The Dai Nippon Butoku Kai

by Mark Cramer

A discussion arose at the GKK annual meeting regarding the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai. From this initial discussion and from subsequent e-mail discussions, I realized that there was some misunderstanding regarding this very old and extremely prestigious organization. In the following article, I would like to offer some clarification about the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai and its relationship to GojuRyu Karatedo.
The Dai Nippon Butoku Kai was originally established in Kyoto Japan1895 by Japan’s Ministry of Education. Its purpose was to promote and standardize martial disciplines and systems throughout Japan. Moreover, the DNBK was officially sanctioned with the full endorsement of Japan’s Meiji Emperor. To this day, it is required that the Governor of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai is a member of Japan’s royal family. Presently, the Governor of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai is the brother-in-law of the late Emperor Hirohito.

The Dai Nippon Butoku Kai is the oldest officially sanctioned martial arts institution Japan. Consequently, it is the center for the heritage of Japanese budo. It stresses the virtues of the martial arts as well as physical excellence in the martial disciplines. The disciplines that the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai sanctions and offers credentials in include kendo, iaido, judo, karatedo, aikido, and kobudo.

The official headquarters of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai is the Butokuden. This martial arts hall was built in the eighth century on the grounds of the Heian shrine in the old capital of Kyoto. This building and its grounds have become the symbol for the traditional Japanese/Okinawan martial arts. A number of prominent Japanese martial practitioners have been officially recognized by Dai Nippon Butoku Kai. Some of the most well-known karatedo practitioners recognized by the DNBK include Gichin Funakoshi, Kenwa Mabuni, and Chojun Miyagi.

GojuRyu Karatedo has a longstanding relationship with the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai. Karate was officially recognized by the DNBK in April 1933. In that same year, Chojun Miyagi registered GojuRyu Karate as an official style of karatedo. In 1934, Mr. Miyagi was appointed as the Chief of Karate for the Okinawan branch of the DNBK. Since that time both the style of GojuRyu and Goju practitioners have been members of this organization and have promoted the goals of this organization.

At the end of the Second World War, the allied command in Japan ordered the dissolution of the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai because it was associated with the militarism which had led Japan into the world conflict. The Dai Nippon Butoku Kai was reestablished in 1953 with the goal of improving international understanding through the study of the traditional Japanese martial arts and their virtues. To this end, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai supports the research and instruction in the traditional Japanese martial arts throughout the world.