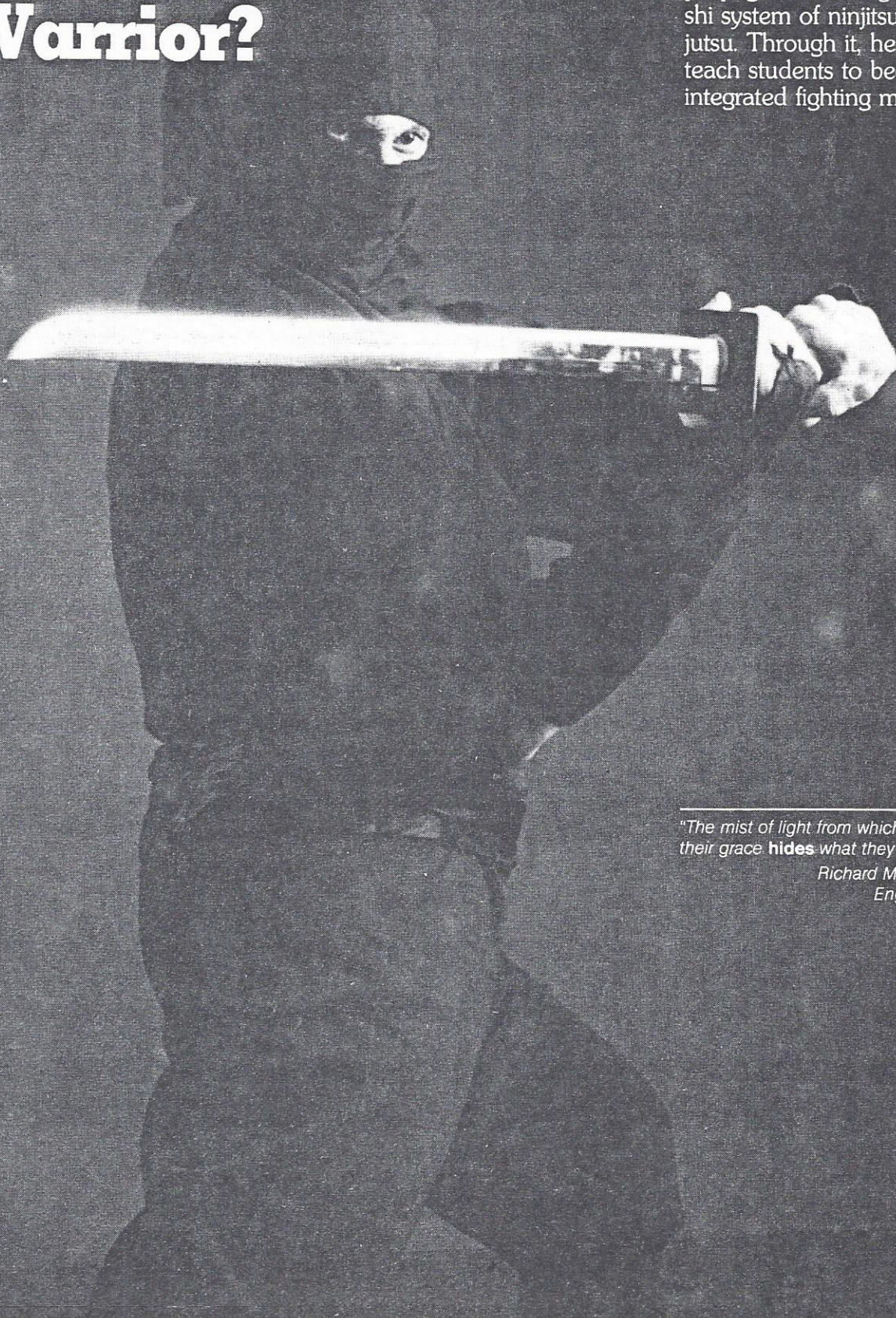


By Bob Mendel

# Can Ninjitsu Make You the Ultimate Warrior?

No longer spies and terrorists, modern ninja are still trained in a baffling array of esoteric survival skills and martial methods traced back to feudal Japan. Frank Dux, an American ninja, propagates the Koga Yamabushi system of ninjitsu, not ninjutsu. Through it, he seeks to teach students to become totally integrated fighting machines.



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*"The mist of light from which they take  
their grace **hides** what they are."*

*Richard Monckton Milnes  
English statesman*

The legend of the ninja is one inundated by mystery and shades of the supernatural. In feudal Japan, where the ninja prospered, he was regarded with a mixture of fear, hate, awe and superstition. His identity concealed behind black garb that revealed only cold, glittering eyes, the ninja carried an arsenal of exotic weapons and tools. And his adversaries could expect nothing but the unexpected.

The prowess of the ninja led Japanese commoners to believe he could make himself invisible, scale walls like a lizard, swim underwater like a fish, and conceal himself in impossibly small spaces. Master spy, assassin and fighter, the ninja carved a unique niche in the realm of the martial arts.

So well preserved was this veil of secrecy, maintained by clan structure to produce generations of ninja, that even historians Donn Draeger and Robert Smith asserted in their 1969 reference work, *Asian Fighting Arts*, that "no ninja exists today." Wrong!

Recently, a flood of information has proved that the tradition is indeed alive and flourishing in Japan. Ninja, though no longer spies and terrorists, are still trained in a baffling array of survival skills and fighting techniques. Not too surprisingly, there are now Americans among their number. And, as they did with karate, they are transplanting this Eastern art on Western soil.

In the heart of the San Fernando Valley, a middle-class suburban community adjacent to Los Angeles, a small shopping center houses a dojo bearing the words "Dux Ninjitsu." Here, the centuries-old tradition of the ninja is available to the American public. The owner-instructor, Frank Dux, is an American ninjitsu expert who earned his credentials in Japan. He is one of the newest ninja to open a school in the U.S.

Dux' unusual career has taken him from the San Fernando Valley to the jungles of Southeast Asia and back, in full circle. He got his first taste of the martial arts by studying in jujutsu at the age of thirteen. Later, after years of training in ninjitsu, he piled his skills in combat during three years of service in the U.S. Marine Corps as an intelligence specialist. Dux was one of the most decorated marines to come out of Southeast Asia, earning the Purple Heart, Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Distinguished Service Cross—awards gained during clandestine operations in Vietnam.

In 1975, Dux used his knowledge, which by this time included training in tae kwon do and hwarangdo, to tutor fellow marines in special tactics. In 1977, he served in the same capacity for the Korean government, this time teaching the Royal Korean Marine Corps. Dux later worked as an anti-terrorist consultant to Nicaragua.

According to Dux, his involvement with ninjitsu began when he entered his first martial arts tournament at age thirteen and "got his ass kicked."

"My jujutsu just didn't work for me," he recalls ruefully. "I mean, I came in last. But I never cried or complained. I just went up there knowing I was going to lose and take a lot of abuse. But the man who would become my teacher happened to be watching from

the stands. He gave me a note saying that if I really wanted to learn to defend myself, to come to him 'like an empty cup.'"

Back then, Dux scarcely knew what to make of those nondescript words. Out of curiosity, he decided to study with the man, Senzo Tanaka.

"He had a small garage where he taught," says Dux. "I was soon working out with three Japanese, and they were slightly irritated at first that I was not one of their race.

"Years later, I learned the reason why Tanaka liked me. One, I didn't complain, and I had drive and determination. But it was also because I reminded him of his son, who had been killed in the bombing of Nagasaki. So he took me in. He had brought the style from Japan and when he died, I inherited the title from him because he had no other relatives. He wanted it that way, and the clans back in Japan not only approved of it but were glad. So I have formed the first school of ninjitsu in the United States."

Thus, chance, and the slow merging of East and West in modern times, helped make possible the entrance of a typical American youth into the mysterious world of the ninja.

In discussing the ninja tradition in Japan, Dux cites two major branches, one calling its art *ninjutsu*, and the other, his type, *ninjitsu*. Are the differences between the two branches semantic or real? Both, says Dux. The two main branches were formed centuries ago when geographical boundaries caused ninja to fight on opposing sides in a civil war, pay allegiance to differing religious traditions, and finally develop their arts along slightly different lines. The words *ninjutsu* and *ninjitsu* mean the same thing—skill, according to Dux. But the two branches refuse to be classified together, although both share the name.

"You don't lump a Shotokan practitioner together with someone from tae kwon do," says Dux, "and you can't lump ninjitsu together with ninjutsu.

Although philosophy, techniques, and attitudes differ between the two branches, a basis in common history exists. Much of what separates and defines the ninja tradition as a whole can be gleaned from its historical evolution in Japan.

"It goes back 2,000 years ago," explains Dux, "to the book *The Art of War* by the Chinese warrior, Sun Tzu, written about 500 to 300 B.C. The principles were brought to Japan in the person of the Prince Regent Shotoku in 593 A.D. He introduced it to Japan as an art, although it had no name at the time.

"The prince employed spies to settle civil disputes in his realm. They were secretly dispatched to determine the truth in the civil cases before him, so he could make a judgment accordingly.

"When the prince died, a power vacuum existed in the government. Two factions clashed in a struggle for supremacy, concurrent with the establishment of a formal religion. One side favored Shinto, the other Buddhism." Among the Buddhists was the group that would eventually become Dux' lineage, the Koga Yamabushi, who also helped to develop the mental stages of ninja training.



**Frank Dux, founder of the Dux Ninjitsu school, displays an ancient crossbow, an extremely lethal weapon.**

The next period of history was the so-called "golden age of ninjitsu," from 1192-1333 A.D., when some twenty-five different schools emerged. The art evolved primarily in the Iga and Koga provinces of Japan. In the Iga, the Oi and the Hatori clans ruled ninjitsu, while in the Koga, some fifty families practiced ninjitsu. The families remained anonymous, and do so today.

During the fourteenth century, civil war broke out, and the two main branches of the art were divided by locale and allegiance. Both sides in the war used a spy network. The Koga aligned with the North, the Iga with the South. In Iga, the White Phoenix Castle system arose, which took in youngsters and trained them for a life as a ninja.

Although the ninja gained a reputation as assassins for hire, this was not generally true, Dux claims.

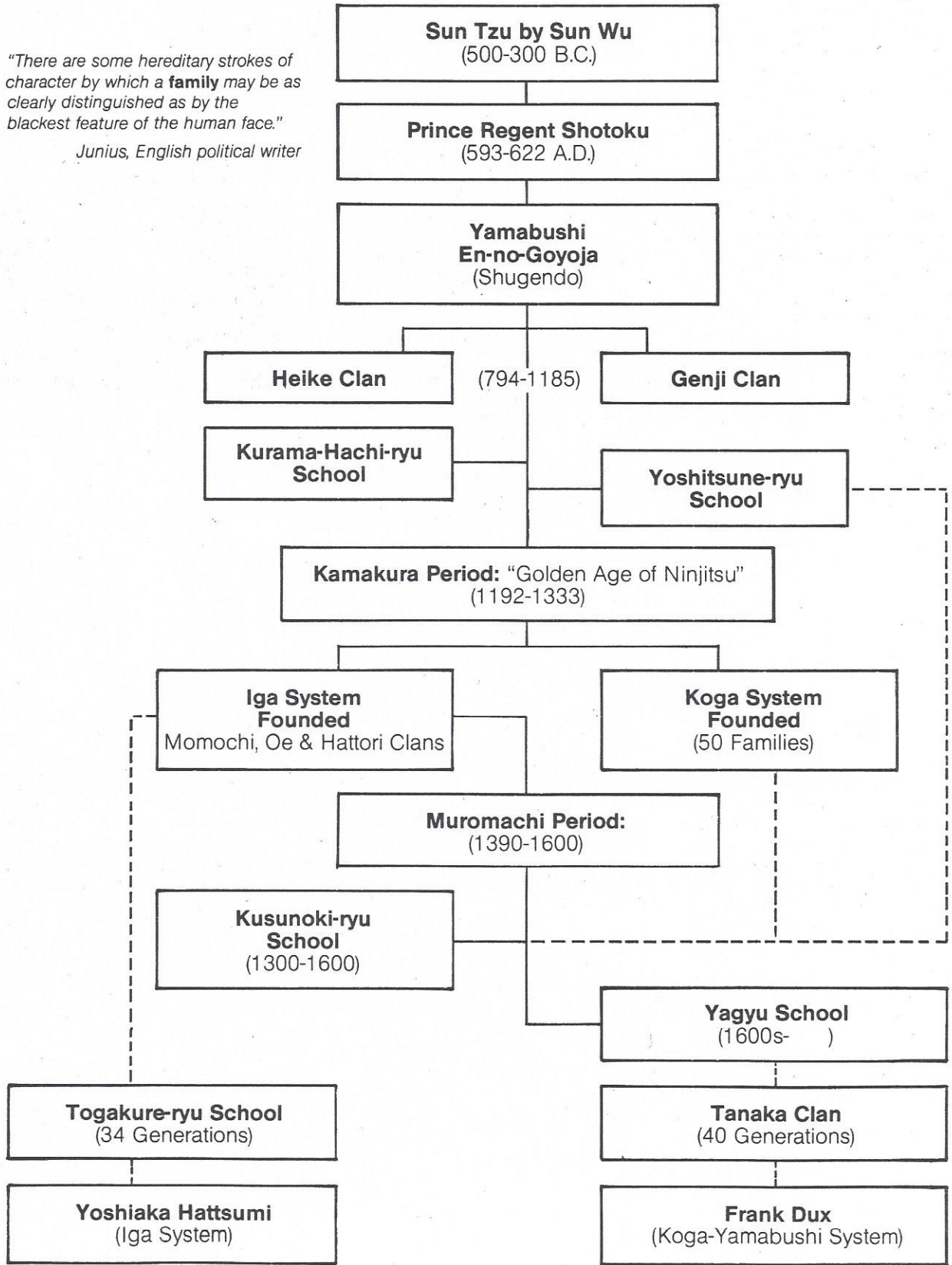
"Within the Iga tradition, a member of the Hatori clan became a shogun and retained his power by hiring out his army. But in the Koga, the ninja were *never* available for hire. In fact, they retained the Buddhist outlook that to hire oneself out would be to demean oneself."

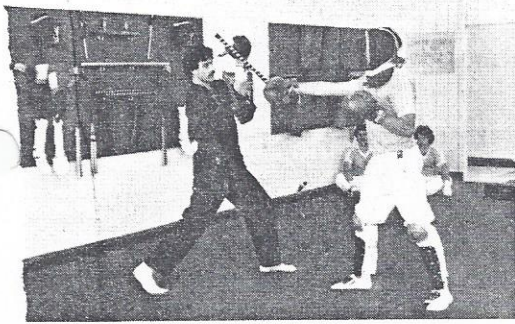
Dux continues to explain some of the essential differences between the Koga and Iga traditions.

"In the Koga Yamabushi," he says, "we stress individual thought, which was not permitted in ancient Japan. Because of this, the Iga line referred to us as *ronin*, meaning 'masterless samurai,' but again, this was not true. While the motivation of the Iga line is to preserve tradition, in the Koga Yamabushi it is one of search. This is more like the attitude here in the West, which is one reason why I feel ninjitsu can become popular in the United States.

# Ninjitsu: Past & Present

"There are some hereditary strokes of character by which a family may be as clearly distinguished as by the blackest feature of the human face."  
*Junius, English political writer*





Weapons training is an integral part of the basic techniques of ninjitsu. At top, Dux works out with a nunchaku.

"In our approach, we try to become integrated individuals in society, regardless of where that is. This is where we differ from the traditional outlook. The Koga tries to eliminate the nonessential; the techniques constantly change and evolve. The Iga, conversely, tends to preserve the past.

"The Iga approach is an *element* system where the ninja becomes a rock or fire whereas the Koga is more like an *animal* system, constantly fluid and constantly moving. When the samurai unsheathed his sword, the ninja would pull out a gun he had bought from a Portuguese trader and shoot him, plain and simple. We believe in accomplishing the objective and we don't care how we get there. The samurai fights as though he were on a rail, but we are constantly moving in circles... maybe due to the Chinese origins."

The Koga is also an animal system, explains Dux, in the way that it interprets strength. The tiger claw is used for a special way of striking, particularly in conjunction with the *shuko*, the clawlike device attached to the hand. With it, the ninja would simply grab the sword blade from the hand of the samurai, devastating the warrior psychologically.

Dux describes other differences between the two systems.

"The Iga teach by example, and students are left to discover much on their own, while we encourage questions and are constantly programming research," he says.

By way of example, Dux describes how he is currently working on the development of a device to increase speed and power in kicking.

"I am working with Dr. Allen Selner, one of the leading experts in sports medicine in the

United States. We have a device that increases kicking speed by thirty percent. But to appreciate it, you have to understand what speed is anatomically. Once you see it, though, it is very simple."

The Koga tradition remains secret, at least in its upper ranks, Dux claims, while the Iga line now teaches openly in Japan. Dux says that his tradition is actually illegal in Japan because of its training method and because it refuses to answer to any government.

"I was told by my teacher that during World War II, when American airborne troops crashed or parachuted into Japan, they were often hidden by the Koga families," Dux relates. "The families believed that the flyers were simply doing what they had to do, and that they didn't deserve to be executed for it."

Personal responsibility, as opposed to responsibility to any government, is a key to understanding the family discipline structure within the Koga Yamabushi tradition.

"If I have a student who goes out and bullies someone, then I am responsible," says Dux. "Not the police or the State of California. Because I taught him, it is up to me to ensure that whomever he hurts is taken care of and that it never happens again. This is why we don't pay attention to governments, United States or otherwise. Some other systems teach ultimate patriotism; we never do. We know that governments can be just as corrupt as individuals, and that blind allegiance is no good at all."

So how did this clan's system of fighting and philosophy, which has remained secret and even illegal in Japan, emerge in an apparently open school in suburban California?

"This is the first time in the history of ninjitsu that there is an open school," says Dux, "and it is experimental. I have to check with the people I work with—the ninjitsu community if you want to call it that—and they make sure that the art is being taught in the proper way. They want it to be known, yet they don't want it to be known. That is why it is called 'Dux Ninjitsu,' with my name appearing first. If I lose face, they know who to come and see."

Dux explains that his school is both open and closed. Beginners learn the basic techniques while working through the lower ranks, giving Dux a chance to get to know the individual and evaluate him. If the student grows with the required discipline, he moves toward higher ranks and inner levels of knowledge. But if he lacks the proper discipline, he drifts to the outer level and remains there by his own inertia.

"As you learn," Dux explains, "we get to know what type of human being you are. If you are sincere and hard working, and you pass your tests, then you advance to the upper ranks. Once you are admitted to the advanced class, the doors are locked and no one else enters. There are special meetings in different locations."

Dux' rank is *shidoshi*, he says, and the ranks in ascending order are: first rank, sensei, master, shidoshi, and gijitsusha. Gijitsusha roughly means "engineer." Dux laughs about the ambiguous title, explaining that as

a teacher the gijitsusha builds, not destroys.

The basic techniques of ninjitsu encompass a wide range of activities and weapons, apropos to the ninja tradition. How to fall, roll, punch, and kick—all the integral components of hand-to-hand combat—are taught first. Before attaining first rank, the student must also master the nunchaku, single and double escrimas, the hatchet and its method of being thrown, knife fighting and throwing, and how to throw the shuriken.

For second level, the student must become ambidextrous—able to kick left and right, punch left and right, and fight against weapons.

Dux explains the long process involved in obtaining a black belt. "In some styles you can get a black belt in a year and a half. Here it can take five years," he says. "You must be in top physical condition, be able to cover 100 miles in 48 hours. If that sounds too demanding, remember that the Indians in New Mexico do it all the time.

"Our tradition embraces all the martial arts," says Dux, "because this is necessary for understanding more. Knowledge is power, and by knowing more you have power over your enemy. That is the secret of coming out alive. Our enemies don't have the foggiest notion of what to expect from us."

The ninja tradition of practicality is simple: If it works, use it. If it doesn't, drop it. Dux uses the Chinese monkey style as an example.

"We have a semblance of the monkey style that involves rolling and sliding kicks and is used for fighting in mud. To teach this in the United States where most fights occur on asphalt would be ridiculous, so we change our emphasis. We learn it, but only to fight in mud. We learn to fight in different terrains. We have techniques that teach you how to climb, to fight in water, to fight linearly as if you're trapped in a hallway, to fight in open or restrained spaces.

"We find a better way and adopt it. If they came out with a laser gun tomorrow, we would use it. In this system, you go all the way to firearms. You are a totally integrated fighting machine. That is all you are designed to do, to be a fighting machine."

Perhaps Dux describes the flexibility and the practical aspects of ninjitsu best when he says that each person develops his own way of fighting within a system that itself is always changing.

"This makes ninjitsu a new way of self-defense for the American people," Dux claims, "as opposed to the more standard arts of karate and kung-fu. As part of the Eastern thought, these arts are motivated by tradition. We are motivated by self-discovery."

Certainly the emphasis on individualism should appeal to Americans, as Dux suggests. The ninja's willingness to innovate technically is also in harmony with the current spurt in technology so evident in American culture. And, as East and West do meet, valuable exchanges of knowledge are taking place. Adventurers like Frank Dux will continue to explore the mysteries of such traditions as ninjitsu in which knowledge is power.

