

# SMAA JOURNAL



Shudokan Martial Arts Association • PO Box 6022, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022  
<http://smaa-hq.com/> • [shudokan@smaa-hq.com](mailto:shudokan@smaa-hq.com) • 1-734-645-6441

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 2022 SMAA DUES

Membership fees were due on January 1, 2022. Please be sure to pay your SMAA dues on time. You can either send a check to our headquarters or pay online at <http://www.smaa-hq.com/payments.php>. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and PayPal. This is a quick and safe way to make your annual SMAA membership payment.

We appreciate our members paying dues promptly. It makes life easier for the SMAA staff of volunteers, and it is representative of the type of self-discipline we are cultivating through the study of traditional Japanese martial arts.

### DONATIONS & TAX DEDUCTIONS

The SMAA is a federally tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation. As such, your donations to our association are tax deductible. Send your donations, in the form of a check or money order (made out to SMAA), to our headquarters in Michigan. We'll send you a letter back acknowledging your contribution, which you can then use for tax purposes. We hope you'll support the SMAA in our goal to preserve and promote traditional budo and koryu bujutsu.

### E-MAIL

Please make sure we have your correct e-mail address. Without this address, we can't e-mail you the *SMAA Journal*.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE SMAA

1. To promote and aid in the growth of Japan's traditional arts and ways.
2. To assist the public in achieving spiritual growth and physical development through budo/bujutsu.
3. To further friendship and understanding between Asian and Western martial artists.
4. To establish goodwill and harmony among martial artists of various systems.
5. To offer Western martial artists access to legitimate budo/bujutsu organizations and teachers in Japan.
6. To give practitioners of authentic budo/bujutsu recognition for their years of devotion to these arts.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Karl Scott Sensei
- Nicklaus Suino Sensei
- H. E. Davey Sensei

**Editor:** H. E. Davey Sensei

**Assistant Editor:** Troy Swenson Sensei

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修道館武道会

Do you have a new e-mail address? Have you sent it to [hedavey@aol.com](mailto:hedavey@aol.com)? If not, we also won't be able to send you SMAA publications, so please be sure to let us know if your e-mail address changes.

## SMAA PATCHES

The SMAA HQ is selling official SMAA patches for your gi. They're great looking patches that embody the spirit and honor instilled in members of our group. They won't fade or bleed when you bleach them, and yet we've been able to keep the cost down. Each patch is basically a 3 ½ inch circle featuring our logo below:



Our patches were produced using state of the art digitizing and ultra-modern technology to create an accurate and attractive embroidered emblem. They feature tight stitches, sharp detail, clean lettering, and top quality craftsmanship. There's no jagged stitching, but we've still got plenty of stitches so that the background doesn't show through.

*The patch should be worn on the left side of your gi jacket near your heart. SMAA policy mandates only one patch per uniform to maintain the sense of dignity associated with traditional budo.*

These new patches are a great way to show your respect and enthusiasm for our group; we hope all of our members will order at least one. *And the best part is the patches are only \$5.00 (US) each!* (E-mail [shudokan@smaa-hq.com](mailto:shudokan@smaa-hq.com) about special shipping for international orders.)

To order, go to the "Payments" section of [www.smaa-hq.com](http://www.smaa-hq.com) or send a check or money order made out to "SMAA" to:

**SMAA HQ**  
**PO Box 6022**  
**Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022**  
**USA**

## FACEBOOK PAGE



Have you been to the SMAA Facebook page? If not, you're missing out on the latest SMAA news, features, videos, photos, and information. It's easy and safe to join Facebook, and all you need to do is click the "Like" button to become a follower of our Facebook page. This is the fastest way to get SMAA news and updates, and we hope you'll drop by <http://www.facebook.com/ShudokanMartialArtsAssociation> and check it out. Once you're on Facebook, we hope you'll share our page with your friends and help us promote the SMAA.

## SMAA ONLINE PAYMENTS

Did you know you can pay for your annual dues at our website using PayPal or a major credit card? You can, and you can also pay for gi patches and promotions in the same way. This is a much faster, and in some ways more secure, means of sending money to our headquarters. We hope more of our members will make use of this feature. Just drop by <http://smaa-hq.com/payments.php> for more information.

## SMAA YOUTUBE CHANNEL

修道館武道会

Shudokan Martial Arts Association

Want to see some great videos of SMAA teachers, officials, and members? Now you can by visiting our YouTube channel. We're Shudokan1994, because 1994 is the year the SMAA was founded.

To see video of SMAA teachers and members, go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5NIka6Ge0&list=PLS11\\_XCH8RkI868tRKZ0fdJFSeFGyNZ0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5NIka6Ge0&list=PLS11_XCH8RkI868tRKZ0fdJFSeFGyNZ0o)

To see video of the amazing experts that trained leading SMAA officials and teachers, go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcE7zBhv9Hs&list=PLS11\\_XCH8RkIV8liNZoXI93WI79BLe1NZ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcE7zBhv9Hs&list=PLS11_XCH8RkIV8liNZoXI93WI79BLe1NZ)

## NEW SMAA ONLINE LIBRARY

We're always trying to offer more benefits to go along with your SMAA membership. So, be sure to drop by [www.smaa-hq.com](http://www.smaa-hq.com) and check out the new SMAA Online Library. We're in the process of gradually adding back issues of the *SMAA Journal* to our website.

## HYPERLINKS

Since we live in the age of the Internet, we're trying to make the *SMAA Journal* more interactive. Look for words in blue and underlined. These are hyperlinks.

Click on them, and you'll connect to websites that can give you information about topics mentioned in this and future issues. Have fun surfing the web! Just remember to come back and finish reading the rest of this issue.

## IN MEMORIAM: OMI KOJI (尾身 幸次)

The SMAA recently received news from Japan that [Omi Koji Sensei](#) passed away. Omi Sensei supported the SMAA for many years, endorsing our ranks and activities, while he served as a Japan-based member of the SMAA Board of Advisors.

## ABOUT OMI SENSEI

Born on December 14, 1932 in Gunma Prefecture, Omi Koji Sensei was a member of the House of



*Omi Sensei, SMAA Senior Advisor*

Representatives of Japan. He was also the former Finance Minister of Japan. He served as Japanese Minister of State for Science and Technology Policy and Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs. Omi Sensei passed away on April 14, 2022.

## MASTERING THE MIND AND BODY

He was a direct student of the late [Nakamura Tempu Sensei](#), who founded the Shin-shin-toitsu-do system of Japanese yoga and meditation in 1919. After using Nakamura Sensei's groundbreaking yoga to overcome a life-threatening illness, Omi Sensei eventually became the Chief Director of the Tempu Society, one of the associations overseeing Shin-shin-toitsu-do in Japan.

Through his lifelong connection to Shin-shin-toitsu-do yoga, he met H. E. Davey, a founding member of the SMAA. Mr. Davey is also the Vice President of Kyoto's [International Japanese Yoga Association](#). The IJYA offers free memberships and a journal subscription to parties worldwide who're interested in Nakamura Sensei's mind and body unification methodology.

Many celebrated athletes and budo experts in Japan have studied Nakamura Sensei's revolutionary Japanese yoga to develop mind and body coordination while cultivating ki, "life power." Internationally acclaimed baseball superstar [Ohtani Shohei](#) is an example of a world class athlete crediting some his success to Nakamura Sensei's Shin-shin-toitsu-do, an art widely practiced in Japan (as noted in the Japanese magazine *Shukan Gendai*.)

At a meeting in San Francisco years ago, Mr. Davey pointed out to Omi Sensei that budo and Shin-shin-toitsu-do have similar goals. After reflecting on this, Omi Sensei felt it made sense to join the SMAA Board of Advisors and help our international nonprofit organization. Serving as one of our representatives in Japan, his celebrity and prominence as a politician helped establish our then relatively new association as a legitimate means for folks around the world to learn truly authentic budo and koryu bujutsu.

His support of the SMAA illustrated the close ties our group has with Japan, and the degree to which the SMAA is respected in this island nation, the birthplace of budo. His desire to join the SMAA validated the important work our association is doing to promote and preserve genuinely traditional Japanese martial arts. The presence of people like Omi Koji Sensei among our leaders gives added weight to the ranks members can receive from the various SMAA divisions.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following is a short list of Omi Sensei's many achievements:

- 1956 Graduated from the Faculty of Commercial Science, Hitotsubashi University
- 1956 Joined the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI)
- 1970 Served as Consul at the Japanese Consulate General in New York until 1974
- 1981 Served as Director-General, Guidance Department, Small & Medium Enterprise Agency until 1983

- 1983 Elected to the House of Representatives (up to the present)
- 1990 Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Finance
- 1995 Chairman Standing Committee on Finance, House of Representatives
- 1995 Drafted and enacted Science and Technology Fundamental Law
- 1997 Minister of State for Economic Planning until 1998
- Acting Secretary-General, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) until 2001
- Minister of State for Science and Technology Policy
- Minister of State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs
- Minister of Finance
- Member of the SMAA Board of Advisors

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 1991 *Rebuilding Japan: A Country We Can Be Proud Of*
- 1996 *Towards a Science and Technology-Oriented Nation*

Omi Sensei passed away at 89 years old. He was a good friend to the SMAA, believing in the health benefits of budo and valuing our use of a traditional Japanese art form to promote cultural exchange. The improvement of well-being, and the encouragement of positive cultural exchange, are goals that he worked ceaselessly toward in his long life.

### OTSUKA SOKE NEWS

In May of 2022, Otsuka Yasuyuki Soke taught a special three-day training camp focusing on [Meifu-Shinkage Ryu](#), an art using ancient Japanese weapons. The camp was aimed at Japanese students of this martial art, and attendees came predominantly from the Tokyo area. The event took place in Sasagawa, which is in Chiba Prefecture.



*Otsuka Soke throwing shuriken*

Otsuka Yasuyuki Sensei, the current Soke (Headmaster) of Meifu-Shinkage Ryu, is a member of the SMAA Board of Advisors. Meifu-Shinkage Ryu is based on Katori Shinto Ryu, one of Japan's oldest forms of koryu bujutsu. Meifu-Shinkage Ryu specializes in the use of shuriken (throwing darts) and the fundo kusari, a weighted chain. Otsuka Soke, a published author of budo books, is one of the highest-ranking martial artists in Japan and one of few people in the world teaching an authentic system of shuriken-jutsu. His desire to join the SMAA points to the value of the work we're doing internationally to promote and preserve genuine Japanese budo and koryu bujutsu. He lives in Ichikawa-Shi, Chiba, Japan and teaches throughout Japan, Europe, and North America.

## **FABIAN SENSEI NEWS**

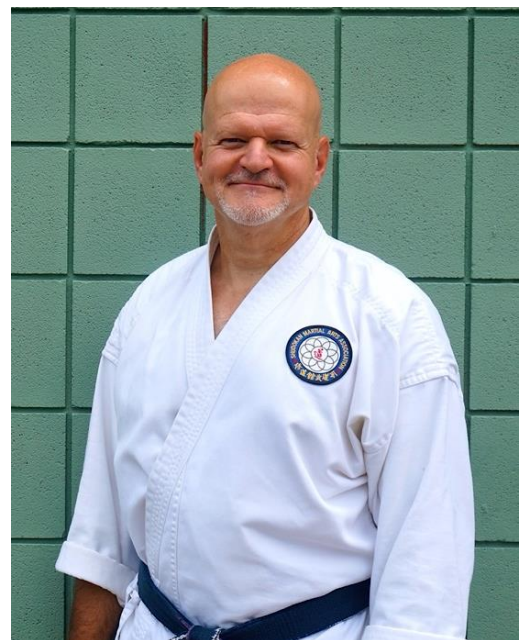
Stephen Fabian Sensei, Co-Director of the SMAA Jujutsu Division and seventh dan, is retiring from 35 years of teaching anthropology, history, and global studies at the college and high school levels and is moving to Lisbon, Portugal this summer. Fabian Sensei has trained in East Asian martial arts for over

45 years and served as the USA Branch Head of the Hontai Yoshin Ryu (a Japanese koryu focusing on jujutsu as well as staff and sword use) for two decades.

SMAA members that have an interest in connecting with Fabian Sensei in Portugal, especially for training in traditional Japanese jujutsu or weapons arts, can reach him via email at [smfabian7@yahoo.com](mailto:smfabian7@yahoo.com). Being able to train in an ancient and relatively rare martial system like Hontai Yoshin Ryu is an opportunity that doesn't come along every day, and Fabian Sensei is also able to teach iaido, having studied both jujutsu and iaido while living in Japan.

He is a direct disciple of the late Inoue Tsuyoshi Munetoshi Soke, the 18th generation Headmaster of the Hontai Yoshin Ryu. Fabian Sensei has received a high-level teaching certification from Inoue Soke in Hontai Yoshin Ryu. He is believed to have been the first American ever licensed to teach this ancient ryu in the U.S.

Dr. Fabian also studied Hontai Yoshin Ryu and Toyama Ryu iaido in Japan. In November 1989, he became the Toyama Ryu iaido All-Japan Champion in the Men's Shodan/Nidan Division, and he has a fourth dan in the SMAA Iaido Division.



*Dr. Stephen Fabian*

He received a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from the University of Illinois and has received the following academic honors: Fulbright Scholar (Brazil 1982–3), Phi Beta Kappa, and Magna Cum Laude. He is also author of *Clearing Away Clouds: Nine Lessons for Life from the Martial Arts*, in which he shared

insights gained from many years of practicing traditional Asian martial arts. At this time, teachers of bona fide jujutsu, like Dr. Fabian, are surprisingly difficult to find outside of Japan.

Congratulations to Fabian Sensei on his retirement and move to Europe!

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF MARTIAL ARTS

*By Nicklaus Suino*

What if I told you that there was a way to achieve the following characteristics?

- Become happy and relieve stress
- Lose weight
- Gain fast twitch muscles, flexibility, and strength
- Slow the aging process
- Join a community of healthy, well-balanced people
- Become more intelligent

You probably think you're being sold a pill. That's not the case. What I have compiled for you is a list of scientifically backed reasons why joining a martial art can help you. Whether you have "martial arts" written on your bucket list or keep a rack of black belts in your closet, doing martial arts today can benefit you greatly!

### ANTI-AGING

A [study](#) that compared martial artists and sedentary 40- to 60-year-olds concluded, "The results provide evidence that... training is an effective intervention that may reduce or prevent [the] declines associated with normal aging" (Douris et al 146).

In the study, martial art practitioners were more flexible, had better muscle strength and endurance,

and improved balance. They also tended to have a lower body fat percentage.

Because training in martial arts has cardiovascular benefits, fewer of the martial artists had heart diseases, compared to the group that didn't practice martial arts. The sedentary lifestyle and high body fat percentage that leads to hypertension, diabetes, and other illnesses did not affect the martial arts practitioners.

### BOOSTS YOUR MOOD AND RELIEVES STRESS

In Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's [Flow](#), he describes how there is a state where an "optimal experience" or



*The author teaching iaido*

state of flow can happen. He cites martial arts as being “a specific form of flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 106) where “the warrior strives to reach the point where he can act with lightning speed against opponents, without having to think or reason about the best... moves to make” (106). This state of optimal experience is an accomplice in achieving happiness.

As with any exercise, it has psychological benefits. In an [article](#) on WebMD, researchers stated that regular exercise releases chemicals called endorphins. The endorphins affect the way your brain perceives pain, often triggering a positive feeling in the body. Not only do they act as analgesics (covering the feeling of pain), but they also act as sedatives. This means that the chemicals relieve stress, alleviate anxiety and depression, improve self-esteem, and act as a sleep-aid.

### WEIGHT LOSS, FLEXIBILITY, AND STRENGTH GAIN

One acronym: [HIIT](#). High intensity interval training means doing periods of short, intense anaerobic exercise. It's good for athletic conditioning, improving the metabolism, and fat-burning. In many martial arts dojo, where the martial art is more sports oriented, the movements tend to involve high repetitions, or cycles, in a short amount of time. The movements also range from using your own body weight to shouldering someone twice your size.

There's a huge calorie deficit. You need 3500 calories to lose a pound of fat. Depending on your weight and the martial art, you can singe anywhere from 500-1500 calories in an hour. Compare that to having to run seven miles at a 10 mph pace.

Not only that, but building muscle promotes a calorie burn *after* you've stopped working out. Because martial arts involve a combination of slow and fast twitch muscle conditioning, you promote muscle development.

In a [study](#) done on sedentary men and women, it was shown that after 15 weeks of strenuous HIIT activity, type I and IIb muscle fibers improved dramatically. The first muscle type is good at resisting fatigue, whereas the second muscle type increased glycogen metabolism.

### MARTIAL ARTS ENHANCE MENTAL PERFORMANCE

In an article from [BotBot](#), studies showed an improvement in memory, enhanced problem-solving skills, and reduced risk of Parkinson's or Alzheimer's after taking part in an exercise regimen. The most effective types of exercises were aerobic and resistance-training methods, both of which can be found in the martial arts. What's more, it doesn't matter when you start. Exercise yields immediate cognitive improvements.

Martial arts are different from other forms of exercise, because a lot of it requires tactical thinking. This means an increase the brain's ability to learn, or plasticity. Resistance training, flexibility or coordination, and aerobic movements all add up to enhanced brain plasticity.

### CULTIVATE FRIENDSHIPS

As the saying goes, “Birds of a feather flock together.” In a [study](#) that looked at how people stay happy, it was found that happy people tend to spend time with other happy people.

You're also in an environment that often requires trusting a partner. In a study by [Desteno](#), he found that being put under high levels of stress requires one of two responses: trust or distrust. If a group of people can trust one another, the stress augmented the working relationships that martial artists had with each other.

This is anecdotal, but it seems me that numerous martial arts programs attract well-balanced, like-minded people. A good dojo encourages growth,

challenges the individual, and cultivates a rich working environment among its martial artists.

## CONCLUSION

Martial arts are beneficial, no matter where you're coming from. Budo can prevent aging, such as muscle atrophy and illnesses. It improves your mental health by boosting your mood and relieving stress. You gain muscle, pump up your metabolism,

and increase your flexibility. You improve your cognitive functions. You cultivate connections with like-minded, happy people.

**About the Author:** Nicklaus Suino Sensei has decades of training in traditional Japanese judo, jujutsu, iaido, karatedo, and more. Much of his study has taken place under high-ranking experts in Japan. He is a founding member of the SMAA and the author of great budo books.

# WABI-SABI IN CLASSICAL JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS AND FINE ARTS

*Text and translations by H. E. Davey*

*Japanese calligraphic art by Kobara Ranseki*

People outside of Japan often refer to their study of disciplines like aikido, iaido, jujutsu, and so on as practicing “martial arts.” And they call themselves “martial artists.” Yet, I’m not sure everyone has spent much time thinking about what these words really mean.

## WHAT’S IN A WORD?

Some of my students have used the word “martial” to mean “intense training that will allow you to dominate an opponent in a street fight.” But the word “bu” in Japanese—as in budo—can actually have a military connotation. The term “martial” also has an English definition that relates to an army, military, or being soldier-like. Neither the Japanese bu character, or the English expression martial, directly suggest street fighting or even personal self-defense. What they do suggest is group-oriented, large scale, armed military actions conducted by an army, navy, or something similar. (Fans of the late great Donn Draeger Sensei will recall he made a similar point in his acclaimed books.)

And what of terms like “arts” and “artist?” Again, I wonder if everyone using these words in conjunction

with training in judo, karate, kendo, and other disciplines has genuinely considered the implications of these expressions. I think many folks’ concept of art in the above-mentioned activities is “being really good at techniques;” and they may be using words like “arts” and “artist” because it kind of sounds cool . . . or they have no idea why they use these expressions. They just do.

And yet, many actual artists have devoted a great deal of time to pondering the meaning of art. Given my lifelong background in Western and Eastern fine arts, I’m pretty sure most real artists don’t think about art like some martial artists do. They’d view a definition of art as just “being really good at something” as exceptionally one dimensional, dumbed down, and overly simplistic.

## A RECONSIDERATION

I admit expressions like “martial arts” and “martial artist” are probably here to stay in the West, and I use them myself. But I’d like to think that I don’t use them without consideration and awareness.

Let’s look at some widespread activities in Japan that Western people often describe as “martial arts,” and



by that they often mean forms of individual civilian self-defense:

- Kendo
- Iaido
- Sumo
- Naginatado
- Kyudo
- Jodo
- Jukendo
- Aikido
- Judo
- Jujutsu
- Karatedo

These are the most typical disciplines practiced in Japan according to the esteemed [Nippon Budokan Foundation](#), and I've added a few more that are at least somewhat prevalent. Of these 11, I count perhaps only the last four that could directly relate to personal self-defense in 2022. And of those, in some cases I'm not sure the relationship is always all that directly applicable. So, if our idea of "martial" in Japanese martial arts means direct preparation for winning modern street fights, then there seems to be some confusion here. And if that's your primary goal in studying these activities, you'll probably be disappointed.

These forms of budo were certainly derived from koryu bujutsu in the distant past, which does have a military connection, but how strong is that connection today for practices like kyudo or kendo? Even the modern Japanese military doesn't arm its soldiers with bows, arrows, and swords.

And what of koryu bujutsu, the feudal era arts of the bushi? These, as Draeger Sensei wrote, are definitely martial arts; they have a direct military link. But just as today's soldiers rarely join the army or air force to learn street fighting, koryu bujutsu originated for

group defense: the defense of the clan or even the nation.

Nonetheless, a huge number of folks all over the world—just like us—study budo, love it, and get a great deal out of it. We'll get even more out of it if we understand clearly what it is and is not. Just keep in mind that the word "martial," while commonly used, may not be the best description of practices like judo, karatedo, and so on.

### PUTTING THE ART IN MARTIAL ARTS

What about the term "art" as in martial arts and martial artists? Well, while I don't view my practice as particularly martial by definition, and while I've never been in the military, I do believe what I've devoted over 50 years to is an art form. But I also think many people involved in budo are not clear about what art actually is, and I don't always see much of what they're doing that relates to art, especially in terms of how the Japanese founders of many budo thought about art and artistic concepts.

They're just using the word. And this has resulted in confusion and compromised capacity for numerous students in terms of getting everything out of their budo training that they could. The good news is that with effort, this is avoidable.

On the other hand, I suspect how I think about art might be different from many Western martial artists, owing to my actually studying art in high school and college, and because I've made a lifetime commitment to understanding the concept of art in old and present-day Japan. This has been helped along by fairly frequent past visits to Japan, demonstrating fine arts and martial arts in Japan, and studying classical Japanese brush calligraphy and ink painting since 1985 under an internationally renowned artist: Kobara Ranseki Sensei.

That's all enabled me to understand budo and koryu bujutsu more clearly, altered how I view these arts, and positively transformed how I train. It can do that

for you as well, making for an easier, more meaningful practice, while helping you to live more fully.

## FINE ARTS AND MARTIAL ARTS

I'm not sure Western combat sports enthusiasts—people into boxing or wrestling—would see much connection between these sports and poetry, painting, dance, and the like. Due to quite a few folks in the West mistakenly viewing disciplines like karate and judo as being Asian versions of boxing and wrestling—just with different techniques—they fail to understand the extremely long connection between Japanese fine arts and martial arts.

While this misunderstanding also happens in Japan, at least at one point in time experienced practitioners of budo and koryu bujutsu often understood that parallel principles are working in fine arts like brush calligraphy as in swordsmanship. In fact, one of my students of calligraphy (shodo) is a very high-ranking teacher of iaido, with extensive training in Japan. He started studying shodo with me to replicate what quite a few legendary iaido sensei had also done . . . they studied brush calligraphy to deepen their understanding of swordsmanship.

You might find this strange from your cultural perspective, but it was anything but in old Japan. The connection between fine arts and martial arts in Japan is long and deep. They share aesthetic principles, which are not merely intellectual ideas in Japan, but rather something practical that profoundly impacts how you practice arts like iaido or jujutsu. These artistic principles will help you to understand how to make your martial art an actual art form, something that will help you in daily life as much as in the dojo.

## JAPANESE AESTHETICS IN FINE ARTS AND MARTIAL ARTS

In the West, or the United States at least, it's difficult to pinpoint a universally accepted definition of

beauty. I exaggerate only a little when I say this isn't the case in Japan. In Western countries few people pay serious attention to aesthetics, aside from professionals working in artistic circles. True, an interior decorator may have a specialist's sense of what looks good in your house, but this rarely extends to your garden or your car. And we look for a car that appeals to whatever sense of style we subscribe to, but few long-lasting, overriding aesthetic principles guide this type of purchase. The generic, four-in-a-box, everyman appeal of the typical economy car isn't mirrored in the metallic insect on wheels, newfangled hot rod looks of the Plymouth Prowler—automobiles that both have their fans. We can say the same for our taste in houses, furniture, and other items.

In Japan, however, most classical martial arts and fine arts have shared common aesthetics for generations. Through the practice of nearly ubiquitous disciplines, the Japanese populace has been exposed to an almost universally acknowledged set of aesthetics.

Although those aesthetics are frequently missing in the urban concrete sprawl of cities like Tokyo, nonetheless, in backdoor bonsai, a cherished antique in the home, the design of traditional clothing (including martial arts gi, hakama, and so on), and countless other forms, Japanese people are traditionally aware of a commonly affirmed aesthetic. Not only is there a common awareness but there is widespread participation among Japanese in martial arts and fine arts devoted to classical concepts of elegance and beauty.

Ride a train any evening in Japan, and you'll see it filled with women in kimono coming from tea ceremony class, students carrying kendo swords and armor, elderly people with samisen instruments—the list is long. At times I've wondered if every person in Japan is studying, or has studied, some traditional art form, and my experience is that in fact most people have or are doing so. Although I

will admit this is probably waning to a degree due to ongoing Westernization.

Owing to this pervasive proliferation of traditional martial arts and fine arts, the Japanese have come to embrace universal aesthetics, or *bigaku*, that first arose around A.D. 700 in the rarefied lives of the Japanese priesthood and royalty. Those aesthetics soon filtered down into the everyday lives of ordinary people, and into classically oriented *budo* and *koryu bujutsu*. They affect everything in Japan, from the way a house is decorated, to its outdoor garden, to the color of the car in the garage.

## WABI

True, Japan has embraced Western artistic ideas, but they've often been modified by the Japanese sense of beauty. And of course, not every Japanese person thinks about such matters in the same way, or at all, but most have a clearer idea (but not necessarily a deep understanding) of what their traditional aesthetics are than is found in the West. One of the most important artistic sensibilities in Japan is *wabi*. *Wabi* is one of several key terms in the vocabulary of Japanese aesthetics. This vocabulary is called *fuzei* and refers to words that describe particular artistic feelings, sensibilities, and ways of seeing. *Wabi* is also a term that strongly resists easy definition.

In *wabi* martial arts and fine arts, we find elegance with a feeling of austerity. *Wabi* is the recognition that beauty can be found even in the depths of poverty, and that beauty isn't limited to expensive, formal works of art produced by recognized masters. In fact, objects of great elegance can be constructed out of simple, inexpensive components. (It's interesting to note that tea ceremony utensils, which originally exhibited a rustic *wabi* style, can be extremely expensive nowadays.) A traditional Japanese wooden house is an example of the unpolished appeal of *wabi*. It can be mirrored in the craftsmanship of well-constructed *bokken*, "wooden swords."

On the other hand, Sen no Rikyu, who promoted *wabi* style tea ceremony, once remarked that a tea caddy, owned by an acquaintance and made by a famed craftsman, was lacking in the spirit of *wabi*. The caddy was later broken into pieces and skillfully repaired. Upon a subsequent visit to his friend's house, Rikyu spied the restored caddy and promptly declared it a work now imbued with *wabi*.

## WABI IN BUDO AND MORE

In the Japanese martial arts and fine arts, simple and natural don't necessarily equate to quick and easy. In *shodo* brush calligraphy, for example, although a work might look like it was dashed off in a frenzy of artistic inspiration—characters about to leap off the paper—it was likely the result of hundreds of dry runs and failed experiments.

And even if it was brushed in only a few moments, the skill that allowed art to be produced in a brief time was the result of years of training. Simplicity can be achieved when skill is present, but being able to consistently hit this "sweet spot" can take years of experience. I think you'll agree that *budo* is the same.

In *shodo*, the character for *ichi* ("one"), which consists of nothing but a single horizontal line, is



*The author teaching jujutsu*

considered to be among the most difficult characters to paint effectively. Likewise, when a martial arts teacher downs an opponent with just a small step forward and a slight motion of the arm, you're seeing budo at a high level. Defeating an attacker with many movements and an exaggerated display of technique is actually the crudest approach to combat, while ending the encounter with just a single glance, before any physical action takes place, is one of the ultimate goals of several Japanese martial arts. Such simplicity has great depth, and it's inspired in the martial arts, shodo, flower arrangement, and other arts by consciousness of wabi.

### WABI-ZUMAI

The literal meaning of wabi is "poverty," but in aesthetics what is understood is a poverty of superficiality and artificiality. Wabi lies in finding that intangible, but valuable, "something" within ourselves and our art that defies trends and is timeless. To find value on the inside and in the soul of things, rather than in their monetary worth—or in monetary worth itself—is to cleave to the spirit of wabi. There's a Zen saying:

Ware tada taru o shiru.

"I don't know much. I only know that I'm perfectly satisfied."

This expresses the essence of the wabi attitude of acceptance, in which being at peace in nature is valued above luxury, wealth, and opulence.

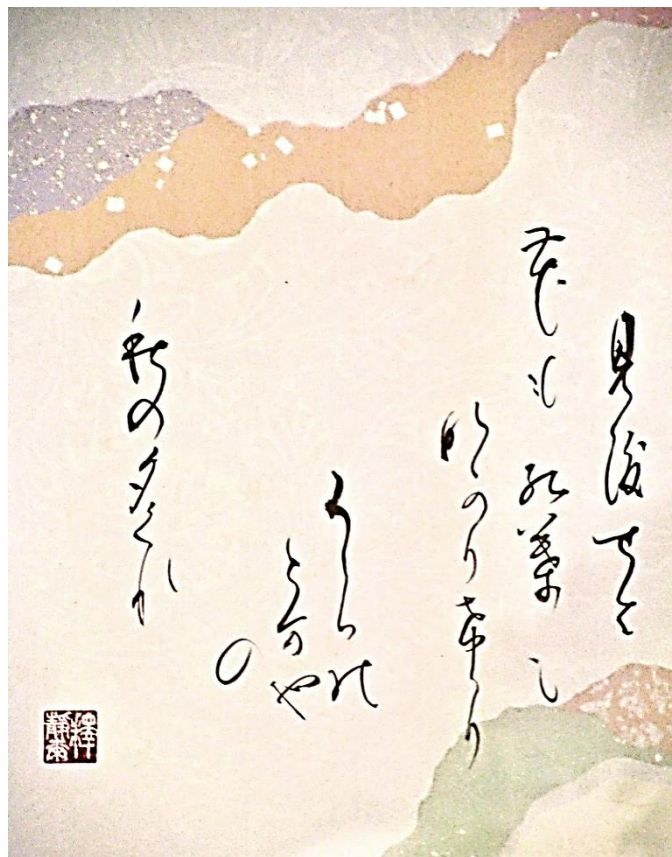
Once this understanding of our innate nature, as well as our innate unity with nature itself, is firmly recognized, then every moment and aspect of our lives is transformed. Whether in the dojo, at home, outdoors, in the city, or in the country, our lives can reflect an essential naturalness, simplicity, and ease of living that are our birthright. This is wabi-zumai, or "a wabi lifestyle," and it goes beyond a mere preference for an uncomplicated, unaffected,

natural mode of living. Wabi-zumai is as much about what we are as it is about where we are, what we wear, and other externals.

This natural way of being, ties into using the body naturally, while harmonizing the mind and body. It's a unity of mind, body, and technique that many folks, who've trained in budo or koryu bujutsu in Japan, can relate to. Yet, lacking in an understanding of the philosophical ground work of wabi-zumai, they may not fully grasp it. And if their practice has been pretty thoroughly Westernized, this understanding may not happen at all.

### SABI

As I look about,  
The flowers and maple leaves  
Have long since vanished—  
Just thatched roofed huts by the sea . . .  
Merging with autumn twilight.



*Poem by Fujiwara Sadaie. Elegant, subtle, and graceful art by the late shodo master Kobara Ranseki.*

Hundreds of years ago, the poet Fujiwara Sadaie composed this ode to a singular austere moment . . . a moment that was gone before his ink-laden brush touched paper, and a moment that's still echoing through endless time. In this waka poem, both the view and the viewer have merged into a solitary unit.

Fujiwara hints at an ageless sliver of eternity, in which the individual and the universal melt into a sole, absolute one that's resting motionless and unconditionally alone. Encompassing everything and thus nothing, endlessly fluctuating and therefore unchanging, swallowing up all creations and containing all things to form the absolute one that dissolves duality: it is the totality of existence. By its very nature, it's utterly alone.

A singularity containing every speck of time and space within infinite borders, it's unaccompanied but never lonely. Fujiwara sensed, and then portrayed, solitariness and detachment, but without a trace of lonesomeness, a condition totally autonomous and yet still linked to all things . . . but not clinging to them. It's a feeling of embracing while letting go. In the classical martial arts and fine arts, this is called *sabi*, and it allows life to disappear back into itself without remorse or longing.

D. T. Suzuki was one of the first writers to explore in English the spiritual complexities of two elementally simple concepts—*wabi* and *sabi*:

Just to be tranquil or passive is not *sabi* nor is it *wabi*.

There is always something objective that evokes a mood to be called *wabi*. And *wabi* is not merely a psychological reaction to a certain pattern of environment. There is an active principle of aestheticism in it; when this is lacking poverty becomes indigence, aloneness becomes ostracism or misanthropy or inhuman unsociability. *Wabi*

or *sabi*, therefore, may be defined as an active aesthetical appreciation of poverty. . . . Nowadays, as these terms are used, we may say that *sabi* applies more to the individual objects [of the tea ceremony, for example] and environment generally, and *wabi* to the living of a life ordinarily associated with poverty or insufficiency or imperfection. *Sabi* is thus more objective, whereas *wabi* is more subjective and personal. [Daisetz Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 284.]

We shouldn't, however, take these comments in too literal a manner. *Sabi* can also make reference to a spiritual quality and a psychological state. It isn't used exclusively to describe individual objects. Plus, not all Japanese practitioners of the martial arts and fine arts use the terms here in exactly the same manner. In short, no universally accepted and precisely delineated definition of *wabi* and *sabi* exists in Japan. And Rikyu, perhaps history's most famous advocate of the *wabi-sabi* aesthetic in tea ceremony, wasn't a poor man who lived far from his kind, alone in a hut—far from it. While *wabi* and *sabi* can be lived out literally, they point to the spirit of living in a certain mode, with a particular sensibility, as much as to the specifics of location, house, or occupation.

Along these lines, we can say that in classical Japanese martial arts and fine arts circles, *wabi* tends to refer more to our lifestyle (*wabi-zumai*), while we might describe an elegantly simple sword as having a "*sabi* feeling to it." Nonetheless, the aesthetic sense evoked by both *wabi* and *sabi* suggests that the terms are interrelated, although the distinction and usage pointed to above are typical among Japanese artisans devoted to the essence of *wabi-sabi*.

*Sabi*, like *wabi*, contains simplicity and austerity in its aesthetic makeup, and the two terms can be used together, so that it's possible to speak of something

as having a wabi-sabi feeling to it. Nevertheless, sabi has its unique implications, such as the sense of solitariness mentioned above. In tea ceremony, sabi makes up one of four basic principles, in which case it's pronounced jaku. (The others are wa, "harmony," kei, "respect," and sei, "purity." These principles may also be echoed in the dojo by advanced budo sensei, teachers with a more authentic and substantial understanding of what they're teaching.)

### SABI-SHIORI

Jaku implies peacefulness, and this is also a central aspect of the sabi sensibility transmitted in authentic Japanese fine arts and martial arts. In this sense, sabi refers to a spiritually independent state, a condition that's connected to all things while being absolutely alone and unaffected by the myriad creations of the world. This solitariness is called sabi-shiori. Such a state of timeless, solitary serenity lies at the core of sabi.

The aesthetic of sabi is also one of melancholy, summoned by, for example, verdigris and patina. It's the antique, rustic appearance of things after lengthy and loving handling—but before old age fully consumes them. In Japan, such a patina is often appreciated since it indicates that a work of art has passed through many hands, an extended succession of human hands. Blemishes and age spots give the object a humanistic property, a certain personality, and consequently make it more aesthetically inviting.

I have a bokken I've been using for nearly 50 years. The tsuka, or "hilt," is stained by sweat and my hands gripping it for decades. All the wood has changed color with age; the tsuka being much darker.

It doesn't look new. The aged discoloration makes it look better than new. Its beauty lies in sabi.

### WESTERN ARTS AND JAPANESE ARTS

In the West, our enchantment with science and industrialization have made us fans of the modern and the automated. Our tendency has been, therefore, to miss the beautiful patina of age or to avoid objects that appear imperfect. Asia, in contrast, was less overwhelmed by either the scientific advancement succeeding the Renaissance in Europe or the engineering progress following the Industrial Revolution in the Western world.

Following the Renaissance, Western art grew apart from its traditional link to human enterprise. In Japan, however, art and existence remained more integrated. Westerners have been inclined to concentrate on the sciences and commerce, leaving the practice of art to individuals designated as artists. The Japanese, on the other hand, have had a greater inclination to remain close to the arts and directly involved in them. Because art in Japan was more integrated into daily life, slight differentiation was made between the beautiful and the usable, an idea that ties into the sabi aesthetic. As expressed in this aesthetic, even everyday things became both elegant and practical.

Certainly, the preceding observations are general, and exceptions can be found in both the East and West. And they pertain to a traditional orientation that is being rapidly altered. From the late nineteenth century, the East and West began a period of mutual influence that continues today. Nonetheless, the generalizations about Japan point to a context in which aesthetics such as wabi and sabi evolved.

Sabi beckons to us in objects that evoke the resonance and unevenness that time bestows. In the classical Japanese garden (niwa), certain areas may at first appear as if nature has taken over, but if we look more closely, we see how human creativity has actually merged with nature to give birth to a sabi

effect. Sabi is best expressed by the use of natural objects. In the garden, much use is made of bamboo (for fences, for example), rocks, straw, tree bark, moss, and the like. All of these things are incorporated into the design of the garden so that as they age and settle into the landscape, they'll express sabi. Gradually these things are altered by their inescapable advance toward dissolution, and this too is incorporated into the niwa, hence the melancholy appeal of sabi.

### THE DUAL PATH OF JAPANESE FINE ARTS AND MARTIAL ARTS

Want to design a traditional dojo, one that will encourage the right mental state? Look into the ideals of wabi and sabi. Discover how they manifest in other Japanese arts that are more closely connected to budo than you might imagine.

Rustic objects, autumn and winter, sunsets and twilight, the willing embrace of solitariness, like an evening spent trapped alone in a cabin in the backwoods by a sudden cloudburst, welcoming the charged stillness—all express sabi, which in turn expresses a self-governing beauty. It is an elegance that's consummated not just by human beings but by the universe through its natural course.

Wabi and sabi are just two aesthetic aspects of Japanese art and culture that originally influenced budo and koryu bujutsu. I'd like to tell you more,

but this article is already pretty long. If you want to read about putting the art in your martial art, check out my book [\*The Japanese Way of the Artist\*](#).

In summary, ikebana and tea ceremony, karate and calligraphy—all traditional Japanese arts share ideals and techniques to achieve the same goals: serenity, mind/body harmony, awareness, and a sense of connection with nature. There's a rich universe of these Japanese spiritual, artistic, and original budo traditions that many have missed out on.

Don't be one of those folks. Explore wabi, sabi, and more to transform your training and your life for the better. It's not just useful and meaningful. Go into this deeply, and you'll discover something endlessly fascinating and maybe even find a gateway to the study of other Japanese arts like shodo and ikebana.

That's what I've been doing for a long time. I've never regretted following the dual path of Japanese fine arts and martial arts. Actually, it's been fun and fulfilling. It can be for you, too.

**About the Author:** H. E. Davey is the Co-Director of the SMAA Jujutsu Division, with the teaching title of Shihan and an eighth dan. A founding member of the SMAA, he's studied jujutsu in Japan and the USA for over five decades, along with Japanese calligraphy and painting for more than 35 years.

**Shudokan Martial Arts  
Association**

PO Box 6022  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022

**Phone:**

1-734-645-6441

**E-Mail:**

shudokan@smaa-hq.com

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Shudokan Martial Arts Association  
PO Box 6022  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022

