

Kūdō/Daidō Juku and its `traditional` value

I have been working the last six years at three different universities, in three different continents, on the history of `traditional karate`. Certain karate styles are considered more traditional than others while newer karate styles have been criticized for breaking with so called time-honored customs. Shitōryū, Shōtōkan and Gōjūrū are considered examples of traditional karate while Kūdō/Daidō Juku might be seen by some as not even karate anymore.

We come to a very interesting conclusion by doing historical research, analyzing old pictures and reading the first books written by the karate pioneers in the 1920s and 1930s. The fact is that karate has always been changing and adapting to different cultures and situations. Many of the modern `traditional` karate elements are less than a century old. (I will just touch upon some of the bigger points here. Those who would like further information can get a free copy of *“The Evolution of Karate: From Secret Martial art to Worldwide Cultural Sport”* by mailing to filipswennen1@hotmail.com .)

(1)Karate used to be known by many different names: `Ryūkyū Tōdijustu` (琉球唐手術) , `Tōdi Kenpō` (唐手拳法) , `Okinawa Kenpō` (沖縄拳法) , `Okinawa Tōdijustu` (沖縄唐手術) . It is only from the 1930s that the martial art became officially referred to as `Karatedō`. (2)The competition formats of `point sparring` started after the Second World War. Before then there was something called `kakedameshi` or challenge matches in Okinawa up to the beginning of the 20th century. The idea was that anything goes except for certain `gentlemen rules`, which the contestants agreed upon themselves. The martial artists would challenge their skills with other trained opponents. The objective was neither to win, beat the opponent or get a medal but to find once own weakness in fighting skills or mental strength by putting oneself to the test. (3)Karateka at that time did test their skills also against wrestlers, jūdōka and boxers with mixed results. (4)They cross trained and rare was the karateka who didn't have any jūdō, jūjutsu or Okinawan sumō (a grappling art closer to jūdō than Japanese sumō) skills. (5)In the 1920s they started experimenting with kendō and baseball equipment as protective armor for safety reasons. (6)Kata were trained while (7)each movement had a functional application. Many of these applications got lost over time. But if you read the first books written by the

pioneers the techniques they practiced were limitless. Punches, kicks, elbows, knees, head-butts, groin attacks, throws, tackles, chokes, joint locks and fundamental ground fighting can be found black on white in the books written by the founders of the `traditional` styles. (8)Supplementary training with heavy objects to gain strength and (9)impact equipment, like sandbags and `makiwara`, were standard tools. And finally, (10)the gi and the black belt/dan were first awarded to karateka in the 1920s.

Let us see how these ten points are still applicable to `traditional` karate in the modern day and to Kūdō/Daidō Juku.

(1)Although many claim that `Karatedō` is centuries old, the name `Karatedō` exists less than ninety years and underwent several changes to get there. The `traditional styles` themselves underwent name changes before they adapted the now world known style names. The Kūdō/Daidō Juku organization is about two decades old and also had some name changes to better reflect certain circumstances. The organization however seems very open to reveal these changes, in contrast with `traditionalists`.

(2)`Traditional style` karateka still compete amongst each other, although the rules are very limited. No grabbing, no excessive contact, no low-kicks and so on. The Kūdō/Daidō Juku competition format allows a wide range of techniques being executed full-contact. The Kūdō/Daidō Juku style of competition resembles much more the old tradition of `kakedameshi`.

(3)`Traditiona style` competitions are done in a closed format, allowing only athletes of certain federations to participate. Athletes have also been suspended for participating in competitions of other martial arts.

Kūdō/Daidō Juku practioners have been known to enter other types of competition formats like UFC, Pankration, Wushu,.... `THE WARS` were also organized where they invited martial arts from different back grounds to test their skills against Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners. Kūdō/Daidō Juku competitions are also `open` competitions, where anybody willing to participate may join. The Kūdō/Daidō Juku rule format allows almost any technique found in other combat sports, thus not limiting other styles. This leads that Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of boxers, jūdōka,... like in the old days.

(4) `Traditionalists` have generally no grappling skills. Sweeps are allowed, but any prolonged clinching and ground work is forbidden.

Many Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners come from a grappling back ground, like jūdō or sambo. Those who start training in Kūdō/Daidō Juku are taught very early on clinch work, throws and ground grappling. Many of the Japanese who started training karate in the 1920s and 1930s were from a jūjusu or jūdō background, as jūdō was a part of the official education system. The Okinawans themselves trained in a grappling art from boyhood onwards. So there karate skills came on top of their grappling skills.

(5) `Traditional karate` competitions do use protective equipment like shin guards, small gloves, groin protectors,... which augments safety. But, in contrast to Kūdō/Daidō Juku, they don't have any face protectors. Facial injuries are common, even with the skin touch rule. We can find pictures of prewar karateka sparring fully armored. So both `traditional karate` and Kūdō/Daidō Juku lay somewhere in between. Head protection, although allows a wider range of techniques like elbows, knees and head butts without seriously injuring the participants.

(6)(7) `Traditional karateka` train kata both for competitions and belt tests. Unfortunately the kata have become more and more a performance art while the actual combat applications are unknown to the vast majority of practitioners. It is not rare to have a world champion in kata who has no idea of how to use the techniques contained in the kata for actual combat. Kūdō/Daidō Juku on the other hand does not practice kata. They do look realistic applications of their techniques including punches, kicks, elbows, knees, head-butts, groin attacks, throws, tackles, chokes, joint locks and ground fighting. The `traditionalists` seem to do the kata without the application while Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners work on applications without kata.

(8) `Traditional karateka` generally avoid strength training with free weights as they have to fight in weight categories without clinch work where the extra strength and weight might be an advantage. They aim is to be as light and fast as possible as the first to score a point wins. Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners on the other hand supplement their martial art training with strength training. The index system used in Kūdō/Daidō Juku competitions adds up the weight and the height of the participants to form categories. This allows stockier and stronger practitioners a chance for an advantage in the clinch while taller, slender types still can use their

speed and reach advantage.

(9) `Traditional karateka` rarely or ever work with punching bags, mitts,... as their competition format actually penalizes hard contact. Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners do use these materials, like the prewar karateka, to maximize the development of their impact power.

(10) Both `traditionalists` and Kūdō/Daidō Juku practitioners wear a gi and receive a black belt after they have reached a certain skill level. The sleeves of the gi of Kūdō/Daidō Juku are a part of the woven cloth, and not separately attached like other karategi, for more sturdiness when being pulled during grappling and clinch work.

Conclusion

Kūdō/Daidō Juku seems in many aspects closer to the older form of karate than `traditional karate` styles. The willingness to put themselves to the test against anybody, just to improve themselves, seems closer to the original martial art. The wide range of techniques and the adaptability to keep improving its training methods has actually lead Kūdō/Daidō Juku back to the roots of original karate while `traditional karate` seems to distance itself further and further away from its origins.

Swennen, Filip. "The Evolution of Karate: From Secret Martial Art to Worldwide Cultural Sport." International Budo University, 2009.