IDEAL TEACHING

JAPANESE CULTURE & THE TRAINING OF THE WARRIOR

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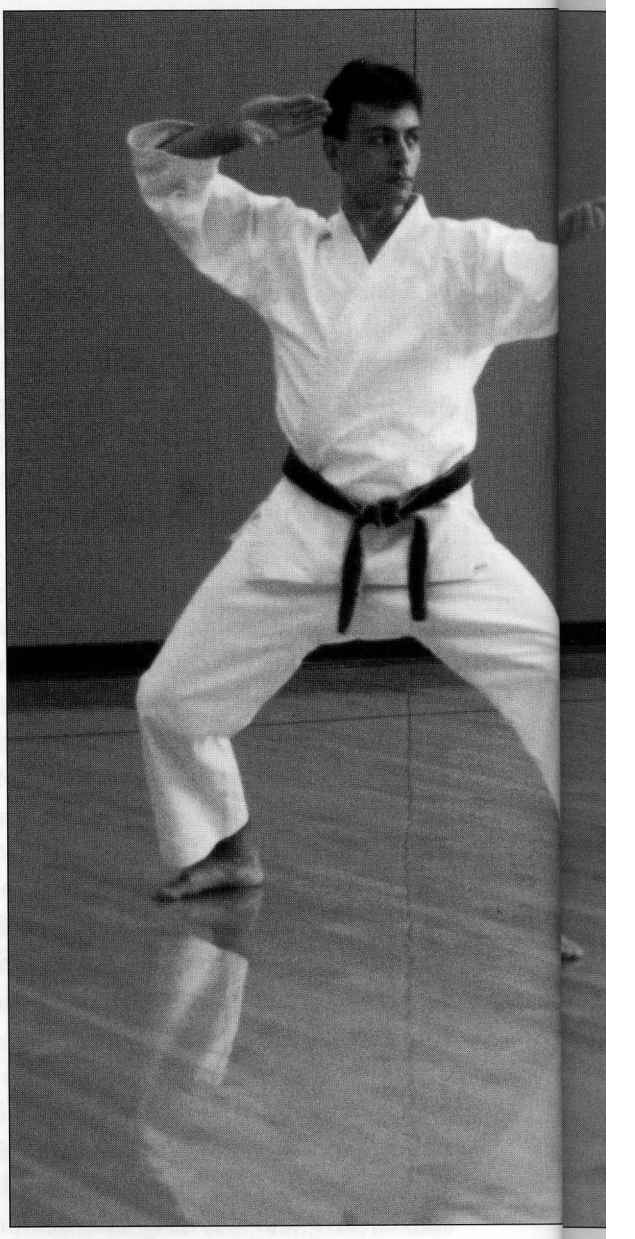

The central themes of Japanese culture have evolved over the past several centuries and permeate all aspects of life in Japan, including martial arts (Befu, 1971:174-179; Beasley, 1975:11-13). Perhaps the most central theme is the strong emphasis on conformity and the subordinating of individualism to the norms of the social group (Befu, 1971:168-169). Yet, one prominent image in Japanese culture seems to conspicuously contrast with this emphasis on conformity—the idealized image of the lone samurai warrior.

Many of us are familiar with the idealized image of the lone warrior as depicted in the famous Akira Kurasawa/Toshiro Mifune samurai films such as "The Seven Samurai." The lone warrior of these films is an independent individualist, who is an ultimately competent, invincible, and technically superb warrior, who single-handedly triumphs in combat against the multitudes of adversaries who oppose him. Is this seeming anomaly of the heroic individu-