

A Reconsideration of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai in the Purge of Ultra-nationalism and Militarism in Post-war Japan

Alexander Bennett Ph.D.
(Kansai University)

Introduction

Kendō and the other *budō* arts were earmarked by Japan's wartime government as an effective means for preparing youth for the rigours of modern war. The 1930s saw the systematic appropriation of *budō* by the state, and although there is some evidence of popular opposition to the government's commandeering of the martial arts to realise their overtly militaristic goals, *budō* was caught up in an unstoppable drift into what is widely considered now to be the darkest period in its history.

The zenith of *budō*'s "militarisation" (*sengika*) eventuated in the period extending from 1942–1945, an era of unprecedented policies aimed at making martial arts education combat effective and ideologically aligned with ultra-nationalistic government policy. The government commissioned an investigation to incorporate all *budō* organisations under one state-governed umbrella.¹

The "National Physical Strength Deliberation Council" sponsored by the Ministry of Health and Welfare recommended in a white paper that an "all-encompassing extra-governmental organisation" be formed between the five ministries to encourage the *budō* arts in all walks of society.² "We have reached a consensus to restructure the Dai-Nippon Butokukai, a registered society that has contributed to the advancement of *budō* for many years, and incorporate it into the organs of government."³

Accordingly, on March 21, 1942, retaining the same name, the Dai-Nippon Butokukai, originally a private organisation created in 1895, was reorganised under the patronage of the five ministries of Kōseishō (Health and Welfare), Mombushō (Education), Rikugunshō (Army), Kaigunshō (Navy), and the Naimushō (Home). The Butokukai's headquarters was situated inside the Kōseishō's office in Tokyo, and its original Kyoto base was designated as a regional branch. The Kōseishō's "Student Physical Education Promotion Committee" became a division inside the Butokukai, and its role was to oversee the five *budō* arts of

¹ Nakamura Tamio, *Kendō Jiten: Gijutsu to Bunka no Rekishi*, p. 241

² Quoted in Harasono Mitsunori, *Kendō no Fukkatsu (Kendō revival)*, p. 40

³ Ibid., p. 40

Kendō (including *naginata*), *jūdō*, *kyūdō*, *jūkendō*, and *shagekidō*. Other private associations such as the Kōdōkan (*jūdō*), Nippon Kobudō Shinkōkai, Shiseikai and Dai-Nippon Kendōkai (private *kendō* societies) were also placed under the supervision of the Butokukai. The following declaration made the state's motivations abundantly clear:

Subjects of the Japanese empire must study *budō* to cultivate loyalty, bravery and heroism in order to bolster the spirit of the nation, while developing principles of devotion and honour. The essence of *budō* must be embodied in the lifestyle of the nation, and when danger threatens, each must not falter in laying down their life showing their obligation to the emperor.⁴

The new rules and guidelines were to set the tone for the introduction of *sengi budō* (combat *budō*) in which the sole objective was to teach the skill to kill while not being afraid of being killed in the process. It is no surprise then that *budō* was, for the most part, banned by Occupation authorities in the aftermath of the Second World War. *Budō* in schools was prohibited with the issuance of notification by the Mombushō on November 6, 1945, and again on December 26 by the head of the Physical Education Bureau.

The Dai-Nippon Butokukai was not dissolved until late in 1946. It is somewhat surprising that the Butokukai was not dissolved immediately after the war despite the widely recognised role that it played in the promotion of *kendō* and other martial arts for overtly militaristic purposes. Inevitable though it was, disbandment involved an extended process with the Japanese government showing little contrition or desire to have the society's officers subjected to the Purge.

This paper will consider the manner in which the Butokukai was dismantled in a way not as straightforward as many scholars assume. Utilising important first-hand observations reported by SCAP officers collated in the Hans Baerwald (1927–2010)⁵ papers, I will show that if anything, the Butokukai and its officials were treated lightly in the Purge compared to other organisations and individuals seen as having connections to militarism.

SCAP's Perspective on the Dai-Nippon Butokukai's Induction into the Military Government

The process of the Butokukai's induction into the militaristic government was reported in

⁴ Dai-Nippon Butokukai, "Zaidan Hōjin Dai-Nippon Butokukai", April 1, 1942 (The day the Butokukai was established as a government body), T. Nakamura, *Shiryō: Kindai Kendō-shi*, p. 77

⁵ Born in Tokyo to a German businessman and his wife on June 18, 1927, Baerwald began a lifelong connection with Japan during his childhood, when he became fluent in Japanese while attending the American School in Japan. In 1940 the family immigrated to Berkeley, CA. He enrolled at UC Berkeley but left when he was drafted into the U.S. Army, where he was posted to Government Section in Gen. Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo during the American occupation of Japan, participating in the political purge of Japanese leaders.

detail in SCAP documents concerning the post-war purge of officials associated with ultra-nationalism and militarism:

It appears that a critical phase in the society's change into a militaristic organ took place under government pressure. This pressure was said to have been exercised by the army ever since the Manchurian incident but the conservative element in the society was able to resist until 1942 when the organization was finally forced to change its rules to the effect that the prime minister was to be its president ex-officio and the ministers of the army, navy, education welfare and home ex-officio vice presidents. For this reason General Senjuro Hayashi resigned on March 5, 1942, and on 21 March when the new by-laws were put into force General Tojo as Premier and Minister of War assumed the presidency. This ended an eleven year struggle (according to these government spokesmen) in which the army had consistently tried to infiltrate army methods of judo, kendo, and kyudo as against the conservative purely athletic method which was taught by the organization since its inception...⁶

It seems the conversion of the Butokukai into an extra-governmental organisation was not without controversy. "[I]t was only after repeated strong directions from the national office that the reorganization was brought about... It took 20 months to complete the reorganization of the prefectural branches."⁷ This may have been due to antagonism against state interference or due to the logistic difficulties in taking control of a nationwide organisation that boasted millions of members.

Nevertheless, in 1943 the newly established Dai-Nippon Butokukai issued guidelines on how *kendō* training, for example, was to be conducted thereafter. It listed practical considerations at the forefront of the document.

1. It is expected that a reasonable understanding of sword usage (*tōhō*) is acquired. This includes the execution of basic cuts and thrusts, and correct *kirikaeshi* (repetitive striking practice).
2. Ample training should be conducted outdoors. The clothes worn will consist of trousers, wrap-around leggings and shoes so that attacks can be practised while running.
3. The length of the *shinai* will be regulated. *Shinai* shall be no longer than 3-*shaku* 6-*sun* (109cm). The *tsuka* (hilt) should be less than 1-*shaku* (30.3cm) with 9-*sun* (27.2cm) under the *tsuba* (hand guard).

⁶ HBP, No. 2-10 "Information on the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai, 26 Nov. 1946"

⁷ HBP, No. 2-24, "Statement regarding the general state of activities of the branches of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai "(association of military virtue) in 'To' 'Do' 'Fu' and 'Ken' and the authorities and functions of the officials thereof."

4. Matches against a variety of weapons should be encouraged. Sword versus sword; Sword versus *jūken* (rifle and bayonet); sword versus short-sword; one person versus multiple opponents; group matches.
5. Test cutting (*tameshi-giri*) should be encouraged.
6. *Kendō* instructors should also study *jūkendō*, and instruct it at a basic level.⁸

Through desperate wartime measures, *budō* had thus become earmarked for more than just educating Japanese youth in the traditions and culture of Japan and helping to create an identity of “Japaneseness”. It was assigned a pragmatic role to prepare youth to fight to the death for the homeland. Thus, looked upon as being symbolic of Japan’s militaristic aggression, it stood to reason that the Butokukai would be targeted by SCAP as a dangerous ultra-nationalistic organization, and its officers seen as potential subversives who deserved punishment. However, the reaction by SCAP was slow, and at times seemed almost sympathetic to the Butokukai; and the Japanese were tardy and virtually unrepentant in their response and the process of dismantling the organisation.

The Purge Process and the Dai-Nippon Butokukai’s Culpability According to SCAP

Officially titled the “Removal and Exclusion of Undesirable Personnel from Public Office”, the “Purge” directives contained in SCAPIN⁹ 548 (Removal of Ultrationalists) dictated that “ultra-nationalistic or militaristic social, political, professional and commercial societies and institutions will be dissolved and prohibited.”¹⁰ The other directive often quoted with regards to the Butokukai is SCAPIN 550 (Removal and Exclusion of Undesirable Personnel from Public Office) which states, “Persons who have been active exponents of militarism and militant nationalism will be removed and excluded from public office and from any positions of public or substantial private responsibility.”¹¹

With a proposed memorandum to the Chief of Staff, “Dissolution of Dai Nippon Butokukai by order to the Imperial Japanese Government is recommended in accordance with the provisions of SCAPIN 548 Paragraph I-f on the grounds that this is an organization ‘affording military or quasi-military training’ and which provides for the ‘perpetuation of militarism’ or a martial spirit in Japan.”¹² Interestingly, however, this memorandum was

⁸ Quoted in Nakamura Tamio, *Op. Cit.*, p. 261

⁹ “SCAP Index”. SCAP is used in reference to the Supreme Command Allied Powers which included GHQ in Tokyo and related administrative agencies, and also to the Supreme Commander i.e., General MacArthur.

¹⁰ SCAP, *Political Reorientation of Japan: September 1945 to September 1948 report of Government Section, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers* (Reprinted edition by the Scholarly Press, 1968), Volume 2, p. 479

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 482

¹² Memo for the Chief of Staff “Dissolution of the Dai Nippon Butokukai”, August 13, 1946. Quoted in an initial draft of “History of the purge” by Hans Baerwald, April 1, 1948, p. 3

not enacted, nor was a subsequent memorandum prepared for the Imperial Government issued. Had it been issued, the Butokukai and its officers' fates would have been clear under Paragraph "C" of the purge directive categories, meaning that all would have been purged without question.

Instead, Hans Baerwald reports the content of the memorandums were relayed verbally because of "assurance by officials of the Imperial Japanese Government that verbal orders would be sufficient..."¹³ Nevertheless, in the immediate post-war period, the Butokukai set about immediately creating what one may term cynically a façade of repentance.

Immediately after the war, *jūkendō* and *shagekidō* were removed from the Butokukai's curriculum leaving *kendō*, *jūdō*, and *kyūdō*. Nakayama Hakudō was appointed as the head of the *kendō* division early in 1946, and the Butokukai sought ways of raising funds to gain independence from any government backing. A SCAP report outlined this process as follows:

The society rid itself of all its characteristics as an auxiliary organ of the government in March this year. Since then it has become a purely people's corporation, changing its system and organization along democratic lines, and endeavouring to regenerate and develop fencing, judo and archery as national sports for the establishment of a peaceful and well-cultured Japan. But in view of circumstances and with the object of fully attaining the abovementioned intentions, it was found suitable to throw away all connections, create fresh atmosphere all over the country, and form new autonomous organizations for every branch of the sports. Thus on Sept. 13 [1946], a meeting of the directors was held and the liquidation of the society was decided upon.¹⁴

Negotiations were held between the Japanese government and SCAP regarding its continued operation, and the degree to which the society would be subject to the purge. The main point of contention was whether or not the Butokukai could be classed as "ultra-nationalistic" or "militaristic" since its time of inception (1895), or after it was appropriated by the government in 1942. General Willoughby recommended to Government Section (GS) in November 1946 that if the Butokukai were to be included under the provisions stipulated in SCAPIN 550, "the beginning date should not be earlier than January 1942 and the ending date not later than September 2, 1945, for any of its important officials."¹⁵ He also relays his concern that if the Butokukai was to come under the axe and all officers purged without question, this would have an adverse effect on the current government in that "three

¹³ Ibid., p. 4

¹⁴ HBP, "Report regarding the procedure for the liquidation of the Dai-Nippon Butoku Kai No. 2-5"

¹⁵ Hans Baerwald, "The Dai Nippon Butokukai and the Purge", unpublished paper presented at the University of California, Los Angeles in February 1982. p. 6

members of the [Yoshida Shigeru] Cabinet and the Director of the Bureau of Public Safety of the Home Ministry” would be ousted from their posts, destabilising the government in a critical time before the introduction of the new constitution.¹⁶

Other SCAP officials took a similar, almost benevolent stance. Of particular note was the GS's Political Affairs Division Chief, P. K. Roest who wrote in a report, “At no time did the Butoku Kai have a special section or group in charge of ‘spiritual’ training. The ‘spiritual’ counterpart of the sports taught had been an integral element of the teaching itself for every one of these sports. It was reiterated that until the out-break of the Pacific War these so-called military arts were practiced as athletics, a physical training only, which at the same time developed worthy moral qualities.”¹⁷ He also tried to justify the role played by military elites in the Butokukai as a passive one, and that it was even opposed to military and governmental interference. “The generals who headed the national organization had usually cooperated fully with the civilian members to maintain the society’s independent character and were themselves, as a rule, opposed to the intrusion of army methods and the fighting arts of shooting and bayonet practice.”

He concludes his report with the following statement: “From the material submitted by the Home Ministry it appears that the Butoku Kai could not be considered as an instrument of ultra-nationalism and militarism until the beginning of 1942, unless the athletics taught by the organization in connection with the Samurai code are in themselves considered as evil. If that extreme position is taken the organization stands condemned from its inception in 1895.”

Deferred Dissolution an Ambiguous Categorisation

Hans Baerwald, who was there in an official capacity to chronicle the Butokukai’s situation, and witnessed their gradual escape off the proverbial hook, viewed this light-handed treatment with a certain amount of scepticism. “In retrospect, it seems obvious that the Home Ministry bureaucrats had undertaken a concerted campaign to influence various well-placed SCAP officials to insure that if the Butokukai were to be included in the Purge criteria, the latter would be drawn and narrowly as possible.”¹⁹

Meanwhile, the Japanese ministries colluded to dissolve the society. The president of the Butokukai, Fujinuma Shōhei (1883–1962), sent a report to SCAP’s Civil Intelligence Section outlining their decision to disband. Fujinuma explained that the society had broken away from governmental control in March of 1946 to serve as an independent society operated in a democratic manner to contribute to the rebuilding of a culturally peaceful Japan by striving to develop the national sports of *kendō*, *jūdō* and *kyūdō* for the welfare of the public.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ HBP No. 2-10, General Headquarters Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers Government Section Memorandum for the Record, “Information on the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai”, 26 November, 1946

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hans Baerwald, “The Dai Nippon Butokukai and the Purge”, p. 7

However, it was decided at the director's meeting convened on September 13, that it was better for the society to be dissolved and that independent organisations of enthusiasts be encouraged to "establish their own democratic societies to promote their sports."²⁰

An application for dissolution was lodged to the Mombushō on November 2, and it was ratified by the ministry on November 7 with a directive to clearly stipulate what measures it intended to take regarding its assets.²¹ The dissolution was finalised with the issuance of "Naimushō Directive No. 45" by the Home Ministry on November 9, 1946. Apart from officially announcing the dissolution of the Dai-Nippon Butokukai and its related branches, the directive also stated that the Butokuden in Kyoto (the main *dōjō* of the Butokukai built in 1899) would be released to the citizens for use as a venue for cultural and sporting activities to help attain the peaceful mission of the post-war rebuilding process.²²

Baerwald claims that the Government Section of SCAP was not aware of this occurrence until later in January, 1947, and was interpreted by Baerwald as "a subterfuge designed to avoid the society's inclusion in the Purge criteria."²³ According to Baerwald, after the issuance of repeated "verbal reminders" asking the Japanese government to add the Butokukai to the Purge, the Minister of Home Affairs, Uehara Etsujirō, sent a petition to General Courtney Whitney on February 24, 1947 "once again emphasizing that the Butokukai was solely concerned with the propagation of sports, but conceding that government control had forced it to engage in coordinating military arts and... the advancement of bayonet drill and shooting."²⁴ In response to Uehara's appeal, Whitney issued the following reply:

1. I have carefully considered your memorandum concerning the status of the Great Japan Military Virtue Association (Dai Nippon Butoku Kai). This association was dissolved and its funds and other property seized under a Home Ministry Ordinance dated 8 November 1946 because during the war the association became an instrument of the militarists.
2. I am advising State Minister Kanamori that in the administration of Imperial Ordinance No. 1, dated 4 January 1947, all influential members of this association or any branch thereof within the period 6 December 1941 and 2 September 1945 will be treated as falling within the provisions of Category "G", Appendix "A" SCAPIN 550, in the absence of satisfactory proof to the contrary.²⁵

²⁰ Dai-Nippon Butokukai, "Dai-Nippon Butokukai kaisan tetsuzuki ni kansuru hōkokusho", September 28, 1946. Reproduced in Watanabe Ichirō (ed.), "Budō sōgō dantai Dai-Nippon Butokukai no setsuritsu to sono kaisan", *KBKS II*, p. 64

²¹ Mombushō, "Zaidan-hōjin kaisan no ken", November 2, 1946. Reproduced in *KBKS II*, p. 66

²² Naimushō, "Zaidan-hōjin Dai-Nippon Butokukai kaisan (Naimushō) rei", November 9, 1946. Reproduced in *KBKS II*, p. 67

²³ HBP, "The Dai Nippon Butokukai and the Purge", p. 8

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hans Baerwald Papers (HBP) No. 2-11 "Memorandum for the Minister of Home Affairs – 13 March, 1947"

Category “G”, as opposed to “C”, meant that the criteria for the Purge and who would be subject to it were vague, and involved a time consuming process of individual assessment. Once the case of the Butokukai had reached this point, both the GS and the Naimushō engaged in the judgment process. But as Baerwald concedes, it was in fact the bureaucrats in the Naimushō (especially the police) who stood to be adversely affected, thereby providing the impetus for the ministry to “protect their own”.²⁶ In the final analysis, only the local *shibu-chō* (branch chiefs) were declared to subjects of the purge. Baerwald describes this result as a “substantial victory” for the Naimushō, and rather wryly states that “no other example better illustrates the pervasive influence of the Japanese bureaucracy in being able to influence policy so as to shield its own personnel from the Purge.”²⁷

In essence, the purge criteria for the Butokukai was not finalised until August, 1947. Whereas “every one” of the career officers in the army were labelled as “purgees” immediately after the war, the Butokukai purge took over two years for implementation; and of the 2,073 officers (of around three-million members in 1942), “1,312 (63.3) were barred or removed, 657 (31.6%) were passed and 104 (5.1%) had died.”²⁸ This totalled a miniscule 0.6% of the total number of Japanese officials (210,288)²⁹ designated as “purgees”.

Butokukai Purge Statistics³⁰

	Passed	Removed	Barred, Prov. Desig.	Previously Designated	Deceased	Total
National HQ officials	5	4	19	21	10	59
Prefectural officials: Chiefs	3	--	55	62	4	124
Vice chiefs and chief directors	64	40	127	--	13	244
Directors and chiefs of sections	169	8	128	--	21	326
Chiefs of sub-branches	416	381	462	5	56	1,320
TOTALS	657	433	791	88	104	2,073

Baerwald’s analysis of these statistics sums up the way in which SCAP was coerced by a virtually unrepentant Butokukai and government officials with regards to their function in the “militarisation” of the martial arts. The following six points show how the Butokukai escaped ruthless purging compared to other ultra-nationalistic societies and military affiliated organisations.

²⁶ HBP, “The Dai Nippon Butokukai and the Purge”, p. 9

²⁷ Ibid., p. 10

²⁸ Ibid., p. 15

²⁹ SCAP, *Political Reorientation of Japan: September 1945 to September 1948 report of Government Section, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers* (Reprinted edition by the Scholarly Press, 1968), Vol. 2, p. 553

³⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 72

First, competing characterizations of the society's basic nature created an aura of ambiguity. Second SCAP officials obtained contradictory information from Japanese Government officials. Third, there was a growing lack of consensus inside SCAP, especially after General Willoughby changed his mind. Fourth, both SCAP and Japanese Government officials began to give precedence to the impact that the Butokukai's inclusion in the Purge might have on incumbent holders of high office, instead of being primarily concerned with the implementation of basic Occupation policy. Fifth, SCAP's decision to exercise its control through the existing structure of the Japanese Government provided the bureaucracy – especially the Home Ministry – an opportunity to protect its career officials. Sixth, the Japanese Government's tactics of delay and obfuscation resulted in the Butokukai's purge being implemented during the period when basic Occupation policy began to shift from reform to recovery.³¹

Furthermore, in 1947, SCAP released a directive that sought to completely rid Japan of any militaristic sentiment in schools.

In all educational organizations, the teaching of military curriculum must be forbidden. The wearing of student military uniforms must also be forbidden. Traditional activities like kendo, which foster the fighting spirit, must be abolished, too. Physical education must no longer be linked to "spiritual education." You must put more emphasis upon purely physical exercise; games that are not military training, and recreational activities. If instructors wearing military-type uniforms are employed as physical education instructors or engage in sports and physical education activities, they must have their qualifications examined.³²

This meant that many of the graduates of the Budō Vocational School, Tokyo Higher Normal School, Kokushikan and various other educational institutions who held national teaching qualifications for the martial arts were left without jobs in their field of expertise. Their fortunes, however, were to change in less than a decade after the *budō* arts were reinstated incrementally as democratized sports in schools under the guidance of the Mombushō, and in the community under independent federations representing the different *budō*.

³¹ Hans Baerwald, "The Dai Nippon Butokukai and the Purge", pp. 16-17

³² "Revision of the Japanese Education System" (March 27, 1947) in Edward R. Beauchamp, James M. Vardaman, Jr., (ed.), *Japanese Education Since 1945: A Documentary Study*, p. 99

Conclusion

In summary, when one takes into consideration the role it played inculcating a nationalistic spirit and training the populace in preparation for war from 1942 and before, it could be said that the Butokukai officials were sentenced rather lightly after the war. Detailed research into this period is sparse and ambiguous, and although nobody denies *budō*'s utilisation in the war effort and the prominent role played by the Butokukai, it is simply alluded to as a dark period in *budō*'s history, although was arguably an unavoidable path given the times.

Budō was the perfect tool from symbolic, ethnic, historic, spiritual, and even practical standpoints to reinforce national identity in support of the war effort. With Japan's surrender, it was inevitable that *budō* participation was banned for the most part by the Occupation authorities, and that the perceived perpetrators of using *budō* to promote militarism also be punished. However, the usual interpretation that the Dai-Nippon Butokukai dissolved itself in repentance to its role in the war is a common assumption that does not stand up to scrutiny.

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