

KENDŌ forum

by Roald Knutsen

PART THREE

Imagination in Kata

There are two passages in the Chinese classical military treatise "*The Art of War*" which sum up the whole principle of Budo kata. They state the truth for all to see and make the effort to understand. They are: "The doctrine of war is to follow the enemy situation in order to decide on battle"; and "Therefore when those experienced in war move they make no mistakes, when they act, their resources are limitless". In my last article in this series I pointed out that the opening postures in *kata* need the closest study for the initial *kamae* contains possibly the only warning of an opponent's intentions and incorrect evaluation can spell defeat.

You do not need to be a military philosopher to realise this. In Kendo, for example, the opening *kamae* in most *kata* are made at about 18 feet interval. Maybe inexperienced men would overlook the vital necessity to interpret the opponent's *kamae* at this long distance. But move in towards the opponent to normal fighting or contact distance and the same postures become much more in need of correct interpretation. If you haven't done your homework death metaphorically stares you straight in the face! In Iai-jutsu and Iai-do, *kamae* is at an even closer *maai* to your opponent. There is absolutely no room for error in Iai if you are to survive a real fight. Remove *zanshin* from the opening move of proper Iai and you are truly left with an empty form — the "posturing of dolls" with as little purpose.

In most of the greater *ryu kata* provides the framework that demonstrates the theory; the effectiveness of the style depends on the dynamism of the higher masters in interpreting and explaining the forms. Each and every form should suggest to the trained creative mind of the student a variety of further possibilities. Bokuden *sensei* is reputed to have said that once the theory of a weapon, especially the sword, is grasped then that theory can easily be applied to every other possible sort of weapon and even unarmed when facing weapons; it is all the same basic theory. Again, I don't think this was meant in only the narrow physical sense but with the widest possible application to *heiho*, or tactics. The point is that in the weaponed arts it is necessary to become a superb technician and above all an artist. There is no room in classical *Bujutsu* for sham and bombast. To understand these arts requires a deep insight into oneself and the realisation that in the mass of difficulties that beset the path to understanding, the apparent chaos, there is a strong thread of the rule of law. Sham and bombast are *satsujin-ken*; the proper way towards self-realisation is *katsujin-ken*. These are the classical Budo terms. The study in depth *kata*, carefully and honestly done, must lead towards understanding and eventually to *katsujin-ken*.

We look at *kata* as demonstrating the main principles of practical fighting, but we must also view it, especially the role of *Shidachi*, as highlighting the principles of the rightful and proper use of strength to oppose the wrongful or indiscriminate use of power. This is the very core of *kata* in all the mature *Bujutsu* and Budo systems and, in my opinion, all the modern Budo systems have, to a greater or lesser extent, lost sight of the truth. The headlong rush into competition and sport rivalry seen over the past 20

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Under 71 kgs

B.U.S.F.

1. S. O'Connor (London U.)
2. C. Phillips (Manchester U.)
3. M. Stirling (Heriot-Watt U.)
3. B. Gallagher (Manchester U.)

Under 86 kgs

B.C.S.A./B.P.S.A.

1. R. Parnell (Bristol P.)

Under 71 kgs

B.U.S.F.

1. C. Loughlan (Glasgow U.)
2. M. Nicholas (Oxford U.)
3. K. Pearson (Stirling U.)
3. M. Gannon (London U.)

B.C.S.A./B.P.R.A.

3. J. Tyler (Lanchester P.)

Conclusions

This year's championships results showed an improvement in the spread of student judo with eighteen clubs gaining a medal in the men's individual championships. It also demonstrated the continued strength of Manchester and London who accounted for eleven medals between them.

Fund for World University Judo — Championships at Rio

The B.U.J.A. are endeavouring to raise funds to prepare and send a full team to the World University Judo Championships being held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from the 1st-5th November 1978.

To succeed we need your help.

Please try to raise money at your university, college or polytechnic Judo Club and send it to the fund officer.

Apart from donations and other funds raised, we are hoping to collect large quantities of trading stamps and cigarette coupons. If your friends and relatives can provide any of these, please collect them up and send them to the Fund Officer at address below.

The Target is £10,000.—We must start collecting now.

Enquiries to: World University Championships Fund Officers, Miss Anne Swinton, 20 Battersea High Street, London, S.W.11.

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years puts Kendo in the forefront of the offenders, especially in Japan, but nonetheless, if there is to be proper understanding of *kata* then there must be a return to the classical ways of study.

As I have constantly said, the use of imagination and sound interpretation of forms aims directly towards constructive and artistic *kata*. For example, if the initial form requires *Shidachi* to avoid a through cut from *Uchidachi*, then there should be as little delay as possible in returning the attack. If there is any delay or a pause then the person missing the initial strike will certainly not oblige by remaining transfixed in the end posture, he will already be recovering. This comes back to the feeling of a real fight and applies equally in all Budo systems. Maybe we are required to demonstrate the forms of *kata* precisely and some-

times relatively slowly, but in dojo training it is important to show the real meaning of the forms. Now in *Kata*, especially *Iai-do*, we tend to aim towards a flexible body, a softening of the muscles, and general physical efficiency. The objective is first to train the body. But in the reality of battle we may need to make cuts harder and with more force. So the actual aim of *kata* is to train the body to respond in a co-ordinated fashion and to train the mind to evaluate form and to select the correct tactics according to the situation.

The classical maxim is: "Therefore when those experienced in war move they make no mistakes; when they act, their resources are limitless". To practice *kata* properly one must first master the basic physical movement but then turn to the real

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intention of the form. Realism is vital in complicated or long established swordsmanship. If this is done then understanding will come quite naturally at the first or physical level, and this understanding will gradually open the inner eye to the other shades of meaning. For this reason *kata* should always be taught properly. The developed techniques will always need deep and prolonged study but there is, to my mind, no reason at all to teach any form other than the strictly orthodox one or confusion will sooner or later occur.

In the *Nihon Kendo-kata* the forms are far from complicated; they are not physically difficult to master when compared to many *kobudo* techniques. And yet only a tiny percentage of students really seem to understand. This being the case then realism is clearly needed to fire the imagination and to give life to the forms.

Kata is not the slavish repetition of techniques because such study is arid and devoid of meaning. If this is the only way that you can practice then you may as well give up because you are wasting your time. Practice in this way means that if you train all your life you will never understand and will only be able to repeat what you have studied like a machine. If you always approach *kata*, whatever your Budo discipline, in the spirit of enquiry then your practice will be fertile and productive. Gradually such training guided

and moulded by the discipline of each form and the full *kata* series will develop and deepen until ultimately you may reach *gokui*, or intuitive understanding.

These three short articles have been offered because I feel there is a very real lack of understanding about the nature of *kata* to-day. Some Budo people have no wish to understand or perhaps no ability to do so; but there must be many who would like the chance to study properly. However, my feeling is that the longer the day when you do start proper *kata* training is deferred then the less your chance to find mature masters who can teach. By teaching I mean with true insight. Even in Kendo which is supposed to be based on *Kata* there are only a few excellent *kata* teachers left, far fewer than before the World War II. How many such masters are now left in Judo in this country, for example? We live in days when sincerity is not valued, and professionalism is the only yardstick by which most Budo people measure their teachers. Very, very few professionals have the slightest idea of true *kata* and by definition have even less idea of the real meaning of the Budo tradition. If you want to study proper Budo then you have to be quite strong and positive on this point, the alternative is the decline and eventual end of the tradition and its replacement by —what?

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