

Lasting Legacies

If you enjoy imagining what might happen in the future, project your mind to a time 100 years from now when an interested party can absorb a quick summary of the martial arts we experience today, transferred directly to his brain by some bioelectrical process. Since people 100 years from now might have even less of an attention span than we do today, the transference would not have all the details, complete with history, curricula, representative *kata* or *waza*, or famous practitioners, but would instead state succinctly what each art and style was known for.

We can imagine that karate would be known for punching and kicking, Judo for sport throwing, Shaolin arts for their long, fluid forms, internal Chinese arts for their unique use of energy, Brazilian Jiu-jitsu for grappling, Japanese ju-jutsu and Aikido for locks and projections, ninjutsu for its stealth, Korean Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do for their kicking, Hapkido and Hwarang-do for their mixture of kicking and locks, and Tuxedo for its formal attire (sorry, just trying to keep you awake).

Would individual styles, well known today as separate from one another, be remembered? Would Shotokan be known for its long stances and driving attacks? Would Goju and Uechi be known for their short stances and more circular blocks? Would Isshin be known for its vertical punch? Or would Okinawan karate styles be known collectively for their diverse kata while Japanese karate styles would be known for their sparring?

If summations of martial arts 100 years from now captured the real contributions that individual styles had made to the martial arts world, what would make those contributions stand out? This is more difficult to think about than it may first seem. Seldom does the future develop in a direct line from the past and so many changes can affect future happenings that, to be frank, we cannot possibly know if any style, system, cultural tradition, or even the martial arts themselves would survive long enough to warrant any interest 100 years from now. We also do not know if humankind will be in a position to care about something so archaic as the history of individual fighting arts. Maybe humankind will be too busy vacationing on Mars or too busy searching for its next meal.

But, if we *could* summarize the contributions various arts and styles are making today to the development of a future generic set of martial skills (without the intercession of favorite methods, politico-religious partisans, or devoted disciples), would we not want to emphasize those aspects of our training *now*? In other words, if we have a background in say, Shotokan and BJJ, we would not also want to know something about Korean kicking and Wing Chun in-fighting?

If this sounds like I am advocating for a sort of modern-day Jeet Kune Do where the practitioner absorbs what is useful and then simplifies, I have to say, “Sort of, but not quite.” I am advocating not for a dismissal of styles or arts since I think it wise that everyone start with something specific to concentrate on, not for an

advanced stage where a student simplifies all that he has absorbed, but for the middle-stage that tends to go unnoticed today.

Sure, a mixed martial art does something similar, but only for the ring, only for the next fight, only to defeat a single opponent. I think traditional martial artists should review what they have learned, understand what they may need to learn, and either seek it out within their own art or go outside their art to seek it in seminars, books, and videos. The development of this accumulation phase is what the advanced phase of simplification depends upon.

The result might be that it ruins the future history of the arts by downplaying or eliminating styles, but it might just keep you interested and improving for a few more of those next 100 years.