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Aikido as an ideal martial art

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Nowadays there are many different types or schools of the Japanese martial arts in Japan. But roughly speaking we have two kinds of standard of classifying all Japanese martial arts. One is whether the participants are armed or unarmed, another is whether it is a match, combat or non-match. Non-match martial arts are called "Kata-budo" in Japan.

In my own case I have been practicing Jyodo, Iaido and Aikido, especially on Aikido I have practiced for about fifteen years and now my rank is 4th dan of black belt.

From my experience I think Aikido is one of the most subtle and sophisticated of the Japanese martial arts because of being non-match and unarmed and being an art of self-defence. In other words Aikido is entirely reflexive, and related ethically to defense against an unprovoked attack. Using Aikido properly, an unjust and violent aggression can be neutralized swiftly and cleanly.

By the way Aikido may have been regarded as one of the old Japanese martial arts, but it has not so long history.

Aikido was founded in 1922 by Master Morihei Ueshiba (1883~1969) from the merits of other various martial arts that he had learned as a young man. His unique life is described as a central figure or a hero in three novels.⁽¹⁾

Master Morihei Ueshiba was born in 1883 in Wakayama Prefecture. His father was relatively rich landowner and merchant, and contributed to his community as village and town councils. The young Ueshiba, feeling unable to meet his father's expectation, went up to Tokyo in 1901, at the age of 18. In Tokyo he served a brief apprenticeship and then started a little store which was distributing and selling school supplies and stationery for school children, but unfortunately he soon became ill and his little store was enforced to be closed.

As a soldier he served in the Russo-Japanese War (1904~05), rose to be a sergeant and was discharged from the Army. Then in 1912, at the age of 29, he recruited more

than 80 people from his native town and took them to settle in the new land in Shirataki, Hokkaido, in order to develop and cultivate the wild and uninhabited land. He and his colleagues had stayed there for seven years and contributed to the development of the Shirataki region.

After hearing his father's death he returned home from Hokkaido but he could not recover from the serious frustration, and then sought the guidance of Onisaburo Deguchi who was the charismatic religious teacher of Ohmoto-kyo.

For eight years, thanks to Master Deguchi's patronage, he stayed and trained at the Ohmoto Headquarter in Ayabe, Kyoto Prefecture. His staying there gave him the chance to study Shinto philosophy and master the concept of Koto-dama, and also practiced and mastered several martial arts, including swordsmanship in the Shinkage Ryu, jujutsu in the Kitoh Ryu and Daitoh Ryu and so on. During his training period he got the highest certification in the Daitoh Ryu from Master Sakaku Takeda, whom he had happened to meet in Hokkaido in 1915 at the age of 32. Certainly Daitoh Ryu principles differ from Aikido's but many techniques are shared in common.

Master Deguchi foresaw his talent of budo, so advised to change his residence into a dojo. In accordance with Master Deguchi's advice he opened his own dojo, the Ueshiba Juku. It was his first dojo. The Ueshiba Juku was originally intended for the young generation of the Ohmoto-kyo, but the name of Morihei Ueshiba was gradually spreading. Many people who lived outside came to train in his dojo, especially the young naval officers from the port of Maizuru came to study his budo.

As previously told, he founded his own martial art and proclaimed it as Aiki-bujutsu. As the term bujutsu suggests, it retained the principles and techniques from the older martial arts that he had trained and practiced during his young days.

In Aiki-bujutsu he used Aiki as a special term. Perhaps his adopting new term may have had something to do with the influences of the Kitoh Ryu and the Daitoh Ryu. However the most important influence was the mastery of Koto-dama, under the religious leader of Ohmoto-kyo, because he constantly remarked it in lectures and instructions in his later years.

At first the Aiki-bujutsu could not get accepted widely, but was referred to his new budo

as the Ueshiba Ryu or the Ueshiba Ryu Aiki-bujutsu.

In spite of these conditions his fame spread continually throughout the country. As repeatedly told, the years of 1924~5 was the turning point of his budo career, when he went on an expedition to Inner Mongolia and soon after return to Japan, he was challenged by a young navy officer in Ayabe, and experienced sumi-kiri, that is to say, the clarity of mind and body that realized the oneness of ki of the universe and ki of self. At that time he was early forties, and this became the foundation of his martial art. So these years of 1924~5 marks the beginning of the spiritual development of Aikido. "True budo is the way of great harmony and great love for all beings"⁽²⁾ is the Master Ueshiba's highest philosophy of Aikido, and also advocated that every movement is the working of the unity ki-mind-body.

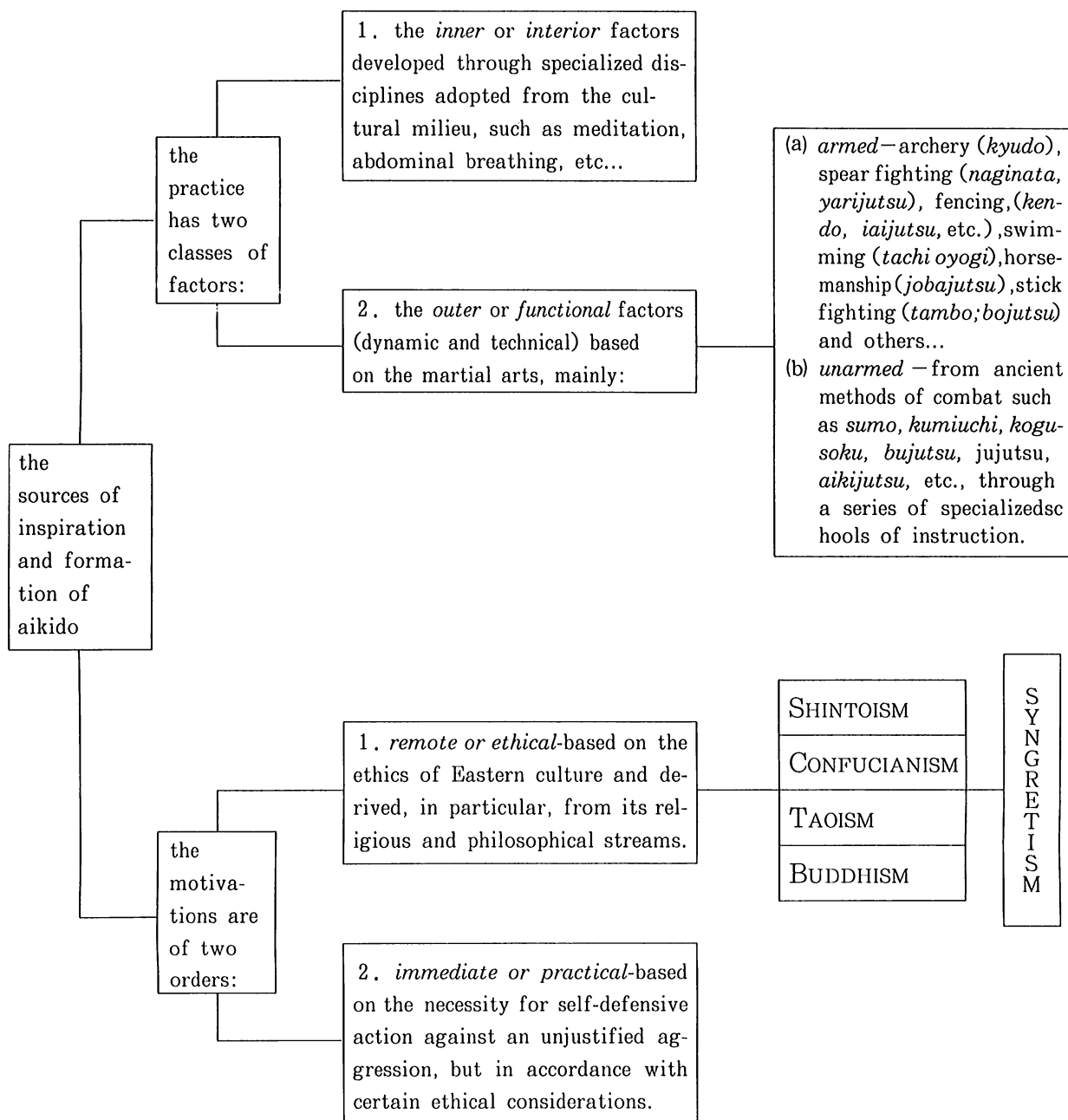
The Master Ueshiba attracted not only the people who practiced various budo but also high army and navy officers. Among his patrons and supporters Admiral Takeshita Isamu persuaded him to go up to Tokyo and give a demonstration of Aiki-bujutsu before distinguished audience. According to the Admiral's advice, he gave the demonstration in Tokyo. One of the audience was the former prime minister, Count Yomamoto Gonnohyōe. In the spring 1926 he was again invited by Admiral Takeshita to Tokyo and gave lessons on Aiki-bujutsu to the members of the Imperial Household Agency who were high-ranking judo and kendo experts, army and navy officers and leading persons in the political and business world. In 1927 at the strong persuasion of Admiral Takeshita and Master Deguchi, he left Ayabe and moved to Tokyo.

He established dojo in Tokyo and instructed many people including high-ranking experts in other martial arts. He also showed his budo of Aiki-bujutsu as something more than the traditional martial arts. For example, in October of 1930, to his astonishment, Kanoh Jugoroh, the founder of Kohdoukan Judo, seeing Master Ueshiba's superb martial art, praised it as the ideal budo, and even sent some of his best students to his dojo.⁽³⁾ In order to accept the growing number of students he established a new dojo in Wakamatsu-cho, Tokyo. This dojo is the Aikido Headquarters Dojo (the Aikido Hombu Dojo) .

In 1936 the Master Ueshiba had a strong intention to make distinction between the old martial arts and his own art, because of the philosophical and spiritual emphasis he had

incorporated in his own art. This is very difficult to explain it. As the following chart shows,⁽⁴⁾ he synthesized it from not only various martial arts but also the spirit of the traditional Oriental philosophy and religion. One can find an outline of the main sources of formation and inspiration tapped by Master Ueshiba in developing the art of Aikido.

MAIN SOURCES OF FORMATION AND INSPIRATION



理想的な武道としての合気道

Almost same time he felt the essence of his new art was quite different from the old traditional martial arts, so he abandoned definitely by the term *bujutsu* and renamed his art *Aiki-budo*.

Since the outbreak of the Japanese-American War in December of 1941, Japanese militarism controlled all over Japan, and for government enforced to unify the diverse martial arts groups into a single body as the war effort, and formed the Greater Japan Martial Virtue Association.

During the three years after the war, the Hombu Dojo at Wakamatsu-cho was forced to curtail activities because of the ban on all martial arts imposed by the Allied Occupation Forces.

In February of 1948 he could get the chance to recover Aikido with the official approval of Aikikai as the new juridical organization. It was first seen publicly at the Takashimaya Department Store in Tokyo in September of 1956, and in next May the Aikikai sponsored the First Public Aikido Demonstration at Yamano Hall in Tokyo. It is said that the peak of the post-war revival came with the completion of the new Hombu Dojo in January of 1969.

Explaining the intention of his art in a lecture, Master Ueshiba once gave to a general audience, he stated :

Budo is not a means of felling the opponent by force or by lethal weapons. Neither is it intended to lead the world to destruction by arms and illegitimate means. True budo calls for bringing the inner energy of the universe in order, protecting the peace of the world and molding, as well as preserving, everything in nature in its right form. Training in budo is tantamount to strengthening, within my body and soul, the love of *Kami*, the deity who begets, preserves and nurtures everything in nature.⁽⁵⁾

I think these words of his are esoterics of Aikido. Aikido has often been referred to as the gentleman's fighting art, because Aikido is a method of self-defense which can be used against any form of attack and has no attack arts, in other words Aikido's goal is

merely to neutralize an unjustified aggression and render the attacker harmless. So not to be irritated is any emergency, but to be always calm and composed, is one of the first principle of Aikido.

The very term “Aikido”, in fact, contains three elements that comprise the art; “ai”, harmony or coordination; “ki”, spirit or mental energy; “do”, way or method.

One who practices Aikido desires only to defend himself without hurting others. To possess this attitude, one must achieve a very high level of integration of the power of the mind and body, needless to say, the harmonious combination of physical means and ethical motive, but I should like to say that it is very difficult to obtain such a level.

Notes

- (1) You Tsumoto, *Ougon no tenma (The Golden Pegasus)*, Bungeishinjinsha, 1970.
Kousuke Wamaki, *Oudo no mon (The Royal Gate)*, Koubunsha, 1975.
Ichiro Kanoh, *Kage no tabigi (The Journey of the Shadow)*, Shupangeijutsu-sha, 1978.
- (2) Kisshōmaru Ueshiba, *The Spirit of Aikido*, Kodansha International, 1990, p.98.
- (3) *Ibid.*, p.99.
- (4) A. Westbrook and O. Ratti, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere*, Charles E Tuttle, 1987, p.30.
- (5) Kisshōmaru Ueshiba, *Ibid.*, p.9.