



Respect and International Affairs: Mutual Welfare and Benefit and the Bow as Foreign Policy

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Judo Culture, Respect, and Mutual Benefit

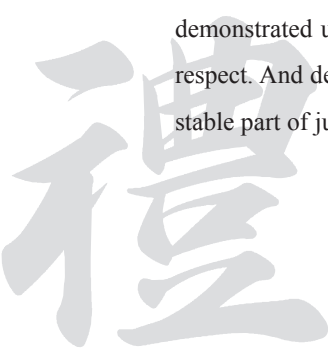
Culture is a meaning and information system shared by a group and communicated across generations (Matsumoto & Juang, 2007), and one way in which the various martial arts – judo, kendo, aikido, karate, sumo, etc. – can be understood is by their cultures. Like many groups that share a common origin, the various martial arts have cultures that are similar in some respects, yet different in others. These similarities include values centering around discipline, perseverance, hard work, and respect.

In this brief essay I consider one of these – respect – from the perspective of the art that I know best, judo. Let me begin by suggesting that, although many martial artists and lay persons alike talk about respect, we all use the term differently because we have different implicit definitions of it. For that reason it is important to make our working definitions of respect explicit, so that we know what we mean when we use the term. My definition of respect is this: the recognition and acknowledgement of the worth or value of another person, from that person's or his or her group's worldview.

Respect is what is afforded to others when we recognize, understand, and even appreciate another person's worth from that person's perspective. As such respect can be given between husbands and wives, friends and family, and work colleagues. Although we speak in the hierarchical judo world of the respect that students give to their teachers, respect should transcend hierarchies, such that teachers can also respect their students, just as bosses can give respect to subordinates and parents to children. Respect certainly can be given among various martial arts and artists.

Respect can also be given to strangers, opponents, and even one's mortal enemies. In the world of competition judo, one of the highest forms of honor can be the respect that one gains from one's opponents. Respect is not liking, acceptance, or approval, and I believe that respect can be given to those whom one may not particularly like, or whose behaviors one does not accept or approve.

In judo, as in many martial arts, respect can and should be demonstrated in many ways. The judo culture is very hierarchical, and respect is often conferred by differentiating status through the regulation of behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. Respect is one of the pillars of judo and all martial arts (although one may argue that the intense sportification of judo may have altered this to some or a large degree, a topic for a different time and place). Interestingly, people of different countries and cultures inculcate and demonstrate respect in different ways, each according to their own cultural milieus and norms (Matsumoto, 2007). But the one way in which respect is demonstrated universally in judo and many martial arts is through the bow. In judo, the bow is the embodiment of respect. And despite many changes that have occurred in judo since its inception in 1882, the bow has remained as a stable part of judo and martial arts culture.



Another important concept in the judo culture concerns the notion of mutual welfare and benefit. One of the mottos of judo – 自他共栄 – refers to the idea that one of the main purposes of the practice of judo is to strengthen the mind and body in order to live a life in which oneself and others flourish together. In this perspective, one cannot consider one's success in life without consideration of the mutual success of other people that is not only associated with but occurs because of one's actions. In this line of reasoning, one's success is defined by the good that one brings to others, and certainly this perspective has at its roots the necessary condition of respect for those others. Without such respect it is difficult if not impossible to live a life of mutual welfare and benefit.

Unfortunately, however, one does not hear much of such respect in today's martial arts world, despite that many of the early leaders – Kano, Ueshiba, and Funakoshi – clearly showed respect among each other by regularly visiting with each other, sharing philosophy and training, and allowing their students to become exposed to one another's arts and practices. Today each martial art tends to be encapsulated within itself, and I often hear many forms of direct disrespect and even condescension toward different martial arts, and toward the arts in different countries.

And, one may argue about whether the bow still embodies the same meanings of respect as originally intended. Certainly there are many instances in which individuals perform the bow, or something with minimal resemblance to it (such as a head nod), but engage in little if any of other behaviors denoting respect. Kano wrote “伝統とは形を継承することを言わず、その魂を、その精神を継承することを伝統という,” which can be loosely translated as “Tradition is not the transmission of form and appearances from one generation to the next, but the transmission of heart and spirit.” I interpret this as suggesting that sometimes we in the martial arts focus on the transmission of form over substance; perhaps we need to revisit teaching and embodying the underlying meaning of the bow – respect – and not just the mechanics and external appearances, else we be judged as hypocrites. Thus despite the advances made in the judo world through the internationalization, spread, and diffusion around the world, and its emergence as a leading Olympic sport, there is much we need to continue to do in order to inculcate respect and the true meaning of the bow among all judo participants, and across all martial arts.

A Larger Perspective

I have conducted research on culture, emotion, and nonverbal communication for over 25 years, and I devote much time and effort in the last few years to working with the American government and its allies in developing intercultural competence. Intercultural relations is a major concern for not only the American government but also for many countries around the world, both domestically and internationally. Domestically, many countries are home to immigrant populations from very different countries and cultures, most by choice but some not. As I write this essay I am on a plane returning to San Francisco from London, which are both two very diverse cities. And they are not anomalies. The great cultural diversity brought by large numbers of immigrants to many countries brings with it a host of complex social problems that impact national policy, international relations, and economies.

International relations among countries are also a major concern, and are fraught with many differences that are rooted in culture. Democracy is a concept that is bantered about and well accepted in many countries; yet there are many types of democracies, and many countries operationalize it in somewhat different ways. Cultural values of individualism, independence, and political economies based on capitalism are at odds with cultures that value conservatism, socialism, and communism. Different religious systems – Christianity, Muslim, and Buddhist – have tenets that are fundamentally and diametrically opposed to each other, and religious wars have occurred throughout



the centuries because of these differences.

The emergence of these differences were inevitable, as different groups lived and survived in vastly different geographic regions of the world, with vastly different climates and available resources to deal with natural challenges to life. These groups developed and maintained very different cultural systems in order deal with social complexity (van de Vliert, in press). There is no doubt that these cultural systems aided humans in surviving, and for that reason were crucially instrumental to that survival. Moreover, culture is invisible, as air is to humans, or water is to fish; thus while culture has been instrumental to human survival, it is not often acknowledged as such explicitly.

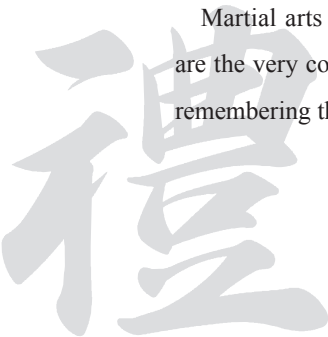
These cultural differences were fine if the groups existed in isolation from one another. And this has been the case to a large degree until recently. Yet, cultural contact brought with it inevitable intercultural conflict. This has been seen time and again in recorded human history with migrations and explorations. Today, with advances in communication and transportation technologies, the world is smaller than it ever has been, and people from very different cultural backgrounds are coming into contact with each other more quickly and completely than ever before, continuing to increase the potential for conflict. While yesterday's world could be characterized by a relative independence of cultural groups from each other, today's world is characterized by a fundamental interdependence among countries and cultures unparalleled in the history of mankind.

Yet, many countries' foreign policies, and certainly the attitudes of the laypersons of those countries, are often based on yesterday's worldviews, with underlying assumptions of isolationism and independence. Foreign policies based on such assumptions in today's new world are bound to only increase tension and escalate the potential for conflict among countries. Is this not what we are witness to today? Many of the problems we face now – in the Middle East, southeastern Europe, western Russia, the horn of Africa, and southeast Asia – are rooted in deep-seated misunderstandings of one's place in the world and misinterpretation of others, all of which has its roots in cultural differences combined with a lack of appreciation and basic respect for others.

In contrast, foreign policies of the future could be based on a principle of fundamental interdependence among countries and cultures that is our reality today and tomorrow. In the US, it is not uncommon to purchase a product, the parts of which were engineered in the US; built in China, Taiwan, or Mexico; distributed through a global network of distributors, and sold in a local retail store. Purchasing a banana at Safeway means giving a job to farmers in South America, truckers in Central and North America, and retailers in the states. Even though it is not to the same degree in Japan today, it is increasingly becoming like that, and only will become more so in the future.

Foreign policies based on the principle of fundamental interdependence among countries and cultures may create practices and policies vastly different from, if not antithetical to, current foreign policies based on isolationism and independence, which can only foster selfishness and self-righteousness. Foreign policies based on fundamental interdependence views the security and survival needs of a culture's lifestyle as fundamentally related to the security and survival needs of another. Cultural success, in this view, is dependent on the principle of mutual welfare and benefit, where success of one culture is dependent on the flourishing of another. Such principles have at their core a necessary ingredient based on mutual respect. Trust, cooperation, and mutual welfare and benefit among countries cannot occur with such respect, just as it cannot occur on the level of individuals as well.

Martial arts can play a role on the world stage in leading a movement of appreciation of these very issues that are the very core of martial arts training. They define what is unique and valuable about martial arts, and help us in remembering the ultimate goals of such practices. Judo itself was transformed as a method to address social problems



within one society and culture, by adapting antiquated battlefield jujutsu practices into modern practices of self-improvement based on principles of respect and mutual benefit. Now is the time for such an adaptation to occur once again, this time on the world stage, so that judo and all other martial arts can address this complex yet extremely important social and cultural problem that faces our future, and our children's and grandchildren's futures.

But how? Clearly there is no one solution to this problem, and it will require a multi-prong attack that involves the diffusion of the practice of martial arts, the conduct of research, and the education and enculturation of society, social structures, and social and cultural leaders to these principles. It requires organizational entities and individuals with vision and influence to come together for a common good that is greater than a single country, culture, or region, and that goes beyond nationalistic interests, where the principles of respect and mutual welfare and benefit form the bedrock of social and foreign policy and produces social and cultural capital that can last for generations. Martial arts practitioners bow deeply in respect for each other before and after each match or practice session regardless of gender, background, size, or strength; can we imagine a world where countries, regardless of population, geography, military power, or GNP, bow deeply to each other before any discussion of interdependent interests? Such a world is within our reach, and martial arts should help deliver that world.

References

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