

performance of the form is not emitted outside the body, but is kept within to nourish it.

ORIGIN OF THE DAN GRADING SYSTEM,

Every martial arts practitioner is fully aware of the dan ranking system and the required qualifications of each rank in his system. However it is questionable how many are aware of the origin of this system and how it has been developed.

It is rather surprising to listen that organized budo training in Japan dates centuries back in time (the Nen Ryu dates from the 1300s, Kashima Shin ryu, Kashima Shinto Ryu and Katori Shinto Ryu are not much younger), while the dan grading system (used throughout gendai –modern- budo) dates only since the end of the 1800s. Prior to the dan grading system, all budo ryuha used a system of scrolls and licenses. Specifically, when a student was recognized as having learned a specific portion of the curriculum, he or she was awarded a scroll called "Okuiri Sho", or "Entry To Inner Teachings Scroll" which detailed what had been learned. When they had achieved a degree of mastery over more advanced curriculum, they were awarded "Sho Mokuroku" or "Beginning Registry List" which was listing all of the kata learned (do not forget that in traditional budo, kata was the exclusive method of teaching. That was also the initial teaching method of G. Funakoshi sensei when he started teaching in Japan). This, in certain cases, was considered as the first teaching license, allowing the recipients to teach students of their own up to a certain level. The next scroll was the "Go Mokuroku" or "Later Registry", listing the further sections of the curriculum learned, and was often considered as allowing recipients to teach students more of the curriculum. The last scroll awarded was the "Menkyo" or "License" which was awarded when the student began learning the most secret part of of the ryu (remember at that time certain part of the curriculum was reserved for a restricted only part of students). At this point he was considered ready to teach the whole of the non-secret curriculum. When he had learned that last part, he was awarded Menkyo Kaiden, as having mastery of the entire curriculum of the Ryu, as well as the right to award all of the scrolls of the system. Normally in each ryu only one Menkyo Kaiden was awarded at a time, thus ensuring continuity of the ryu.

The founder of Judo, Kano Jigoro, an experienced martial artist, had received teaching licenses in two classical jujutsu ryuha, Tenjin Shin'yo Ryu and Kito Ryu. He founded his Kodokan Judo as a means of preserving the value he saw in these classical systems, but also as a means of physical education, which would develop both sound minds and bodies. Many of the combative kata of Kodokan Judo are taken directly from the classical systems Kano had mastered. His teaching system however was intended to develop student's physical and mental capabilities and included specialized stretching and exercise practices, combined with lectures in order to develop student's moral and social characteristics. He wanted to train the whole of the student, body, mind and spirit, rather than simply training fighters. Being also an educator in the new public school system of Japan, he wanted his Kodokan Judo to be

used as a form of physical education in the national school curriculum. Being successful in getting Ministry of Education approval, he began training jujutsu teachers, from other ryuha, in his Kodokan system. As the ranks of Kodokan Judo instructors increased quickly, Kano encountered a couple of problems.

Traditionally, bugei ryuha were small organizations and the head of the system could easily know the name of everyone who practiced in. As Kodokan Judo expanded to a national organization, this traditional method of the teacher knowing the student personally and awarding scrolls and licenses based on his personal level of familiarity became impossible. In addition, the traditional training gear of hakama and uwagi was not suitable for the Kodokan's style of training, which balanced three aspects of training; technique practice, kata practice, and freestyle matches. It is worthy to note that, randori matches were something new as a training method. Kodokan Judo, in its early days, had often been challenged to public matches. Usually, based on its strengths, it won these matches, but when lost, Kano worked hard to discover and correct the weaknesses the losses revealed. In order to better prepare for the challenge matches, freestyle randori training between students was essential. But the traditional uwagi and hakama were not well suited to this sort of training, so Kano and the Kodokan developed the today judogi, which of course required a new belt to keep it shut. This is the origin of the belt worn with judogi, which is different in style from any other used by then.

Kano grappled with the rigors training in his new system, but he also grappled with the problem of how to identify and license his students, whose numbers were constantly increasing, thus making the old Menkyo system ineffective. He found that a new system of licencing students was required, so he created the dan ranking system. He borrowed the "dan" system from the classical game of Go (dan means nothing more than step). In classical Go, there were three dan grades. Kano initially used three dan grades, which were roughly equivalent to the Sho Mokuroku, Go Mokuroku and Menkyo of classical bugei ryuha. "Shodan" or "beginning step", the student had achieved the first level of mastery and recognized as being able to teach, "Nidan", the student would have been a high level student, and "Sandan", the student been considered to have full mastery of the system. Having instructor level students wearing a black obi was a simple way to distinguish them from the mass of students, as Kodokan Judo was growing extremely rapidly as part of the national school curriculum in Japan.

Kodokan Judo continued to expand and from a small local style in Tokyo became very rapidly a system of training practiced throughout Japan. It was also found useful for training military and police personnel. With this rapid spreading throughout Japan, Kano had to deal with organizational and human problems that no koryu bugei system had ever dreamed of. Over time, the necessity to increase the number of ranks in order to show finer and finer divisions between the level of student and instructors became obvious. So the dan ranks were expanded from 3 to 5, and finally to 10, although today there are practically only 9 (The Kodokan has decided it will no longer award the 10th dan). 8th dan came to symbolize complete mastery of the system,

roughly equivalent to menkyo kaiden of the classical systems, which still does today. To achieve 8th dan in Kodokan Judo requires decades of study, and at each rank you are tested on your knowledge of the fundamental kata. The test for 8th dan includes the last of the kata that are taught, the Kodokan Goshinjutsu.

The dan system turned out to be incredibly popular in the rigidly hierarchical society of pre WWII Japan. With just a couple of words everyone can determine their relative position in a group. When kendo was formulated and established as portion of the national education curriculum alongside Kodokan Judo, a dan ranking system was created for it as well. Most gendai budo arts, to include karate as well followed the same system. By the time the Dai Nihon Butokukai was established as the national body overseeing all Japanese martial arts, the dan system was firmly established in the national psyche of Japan, and was widely used as a ranking system in large budo organizations of all sorts. This continued after the World War 2 and the disbanding of the Butokukai.

Funakoshi Gichin introduced the dan ranking system in his art. Until his death diplomas were presented with his signature, while he was present during exams. Funakoshi himself had not awarded a rank higher than 5th Dan, Godan. In 1961 the Japan Karate Association, JKA, decided to expand its rank according to Judo and Kendo organizations, so Nakayama sensei was awarded 8th dan (Nakayama later was awarded 9th dan, the higher actual rank which is awarded to its Chief Instructor only – today Sugiura M. sensei-). Shotokai and Shotokan Karate of America (Oshima T. organization) maintain 5th dan as their highest rank. As time was passing every martial arts organization worldwide adopted that system which continues up to now.

(I would like to thank my friend Peter Boylan, of Mugendo Budogu and a vivid martial arts practitioner, who has been the source for most of the above information)

What is Shugyo

In Japanese budo, as well as in any activity, there are six words when someone refers to the intensity of training: *keiko*, *renshu*, *shunren*, *tanren*, *kufu*, and *shugyo*. Although the first four can be translated respectively as, practice, training, discipline, and forging, there are no English words for an adequate translation of the last two. “*Shugyo*”, which may literally translated as “*austere training*”, is the highest physical and deepest spiritual training possible.

The Japanese term “*shugyo*”, generally translated as “austere training,” seems to have been originated with the training of the Samurai during the “*Pax Tokugawa*,” an unprecedented period of internal peace from the mid-1600 through the mid-1800. Its purpose is to “forge the spirit,” remaking a practitioner’s character through hard physical and mental training. As the heirs of the feudal samurai, modern *budo-ka* have incorporated *shugyo* into their