Martial arts in the process of institutional and ideological change on the example of Aikijutsu

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Far-Eastern martial arts are subject to evolution in their contents – both technical (methods of training, techniques and forms of combat) as well as ideological, and also within the scope of their institutionalization. The ideological change consists in the change of the sense, ethos or purpose of practicing martial arts, their religious, ideological or philosophical foundation.

The main problem undertaken in this work is to show this process of change on the example of aikijutsu - a typical, original Japanese martial art. How do the purposes, ethos and general sense of practicing martial arts change in the context of social-cultural conditionings? The authors indicate several main currents and tendencies of this kind of changes.

Basic Notional Categories

Institution can be generally understood as an accepted and preserved way of action in a given matter. The process of institutional change concerns here the formal organizational structures, teaching, competence confirmation system, divergence from the rules of behavior sanctified with the tradition and modernizations of various kinds.

The classical aikijutsu (Japanese technique of harmonization of energy) was created in the times of Japanese middle ages and was developing between the 9th and 19th centuries in several noble families (Minamoto, Takeda, Aizu) [Cynarski 1997; compare: Mol 2003, p. 50]. It is related to the original jūjutsu of so called old schools (Japanese koryū, ryōha), but considerably less known and popular than jūjutsu - the samurai art of softness and elasticity. However, it is subject to similar tendencies of changes.

The ethos is the model (example) of integrating values [Bock 1984, p. 403]. It constitutes the root of axionormative system of various ways of martial arts (budō). These ways are different according to the accepted emphases and priorities, or more deeply – in ideological assumptions and religious or philosophical background. To the past mosaic character of Far-Eastern martial arts, their variety resulting from social and ideological differentiation and outlook and personality differentiation of the creators of particular schools there was added the change of purposes changing the sense of the whole psychophysical practice. Several types, stages and currents of it can be distinguished.

For the interpretation of the indicated phenomenon or process there can be useful the categories of the conception of reflexive modernization of A. Giddens [Giddens, Beck, Lash 1994], the theory of intercultural dialogues and the categories of westernization-easternization of Tokarski [2004], or the general reflection on the ground of the humanistic theory of martial arts [Cynarski 2004] and sociology of physical culture with basic notions of change, democratization and commercialization.

From aikijutsu to aikidō

The researchers writing about aikijutsu in the past tense, as about a historical type of martial arts which has gone giving rise to aikidō, make a mistake. Also the change of notional category of 'jūjutsu' into 'dō' does not entitle to generalization that the old aikijutsu - as a form of būjutsu (classical martial arts) – is the past [compare: Draeger 1996; Litwiniuk, Cynarski 2003].

Up to the present day there have been cultivated old traditions of martial art aikijutsu fundamentally in two main lines of transmission - daityūryū shō-ryū (the leader master, i.e. sōke is here Munemitsu Takeda) and takeda-ryū gen-ryū (sōke Hisashi Nakamura). These arts are still being taught and promoted in the world “market” of martial arts, to mention only the books of Shirō Omiya [1999] and Roland J. Maroteaux [1993] or the articles in the magazines on martial arts [Maillet 1993; Kobizna 1998]. The term aikijutsu refers to the old techniques from the traditional schools or also to their utilitarian values.

Somehow “between” the military, utilitarian in its primary form aikijutsu or aiki-no jutsu and “the way of harmony of motion” in the version of master Morhei Ueshiba (1883-1969), and more precisely his later conception, there is the evolutionary form under the name aikikudō. Aikikudō is the most general term and it indicates various ways of martial arts in which the primary principle is aiki - harmonization of opposed energies. This is how “early Ueshiba” called his practice in the years 1930-1940. The system aikikudō of Alain Floquet contains both classical forms (daityūryū techniques) and evolutionary forms (from the school yoseikan of master Minoru Mochizuki).

In turn the term aikidō is associated with the system popularized by Morhei Ueshiba and his students. Meanwhile, some schools, as yoseikan of M. Mochizuki and takeda-ryū of Hisashi Nakamura use also the names aikidō and aikidō jūjutsu, despite teaching classical techniques. It results from currently emphasizing the moral and educational dimension (the element dō - Japanese ‘way’) of practicing martial arts.

In International Martial Arts Federation (Kokusai Budō Renmei), where Prof. Shizuya Sato (expert in jūjutsu - 10 dan, hanshi) is the leader, aikjutsu is classified among kobudō - the complex of classical, traditional martial arts. Once it was the elitist art, practiced in the aristocratic families of mediaeval Japan, but today it meets the criteria of so called sport for all (for everybody).
Cultural Tradition, Self-defense or Sport?

Aikijutsu in its various forms of today remains more or less true to the Japanese original as the heritage of culture of this country. Its useful value in combat at mediaeval battlefields and in duels of ancient warriors preserves usefulness also in contemporarily taught self-defense. However, there often occur modifications towards greater many-sidedness in teaching the techniques and tactics of hand-to-hand fight at the cost of teaching greater number of forms of wielding classical weapon [Cynarski 1997; 2004].

Especially sport competition implemented in the school takeda-ryu of master H. Nakamura, and concerning duels in aikidō and iaidō (practically aikijutsu and kumi-battō-jiai), forces the change of technical profile, program of teaching and applied training methods.

During the Second Congress European Sobukai Takeda-ryu (EST) in Liége (1995) in Belgium took place the First European Iaidō/Batted Shiai Tournament – championships of the old continent in the sport version of fencing duel of samurais. The chief referee was H. Nakamura [Cynarski 1995 a; 1995 b] who in Japan also organizes combats in aikidō with the use of conventional strikes (using protectors) and techniques of throws. However, the attempt of wider popularization of this formula in Europe failed and there were no more European tournaments, nor world ones.

However, will the tendency to accept the formula of sport competition not direct aikijutsu onto the paths similar to those which is followed by technically and axiologically related jūjutsu? A part of jūjutsu environment already accepted the sport competition, however, a part sticks to traditional teaching of this martial art or concentrates on the very utilitarian dimension, i.e. self-defense (which constitutes a subsystem of jūjutsu).

The example of world career of jūdō is ambivalently accepted here. This Olympic discipline became – despite intentions of its creator J. Kanō - a force and aggressive combat sport, losing a lot from the idea of budō - the moral way of non-aggression and self-realization, which is confirmed both by the results of sociological studies and by common observation [Villamón, Brown, Espartero, Gutiérrez 2004; Cynarski 2004]. Modernization of jūdō is in fact its westernization and going away from basic canons of martial arts [Förster 1986; Carr 1993; Tokarski 2004]. Only its physical form – the technical sphere (waza, kata) and tatami mat constituting the arena remain Far-Eastern. However, even here one may observe occurrence of wrestling holds and techniques of Russian sambo. Is aikijutsu condemned to similar, gradual regression?

There is yet possible the formula of ritualization of the old art accepted by master M. Ueshiba, the creator of modern aikidō. As his son puts it, “In the years 1910-1923 the Creator extremely diligently studied the old forms of jūjutsu. If he had stayed faithful only to one school, there would not have been aikidō, because aikidō - although one may find elements of tradition in it – in fact it is a dynamic part of contemporary community” [Ueshiba 2002, p. 146]. Modification of techniques was accompanied here by the change of axiological background – the code of bushidō and the chivalry way of self-realization was replaced by the religion of the Shinto sect Ōmoto-kyō, the way of “love and peace”. There also changed the purpose and the way of exercises which are to serve – according to this guru’s teaching – achieving harmony with macrocosm through harmony of motion.

Conflicts of Interests and Organizational Break

One of the first Europeans undertaking research over the tradition of aikijutsu was Alain Floquet who in 1973 founded Cercle d’Étude et de Recherche en Aiki et Kobudo (CÉRA). Floquet introduced in Europe the classical aikijutsu daitō-ryū in the transmission of sōke Tokimune Takeda (and now of his nephew whose name is Munemitsu) and founded adequate shibu - the branch office of daitōkan school. The intention of Floquet was to come back from contemporary forms of aikidō to the roots and military techniques of combat of the noble families of old Japan [Floquet 1989]. However, he popularizes mainly the method and techniques originating from yoseikan school and has no authorization to teach daitō-ryū on his own.

Later, another French aikidōka and instructor of hakkō-ryū jūjutsu Dr Roland J. Maroteaux met in Japan the current, 44. sōke of the second main line of transmission of the old aikijutsu - master Hisashi Nakamura 10 dan and visited the seat of the schools of takeda-ryu nakamura-ha (honbu dōjō) - Nippon Sōbukan in Tokyo (1987). Maroteaux after years of studies and research became the first shihan - the teacher of takeda-ryū school in Europe. Nakamura assessed his knowledge and skills with the high degree of 6 dan. Later, however, a Viennese instructor Siegfried Kobilza competing in Europe with Maroteaux, gained higher degree (7 dan).

First Nakamura appointed Ms. Werhahn-Mees (2 dan aikidō, iaidō) from Luxemburg as his European representative. His second European favorite was very Maroteaux who gained high degrees 6 dan in aikidō, 5 dan in iaidō and 5 dan in jūdō (main disciplines taught within the framework of this school) and the master degree jōden-shihan. Maroteaux, together with students, established the association European Sobukai Takeda-ryu (EST) based in Avignon. In the result of the conflict with master Nakamura (since the EST congress in Liége, 1995) Maroteaux established his own line of teaching under the name takeda-ryu maroto-ha, and also ESTAM (European Sobukai Takeda-ryu Maroto-ha) and WTMF (World Takeda-ryu Marotokan Federation). Nakamura, however, in July 1997 deprive the French leader the authorizations given to him and promoted an Austrian, Sigfried Kobilza, leading ISTB (International Society for Takeda Budo), and gave him the high title okuden-shihan. Similar conflicts and divisions concern the second main line of transmission – the school daitōryū, where, however, to a greater extent it concerns claims for succession of the school and the function of master-leader [Zięba 1995].

Certainly the differences of views and opinions, interests (material and concerning “power” – decision-making matters) cause divisions of such a kind. Despite the noble ideals of “moral ways” of martial arts there decide on it just particular interests, incompatibility of characters of particular leaders and crash of cultures:
feudal, samurai tradition and private property of school in confrontation with democratic formula of organization and economic calculation. For these mainly ambitions and economic reasons the present shoguns do not recognize one another. Another thing is that establishing institutions independent of Japanese supremacy is not only cheaper, but certainly easier. Therefore, there becomes decisive the choice between rationalization of such a kind and the effort for legitimization of realized teaching.

Maroteaux kept the name aikijutsu (takeda-ryū maroto-ha), but at the same time he uses the name aikigoshinrō, indicating the “way of self-defense”. M. Takeda and A. Floquet use the name aikibudō, and Nakamura – aikidō (takeda-ryū nakamura-ha). For defining the techniques originating from daitō-ryū and yoseikan there is also used the name aiki jūjutsu, as Jan Janssens (Belgium) and Stanisław Cynarski (Poland) do it. Moreover, it is not always known who has the formal right to use the names and emblems of a given school, because sometimes, for commercial success, self-appointed masters assume names of famous Japanese schools without knowing who has the formal right to use the names and emblems of a given school, because sometimes, for commercial success, self-appointed masters assume names of famous Japanese schools without having adequate licenses. Different names result from marketing or legal reasons – possessing or not possessing of branch offices of a given master and school, authorizations to teach and examine, rights to sign certificates and to posses the seal etc. To the economic matters (costs of education “at the source”) there comes the problem of having adequate licenses. Different names result from marketing or legal reasons – possessing or not possessing of branch offices of a given master and school, authorizations to teach and examine, rights to sign certificates and to posses the seal etc. To the economic matters (costs of education “at the source”) there comes the problem of not possessing by some aikijutsu teachers a complete knowledge on the program of a given school and the contents of the system – similarly as it concerned teaching jūjutsu in many Western countries in the beginning of the 20th century [compare: Mol 2003].

Very often paralleling to the conflicts of world and continental leaders there occur divisions and conflicts among domestic instructors and activists. In the years 1987-1994 aikibudō, kobudō i aikijutsu came – thanks to the effort of pioneers – simultaneously instructors and activists – to Poland [Maroteaux 1995; Cynarski 1997; Draus 2004], and then also to other countries of Middle-East Europe. The students of Floquet competed in Poland for several years, then they founded associations teaching the systems independent of the organization managed by this French expert. Competition for leadership in the domestic organization and representing a given style or school of combat in a given country takes place in the borderland of institutions of feudal origin (nominal authorization or obligation to responsibility gained from the master) or democratic origin (elections to the authorities of the association).

The wish to appear in the role of instructor of “historical” aikijutsu causes also careless naming with this term the practices which are very remote from the original, various eclectic systems and schools of other types of hand-to-hand fight.

Recapitulation

In the original martial arts whose example is aikijutsu, there occurs the ideological change – of the purpose and sense of practicing it. It is no more the teaching of “mortal struggle”, but original, cultural Japanese ethos practiced in various countries of the world for recreation and self-realization, or self-defense, health or sometimes also for sport competition. The change, or rather variety of purposes of practicing martial arts, is followed by the change of their ethos or also of their philosophical background – e.g. from religious to some ideological.

In the context of the present social-cultural conditionings, one may specify several main currents and tendencies of such a kind of changes. There occurs democratization of previously elitist aikijutsu. Martial arts become more and more available, which causes their popularization. In turn, world popularization of aikijutsu is connected with commercialization, fight for the market (popularity, number of students, incomes) and adaptive modifications (modernization).

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