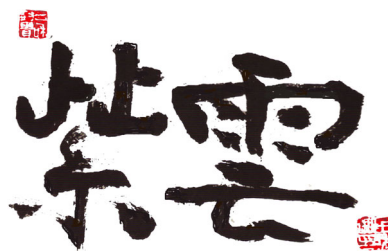


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COVER ART WORK BY BERNARD ABTEY



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Chiba Sensei on the creation of Birankai International. Part II

The essence of our activity is found in the student-teacher relationship. This is where the transmission of the art becomes possible, and through this transmission, practitioners become connected to the lineage (Douto). The teacher-student relationship is based on the activities centered around the dojo environment; it is personal, as well as being characterized by a particular local culture.

The creation of Birankai International was fundamentally motivated by a clear recognition of the prime importance of this principle. To support this principle, the creation of the physical dojo as an independent school- instead of as a social, club-oriented establishment, which is common in the Aikido world outside Japan- is vitally important. Needless to say, this is a difficult task to undertake- financially alone- to begin with- and many hundreds of steps are ahead of us. It is like pushing a heavy cart up a mountain slope. But our intention is clear and pure and, hopefully, is strong enough.

I am very happy and have been encouraged to see that the current is already shifting in that direction, with a number of full-time dojos already established in various places within Europe. It is my hope that turning in that direction will allow us to keep a healthy distance from state politics and bureaucracy. This will ensure that Aikido's fundamental freedom of activity to be a non-competitive school, oriented to artistic discipline, is preserved.

Another task we face is philosophical in nature. This is: to define the meaning of the rank system as the central thread of the fabric woven through the student-teacher relationship. Prior to the creation of Birankai International in 2000, this issue was discussed thoroughly amongst the teachers. We even considered divorcing ourselves from the system, as the situation in general appeared to be overwhelmingly shifting to having a negative rather than positive effect.

However, I have decided to keep the system, as I see that the problem is due to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the original concept, for which an egocentric and materially-oriented attitude is responsible. Rather than divorcing ourselves from a system that has been corrupted in many ways, we need to return to the original concept, defining it and embracing it in our hearts for further cultivation. (For the reader's information, I intend to include within my series of articles for Shiun a note addressing this issue that was circulated to teachers and related organisations, including Hombu Dojo in Japan, at the time of the creation of Birankai International.)

A historical note: for ten years prior to the creation of Birankai in 2000, Hombu Dojo and the North American Continental Shihankai (which consists of residential Shihans in the US, Canada and Mexico) engaged in a serious political discussion of three basic issues. First: should recognition of the teacher-student relationship as the cen-

tral thread of transmission of the art be directly expressed within the format of the dan certificate? Second: should the certificate be written in a language other than Japanese? Third: should the structure of dan registration fees be flexible and be able to adjust to different income levels? (In contrast to the current mechanical, uniform, compulsory system, which causes a considerable hardship to members from lower-income nations.) However, after a decade of negotiation through a series of meetings, with considerable money and time spent, no resolution of these issues was achieved, and the Shihankai effort was fruitless.

The present dan ranking procedure, including the format of the certificate and the registration fees, was originally established by the central authority in Japan for its overseas members. The system is, in my view, too mechanical. Being largely the creation of a bureaucracy, it not only fails to reflect the reality, it ignores the reality. Its most critical failure, as far as I am concerned, is that it enshrines a symbolism based on a misinterpretation of the concept of the lineage. The essence of the lineage is expressed through a freely chosen, heart-to-heart connection between teacher and student, which passes from generation to generation. In a bureaucratic system such as we now have, this connection is mechanically forced, where it should be manifested naturally. The essence of the system is therefore ritualistic and based on materialism, in which political and cultural arrogance is a hidden and deeply underlying factor. The expression of unification as symbolised by the dan certificate is fundamentally positive. However this same symbolism carries within it a subtle but powerful political intention. By presupposing and reaffirming such differences as insider vs. outsider, closer vs. farther, self vs. others, the ritual takes on the role of achieving a political objective.

I would not hesitate to support the ritual if I felt that it did indeed hold a universal appeal in the hearts of people, and that it contributed spiritually beyond cultural boundaries. However, in my view, the concept of unification presented by "Aiki" becomes a disaster when it is interpreted materialistically and with political and cultural arrogance. It cannot then be recognized as universal or international. The sense of belonging to the lineage carries a spiritual meaning that is fundamentally a part of the Japanese culture and is central to its social order throughout its history. Because of the strong cultural identification, this

spiritual significance is limited. But the true transmission of the lineage, which comes through the personal sacrifice of both teacher and student, transcends East and West, and is noble precisely because it has been freely chosen. Unfortunately, the current form of the dan certificate issued by the central authority in Japan to its overseas members, in my opinion, does not reflect the true transmission of the lineage that is the student-teacher relationship. It is a superficial expression of a lifeless ritual. Many years ago I conceived a way to renew and restore life to that ritual. I gave my idea a body in the year 2000. It is known today as Birankai International.

At this point I feel it is important to state that the creation of Birankai is not intended to make a political break with our mother house, Hombu, nor is it meant to challenge the authority of existing organisations. However, in places where the eyes and hands of the mother house are unable to act appropriately, it is vital that a less centralized organisation exists, to take care of the work that has been abandoned or neglected by the mother house. The world Aikido community is vastly different. A bureaucratic approach to such diversity inevitably leaves holes and missed opportunities, which can result in the destruction of great potential growth. As far as I am concerned, the work of Birankai International supports, nurtures and complete the mission of Aikido to the Aikido world at large.

Fortunately, Hombu seems to understand our intent and has allowed us to operate Birankai International as we intend it to be, without rejection. I am very grateful to the openness and flexibility demonstrated by Hombu. We can work together, hand to hand, in different dimensions for the common cause of Aikido in the world. In political terms, as earlier stated, Birankai International is an attempt to create a de-centralized, flexible organization. **However, the essential message that I intended to convey to today's Aikido world though the creation of Birankai International is not political.**

I intend, first, to give positive recognition to local teachers and their relationship to their students. I strongly believe if the lineage and its transmission are to remain alive, these teachers and their students are its heart. Second, I wish to make clear my belief that spiritual values cannot be conveyed through materialistic and mechanical means. What makes the transmission meritorious, and gives value to the ritual that symbolizes it, is that it is

freely manifested, without materialistic conditions. (I would be ashamed of myself if I choose to charge any member a Shodan registration fee, for instance, equivalent to a month of living costs for his entire family, when Aikido calls for universal brotherhood.) For this reason, the teacher-student relationship is clearly printed on the dan certificate issued by Birankai International, so as to reflect the substance of the transmission. Furthermore, there are no fees as such for all dan rankings, except for processing fees to cover administrative expenses.

Whether or not Birankai International will survive, and how, has yet to be tested. Regardless of what its fate will be in the future, I am convinced that the fundamental message that I intended to convey with the creation of Birankai will, hopefully, remain meaningful to some of us.

T. K. Chiba
San Diego, 5 / 31 / 02



Aikido and Budo

Gabriel Valibouze

Since the Dawn of humanity, every clan, tribe, people, nation of the human specie, through its own culture and identity, has permanently marked the History of Mankind. Today, there is no doubt that, in the area of Martial Arts, it is Japan that has given to modern society the most remarkable heritage, having cultivated to perfection the Spirit of Budo.

One of the noblest expressions of this spirit is to be found in the Art developed by Aikido's founder, Morihei Ueshiba O'Sensei, nowadays widely spread around the world thanks to his disciples and all those who devote the best of their time to the practice and teaching of Aikido.

In order to give an accurate definition of the causes at the root of Aikido, it is necessary to go far back in the history of Japan, and even in the history of mankind. Martial Arts have their foundation in the first fights men had to engage for their survival on the one hand, and in the ever-growing demand for conquest on the other.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to say when this time did begin. One may, however, assert that all living beings innately possess the sense, more or less revealed, of self-defence, in other words of protecting oneself and one's own kinds so as to ensure one's survival. The human brain has designed sophisticated methods in order to channel this ability by developing fearsome combat strategies, with devastating effects.

However, in order that this warlike genius really becomes an Art in the noble sense, it has been necessary to basically understand and accept that true martial spirit had to dedicate itself to peace and that henceforth one had to stop killing. One needed to achieve the enemy's physical destruction only in extreme circumstances, when, for example, the survival of the majority was at stake.

As I see it, the sublimation of Martial Arts has its roots in the extremely bright spirit of a few warlords imbued with high moral values, inspired by clear-sightedness, wisdom and indeed by love and compassion. Those inspired military strategies, born from their fine judgment, have acquired, thanks to that, their artistic and philosophic dimensions. It became thus possible to enjoy long periods of peace and prosperity. The institution of the famous Bushido Code of Honour (Way of the Warrior) is a remarkable expression of this sagacity, where the Martial Art, originally

an art of survival and conquest becomes an Art of living.

Though warlike tradition is not the sole privilege of the Japanese, no other country has raised so high the martial ideal and succeeded in transmitting this ideal up to now so as to make it fit our times. As far as I know, no other civilization has generated the metamorphosis of a warlike art, in the most deadly sense of the word, into an Art of peace seen as a means toward spiritual realization. All the civilisations in the world that overcame the challenges of History have achieved this through an adequate martial strategy, which allowed them to insure their own defence. In absence of that, no civilisation can develop and prosper, economically or socially. To the history of nations, almost always is linked a major "military" figure. Those who have not been relying on warriors have disappeared.

It is only in modern times, with the advent of certain stability, that the war rules have changed. Being closed on itself longer than other big countries, Japan was, for various reasons, able to maintain intact some great discoveries with regards to martial strategies and techniques.

With the «forced» opening to the modern world (end of 19th Century), the princes governing the country, represented by the emperor Meiji, having realised that the "Licence to Kill" given to the Samurai was obsolete, had ordered the "abandon of arms" and suppressed the Warrior social caste as well as all the privileges associated. The great martial arts schools were therefore left with only one alternative: disappear or adapt.

I think that it is truly starting with this change of martial strategy that a promotion of great amplitude of the martial arts, as art of peace, could (and had to) start, to avoid disappearance. It is also at that time that was born one of the greatest figures of martial arts in contemporary Japan: Morihei Ueshiba. He would, like no other before him, embody those deep ideological changes.

I believe that the "martial arts fans" of today owe to Japan to have been the "laboratory" where the martial principle was brought to the highest degree of achievement and then transcended thanks to the discovery and elaboration of the fundamental principles of Budo. This is what allowed Japan to develop an exceptional level of society and culture. In addition, it is, to my knowledge, the only country which, while being technologically at the top, keeps alive the great teachings of the past and, thus, maintains us linked to our ancestors.

I would like to conclude by saying that I am perfectly aware that there has been, before the Japanese, other brilliant civilisations, like the Sumerians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Aztecs, the Mongols, the Chinese, etc. Not forgetting those that take a special place in my heart, the men of Cro Magnon, gifted with exceptional memory, who had also developed a remarkable form of civilisation through their intuitive knowledge of the laws of Nature, transmitted through generations, and the skills of their hunters, pillars of their survival. All those civilisations owed their prosperity (social, economical or

cultural) to the military genius of a few of them.

But, to this day, only the Japanese martial arts masters have revealed to the modern people the principles of Budo, thanks to their direct contacts with the last of them, and to their interest in transmission from person to person.

Principles whose essence goes back to the dawn of humanity.

**Gabriel Valibouze,
Aikikai de Strasbourg**

From Dee Chen

The birth of Shiun not only celebrates the existence of Birankai Continental Europe but also completes the triangle in the Birankai International organisation at this present time.

Communication plays an important part in the efficient and successfully running of an organisation. It is hoped that the exchange of views of the members through the three publications - Biran from the USA, the British Aikikai newsletter and Shiun - will help to strengthen the ties and kinship which exist amongst the students who follow the path of Aikido as set down by O-Sensei and transmitted by Chiba Shihan.

Congratulations on the publication of Shiun.

**Dee Chen
Editor, British Aikikai Newsletter
31 August 2002**



“Aikido is not about self-defence. Aikido is about self-discovery.”

T. K. Chiba Sensei
Mèze, August 2002

The Aikido Body: an anthropological view

**Dr. Tamara Kohn
(University of Durham, UK)**

There is not a subject of contemporary social anthropological interest that cannot be seen in a meaningful way through the practice, movements and words of aikidoists. This is largely because aikido practice is a path, a philosophy of movement and of life encompassing issues of family, gender, ideology, religion, ethnicity, nationalism, the constructing and changing of "self", etc. Some aikidoists' ideas about the "body" will be the focus of this short excerpt of a larger paper soon to be published in an academic collection.² These ideas are shaped both by felt movements in space as well as by a vocabulary developed to aid people with their aikido practice. They are central to the understanding of the art as well as to a more general understanding of the ways in which "bodies" are socially situated, socially inscribed and indeed, I would suggest, inscribing.

Nearly all who train for any length of time will eventually come to understand their practice in terms of a number of key principles of movement that are very commonly related to analogous reactions and events in their everyday social world. These principles are clarified and taken into the body only through repetitive and reflexive practice over many years, but they are also simultaneously understood through a consciousness of their general applicability in the process of living from day to day. These understandings are shared and indeed "taught" to others in their social interactions as well as in the essays submitted for their dan grade tests and in contributions to aikido and other martial arts books, magazines, newsletters and web pages etc. The examples are limitless. For instance books with titles like "Herding the Ox: the Martial Arts as Moral Metaphor" (Donohue 1998) or "Aikido in Everyday Life: Giving in to Get your Way" (Dobson and Miller 1978) all read like personal development manuals. Other writings share narratives of personal discovery, for instance Stone's story about "blending" with the reality of her father's death (1985). In San Diego, Marcus³ told me how he often applies aikido principles on his verbally abusive boss by "meeting at the point of attack"... entering and then blending with his aggressive energy and redirecting it to his weak point with a calm and centered response. Denise

showed me the clay sculpture she was working on and explained how her art is changing – how she now tries to take ukemi (receive) when she works the clay – to let the piece lead the form rather than her own will and to move naturally, often in unexpected directions.

All these revelations are genuinely felt to have emerged from embodied experiences on the mat. They were felt to be new revelatory responses to the world rather than old ones that aikido metaphor could slot into nicely. They were expressed by people from many occupational and cultural backgrounds (not just the "new petty bourgeoisie" or "artsy fartsy" California set). It is for this reason that the bodily practice may be said to be inscribing of society as a whole, as well as something which transforms the individual body and spirit.

Aikido Body

After the group interview finished, the "kenshusei" finished up the last of the pizza in the back room of the dojo, and Chiba Sensei drank some home-made sake. Sarah, the most senior of the kenshusei in the dojo said, "I'll tell you a really interesting thing that's happened to me since I've been training is that in the last three or four years I've been painting stuff that shocks me, because I've suddenly seen things differently... I mean, literally, I couldn't draw a stick figure as a kid, I had no ability to see any of that stuff and now it just comes out of me. But it has totally to do with aikido – something in the way I've seen." Sensei responded, "That's very good. I see movement like a painting drawn with the stroke of brush. That's our specialty – try to eliminate everything unnecessary. The aikido body is something to do with that very much. How your body draws line in atmosphere – that's what I see – how much clarity, how much purity, how much force in the simple drawing of how you move. What is most important is that calligrapher's line.'

On another day he said, "The aikido body can be seen in any first class well-trained martial artist. Aikido body is alive. In order to be alive you must have center... so that the left and right don't argue with each other. Upper portion body, lower portion body don't argue with each other. We say... The mountain doesn't laugh at the river because it's low. The river doesn't laugh at the mountain because of its stillness. Every function in the body has condition. And there has to be center to cause link – to make it one single unit –

for body to become alive. And everybody has it in youth, but most of the time they don't use. As the notion of I – I, me, mine – start to grow in a natural progression, the centre is sort of lost. And aikido training, I consider, one of the best ways to discover that organic order.'

In the words above, Sarah, echoed by many others I've spoken to, introduced the notion that an aikido body is one that sees itself and its surroundings in a different and clearer way. Its development through focused training allows a perceptiveness that can be expressed in unexpected ways. This led to Sensei discussing the aikido body as it moves through space like a single stroke of a brush with coordination and spirit that he suggests is natural in childhood but lost with the development of ego. Aikido training with the right spirit involves a peeling back of these egocentric layers to reveal qualities that appear paradoxical but may exquisitely coexist in the aikido body. Sensei said, "In Japanese we say, heavier, lighter - same time. Stronger, weaker - same time. That is not paradoxical to us. Fast and slow same time.' It is suggested that in that moment of balance and clarity of movement, a healing or recovery takes place within the self, allowing creativity and freedom beyond the constraints of the various forms that are practiced. A fellow student from the UK once suggested that most aikido practitioners have been physically or psychologically damaged at some point or other, and that their training is a healing process. Another spoke of layers and layers of "crap" or excess that we as individuals accumulate through life and that we need to painfully (literally through the pain of hard training) peel off and let go of. What is then revealed within is what Sensei calls "the true body":

Kenneth spoke of how supportive the aikido community could be to a person going through a "hard time", and Sensei responded, "That exactly relates to our problems with aikido body. As much as man, woman broken up, as much as nuclear family as community is broken down, that's what I mean by aikido body – recovery of aikido body. My kids come to see me and say, "You take care of your students better than us!" I say, "no" I don't make difference – whether my family or my dojo – that is all our body."

So here we see the aikido body may be situated within a community framework – this time offering a path along which perceived loss or disarray in the family or local community may be followed by recovery – a regaining of balance. This recovery

is felt to take place in the self as well as within society as a whole. Aikido is described by some as an "antidote to modernity", by others as a "counterbalance to the worst tendencies in American culture of materialism and individualism/isolation".

Dr. Khon's article will be continued
in the next issue of Shiun.

The birth of Sanjukan in Lisbon, Portugal

Instructor: Christophe Peytier

Something always exists, just at different stages of realisation.

This very oriental way of seeing things certainly applies to Sanjukan (the «school of three trees») since it has gone through a few stages of materialization in the last two years. When I arrived in Portugal in September 2000, it was just an intention. Those first six months, I just tried to find my place in Portugal, train, and get to know the various actors of the Aikido life in that country.

I ended up practicing mainly in one of those typical gym clubs that offer dozens of activities, among which Aikido was present.

The teacher, a nidan in his late twenties and student of Georges Stobbaerts (the Belgium man who really kicked-off Aikido in Portugal in the 70s), was athletic and had a good martial spirit that I enjoyed. He had been very open-minded and greeted me in his school with a sincere and positive attitude. When he left for Brazil with very short notice, the gym club was concerned to leave the few students that trained there regularly with no instruction, and it was all naturally that they accepted me as the teacher for the club after seeing my credentials.

In September 2001, we continued under that gym club umbrella, I was officially employed by them, and my students were actually paying their dues to the club, as regular members. The children class prospered, and ramped from four kids in the previous year to 22 (more due to my daughter's connections at the neighbouring French school than to my talent as an instructor, I must admit) while adult membership stayed around 4 or 5. But that structure did not please me much, for the lack of independence forced us to have only the worse time slots (the primetime being kept for Judo because they bring medals to the club, hence

financial help from the Portuguese Federation) and no possibility to train out of the place.

Thus I started the formal steps in order to create a legal entity, registered with the Portuguese government. And in November 2002, the Sanjukan association was officially born, with a President, a General Secretary, a treasurer, and a technical director. Being obviously the latter, I am very thankful to the people representing the three other functions, Hugo Lavrador, Nuno Campos and Joao Moita, who are the core of students committed to learn the Aikido of Birankai. In fact, I also have to say that all this would have been much harder without the continuous support of Jean-Marc Duclos, another Frenchman who also teaches in Lisbon. He has ramped up his school for the last 25 years, and he is a real Budoka. He has recognized value in the Birankai Aikido and has asked his students to give us full support in the creation of Sanjukan. The fact that some of his students are lawyers or insurance brokers came quite handy!

So, now, we can practice anywhere we like, and indeed we have two places, one for the evening, and one for lunchtime. The first one is the University that trains all the PE teachers in Portugal. Needless to say, the potential students are all healthy and athletic! The second place is a typical neighbourhood sports hall, long past its prime. It does have a pre-war look and feel, and there is hardly anyone in there, I just know that a Judo school also uses the mats at another time. I was able to put there a small Tokonoma with a picture of O Sensei in order to create a Kamiza and give a polarisation to the place, thing that the

Judo guys don't care about anymore nowadays. It definitely has spirit, and the cold showers remind me of those of Hombu Dojo.

So, we are on tracks. The next step is to start advertise and grow the membership, so that more and more people can enjoy the benefits of Aikido. The coming year is going to be challenging, I have now taken a part time professional activity, but the schedule is going to take sometime to put in place.

Of course, every day that passes, I am asking myself if this is the right thing to do: Wouldn't I be better off comfortably continuing my own training as student of a Birankai high ranked instructor, like I had the privilege for 10 years? I still have so much to learn... Am I going to be able to really create something that lasts? Will I have the lucidity to make the right choices in order to fulfil the objective that I have defined, that is: be a link that pas-

ses a part of the Budo culture through the teachings of O Sensei? Will I be worthy of the time my masters have passed teaching me and the time my students have passed learning from me?

Well, I guess all that was described above is no different than what everyone in the situation of opening a school has gone through. It reminds me of that experience, shared with two friends from Alameda Aikikai, when we climbed Mount Shasta in California (14,000 feet). Rick McKinley, who had done it before, kept telling Elmer Tancinco and I: «DO NOT look up. Just keep climbing one step at a time.»

One step at time. Those four words keep echoing in my mind everyday. As I bow to the Shomen at the beginning of each class, even when there is only one student also bowing behind me as it happens sometime, I keep thinking, «Every class is one step more on the way».

Christophe Peytier

The United States Aikido Federation,
Western Region and Birankai International
present:

A voyage to Japan

October 22 - November 7, 2003

With T. K. Chiba Sensei

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