

The amalgamation of eastern and western philosophies within Idokan Karate

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ORIGINAL PAPER**Abstract**

Every school of the Japanese martial art of karate possesses special values and norms unique to its practice. Unsurprisingly, the philosophy of Idokan karate is therefore similar to other schools while remaining distinct in the myriad of martial art practices. Idokan karate possesses a practical philosophy (i.e., applicable to everyday life) influenced by Eastern and Western belief systems that are internalized and utilized by its practitioners as forms of today's civilian warrior path. This single case study examines the prominent Idokan ethics, values, and rules as well as details its specific and symbolic content. It makes use of the hermeneutic phenomenology research method to present a content analysis of literature on Idokan within the wider discourse of martial arts studies. A broad discourse analysis of these topics in both scientific studies and popular publications was conducted. In doing so, this study's practical implications are that it not only provides a glimpse into the uniqueness of Idokan karate philosophy but also into that of the vastness of the great martial arts menagerie. Idokan karate philosophy is derived distinctively from its founders' understandings of Chinese and Japanese martial arts, Taoism, and Christianity and dictates practitioners a unique morality. Such teleology comes from special values, rules, and aims embedded in Idokan teachings. In normative ethics, the Decalogue and nobility of spirit (the *Homo Creator Nobilis*) are most important. Tao in Idokan is understood as God's Word, the principle of love, and the way of (Christian) heaven.

Keywords: Martial arts; combat sports; philosophy; ethics; religion; Taoism; Christianity.**La fusión de filosofías orientales y occidentales en el Karate Idokan****Resumen**

Cada escuela del arte marcial japonés del karate posee valores y normas especiales, únicas para su práctica. Así, la filosofía del Karate Idokan es similar a la de otras escuelas, a la vez que distinta, en la mirada de prácticas marciales. El Karate Idokan posee una filosofía práctica (es decir, aplicable a la vida cotidiana) influenciada por los sistemas de creencias orientales y occidentales, que sus practicantes internalizan y utilizan en el ámbito civil como formas actuales del camino del guerrero. Este estudio de caso único examina la ética, los valores y las reglas principales del Idokan y, asimismo, detalla su contenido específico y simbólico. A través del método de investigación fenomenológico hermenéutico, presenta un análisis de contenido de la literatura sobre el Idokan, dentro del discurso más amplio de los estudios sobre las artes marciales, realizando un amplio análisis discursivo de estos temas, tanto en estudios científicos como en publicaciones divulgativas. Al hacerlo, las implicaciones prácticas de este estudio son que este no solo ofrece una mirada a la singularidad de la filosofía del Karate Idokan, sino también a la enorme y maravillosa diversidad de las artes marciales. La filosofía del Karate Idokan se deriva claramente de la comprensión que tienen sus fundadores

A fusão das filosofias orientais e ocidentais no Idokan Karaté**Resumo**

Cada escola da arte marcial japonesa de karaté possui valores e regras especiais, únicos para a sua prática. Assim, a filosofia do Idokan Karaté é semelhante à de outras escolas, bem como diferente, na miríade de práticas marciais. O Idokan Karaté tem uma filosofia prática (ou seja, aplicável ao cotidiano) influenciada por sistemas de crenças orientais e ocidentais, que os seus praticantes internalizam e utilizam na esfera civil como formas atuais do caminho do guerreiro. Este estudo de caso único examina a ética, os valores e as principais regras do Idokan, e também detalha o seu conteúdo específico e simbólico. Através do método de pesquisa fenomenológica hermenêutica, apresenta uma análise de conteúdo da literatura sobre o Idokan, dentro do discurso mais amplo dos estudos das artes marciais, realizando uma ampla análise discursiva desses temas, tanto em estudos científicos quanto em publicações informativas. Ao fazê-lo, as implicações práticas deste estudo são que ele não apenas oferece um vislumbre da singularidade da filosofia Idokan Karate, mas também da enorme e maravilhosa diversidade das artes marciais. A filosofia do Idokan Karaté deriva, claramente, da compreensão dos seus fundadores das artes marciais chinesas e japonesas,

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sobre las artes marciales chinas y japonesas, el taoísmo y el cristianismo, y dicta a los practicantes una moralidad única. Tal teleología proviene de valores, reglas y objetivos especiales, que se incrustan en las enseñanzas del Idokan. En la ética normativa, el Decálogo y la nobleza de espíritu (el *Homo Creator Nobilis*) son lo más importante. El Tao en el Idokan se entiende como la Palabra de Dios, el principio del amor y el camino del cielo (cristiano).

Palabras clave: Artes marciales; deportes de combate; filosofía; ética; religión; taoísmo; cristianismo.

taoísmo e cristianismo, e dita uma moralidade única para os praticantes. Tal teleologia decorre de valores, regras e objetivos especiais, que estão embutidos nos ensinamentos Idokan. Na ética normativa, o Decálogo e a nobreza de espírito (*Homo Creator Nobilis*) são os mais importantes. O Tao no Idokan é entendido como a Palavra de Deus, o princípio do amor e o caminho para o céu (cristão).

Palavras-chave: Artes marciais; desportos de combate; filosofia; ética; religião; taoísmo; cristandade.

1. Introduction

Karate and other Eastern martial arts have gained global popularity in part due to the absence of the Cartesian education model that dominates Western physical education. Eastern martial arts are said to incorporate and demonstrate the movement forms of Eastern philosophy (Tokarski, 1989), thus conjoining the body, mind, and spirit. There is also a sense of practicality in this body-mind-spirit philosophy as Eastern martial arts provide self-defense skills as well as a mental discipline derived from practice of psychophysical exercises that can be incorporated for non-combative, everyday activities (Mayen et al., 2015; Kim & Bäck, 2022). In part due to the fact that their physical practices are guided by Eastern philosophies advocating the transcension of their self-defense lessons, common karate practitioners overcome their perceived mental, emotional, and social weaknesses to cultivate themselves into better human beings. This is what constitutes the general practicality of karate-do, or the *karate way* of life.

Generally, there is a preference on the part of academicians to study the physical aspects of Eastern martial arts. While exceptions can be made (c.f., Mayen et al., 2015; Kim & Bäck, 2022), a lack of Eastern martial arts philosophical studies is evident (Cynarski, 2013). These can be classified as terminological, partial analysis or, on the contrary, unjustified generalizations. Multifaceted approaches are still lacking. In particular, descriptions of martial arts' psychophysical cultures, with their specific axiologies and teleologies, have yet to be attempted. Nonetheless, systems of psychophysical practices, described and explained philosophically, have already gained considerable popularity globally. This applies to both cinema and film, sports and leisure, as well as literature and research on the martial arts (Cynarski et al., 2015).

Hundreds of martial arts exist today, all claiming uniqueness in style and philosophy. Indeed, while the human body can only move in a limited number of ways, there seems to be a never-ending stream of Eastern martial arts that evolve from one another to create something distinct. One such martial art is Idokan karate, an Eastern martial art infused with an amalgamation of traditional Asian karate practices as well as educational goals that were influenced by Eastern and Western religious ideals. Idokan karate possesses a direct lineage to Okinawan and Japanese karate, yet it is practiced primarily in Poland and elsewhere outside of Asia. As such, Idokan karate is one of the more unique martial arts practiced in the world today. The aim of this study is therefore to explicate the philosophy and ideals of Idokan karate praxis. In doing so, this study not only provides a glimpse into the uniqueness of Idokan karate but into that of the world's vast martial arts menagerie as well.

2. Methods

The general guiding questions of this study included: 1) Does Idokan karate possess the same goals as touted by other martial arts, or does this unique karate practice offer something singular? What ethics, values and rules are prominent in Idokan karate? What is the specific, symbolic content of this style and school? We compared Idokan to other varieties of karate and Eastern martial arts. Then, we examine how Idokan karate has amalgamated Eastern and Western philosophies distinctively by examining Idokan's physical practices, philosophical evolution, and symbolism.

To elucidate Idokan karate, a number of methods were used. As noted by Cieszkowski and Sieber (2006, pp. 219-221), cultural studies of martial arts, including the culture of warriors and axiology of various martial arts variations, are best conducted within the systemic approach of the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts. This theory conceptualizes and categorizes martial arts as "forms of psychophysical activity linked to a certain tradition of hand-to-hand fighting or using weapons,



aimed at personal development and merging educational methods with improvement in the spiritual dimension” (Cynarski & Skowron, 2014, p. 53). For the current descriptive, interpretative, and evaluative case study, we employed the content analysis of literature and the wider discourse as recommended by Krippendorff (2004). A literature review of both scientific studies and popular publications was undertaken to frame Idokan karate’s within the academic and lay perspectives in order to provide a holistic conceptualization of the practice. Journal articles and books were identified through Google Scholar using the keywords “Idokan,” “karate,” “martial arts,” and “Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts.”

The hermeneutic phenomenology research method, a qualitative methodology “in the fields of education and other human sciences” (Kakkori, 2020, p. 19) that asserts that individuals are as specialized as their lives (Miles et al., 2013), was utilized for this study. This methodology was deemed appropriate, since it “recognizes the meaning and importance in pedagogy, psychology and sociology according to the experience collected” (Guillen, 2019, p. 217). Accordingly, it was used to present varied case studies of well-known and respected martial artists and contextualize them with Idokan karate practitioners and philosophies. The authors also drew upon the biopsychosocial phenomenon, a respected approach in the social sciences of sport (Thiel et al., 2019), to arrive at their conclusions below. Discussions were framed within Johnson and Ha’s (2015) delineations of combat systems, martial arts, and combat sports, and Johnson’s (2017) stratified pedagogy of taekwondo was adapted to elucidate Idokan’s similar developmental process.

3. Results

3.1. *Traditional Christian and Eastern warrior frameworks*

Non-destructive and aggressive warrior cultures, which possess their own ethos systems, affirmative towards life, such as the Christian knight and the Japanese samurai who followed the bushido code of conduct. Despite the Decalogue (i.e., Christianity’s Ten Commandments) demanding we do not kill, the Church allows the use of force in self-defense of the individual and community. The case of Christian knighthood exemplifies the establishment of using religious doctrine to ennoble combat practices with religious principles (Cynarski, 2016a). The knights’ ethos was connected to Christianity (Takagi, 1984), of which the goals (teleology) and duties (deontology) of the knights’ state were born. It is important to note, however, that the authors recognize the ongoing discussion of the impact that Christian religious wars have had on the world for centuries. Accordingly, this article does not seek to glorify these wars, but instead intends to illustrate how Western religious beliefs have been infused into combat practices to ennoble the warrior.

Nitobe (1906) rejected the ritual suicide and vengeance so often associated with the samurai, and likened Japanese bushido (the samurai’s unwritten code of conduct) to Christian ethics: “Shinto...believes in the innate goodness and Godlike purity of the human soul, adoring it as the adytum from which divine oracles are proclaimed” (Nitobe, 1906, p. 12). Indeed, “[b]y combining Confucian, (Zen) Buddhist and Shinto principles, Japan’s warrior class created a system of etiquettes and behaviours which eventually became so pervasive that Nitobe went as far as to call Bushido an ethical system” (Lewis, 2016, p. 222). Nitobe’s contribution to our understanding should be tempered, however, as bushido’s ethics were intended to instill a sense of nationalism in Japanese citizens and thus helped create “the radicalization and expansionist zeal” responsible in part for World War II (Peterson, 2008, p. 9) by unifying Japan’s “spirit, thoughts, and actions” (Warner & Draeger, 1993, p. 90) toward a strong military. While Nitobe’s famous discussion of bushido may not summarize the centuries of samurai culture accurately (and it may even regulate bushido into a nationalistic invented tradition), numerous contemporary Eastern martial arts have adopted his definition of bushido into their own practices (c.f., Sánchez García, 2023). It can even be stated that today’s Post-War Japanese martial arts, like much of Japan, has reformulated bushido yet again to focus on self-cultivation rather than nation-building (c.f., Johnson & Ha, 2015; Clapton & Hiskey, 2020; Kodokan, 2009; Peterson, 2008; Ikeda, 2014).

3.2. *Axiology*

The axiology of the myriad of martial arts styles and their organizations’, especially the normative ethics of the various schools, is immensely diverse. Most are formed around the views of



the founder-master, a tradition transmitted, or a fixed ideology. These can be individual philosophies of different masters-teachers. Sometimes, however, one can distinguish constitutive features for individual schools, especially when the corresponding canon has been written or otherwise preserved somewhere.

While traditional Okinawan karate grew from the ground of Confucianism, the Japanese version is mainly associated with Zen Buddhism. Similar to other Eastern martial arts, karate is practiced for self-defense, self-fulfillment, recreation, health, self-expression, sport (Jones et al., 2006), mind-body-spirit connection (Stefanek, 2004), and/or aesthetic purposes (Lewis, 2016). Karate participation differs depending on the accepted method of sparring (i.e., contact or non-contact, see Rosa, 2012), which would also change the pedagogical and philosophy functions of praxis. A large proportion of young people practicing karate are interested in sports and competition (Jakhel & Pieter, 2013), indicating a convergence of Western and Eastern axiologies. Nota bene, although its status in future Olympic Games is now in doubt, in 2020 karate was an official Olympic sport and preparation for combat sports varies widely away from practice of a martial art (Johnson & Ha, 2015). Moreover, representatives of traditional karate schools often reject sports competition (Funakoshi, 1975). To Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of Shotokan karate-do, karate-do (i.e., *karate way*) is a way of personal self-improvement, overcoming one's weaknesses, observing ethical principles resulting from the Confucian social philosophy. He unequivocally rejected sport competition and fighting for any reason other than self-defense; he taught karate-do for self-cultivation purposes. While, he believed its practice could be used for health purposes, Funakoshi disavowed karate-do practice for self-gratification or self-aggrandizement through competition. Instead, he encouraged the study of technical forms, such as formal exercises of highly choreographed offensive and defensive movements called *kata*. This type of practice, he claimed, assisted students in becoming stronger mentally as well as physically (Funakoshi, 1975).

Masutatsu Oyama, the founder of Kyokushin karate, accepted the Confucian principles of respect and courtesy in social relations. From bushido, he borrowed a desire to test himself in unbelievable ways, most notably by charging bulls and engaging in an endurance contest where he fought full-contact one hundred combatants consecutively. On the other hand, he referred to the Great Way of the Heavens of Taoism and Zen Buddhism. He also adopted certain meditative exercises to develop concentration skills and lead to enlightenment (Oyama, 1979). Intense training and practical preparation for actual combat were, in Oyama's mind, the means of becoming a better person in his system.

Idokan incorporates all of this and more in its teachings. For instance, Western nobility takes on a special meaning within the Idokan ethos. Znaniecki's concept of *Homo Creator Nobilis* (i.e., "a noble and creative" person), which can be understood as "intellectual aristocracy" (Cynarski & Szajna, 2017, p. 1; see also Znaniecki, 1978), elucidates nobility for Idokan practitioners. Here, an aristocrat is a person in possession of the spirit of a warrior or a 'knight of truth.' These knights esteem the paths of virtue and truth, ethics, goodness, and spiritual cultivation. For them, wisdom is the knowledge and love for all creation, and the ethics of nobility determines their positive cultural evolution. In this sense, Idokan philosophy is similar to a science in that it seeks to know the truth about the world as a social service and an attitude of responsibility. The ideal Idokan noble knight should therefore be courageous and become a force for truth.

Homo Creator Nobilis as an archetype possesses highly developed intuition, imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, and ethical levels. This person is noble for progressing along a spiritual path of love and truth as well as for fighting for the good of man and the world. The Idokan knight is a wise Christian, ascetic, warrior, and holy person, like Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Brother Albert Chmielewski, or Mahatma Gandhi. Idokan knights are not passive fans of reality but are actively trying to develop and improve their personalities comprehensively to create a positive (in the moral sense) cultural reality. Moreover, they are entirely open to dialogue with others. The Idokan Poland Association (IPA), the governing body that oversees Idokan karate rank standards and promotions,¹

¹ According to IPA website, the IPA was established in 1993 by Wojciech J. Cynarski who still currently presides over the organization. The IPA disseminates reliable knowledge and educates its members through systematic scientific, educational and sports activities. The highest virtues its members can maintain are truth, wisdom,



accepted Znaniecki's *Homo Creator Nobilis* concept and incorporated it into the Idokan philosophy. The Znaniecki's Noble and Creative Person is to be a warrior of truth, a knight for modern times, and someone who complies with the ethos of nobility in today's commercialized world. The Idokan knight and the IPA are thus committed forces to the Christian concept of good.

3.3. Teleology

Martial arts serve multiple purposes that are fostered and guided by numerous factors, including the individual practitioner's personal goals, the learning objectives established by the instructor, or the actions taken by the martial art's governing bodies (i.e., creating more tournaments or organizing spiritual development seminars). The various purposes of praxis within martial arts have necessitated new examinations into what a martial art is and is used for. Johnson and Ha (2015) differentiate the terms combat systems, martial arts, and combat sports by their pedagogical objectives in order to create a comprehensible teleology. In that study, *combat systems* are systems of offensive and defensive physical techniques used for survival in combat, like what is taught in military boot camps; *martial arts* are composed of self-defense techniques practiced for character/spiritual development; and a *combat sport* adopts and adapts martial arts skills for competition purposes (e.g., Olympic taekwondo and judo).

Undoubtedly martial arts as we know them today began with a pragmatic and utilitarian purpose: to defend against or attack a rival. Effectiveness in actual combat is the primary learning objective for combat systems such as military or police hand-to-hand combat systems. While practitioners can philosophize upon the knowledge they acquire when learning these systems, "[o]nce the student has learned combat skills, they are only required to practice those skills until they are no longer needed" (Johnson & Ha, 2015, p. 67). In many schools this remains the dominant goal to this day (Shishida & Flynn, 2013). Practice is guided by its philosophy of self-defense and use of force only for the protection of good. Using Idokan karate for violence or for personal gain would be abhorrent and contemptible according to the art's doctrine. In this way, Idokan karate is not a combat system per se, since its practitioners are seeking neither violence nor are they anticipating being in a violent conflict such as a member of the military would. Instead, the merging of the philosophy of self-defense ascends Idokan karate to something more: a self-cultivation method (i.e., a martial art).

To a large extent, the choice of values and goals taught in a martial art are influenced by the art's philosophy, which often directs conduct in- and outside of the *dojo* (the Japanese word for *martial arts practice area*, or literally *room of the way*). For instance, the Shotokan karate-do's first rule is that karate begins and ends with respect. Judo likewise teaches the maxims of maximum efficiency and mutual benefit. Taekwondo, the Korean martial art turned Olympic sport, also has pedagogy based on using physical practice to improve society (Johnson, 2017). Bryant (2018) states Aikido practice is "as much about spiritual discipline as it was about physical training" and discusses that Japanese martial art can be applied to peace education initiatives (p. 23). Each martial art's teleology is clear: physical practice is intended to teach lessons that transcend violence or self-defense and improve the practitioner's character and society.

In schools focused on competition, the main educational objective is somewhat different. For them, combat sports practitioners, or maybe it is more accurate to refer to them as athletes, strive to win competitions. In other words, as in other sports, the measure of martial arts success is the result of a competition: the title or medal. Additionally, skills unneeded in combat such as ring control and running down the clock are taught. The authors of sports karate books often omit the issue of philosophy, probably since there is little time for it in competitive sport. Sports as played today worldwide are also Western constructs, which explains why some Eastern combat sports, like Olympic taekwondo, have adopted Olympism and other Western values (c.f., Kim & Bäck, 2022; Johnson & Lewis, 2021). Thus, when combat sports philosophy is discussed, it is often based within a Western lens despite the sport possessing oriental traditions such as bowing to the opponent and

courage, constant self-improvement, and patriotism. It has six branches in Poland: Przemyśl, Mrozy, Kraków, Katowice, Poznań and Warsaw. The IPA conducts educational seminars, competitions, scientific research and publishing activities, as well as other events for its members (IPA, 2023).



referees. Even in the organizations and *dojos* that have entered the path of sporting activity, there remains the pursuit of mastery in martial art.

Furthermore, and this is the case for Idokan karate, many karate practitioners engage in competition not for the purpose of defeating an opponent, the frisson encouraged through competition, or even to test their prowess, but to submit themselves to a mentally, physically, and emotionally challenging endeavor to learn something about themselves or to cultivate their character. Indeed, Idokan karate practitioners are supposed to be strong and courageous, but they cannot use their skills for evil purposes, because it would cause complete degradation according to the style's philosophy. Martial arts must use their physical skills only in the defense of life (Burrow, 2014), which is a core lesson in Idokan as well. A trained karateka can be a great candidate for a soldier, a police officer, or an employee of another uniformed service. The long-term educational process usually results in (though not always) a mature, well-formed personality. The Idokan karate practitioner is to be a good person first and foremost, an idea that aligns with the philosophies of Shotokan karate-do, non-Olympic judo, Aikido, and other martial arts. What distinguishes Idokan karate from others, however, is its emphasis on life, humanity, and wisdom within a Christian worldview.

Idokan karate is derived from the Zendo karate style established by Peter K. Jahnke and then expanded upon by his students Lothar Sieber, Dietmar Schmidt, and Josef Bachmeier. Zendo refers to "1) the way of meditation, 'internal way'; relating to the physical and psychological dimension of the practice [and] 2) a full, complete road or method, for example, in relation to the art of karate" (Cynarski & Skowron, 2014, p. 65). Its primary goals were to assist practitioners in creating a better self and, secondarily, to teach self-defense (Cynarski & Seiber, 2016), much like Funakoshi's Shotokan karate-do (Funakoshi, 1975). While the curriculums of the Idokan and Zendo karate styles overlap in their physical practice, Idokan has developed into a distinct, and rather unique, martial art. To explicate its distinctiveness, one must look at the physical practice of the two styles' shared *kata*, the philosophical underpinning of their pedagogies, and Idokan's symbolism.

3.4. Idokan's physical practices

Karate, created on the Ryukyu archipelago, largely succumbed to the Japanization process (Johnson, 2012). Interest in Japanese culture facilitated a new wave of dissemination of Japanese traditions globally after the Second World War. This applies specially to martial arts such as karate, which is why the world learned Japanese karate as envisioned by Funakoshi rather than its Okinawan progenitors. The sportification of karate is the practice of reimagining an Eastern tradition into a western construct.

The similarities between the Idokan and Zendo styles remain solely within the physical techniques, which are practiced nearly identically, as well as a complete rejection of sports competition. Idokan karate drew a lot from Japanese schools: Shotokan, Wado-ryu (another Okinawan karate style), and – to a lesser extent – Kyokushin. It also contains elements of Chinese and Korean origin, as it relates to technical-tactical and ideological solutions (i.e., names, symbols, and gestures). Just like in other martial arts of Japanese or Korean provenance, the main objective of practicing this style to constantly cultivate one's character through regular, if not daily, practice (see: Kim & Bäck, 2022).

Elements of Zendo and Idokan karate are clearly taken from karate practices. First and most obviously is the practice of *kata*, which is a pedagogical tool unique to Eastern martial arts. These practices contain references to the wisdom of the East, constituting the technical and symbolic heritage of many generations of masters from East Asia. On the other hand, in Christian- and Western-influenced Idokan, the practice of *kata* becomes a form of physical (or psychophysical) discipline, as a modern version of asceticism. The merging of these two philosophical backgrounds into the practice of *kata* facilitates the learning of Christian moral virtues, which are arduous to acquire. Moral rearmament and fortitude are indeed goals of martial arts practices found in *budo* (Japanese: *martial arts*, or possibly better *martial ways*), but the Christian ethos espoused in Idokan karate *dojos* appeal directly to the Western knightly virtues (Takagi, 1984). Although first reported by Cynarski et al. (2017), Table 1 details the four Idokan karate *kata* to summarize the Zendo and Idokan *kata* and their lessons.



Table 1. Zendo and Idokan karate katas (source: Cynarski et al., 2017).

Level	<i>Kata</i> name (Japanese / English)	Creator	Pedagogical intent
4 th <i>kyu</i>	<i>Jindo-te</i> The Way of Humanity's Hand	Peter K. Jahnke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary lesson: <i>jin</i> (law of great love; from Taoism) • Secondary lesson: non-aggression • Tertiary lessons: develop a conditional understanding of all humans, feel compassion for all living beings, and protect all life
2 nd <i>kyu</i>	<i>Jin-te</i> The Hand of Humanity	Lothar Sieber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary lesson: develop a capacity for true love • Secondary lesson: overcome selfishness • Tertiary lessons: be modest and humble human being
1 st <i>dan</i>	<i>Tai-te-tao</i> The Way of the Hand of Peace	Peter K. Jahnke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary lesson: to express the principles of softness and fluidity; i.e., the water principle as expressed in Taoism
3 rd <i>dan</i>	<i>Tai-te-jutsu</i> The Technique of the Hand of Peace	Lothar Sieber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary lesson: develop coordination between movements and breath • Secondary lesson: develop rhythm • Tertiary lessons: elucidate the concepts of fighting only in self-defense and the spirit of humanitarianism

Kata: formal exercises of highly choreographed offensive and defensive movements; *kyu*: (Japanese) color belt; *dan*: (Japanese) black belt.

Idokan karate advocates high overall physical fitness and combat proficiency. In this way, the positive health benefits of physical practice (e.g., high levels of motor skills; physical, mental, and emotional endurance; and self-confidence in the face of adversity) are cultivated and practical self-defense skills are acquired. To further develop students' self-defense skills and the mental, emotional, and potential spiritual development opportunities such training affords, Idokan karate is often practiced alongside sogo budo jujutsu, another Japanese martial art that focuses on close-quarter self-defense skills (Cynarski, 2009). As such, it provides a broader curriculum based on the brutal realities of self-defense rather than simulated combat in a controlled competition. It is difficult for this reason alone to overestimate Idokan practitioners' sense of individual security and the myriad of ways they may develop. Idokan karate is in this way identical to other systems of karate and Eastern martial arts.

Also similar to other martial arts, practicing Idokan karate provides aesthetic satisfaction, mental relaxation acquired during sparring as there is no fear of being harmed in the extreme, increased attention spans, and improved eye-hand coordination in addition to the above-indicated utilitarian values. Performing all Idokan movements on both sides of the body should improve the functioning and cooperation of both brain hemispheres. In addition, the wealth of movement in combat techniques and applied gymnastic exercises provides for improved motor memory, motor coordination, and spatial orientation. The practice of controlled sparring favors the development of self-control (unlike in Kyokushin karate or Olympic taekwondo and judo in which blows are delivered full power). Breaking board tests improve precision, focus, and courage. In total, Idokan karate is a complex educational program, spread over a minimum of 20 years of systematic practice. Indeed, the Idokan black belt can be obtained only after a decade of exercise.

3.5. Idokan's philosophical evolution and amalgamations

In addition to technical skills, Idokan offers students a parallel curriculum consisting of acquiring practical self-defense skills, knowledge (intellectual development), and moral principles (knowledge and proper behavior). Idokan's moral principles mirror those found in Eastern belief systems, particularly: respect and loyalty towards the teacher, respect for the elderly (seniority principle), responsibility, kindness for each other, integrity (e.g., truthfulness and punctuality), gentleness, avoidance of violence, moderation, control over sensuality, and avoidance of stimulants. Furthermore, the Western nobility's ethos is emphasized: "Nobility, honour, dependability, contempt for the accumulation of material goods for the benefit of the higher values, ethics, fidelity, truth, the

pursuit of wisdom, courage in the struggle against evil, and similar universal values co-create the philosophy... a product of patriarchal elite and military cultures of Asia and Europe” (Cynarski, 2017, pp. 100-101).

Idokan karate retains much of Zendo karate’s physical practices, but its philosophical foundation differs in what can be defined unambiguously as the Idokan philosophy. Zendo continues to adhere to a Buddhist-centered philosophy, while Idokan has developed an amalgamation of Eastern and Western philosophy of practice. For instance, Zendo practitioners engage in zazen meditation, a Buddhist tradition, whereas Idokan rejects this training method. Zendo karate was also originally associated with the Taoist idea of the Great Way, the cosmic law of great love Tao (Jahnke, 1992). The pedagogies of the two also share the concept that preparation for and the practice of combat is to serve the purpose of mutual learning between two practice partners. Both styles advocate self-discipline and character improvement as their primary educational goals. The Taoist water principle is also used to convey Idokan pedagogical principles, a technique common in jujutsu and Zendo schools. This principle, which is derived from philosophical Taoism, instructs practitioners to adapt to a situation (i.e., change their combat tactics) to fit their current struggle, much like how water forms to the shape of dish rather than trying to change the shape of the vessel.

In addition to the aforementioned influences of Christian knighthood, humanism, and personalism, the Idokan philosophy refers to selected topics of social thought by Fromm to establish a new paradigmatic pedagogy (Cynarski et al., 2016) and Stoic philosophy. Practitioners today strive “towards a state of psychophysical harmony and [reject] the selfish attitude of openness; it seeks spiritual mastery while maintaining the best possible health and fitness. It implements the demands of physical culture” (Cynarski, 2017, p. 102).

It is particularly interesting that the IPA, operating under the patronage of Saint Michael the Archangel, draws more from Christianity than it does the Chinese belief systems as typically found in Japanese and Okinawan karate. For instance, practitioners are expected to model the patterns of nobility drawn mainly from European, Christian knights. In this way the IPA inculcates the idea of a noble and creative human being, the *Homo Creator Nobilis*, as a warrior of the moral way of Truth (Cynarski, 2016a, 2017). Indeed, the IPA’s Chivalrous Order *Homo Creator Nobilis* medal features a cross with the figure of Saint George on horseback in battle with the dragon (Figure 1) and is the highest award in the IPA and the European Nobility Club. The dragon St. George slew is, in the chivalric and Christian traditions, a symbol of evil and was thusly chosen as the IPA’s highest honor as it symbolizes wisdom, strength, and knowledge, all virtues the IPA holds in the highest regards. Patriotism is one of the statutory goals of IPA. Love for the Fatherland results from the Decalogue, from the commandment to love one’s father and mother (John Paul II, 2005). Thus, the IPA shapes affirmative attitudes towards practitioners’ countries of residence and their cultures (Sieber et al., 2009), at the same time contributing to respecting strangers and other cultural patterns, something the practice of East Asian martial arts also favors.

Idokan karate is influenced by Stoic philosophy as well (Cynarski, 2007). Idokan practitioners must act for the sake of goodness in expressions of virtue oriented towards a *proegmena*, or *Preferred Things*, in Stoic nomenclature. *Proegmena*, not unlike the Taoist concept of *yang* or positivity, are things in nature we pursue instinctively. They include life, health, and beauty. Opposite of these are *t’apoproegmena* (*Rejected Things*). These dualist counterparts of *proegmena* include death, illness, and ugliness and are similar to the Taoist concept of *yin*. Following Stoic tradition, Idokan practitioners’ spiritual values should take precedence over their flesh. Affects, or passions, are seen as sources of evil, and therefore work against virtue, nature, and reason in Idokan teachings. In the pursuit of true wisdom, one must get rid of their passions (Sharples, 1996). Thus, Idokan is about full emotional self-control.

Figure 1. The Idokan Poland Association Chivalrous Order *Homo Creator Nobilis* medal featuring a cross with the figure of Saint George on horseback in battle with the dragon, signifying the acceptance of European and Christian influences on Idokan karate.



While the Idokan *Do* (*way*) is a stoical path of virtue and is akin to the Taoist path, Christianity provided its moral dimensions. Idokan took from Christianity its concept of humanitarianism, which is described as a type of moral attitude towards people and humanity in general, manifesting itself in charity and help to others. Also found in Idokan is the Christian concept of personalism, a philosophical direction that recognizes the special, central position, role and value of the person. Somewhat paradoxically, Idokan philosophy has adopted the Christian principle of non-violence. In doing so, the Idokan practitioner abhors violence against others, but can react in self-defense if attacked. Idokan's fourth moral dimension from Christianity is an unambiguous understanding of evil. Here, the Idokan practitioner is charged with overcoming and defeating evil, which stands in contrast to the Taoist belief that adepts should strive to create balance and harmony instead of defeat negativity. The concept of Tao is nevertheless still found within Idokan, albeit the idea has been redefined. In Idokan, Tao is understood as God's Word, the principle of love and the way of Heaven. Negativity in Taoism is not considered an opponent; rather, it is viewed as an unbalancing of the natural order. The Taoist adept strives to restore the natural balance whereas in Idokan's Christian-influenced philosophy evil, which might be better understood as ungodly behavior or action, practitioners must vanquish evil.

3.6. Idokan's symbolism

The symbolism adopted by the IPA provides another glimpse into how East and West amalgamate in Idokan karate. Figures 2 and 3 present two of the IPA's logos and emblems with Taoist symbols and names. In Figure 2, an icon depicting arrows circulating around the letters IK that represent Idokan Karate (the letters are in the same unique font). This represents energy transformation, a fundamental principle of movement in Idokan karate self-defense practice in which an aggressive motion is transformed into something positive. It also illustrates a calmness while activity moves around oneself, not unlike the Aikido philosophy discussed by Bryant (2018).

The symbol for Zendo karate Tai-te-tao possesses a similar theme of motion, but it features a Chinese crane, tiger, and dragon combine with today's Idokan karate (Figure 3). In some Chinese martial arts, the movements of these animals are mimicked. The pedagogical concept taken from Taoism is that these animals act according to their nature and are harmonized with nature; they are natural and true to their identities, and to mimic them reminds humans to do the same. Thus, by adopting the same imagines, Zendo karate illustrates a central pedagogical goal for its students: to cultivate oneself by becoming more human. These animalistic images are also used in other karate symbology, most notably the tiger symbol of Shotokan karate-do. At the top of Figure 3 is the Taoist yin-yang symbol, which illustrates the duality of life: left and right, male and female, positive and negative, and so forth. Finally, the Chinese lettering down the left and right sides of the symbol mean Zendo Karate and Tai-te-tao (The way of the hand of peace; see Table 1), respectively.

While Figures 2 and 3 clearly depict Eastern philosophies embedded in Idokan and Zendo karate, the banner of IPA presents the Western Saint Michael the Archangel, patron of European knighthood (image unavailable). This symbol is possibly the most poignant of the three provided herein, since it illustrates a clear separation between the Eastern philosophies on which Zendo karate was founded upon and the Western philosophies incorporated in Idokan karate. Zendo karate as the parent art will obviously will have had some philosophical and pedagogical influence on Idokan, but

Figure 2. Stylized logo with Taoist symbolism for Idokan karate created by Lothar Sieber.



Figure 3. The symbol for Zendo karate Tai-te-tao (The way of the hand of peace; see Table 1) created by Josef Bachmeier with Taoist imagery.



the latter has separated itself with far more unique philosophical underpinnings as evident from Figures 1-3. It is indeed rare to find such an amalgamation of East and West in an art, martial or otherwise.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Martial arts are both educational systems and processes. Historically, they served to prepare a warrior for combat or self-defense. Today, they are systems of self-cultivation governed by various belief systems and cultures. Although first espoused widely by Kano (2005), this pedagogical technique was discussed by Johnson (2017) through the Korean martial arts tradition. Johnson claimed martial arts pedagogy follows a universal skill acquisition process in which physical techniques (i.e., self-defense skills) can be stylized and adopted to one's personality or preferences. This, the second stage of his pedagogy, is where the combat techniques learned become an art. The third and final stage is when the practitioner has practiced the art that the physical techniques and the kinesthetic concepts behind them, which are often inspired by or are symbols of Eastern thought, become second nature. It is at this stage that the practitioner then acts in their everyday lives according to those philosophies and the lessons learned during practice; in other words, they have embodied the art and use it to enhance their lives outside of their martial arts practice.

Naturally martial artists are individuals and, according to Johnson's pedagogy, will find different expressions of their arts than the founders. This is indeed the case of Idokan karate diverging away from its Zendo predecessor. In fact, it becomes a forgone conclusion that Zendo, like all martial arts will change and evolve. When they have changed so fundamentally, such as how Idokan has rejected the Eastern philosophies of traditional Japanese and Okinawan karate, a new system emerges. Much of the progenitor art's techniques and philosophy remains when this occurs. Idokan karate, however, is unique in the sense that the while the techniques are the same, it has adopted a very Stoic and Christian philosophy.

Masutatsu Oyama (1923-1994), the creator of Kyokushin karate, stated hard karate practice brings students to the Truth (Cynarski, 2016b; Oyama, 1979). In Idokan karate a path of self-truth is laid out that is:

as straight as cutting a sword in accordance with the canon of knightly principles. Properly carried out, leads to getting to know oneself, to knowledge about the art of humanity. The master in the art of humanity is brave, but not aggressive. He teaches martial arts, but he himself becomes a work of art through autcreation. (Cynarski, 2016b, p. 8).

Nevertheless, hard training and hard contact fights are not pleasing to everybody. The Idokan karate path to Truth is not for everyone. This is why Shotokan and Kyokushin karate-do, wushu, taekwondo, and many more martial arts were created. It furthermore explains why there are so many different martial art forms to begin with: few people desire to express themselves or find their Truth via actual combat. Some martial arts, such as Okinawan kobudo, aikido, and others are based within combat techniques but rarely, or ever in some cases, require practitioners to engage in sparring. Martial arts like these encourage simulated combat through *kata* or other exercises.

Many of today's karate enthusiasts practice a type of karate heavily influenced by Western sport. Yet, traditional Japanese martial arts, such as Idokan and Funakoshi's Shotokan karate, are muchly devoid of this concept. Instead, traditional karate practice was based on Confucian ethics and understood as a means to perfect oneself in a way that the practitioner best sees fit (Funakoshi, 1975) with the additional bonus of having acquired self-defense skills. However, the ideological orientations of today's masters and their students are very diverse (Jakhel & Pieter, 2013). After their empirical study Cihounkova and Reguli (2016, p. 36) concluded:

We cannot determine one of karate styles as the only true one. Every karate style, every karate association, every karate club has its own characteristics. Also, people within the groups of different karate styles and different karate associations are different in some way and same in other matters. Or they modify their attitude to karate to fulfil the acceptance of their coaches and associations. The conclusion is...there is only one karate. However, there are countless numbers of ways on how to follow it.



Idokan karate is an educational system in which the moral way of truth is contrasted with the way of extreme challenges and the cult of strength. It draws from the teachings and biographies of outstanding karate masters and other martial arts, but at the same time also from Christian ethics and knight tradition. Accordingly, we agree that:

Karate is considered a martial art, budo, combat sport and fighting art. It can sometimes even be a spectacle. Martial arts discipline the mind by disciplining the body. Budo is based on the warrior's philosophy of life and is closely linked to the spiritual dimensions of the practice. Combat sports aim for continuous improvement of performance. The concept of budo is included in martial arts. Martial arts and combat sports have two completely divergent goals. 'Fighting arts' is an umbrella term encompassing martial arts and combat sports. Karate is perceived differently depending on practitioners' cultural background. The main reasons for practicing karate fall into three main categories: pragmatic motives concerning health and sport; philosophical factors which are about education, and thirdly, utilitarian motives which are linked to self defence. (Messaoud, 2016, p. 47)

The same applies to the Idokan karate school's style and organization. However, this is not a blind imitation of patterns from the Far East. Developed by European masters, Idokan is innovative in technical solutions, but also original in the accepted ideological foundation.

The individuals responsible for this – Peter K. Jahnke, Lothar Sieber, and Hans Schöllauf – expounded upon the Japanese karate kinesthetic pedagogy and imbued Idokan with Stoic and Christian philosophies. Jahnke pointed to humanism and a new sense of struggle (mutual learning in the *dojo* and real self-defense in an actual combat). Sieber pointed to the Decalogue as the basic moral signpost. In turn, Schöllauf recommended the parallel use of the wisdom of the East and the West in the Asian martial arts and European knighthood traditions. This aspect of Idokan is not about a specific tradition of a given knightly order such as the Knights Templars or the Knights of St. John. Rather, it is about the ethos and values of European knighthood in general. For more information on Jahnke, Sieber, and Schöllauf's influence on Idokan, see: Cynarski (2009), Cynarski (2017), Cynarski and Sieber (2016), Cynarski and Szajna (2017), as well as Cynarski and Skowron (2014). By adopting this admittedly ambiguous value set, Idokan encourages its practitioners to adhere to the values that should have been binding on a European Christian knight in the Middle Ages. A general canon of these ideals includes possessing courage, honor, loyalty to the king and the Church, care for the weak (widows, orphans, etc.), and respect all people.

Idokan karate creates an educational system based on Christian values as well as a Stoicism. It is a radically humanistic understanding of the hierarchy of needs and values with a personalist understanding of human dignity, personal transgression, and transcendence. The specific, symbolic content of the Idokan karate is taken from Taoism, Chinese, and Japanese traditions of martial arts, but they are imbued with the Christian ethos. Indeed, Idokan karate requires its practitioners to pursue a morally Christian *Do* (*way*). As such, Idokan karate provides a distinctive pathway toward being a better human being.

Most the Idokan values, such as the aforementioned human dignity, personal transgression, and transcendence, are universal. As a consequence, non-Christians may find those values coupled with self-defense appealing, and Idokan karate instructors do not ask what students' faiths are. Rather, they refer to the aforementioned values and symbols of nobility so they are applicable to all. Anyone who shares these values and who wishes to learn to protect themselves may therefore practice Idokan karate. Within this understanding, Idokan karate falls within the umbrella of other martial arts such as the Taoist-inspired tai chi chuan, the Buddhism-infused kung fu, and the Confucian-influenced taekwondo in that it can inspire and provide an openminded practitioner a path of personal cultivation through a combination of self-defense training and moral expectations.

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