

Style or System?

Over the years I have been asked by different people what style or system I study / teach? Unfortunately (in my opinion) this can often lead to a more complex answer than the individual may like.

The answer is that I teach my style of a Kempo Ju-Jitsu system.

However, many people use the terms style and system interchangeably whereas if we use the dictionary definitions, testing we can see that they refer to different (but related) things:

System: an ordered and comprehensive assemblage of facts, principles, doctrines, or the like in a particular field of knowledge

Style: a distinctive, formal, or characteristic manner of expression in words, music, painting, etc...

So, to me the system of martial art I study is whichever one I have studied or am currently studying, under another instructor following their system, be it Wado Ryu Karate, Shotokan Karate, Contact Karate, Fung Shao Kung-Fu, Goshin Kai Aikido, Traditional Judo, Seitei Kobujutsu, JKD, Dacayana etc... These systems have / had an ordered and structured set of principles in their respective field (i.e. Karate, Aikido, FMA, Weapons, etc...) laid out for a student to follow in logical progression, this is their syllabus of technique, and allows us to progress from absolute beginners to advanced students within a set amount of time partially dictated by how often we train, how well the techniques and principles are explained and how quickly we absorb them.

The study of a system or systems of martial art are what allow us to go on and create our own style of martial art. By this I don't mean we get a 1st Degree Black Belt then toddle off to create My-Kwon-Jutsu and award ourselves a 10th Degree! No, what I mean is we take the knowledge our instructor has given us from their system and begin to make it work for us as an individual, now I admit there are some great martial artists out there that simply don't do this, they teach exactly what they were taught how they were taught, they continue to teach Grand Master Joe Bloggs system and style, does this make them poor martial artists? In my opinion no it doesn't, but they are not developing and evolving the martial arts, they are not keeping them alive, they are attempting (sometimes without realising it) to keep them in a form of stasis. Sometimes it is because they are unable to think 'outside the box' and in other cases it is because they feel they are dishonouring their instructor(s) by altering or changing what they taught them over the years.

I consider myself lucky in the sense that all the main influences in my Martial Arts journey encourage you to develop your own way of doing things, your own style. My main instructor over the last 38 years of training and studying the martial way taught me around 65 / 70% of my systems, the main one being Kempo Ju-Jitsu. When we share a mat together you can see the similarities, but because of the other influences in my life such as FMA (primarily Dacayana Eskrima) my style of performing the system is different. This is because that is how I have been taught, what works for your instructor perfectly may not work for you, you have to

adapt it to make it effective, you have to make it your own, you have to have your own style 😊

Yours in Budo,

Shihan D. Court

(August 2022)