



SMAA JOURNAL

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

2025 SMAA DUES

This is a reminder that SMAA membership fees are due on January 1, 2025. Your prompt attention to this matter is appreciated. Payments can be easily and securely made at www.smaa-hq.com.

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*.

Do you have a new e-mail address? Have you sent it to hedavey@aol.com? If not, we also won't be

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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修道館武道会

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

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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 Friday, October 18, to Sunday, October 20, Otsuka Yasuyuki Soke held an autumn training camp in Japan for students of Meifu Shinkage Ryu. This time, in addition to many participants from overseas, there was also a large proportion of beginners, along with a mix of veteran members.

Otsuka Soke is the current headmaster of Meifu Shinkage Ryu. A member of the elite SMAA Board of



Practicing with the fundo kusari

Advisors, he lives in Ichikawa, Chiba. 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 (thrown dart-like weapons) 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 very few people in the world teaching an authentic system of shuriken-jutsu. His desire to



Throwing shuriken



Otsuka Soke

join the SMAA points to the value of the work our group is doing internationally to promote and preserve genuine Japanese budo and koryu bujutsu.

The SMAA is active around the world and lead by both Western and Japanese martial arts experts. Otsuka Soke is one of a number of prominent martial arts teachers in Japan, who actively support our association and validate the ranks issued by the

SMAA. Their presence in the SMAA speaks volumes about the importance of our group and the degree to which it is respected in Japan, the birthplace of budo and koryu bujutsu.

FABIAN SENSEI NEWS

On November 7, 2024, while training at the Hontai Yoshin Ryu honbu, or “headquarters,” dojo in Nishinomiya, Japan, Stephen Fabian Sensei, SMAA Jujutsu Division Co-Director, received the hiden (“secret”) transmissions for, and was certified as, chuden in the traditional ranking system of this 400-year-old koryu.

The Hontai Yoshin Ryu is a composite martial system comprised of its core teachings in jujutsu, as well as bojutsu and iaijutsu components. Chuden is one of four traditional ranks in the Hontai Yoshn Ryu, following shoden, and preceding okuden and menkyo-kaiden. This traditional ranking system runs parallel to the modern dan-grading system. However, the two ranking systems do not simplistically interface, and promotion in each is based on somewhat interrelated but different



Fabian Sensei holding his chuden certificate at the Hontai Yoshin Ryu dojo. To his right is Inoue Hirohide Munemasa Sensei, son of the current Soke and his successor.

criteria. The dan–grading system is based mainly on competence in specific technical requirements, including waza and kata demonstrated periodically before the public and trained in classes and seminars that are to some extent accessible to both the ryu’s members and the general public, the material transmitted via the –den ranking system is not. This material includes physical martial techniques as well as basics in resuscitation, tactical and strategic considerations, and philosophical precepts. The hiden or restricted material is accessible only to those members of the ryu at or above any specific –den rank; it is never revealed to the public.

The late 18th Soke, or Headmaster, of the Hontai Yoshin Ryu, Inoue Tsuyoshi Munetoshi, opened this traditional Japanese martial system to foreigners around 1980, and actively exported it to several European countries and Australia, a practice and

connections maintained by the current 19th Soke, Inoue Kyōichi Munenori. Fabian Sensei lived in Japan and trained directly under both Inoues from 1987–1990. Several years after returning to the USA, Fabian Sensei was officially recognized as the first Hontai Yoshin Ryu–USA Shibuchō, or “Branch Head,” a position he retained for over two decades until voluntarily retiring from the position and transitioning to USA Senior Advisor at the age of 60 with approval from Hontai Yoshin Ryu headquarters, naming Brian Barnes Sensei as his successor.

Fabian Sensei, SMAA Jujutsu Division seventh dan, currently lives in Lisbon, Portugal, and is especially grateful for the welcome and support offered by the various European Hontai Yoshin Ryu branch heads and their students as they continue to train and share the close–knit relationships of this transplanted Japanese martial system.

WABI AND BUDO

Article and Japanese Calligraphy
by H. E. Davey



Do, the “Way”

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 (道). If they’re not 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 indeed, 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 (武道) and other Japanese arts is closely related to the Chinese idea of the Tao.

The Chinese word Tao, as used in Taoism, is often translated as “Way” or “Path.” It refers to the fundamental principle that’s the source of all existence, the natural order of the universe, or the manner in which things are meant to unfold.

In Taoism, Tao represents the natural flow of the universe, the principle that governs life and nature, and the process through which everything operates in harmony. It can also be understood as the Way of living in harmony with nature, the universe, and ourselves.

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 one simple Japanese aesthetic and philosophical point that relates 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, the above 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 style martial arts,” 古流武術). 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 keiko gi and hakama in budo, and countless other forms, the Japanese are aware of a commonly

affirmed aesthetic. Not only is there a common awareness but also there's 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 in fact 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 concepts 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* (美学), 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 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 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 (侘) is one of several key terms in the vocabulary of Japanese aesthetics. This vocabulary is called *fuzei* (風情) and refers to words that describe particular artistic feelings, sensibilities, and ways of seeing. *Wabi* is also a term that strongly resists easy definition.



*"Plum blossoms dropping,
I glance up at the heavens—
A sharply clear moon."*

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. 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



The kanji for shodo

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. In shodo (書道), the ancient art of Japanese brush calligraphy, the character for the number one (ichi, 一) that 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, while 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, and 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’s 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 adhere to the spirit of wabi. There’s a Zen saying:

吾唯足知

Ware tada taru o shiru.

“I don’t know much. I only know that I’m perfectly satisfied.”

This phrase is famously found on the stone basin (tsukubai) at the Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto and reflects the Zen teaching of knowing and appreciating what you have. It also 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 tsukubai at Ryoan-ji

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 (侘住まい) 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’ve 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. Still, 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* and the author of several books about Japanese arts and meditation. The Co-director of the SMAA Jujutsu Division, he’s earned an eighth dan and the teaching title of Shihan from the SMAA. He’s studied budo and other Japanese arts, in Japan and the USA, for over 50 years. He’s also practiced Japanese fine arts for 40 years, and his Japanese calligraphy and ink painting have won multiple awards at the International Shodo Exhibition in Tokyo. You can learn more about his books at www.MichiPublishing.com.

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