

First Drafts 2

If many of the major martial arts were not complete, i.e. they continued to evolve even during their founders' life times, perhaps it would be educative to understand why and how changes in the arts can (and sometimes must) happen.

Let's say Mr. Youngblood Whiplash wishes to break away from his instructor, Master Jack Caltrop, to found a style of ju-jutsu. It is logical that Whiplash will begin his new system by modifying what he knows, that is, he will simply start with Caltrop's curriculum and make changes where he feels changes should be made. How does he decide what should be changed?

I have had several students break away from my dojo to start their own schools (occasionally to "found a style"), some with my support, some without. Every one of them began with the Bushido-kai curriculum. One gentleman, with whom I maintained a good relationship, decided to drop a technique from our Aiki basics and add in a throw at a lower rank that he felt our curriculum had ignored until a much higher rank. Unfortunately, he did so because he did not "like" one technique and "really liked" the other. I suspect that since he was not yet a master of the system, he did not see that the technique he dropped was intended to pave the way for techniques in the middle and higher ranks.

An art is more than a curriculum, but a curriculum is how an art presents itself to the students. Certainly Bushido-kai's Takeshin Aiki was based on Shihan Church's Kamishin Aiki; however, with Shihan Church's permission, I had gone through years of teaching certain supplemental techniques that not only became accepted as the Kamishin curricula for shodan through yondan, but also fleshed out his original curricula so that, with them, kyu rank requirements prepared systematically for shodan; shodan presented the fundamentals for higher ranks; and the higher ranks reflected the development of the kyu ranks, albeit at a higher level. This curriculum became further modified as solely a Takeshin curriculum after Shihan Church's passing because I had begun to do the techniques with more subtlety and less pain-compliance. Even though Shihan Church had given me the title of *ichiban deshi* (#1 student) in aiki and had shown his willingness to accept a wide range of variation, I felt it was unfair to call my curriculum Kamishin while performing it in a way that varied noticeably from Shihan Church's students, even if they continued using my revised Kamishin curriculum.

Just as first drafts must go through revisions, Takeshin changed over the years. But I would not say that, once released to the public, it went through several drafts. A *severe* revision certainly can be considered a new draft, but adjusting subtle details, in my humble opinion, cannot. It is a "half-draft" that I would call a *minor* revision. I do not mean to suggest that somehow I brilliantly avoided the problem of "publishing" an art while it was still in the draft stage while the old masters could not; rather, I am suggesting that the creation of an art is often not the conscious deliberate process we think it is.

Rarely is a practiced art a masterpiece such that every technique prepares for, or relates to another, considers the abilities of students at all levels, and by itself, without the refinements offered by its teachers,

hoists the student from stumbling novice to soaring master. Rather, most martial arts, famous or unknown, old or new, develop in organic ways we do not fully comprehend. Although we may like to think of our chosen martial art as the masterpiece of its founder, often it is a first draft that brilliant successors have managed to revise a little at a time so that it can be enjoyed even a hundred years later. Traditional arts are not classical arts. They are not formed in stone. They are in the process of forming all the time. That is why, for every generation, they are formative.