Three Budo Masters and Their Impact in Martial Arts

Introduction

In *Three Budo Masters*, John Stevens presents facets of the lives of Jigoro Kano, Gichin Funakoshi, and Morihei Ueshiba. These *budo* masters significantly influenced martial arts and the world with their teachings and philosophies in judo, karate, and aikido in such a way that the growth of these arts has become integrated in many societies today. I will present these masters in a similar format to Stevens with glimpses of their lives and developing influence beginning with Kano, then Funakoshi, followed by Ueshiba and conclude with determining a few of their similarities and differences.

Jigoro Kano (1860-1938)

Jigoro Kano was born six years after the Treaty of Kanagawa, an event that marked the beginning of Japan's "introduction" to the rest of the world. He was born to a wealthy family with Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian scholars on his father's ancestral line and prominent sake brewing clan on his mother's side. He had a strict and disciplined upbringing and moved to Tokyo as a child with his father, a government official who promoted the modernization of Meiji Japan. This was a time of change for Kano, who learned from his teacher, Keido Ubukata, "[that] while a classical education was invaluable, from now on Japanese students needed to acquaint themselves thoroughly with Western culture as well.[1]"

Entering the martial arts world was not easy for Kano. With the end of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), even martial artists admonished Kano with words such as, "Times have changed and such things are no longer useful[2]." Indeed, times of peace and Westernization were upon Japan and some writers asserted that jujutsu became unnecessary due to the decrease of violence in everyday life. However, Kano was bullied continually both in school and out and became increasingly determined to learn jujutsu. With perseverance he found his first instructor, Hachinosuke Fukuda of the Tenshin Shin'yo Ryu, who specialized in pressure points and grappling. Like the scholar that he was, Kano often tried to learn the detailed explanations for every technique—from the placement of the hands and feet to the angle of entry—but Fukuda taught practically and continuously threw Kano until he learned from firsthand experience. By the time Kano was twenty-two years old in 1882, he felt that jujutsu should be preserved as a "Japanese cultural treasure[3]", but it needed to be adapted as Kodokan Judo, a discipline of both mind and body to cultivate wisdom and virtuous living. By adapting jujutsu, it would be better serving of society by influencing both individuals and society. Thus, began Kodokan Judo, known as "the way of softness" and "the path that follows the flow"; Kano interpreted it

[1]Stevens, John. *Three Budo Masters.* New York: Kodansha America, 1995, 13
[2]Stevens,14
[3]Stevens, 21

as the, "most efficient use of energy[4]."

By 1885, the applicants for Kodokan Judo increased and foreigners began to ask for instruction as well. Over the next few years, Kodokan members began fighting in tournaments sponsored by the National Police Agency and in 1888, Kano and Rev. T. Lindsay delivered a paper (and possibly a demonstration) to the Asiatic Society of Japan. In 1889, Kano traveled across Europe to inspect educational institutions and later promoted education in the provinces of Japan. He returned to Tokyo and in 1894, the Sino-Japanese War began and judo became more popular due to the "war fever." Postwar, Kano and his disciples such as Yoshiaki Yamashita, Jojiro Tomita, and Mitsuyo Maeda performed demonstrations that led to increased foreign awareness of judo. In 1909, Kano became a member for the International Olympic Committee and was concerned with whether judo should be included in the Olympics due to the competition and nationalistic elements that would detract from the spirit of Kodokan Judo. Nevertheless, Kano endeavored to battle these elements with his worldwide lectures and teachings via his own spirit and his words, "The teaching of one virtuous person can influence many; that which can be learned well by one generation can be passed onto a hundred[5]."

Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957)

Gichin Funakoshi was born in Okinawa, an island rich in culture and controlled by the Satsuma samurai overlords of the southernmost island of mainland Japan. The Satsuma reinforced a previous ban of private ownership of weapons—even for self-defense; with the strategy of "take away their weapons so they will be easily controlled." However, the Okinawans did not allow themselves to be submissive; they integrated the Chinese martial arts, learned via trade and cultural interactions, and developed ways to wield every day tools as weapons. The "Chinese Hand", the original meaning of karate, and the Okinawan martial arts was integrated into folk dance and was practiced at night behind garden walls.

Funakoshi was born into a genteel family, his grandfather was a renowned Confucian scholar who had tutored the royal family; however, his father wasted away their family fortune on liquor and gambling. Funakoshi had been born two months premature, but had lived to be a healthy boy and was hardly ill in his adult life. Funakoshi was raised in a period of Meiji reform and a time when heritage and symbols such as kimonos and topknots were being overturned in society—he even rescinded his acceptance from Tokyo Medical College because they did not permit topknots. While Funakoshi did not particularly support the "Obstinate Party" of traditional society, his family was furious when he finally cut off his topknot as a prerequisite to accepting a teaching position when he was twenty years old.

There is some discrepancy about how Funakoshi first learned karate, but for the

[4]Stevens, 21
[5]Stevens, 47

sake of this paper, I will present his time with karate master, Yasutsune Azato, at the age of eleven. During this time, martial arts were still studied secretively. Azato's teachings were of *kata*—to "turn your hands and feet into swords," proper deportment, and dignified manners, to know both yourself and your opponent, and to understand the world's affairs. Funakoshi often used karate in defending himself and chose not to counterattack his assailants; and because he was level headed, he often mediated problems within the school he taught for and the surrounding hamlets. Around 1892, karate in Okinawa was not so secretive and demonstrations of karate began. In 1902, Funakoshi also gave a demonstration and karate was soon integrated into physical education. In 1922, Funakoshi was selected as the representative for Okinawan karate in the National Athletic Exhibition held in Tokyo by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Though he was not necessarily the most skilled, Funakoshi was a scholar, educator, good public speaker, and in his mature fifties and a most appropriate candidate. During this time, Jigoro Kano and Funakoshi reacquainted themselves and Funakoshi decided to teach a few *kata* at the Kodokan.

Funakoshi is not considered the creator of karate, but rather as the father of modern karate. His efforts led to the national promotion of karate and he continued his efforts throughout his whole life. Funakoshi's particular style was named Shotokan Ryu by his students, though he believed that all karate should be thought of as "one" instead of distinct entities. As World War II began, training increased with the imminent possibility of young men being drafted into war and in 1945, the Shotokan dojo was destroyed during an air raid. Afterwards, Funakoshi rebuilt Shotokan karate, but times had changed. Karate lost much of its spiritual element and grew in the realm of competition. However, many foreigners began to learn karate and it spread overseas largely in the 1950s. Due to Funakoshi's perseverance and dedication to education are we able to have karate across the world today.

Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969)

Morihei Ueshiba was born in Tanabe, Wakayama Prefecture, known as the "Province of *Kii*" which many considered a node for the flow of cosmic energy. He was a sickly infant, and though Ueshiba performed amazing acts, his health wavered throughout his life. His father was a village council member and his mother loved art and literature and was very pious. Ueshiba had a photographic memory and preferred the Shingon Buddhism teachings to Confucianism; he often practiced mantra and Shingon visualization techniques and had visions throughout his life. Ueshiba's father, Yoroku, had him learn sumo; later Ueshiba learned that "one must be strong enough to overcome brute force" when Yoroku was attacked by thugs whom political opponents hired. Ueshiba loved learning, but did not enjoy being a classroom and entered an abacus academy where he learned at his own pace. He was hired as an accountant by the local tax bureau but believed that the law was unjust toward fishermen. Ueshiba participated in a protest that led to a clash with his father, who was part of the village council.

Yoroku funded Ueshiba's journey to Tokyo in 1902 where he apprenticed himself

to a merchant and began learning Tenshin Shin'yo Ryu jujutsu and possibly Shinkage Ryu swordsmanship as well. During this time, he developed beriberi—a thiamine deficiency that damages the nervous system—and returned to Tanabe. With the war between Russia and Japan looming closer, Ueshiba began training to recover his health and prepared to being drafted—but was ultimately rejected because of his height, 5'1.5". Instead of being relieved, Ueshiba endeavored to stretch his spine to meet the height requirement and was accepted into the reserves near Osaka. During his army assignment, he learned to use the bayonet and learned under Masakatsu Nakai to train in Yagyu Ryu jujutsu, spears, and swords. However, Ueshiba's hand-to-hand combat was limited during this time, largely due to letters from his father asking that his son be kept from the front lines.

Postwar, Ueshiba had difficulty finding his place in life—his father later built a dojo where his son could "train his cares away[6]." Eventually Ueshiba decided to become a pioneer and recruited others to move to Shirataki, a fertile, but remote land in Hokkaido. During this time, Ueshiba practiced martial arts and used it in confrontations with highwaymen. When meeting Sokaku Takeda, Grandmaster of the Daito Ryu Aikijutsu, Ueshiba was entranced. Takeda's ability was not due to his physical body, but rather his technical ability, perfect timing, mind control, and mastery of *Ki*. With *aiki*, the blending of positive and negative energy, Takeda could throw any number of attackers.

Ueshiba left Hokkaido upon hearing his father was ill and headed to Tanabe, but felt a calling in Ayabe. There he met Onisaburo Deguchi, a leader for a "new religion" called Omoto-kyo. After grieving for the death of his father, Ueshiba joined Deguchi in 1920 and taught budo to the Omoto-kyo members. However, the government began fearing Deguchi's influence and arrested him, though Ueshiba was a new member and was relatively unaffected. Two years later, Takeda visited and certified Ueshiba as a Daito Ryu instructor, though he and Deguchi loathed each other.

Following a trek with Deguchi to Inner Mongolia and traveling back by himself after Deguchi was rearrested, Ueshiba's life was often in peril while traveling. Ueshiba changed with these trials and began training even more with live weapons and gained insights that led to what Stevens refers to as, "incredible powers: [Ueshiba] could displace enormous boulders, leap unbelievable distances, and dispose of any attack—anywhere, anytime[7]." In 1925, Admiral Isamu Takeshita, who was a patron for Kano and Funakoshi and now Ueshiba, organized a demonstration in Tokyo for several dignitaries. Due to Ueshiba's ties with Deguchi, there was controversy of Ueshiba's presence at government events. However, Deguchi encouraged Ueshiba cut ties with him in order to fulfill "[his] purpose in life... to reveal the true meaning of budo to the world[8]." Later at several makeshift dojos, he taught many high-ranking army and navy officers,

[6]Stevens, 97
[7]Stevens, 112
[8]Stevens, 113

aristocrats, and wealthy businessmen. As with Kano and Funakoshi, Ueshiba's students included women as well. In 1930, Kano requested a demonstration from Ueshiba and was very impressed, even calling it his "ideal budo; it is a true and genuine judo[9]."

In 1931, the Kobukan, "Hall of Majestic Martial Arts," was built as a dojo and living quarters for Ueshiba and his select live-in students. After a those years of difficulty with the government and Deguchi, Ueshiba was finally freed from that quagmire of political power struggles and became the Chief Martial Arts Advisor of the Manchukuo government in 1932. After war broke out with China in 1937 and WWII in 1941, Ueshiba was sent to China for peace treaties, but nothing arose from those efforts. Ueshiba hated teaching at the Espionage and Military Police Academies and withdrew from his positions stating illness. He moved to Iwama to recuperate and develop aikido, "the Art of Peace." After Japan surrendered in 1945, all martial arts were banned except karate, and the Kobukan Foundation was disbanded. In 1948, Ueshiba's students and supporters regrouped to form the Aikikai Foundation and the post war ideals of non-competitive arts with spiritual and physical wellbeing was found in aikido.

Similarities and Differences between These Three Budo Masters

These three masters were renowned not for their physical stature, but their skills and influence. In fact, Kano was the tallest of the three at 5'4" and all of them had an aura of strength that was likely derived as much from their spirit as their physical bodies. Though as mentioned by Stevens, Kano and Funakoshi may not have been considered as technically the best martial artists, they were all educated and gained influence in their circles and government that led to their great influence in Japan and across seas. It is likely that Admiral Isamu Takeshita played a great role as their patron to open the international doors to the Japanese martial arts. Stevens writes that Kano was probably the least technically adept of the three, especially since he only trained full time for about ten years; however, Kano exemplified the role of a gentlemanly scholar and preceded Funakoshi and Ueshiba. This is not mentioned to belie Kano's abilities, but rather mark one of the differences of these three masters. In fact, the respect that each master had for the other two is unbounded.

While Kano and Funakoshi's martial arts were rationally grounded and one may even say modern with planned syllabi, Ueshiba's *budo* was ethereal and often remarked with words such as "superhuman" and "otherworldly." Relatively, judo and karate were easier to understand in introduction and Ueshiba's students usually had background in judo and/or karate before learning that aikido from Ueshiba meant that nothing was practiced the same way twice. Though they were acquainted with one another, these three masters did not exchange many techniques, though Kano was able to use some of Funakoshi's karate movements as part of some judo *katas*. Additionally, all three developed movements that became more defined by proper timing, circular motions, *ki*, and concentration.

[9]Stevens, 115

With their philosophies that integrated the physical body, spiritual betterment, and respect, was the martial arts able to be understood especially in the times of war and recovery. Though each of these masters realized that martial arts would unconditionally be changed with time, their efforts helped preserve a sense of what one may truly seek as the martial spirit and purpose. Though many writers and martial artists have different definitions and ideas of what is the true budo way, the efforts of Kano, Funakoshi, and Ueshiba aimed to shape its modern role to be more than competition and sport. It is important to understand not only those philosophies, but realize exactly how they gained enough of a foothold in order to imprint a mark in history—that through teaching others are the present ideals passed on, though clothed in different forms.