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The meaning and role of budo (the martial arts) in school education in Japan

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Summary

Many agree that martial arts and sports have common attributes, although a number of people claim that *budo* (i.e. Japanese martial arts), a method for the development of human character, has a component that is different from that of sports. Undoubtedly, the objective of *budo* is rather educational, as it emphasises spiritual development, than sport-like, especially compared to European recreational sports.

Various kinds of sports taught in Japanese schools (as physical education) are also taught for the purpose of spiritual development. Clearly, not the technical aspects alone but also spiritual growth, are part of the educational curriculum. The spiritual side of *budo* emphasises the spiritual growth aspects of these activities to students more so than that of sports mentioned above.

The new direction of physical education is to make students familiar with practicing sports and to continue that throughout their lives. It can be said that *budo* has the same meaning and more importantly, demonstrates the same role in the academic environment.

Key words: Budo • Japanese martial arts • Combat sports • Japanese culture • School education

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Martial arts (*budo*) in school education

Martial arts existed in schools even prior to World War II, when it was called *budo*. After World War II, *budo* was still in the school curricula but was called *kakugi* (combat sports). More recently *budo* has reappeared as part of the school curricula. When *budo* reappeared, it maintained certain elements of *kakugi*. However, it evolved into a somewhat different activity based on the needs and expectations of the present and future eras.

The following concept was one of four stressed at the Japanese Curriculum Council (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). The aim of the curriculum in the 21st century is to bring up human beings enriching their minds, making them able to adapt to the changes taking place in the society. In addition, one aspect of this goal was to deepen the international understanding and stress the attitude of respecting our own national culture and traditions. Related to this, *budo* was introduced as Japanese unique cultural characteristic.

The Japanese Curriculum Council proposed that the standards for the curriculum be improved. *Budo* was discussed and it was determined that *budo* was uniquely Japanese and developed throughout its long history in Japan. This is a culture that Japan should be proud of exporting to the rest of the world. Therefore, it was determined that Japanese students should be instructed in *budo* in a way that emphasises the unique aspects of Japanese culture. Martial arts in academic training will thus have to value methods and techniques of instruction that make the best use of Japan's traditional cultural values and the same applies to educating the international community.

Kakugi is the name of motor activity, a type of martial arts that was taught since 1958, after martial arts education had been abolished due to World War II. However, in the contemporary world it is socially and academically accepted to teach *budo* as simply as "*budo*". Examples of this trend appear in the names of places and subjects, such as "*Nippon budokan*" and "*budo* Studies Department", or "*Budo Gakkai* (The Japanese Budo Association).

The Educational Curriculum Council try to emphasise the excellence of values of *budo* with respect to the methods of teaching. The council take the standpoint that using *budo* is more appropriate for this purpose than *kakugi*.

The direction of *New Budo* education

The first objective of the *New Budo*, similar to physical education, is working towards the goal of making the participation in sports a lifelong pursuit. Additionally, making *budo* a part of physical education that stresses the "fun" of playing sports and taking part in physical activities (Happy Physical Education), is a natural tendency for the society to follow this path.

This *New Budo*, analogous to "Match Sports (one opponent versus another opponent)" cultivated through the participation in lifelong sports during the *kakugi* era, can be additionally defined as "happy *budo*". Happy *budo*, as a sport, has characteristics of combative martial styles.

Due to the Educational Curriculum Council's policy to educate students that have a deep understanding of the international situation and value Japanese traditions and culture, a second aim of *budo* evolved. That aim of the *New Budo* became the main concept of developing human characters. Those practicing it are proud to spread *budo* internationally, as part of Japan's unique culture. In other words, this is the *budo* which is used as a way of seeking "The Path".

There are many ideas about the *New Budo* but they can be consolidated into two common concepts: the *New Budo* is seeking to enrich and produce more "happy *budo*" and to deepen the understanding of *budo* which is used as a way of seeking "The Path".

Japanese culture and *budo*

In some of the sports practiced round the world, the way people think or act is of special value. This is demonstrated by those who observe the rules and manners based on the culture of the nation where given sport originated. For example, in rugby, where one referee has absolute power of judgment and the completion of a match is called "no side", demonstrates the British way of thinking and acting. Through rugby, the that way of thinking and methods of action can be seen to infiltrate the world.

Following the same logic, if one looks upon the Japanese way of thinking and acting, one would see *budo* as part of Japanese culture. It is meaningful to stress *budo* as a Japanese educational part of academic curriculum to make students understand the international community in a deeper way.



Happy *budo* (joyful martial arts)

In the new policy of the Physical Education Department, sports are not just means to improve the physical strength and to maintain the health of individuals but are considered to be one of the most important elements of living a more enriched and fulfilled life. The function of physical education is to encourage people to do all these things throughout their lives. This makes *budo* a uniquely Japanese sport that contains the above-mentioned characteristics; *budo* will contribute to the lifelong sport education through its instructions of seeking true benefits and magnetism. For that purpose, the core part of learning is to experience the enjoyment of fighting through the martial arts. In addition, it is required to do so through the use of certain methods and techniques of instruction. This would mean the enrichment of happy *budo* instruction.

Budo as a way of seeking The Path

With regard to the matter of *budo*, which came in place of *kakugi*, it has been clearly stated: “*budo* should be done in a traditional manner”. This concept is a new one as a way of seeking “The Path”. It is natural to have to clarify what “The Path” is for instructors of the curriculum. Needless to say, one may think that “The Path” indicates the road which people follow to seek a better way of life. Current martial art education requires *rei* (a bow) and personal attitude after winning or losing a match, reflecting the concept to live in a manner “following The Path”. Instructors should teach the mindset of the former not just the technique.

Meaning of *rei* (a bow)

It is thought that the bow in martial arts is not just a way of showing respect to the opponent, but also an act of becoming a better human being. In saying so, one must realise that the emphasis on the correctness of the form is more than a matter of interpersonal relationship with the opponent. If the bow meant only this, one would not strive to be so correct in its form. This correctness comes from trying to improve oneself. It is thought in martial arts, that the bow, strictly adhering to proper form, is valued more than just a bow in general. There is a deeper meaning in doing the bow with correct form. In *budo* it is required to bow to your opponent correctly and courteously, suppressing the excitement after a fierce match. The ability to bow in such a situation, enables one developing own inner personality. In other words, by following a strict discipline of correct form, one learns to control oneself and by doing so, one eventually reforms the personality and develops character. This

leads to the idea of valuing “The Path”, in which one seeks a better way of life. In short, valuing the bow and the correct practice of it, in *budo* practices and matches, develops a modest mind, which enables respecting the opponent and develop self-control.

A common attribute of the practitioners of *budo*, after practice and matches, is the way they behave towards the result of winning or losing. The attitude is very serene. It is based on the relationship between the participants being one of comradely in learning “The Path” (a better way of life) together; this is not a relationship of enemies. Therefore, in *budo* one believes one could win because one had an opponent. This says that the ultimate goal of *budo* is to learn “The Path”, and as such, the opponent is an important element to that end.

The attitude of stressing winning and losing is a short-term result, which needs to be suppressed. *Budo* values the idea of suppressing the attitude of winning and losing.

From sports to *budo* (Japanese martial arts)

One of the problems of *budo* is how one teaches the ideas of *budo* in the actual instructional situation, in a concrete way. The idea number one of *budo*, is the goal of human development. In short, there is problem of teaching “The Path” of *budo* and the way of instructing its real meaning.

One can learn a lot about the problems of *budo* from the introductory Noh training textbooks: “*Nenrai Keiko Jyojo*” that is a passage from “*Fushi-Kaden*” (Flowering Spirit) book written by Zeami (1363-1443: Noh player at time of the middle ages).

The training in Noh should begin about the age of seven years. Children training can be accomplished because one does not interfere with their learning style. The instructor values the natural heart of the child and encourages him/her to like the training. The instructor merely guides the child along the path, just allowing the child to follow the heart. The instructor should not comment on what was good or bad about the child’s method. Too much attention to good or bad stresses the child and takes away the desire to learn. To make the child mimic the forms with too critical a stress on correctness of form, should not be the instructional method, even if the child is capable of following instructions. The Noh’s texts teach us that *budo* instruction begins by making *budo* a fun sport in order to learn until the student is ranked, at which time the training converts to a stricter life training. What are your thoughts, do you agree?

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