

The Contemporary Martial Arts Master-Teacher as a Compete Warrior

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Abstract

Studi Purpose- Background. Learning martial arts, even the Japanese budō tradition, can be limited to a single discipline. But for comprehensiveness, it is possible to study a whole range of disciplines.

Problem. What characterizes a master-teacher who has mastered various martial arts? What distinguishes the master we call a complete warrior?

Method. Ten renowned masters of the highest rank who achieved high ranks and titles in various martial arts disciplines were considered. A comprehensive index measurement and qualitative analysis were used. Knowledge derived from direct acquaintance with the author, who has been active in the martial arts community for many years (48 years of participant observation), as well as data from the literature on the subject were used. Results and

Conclusions As a complete warrior, the master-teacher possesses skills in wielding various weapons, not just saber fencing. He also possesses proven hand-to-hand combat skills, both at a distance and in close combat. In each case, these were decades of daily or regular practice—practical study.

Keywords Fighting Arts, Martial Arts, *Budō*, Mastery, Versatility

1. Introduction

In the popular perception of martial arts, *budō* masters (Nakiri 2015) are considered to be co-creators of the *budō* concept (Stevens 1995) or, as a collective term, relatively randomly selected, distinguished representatives of individual disciplines within Japanese *budō* (cf. Braeley 2022). These are not often masters who achieve high or the highest competence (confirmed by licenses or certificates) in more than one discipline, for example, in both *judo* and *karate*.

Why do we use the category "**master-teacher**" and not, for example, Grand Master? Master-teacher is a category used in the humanistically oriented anthropology of martial arts and in the GTFA / General Theory of Fighting Arts (Cynarski 2004, 2019). It is important that this concept not be confused with a sports champion, a Grand Master of some order or secret organization, or another trainer or guru. This refers to a master who is a teacher and educator, teaching the martial art and showing the correct path (Chinese *Tao/Dao*, Japanese *dō*, Korean *do*). All basic concepts, such as "martial art" and "combat sport," are given according to the GTFA (Cynarski, Skowron 2014).

While a warrior once had to learn all methods of weapon and hand-to-hand combat, including the methods of fighting potential enemies, today's warrior most often learns these things as an enthusiast, a connoisseur. For the purposes of modern self-defense and warfare, there is no need to study martial arts using numerous traditional weapons. However, **real self-defense** utilizes many different combat methods, and a broader repertoire of skills is the advantage of possessing a variety of combat means with the ability to adapt them to the situation (Cynarski 2026).

Today's **Way of the Warrior**, practiced for self-improvement and recreation, building fitness and positive health potential, may be limited to a single specialized discipline. But from a maximalist perspective, it is tempting to learn as much as possible of the technical richness of even just Japanese martial arts.

The **technical richness** of Japanese *budō*, as a set of disciplines and "ways of war," is a multifaceted phenomenon. It ranges from the teachings of old, traditional schools (*kobudō*) to modern variations (*gendai budō*). Older schools primarily taught the use of various weapons, while hand-to-hand combat (without weapons) was merely an adjunct to fencing, shooting, and other skills.

The range of weapons determined combat at the **appropriate distance**. Before the advent of firearms, bows and throwing weapons such as *shuriken* and *shaken* (rods and stars) or *tantō* (knives) were used. Furthermore,

weapons on a rope or chain, with weights and blades (*manriki kusari*, *kusari-gama*) were used. Pole weapons included the staff (*bō*), the spear (*yari*), the glaive (*naginata*), and later also *jūkendō* – fighting with bayonets (cf. Hall 2012). Middle-range combat refers to fencing (swords, sabers). For close combat, a knife (*tantō*), fan, or brass knuckles were used. Only in close combat were grappling techniques and various bare-handed techniques (*yawara*, *jūjutsu*, *taijutsu*, *kenpō*, *karate*, or other names) employed.

Old martial arts schools, such as the *Tenshinshōden Katorishintō-ryū*, still teaching since the 15th century, include instruction in combat with a variety of weapons. Technical and tactical skills include fighting with the Japanese saber against other weapons, including the *naginata*, long staff, and *yari*, dual saber combat, *shuriken*, hand-to-hand combat (*yawara*), and so on. The entire curriculum, including principles of strategy, psychology, espionage, and fortification construction, is referred to as *heihō*. Essentially, however, it is a school of fencing – *kenjutsu*, because in those days, the Japanese *bushi* carried a pair of sabers at his side, commonly known as a pair of samurai swords. This is very similar to the Polish nobleman of the 17th century, who also carried a saber and primarily honed his fencing skills.

Hardness and Softness

Today's martial arts systems focus more on unarmed combat. Today, bladed weapons are no longer carried, and possession of other weapons is significantly limited. Therefore, due to their usefulness in self-defense, martial arts that primarily use the body, such as *jūjutsu* and *karate*, exported from Japan to the Western world, have gained popularity.

Among the many varieties of fighting arts (martial arts and combat sports), there are striking-based varieties, such as various forms of boxing and kickboxing, and grappling-based varieties, such as wrestling. *Karate*, in most varieties, relies on fighting from a greater distance, while *judo* techniques require grappling. This division is often sharp and clear, especially in combat sports. In sport *karate* or kickboxing, a competitor is punished for grappling, while in *judo* or sport *sambo*, the opposite is true for striking. Furthermore, striking can be divided into contact types – from non-contact, through semi- and light-contact, to full-contact, and there are other formulas, such as knock-down or oriental rules / K-1.

Bolli (2008) distinguishes five varieties of fighting arts that can be analyzed: 1) performance arts; 2) internal arts; 3) weapons arts; 4) self-defense arts; and 5) combat sports (grappling, striking, and combined). Among combined combat sports, we find those varieties in which the competitor must demonstrate a wider range of skills. In sport *jūjutsu*, combat is fought at range and from a grappling position, also on the ground, but usually in an interrupted format. In MMA, it is similar, but with full contact and quite realistically. Here, the competitor must cope with various positions and distances, but without the use of any weapons.

A modern warrior, whether a soldier or special agent,

competing in competitive sports, or simply teaching real combat, should possess real skills. In close combat, they should practice both grappling and striking skills. A broad repertoire of technical and tactical skills offers greater application possibilities, which is a distinct advantage. These skills are sometimes divided into *Gō* and *Jū*, such as hardness and softness (Cynarski, 2000; Cynarski, 2004), "hard *ki*" and "soft *ki*." In the *Yin-Yang* circle (Jap. *In-Yō*), opposing elements intertwine and complement each other. The same is true for hardness and softness. Philosophical Taoism recommends such a complementary approach.

Hardness is essentially striking, force, and dynamics, as in dynamic kicks. Softness, on the other hand, is associated with grip, flexibility, evasion, and entrapment. Even in the symbolism of martial arts schools, we find symbols of hardness and strength, such as the fist (*Gōjū-ryū*) and the tiger (*Shōtōkan*) (cf. Sieber, Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2008). However, in the case of *Gōjū-ryū karate*, the very name indicates both elements – *gō* and *jū*. And indeed, this style features techniques similar to *jūjutsu*. *Jūjutsu*, as the name of the method, contains the element *jū/yawara*, from the main principle – *jū-no ri*, meaning softness and flexibility. A complete warrior, therefore, should be skilled in both. They should also wield all types of weapons.

Mastering all this technical richness within a single, coherent system is possible through complete systems called *sōbudō* or *sōgō budō* (cf. Draeger, Smith 1980). A complete warrior is one who has learned the entire set of disciplines of a given *sōgō budō*, for example, *Takeda-ryū Nakamura-ha*, or, according to the aforementioned *Tenshinshōden Katorishintō-ryū* school. However, a complete warrior, a versatile martial arts master, can be someone who has mastered at a high level both a given *gō* style (e.g., *karate*), a *jū* (*aikidō*, *judo*, or *jūjutsu*), and traditional fencing (*kendō*, *kenjutsu*), or other weapons (Okinawan, samurai, or others). In schools teaching *sōgō budō*, there are specific requirements for becoming a high-ranking master within a given system. For example, one must obtain at least 9th, 7th, and 5th dan in several basic disciplines (such as *aikijutsu*, *iaidō*, *jōdō*, *jū-kenpō* in *Takeda-ryū*), appropriate licenses, and titles such as *okuden shihan* or *kaiden shihan* (cf. Cynarski 2004).

2. Method

A qualitative analysis was undertaken to characterize a master-teacher who is a relatively complete master of the entire martial arts complex of Japanese *budō*. As an example, N = 10 famous representatives of the martial arts world, high-ranking masters in several *budō* disciplines, were selected. This is a purposive case study.

A versatility factor was applied (for 10 disciplines of *budō*):

$$A = 1/10 \sum ai Pi,$$

where: the 10 disciplines (by popularity criterion) are: 1) *aikijutsu* / *aikidō*, 2) *goshinjutsu*, 3) *iaidō*, 4) *judo*, 5) *jūjutsu*, 6) *karate*, 7) *kenjutsu*, 8) *kobudō*, 9) *zendō* (meditation practices, breathing exercises / *qigong* / *ki keiko* etc.) and 10) other (e.g. *bojutsu*); and the M-Q scale:

M (Japanese: *mukyū* - rookie, *mudansha* - student below 1

dan) - 1-2 points

AS – agonist, participation in sports competitions - 2

Y – *yūdansa*, holder of the “black belt” - 3

I – instructor - 4

Ii – international instructor - 5

H – highest technical degree - 6

O – other important achievements - 7

S – *shihan*, *hanshi* - 8

J – *judan* (10 dan) - 9

Q – *meijin*, *sōke*, Grand Master – 10 (Cynarski 2022).

Additionally, a qualitative assessment was taken into account; this refers to the combined skills of "boxing/kickboxing" (*gō*) and "wrestling" (*jū*) techniques, fencing, and other traditional weapons.

Results: Versatile *Budō* Masters

Thus, one can master various *budō* disciplines within a single *sōgō budō* system, or by studying different schools and styles. It is important to master fighting methods at various distances, "hard" and "soft," with various weapons and unarmed. This does not preclude specialization in a given weapon or group of techniques.

Here is a subjectively selected Top Ten of master teachers who have mastered the wealth of *budō* at a high or highest level (listed alphabetically by surname):

1. Jon Bluming (1933-2018) – 10 dan *Kyokushin karate* and *hapkido*, 9 dan *judo*, 4 dan *bōjutsu*, *yūdansa* also in *kendō* and *iaidō*;
2. Kaniyuki Kai (born 1943-) - 10 dan *Gōjū-ryū karate*, 9 dan *Ryūkyū kobujutsu*, *iaidō* and *jōdō*, *jūjutsu* and *Yōshinkan aikidō*, 6 dan *wushu*; 5 dan *kendō*;
3. Keith Kernspecht (1945-2024) - 12 toan *Wing Tsun kung-fu*, 9 dan *karate* and *I Lik chuan*, 6 dan *hapkido* and *escrima*, 3 dan *aikidō* and *idō*, 2 dan *judo*;
4. Jamal Maesara (born 1949-) – 10 dan *Shōrin-ryū karate* and *kobudō*, 7 dan *aikidō/aikijutsu*;
5. Minoru Mochizuki (1907-2003) - 10 dan *aikidō* and *jūjutsu*, 8 dan *kobudō*, *iaidō* and *judo*, 5 dan *karate* and *kendō*;
6. Masutatsu Oyama (1923-1994) – 10 dan *Kyokushin karate*, 4 dan *judo*, skills in the field *Daitō-ryū aiki-jūjutsu*, *kenpō*, *bōjutsu* and *shurikenjutsu*;
7. Kazuo Sakai (1930-2016) – 10 dan *Wadō-ryū karate* and *kobudō*, *shihan Shindō Yōshin-ryū kenpō jūjutsu*, also specialist in *bōjutsu*;
8. Lothar Sieber (born 1946-) – 10 dan *Zendō karate Tai-te-tao* and *karatedo*, *jūjutsu*, *goshinjutsu* and *idō*, 9 dan kickboxing, 8 dan *iaidō* and *judo*, 6 dan *Haidong gumdo*¹, techniques *sai* etc.;
9. Yoshio Sugino (1904-1998) - 10 dan *Tenshinshōden Katorishintō-ryū kobudō* and *aikidō*, 4 dan *judo*, teacher of *kendō* and *kenjutsu*;
10. Masafumi Suzuki (1929-1991) - 10 dan *Gōjū-ryū karate*, *jūjutsu* and *kung-fu*, 8 dan *kendō* and *iaidō*,

also selected *kobudō* weapons (specialization in *sai* and *bōjutsu*)².

How does *aikijutsu* differ from *aiki-jūjutsu*? In *aiki-jūjutsu*, the *jū* element is emphasized. *Aikijutsu*, on the other hand, can incorporate *kogeki-waza*, dynamic forms of attack (strikes and kicks), emphasizing hardness (the diamond in the Takeda family coat of arms and the *Daitō-ryū* school emblem³). Similarly, *taijutsu* and *kenpō jūjutsu* (softness and hardness) are similar. *Aikidō*, on the other hand, can be a gentle art of harmony of movement and peace, as in the *Aikikai* formula, or technically similar to *aikijutsu*, as in the *Yōshinkan* school. Significantly, the master-teacher Gōzō Shioda, the founder of the *Yōshinkan* school, was a man of very slight build (156 cm tall, 46-49 kg). This contrasts sharply with the physical attributes of top K-1 and MMA fighters, such as Semy Schilt (212 cm, 130 kg). G. Shioda likely realized that without hard *atemi* (strikes and pressure on sensitive areas), *aikidō* technique is ineffective. Another point is that there is no single *aikidō*, and not all *aikidō* originates from Morihei Ueshiba. Hisashi Naukamura taught *Takeda-ryū aikidō*, but this term covered traditional *aikijutsu*. Master-teacher H. Nakamura (*sōke*/lineage successor, 10th dan) was very skilled in both Japanese saber (*kenjutsu*) and staff techniques, as well as hand techniques (*aikijutsu* and *jū-kenpō*; throws, grabs, strikes, and horseback maneuvers, including jumping). He taught *sōgō budō*—a set of disciplines, including martial arts medicine (*bujutsu idō*). Korean *hapkido* (literally *aikidō*) is a combination of *aikijutsu* and *taekwondo*-style kicks.

A **comprehensiveness coefficient** was determined for 10 disciplines of *budō*: $A = 1/10 \sum \alpha_i P_i$, according to advancement in individual disciplines on a point scale from 1 (for a beginner practitioner) to 10 (for a master of the highest rank) (Cynarski 2022). Knowledge of *gō* and *jū*, fencing (*kenjutsu*, *iaidō*), and other weapons (*kobudō*) was taken into account.

Ad. 1. Jon Bluming - A = 3.9

Ad. 2. Kaniyuki Kai – A = 5.1

Ad. 3. Keith Kernspecht – A = 4.3

Ad. 4. Jamal Maesara – A = 2.4

Ad. 5. Minoru Mochizuki – A = 7.9

Ad. 6. Masutatsu Oyama – A = 2.6

Ad. 7. Kazuo Sakai – A = 3.2

Ad. 8. Lothar Sieber – A = 7.2

Ad. 9. Yoshio Sugino – A = 3.6

Ad. 10. Masafumi Suzuki – A = 5.4

It's worth noting that this often stems from the Okinawan tradition of *karate* and *kobudō*, where *Okinawan karate* practices realistic self-defense similar to *jūjutsu* or *taijutsu*. This is even more strongly emphasized in the *Gōjū-ryū* style, which gave rise to K. Kai and M. Oyama, the founder

¹ The Korean equivalent of Japanese *kendō/kenjutsu*.

² Longer biographies of the highest-ranking masters mentioned here can be found in martial arts lexicons (cf. Lind 1999; Cynarski 2021).

³ This school (*Daitōkan* headquarters in Abashiri, Hokkaido) has previously used various terms – *aikijutsu* and *jūjutsu*, *aiki-jūjutsu* and *aikibudō*.

of *Kyokushin karate*. J. Bluming was a student of Oyama, and K. Kernspecht, for example, received his 8th dan from J. Bluming. Grand Master K. Kernspecht achieved his greatest achievements in Chinese traditions – *Wing Tsun* and *I Lik Chuan*, but he also studied Korean and Filipino styles, wrestling and *Muay Thai*, *aikidō*, and *judo*. *Wing Tsun* incorporates striking and kicking techniques (an element of *gō*), double weapons – "butterfly swords," and long pole techniques. *I Lik Chuan*, on the other hand, is an internal style (*jū*).

M. Mochizuki, M. Suzuki, and K. Kai demonstrated that it was possible to achieve the *hanshi* level (8th-10th dan) in more than one *budō* discipline. Among the Europeans, L. Sieber, in particular, was a *meijin* in *jūjutsu* and *karate*, a *hanshi* in *iaidō*, a specialist in realistic self-defense (*goshinjutsu*), and a 9th dan/*Mastergrad* in kickboxing. Y. Sugino studied historical *aikibudō* under M. Ueshiba, for which he later received 10th dan in *aikidō*. He practiced *Yōshin-ryū jūjutsu* and *judo*, taught *kendō* and *naginata-jutsu*, but later focused on the relatively complete system of the *Tenshinshōden Katorishintō-ryū* school (*kenjutsu*, *kobudō*).

3. Results and Discussion

Ten masters active in the 20th century or at the turn of the 21st century are featured, seven of whom have since passed away. Those still active, now around 80 years old, have decades of practice and teaching martial arts under their belts. Thus, all ten are united by their versatility, based on lifelong, practical study of martial arts. In nine cases, this was primarily Japanese *budō*. In each case, they demonstrated high competence in hand-to-hand combat techniques (striking and grappling), as well as within fencing traditions and other weapons. The featured master-teachers achieved a comprehensiveness index score of A ranging from 2.4 to 7.9. Of the ten, four Grand Masters hail from Japan, two others from Korea and Taiwan, and thus also from East Asia. The remainder are from other European or Asian countries. Therefore, martial arts do not necessarily find enthusiasts in their countries of origin.

A similar study from 2022 included N = 22 martial arts masters, starting with the historical Miyamoto Musashi (16th-17th century). It was then found that versatility is linked to creativity, namely, that a wealth of practical knowledge often translates into the creation of new quality – the emergence of new varieties (schools, methods, styles) of martial arts. A moderately strong correlation, a moderately strong relationship, a significant, linear, and positive relationship were found ($\text{Chi}^2 = 83.575$; Cramer's V = 0.3149; Pearson's C = 0.5202, p = 0.0125) (Cynarski 2022).

In this case, seven of the ten Grand Masters (70%) established their own schools, styles, and organizations. Only J. Maesara, K. Sakai, and Y. Sugino proved to be continuators, or even guardians, of the traditions inherited from previous generations of martial arts disciplines, in their respective lineages. Perhaps it is also the way of things that when a new quality emerges, based on years of practice, experience, and reflection, martial arts develop.

The reasons may also be more mundane, such as the desire to gain independence in the martial arts market, ambition, and competitiveness within the community. This has not been investigated.

Another study, involving N = 285 martial arts practitioners, found that "the average time of practice before starting their own school or setting up their own style; for the Asian masters – 33.2 years (from 20 to 46), age – 43 years (32 to 59) and rank of 5th or 6th dan (from 2nd to 8th dan, or licence of *menkyō kaiden*). In the case of non-Asians it is similar. The time of practice is on average 29.1 years (1 to 54), rank of – 5th or 6th dan (1st to 10th), and average age – 47.1 (21 to 70). The non-Asians practise for a little less time, but full independence as leaders of martial arts schools is reached at a slightly older age, compared to the Asians. The average difference in both cases is 4 years." (Cynarski *et al.* 2015) Studies of prominent *budō* figures typically feature their profiles/biographies and interviews (Czerwenka-Wenkstetten, Cynarski 2008; Strauss, Slopecki 2014; Witkowski 2022). Some researchers point to the effects of extreme commercialization, such as obtaining high and highest degrees contrary to tradition/through fraud (self-proclaimed "grand masters") (*cf.* Cynarski 2004; Slopecki 2013).

Sometimes, studies are conducted on the versatility of the Warrior's Way, considered as an activity both in practice and in academic research. Sometimes, the study concerns a single master-teacher (and a single system of *sōgō budō*) (Cieszkowski 2010; Czuba, Błażejowski 2020; Maroteaux 2021; Kubala 2025), and at other times, by martial arts researchers in general (Sieber, Pawelec 2016; Korobeynikov, Czarny, Cynarski 2022). Certainly, knowledge of a larger fragment of the multifaceted phenomenon of martial arts allows for more competent scholarly analyses of this area of culture.

Bruce Lee studied primarily Chinese, Japanese, and Korean martial arts, but also drew on Western boxing and fencing (Lee 1975; Czajkowski 2005). He explained that one should not limit oneself to a single martial art or style, as each discipline or style has its advantages but also limitations. This may have influenced his choice of the Warrior's Way, focusing on versatility, and, on the other hand, his search for an open formula for sporting competition between strikers and grapplers.

4. Conclusions

The outstanding figures in today's *budō* world (the 10 figures presented above) hail from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds. They have achieved the highest levels of skill in various martial arts, both with and without weapons, through diverse paths. Under the guidance of competent teachers, they have progressed through various martial arts, confirmed by the achievement of successive mastery degrees. They have proven that achieving 8th-10th dan in several martial arts is achievable. In this way, they have learned a wide range of technical and tactical solutions, gaining the highest competence in teaching combat skills. In each case, these were decades of daily or

regular practice – practical study.

As a complete warrior, a master teacher possesses skills in wielding various weapons, not just saber fencing. They have also acquired proven skills in hand-to-hand combat, both at longer ranges (hand techniques and kicks) and in close quarters (grabs, throws). Or, they possess mastery of several disciplines in a given *sōgō budo* system, confirmed by degrees or a *menkyō* license.

It should be noted that this is a small, purposefully selected sample, and the results cannot be generalized. Just as in high-performance sports we examine outstanding individuals in a given discipline, this analysis focuses on a small group of undisputed, top-ranking masters in various *budō* disciplines or related martial arts.

Further research should likely include a larger sample and more data (in addition to years of life and practice, disciplines and styles of fighting arts, degrees and titles achieved). It is worth considering the factors and barriers to achieving mastery. However, individuals who achieve the highest level of authentic mastery in more than one discipline are rare.

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