

## CULTURAL RESEARCH

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### Values associated with practicing modern karate as a form of cultivating old Japanese Bushido patterns

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#### Abstract

Many masters of martial arts derived from the nobility, therefore, the principles of Bushido continuously penetrated the social systems with which the tutors were identified. The moral values such as righteousness and justice, courtesy, kindness, goodness, and honor determined the key to understand the major goals of teaching karate as a sport discipline. Bushido as a chivalrous system of values emerged with the development of war crafts in the medieval Japan, pointing direction towards educating and functioning of Japanese chivalry namely people skilled in the art of war. Righteousness and justice are distinguished in terms of many features of the warriors. They are associated with an obligation to respect orders dictated by reason and act in a just cause. The actions were entirely supported by bravery and courage, where the fear of death ceased to exist. The most valuable items owned by a warrior were his weapon and his self-esteem. Japanese culture strongly emphasizes politeness as the feature which already in ancient times has been regarded as one of the most important virtues and associated with a favor of respect for other people and their feelings. Karate cultivates the tradition of performing monastic training, derived from Buddhist practice. The stages of initiating and finishing the training with meditation, the atmosphere of discipline, specific relationship between a master and his learner in which the teacher is a guide on the way of gaining personal knowledge and skills. In conclusion each element of training process makes karate become a practical field of acquisition and exploring the truth concerning ourselves and life and the truth which pursues a sense of excellence. The research objective is to examine an opinion of the contestants practicing shotokan, on the values they perceive which result from cultivating martial arts.

#### Introduction

Many martial arts masters originated from nobility and therefore the Bushido rules naturally penetrated into their systems. Integrity and justice, politeness, courtesy, kindness and honor are the key to understanding the teaching goal of this discipline. A knightly system of values – Bushido came into existence with the development of martial art in medieval Japan and became the way of upbringing and operation of the Japanese knighthood, experts in martial art. Integrity and justice are some of the qualities characterizing warriors and they are connected with performing duties imposed by senses and activities in just causes. All actions were supported by bravery and courage, where the fear of death ceased to exist. His weapon and the sense of honor were the most valuable things that a warrior

possessed [Szeligowski 2009]. The Japanese culture puts great stress on politeness, which even in the old times was considered to be one of the most valued virtues and was associated with showing respect to other people and their feelings. Karate cultivates the tradition of monastic exercises originating from Buddhism. Beginning and finishing classes with meditation, the atmosphere of discipline, a specific relation master – disciple where a teacher is a guide on the path to acquiring personal knowledge and skills make karate a practical domain of learning and deepening the truth about oneself and life – the truth leading to perfection [Nakayama 1994]. Nowadays young martial art learners join sports clubs because they want to learn self-defense for their own safety, improve their physical fitness or rival in line with sports rules [Kuśnierz 2006]. According to Kalina [2000] martial arts are the effect

of a dialogue and cross-cultural exchange. They help to control aggression, teach tolerance towards other races, cultural traditions and religion. Unfortunately, with time there occurred many hazards connected, among others, with the development of technology, which resulted in a gradual loss of the most significant values. Modern fighters often forget about the sense of the martial arts and they do not cultivate the tradition connected with the Far East philosophy. Modernistic tendencies lead to the occurrence of new synthetic systems of self-defense and fighting and many Budo disciplines became sport oriented. Due to the development of technology martial arts have become a global phenomenon. Commercialization is the most significant threat connected with the modernistic trend. The motives of many current contestants' activities differ from the traditional ones. Prestige, fame, and first of all money, are mostly sought for. Cynarski [2000] says that many karate fighters reject the Far East tradition to fight for money in kick-boxing. At present, disciplines based on mixing various styles have become very popular. K1 or MMA contests attract crowds of fans, the contestants are very popular and get huge material benefits. Also the attitude towards a coach has changed. In the old days respect of the fighters for their master was, undoubtedly, something special in the Far East martial arts. Sensei was the most important person in a fighter's life and the development of the disciple depended on him to a large extent. The coach directed the actions of his follower and passed the knowledge necessary to achieve the goal. A model master, following Cynarski [2000], should be: authentic, trustworthy, truthful, involved, diligent (a perfectionist), wise and just. Nowadays, a coach does not cherish so much respect. Conflicts happen between a contestant and a coach, which was unthinkable in the past. Contestants question the methods and wishes of their masters out of the lack of humility, and being impatient they wish to achieve successive ranks as soon as possible. Young people practicing martial arts forget that in order to achieve success, full trust is indispensable on both sides.

The aim of the research was getting to know the opinions of the persons practicing Shotokan Karate on the values they observe in practicing this discipline.

Research questions:

1. What are the main motives for taking up training?
2. What values do karate fighters observe in this discipline?
3. What effects and benefits do they find in practicing karate?

## Material and methods

The research was carried out in Karate-do Shotokan Club in Opole and it covered 50 contestants, including 40 men and 10 women aged 19-24. The method of a diagnostic sounding and a questionnaire technique were applied. The questionnaire contained 18 questions.

## Result analysis

Martial arts are carriers of some ideas and a several-hundred-year-old tradition. Many historical descriptions made it possible to learn about the origin, development and values connected with practicing hand-to-hand fighting. In spite of significant civilization changes there can be observed a great interest in the history and tradition of the Far East, the countries in which martial arts achieved the highest level of development. Theoretical knowledge of these issues seems to be indispensable for people practicing karate, therefore the respondents were asked to define their level of knowledge of martial arts history and tradition. The answers provided show that a very good knowledge in this scope was declared by 25% of the respondents. Most answers (45%) were around 'good'. 30% of karate practitioners assessed their own knowledge as satisfactory (Fig. 1).

Getting to know the respondents' motivation for beginning to practice this discipline is the essential research element. The question to be asked is why the persons under study decided to choose this specific form of physical activity – karate. What made them interested and willing to take up the Japanese martial art?

The research results point out that the main motive is learning how to fight, and in spite of the sports character of the training 40% of the people practicing karate want to learn self-defense rules. A considerable group of the respondents (33%) claimed that they had taken up karate to follow great masters, which is connected with following the path of karate throughout their lives and aiming at perfection. It can be assumed that this motivation was evoked by historical descriptions and results from the wish to consider a life-long training as an idea (Fig. 2)

Describing their own reflections on the training in the club the karate fighters stress the good points of training, the effects experienced after the first year of training which come down mainly to the rise of the feeling of safety (54%), boosting one's own self-esteem and increase of strength and general fitness (23%), Fig. 3.

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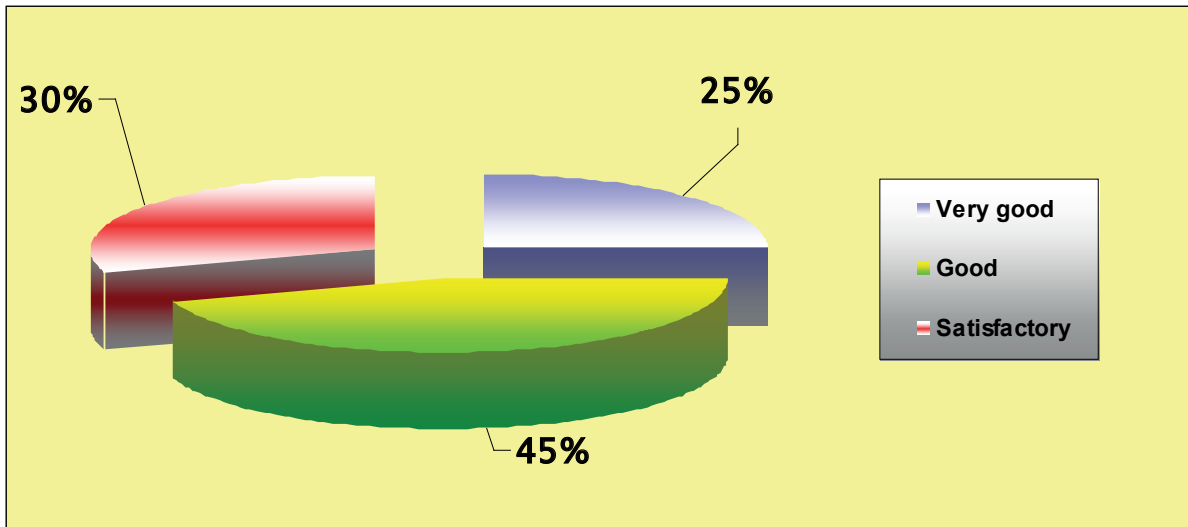


Figure 1. Theoretical knowledge and the knowledge of the martial arts history

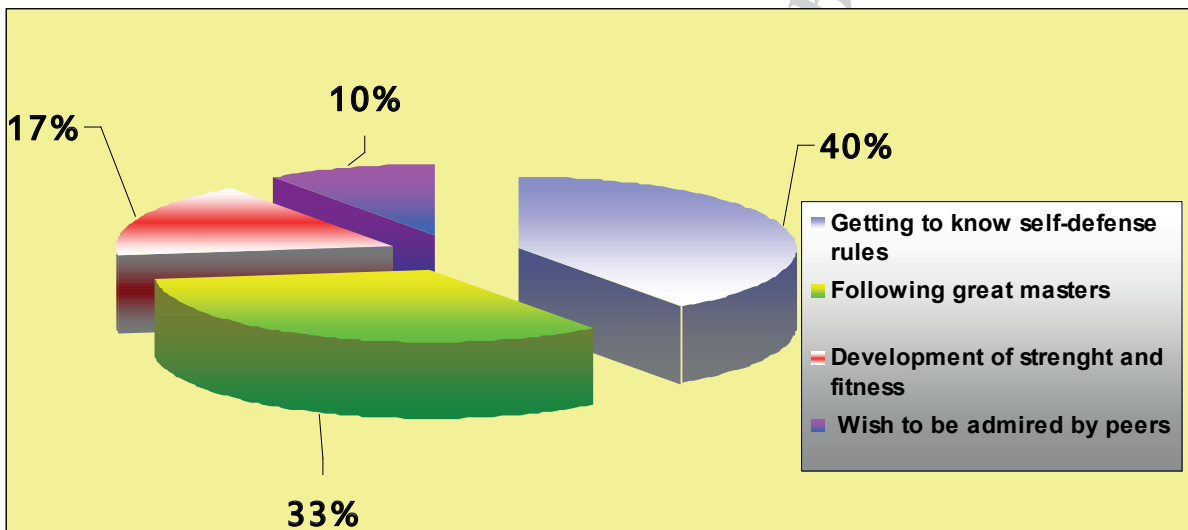


Figure 2. Motivations for taking up karate

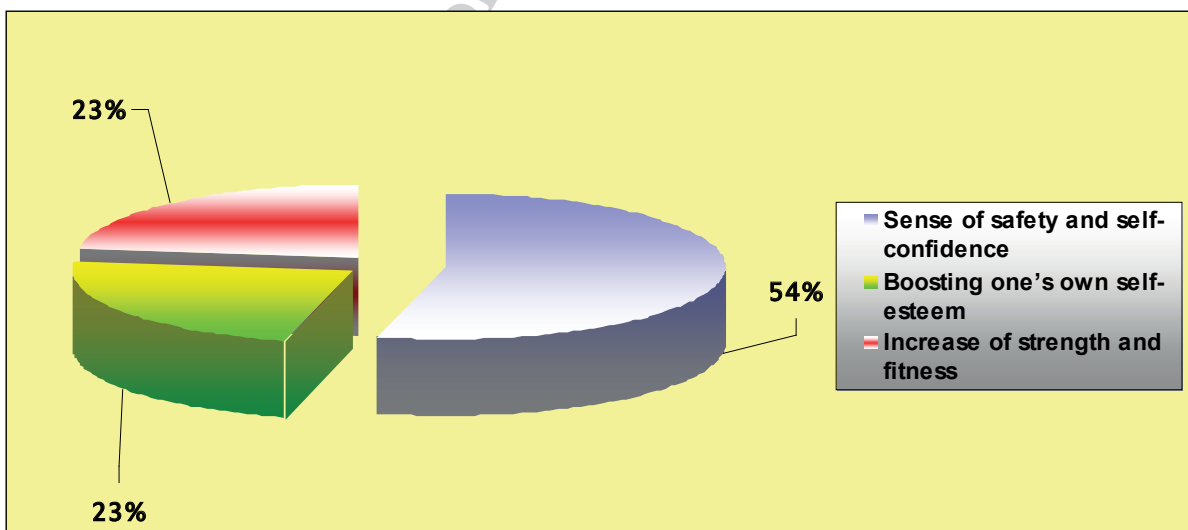


Figure 3. Experienced effects after an initial period of training (1 year)

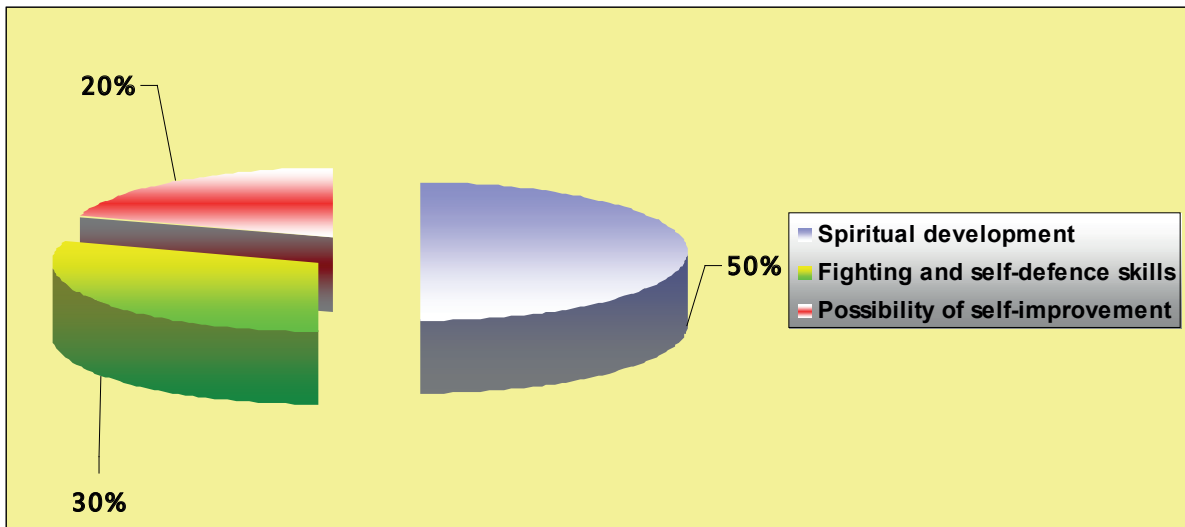


Figure 4. Values perceived in modern karate

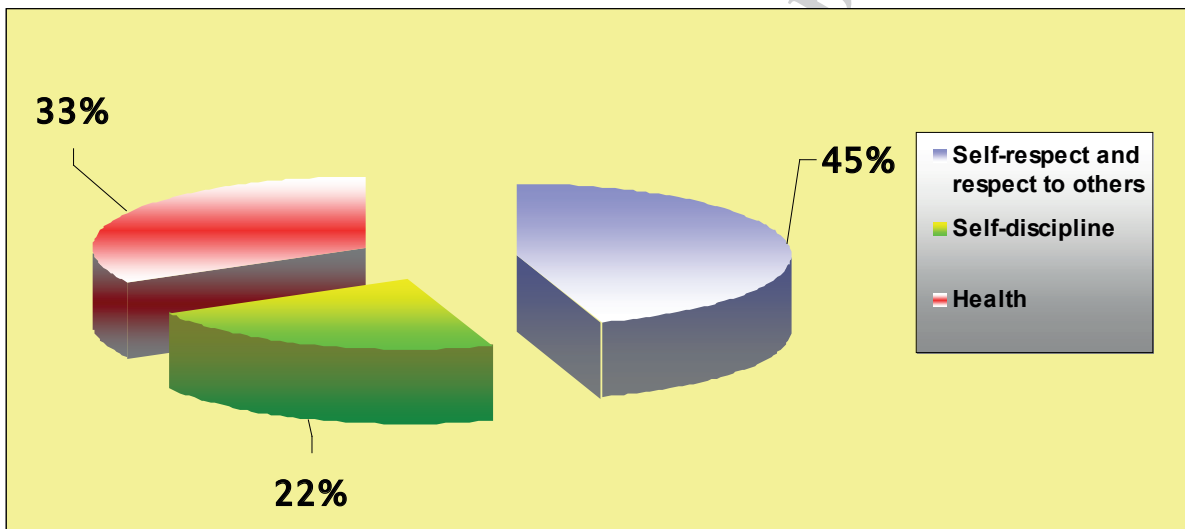


Figure 5. Effects obtained through many years' training

The essential aspect of the research is determining the values perceived nowadays in practicing karate as numerous social and cultural transformations changed significantly a contemporary understanding of martial arts, usually making out of them forms of sport. The question is what values are perceived by the contestants in the form of exercises that have developed into sporting activities, which in the old days were a real fighting martial art supported by philosophy and religion? Fighting and self-defense skills, which were the main motives for taking up karate, only for 30% of the respondents were the priority after a few years of practice. Fifty per cent of them claimed that the greatest value was their spiritual development and development of the volitional qualities, and 20% indicated the possibility of self-improvement (Fig. 4).

Describing the effects resulting from many-year training the respondents draw special attention to

self-respect and respect to other people (45%) which results from hard training, 33% of those under study claimed a significant improvement of their health and frame of mind, 22% of karate practitioners indicate an increase of self-discipline, diligence and good organization in everyday life (Fig. 5).

## Discussion

Analyzing the values of modern karate our attention should be drawn to the discrepancy between an idea of a sports training and a traditional approach to this discipline as the Budo system. The sports form is often perceived as contradictory to tradition, in sports competition it is winning that counts. However, the essence of Budo is acting in compliance with some rules, defeat or death on the battlefield was not perceived as the worst thing that

could happen. The behavior unworthy of the Bushi knighthood, lack of courage, loss of honor were considered to be much worse than death [Oyama 1966; 1979]. According to the Budo idea, karate concentrates on proficiency and moral development, and sports competition is often connected with activities contradicting the old system of values. Presently, people practicing various martial arts and sports put financial benefits over ethic and moral values [Cynarski 2000]. Ancient warriors showed contempt for money, which was the proof of good upbringing. The research carried out among the Karate Shotokan contestants showed that the main motivation for taking up this discipline was learning self-defense and hand-to-hand fighting rules. Similar results were obtained by author testing Kyokushinkai style karate fighters [Kuśnierz 2006]. Following great masters was also among the factors motivating for training, which proves that present-day karate practitioners appreciate old models of behavior and system of values. In order to analyze the values connected with practicing hand-to-hand fighting, the level of knowledge of the martial arts history and theory was assessed. It was proved that theoretical knowledge influences, to a large extent, the image of the discipline practiced and motivation. The answers obtained prove that 45% of the respondents declare a good level of their theoretical knowledge and history, and 25% a very good level. The essential value connected with the discipline chosen is spiritual development (50% of the answers) and the respondents believe that hard training, Dojo etiquette, fighting, influence the development of inner predispositions.

## Conclusion

1. The essential motivation for taking up training is mastering the hand-to-hand fighting and self-defense rules. This provides the sense of safety.
2. Spiritual development and the development of inner predispositions are the main values for people practicing karate.
3. Training provides and increase of self-respect and respect to others and increase of self-discipline and the level of fitness and health.

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## Wartości związane z uprawianiem nowoczesnego karate jako forma kultywowania starojapońskich wzorców Bushido

**Słowa kluczowe:** karate, motywacje, tradycja

### Streszczenie

Wielu mistrzów sztuk walki wywodziło się ze szlachty, w związku z tym zasady Bushido w naturalny sposób przenikały do ich systemów. Prawość i sprawiedliwość, grzeczność, uprzejmość, dobroć i honor są kluczem do zrozumienia celu nauczania tej dyscypliny. Rycerski system wartości – Bushido powstał wraz z rozwojem rzemiosła wojennego w średniowiecznej Japonii, stając się sposobem wychowania i działania japońskiego rycerstwa, ludzi biegłych w sztuce wojennej. Prawość i sprawiedliwość są jedną z wielu cech przynależnych wojownikom. Wiąże się z nimi obowiązek wypełniania nakazów dyktowanych przez rozum i działań w słusznej sprawie. Wszelkie działania były poparte męstwem i odwagą gdzie strach przed śmiercią przestawał istnieć. Najcenniejszymi rzeczami jakimi dysponował wojownik były jego broń oraz poczucie własnej godności [Szeligowski 2009]. Japońska kultura akcentuje bardzo mocno grzeczność, która już w dawnych czasach traktowana była jako jedna z najważniejszych cnót. Wiązała się z okazywaniem szacunku dla innych ludzi i ich uczuć. Karate kultywuje tradycje klasztornych ćwiczeń, wywodzących się z praktyki buddyjskiej. Rozpoczęcie i zakończenie zajęć medytacją, atmosfera dyscypliny, specyficzna relacja mistrz-uczeń, w której nauczyciel jest przewodnikiem na drodze do zdobycia osobistej wiedzy i umiejętności – wszystko to sprawia, że karate staje się praktyczną dziedziną poznania i zgłębiania prawdy o sobie i życiu, prawdy prowadzącej do doskonałości.

Celem badań jest poznanie opinii zawodników trenujących karate shotokan na temat wartości dostrzeganych w uprawianiu tej dyscypliny.