

EXPERTS OPINIONS

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The way of life and the way of martial arts

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Abstract:

The purpose of this work is to present a great *jūjutsu* and *jūdō-dō* master, who contributed an immense amount of effort to popularising and developing *jūjutsu* and *jūdō-dō* in Europe. The employed method is a direct interview, a dialogue between the holders of the highest master ranks in *jūjutsu*.

The article describes the way of *budō* which Franz Strauss has been following for the past 63 years practising martial arts, taking active part in numerous international trainings. He holds the titles of *sōke*, 10th dan in *jūjutsu* and 10th dan in *jūdō-dō*. Currently he is the vice-president of the Austrian Ju-Jitsu Association and vice-chairman of European Jūjutsu & Kobudō Committee (EJKC). In 2011 Franz Strauss was awarded the title and medal of martial arts Expert-Professor by EJKC.

Introduction

The authors decided to present the profile of the master and his understanding of the way of martial arts in the form of a dialogue between the holders of the highest master ranks in *jūjutsu*. The purpose of this work is to present a great *jūjutsu* and *jūdō-dō* master, who contributed an immense amount of effort to popularising and developing *jūjutsu* and *jūdō-dō* in Europe. The employed method is a direct interview, supplemented by the analysis of literature on the subject. The theoretical perspective for the presented considerations is based on the humanistic theory of martial arts and anthropology of martial arts (anthropology of the way of the warrior) [Cynarski 2004, 2012a].

The co-authors first met ten years ago in Wasserkuppe during the International Martial Arts Seminar. Their discussions during said seminar, followed by meetings at various international trainings, reassured the co-author about the value of such meetings as well as the rich personality and spirituality of Franz Strauss. Modesty, charisma, knowledge, life experiences and calmness are the virtues of a true teacher, embodied by *shihan* Strauss.

F. Strauss has been practising martial arts and combat sports since he was 17. He started with



Photo 1. *Shihan* Jan Słopecki and *shihan* Franz Strauss 10th dan
 [source: Marcin Dawidowicz, Głogów 2013]

jūdō, trained by Franz Nimfür, Leopold Wunsch and Adolf Bauer. He practised *Jūjutsu* under Josef Ebetshuber, Franz Rautek, Hubert Klinger-Klingerstorff and Rudolf Büchler; *jūdō-dō* under

Julius Fleck, Adolf Bauer and Josef Ebetshuber [cf. Cynarski 2009; Marches 2010]. He achieved his first master rank in the martial art of *jūjutsu* in 1962, he gained 1st dan in *jūdō-dō* in 1968. In 1999 he was awarded 10th dan in *jūdō-dō*. In 2007 he achieved 10th dan in *jūjutsu*. In 2011 Franz Strauss was awarded the title and medal of martial arts Expert-Professor by EJKC, the highest distinction awarded by this body of experts [Slopecki 2012b].

The purpose of this interview was to present the profile of a great martial arts master, who, like his teachers, gladly shares his knowledge with others. He has been practising and popularising *jūjutsu* and *jūdō-dō*. He transfers the values of martial arts into his private life and relations with other people. He practises combat sports and martial arts because at the beginning of his way of *budō* he discovered that they are not mere sports. In fact, they influence one's personality as a whole.

Strauss rests most effectively in his garden, where he ponders on matters of spirituality. His opinion on martial arts is lined with concern for the dissolution of tradition in the *dojō*, he points out that politics is entering martial arts and the ethical code is being abandoned more and more often. *Sōke* Franz Strauss cannot understand awarding master ranks in an organisational manner, he believes it stems from the misunderstanding of the rules of *budō*, lack of knowledge on the part of masters behaving this way. He advises limiting contacts with such people to a bare minimum. The most important part of teacher-student and student-student relations, according to Strauss, is harmony and respect.

The interview

J. Slopecki – Would you mind if we addressed each other by first name during this interview, like we have been doing for many years?

F. Strauss – Of course not.

J.S. – The interest in Far-Eastern martial arts has been increasing for many years, more and more people get involved in them professionally. Could you tell me what place and meaning of Far-Eastern martial arts in your life are?

F.S. – I have been practising combat sports and martial arts since I was seventeen, I have gained knowledge and skills under many great teachers. A time has come when I realised my task, that, like my teachers, I am going to share my knowledge of martial arts with others. This is my life-long mission.

J.S. – You have followed the way of *budō* as a student and teacher, rooted in tradition and etiquette; an older student has to take care of his

younger partner during training, then the values passed on by the teacher and the teacher himself becomes an example to follow and we start to walk a similar path, pass the knowledge to other students.

F.S. – Yes, that is precisely what happened.

J.S. – How did you become involved in Far-Eastern martial arts?

F.S. – In the 1950s *jūdō* was cheaper than biking sports, which is why I abandoned biking, *jūdō* was more accessible to me. Of all the *budō* disciplines *jūdō* was the only known one. It was a new area of sports, partially shrouded in mystery.

J.S. – What made you interested in practising *jūdō* and *jūjutsu*?

F.S. – I think that the first impulse was the lack of money. As I mentioned before I had to give up biking due to financial issues. Another thing that changed my interests was a friend of mine, who had been practising *jūdō*. He was the one who encouraged me to take up practising this discipline.

J.S. – What was the government's attitude towards the martial art of *jūjutsu* when you started practising *jūdō*?

F.S. – In 1950, when I started practising *jūdō*, it was the only discipline discussed, *jūjutsu* was not known. It was not until the mid 1950s that the first *jūjutsu* clubs were created and the interest in martial arts started to increase.

J.S. – What role did a teacher play in your training and life? Who was your teacher?

F.S. – The teacher who influenced my life the most and is responsible for the fact that I have been following the way of *budō* for 63 years was Josef Ebetshuber, promoted by Erich Rahn to 10th dan. He was one of the masters who had tremendous influence on the development of *jūdō*, *jūdō-dō* and *jūjutsu* in post-war Austria. To me personally he was a teacher and a friend. I was with him and by him until his death.

J.S. – Could you describe how you achieved master ranks and professional qualifications?

F.S. – My sports path shared aims and good relations with my profession. I had worked in the Vienna Police Department for forty years, where I could apply the skills I gained in the *dojō*. In 1962, I achieved 1st dan in *jūjutsu*; in 1968, 1st dan in *jūdō* and *jūdō-dō*. In 1970, I opened my own school in Vienna, where I could devote my time to work as a trainer, which I continue to do to this day.

J.S. – According to you, what is the most important thing about the rules (regulations) pertaining to achieving dan master ranks?

F.S. – The curriculum, regulations concerning exams and awarding master ranks should take into account the spiritual maturity of the candidate with regard to the appropriate level of education and

corresponding master rank. Such a person should be familiar with tradition, uphold the ethical code, be of appropriate age for a given rank, should be practising a given sport for a period of time specified by the traditional system of education, and, of course, has to pass a technical exam based on the knowledge of the technical programme.

J.S. – Could you please specify the unquestionable requirements a candidate has to fulfil in order to be permitted to take an exam?

F.S. – The most important rules which permit a candidate to take an exam for technical or honorary ranks are included in upholding tradition (an established way of examination by previous generations of masters), which are based on the ethical code and the code of conduct adopted by a given school or organisation.

J.S. – What are your thoughts on masters who reached the highest dan ranks in a quick (sprinting) manner?

F.S. – In my opinion there should be a set period of waiting, included in the regulations (assigned to every level of education) and for every given master rank. The age of the candidate needs to be taken into account (the minimum requirement for every master rank, for example, 10th dan requires a person to be over 60 years old), because along with life experience comes reason, knowledge and skills. These two requirements should initially determine whether the candidate is allowed to be tested during a technical exam.

J.S. – My thoughts on achieving master ranks are similar. *Sensei* should be a high moral paragon, internalised by students on their way of spiritual advancement. If that is the case, *budō* is an authentic school of character, raising socially valuable individuals [Cynarski 2004: 214].

Does the current system of awarding ranks, used by some organisations (masters with lower ranks award higher ranks to their masters [Slopecki 2013]) have anything to do with the philosophy and tradition of martial arts?

F.S. – I believe that this is illogical and it contradicts the traditional system of education, if such things happen. No serious master would do something like that.

J.S. – I share your opinion on this subject. The problem of dishonesty of martial arts teachers and self-proclaimed masters is touched upon by Wojciech J. Cynarski in several of his works [2002, 2004, 2011, 2012a, b], where he explains these social facts in the category of a moral crisis and pathology, as evidence he points to the extreme commercialisation, opportunism of teachers and swerving away from time-honoured rules. Of course these rules are still upheld by self-respecting

organisations and institutions, which is the result of still functioning axio-normative systems [cf. Hare 1981; Szyszko-Bohusz 2007; Obodyński, Cynarski, Witkowski 2008; Szmyd 2010; Cynarski 2012a,b].

How should one act when dealing with such masters during various sporting events so as not to show our approval of such distorted actions?

F.S. – The problem is ethical in nature. In contacts with these persons we should act in such a way, which will not be taken by others as accepting their behaviour. I would limit myself only to the necessary conversation.

J.S. – What do you think about awarding ranks above the 10th dan in *jūjutsu*?

F.S. – It is all nonsense. The rules of *budō* should be preserved, regardless of the masters' aspirations and their policies, which destroy *budō* values.

J.S. – What kinds of combat sports and martial arts do you practise?

F.S. – I practise *jūdō*, *jūdō-dō*, *jūjutsu* and *aikidō*.

J.S. – How long have you been a teacher?

F.S. – Since 1962.

J.S. – What is your opinion on the sporting nature of martial arts?

F.S. – It is a pity that there are people who keep reinventing a name for the same thing and that they replace ethical and educational values with politics and brutalisation of fighting techniques.

J.S. – What made you choose *jūdō*, *jūdō-dō* and *jūjutsu*?

F.S. – Firstly, my friend, who had been practising *jūdō* as well. Later I discovered that it was not just a sport, that it affected a person entirely, not only the body, but also the spirit.

J.S. – Looking back through your eyes, has anything changed in the approach to martial arts training?

F.S. – Yes, many things have changed in the very training process. Nowadays a person is not perceived through *budō*.

J.S. – What was the cause of these changes?

F.S. – The whole attitude towards the *dōjō* and the *dōjō* etiquette, which should still exist, were lost. It was introduced through today's politics. Contemporary sport, when there is international success, is aided by finance and politics. This is why the *dōjō* turns into a sports hall.

J.S. – What are your greatest achievements in *jūjutsu* and *jūdō-dō*?

F.S. – In 1969 I became Austria's Champion in *jūdō-dō*. My success in *jūjutsu* came about when I was noticed abroad and invited to conduct training sessions as a teacher. For that I am to this day immensely grateful to *sensei* J. Ebetshuber, who introduced me to many masters from different countries.

J.S. – Do you use meditation exercises or similar techniques in your training or personal life?

F.S. – Not during training, but I do practise them in my garden. I can enjoy peace and quiet there.

J.S. – What do you think about the teaching methods (teaching methodology) generally employed in martial arts?

F.S. – I think that the current methods of teaching have more in common with sport than with traditional educational system. Master-teachers use the educational process of sport training as their model, *budō* is being abandoned.

J.S. – Is there any model of teaching methodology functioning at present, or does each master prefer their own method of teaching?

F.S. – I believe that teaching methods have improved. Unfortunately, they are not used correctly by some of the masters. It is particularly true when it comes to educational values, which are often omitted in the process of training (the Far-Eastern martial arts).

J.S. – Would you agree that there are two approaches to teaching? Some masters (quite a big group) copy techniques and teaching methods used by other masters without giving them much thought. Others (a much smaller group) work on their own interpretation of combat techniques and their effectiveness.

F.S. – Yes, I agree with you.

J.S. – Would you also agree with me that currently the vast majority of masters and organisations representing *jūjutsu* prefer the system (method) of “*modern jūjutsu*”?

F.S. – In this case I also have to agree with you, but this situation is influenced by politics entering the masters’ lives. Money can be helpful in achieving prestigious international success, but it does not influence the knowledge and skills of particular masters. The *modern jūjutsu* method is adapting to the needs of a modern society in the 21st century.

J.S. – Has practising martial arts changed anything in your life?

F.S. – I believe that through training my life has been peaceful and modest.

J.S. – Like you, I think about the influence *jūjutsu* had on my life. „Training *jūjutsu* allows to transform one’s personality into a spiritual one, it develops in the harmony of mind-body-spirit, transfers these values from a training hall to everyday life” [Slopecki 2012a: 55].

Do you pay special attention to the rules and philosophy of Far-Eastern martial arts?

F.S. – Yes, in my *dōjō* there should be a little *budō* spirit.

J.S. – Which of these rules do you find most important?

F.S. – Respect and harmony between a teacher and a student, as well as between students.

J.S. – Is there something you do not accept in martial arts?

F.S. – Going to the extreme in either direction. Everything needs to be balanced and within reason. Martial arts are supposed to be suitable for anyone and should serve the common well-being.

J.S. – What are the most important values in your life?

F.S. – The fact that I lead my life in harmony and that my students take pleasure in my training sessions.

J.S. – Have you noticed positive changes in martial arts over the past decades?

F.S. – Yes, these changes touch upon a deeper understanding of *budō* by the masters who wish to educate themselves. The field of study of martial arts is expanding.

J.S. – Do you have any thoughts on how martial arts are perceived and understood by outsiders (the media, officials)?

F.S. – *Budō* has become more recognisable through international competitions and media coverage. Unfortunately, people of the media fail to distinguish combat sports from martial arts; it is all perceived the same way – as a sporting competition.

J.S. – Do you think the time has come to act boldly in order to introduce a generally accepted model of educating martial arts teachers on an academic level, as is happening in sport disciplines?

F.S. – It is already being introduced in many countries. I think that things are going in the right direction.

J.S. – Currently there are two systems of *jūdō-dō* and *jūdō-dō / idō* functioning in Europe, what is the difference between them, do you know the other one?

F.S. – I do not know what *jūdō-dō / idō* is. There is one *jūdō-dō* established by professor Fleck. The history of creating a new *jūdō-dō* system is associated with Austria. After he had invented it, Prof. Fleck presented it for the first time in Austria in 1949. Soon after the presentation in his homeland, he went to Japan to showcase his concept of the new style. The Japanese liked *jūdō-dō* very much. They wanted to include this system in the sport training of *jūdō*, but under one condition: that prof. Fleck relinquishes the authorship of this system and the world would be led to believe it was created in Japan. Prof. Fleck refused, returned to Austria and kept developing the *jūdō-dō* system. He named the throws in his native language. The names of the throws reflect movement and the way it works. Some

examples of these names are: avalanche, rocket, slingshot, broken body, the X throw.

J.S. – Thank you for the interview.

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O drodze życia i drodze sztuk walki

Słowa kluczowe: Franz Strauss, *jūjutsu*, *jūdō*, *jūdō-dō*, droga *budō*, filozofia sztuk walki, stopnie mistrzowskie

Streszczenie

Autorzy zdecydowali się na przedstawienie sylwetki mistrza i jego rozumienia drogi sztuki walki w postaci dialogu posiadaczy najwyższych stopni mistrzowskich w *jūjutsu*. Celem pracy jest właśnie prezentacja sylwetki wielkiego mistrza *jūjutsu* i *jūdō-dō*, który wniósł znaczący wkład w popularyzację i rozwój *jūjutsu* i *jūdō-dō* w Europie. Zastosowaną metodą jest wywiad bezpośredni, a dodatkowo – analiza literatury przedmiotu. Perspektywę teoretyczną dla prezentowanych tu refleksji dają humanistyczna teoria sztuk walki i antropologia sztuk walki (antropologia drogi wojownika).

Pierwsze spotkanie współautorów miało miejsce dziesięć lat temu w Wasserkuppe podczas Międzynarodowego Seminarium sztuk walki. Ich wspólne rozmowy podczas wspomnianego seminarium i następane spotkania na różnych szkoleniach międzynarodowych, upewniały drugiego współautora w przekonaniu o wartościach płynących z takich spotkań, oraz o bogatej osobowości i duchowości Franza Straussa. Skromność, charyzma, wiedza, doświadczenie życiowe, spokój, to zalety prawdziwego nauczyciela, które uosabia Franz Strauss.

Shihan Strauss ćwiczy sporty i sztuki walki od 17. roku życia. Najpierw było to *jūdō* pod kierunkiem Franza Nimfura, Leopolda Wunscha i Adolfa Bauera. *Jūjutsu* trenował pod okiem Josefa Ebetsubera, Franza Rautka, Huberta Klinger-Klingerstorffa i Rudolfa Büchlera, *jūdō-dō* ćwiczył u Juliusa Flecka, Adolfa Bauera i Josefa Ebetsubera. Pierwszy stopień mistrzowski zdobył w roku 1962 w sztuce walki *jūjutsu*, w *jūdō-dō* 1 dan otrzymał w roku 1968. W roku 1999 promowano go na stopień 10 dan w *jūdō-dō*. W roku 2007 uzyskał 10 dan w *jūjutsu*. W roku 2011 został przez EJKC odznaczony tytułem i medalem Eksperta-Profesora sztuk walki, najwyższym odznaczeniem tegoż gremium ekspertów.

Artykuł opisuje drogę *budō* przebytą przez Franza Straussa w praktykowaniu sztuk walki, którą kontynuuje on od 63 lat, biorąc czynny udział w licznych szkoleniach międzynarodowych. Posiada on tytuł *sōke*, 10 dan w *jūjutsu* i 10 dan w *jūdō-dō*. Obecnie pełni funkcje wiceprezydenta Austriackiego Związku Ju-Jitsu i wiceprzewodniczącego European Jūjutsu & Kobudō Committee (EJKC). W roku 2011 został przez EJKC odznaczony tytułem i medalem Eksperta-Profesora sztuk walki. W wywiadzie wyraża on swoje opinie na temat dzisiejszej kondycji sztuk walki i sensu uprawiania *budō*.