

From Wars to Spirituality: A Socio-Historical Investigation of the Japanese Budo

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ABSTRACT:

Background and Study Aim: Spirituality in this study is based on the understanding of Michel Foucault and his discussions on the aesthetics of existence, which relate to a way of life consisting of a set of practices of self-care, asceticism, enlightenment and training of the moral subject. Our study aimed to discuss the socio-historical basis of the *Budo* as a way of living and educating the body in movement through martial arts.

Material and Methods: through a systematic review of academic studies from different databases, based on Foucault's discourse analysis.

Results: we analyzed 44 studies from 8 different databases, including articles, master's dissertations and doctoral theses, and identified a significant number of keywords to budo's understanding, such as: Body cult, *Bugei* and *Kakugi* (martial arts and educational sports fights), Bujutsu, *Bushido* (way of the warrior), Character Formation, Culture, Educational system, Ethics, Modernity, Spirituality, Religion, Way of life.

Conclusions: we highlight the character of the *Budo* as part of Japanese tradition from the perspective of life path, self-knowledge, self-improvement and body cult, spirituality and education, and also as a cultural phenomenon that has undergone reconfigurations due to the influence of religion and cultural exchanges with other countries.

KEYWORDS: Japanese Martial Ways. *Budo*. Aesthetics of Existence. Body Cult.

GLOSSARY:

Budo - according to the Nippon Budokan, it refers to the physical culture of self-development practiced through the martial ways of Japan.

Bugei – expresses the idea of martial art as a tool, the term is close to the expression martial art used in Western language.

Bujutsu – body fighting techniques.

Bushido – an expression that represents the discourse on the knowledge and practices associated with the “way of the warrior”.

Dao – Chinese expression that represents a path, a way of life.

Do – Japanese expression that in this study is associated with the choice of one of the martial art disciplines as a lifestyle practice.

Kakugi – have a translation close to the expression combat sports.

Kanji – ideograms that represent words or full expressions, commonly used in China and Japan.

Kata – form or study of the form, it is the main organization of the gestures and techniques of the way of learning the principle of budo practices and martial arts.

Martial Arts – body practices composed by fighting techniques, principles, philosophical, historical and cultural aspects, and can be an organized educational structure.

Meiji Restoration - the period of reform from the feudal era to modernization in Japan, a period of significant changes to the cultural practices and traditions of the samurai and other martial arts practitioners.

Michi – expresses the notion of a life path.

Sei Shin Tanren - student's attitude in spontaneously submitting to the process of becoming spiritually forged.

From Wars to Spirituality: A Socio-Historical Investigation of the Japanese Budo

Sengoku-Jidai – Period of time in Japan (1477 – 1573) that the shogun lost their rule and the daimyos (lords) try to overrule each other aiming the conquer and unification of all Japan.

Shugyo - refers originally to spiritual and practical training—such as observance of precepts, meditation, confession, and ascetic practices—aimed at attaining enlightenment or liberation, then this meaning expanded to the arduous training, an ascetic form of spirituality which, by means of the imperative of the *budo*

Yamato Damashii – the term alludes to the traditional aspects that characterize the Japanese spirit and culture.

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese martial arts are widely known in the West [1]. However, a few decades ago, they have been losing their popularity and many of these practices have turned into westernised sports and leisure activities. Nevertheless, in the sphere of education, martial arts have been included in the educational system both inside and outside Japan. Their pedagogical content promotes knowledge about cultural history and national heritage.

The modernization and westernization of the *budo* made its practices more accessible to the public in general. Farias [2] highlights that with this transformation process, the idea of *budo* that started to be transmitted was adapted to the new culture and, especially, to favor the performance of competing athletes. Besides, under the influence of the media, family and/or friends, the society receives the information that the practice of Japanese martial arts promotes benefits for the body and for the mind, being a worthy cultural manifestation even before the person joins. Among the speeches, it is also identified the assumption that with the years of practice in *budo*, people tend to change the focus of training, valuing more the moral, philosophical and spiritual aspects [2].

The publications that address the History of the *Budo* in Brazil are very rare and not very specific [2]. Historical records point out that the Japanese cultural manifestations in Brazil began with the immigration, around the year 1908. The Japanese came to work on the coffee plantations in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. In 1938, Ryuzo Ogawa founded the first Judo Association in Brazil, the Budokan Judo Association, and in 1958, the first Brazilian federation of Judo, the Paulista Judo Federation.

One of the factors that favored the dissemination of the *Budo* in Brazil, in the 20th century, were the entertainment industries, with the production of films and manga, which are magazines of illustrations of Japanese contexts, for example. Farias [2] also assures that other forms of *budo* continue to grow, but it is necessary to pay attention to the symbolism that permeates this growth. In the period in which we live, of postmodernity, Piwowski [3] considers that Japanese martial arts suffer a crisis of values.

In the book *100 years of Japanese immigration in Brazil*, a historical production by Arai and Hirasaki [4], it is documented that the first Japanese who arrived in Brazil date back to 1908, by means of the Kasato Maru ship, with 781 immigrants. With the cultural exchanges, the *budo* started to be incorporated in Brazil and comprehended as similar to the expression “martial arts”.

In academic research, it is recurrent to identify that *budo* is translated, in etymological character, as martial arts, way or martial paths. Weinberger [5] is one of the authors who criticizes researchers who end their studies at this point, without necessarily investigating the deeper meanings of the concept or even the *kanji* (ideograms) used in its formation.

To evoke the concept of *budo*, we emphasize that our perspective is based both on the experience with the practice of aikido and on studies related to the theme in academic literature. The socio-historical course of Japanese physical culture is related to the wars and the development of martial practices and the spirituality that were associated and comprehended as *budo*. Meanwhile, through the speeches, we rescue some important scenarios and personalities for the reconfigurations that occurred internally and externally by Japan.

Based on this context, our study discusses about the conception of *budo*, from the time of the wars (Sengoku Period) to the notion of spirituality that gives bases to a philosophical discussion about the aesthetics of existence throughout martial paths that demands the very being of the subject, in an ethical occupation with himself.

Our study aimed to discuss the socio-historical basis of the *Budo* through a systematic review of academic studies from different databases, based on Foucault's discourse analysis.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Our study is registered with the Ethics Committee under number 30983920.9.0000.5188, from the Health Sciences Center of Federal University of Paraíba. For this study, the procedures performed were: 1) systematic review; 2) analysis of the material; 3) preparation of the discussion [6].

The following databases were searched for academic studies: SciELO, CAPES Periodicals, Cochrane Systematic Reviews, Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS), Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, Google Scholar, Ido Movement for Culture - Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology, Qualis Periodicals, Archives of Budo, Archives of Budo Science of Martial Arts and Extreme Sports and the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) database. The studies inclusion criteria obeyed the following organization: 1) The keyword *Budo* was present as the exact term in the manuscript; 2) Dynamic reading of the title, abstract, and keywords; 3) Selection by languages in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, by limitation

From Wars to Spirituality: A Socio-Historical Investigation of the Japanese Budo

of the researcher's language; 4) After full reading of the studies, those which did not contextualize the *Budo*, its historical, cultural, and philosophical process, or only defined it as the "way of the warrior" were excluded.

For the analysis and discussion of the information raised in the interview reports and academic studies, we relied on the discourse analysis [7]. To present the results of our study, it was organized with the following topics: Results; Discussion; Conception of *Budo*; and Conclusions.

RESULTS

In our investigation, the first filtering resulted in the identification of 104 studies. Of these, only 44 were selected in the next stage, which corresponded to the full reading of the study, and analysis of the *Budo* accompanied by a social, philosophical and/or historical context. The studies included in our research can be seen in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Studies included in the research.

Source	Authors
SciELO	Martins and Kanashiro [8]; Mori and Oliveira [9].
LILACS	Coelho, Coelho e Salgado Filho <i>et al.</i> [10]; Espartero, Villamón and González [11]; Lage and Gonçalves [12]; Sousa [13].
Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations	Farias [2]; Fernandes [14].
Google Scholar	Matsui, Larson and Yamahira <i>et al.</i> [15]; Sato [16]; Villamón, Brown and Espartero <i>et al.</i> [17]; Cynarski and Obodyski [18]; Rogers [19]; Vila [20]; Dodd and Brown [21]; Honda [22]; Fujita [23]; Raman [24]; Weinberger [5]; Sato and Inoue [25]; Taisuke [26], Róbert [27]; Bonomo [28]; Edinborough [29]; Rafolt [1].
Ido Movement for Culture - Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology	Light [30]; Nakiri [31]; Piwowarski [3]; Tomas and Zaragoza [32].
ERIC	Brawdy [33]; Choo and Jewel [34]; Miller-Lane [35].
Archives of Budo Science of Martial Arts and Extreme Sports	Kalina and Barczyński [36].
Archives of Budo	Sasaki [37]; Sasaki [38]; Tokarski [39]; Sikorski [40]; Kalina; Barczynski [41]; Kalina and Barczynski [42]; Barczynski, Graczyński; Kalina [43]; Shishida [44]; Tai [45]; Franco and Mendes [46]; Morvay-Sey, Retsag and Palvolgyi <i>et al.</i> [47].

Source: author's own preparation.

By analyzing the studies, we were able to organize them following the identification of some keywords, such as described in Chart 2:

Chart 2: *budo* keywords.

Body Cult	<i>Bugei</i> and <i>Kakugi</i> (martial arts and educational sports fights)	Bujutsu	<i>Bushido</i> (way of the warrior)
Character Formation	Culture	Educational system	Ethics
Modernity	Spirituality	Religion	Way of life

Source: author's own preparation.

DISCUSSION

Conception of Budo

The analyzed studies pointed us to some keywords of relevance, described on Chart 2. The body cult, *bugei* and *kakugi*, *bujutsu*, *bushido*, character formation, culture, educational system, spirituality, ethics, modernity, way of life and religion. To comprehend this association to *budo*, it is necessary to revisit the story of Japan.

The fights as one of the oldest cultural manifestations of the world. The *Sengoku Jidai* (Sengoku Era, 15th and 16th centuries) represent a period of time that Japan lived in constant internal civil wars. Most to decide the ruler of all Japan. Tokugawa Period (or Edo, 1603 to 1868) was marked by the family transition of 15 *shogun*, the rulers of Japan. The importance of the Tokugawa period (or Edo), is due to the end of many wars between the several daimyo who wanted the power and the government of Japan for themselves, and to the period of governmental stability and considerable modifications in the country's politics [48]. For Carranco [49], the impact of the Tokugawa government is not only recognized by the peace that lasted in Japan, but by the changes in the way of thinking, values, social conduct and public institutions.

The organization of society became more rigid, with class divisions, such as the samurai, peasants, artisans and merchants. Another point worth mentioning is the prohibition of Christianity in Japanese territory [8] and the incorporation of neo-Confucian philosophical and moral precepts and other systems of thought, such as Buddhism and Shintoism, to Japan, in this same period [50; 12; 2].

Within the teachings of these philosophies, we come across the idea of path and that they have been re-signified for the Japanese context in the form of *Michi* and *Do*. Firstly, *michi* is a term derived from *Tao or Dao* (from Chinese) and means path or way, designating a spiritual sense for a "discipline", a "virtue" or a "road", it is sometimes found in the form of the particle *Do*, as a suffix of compound words [48, p.776]. In turn, *Do*, despite also having as one of its meanings the idea of path, in it is emphasized an objective within a discipline, an art or a technique that is peculiar to their style of training, which is considered spiritual and intense, and is sometimes compared to the expression *Bodhi*, from Sanskrit, which means Buddhicity [48]. Examples of the practices are cited by Frédéric [48] and Farias [2], such as *Judo*, *Sado*, *Kado*, *Kendo*, among others.

The path of the warrior, *bushido*, described by Frédéric [48], was used in the 17th century, especially based on the theories presented by Yamaga Soko. Expressively, *bushido* is defined by Tsunetomo [51, p. 3] as the way of death, or "living as if already dead", being this death related to glory or servitude to its commander. For Bonomo [28], the expression *bushido* literally defines the samurai lifestyle.

According to Carranco [49] and Nakamura [52], during the Tokugawa period, Japan isolated itself from most of the other countries in the world, only allowing access to its ports to China, Korea and Holland. With the phenomena of internal investments, Japan underwent economic changes within the feudal system itself, which promoted significant changes of some rules that would make the shogunate lose its value [52]. At the end of the nineteenth century, occurred the reopening of its ports, which enabled the entry of Europeans and Americans and symbolized the loss of power of the Tokugawa, since based on the precepts of Shintoism, the emperor positioned himself against the shogunate. Thus began the Meiji era (1868-1912).

The Meiji era represented a process of restoration of power in the figure of the emperor and, at the same time, of modernization of Japan. The strong North American and European influence promoted in the country access to other technologies and other knowledge, including the creation of the University of Tokyo in 1877 [49]. According to Nakamura [52], the reopening of the ports enabled the Japanese people to realize what the author calls the "technological gap" that existed between Japan and the rest of the world.

The Meiji Restoration was also a period of significant changes to the cultural practices and traditions of the samurai and other martial arts practitioners. Martins and Kanashiro [8] and Mori and Oliveira [9] highlight that significant adaptations occurred in the temporal transpositions of the 17th century, in the period known by the Tokugawa government or Shogunate and, mainly, in the Meiji Restoration, moment in which the sociocultural reconfiguration of Japan made the samurai class disappear and re-signified the war activities to a moral and transcendence perspective with educational values, preserving the ethical and spiritual precepts of the samurai.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the martial arts started to have transformations due to the modernization context itself, but also went through the process of sportivization [8]. At the end of the same century and beginning of the XX, martial arts are understood as cultural manifestations that represent a potential resource of transmission of the characteristics and cultural values of the "Japanese Spirit", the *Yamato Damashii*, an element that deserves to be highlighted when dealing with a patriotic and expansionist discourse that marked the Japanese society [13].

After the Second World War, *bushido* lost much of its reputation due to the influence it caused regarding militarism, ruler worship and Japan's loss in the war [51]. After the defeat in the war, *bushido* was partially respected by martial arts practitioners, who started using the expression *budo* [48; 26]. The practices of warriors and samurais, their combat techniques and their code of conduct were reconfigured to translate the idea of martial arts [8].

In this context, the *Budo* played an important role in the formal education of the country, either by its practice in martial arts schools or by its insertion in the school curriculum. With this, we begin to understand the role of *Budo* in Japanese tradition and

From Wars to Spirituality: A Socio-Historical Investigation of the Japanese Budo

education. In the 19th century, through the actions and the Japanese Physical Education Department, together with the Japanese Curriculum Council (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), the *Budo* is inserted in the school curriculum. According to Sasaki [37], this insertion had the objective of making people more susceptible to adaptations and changes, besides performing actions productive to the society.

In the historical and cultural transition from *bujutsu* to modern *budo*, Farias [2] highlights that the main personalities to safeguard the martial arts traditions in Japan were: Jigoro Kano (1860-1938), creator of judo, Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957), creator of karate-do, and Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969), creator of aikido.

After his graduation at the University of Tokyo, Jigoro Kano, at the age of 22, created the Kodokan, translated as "Institute for the Study of the Way" [53, p. 22]. The Nippon Budokan [54] comments that, due to the educational and formative bias that Jigoro Kano assumed in his practice, his preference was to use the suffix *Do*, instead of keeping the term *jutsu* (or technique), creating judo, the first modern *budo*. Thus, he was responsible for important changes in the techniques he had learned in *jujutsu*, adapting them to the process of sportivization and removing techniques considered more traumatic or lethal [55].

Having strongly contributed to the Japanese Physical Education, Jigoro Kano is recognized as its patron. In the work *Kodokan Judo*, Jigoro Kano [56] describes the basic concepts of judo, the techniques, the free practice, the forms and the health and first aid. At first, about the basic concepts, we see that he establishes relationships with Physical Education, training methods, the body, the mind and ethics, addresses the aesthetic issue and the precepts of judo outside the *dojo* (training place). In his work, Kano [56] considers that the idea of path refers to life itself.

In Fujita's [23] interpretation, the process of sportivization of the *budo* emerged from a discourse associated with a sports festival in the Meiji era, the *Meiji Jingu National Sports Festival*, an event in favor of physical education on a national scale. As an international phenomenon, Sato and Inoue [25] highlight its great importance in cultural exchanges and, consequently, in the way in which *budo* came to be understood and practiced. In the midst of the demonstrations and trainings, we perceive that the idea of participation in a combat is essential.

Despite its similarity with sports, Frédéric [48, p. 137] describes the term *budo* as the "way of combat", and as "physical and spiritual disciplines", under the manifestation of the *kata*, a choreographed model of movements, and the idea of path. This place of combat, for Nippon Budokan [54], enables the interaction between teacher and student, and fosters the perception that both are going through the same difficulties as they advance in their training, whether in knowledge or skills. Furthermore, it is expected that this interaction occurs with a feeling of mutual respect and with the recognition of oneself and the other. The combat can also be understood as an intercultural and reflective *locus* regarding values and ethics [57].

Historically, the transition of *bujutsu* into *budo*—that is, their shift from combat techniques to methods for character development and education through physical and mental training—occurred during a period when peace had been achieved. When the Sengoku period ended and the peaceful Edo period began, martial arts were transformed into educational methods by practitioners like the Yagyu. Following the era of civil war, from the late Edo period to the early Meiji Era, and as modernization reached a certain stage, practitioners like Kano and Funakoshi proposed martial arts as a method for education and self-formation. Furthermore, as the era of imperialism and totalitarianism—that is, the period from the late Meiji era to the end of World War II—came to a close, *budo* became even more educational within the postwar peace. Conversely, in an era where war permeates everyday life, cultural concepts imbued with spirituality like "*budo*" are excluded, and "*bujutsu*" surfaces as a killing technique for achieving victory in war.

As we understand the *budo*'s spiritual aspects, which are related to the educational methods and character development through physical and mental training, we may see a path to understand it as a complex social and philosophical system imbued with the techniques that we would associate as a different expression of the self-care, as described by Michel Foucault [58; 59; 60] as the aesthetics of existence or way of living.

The notion of *Sei Shin Tanren* translates the student's attitude in spontaneously submitting to the process of becoming spiritually forged [33]. By placing himself under such a mode of subjection, the subject also proposes to assume an asceticism, a set of spiritual practices and moral codes, and, at the same time, that will constitute his aesthetics of existence, his way of living. On the relationship between the mode of subjection, asceticism, and morality, Foucault [60, p. 34] points out that there is no moral action without implications in the subject for the modes of subjection, and of the subject for his constitution and realization of the practices of the self on which these modes rely.

The physical culture of inherited to *budo* described by the Nippon Budokan [54] considers the martial arts as a type of equipment that the subject needs to learn and develop to improve himself. In other words, it is a progressive method that starts "from the microcosm of 'technical exploration' to the macrocosm of 'self-exploration', [...] a 'Path' (*do* or *michi*) to self-discovery" [54, p. 45].

CONCLUSIONS

By looking into several academic studies, we had as specific objectives to identify the meaning of *budo* in the national and international academic literature. To highlight the primary references, which we took for our theoretical support and identification

From Wars to Spirituality: A Socio-Historical Investigation of the Japanese Budo

of the concept of *budo*, we used the Nippon Budokan [54]. For the discussion, the notion of spirituality is essential and was based on Michel Foucault from his studies about the aesthetics of existence.

The art that *budo* seeks to work on is the body and the life of the subject itself, by itself. The *shugyo* refers to this arduous training, an ascetic form of spirituality which, by means of the imperative of the *budo*, configures itself into a system of self-techniques for self-knowledge and development. Its manifestation is made from the aspects of religiosity added to those of martiality.

To build such aesthetics of existence demands the very being of the subject, in an ethical occupation with himself. Recognizing his limitations and working on them to improve himself and thus better fulfill his role in society, benefiting himself and others. With this in mind, we can understand that the socio-historical aspects of the *Budo* enable us to rethink our reality, the uses we make of the body, and the practices constructed with the objective of improving ourselves as human beings.

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From Wars to Spirituality: A Socio-Historical Investigation of the Japanese Budo

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