

# Japanese Martial Arts as Popular Culture: Teaching Opportunity and Challenge

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## Abstract

Japanese martial arts, here after Japanese *budō*, are popular cultural icons that are found in films, comics, video games and books. Teaching Japanese *budō* at university offers a novel way to teach about East Asian and in particular Japanese culture, history, and philosophy while including ideas about the globalization and the localization of culture. Question though remains as to how and what should we teach about the popular culture of Japanese *budō* at the university level? This paper found that a comprehensive approach to teaching about *budō* was effective. By using many kinds of materials and the incorporation of opportunities to experience *budō* and to try *budō*, students were better able to grasp the historical, cultural and religious characteristics of *budō*.

**Keywords:** Japanese culture, pedagogy, *budō*, martial arts

## Izveček

Japonske borilne veščine, od zdaj naprej *budō*, so popularne kulturne ikone, ki jih najdemo v filmih, stripih, video igrarh in knjigah. Učenje japonskega budoja na univerzi ponuja nov način učenja o Vzhodni Aziji in še posebej v japonski kulturi, zgodovini in filozofiji, saj vključuje ideje o globalizaciji in lokalizaciji kulture. Kljub temu pa ostaja vprašanje, kako in kaj se naj poučuje o popularni kulturi japonskega budoja na univerzitetni stopnji. V tem članku pride avtor do spoznanja, da je k učenju budoja učinkovit vsetranski pristop. Z uporabo raznovrstnega materiala, z izkustvom in poskusi budoja, so lahko študentje bolje doumeli zgodovinske, kulturne in religiozne značilnosti budoja.

**Ključne besede:** japonska kultura, pedagogika, *budō*, borilne veščine

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## Introduction

Japanese martial arts, here after Japanese budō, are popular cultural icons that are found in films, comics, video games, books, sports and even in our neighborhoods where we live. Studying and teaching Japanese budō at university offers a novel way to teach about East Asian and in particular Japanese culture, history, and philosophy while including ideas about the globalization and the localization of culture. Question though remains as to how and what should we teach about the popular culture of Japanese budō at the university level?

Scholars have broached this conundrum from many different points of view. For instance, Japan's National Institute of Fitness and Sports (NIFI) has advocated teaching Japanese modern *budō* such as *kendō*, *naginata* and *jūdō* in educational institutions to convey, preserve and pass on Japanese cultural traditions (Maesaka 2008, 45). In Maesaka's analysis on the initiatives of NIFI, he found that teaching Japanese budō is not linked to teaching popular culture, rather it stresses inculcating the cultural traditions associated with Japanese budō. In this sense, NIFI is attaching national identity to the practice and study of Japanese budō with a domestic agenda of strengthening the indigenous nature of Japanese budō rather than linking it to previous academic research.

Other scholars such as Callan have investigated Japanese budō education in the UK and the difficulties that educators have in transmitting some of the philosophical and cultural characteristics of Japanese budō in a non-Japanese setting, region or country. Specific impediments to teaching were associated with attaching meaning and significance to the key components of Japanese budō, etiquette and decorum.

In September 2010, I began teaching a university level course entitled "Japanese Budō Tradition and Transformation from the Edo Period to Today" for the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Department of Japanese Studies. My experience echoed much of the hurdles Callan faced in the UK. Moreover, teaching a new course at university is always fraught with challenges, especially regarding course contents and pedagogical approaches to learning. Particular questions that arise in terms of teaching a course on budō include but are not exclusive to the following:

1. How to design a reading list that encompasses historical, cultural and technical development of budō? This is especially a challenge in terms of finding English sources for non-Japanese language readers.
2. What is the appropriate level of academic rigor for a course on budō?
3. Where to begin our historical examination of budō?
4. What is the best way to introduce budō to non-Japanese majors? That is students with no knowledge of Japanese language, culture or history?
5. Is there an appropriate way to introduce budō practice in the classroom and link that with classroom lectures on culture and history?
6. How to teach student's "whose cup is already full"?

This study makes no attempt to theorize about popular culture. Instead, it is a pedagogical investigation that aims to address some of the above questions, at least from my perspective as a scholar and practitioner of *kendō* and *iaidō*. Through introducing and discussing the teaching of Japanese budō at a university, I hope to shed light on teaching possibilities and novel approaches to a more rigorous yet interesting way of learning and teaching the popular culture of budō. This qualitative study employed participant observation, questionnaires and repeated structured interviews over a four-month period from September to December 2010. Questionnaires were distributed to first-year and third-year Japanese studies major students and to students of the Japanese budō class that I taught. Ten students were interviewed repeatedly through the semester. Each interview was no more than 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English and in the classroom after or before class. Participant observation was twofold. First, as the instructor for the course and second as the teacher of the tutorials in which students were taught several *kendō* exercises called *kata* ("shape" or "form").

As part of the structure of this paper, I will divide my discussion into six sections representing the questions raised in the introduction. Each section will be subtitled with the question posed in the introduction. These questions represent what I feel to be the most pertinent results of this study but they are by no means exhaustive. I recognize that some of my conclusions drawn in this paper would be different in different cultural and national settings. That being said, this paper aims to contribute to the teaching of popular culture at the university level by providing a reflective example of teaching popular culture in a non-North American setting.

## How to Design a Reading List that Encompasses Historical, Cultural and Technical Development of budō?

When I initially proposed this course to the Japanese Studies Department at CUHK, I experienced both enthusiasm and skepticism. Enthusiasm for the course was based on the interests of students who have up to now had interest in learning more about Japanese budō and martial arts culture but had no one to learn from. My proposal to meld classroom lectures with visits to local *dōjōs* and some practical training also was attractive as it linked theory, culture and history with the opportunity to actually experience the culture of budō, both through *kendō kata* and speaking with local teachers and practitioners. Lastly, the course was attractive to my colleagues as it intended to discuss budō using contemporary academic frameworks such as globalization, localization and modernization of culture (See course introduction below) and relate them to Japan's closed past and contemporary inclination to export Japanese culture under the rubric of "Soft Power" or "International Culture Understanding."

### JAS 2710

#### **Japanese Martial Arts (BUDŌ): Tradition and Transformation from the Tokugawa Period to Present**

**Course description:** This course is intended to introduce and broaden the understanding of the development of Japanese Martial Arts (BUDŌ) from the early Tokugawa period (1603–1868) to today. Students will examine the development of BUDŌ by studying it within its historical context, identifying its cultural influences, and transmission patterns. Utilizing an assortment of readings, lectures, and multi-media outlets such as film and on-line documentaries, students will engage in a multidisciplinary analysis of the development of BUDŌ and its impact on contemporary Japanese society. Complementing this multi-disciplinary approach will be opportunities to experience Japanese martial arts and its key components such as etiquette and philosophical approaches to techniques through a hands-on introduction to the art of *kendō* and visiting local Japanese martial art schools. Lastly, in an era of rapid globalization it is also crucial that students will examine the influence of Japanese Budō abroad. Through comparisons with the martial arts of neighboring countries such as Korea, China and well as others, students will also gain a better understanding of aspects of modernization, that is the convergence and localization of culture as it is transformed through the movement of people.

From the standpoint of the deliberate inculcation of experience-based learning to further the student's ability to grasp the material being introduced, it could be said that my approach resonates with Maesaka's advocacy of a culture-based learning and teaching process when teaching Japanese budō (2008, 45). Moreover, the comprehensive approach to teaching Japanese budō that included not only history but also culture, philosophy, sociology and practical training resembled the approaches of other budō practitioners. For example, Wojciech J. Cynarski and Kazimierz Obodyński argue that "it is also easier to show the realization of 'ki' on the example of the master whose attributes are excellent skills of concentration, motor coordination and perfect technique coupled with strong will, control of pain etc., than to give accurate definition" (2005, 1).

On the other hand, some of my colleagues were concerned about the possibility of offering a course that was not only interesting to students but also had academic rigor, that was well founded in previous research and well tested books related to budō. In fact, the perceptions of martial arts may have entrenched imageries in popular culture. For example, Stuart Fischhoff, Ana Franco, Elaine Gram, Angela Hernandez and James Parker's study of "Offensive Ethnic Clichés in Movies: Drugs, Sex, and Servility" highlighted the association of martial arts with potentially "offensive" stereotypes (1999, 8).

In this sense, their concern was somewhat justified as when I conducted an initial survey of books, articles and papers related to budō. I found that articles fell into four categories: first, sports or sports related; second, historical/cultural articles on the development of budō; third, articles concerning the "meaning of budō"; and fourth, articles or journals written by non-academics but budō practitioners.

The last category of articles and books, although interesting and noteworthy in many cases, lack the thorough attentiveness to detail and solid foundations in archival sources in Japanese. The anecdotal experiences of fellow *budōka* (budō practitioners) provide individual, personalized interpretations of their experiences discovering budō that give us important hints to how we change through the practice of budō but in many cases tended to be volumes legitimizing one particular school of budō or interpretation.

The sports related articles and books ranged from those related to sports performance and sports-medicine, i.e. articles related to bandaging techniques for

*jūdō* athletes (Yamamoto, Kigawa and Xu 1993, 110–12), and *Asian Martial Arts and Approaches of Instruction in Physical Education* (Theeboom and De Knop 1999, 146–61). These articles focus on conceptualizing budō related topics in terms of Western education and science paradigms bringing different perspectives and understandings to age old traditions.

In the case of historical/cultural studies numerous books and papers have been written on budō such as *Budo Perspectives Vol. 1* edited by Alexander Bennett, the Classic three volume set of *Classical Bujutsu* (1973a), *Classical Budō* (1973b) and *Modern Bujutsu and Budō* (1974) by Donn Draeger, Hurst, G. Cameron's *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmen and Archery* (1998), and Kiyota Minoru's *Kendo: Its Philosophy, History and Means to Personal Growth* (1995). Each provides well researched and interesting historical, cultural and philosophical writings on Japanese budō that helps the reader weave together an understanding of budō. Draeger does this by trifurcating his historical study into classical *bujutsu* (the military/martial arts), classical budō and its modern incantations, whereas Bennett's volume gathers a group of well respected budō scholars and practitioners to provide insight on the internationalization of budō, its marquis characteristics, its role in education and about its practitioners. Employing his extensive experience in Buddhism, Kiyota on the other hand delves into the impact of Buddhist thought on the development of swordsmanship. Each author in their own way delves into budō's complex history, synthesizing a narrative that is multi-dimensional.

In contrast to cultural and historical approaches, the authors that focus on the “meaning of budō” tend to place their discussions in particular eras, denoting the evolving meaning of budō depending on the cultural, historic and government milieu of the times. Dependent on the zeitgeist, budō seemed to take on different significances. For example, Yamamoto Reiko (2008) examined the “Budō values of the Greater Japan Martial Virtue Association in the WW II” period. Sasaki Taketo, on the other hand, employs *kata* as his prism to understand budō (Sasaki 2008, 46–49). He has also examined the meaning and relevance of budō in education (Sasaki 2006, 11–14). Stressing the possibilities of spiritual development through the practicing of *kata* and budō, Sasaki argues that budō's contemporary relevance has transformed from a vehicle to preserve culture and develop strength towards a practice that can contribute to developing thoughtful and productive members of society. Still other authors offer insightful narratives

as to the meaning of budō and its relationship with WW II Japanese militarism and feminism (Ikeda 2010, 537–52).

In short, we see that scholarship, both that of professional and lay writers, encompass a multitude of perspectives and orientations that as a whole can contribute to understanding budō. Through examining budō through various frameworks such as the three put forward above, perhaps we can shed light on budō’s labyrinthine nature.

### What is the Appropriate Level of Academic Rigor for a Course on budō?

This question plagued me during my initial planning stages of this course for a plethora of reasons. First, dependent on the students they will have different degrees of familiarity and understanding about Japanese and Chinese history, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and Taoism. This was evidenced in the one-month survey comment by one of my exchange students.



Figure 1. Ryan learning *kendō kata* as part of his studies<sup>2</sup>

The hands-on tutorial is very helpful in understanding theoretical concepts. The lectures, historical periods are sometimes hard to follow without specific knowledge (background) of Japanese history because I have to draw a connection from one to another. (Ryan, Age 20, American exchange student)

Second, in the Orientalism tradition, students, particularly from North America hold “Hollywood-type” understandings of the samurai, *bushidō* and Japanese and Chinese cultures. Peering through the lens of the Karate Kid’s “Mr. Miyage”,

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<sup>2</sup> Photos courtesy of Ms. Helen Chan.

David Carradine’s “Kung Fu” or Bruce Lee’s “Enter the Dragon”, North American students (and perhaps most Westerners) hold conflated images and views concerning the philosophies and culture of budō. The same is equally true though of students from Asia. Where they diverge is their romanticization of the samurai, *bushidō* and Japan. This is particularly noticeable when teaching students from Mainland China where the samurai and *bushidō* ethos is mistakenly construed to be synonymous for the aggressive militarism, violence and cruelty undertaken by the Japanese military in China. In this sense, for Chinese but also other nations, samurai and *bushidō* ethos have been recursively constructed by and through interactions with the modern imperialist/nationalist 19<sup>th</sup> century world.



Figure 2: Hai Xia learning *kendō kata*

The contents of the lectures are very helpful for us to understand Japanese budō. Especially it is very exciting that the tutorial lessons allow us to participate a real *kendō* practice. Through this good form we can get to know Japanese martial arts better. (Hai Xia, M.Phil student from China)

It is easy to understand why different nationalities have responded differently to Japanese budō and its connection to the sword. Simply, these emotive responses arise from complicated historical contextualization and interpretations of martial arts, both in the West and in Asia. Paul Yoon’s study of film representations provides the example of Bruce Lee movies where the protagonist confronts a Japanese *jūdō* master for portraying China as the “Sick Man of Asia” (2009, 109). But at the same time, perceptions and interpretations of symbolisms may also be powerful instruments for peace as they can be used as tools for foreign diplomacy, for example, the historical inclusion of *jūdō* as a form of direct diplomacy in Anglo-Japanese friendship that Kuwayama Takami pointed out in his study (1998,



24). The ambiguous role of the symbolism of martial arts continues to be debated and interpreted.

Upon consideration of these “contextualization and interpretations of martial arts” and in particular those related to Japan, I decided that creating a legitimate course on budō required students to approach their studies through readings, small group discussions, presentations and a multi-faceted experiential approach that linked readings to experience and lectures to observations. Importantly, their assessment included written reflections, a formal oral presentation, a couple of field trips and actual training in *kendō kata*.

### **Where to Begin our Historical Examination of budō?**

Examining the history of any country as old as Japan is challenging. The difficulty is compounded by students with language and cultural differences. With these factors in mind and through a bit of trial and error, I tried to organize a curriculum that delves into the following themes:

1. Transformation from *bujutsu* to budō
2. Budō in the Tokugawa period and its social context
3. Lineage, Transmission, and Legitimacy
4. Buddhism in Japanese budō
5. Modernity and the Invention of Traditions
6. Globalization and Japanese martial arts: Convergence and localization

Using these themes, I scurried the university’s library, my own library and electronic search engines for readings, articles, books, and dissertations related to budō. In that search, I made the decision to divide the course into the above categories which examine budō’s historical inception, evolution, cultural infusions, changes in accordance with governance and contemporary relevance. Students in particular learn about the Buddhist, Confucian and Taoist principles inculcated in budō, how the calcified class system of the Tokugawa period provided the impetus for samurai to seek meaning in their lives through budō. Linking these discussions to historical time periods such as Japan’s 250 year *sakoku* period when it was mostly closed to the outside world, the massive Westernization of the Meiji Period, Kano Jigoro’s enthusiasm for the development of a sport for all, Japanese militarism, the occupation and post-WW II reconstruction, students are able to

peer through various lens to see how domestic, regional and global currents effected the development and meaning of budō.

From the standpoint of academia, it was also important to disconnect budō and its study from the position of a Latin-like, dead language, cultural oddity and connect it to the students' living understanding of history. Above and beyond this connection, approaching the study of budō through concepts such as modernization theory, the dialectic of convergence and divergence of culture, and globalization allowed students to connect budō's history and development to contemporary issues that revolve around culture preservation, modernization and development.

### **What is the Best Way to Introduce budō to Non-Japanese Majors? That is, Students with No Knowledge of Japanese Language, Culture or History?**

Introducing budō to students who are non-Japanese study majors was unexpectedly easier than I expected. Non-majors of course have language barriers and knowledge gaps that impede their initial learning. These are not easy to overcome but interest in the topic, a willingness to engage in the course and curiosity propels these students forward through their exploration of budō's tradition and transformation.

In fact, it was the major students, those mostly interested in popular Japanese culture that seemed to be the least interested in studying Japanese traditional culture such as budō. The study of budō, whether it be first year or third year students, was quite divorced from major students' interest and often seen as hard, difficult and irrelevant to the study of Japan or in the job hunting process. Indeed, the attractiveness of budō, especially when it is seen in this light makes J-pop, Cosplay, Anime and Manga infinitely more interesting and digestible.

Although not entirely effective in attracting students, teaching about *budō* culture from the standpoint of its lingering impact on the Japanese work ethic, attention to detail, consciousness of hierarchy, learning through prolonged engagement in a single activity, loyalty to one's company, class structure, etc., students begin to glean an understanding that budō's cultural influence is widespread in Japanese society and that modern sub-cultures, although superficially different, employ similar ways of thinking.

## Is There an Appropriate Way to Introduce budō Practice in the Classroom and Link that with Classroom Lectures on Culture and History?

In teaching university level course related to budō, we are bound by professional considerations to abide by academic standards, a certain level of academic rigour and the design and presentation of a topic, in this case budō. The challenge of teaching a course on budō is that as you leave the realm of discussing the historical development of budō and its relationship to Japanese society, you need to also convey to students less tangible concepts that do not necessarily lend themselves to textbooks. For instance, how to convey the ideas of *rei* 礼 (bow/greeting), *kamae* 構え (posture), *seme* 攻め (attack), *sen no sen* 先の先 (pre-emptive strike), *zanshin* 残心 (remaining spirit/heart), *metsuke* 目付け (engagement distance), *maai* 間合い (eye control), *yūgen* 幽玄 (suggestiveness, tranquility, elegance), and *miyabi* 雅 (courtliness and refinement) and other nebulous *budō* concepts? What about understanding the nature of *kata* in training and refining one's self? Is it possible to convey the meaning behind *rei*, the principles of the sword in the case of *kendō*, the infinite complexity in *waza* 技 (techniques)?



Figure 3: Introducing *kendō kata* in classroom

In the planning of the course on Japanese budō that I taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I opined over how to teach students not only the history of budō but also convey to them some of the more enigmatic and abstruse aspects of budō mentioned in the questions above. In that process I decided that I would

combine lectures with field trips to local *dojos* to watch, visit with and experience budō. This included the Shoujinkan Kendō<sup>3</sup>/*iaidō* *dojo* led by Kendō 7 dan *renshi*, Mr. Kishikawa Roberto and the Hong Kong Jūdō Kan<sup>4</sup> founded by Jūdō 7 dan Iwami Takeo sensei.



Figure 4. Iwami sensei at the Hong Kong Jūdō Kan, February 24 2010, Tomonokai Omochitsuki Event

On 30 October 2010, ten students accompanied me to Kishikawa sensei's *kendō dōjō* in Mong Kok, Hong Kong, to watch practice. My students were able to watch firsthand how a *kendō keiko* (training) occurs from start to end. We practiced in our normal fashion, beginning our normal *rei*, followed by Kishikawa sensei's *dōjō* precepts, *kendō kata* and then *keiko*.



Figure 5. Kishikawa sensei's Shoujinkan kendō dōjō, Hong Kong

<sup>3</sup> See Shoujinkan Kendo's homepage at <http://kendohk.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Hong Kong Judo Kan's homepage at <http://www.hongkongjudokan.com/index.shtml>.

Various students had different ideas about the practice but they noticed and felt many of the key concepts that we had been talking about in our class. Comments included:

The tour is enjoyable. It helps me understand more about the traditional culture of Japan. I wish I can try the training when I go to Japan next year. (Keith, Hong Kong Japanese Studies major student)

This is my first time to see the whole process of practicing *kendō* and all the ten *kendō kata*. *Kendō* is very physically challenging and has fast-movement training. *Kiai* is really important to show the spirit. Everyone in the *dōjō* respects their partners. (Helen, Hong Kong Research Assistant)

This is my first time to see such a traditional activity of Japan. People bowing their heads to each other and the order of introducing yourself from the youngest to the most experienced one gave me a very deep impression. I was thinking about all the manners and Japanese *sempai-kōhai* system when watching *kendō*. (Queenie, Hong Kong Japanese Studies major student)

It was great to have seen people practicing *kendō* outside Japan, so perhaps I will just quote Confucius's saying to thank your *kendō sensei* for his efforts of teaching *kendō* in Hong Kong: “道不遠人” (The Way of the Tao is Never Far, 道は人に遠からず). (Rosemary, Hong Kong Japanese Studies major student)

Students, even first timers noticed *kendō* and budō's more esoteric ideas such as *rei*, *kiai* (explosive scream), *sempai-kōhai* (juniors and seniors) relationships, and that notions that *kendō* has is religious but in its practice not-religious. One student even commented on the Taoist principles infused deeply in the practice of *kendō*.

This was a good start in terms how enabling students to digest so many of the intangibles found in budō. They were beginning to point out and identify the qualities and characteristics of budō. Moreover, they could identify the differences between Japanese budō, in this case *kendō* and their own indigenous martial art systems.

The next step was to enhance my students' direct experience with budō. In order to do that, in the first several classes of the semester, I demonstrated *iaidō* to allow students see their “professor” walk the talk. Here they had a chance to see a *hakama* (pleated pants), *tōrei* (sword greeting), touch a sword and watch an *enbu* (demonstration).

The *iaidō* demonstration was preceded in the following week by a *kendō* demonstration which included both *kendō kata* and *keiko*. On this occasion students could experience a different *budō*, ideas like *ki-ken-tai-ichi* (spirit, sword and body as one), the importance of partners working together as well as the rigidity of both the *kata* and the *keiko* motions. My partner, skillfully demonstrated *kendō* and *budō*'s principles to the students and staff who attended the demonstration.



Figure 6: *Iaidō* (Japanese swordsmanship) demonstration

After the demonstration, students and staff were encouraged to share their impressions, thoughts and ideas. This sharing session raised many interesting questions, especially related to cultural differences, the meaning of *kiai*, the rigid forms and attention to fine detail. The practicality of the techniques was rightfully questioned and allowed us to engage in a thoughtful discussion of *kendō*'s tenets and what Draeger (1973b, 52–53) calls mastery of the *kata* or physical *kōans* 公案 (paradoxical questions), the act of solving the physical *kōan* filled *kata* 形 which are metaphors for conundrums and situations that evoke crisis which are prominent training methodologies in Zen Buddhism.

Interestingly but not atypically, attendees found it difficult to delink the presence of the sword, an opponent and the warrior like yells from a path of cultivation. It seemed inconceivable to some students, that *kendō* was anything but violence and a physical set of techniques related to fighting that was formalized into a hobby.

Lastly, to help dispel that violent impression and as part of our tutorial, students themselves have been learning and practicing *kendō kata* on a weekly basis.



Figure 7. Students bowing to the *kamidana*

In the tutorial itself, we borrowed Irie Kōhei's (Professor Emeritus from Tsukuba University) to introduce, discuss and understand the *kendō kata* and budō. In particular we focused on: (1) the combative characteristic; (2) the religious characteristic; (3) the aesthetic characteristic; (4) the educational characteristic; and (5) the competitive characteristic (Irie 2005, 155–69). The usefulness of these broad categories really helps students to break down the *kata* into digestible and relevant components. For example, through practicing *kata*, we begin by introducing the concept of *rei*. Students learn to turn to the symbolic *kamidana* (a miniature shrine to the patron saint of the *dōjō*) and bow followed by bowing to each other. Based on Irie's ideas, we can introduce the religious significance of the bow, why we bow to the *kamidana*, the cultural narrative of the sword bearing a deity or being sacred. Bowing to each other prior to beginning *kendo kata* practice also reemphasizes the idea that *kendō* begins and ends with *rei*. It allowed the students to better understand how *rei* is based upon Confucian principles which make a clear distinction between the self and others, and also demonstrates the will to maintain harmonious relationships. It is a socially established pattern of contact (Irie 2005, 155–69). The weekly practice of *kata* gave students the chance to experience, although in a limited fashion *rei* in terms of Buddhist ideas of disciplining the mind through *shugyō* (ascetic practices) (Irie 2005, 155–69).



Figure 8: Explaining *kendō kata* to students

Importantly, the physical practice of *kendō kata* allows the student to experience what Christmas Humphreys (in Suzuki 1977) articulates as “the intellect only being able to toy with the concept and what only intuition can understand”. Simply, through the physical practice of *kendō kata*, students developed an understanding, albeit non-intellectual understanding of the more esoteric aspects of *kendō kata*. For instance, students gain insight into the idea of *ki-ken-tai-ichi*, as they try to make the *bokuto* (wooden swords) a physical extension of themselves in order to “press” their partner/opponent into moving according to the prescribed kata patterns.

Another example is the embodiment of *yūgen* (suggestiveness, tranquility, elegance) or *miyabi* (courtliness and refinement) when doing *kata*. Simply explaining these abstractions would certainly not do them justice in terms of their deeper meaning neither would they help students of *kendō* imbue the basic tenets of *kendō*. By watching a more experienced *kendō-ka* (*kendō* practitioner) perform *kata*, through visiting the Shoujinkan, and through practice, in a matter of weeks students actually go through a process of refinement of their motions, starting to carry themselves differently when they perform *kata* and they begin to demonstrate a certain level of tranquility when performing the *kata*. The transformation is interesting to see, even if it is just two or three months of practice.

Lastly, through weekly practice students experienced Irie’s educational characteristics (*kyōiku-sei*) of budō. This became clear when I explained to students that merely performing the *kata* in a physical way divorced the *kata* from its ability to cultivate and forge discipline, courtesy and sincerity. It is the manner



in which we perform the *kata* that makes it budō and allows budō to be practiced by men, women, the young and the old. Virtues of sincerity, courtesy, compassion and discipline conveyed through correct practice of budō is what distinguishes budō from *bujutsu* and makes it possible to be a lifetime pursuit or way.

### How to Fill a Cup That Is Already Full?

A particularly interesting challenge while teaching about budō in a Chinese context is breaking through the “historical glaze” that seems to tint some students’ views of budō, *kendō* and the *samurai* tradition. The resistance to learning about budō includes: (1) an association with violence; (2) ethnocentricity; and (3) resistance to a non-Asian teaching Asians about Japanese culture.

In the first case, it is always interesting to note how some of my Chinese students continue to see budō through the prism of violence, the *kamikaze* and the horrible events that took place in China during World War II in the name of *bushidō* or at least using the representative weapon of the *samurai*, the *katana* (Japanese sword). For example, as part of my efforts to introduce budō culture in the classroom, I gave both *iaidō* and *kendō* demonstrations (*kata* and *keiko*). One student had difficulties in seeing through the sword and training of the principles of the sword. After some discussions and actually experiencing *kendō kata*, especially understanding the training principles and connection with Zen and Confucian ideas of learning, this student has grown to comprehend *kendō*’s principles.

Ethnocentricity showed its face when discussing budō and training, especially from students who had historically different understandings of Japan and China. Some students and cultures still tend to see Japan as a little brother, an off-shoot of Chinese civilization, a shadow of China’s rich and long history. In this second case, it was important to demonstrate the independent nature of budō, how it shared many ideas with its Chinese influences, but how it has branched off to become an independent and unique cultural practice of Japan. This was and continues to be challenging when teaching *budō* because ethnocentricity colours one’s interpretations of virtues, manners to communicate, ways to cultivate oneself, and what the cultivation of self actually means.

In the last case, resistance to a non-Asian teaching Asians about Japanese culture reminded me of *Nihonjinron* (theories/discussions about the Japanese)-type

arguments that only Japanese could truly understand Japanese culture. For many students and students who were born and raised in Asia, it was and is initially difficult to image a non-Asian teaching Asians about their own culture. In practice, of course it is different. By demonstrating budō in several forms, preparing materials and organizing lectures that engaged students about budō from historical, cultural, religious and theories of modernization, students could quickly get past their initial stereotypes.

## Conclusion

The development, initiation and teaching of a university level course on budō have been a significant undertaking to say the least. From finding good sources to integrating and articulating practical training, I have been challenged to find novel ways to teach less than concrete ideas. Through that process I have been able to learn a tremendous amount about budō, teaching and training. I have had to reflect on my own experience learning budō in Canada, Japan and Hong Kong. I have had to adjust to different interpretations and cultural milieus while attempting to preserve the teachings of my teachers. Importantly, this course has compelled me to more deeply examine the Confusion and Zen aspects of budō and their intuitive learning approaches.

What is the best way to teach a university level course about budō? Although, I can give you some hints, frankly I am still experimenting with what works and does not work. What I can share is that you need to take a comprehensive approach, use many kinds of materials, and incorporate opportunities to experience budō and to try budō. Through this course I discovered that Western students have slightly different needs than students from North East Asia (China, Korea and Japan). Students who could not read *kanji* (Chinese characters) also needed tools to help them understand many of the principles of *budō* that are conveyed through *kanji*. In contrast, students from Asian countries required further explanations about the principles of budō and *bushidō* in order to separate *bushidō* and budō from militarism and militarism from the Japanese. Lastly, based on my experience, I believe strongly that students need to actually train in a budō through the duration of the course. In my case, students trained in *kendō kata* and the *kata* proved to be a wonderful instrument to teach about *kendō* and budō, incorporate the historical, cultural and religious characteristics of budō.

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