

SMAA JOURNAL



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

2023 SMAA DUES

Membership fees were due on January 1, 2023. 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

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- Nicklaus Suino Sensei
- H. E. Davey 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? 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 about special shipping for international orders.)

To order, go to the "Payments" section of 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

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

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 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.

OTSUKA SOKE NEWS

From May 12–14, the Meifu Shinkage Ryu held their annual spring training camp in Japan. The venue was Dozen Ryokan in Sasagawa, Tonosho-machi, Chiba Prefecture. Otsuka Yasuyuki Soke, a member of the SMAA Board of Advisors, offered expert instruction for two nights and three days.

Otsuka Soke is the current headmaster of Meifu Shinkage Ryu. In addition to teaching Meifu



Otsuka Soke throwing shuriken

Shinkage Ryu in Japan, he teaches in official branches and study groups in Asia, Europe, and North and South America. His exceptional skills are recognized by leading martial arts authorities in and outside of Japan.

Meifu Shinkage Ryu specializes in the use of ancient weapons, particularly shuriken and the fundo kusari, a chain weapon. It is descended from Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu, one of Japan's feudal era martial arts.

SUINO SENSEI NEWS

Nicklaus Suino Sensei's dojo recently celebrated its 17th anniversary. The Japanese Martial Arts Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan offers professional instruction in traditional judo, jujutsu, and iaido.

Suino Sensei has earned a sixth dan in judo, a sixth dan in jujutsu, and an eighth dan in iaido from the SMAA. He's trained in Japan and the USA for decades, and he's the celebrated author of multiple acclaimed martial arts books, including *Budo Mind and Body*.



Suino Sensei teaching at his dojo

He studied iaido at the home dojo of the late Yamaguchi Katsuo Sensei, one of the greatest of the WWII generation swordsmen and tenth dan. Suino Sensei was four-time All-Tokyo forms champion in iaido at his rank level between 1989 and 1992, and represented the Kanto region in the All-Japan tournament in Kyoto in 1992.

His background in judo and jujutsu is equally impressive, having practiced with the late Walter Todd Sensei, judo eighth dan and one of the founding members of the SMAA. Congratulations to Suino Sensei and his students on their dojo's anniversary!

WABI & THE MARTIAL ARTS

By H. E. Davey

Certain philosophical and aesthetic standards are shared by all Japanese arts. From the martial arts, to Japanese dance, to flower arrangement, distinctive artistic codes are held in common. These aesthetic codes have had a profound effect on the unfolding of the Japanese Ways, or Do. If they aren't absorbed, no great appreciation of any Japanese cultural art is likely, including budo—the "martial Way."

The large body of terms and theories allied with the aesthetics of Japanese art is beyond the reach of this article, and legitimate mastery of these principles comes only through individual, hands-on experience. But I'd be remiss if I didn't note here at least the more significant of them. All of these principles connect to one another to form the harmonious totality of the Japanese arts and Ways. They're simply different methods of describing aspects of a singular entity—the Way. In this case, Do implies not merely a way of doing a particular thing, but actually a way of living, and in a larger sense, the Way of the universe. In this context, the Do in budo and other Japanese arts is closely related to the Chinese idea of the Tao.

The following list of attributes represents a summary of my understanding of the aesthetics of the Way:

- Harmony
- Asymmetrical balance
- Artlessness
- Impermanence
- Unity with the universe

You can read more about these five concepts in my book *The Japanese Way of the Artist*. However, in this short article I want to focus on just a few simple Japanese aesthetic and philosophical points that relate to budo and other common Japanese art forms.

Some observers of Japan have noted that it's a culture of contradictions, and the same can be said for the aesthetics of the Japanese arts and Ways. Noh drama, for example, mirrors the Japanese affection for artlessness, understatement, subtle expression, and representative motions. But Kabuki drama employs larger-than-life mannerisms,

passionate oration, and dazzling stage effects. Consequently, like any generalizations, these five attributes aren't invariably applicable, but they do offer a beginning point for examining Japanese arts, including modern budo and especially koryu bujutsu ("ancient martial arts"). And I hope, as you read through this article, you'll discover that the Way lies in embracing and transcending duality, entering a state in which all contradictions dissolve.

With these attributes in mind, then, let's examine one of the most important principles underlying the Japanese arts and Ways.

WABI

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 exotic look of the Porsche Cayman—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 arts and Ways 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 these 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 the traditional gi and hakama in jujutsu, and countless other forms, Japanese are aware of a commonly

acknowledged aesthetic. Not only is there a common awareness but also there is widespread participation among Japanese in arts devoted to classical concepts of elegance and beauty.

Ride a train any evening in Japan, and you'll see 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 many people have or are doing so. That said, I'm willing to acknowledge that in the 21st century the popularity of certain classical arts maybe waning among younger Japanese, but I think even they have at least some general idea of what Japan's traditional aesthetics amount to.

Owing to this widespread proliferation of traditional arts and Ways, 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. These aesthetics soon filtered down into the everyday lives of ordinary people and into the Do forms. They affect



The author teaching traditional jujutsu

everything in Japan, from the way a house is decorated, to its outdoor garden, to the color of the car in the garage.

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 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 art, 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.

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.

In the Japanese arts and Ways, simple and natural don't necessarily equate to quick and easy. In 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



Sho, "Japanese calligraphy." Art by the author.

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. In shodo, the character for *ichi* ("one"), which consists of nothing but a single horizontal line, is 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. And ending the encounter with just a single glance, before any physical action takes place, is one of the ultimate goals of the Japanese martial Ways.

Such simplicity has great depth. It's inspired in the martial arts, shodo, flower arrangement, and other Do by consciousness of wabi.

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 follow 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 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.

TRADITION IN PRACTICE

By Nicklaus Suino

What does it mean to teach “traditional” martial arts? It can mean many things, some obvious and some not so obvious. A few of the major aspects of a traditional dojo include: a verifiable lineage in a recognized historical style, a respectful atmosphere, reasonable training fees, and observance of basic formalities.

Lineage: The instructor at a traditional dojo should be able to tell you the name of his or her teacher, and to explain the line of teachers from the recognized founder of the system. This information helps to show that what is being taught has

This is wabi-zumai, or “a wabi lifestyle.” 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, along with the principles of mental and physical harmony that can lead to it, is embodied by Japanese sensei of many arts—including budo—who have delved deeply into their craft for decades. Of course, not every budo teacher in Japan has reached this height of understanding, and some may not even be aware that such a level exists. However, like most Japanese Do, budo in its original form points toward the wabi philosophy, aesthetic, and lifestyle.

About the Author: H. E. Davey is the editor of the *SMAA Journal*, jujutsu eighth dan, and the author of several books about Japanese arts and meditation. His book *The Japanese Way of the Artist* focuses on universal principles that underlie most Japanese arts, crafts, and Ways, including the martial arts. You can read more about this book at www.michipublishing.com.



Suino Sensei teaching traditional iaido



*Suino Sensei with his teacher
Yamaguchi Katsuo Sensei, iaido judan*

legitimate historical roots and is likely to be respected internationally. Moreover, a teacher who respects and preserves his or her traditions is probably the type of person who will pass on positive character traits to students.

Respect: Respect is the foundation of long-term development in the martial arts. Students must respect the instructor, recognizing the effort and sacrifices the teacher has made to earn his or her credentials. The teacher must respect the students, recognizing their positive qualities and helping them to become stronger, more successful people.

Reasonable Fees: A martial arts school must charge training fees in order to pay the rent and utility bills, and to compensate the teacher for his or her time

teaching and keeping the school running. However, our experience has shown us that a sincere instructor usually charges reasonable fees. This may be because he or she loves the art and wishes to pass it on without regard to financial gain, or because he or she wants to avoid excluding those who can't afford high fees. Whatever the reason, it is important to recognize that high training fees alone are not an indication of quality.

Formalities: Bowing, saying "Hai!," and referring the instructor as "Sensei" are important aspects of tradition in the dojo. Besides adding a cultural flavor to practice, these formalities create the respectful atmosphere we discussed above. They validate the teaching hierarchy that is a natural part of learning the martial arts, and help to avoid causing offense—whether between student and teacher or between student and student. A humble student who is diligent about the formalities is one whose "cup is empty," meaning that he or she is open to learning and ready to work hard to master new skills.

About the Author: Nicklaus Suino Sensei began training in judo at the Ann Arbor YMCA in 1968. After earning his BA and MFA at the University of Michigan, Suino Sensei lived in Yokohama, Japan, between 1988 and 1992, where he studied judo, jujutsu, iaido, and kyudo (archery). He continues to visit Japan regularly, and he's one of three primary directors of the Shudokan Martial Arts Association.

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