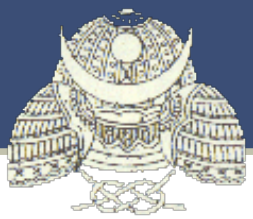
Vol. 26, Issue 1
2021

SMAA JOURNAL



Shudokan Martial Arts Association ▪ PO Box 6022, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-6022
http://smaa-hq.com/ ▪ shudokan@smaa-hq.com ▪ 1-734-645-6441

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2021 SMAA DUES

Membership fees were due on January 1, 2021. 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 growthand 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

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_XCH8RkIV8IiNZoXl93Wl79BLe1NZ

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.

SPACE IN BUDO AND LIFE

Article and Art by H. E. Davey

Japan's traditional martial arts were born of the Japanese cultural matrix, and we could say the same thing about art forms emerging from other societies. They're all influenced by the culture they developed in, and that includes that civilization's religions, social customs, aesthetics, arts, and philosophies. This is particularly true of ancient Japan, where at least some bushi strived to embody bunbu ryodo (文武両道).

What's that? It basically means "the dual paths of fine arts and martial arts." And that means art forms like tea ceremony, brush calligraphy, flower arrangement, ink painting, haiku poetry, and more had a bigger influence on the evolution of budo than the average person realizes.

The bushi was expected to engage in a parallel study of at least some of these arts, ideally achieving as much understanding of fine arts and literary arts as of feudal era combat. The goal was the creation of a balanced character and personality.

As a result, the aesthetics and philosophies of these fine arts began to gradually permeate the martial arts, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the martial tradition being studied, the orientation of the clan that the school was associated with, and the personality of the headmaster. Sure, there were many bushi that were poor examples of bunbu ryodo, and how "the dual paths of fine arts and martial arts" were put into practice varied according to era, clan, location, and of course, the individual as well. But bunbu ryodo continues to influence the thinking and training of budoka even today (if they have a genuinely traditional mindset).

BUNBU RYODO IN AIZU

My wife is a descendent of the Abe bushi family, who were part of the Aizu han, or "clan," located in the northern part of Japan's main island (Honshu). In the 1990s, I made two trips to Japan to research the koryu bujutsu, "ancient martial arts," of the Aizu han. I visited the Nisshinkan, an Aizu bushi training academy, and the Aizu Buke Yashiki, a samurai mansion, where Saigo Tanomo (an Aizu retainer) lived. I dropped by Tsurugajo Castle and its museum, along with other pertinent locations, and interviewed the staff and historians of these various institutions about Aizu bushi history and bujutsu, since the martial tradition I practice has ties to Aizu.

When I arrived in Aizu-Wakamatsu, the first place I went to research Aizu bujutsu was the Nisshinkan. It's impressive even to tourists with little knowledge of samurai culture. If you are in the area, it's worth a stop, because Saigo Tanomo and the celebrated

Tsurugajo Castle

Aizu bushi—including the Byakkotai—were all trained at the Nisshinkan. This Aizu clan school of the late Edo period was instrumental in the development and propagation of martial arts, possibly including what is now known as aiki-jujutsu. And at the time I visited, some martial arts were, once again, being taught at the Nisshinkan to residents of Aizu.

During the late 1700s, Aizu experienced a great famine that caused the deaths of many citizens. During this time, Matsudaira Katanobu, the fifth daimyo, or feudal lord, of Aizu, was advised to build a school to reform the educational system, develop the children of the Aizu bushi, and thus make the clan stronger in general. It took from 1799 to 1803 to build the Nisshinkan.

The Nisshinkan is generally representative of the type of education that bushi in the late Edo period received, as it was one of 300 bushi clan schools existing in Japan at that time. Aside from training in several martial arts, upon entering the Nisshinkan, the ten-year-old sons of the Aizu bushi were acquainted with the *Naranu Koto Wa Naranu Mono Desu*. This was literally a list of "things you must not do," and describes the ethics of the Aizu warriors:

1. You must do what your seniors tell you to do.
2. You must bow to your seniors.
3. You must not tell lies.
4. You must not behave in a cowardly manner.
5. You must not bully those weaker than yourself.
6. You must not eat outside.
7. You must not talk to women outside.

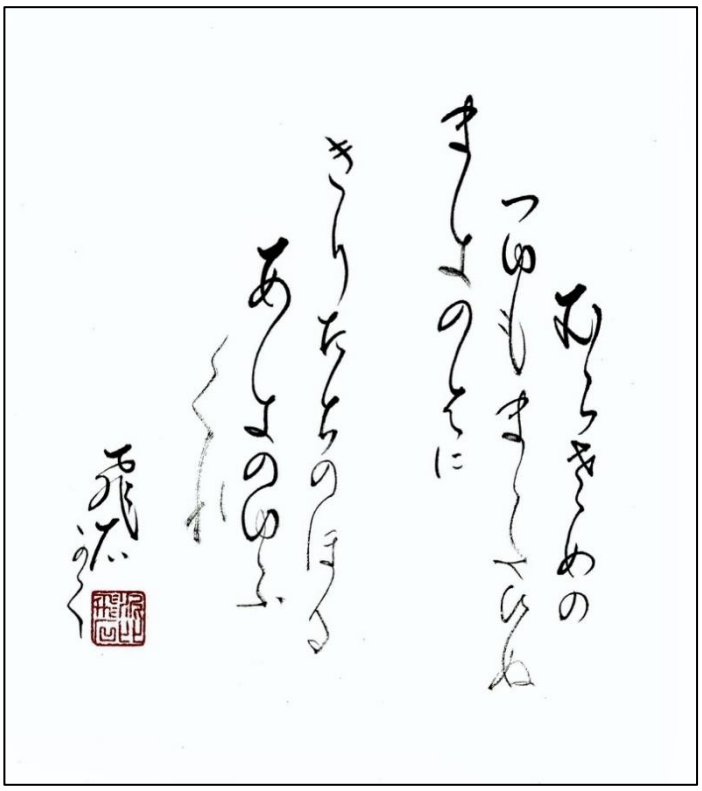
Young students studied such subjects as sodoku ("reading"), shodo ("brush calligraphy"), sumi-e, ("ink painting"), tenmon-gaku ("astronomy"), Confucianism, suiei-jutsu ("swimming while wearing full armor"), and reishiki-kata ("etiquette"). That's a lot more than how to use a sword or spear, and the goal was bunbu ryodo.

Space in Fine Arts and Martial Arts

So now you realize that many aesthetic, philosophical, and technical principles found in varied Japanese fine arts overlap with, and substantially influenced, the martial arts. One of the key principles common to both budo and multiple Japanese fine arts is the idea of space—both respecting space and utilizing space as a central component in the art being practiced. Here are a few examples.

In bonsai, the miniature trees are trimmed and pruned to provide enough space that a tiny bird could fly through the branches and perhaps rest

In the Nisshinkan compound



Islands of calligraphy: An evening in fall—watch the valley mist rising amid fir needles still clutching the dribbling damp of the cold day's swift sprinklings.

briefly on a branch or two. Poorly sculpted bonsai are often criticized for their lack of internal space, and the same can be said for ikebana, Japanese flower arrangement, an art also practiced by bushi in Japan's ancient past.

Adept Japanese calligraphers think not so much of making ebony ink lines on white paper, but rather, outlining the empty space, focusing on the formless white as much as the black characters. The spacing between each calligraphed line of a poem is important, too. The stanzas in expertly created shodo art float precisely and creatively in islands within a sea of emptiness. The space is needed as much for brush writing as for bonsai and ikebana.

And sumi-e painting is famous for its minimalist look, making ample use of space. It's amazing the way a skilled artist can convey bamboo and peonies with just a few ink strokes of the brush. When proficiently crafted, sumi-e includes the paper's space as a crucial part of the overall design.

The importance and respect for space permeates a number of Japanese martial arts as well. And this emphasis on space was influenced by other arts studied by the bushi like those mentioned above, all of which value and use space to create simple, uncluttered, and refined excellence.

Most reasonably skilled martial artists know that one of the secrets of budo is controlling and manipulating maai (間合い), the space between opponents. Not too close, not too far away, and always the right amount of space and distance at the right time. I know . . . easier said than done, and not necessarily something Western people are familiar with.

For instance, I studied Western art—particularly water color painting and drawing—in high school

The sound of a pure breeze in the bamboo

and college. In most every type of Western painting, I was encouraged to eliminate "negative space," whereas Japanese art not only believes emptiness is natural; unfilled space permeates traditional Japanese culture, art, and philosophy. Japan made empty space part of the design in shodo, sumi-e, gardens, flower arrangement, and more. As noted, that emphasis on space carries over into budo, too.

In Japanese arts, "less is more" has reached a high level of refinement. It's an idea that we'd do well to bring into our lives, especially when many in the USA have nearly every minute of the day scheduled, trying to cram in as much work and as many activities as possible, in a desperate attempt to have it all.

Space in Budo, Space in Life

Trying to do too much makes studying a traditional Japanese martial art tough, and it's becoming a greater problem each year for teachers like myself. Simply put, even when we meet a student that wants to practice something like budo, they're frequently unable to find time to just watch a single class. In several instances I've asked these folks how they're going to attend practice regularly if their lives are so crammed with goings-on and work that they can't find time to even observe and possibly register for classes. They are doing too much, and yet they want to do more.

These individuals have no space in their lives, because by trying to get and do everything they're eliminating all the "negative space." Problem is, *space isn't negative*. It's important and has value, not just in budo but also in life. We need it.

And we can get it back, but we have to make up our minds to do so, rather than hoping that "maybe someday I'll have some space in my schedule." It's something I hear as a teacher regularly, but I don't recall anyone that said this eventually finding time to seriously practice with me. Even if such individuals discover time to join a dojo at best they just dabble.

Ku, or empty space, brushed in gyosho script by the author

I've no doubt they sincerely want to practice, but they also believe they're too busy. In reality, few people are too busy to correctly study any of the traditional Asian arts I teach. They just have different priorities.

Sure, budo takes quite a bit of time, but we can find the time—the space—if we're willing to make changes in our lives. Watch 60 minutes less TV each night. Then you can go to bed 60 minutes earlier, which means you can wake up an hour earlier. You've got an hour for meditation, budo, or whatever you want. But you have to be willing to give up some TV time and wake up earlier.

Everyone's situation is different, and the above is just one possible scenario, but finding time to practice isn't completely outside of our control. We just have to stop doing certain things, or don't start them to begin with, and space appears in our lives.

Artful Living

Despite this I've had students object that my life situation is easier than theirs, that I have more space

in my life to practice. They say: "You're lucky you have a lifestyle that allows you to devote yourself to these Japanese arts. But I don't have that sort of life or time."

Not true. My life is not a happy accident.

It's not luck that allowed me to seriously study with remarkable teachers. It wasn't luck that produced my accomplishments in martial arts, shodo, sumi-e, and Japanese yoga. And it was not innate talent. It was effort and making these arts a priority.

Luck didn't get me good grades in high school. And luck didn't practice martial arts for me several nights a week, when I also had to study for tests on the next school day.

Luck didn't do my afterschool job every weekday, which was aimed at helping me save money to go to Japan following my senior year. That was all by design. It was tough work, and it meant there were a bunch of other things I didn't get to do.

Luck didn't pay for my trips to Japan over the years or pay for training, books, and supplies. That took effort and creativity.

Luck didn't help me find excellent teachers. It didn't give me the time to study with them. That was ongoing research and making my studies an important priority.

Thinking we're at the mercy of luck, fate, or some other superstition makes victims of us all, while we wait passively for something to miraculously change so maybe we can practice a martial art that might really help us in life. Most have the capacity to do what I've done, to accomplish what I've accomplished, but we have to decide to actually do it and not attempt to do everything. This is simple, unless we convince ourselves that it's complicated.

I have no idea how much money I've spent learning Japanese yoga, healing arts, martial arts, and fine arts. I do know it's not a small amount.

I have no idea how much money I've forgone by authentically teaching and writing about Asian art forms, which doesn't always generate much income. I'm not dumb or unwilling to make an effort, so I'd like to think I could've made more cash in my lifetime, if I'd been so inclined. I wasn't, but that's OK. I have enough.

I have no idea what it's like to visit faraway places and take fantastic vacations. I usually went to Japan when I had time and money. And these days I can't close my dojo for long vacations, because I have an obligation to my students to be around. Even seven-day vacations aren't common for me.

I have no idea how many things I didn't get to do, because I never tried to frantically do everything I thought might be fun. That's endless, and we end up endlessly chasing after more stuff and experiences. But this doesn't necessarily change who we are. We have to do that ourselves, and it's not a matter of accumulating possessions, money, jobs, or even experiences.

But I do know that I have few regrets about missing out on this, that, or some other thing. We'll never do everything. Not even if we lived 20 lifetimes. Human undertakings are countless, and we can't do it all.

So let go of that way of thinking. Pick something meaningful you want to work on and make it a high priority. Then there's no more agonizing about if you should do this or that today. No more ruminating about how to possibly fit one more pursuit into an overscheduled overflowing life . . . because you'll have a reasonable number of priorities in life, and you'll know what the main ones are. Decisively decide this and stick with it. Watch your life become simple.

Every top teacher of a classical martial art that I know has done this. And I've been fortunate to meet and/or study with some of the world's highest-ranking instructors of shodo, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, multiple martial arts, Japanese yoga,

The author teaching Saigo Ryu martial arts

and various healing arts as well. That wasn't luck either.

Each expert designed a life that was meaningful to him or her, but not overflowing. This gave them the space to dive deeply into the arts they were practicing. In doing so, they ultimately discovered the art of living itself, something not easily done through sporadic training.

On-and-off practice is like trying to get water to boil while taking the kettle on and off the stove. Leave it on the burner steadily, and one day it'll transform into steam. Move it from burner to burner, constantly looking for a better or newer flame, and the water may remain in the same form forever. Just like the process of boiling water aims at transmuting water into a new form, so do the various Japanese martial arts and fine arts aim at human transformation.

Learn from bunbu ryodo. Create an artfully designed life. Less is more. Balance matters. Space is important. So is being natural and not forcing things.

We have an endless pool of creativity within the depths of the subconscious, waiting to be released. Each of us can accomplish a lot in life, including doing well in the study of a Japanese martial art. We just have to believe we can, stop vaguely hoping that space and time will appear, and make what we study a top priority. If we change our priorities, we change our lives. By aiming for space and simplicity, everything becomes simple, like abbreviated but stunning ink paintings.

About the Author: H. E. Davey is a founding member of the SMAA. A Shihan and eighth dan in the SMAA Jujutsu Division, he has practiced budo for over 50 years in Japan and the USA. Information about his books on various Japanese arts can be found at www.michipublishing.com.

KATA CLASSIFICATION IN KORYU

Article and Photos by Wayne Muromoto

One of the things I had to wrap my head around when I started to do koryu ("ancient systems") after over a decade of training in shin budo (the more "modern" martial Ways) was that there were different levels of kata. Judo, for example, may have harder kata forms that are meant for more advanced study, but they are not clearly demarcated. Nage No Kata ("The Forms of Throwing") can be considered by some teachers to be more applicable to beginners than Ju No Kata ("The Forms of Pliability"), but there really is no formal restriction that keeps beginners from learning the latter, more complex, subtle form. Nor are any of the individual techniques taught in a stratified, restrictive manner; rather they are simply taught from the easiest and most applicable to the more individualistic and complex, according to the individual instructor or the necessities of testing and ranking.

In large part, this must have been influenced by Kano Jigoro Sensei's approach to education and pedagogy. He was, besides the creator of modern

Kodokan judo (and hence a distant ancestor who laid down the basic DNA for all modern grappling arts influenced by judo), one of Japan's most important public-school educators at the turn of the 20th Century. Kano Sensei embraced the open, facts-based, inquiring nature of Western educational theory. Besides training sessions, he would hold lectures on the philosophy, theory, and mechanics of judo. By his actions, we see that Kano Sensei believed in disseminating knowledge; not just within the new Kodokan style but also distilling important information from the various different jujutsu ryu before they faded away, taking their knowledge with them. He wanted to open up education.

Also, karate-do had kata but no real hierarchical structure as I'm about to describe. Some kata were harder, more technically complex, but once you reached a certain level of ability, you would conceivably be able to learn all of them per the judgment of your teacher. I suspect this may have arisen from the very different nature of traditional Okinawan arts compared to traditional Japanese arts. As an Okinawan karate friend related to me, from his interviews with very old karate sensei in Okinawa, before the consolidation of the kata into specific ryu, karate was taught more like how the art of sanshin (Okinawan shamisen, or three-stringed musical instrument that strikes me as a kind of Asian banjo) was taught. You apprenticed yourself to a master and learned that master's specialty, perhaps two or three songs that he's famous for singing. In the same way, you'd study under a karate teacher and learn perhaps two or three kata and the basics. When you reach a certain level, the teacher may tell you, "Okay, you have learned as much as you can from me. Now go study under my friend in the next village. He'll teach you his own special kata (or song, if it was sanshin)," and off you'd go to work on a couple more kata. Pretty soon, after making the rounds of different teachers, you end up with your own specialty or flavor and start your own little school (a karate or sanshin club), or you would decide you'd rather not be a teacher and go back to studying under a teacher that you really like and whose style and emphasis you want to emulate.

With modern kendo, the standardized Nihon Kendo Kata were established by a committee for grading purposes. Everyone learns them for ranking. There's no secret kata only for higher ranks. There is, therefore, only one level and you are judged by your performance per those open and widely understood parameters.

With the koryu, however, there are different ryu whose methods are so different that you can't compare and contrast one person's technical abilities directly with another person. Some of the gross body movements may be similar, but the execution and direction, the timing and intent of similar-looking cuts and strikes may be totally at odds from school to school. So, I can understand why, in casting about for a standardized set of kata that would unify kendo players or iaido practitioners, you need a system that would hold everyone to the same form and application.

But beyond that, within each koryu ryuha, there are classifications of kata based on your ability to

The author (right) practicing Takeuchi Ryu kumi-uchi kata

absorb the teachings, on a technical physiological level, and on a mental/theoretical level. Grossly speaking, I am referring to what are called the shoden, chuden and okuden levels of kata.

You will find these general stratifications in all traditional Japanese arts, from music to Noh drama, to flower arrangement to tea ceremony. They may be named differently, but the basic concept of levels of stratification remains the same.

In the Urasenke school of tea ceremony, for example, you have Nyumon, a primary certification that allows you to learn the most basic temae, or tea forms (which we could equate to martial kata), then you quickly move from these basics to Konarai (literally, "Little Teachings"). These lay the foundation skills in the temae. Then, generally speaking, you have Shikaden; an intermediary set of temae, and Okuden, the forms not published or openly taught. What you can be taught depends on your ranking, which is somewhat aligned to the level of temae, but not quite exactly, especially at the upper end of the temae.

Shoden

In most koryu forms, the foundation level kata are classified as shoden, meaning "beginning teachings." Quite obviously, shoden kata are taught to beginners, and are the simplest to learn, easiest to grasp, rudimentary kata. These kata can also be called shin ("formal, concise") or "omote" ("outward").

Chuden

Chuden are "middle teachings." They are intermediary in complexity. They can also be called "gyo" ("running") as opposed to the stiffer, more stylized "shin." Sometimes they are called "ura," as in "the other side of omote."

Okuden

Okuden, or "hidden teachings," are often referred to as "secret teachings." While they are limited only to the initiated, the meaning of okuden is not so much secret as it is "far in the back, or remote part, of a training hall." In other words, these forms are taught in the far end of a dojo, away from prying eyes at the entrance, in the oku, or deepest recesses of the room. There are also references to this level as being "so" of the shin/gyo/so classification. This is derived from the three scripts of Japanese calligraphy, which correspond roughly to structured, angular writing (shin), more free-flowing script (gyo) and the hardest: very spontaneous, expressive, free flowing writing (so).

In a sense, if you look at the geomantic symbolism, shoden techniques are taught when you just have a foot in the door of the dojo. Chuden are when you are fully engaged and committed to the school, and you are training right in the "middle" of the dojo. Okuden is taught way back in the remotest part of the dojo, taught when you are ready to plumb the depths of the ryu.

There are good reasons why this stratification of kata exists in koryu, and also good reasons why they perhaps shouldn't in modern shin budo. The reasons range from the practical (if you have over 450 kata, you've got to categorize them in some way or you will have information overload, and it all will be a jumble of too many kata; and cataloging them according to technical/mental complexity is a really logical, intuitive way) to the financial. (By charging a fee to be licensed to learn each level, the teacher and the school has a progressive stream of income.)

Philosophically speaking, I think modern budo does not like to deal with this shoden/chuden/okuden demarcation because of Kano Jigoro Sensei's influence as a progressive educator. He wanted to modernize traditional jujutsu, and he therefore eschewed the secrecy involved in the classification

of kata. You learned the techniques and kata when you were able to learn it. You didn't need a certificate, and you didn't to pay an additional fee to do so.

When you have no secrets, then everything is an open book, and everyone can contribute to studying the techniques, refining them, and possibly retooling them to work better in contests and training bouts. Hence, you will not see any such classification in judo kata, kendo kata, or karate kata, that I am aware of.

There are also secondary classifications. Betsuden (meaning "separate from the tradition") is a class of kata that are derived from outside the primary, original teachings. You can also call these kata bangai ("stuff outside") or bette ("separate hands," i.e., separate techniques). They may have been devised by a headmaster or master instructor based upon existing techniques and then made part of the curriculum. They also may have been grafted onto the system by exposure to another ryu, perhaps in a case where a headmaster studied under a different ryu for a while and received a teaching license, and then returned to his former system but wanted to retain what he learned.

Within the okuden, there are also discreet levels. Their names vary depending on the ryu. Of the ones I am aware of, you have shinden (kata whose origins are directly inspired by a spiritual vision by the founder or his lineal successors), soden (the original kata devised by the founder), oku-iri (kata that introduces you to the okuden), and so on. Different ryu will have different ways to subcategorize their kata.

The danger I see, however, is mixing the two systems of teaching up. Trying to introduce the shoden/chuden/okuden into modern budo doesn't make sense. The ship already left the harbor. You can't change the teaching methodology without messing up the entire integrity of the system. So, a koryu wannabe karate studio really shouldn't just

Bitchuden Takeuchi Ryu in Kyoto

make up classifications for the sake of charging more money for teaching an "advanced" kata like Wanshu or Bassai Dai, because the teacher read about it in my article and thought, "Hey! More money!"

Likewise, breaking apart the classifications to "modernize" koryu just makes no sense. The classifications are there for very good reasons, not the least of which is that it establishes a progressive learning system that makes sense of a full, rich curriculum.

Within the Bitchuden Takeuchi Ryu of my teacher, Ono Yotaro Sensei, the attainment of a certain level allows you to first learn certain okuden kata that are called soden, kata passed down from the founder for over four centuries. When receiving permission to learn these forms, your certificate only lists the names in cryptic, often confusing Chinese characters that give very little clue to their meaning. There are no written explanations to how these methods are done. You are taught these methods only one night a year, on the anniversary of the founder, Takeuchi Hisamori Sensei's, death. After other students receive their rank promotions, all the assembled students above a certain rank gather in the dim moonlight and firelight, on the side of a mountain that overlooks Kyoto, and we

cooperatively teach the techniques to the newly inducted. Each of us reviews the methods, then we give the newly promoted a chance to try the techniques out, and we go over them, one after another, under the quiet and watchful eyes of our headmaster. In that way, the tradition is passed on from us to each other, as we learn to teach, and the new ones learn to absorb the teachings, in a truly traditional, exclusive manner.

I thought that everything I had been taught at the shoden and chuden level, and even at the first okuden levels, were now evident as techniques to prepare me for this moment. And yet, the techniques were at first baffling to me. They were simpler, faster, more— dare I say it? —upfront and powerful than anything I had been previously taught. Some of the techniques were so fast and brutal, they negated anything I learned in the previous categories. Yet, perhaps had I NOT been trained towards that moment, what seemed simpler may have been impossible for me to perform even half-way decently, because the seeming simplicity hid, quite possibly, precise techniques that would not be possible for me to do without prior training.

I know, this paragraph seems confusing. Perhaps it's because I'm still digesting the implications of learning the soden and shinden methods. They were so different, yet so similar, that it felt like a whole new world opened up to my understanding of the ryu.

In a way, as you progress from one level to another, from shoden to chuden, your understanding of the methods also changes, and at that stage, no doubt they also appear as radical a change of view as what I experienced that night. As I tell my students, think of shoden as going to elementary school and learning how to write the alphabet. You really need to go through this stage to become literate, and you have to keep practicing. But you also have to graduate from elementary school one day and move on to middle school, and high school, and eventually to okuden, which is like college. Shinden or soden? That's like graduate school, and you're going to get a Ph.D. But if you can't write, you can't get very far at all, let alone even reach the intermediate level.

About the Author: Wayne Muromoto is a member of the SMAA Board of Advisors. He lives in Hawaii, where he teaches Bitchuden Takeuchi Ryu jujutsu and Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu iaido. He's a regular and valued contributor to the *SMAA Journal*.

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

Phone:
1-734-645-6441

E-Mail:
shudokan@smaa-hq.com

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

http://smaa-hq.com

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