



The Meaning of *Bu* and *Budo*

The word element *bu* is found in such Japanese terms as *budo*, *bujutsu*, *bushido*, *kobudo* and *bugei**, all generally referring to aspects of what are known as the “martial arts.” However, *bu* is poorly translated as “martial.” When the first Western translators watched the martial arts being practiced by Asians, they noticed the joy and enthusiasm being put into the training, and deduced from that a love of war. Utilizing the Western philosophical concept of the joy of warfare, they named the Asian fighting arts after the Roman god of war, Mars, hence *bu* = “martial.”

However, the oriental concept is actually much different from the Western concept. The character *bu* is constructed from the characters meaning “arms of war” or “violence,” and “to stop, prohibit, or bring to an end.” Therefore, *bu* is more accurately translated as “to stop violence,” or perhaps “to bring about peace.” Thus *budo*, *bujutsu* and *bugei* might more appropriately be known as the “arts of the peacemaker.” The warriors of China and Japan saw their skills as tools for maintaining the peace rather than indulgences in a love of war. And although warfare was sometimes necessary to restore peace, peace was always the ultimate goal.

Sokon Matsumura (1797-1889), revered founder of the Shorin schools of Okinawan karate, described *bu* as comprising seven virtues:

1. *Bu* prohibits violence.
2. *Bu* maintains discipline among soldiers.
3. *Bu* maintains order among the citizenry.
4. *Bu* spreads virtue.
5. *Bu* gives a peaceful heart.
6. *Bu* helps keep peace between people.
7. *Bu* makes people and nations prosper.

Going back still further, the benevolent rather than violent aspect of Asian martial arts is reflected in the *Bubishi* (“martial arts manual,” or, more literally, “source of the heart of the samurai warrior”). This is an early Chinese book of unknown age which was very influential in the Okinawan martial arts; many early Okinawan masters, including especially Chojun Miyagi (1888-1953), Kenri Nakaima (1819-1879) and Kanryo Higashionna (1853-1916), considered it their “treasure.” It appears to be a manual of the White Crane style of kung fu, but it includes many chapters on the arts of healing combat injuries. The “god of war” is referred to in this book as the “Peaceful Controller.”

Thus the avoidance of violence where possible, the use of force only in the cause of peace, and giving compassionate aid to the victims of violence, are seen as the ideals of the true martial artist. This gives us a much better and more benevolent insight into the *bushi*, the “peacemaking warrior,” and the *bushido*, his code of life.

Budo, the Martial Way, is a philosophy of life which incorporates and expands upon the concept of *bu*. Much has been written about its historical evolution over the centuries and its significance in modern times. Following the concept of seeking a unity of mind and technique, *budo* has been developed and refined into a discipline of austere training which promotes etiquette, skillful technique, physical strength, and the unity of mind and body.



In 1987 the Japanese Budo Association was formed to uphold the fundamental principles of traditional *budo*. Member organizations include the Japan Karatedo Federation, the All-Japan Kendo Federation, the All-Japan Sumo Federation, the Aikikai Foundation, the Shorinji Kempo Federation, the All-Japan Jukendo (bayonette) Federation, and the Nippon Budokan Foundation. Together these organizations drafted the *Budo Charter*, six guidelines for the preservation of correct *budo* in modern martial arts:

(1) **Object:** The object of *budo* is to cultivate character, enrich the ability to make value judgments, and foster the development of a well-disciplined and capable individual through participation in physical and mental training utilizing martial techniques.

(2) **Training:** When practicing daily one must constantly follow decorum, adhere to the fundamentals, and resist the temptation to pursue only technical skill rather than the unity of mind and technique.

(3) **Attitude:** In matches and in the performance of kata, one must manifest *budo* spirit, exert himself to the utmost, win with modesty, accept loss gracefully, and exhibit temperate attitudes at all times.

(4) **The Dojo:** The dojo is a sacred place for training one’s mind and body. Here one must maintain discipline, proper etiquette, and formality. The training area must be a quiet, clean, safe and solemn environment.

(5) **Teaching:** In order to be an effective teacher the *budo* master should always strive to cultivate his own character, and to further his own skill and the discipline of mind and body. He should not be swayed by winning or losing, nor should he display arrogance about his superior skill; he should instead retain the attitudes suitable for a role-model.

(6) **Promotion:** When promoting *budo*, one should follow traditional values, seek substantial training, contribute to research, and do one's utmost to perfect and preserve this traditional art, with an understanding of international points of view.

* According to my son, there is also *bubu*, the martial arts injury, and *bu*, the Halloween kiai.

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(email: minrecord@comcast.net)

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