

Philosophy and Principles of 3 Martial Arts

Introduction

Martial art is the general term used to refer to the many styles that instruct in the art of hand and foot fighting or self-defence. The martial arts originated in the Far East where they were devised as a defence for unarmed persons against many differing attacks. Through discipline and training, the student learns to coordinate mind and body and can obtain access to extraordinary power and speed of response.

Many styles have developed over a period of 2,000 years. The three main martial art nations are Japan, China and Korea. For this reason I have chosen to investigate Aikido and Kung Fu respectively, in addition to Taekwon-Do. The following is a very brief overview of the philosophy and some of the principles behind the arts.

Aikido

Aikido is a Japanese martial art developed from Jujitsu. It literally means the "Way (do) of Harmony (ai) with the spirit (ki)". A unique feature of Aikido is that it does not use strength against strength, but utilises body and mind relaxation to direct the opponent's force away. Because its main purpose is not to take the offensive in injuring or harming the opponent, Aikido has often been called a "non-violent" martial art.

Modern Aikido was founded by a man called Morihei Ueshiba (1883 - 1969). Ueshiba was a deeply spiritual man, being an ardent student and practitioner of Zen and Shinto. Shintoism is the traditional religion of Japan, from which Aikido draws upon for many of its principles.



Aikido techniques express elements of philosophy, psychology and physics.

The object of Aikido is to be able to:

- Perceive a threat;
- Respond instinctively (but humanely) to an aggressive act;
- Redirect and neutralise the physical force of the attack; and
- Leave both the defender and attacker unharmed.

One of the philosophical pillars of Aikido is the notion of being in harmony with the attacker rather than being in conflict with them. Therefore, the idea of Aikido is not to think of overpowering and defeating an opponent, but to harmonise with them both spiritually and

physically. This is why Aikido is sometimes called "The Art of Non-Resistance" or the "Non-Fighting Martial Art".

"When an enemy tries to fight with me, the universe itself, he has to break the harmony of the universe. Hence at the moment he has the mind to fight with me, he is already defeated. There exists no measure of time - fast or slow."

Morihei Ueshiba

Unlike other martial arts, Aikido has largely rejected competitions and contests. Instead, Aikido has remained committed to the idea that self-discovery and self-development are incompatible with the whole concept of winning and losing. There are no losers in Aikido, for there are no contests. Aikido is a martial art that seeks to redirect and control aggression by the art of not opposing it. It does not seek to defeat or humiliate an opponent, or even to establish competitive superiority, but only to protect.

Aikido makes extensive use of the concept of Ki and is a very important part of Aikido. Everything in the universe has Ki. It combines the mind and body together and is a way of transferring energy from nature throughout the body and mind. The energy comes in through the body at the fingers and hands and then works its way through the rest of the body. Ki allows an individual to defeat problems within his or her mind by the energy that is entering their body.

Another important aspect of Aikido is the integration of In and Yo. In and Yo are similar to the Chinese Yin and Yang (discussed below). This is a way of balancing positive and negative energy together. In and Yo are opposites of each other so they are balancing one another and bring harmony.

Kung Fu

The martial arts of China are deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy; they contain both a strong theoretical framework pertaining to technique and skill development, as well as a deep rooting in ethics and morals. Kung Fu is the product of several thousands years of Chinese civilisation. Its psychological and physiological aspects can be dated back to the period of the Yellow Emperor (2696 BC).

The ancient origins of Kung Fu are attributed to an Indian monk named Bodhidharma, who introduced a martial art to the Shaolin Monastery in Northern China. Bodhidharma found that the Shaolin monks were sickly and lacked the physical and mental stamina needed to perform even the most basic of Buddhist meditation practices. He taught the monks moving exercises designed to both enhance chi flow and build strength. These movements were the beginnings of Kung Fu. The monks developed and mastered the art of Kung Fu for the promotion of health through a harmony of mind and body. Inside their temples, strict training regimes and religious studies were enforced, and for more than 500 years the Shaolin monks were revered and feared as formidable fighters. Although the monks were capable of killing with their bare hands, due to the Buddhist respect for all life forms this ability was restrained. Only when a monk was faced with death would he kill in self-defence.

In the Shaolin Temple in Northern China, the monks not only study Buddhism but also Kung Fu. This fact confuses those who wonder why a Shaolin monk would want to study fighting, when Buddhist doctrines oppose violence. This is because its purpose is not to hurt other people, nor is it to gain fame as the best master of Kung Fu. The purpose is rather to train the body to be observant of itself. To gain control over the emotions, and help in times of physical attack, when no other way is possible.

There are three doctrines of Eastern philosophy that were instrumental in the evolution of the philosophy and development of Kung Fu. These doctrines are:

1. Taoism (Lao Tzu, circa 604 BC) - a doctrine of naturalism based on the soft, yielding, ways of nature.
2. Confucianism (Confucius, circa 551 BC) - a doctrine of humanism based on the efficacy of ritual and conformity as the means to salvation.
3. Buddhism (Buddha, circa 506 BC) - promoted non-materialism, compassion based on the realisation that all is illusionary.

An important role that Taoism played in the development of the principles of Kung Fu is introduction of the fundamental teaching that there is a harmony of Yin and Yang. Everything in existence has an opposing force. It is these two opposing forces that flow into one another that are known as Yin and Yang. Understanding the interchange of Yin and Yang is perhaps the most important aspect in the learning of the Kung Fu system.

The underlying philosophy in Buddhism is the value of all life and the need to break through the cycle of suffering though self-cultivation. Buddhism is the most important component of Chinese martial arts, in that the practice is necessary for self-defence and self-cultivation.

True teachings advocate a unity of everything, love for all mankind and all of God's creations. True Shaolin advocates making a friend not an enemy and blending with the world and its people.

The Chinese believe that Chi is the root of all energy. Kung Fu focuses on harnessing chi. This involves control of breathing patterns and complex mental concentration. By utilising chi it is believed that practitioners can summon phenomenal strength, while it also promotes good health and appearance.



A famous mural in the Shaolin Monastery depicting monks practising Kung Fu

Taekwon-Do

Although Taekwon-Do literally translates to mean the "way of the foot and fist", this is a superficial translation of the art. "Do" in Korean implies a philosophical approach to the way of life.

Taekwon-Do philosophy has a very close relationship to traditional oriental philosophy. Therefore the characteristics of Korean thinking, which founded the traditional culture, form the essence of Taekwon-Do. The three main influences of this philosophy are Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism.

The paramount philosophical goal of Taekwon-Do is to build a more peaceful world. To accomplish this goal, Taekwon-Do begins with the foundation, the individual. The Art strives to develop the character, personality, and positive moral and ethical traits in each practitioner. It is upon this "foundation" of positive attitudes and characteristics that the "end goal" may be achieved.

Taekwon-Do develops the positive aspects of an individual's personality, particularly: respect, goodness, trustworthiness, loyalty, humility, courage, patience, a sense of responsibility to help and respect for all forms of life. This takes a great deal of hard training and many do not reach far enough to achieve perfection in all of these aspects. However, it is the physical, mental, and spiritual effort, which the individual puts forth, that develops the positive attributes and image of both the individual and how he or she perceives others.

Respect, humility and a strong sense of morality are important teachings of Taekwon-Do. Respect is particularly important, and should be extended outside of the dojang to all aspects of everyday life. Taekwon-Do also teaches the importance of responsibility and honesty as the means to achieve harmony with society. These aspects are reflected by the tenets of Taekwon-Do:

Courtesy
Integrity
Perseverance
Self control
Indomitable spirit

General Choi Hong Hi, who created the art, developed the following philosophy and guidelines, and encourages all students to live by them:

1. Be willing to go where the going may be tough and do the things that are worth doing even though they are difficult.
2. Be gentle to the weak and tough to the strong.
3. Be content with what you have in money and position but never in skills.
4. Always finish what you begin, be it large or small.
5. Be a willing teacher to anyone regardless of religion, race or ideology.
6. Never yield to repression or threat in the pursuit of a noble cause.
7. Teach attitude and skill with action rather than words.
8. Always be yourself even though your circumstances may change.
9. Be the eternal teacher who teaches with the body when young, with words when old, and by moral precept even after death.



General Choi explaining the philosophy of Taekwon-Do to United States Senators and Congressmen

General Choi in the condensed encyclopaedia remarks that (in the world today) there is the tendency of "the stronger preying upon the weaker". The use of Taekwon-Do for selfish, aggressive or violent purposes is strictly forbidden. Continual harassment, invasion and occupation of Korea and its ancient kingdoms have probably contributed to this belief. General Choi states the utmost purpose of Taekwon-Do to eliminate fighting by discouraging the stronger's oppression of the weaker with a power that must be based on humanity, justice, morality, wisdom and faith, thus helping to build a more peaceful world. This is indeed reflected by the Student Oath, particularly the last two articles:

I shall observe the tenets of Taekwon-Do
I shall respect the instructor and seniors
I shall never misuse Taekwon-Do
I shall be a champion of freedom and justice
I shall build a more peaceful world

General Choi states that in order to realise the ultimate benefits of Taekwon-Do, each practitioner must practice daily and commit to it for a lifetime.

Conclusion

Philosophically, all three martial arts are founded on the defensive spirit and their code forbids unfair assaults or use of force. All have strong roots with the oriental religions, which have shaped their moral basis. A strong sense of humility, discipline and harmony, which is encouraged to be extended outside of the training area, is instilled in practitioners, irrespective of whether that training area is the dojang or place of training used by practitioners of Aikido and Kung Fu.

The philosophical basis of the martial art usually reflects the environment in which it is developed. The environment during the development of the arts was that of ardent spiritual and religious belief, whether they were Shinto, Buddhist, or Confucianism. Each art instils basic human and spiritual values that are derived from religion. However, Aikido and Kung Fu have far stronger links with their organised religions than Taekwon-Do. Taekwon-Do is, in contrast, secular.

In addition to the values learnt from religion, history plays an important part in the development of the philosophy of the martial arts. Ancient times, and even modern times, were filled with conflict and war. This has shaped their development and is the basis behind the aspirations of the creators of the art. The utmost objective is to prevent conflict and to build a peaceful world and be in harmony with others.

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