will be more likely to apply the religiously-influenced teachings of compassion and successfully avoid anger or grudges. This also applies to the field of conflict resolution, where it is imperative that people be able to move past their old traumas and conflicts and begin building relationships. A better-trained and technologically superior military force is able to succeed without incurring too much damage (both physical and psychological damage), thus minimizing its resentment towards its adversaries and easing the future transition to peaceful relations.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I hope to have shown that the martial arts contain many teachings that promote harmony and the pursuit of peace. I have stressed that the true nature of the martial arts, as put forth in its highest teachings, stresses the peaceful resolution of conflict. I have discussed the means through which the martial arts
attempts to demonstrate this pursuit of peace, be it through gurus who avoid duels by demonstrating seemingly-impossible mastery over the physical, or principles and precepts which teach the avoidance of anger. I have discussed how some of the most apparently-vicious warriors of Japan actually valued peace and harmony above martial skills, despite the sensationalist tendencies of Hollywood and novelists. I have suggested that years of practice in the martial arts not only drain the aggression out of violently-inclined people, but also enforce empathy and compassion in the practitioner. It is this compassion that can help establish a foundation for peace and the dissolution of the barriers which separate people and groups. Lastly, I have discussed similarities in the skills imparted by martial arts training and conflict resolution work. It seems apparent that martial arts training and principles could be utilized as physical manifestations of peacemaking concepts to enhance the training of those in the field of conflict resolution.

When Tolstoy wrote that “Art should cause violence to be set aside. And it is only art that can accomplish this,” what did he mean? Do the martial arts fit into this category of art? As we saw in Part I, Japanese society certainly viewed the martial arts with the same amount of dignity, and in the same light, as the fine arts. Art was viewed as a means of attaining enlightenment and human perfection. Art is a language that all humans share; every human civilization that has left historical and archaeological evidence has done so also in the area of art. Art is also a uniquely human creation; there are no records of any other species creating original pieces of art other than mimicry or
conditioned mimicry. However, it is also a common bond that humans share, a language that all cultures and ethnicities speak, and as such, a possible source of conflict resolution. As contradictory as this may still seem to much of the world, martial arts are no-less capable of accomplishing this task than music or the fine arts. In fact, because they deal directly with conflict and pacifying man’s conflictual nature, I believe they are better equipped to create peace and peacemakers in the world.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this paper I hope to have illustrated the connections between martial arts, religion and conflict resolution in a somewhat new and unique way. According to our earliest records, the East Asian martial arts have been highly influenced by, and have in turn influenced, the religions of that region of the world. The martial arts, at various times throughout history, have been used as physical practice aimed at spiritual self-cultivation as a means of attaining religious understanding and enlightenment rather than simply as a form of physical exercise or as a way of becoming a more effective combatant. It is quite possibly these connections with religion that have created within the martial arts an inherent system of warrior ethics and morality characterized by an emphasis on the pursuit of peace and the avoidance, or transformation, of conflict.

Why Religion Should Continue to Influence the Martial Arts: The Necessity of an Increased Focus on Ethics Within the Martial Arts

Although it is true that the connection between religion and the East Asian martial arts still exists today, it is a somewhat tenuous one. Many people today consider religion to be a system of arcane myths and obsolete superstitions and practices that has no place in today’s modern world. Most modern practitioners of the martial arts are no exception; they do not focus on, or explore, the philosophical aspects and bases of the
arts (if they even know they exist). This is troubling to many who are aware of this historical connection who find it "worrying that many Western masters of the martial arts teach techniques without their moral background".\footnote{Reid and Croucher, \textit{The Way of the Warrior}, 213.} Perhaps the example of Meiji Japan is a good illustration of the results of severing the connection between the martial arts and their moral and ethical system. The highjacking of the martial arts by the Meiji government and the resulting elimination of the ethical and moral codes associated with those arts led to many widespread instances of human rights abuses and acts of brutality perpetrated by practitioners of the martial arts.\footnote{See above discussion in Chapter 5, pages 90-93.} McFarlane raises an interesting point to those who, for whatever reason, seek to dissociate the martial arts from religious values. He cautions that they are, in effect, “surrendering the field to the brutalized, street-fighting approach,” and overlooking the martial arts’ “social and socializing dimensions.” I agree with him and argue that this should be avoided, or one runs the risk of removing all ethical values from a system in which these values serve a necessary humanizing and moralizing function.

The most popular martial arts in the Western world today seem to be Brazilian (Gracie) Jujutsu and Tae Kwon Do. These arts are fairly modern and are almost completely devoid of spiritual and ethical teachings. I believe this is dangerous. Some argue that the reason these teachings are downplayed, if not outright ignored is due to the connection between them and the religious traditions of the East and a fear of being
accused of proselytization, or of alienating those students with non-Eastern religious beliefs. Similarly, the western styles of boxing and wrestling are completely devoid of any spiritual, or even ethical, teachings. Instead, emphasis is placed on competition and winning. I believe this transforms one’s opponent into simply an obstacle, and removes his humanity. Therefore, spiritual and ethical teachings do not apply. McFarlane argues that martial arts training with an appropriate moral foundation can “foster values and qualities of humility, patience, cooperation, discipline, self-control, mental clarity, and physical health” and has frequently been encouraged in the East because of these benefits.  

But the influence of religion on martial arts need not be limited to the teachings of Buddhism and the East Asian religious traditions. Martial artists are not all Buddhists, and even many who are have been influenced by the teachings of other faiths. The Abrahamic faiths as well as other traditions influence the ethical framework of many martial arts practitioners. These influences should not be denied and neglected. The ethics of the martial arts and martial artists need not remain solely Buddhist, though understanding the foundations of martial ethics grounded in Eastern traditions could be quite important to practitioners of these arts. But if Western practitioners of martial arts continue to divorce their practice from the ethical framework of either their particular religious or philosophical system, or the system of martial ethics, we run the risk of the martial arts creating skilled, heartless “fighting

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3 McFarlane, “Mushin”, 414-415.
machines”. Instead, in order to help the martial arts live up to their goal as forms of *budo*, or ways of stopping the spear, there must be an increased emphasis and focus on ethics and religion within the study of the martial arts.

**Why the Martial Arts Should Influence Religion: The Necessity for Both an Increased Focus on the Body as a Vehicle and Peacemaking Within Religion**

But it is important to note that the growing chasm between religion, or ethics, and the martial arts is not unidirectional. Most religious practitioners and ethicists dismiss the martial arts completely, without any consideration. I have discussed above the negative effects this widening gulf has had on the martial arts, however, I will argue that it also negatively impacts religion. As discussed in the second chapter, it is believed by some that the martial arts of the *Shaolin* monks were created based on the teachings of Bodhidarma, who sought to change the sedentary lifestyle of most monks. He infused exercises, stretches, and movements into the Buddhist practice of these monks most likely as a way of using the body as a vehicle through which to attain spiritual enlightenment (similar to the focus of Shorinji Kempo discussed in the second and third chapters). However, this also had the added benefit of increasing the physical strength and health of the monks. Though many religious scholars and practitioners participate in some forms of physical exercise to improve or maintain their physical health or increase their physical strength, this practice is too often completely divorced from their spiritual studies and practices. And even if it is not completely divorced from their spiritual pursuits, it is not commonly seen, or used, as a method of spiritual
self-cultivation. The study of the martial arts or even an awareness of this aspect of budo training, could be of great benefit to those studying, or practicing, religion.

The field of religion (both academic, lay, and religious) could also benefit from budo’s unique approach to conflict resolution and emphasis on peacemaking, especially in today’s era of religious conflict and violence. Nearly all religions involved in conflict or violence have highly regarded teachings that emphasize the importance, and primacy, of peace. Yet either these teachings are not being highlighted by religious figures in religious institutions, education, and ritual, or they are simply not making it into the practice of religion, and thus the minds of the average practitioner. Another problem is that the conflicting messages within religions that preach peace, while condoning violence can often be confusing, sometimes forcing religious adherents to choose one approach to the exclusion of the other. Marc Gopin suggests that religious communities (both on a larger organizational as well as a local level) have a responsibility to develop, practice and teach values and skills applicable to conflict resolution with those both inside and outside the faith that are based on the beliefs and values of their particular religious community. The martial arts and their philosophy, which is not antithetical to most of these religious traditions, could be a useful source of conflict resolution theories and practices.4

In a comparison of the religious peacemaker with the religious advocates and fomenters of violence, R. Scott Appleby says that both may have to resort to violent

means in some situations. However, the difference between the two individuals, or groups, lies in the fact that for the religious peacemaker, whose foremost concern is the cessation of violence and the resolution of conflict, “reconciliation or peaceful coexistence with the enemy is the ultimate goal”. This seems very much in accord with the ethical system of *budo* discussed in the fourth and fifth chapters. Alternatively, the chief concern of the religious extremist who utilizes violent means to accomplish his/her goals is “victory over the enemy, whether by gradual means or by the direct and frequent use of violence”. Appleby further argues that it is “neither religion nor religious militancy per se” that is “a source of deadly conflict”. He argues that “the militant peacemaker attempts at great cost to avoid physical violence; employs it only sparingly, in self-defense, and as a matter of last resort; and, most important sees and seeks reconciliation with the opponent as an integral part of the act of resistance”.5 This approach yet again seems to be congruent with the ideals of the martial arts, which teach that even when one must engage in self-defense, he should maintain a peaceful heart at all times, a heart that seeks and pursues peace, even in the midst of conflict. The applied philosophy of *budo* teaches that peace is the best approach and violence is a last resort, which if necessary should be as mitigated as possible, because violence is the result of one’s failure to solve issues in any other way. Violence should also only be entered into in order to ultimately (yet imminently) save lives and increase peace. I believe that the moral philosophy as well as the methods through which martial arts

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teaches its system of morality could assist in meeting the widely recognized need for a greater emphasis on peacemaking and conflict resolution within the religious realm.

**The Necessity for an Increased Focus on the Connection Between Martial Arts and Conflict Resolution**

But religion is not the only field that is guilty of ignoring, or missing, the possible benefits of an exploration of *budo*. Though often neglected in the field of diplomacy, I have argued that the martial arts can be an important resource for conflict resolution theory and techniques. However, I have also noted that martial arts have an obvious potential for much violence and destruction, but maintain that this potential can be mitigated by strengthening the relationship between martial arts and the field of conflict resolution in various ways.

Historically speaking, a large percentage of human technological advances have been motivated by the need for military applications. I believe this is somewhat unfortunate when one considers how much good the same amount of innovative brain power could have accomplished had it been directed at solving the social and medical calamities of our world (e.g. the global problems of hunger and disease). And today, most countries spend huge sums of money on their defense budgets, while many of their citizens live in abject poverty. I believe that though this spending may seem to be historically justified, martial arts may provide us with a unique perspective on how to remedy this unfortunate situation. I will suggest that the reason for the huge sums spent
on defense is a mixture of fear and historical precedent. When one considers the vast span of history, it becomes clear that when a country possessed greater military might than its neighbors (in modern times this has usually been characterized by a more technologically advanced fighting force), it would attempt to exert its power beyond its borders, often using its military as a form of leverage, or an instrument of conquest. Therefore, in order to maintain their independence, countries constantly had to try to keep up with each other in terms of military technology. I contend that with a strong ethical and moral value system in place, a strong country would not feel the need to invade other countries (either physically, economically, or culturally) and the arms race would not need to continue to spiral out of control, while millions of people around the world live in poverty. If our moral and ethical value systems advanced together with our weapons systems, just as the moral and ethical systems of the martial arts were consistently handed down together with the combat technique systems, perhaps the desire to conquer would be somewhat tempered and the incidence of conflict would decrease. This, in turn, would reduce the need to compete in the arms race, which would allow countries to focus their resources on solving both national and global social and medical problems.

I believe that the lessons of the martial arts that have been influenced by various religious philosophies can be a valuable resource in the field of peacemaking and religious conflict resolution. Rob Chamberlain, who has been a practitioner of the Japanese martial arts for over twenty five years, and also a Foreign Service Officer at
the US State Department, stressed that the lessons of martial arts could be a valuable resource for instilling ethics and morality back into warfare. He prescribed martial arts training, but insisted that the training retain ethical and spiritual elements necessary to avoid the dehumanization of the enemy.\footnote{Rob Chamberlain, Interview by the author, 09 May 2004, Rockville, Maryland.} I believe this would help to alleviate some of the human rights abuses and violations of the Geneva Conventions that seem to invariably occur in war. It is my strongly-held belief that this is a field that should be further researched and not ignored as solely contributing to the violence of this world.

However, I also believe that the lessons and theories of the field of conflict resolution should be formally introduced into (or highlighted within) the martial arts. Though the literal meaning of the words ‘bu’ and ‘wu’ might mean to stop conflict, the martial arts are rarely taught or practiced as methods of conflict resolution. Why is this? Why aren’t more martial artists involved in conflict resolution? I believe the answer to this question lies in the modern downplaying of the ethical teachings of the martial arts and the concentration on ‘self defense/self protection’. I believe that only those who grasp the lessons of humility and compassion, combined with a high empathic aptitude, (and possibly spirituality) will truly seek non-violent solutions and peaceful resolutions to conflict, until there is absolutely no other recourse to violence. And at that point, only those powerful enough (such as those skilled in the martial arts) will have the ability to successfully and compassionately resolve the conflict through minimalized violent means, with no residual contempt. It is my hope that this lack of
residual contempt will allow healing between the two parties and relationship-building, eventually leading to amicable relations and true, lasting peace.
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