

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

2025 SMAA DUES

This is a reminder that SMAA membership fees were 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

- Nicklaus Suino Sensei
- H. E. Davey Sensei

Editor: H. E. Davey Sensei

Assistant Editor: Troy Swenson Sensei

Webmaster: Don Prior Sensei

General Manager: Nicklaus Suino Sensei

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

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.

SMAA DAN RANKING AND TEACHING TITLES

SMAA dan and teaching titles are based on technical ability and character development. In the case of dan grades, more emphasis is placed on technical ability. Teaching titles, which are more difficult to achieve, place emphasis on personal development and teaching ability. (Teaching titles allow instructors to recommend individuals to the SMAA for ranks within one level of their own.)

The support one has given the SMAA, the recommendations of one's seniors in the SMAA, and the contributions that one has made to the martial arts, are major considerations for promotion. SMAA time requirements for promotion apply to members with prior SMAA rank. In the case of uniquely talented individuals and/or professional instructors, an altered schedule of promotion may be approved by the officials of SMAA. Time requirements for Fuku-shihan, Shihan, and So-shihan can be waived for qualified instructors when they initially join the SMAA.

All applicants for title/rank are thoroughly examined by the SMAA Directors and Advisors. Rank issued by mainstream, well-known Japanese associations will frequently be recognized by the SMAA. Ranking from lesser-known groups, while possibly legitimate, may require an in-person examination conducted by an appropriate SMAA official.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SMAA DAN PROMOTIONS

Shodan	At least 2 years of training and over the age of 16
Nidan	More than 18 months after Shodan
Sandan	More than two years after Nidan
Yondan	More than three years after Sandan and at least Fuku-shido in title
Godan	More than four years after Yondan and at least Shido in title
Rokudan	More than five years after Godan
Shichidan	More than six years after Rokudan and at least Fuku-shihan title
Hachidan	More than seven years after Shichidan, at least Shihan title, and at least 50 years old

REQUIREMENTS FOR SMAA TEACHING TITLES

Fuku-shidoin	Written essay, magazine article, or book (500 word minimum) about any aspect of budo or bujutsu (minimum rank of Shodan)
Shidoin	Written essay, magazine article, or book (500 word minimum) about any aspect of budo or bujutsu (minimum rank of Sandan)
Fuku-shihan	At least two years after Yodan and written essay, magazine article, or book (2000 word minimum) about any aspect of budo or bujutsu (minimum rank of Yodan)

Shihan	At least two years after Rokudan and written essay, magazine article, or book (2000 word minimum) about any aspect of budo or bujutsu (minimum rank of Rokudan)
So-shihan	At least two years after Shichidan and written essay, magazine article, or book (2000 word minimum) about any aspect of budo or bujutsu (minimum rank of Shichidan)

SENSEI?

By H. E. Davey

In Japan, the word “sensei” (先生) is an honorific of respect used for people recognized as guides through skill, learning, or public service. Educators, physicians, lawyers, elected officials, and established artists or authors are addressed as “Name Sensei.” The word literally means “one who was born before,” pointing to experience rather than a specific license or rank. Everyday references and Japanese language books note this broad social scope; it’s not a dojo-only term.

HOW TO USE THE WORD

Japanese puts honorifics after the name—Tanaka Sensei—and you don’t use them for yourself. In conversation, a patient may call across a clinic “Sensei?” to a doctor, but that same doctor would introduce herself by name and role, not as Tanaka Sensei and never as “Sensei Tanaka.”

This follows the rules of keigo (敬語), where honorifics elevate the other party rather than the speaker. Understanding this simple name-order and non-self-reference can help Western budo students mirror how native speakers actually talk. And keigo is the system of honorific or respectful language in Japanese used to express respect, humility, or social distance depending on the relationship between speaker, listener, and the person being talked about.

IS “SENSEI” A RANK?

Because sensei is an honorific, it’s not a rank. In modern budo, the rankings are dan and kyu (段・級), meaning “grade” and “class.” And in the koryu bujutsu, a limited number of menkyo (免許), or teaching licenses, exist. Some arts also award instructor titles called shogo (称号)—renshi (錬士),

kyoshi (教士), hanshi (範士)—under federation rules. Others like the Aikikai and the SMAA issue teaching titles like Fuku-shidoin (副指導員), Shidoin (指導員), and Shihan (師範).

Legitimate martial arts organizations publish procedures for these qualifications. None list “sensei” as a credential. You may rightly call a teacher “Yamada Sensei,” but his or her certificate on the wall will read something like rokudan or kyoshi, not “sensei.”

WHAT ABOUT LOYALTY?

Another frequent question in Western dojos is whether it’s disloyal to call more than one person “sensei.” Japanese usage doesn’t impose a one-person limit. In a single day, someone in Tokyo might address a math teacher, a dentist, and a novelist as “sensei,” and no one would bat an eye.

Loyalty in traditional training is real, but it belongs to the instruction and lineage, not to the term “sensei.” Many arts organize study under a primary head teacher or family line, explained by the iemoto (家元) system in tea ceremony, theater, and allied traditions. The iemoto system is an old Japanese hierarchical system used to preserve and transmit cultural arts like tea ceremony, flower arranging, and some classical martial arts. The iemoto, or headmaster, is the hereditary or appointed leader that controls the teaching, licensing, and artistic standards of the school. Students receive permission to teach or advance through ranks only with the iemoto’s authorization, often via formal licenses. This system emphasizes loyalty, continuity, and the preservation of tradition within a single lineage.

In the iemoto system, students often belong to a shachu (社中) led by a shisho (師匠), who takes responsibility for transmission. That structure governs licensing and mentorship, while the word “sensei” remains a general honorific for teachers

and recognized experts. For example, in Urasenke, one of the main tea ceremony schools, the iemoto is the grandmaster, but many shachu, or regional branches, are run by senior teachers around Japan. These shisho, or advanced teachers, report to or receive licenses from that iemoto. In some cases, especially in traditional arts like kabuki, shachu operate outside a formal iemoto structure, but they still maintain similar teacher–disciple dynamics.

So, while loyalty to one’s art form and/or one’s teacher is a time-honored and important tradition, it isn’t compromised by calling an educator, or an instructor of another classical art, something like Tanaka Sensei. People in Japan do it all the time.

WHERE SHOULD YOU CALL YOUR TEACHER “SENSEI?”

In traditional Japanese culture, the title “sensei” extends far beyond the walls of the dojo. It’s not merely a courtesy—it reflects a continuous relationship of deep respect and recognition. In Japan, students of budo routinely refer to their teacher as “sensei” in every setting, not just during training. This practice reinforces the enduring nature of the teacher–disciple bond.

Whether in a formal seminar, a social gathering, or a casual conversation, the title “sensei” is consistently used. It acknowledges the teacher not just for their technical knowledge, but for his or her role in shaping the student’s character and way of life.

By contrast, in many Western settings, judoka (for example) often restrict the use of “sensei” to the dojo, reverting to a first name or surname outside it. While this may stem from Western cultural norms emphasizing equality and informality, it undermines the traditional teacher–student relationship central to Japanese martial arts. Using “sensei” only within the training hall reduces the role of the teacher to a mere technician or instructor, rather than a guide and mentor whose influence permeates daily life.

This fragmented respect weakens the sense of commitment, loyalty, and humility that are meant to be cultivated through long-term training. It suggests that the values of budo can be compartmentalized, when in fact they're meant to be lived fully.

In Japan, this continuity of respect reflects a cultural worldview in which the transmission of knowledge—especially in arts like judo (柔道), kendo (剣道), and other traditional disciplines—is inseparable from human relationships. The role of the teacher is lifelong, and the proper attitude of the student doesn't fluctuate based on setting. As Kano Jigoro Sensei, the founder of judo, emphasized, martial arts are a path of personal development. They're not merely about combat or sport—they're about cultivating a way of living. Upholding the title "sensei" both inside and outside the dojo honors this ideal and helps preserve the integrity of the tradition. Failing to do so may lead students to forget that their training isn't just for the mat—it's for life.

HOW SHOULD WESTERN DOJO INCORPORATE THIS WORD?

For Western dojo that want to honor Japanese usage, there are a few habits worth adopting:

- Use Name-sensei rather than "Sensei Name," because the suffix form is how Japanese language marks respect. Avoid "pidgin Japanese."
- Emphasize that the word "sensei" is used both inside and outside of the dojo.
- Encourage students to reserve "sensei" for addressing others, not for self-branding and self-glorification.
- When you need to communicate qualifications, say the rank or instructor title

directly—godan, rokudan, shihan, or a recognized shogo—and let "sensei" do its proper job as a courteous form of address. Clear separation of address and accreditation aligns with most association policies and prevents the common confusion that "sensei" equals a belt level.

- It also helps to show students how far the word "sensei" reaches outside martial arts.

Japanese news reports, dictionaries, and language resources all note that doctors, lawyers, politicians, and established authors are routinely addressed this way. That broader map keeps the term from shrinking into a dojo label and reminds us that Western students are borrowing a living language from a culture where respect is baked into daily speech. When students see that "sensei" belongs to classrooms, clinics, courtrooms, and art studios as much as to dojo, they better understand its weight—and are less likely to treat it as a personal brand or a rank.

Finally, a word on tradition and modern life. You might encounter "sensei" tied to hereditary leadership in arts like tea ceremony or Noh and wonder how that relates to today's budo. Studies of the iemoto system explain how heads of schools preserved repertoire, issued licenses, and shaped transmission over centuries. That history is useful context for understanding why commitment to a primary teacher remains a strong value in many dojo—even while the everyday honorific "sensei" continues to be used for many professionals and teachers across society. It's worth looking into.

CULTURAL APPRECIATION VS. CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Let's make this simple. Respect the lineage you train in, state ranks and titles plainly, and use sensei as Japanese speakers do: as a courteous way to address the people who teach you.

Given the fact that we're all students of budo and/or koryu bujutsu, I'm going to assume that we all have an interest in Japan and its culture . . . because disciplines like budo absolutely are Japanese cultural arts just like tea ceremony and brush calligraphy. They both embody and preserve that ancient culture. That's why they've continue to exist in Japan.

Unfortunately, some misinformed Western people have come to equate arts like karate-do and jujutsu with non-Japanese combat sports like boxing and wrestling. These activities are culturally, historically, and philosophically different. And that matters.

Cultural appropriation occurs when elements of a culture—such as language, clothing, rituals, or symbols—are adopted by people outside that culture without proper understanding, respect, or acknowledgment of their origins. This often occurs in ways that distort or commodify traditions, stripping them of their deeper meaning or spiritual context. This has definitely happened to the traditional Japanese martial arts outside of Japan.

Now, the problem isn't simply borrowing or appreciating these arts; that's fine. It's the careless or exploitative use of cultural expressions by those in a position of power or privilege, especially when the originating culture has faced discrimination or marginalization. Such appropriation can perpetuate stereotypes, distort important teachings/values, and reduce living traditions to commodified trends, rather than honoring them as part of people's identities and lived experiences.

So, it's important for SMAA members outside of Japan to understand the uniqueness of Japanese culture if they want to understand traditional Japanese martial arts in full. The use of the word "sensei" is part of that cultural understanding.

When you use it correctly, you're engaging in cultural appreciation. When you use it incorrectly, especially if your approach to budo is significantly

altered from the Japanese original, you're engaging in cultural appropriation. One is beneficial, and the other is insulting to the culture you're meant to be learning from.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Cultural exchange is the sharing of ideas, traditions, customs, art, language, and ways of life between people from different cultures. It happens when individuals or groups interact across cultural boundaries—through travel, education, work, international programs, or classes—and learn from one another. This kind of exchange helps people broaden their understanding, reduce stereotypes, and build mutual respect. Rather than just observing another culture from the outside, cultural exchange encourages real human connection and allows both sides to grow and see the world in new ways.

The study of budo and koryu bujutsu by people around the world can potentially be a great form of cultural exchange that leads to a better world for everyone. Learning classical Japanese martial arts can be a very meaningful form of cultural exchange for Western people, but only when practiced in an authentic way that respects the values, etiquette, and historical roots of the tradition. Understanding how terms like "sensei" are used traditionally in Japan is one aspect of that.

And more than just physical techniques, some of these arts carry centuries of Japanese philosophy, discipline, and spiritual outlook. Through sincere, respectful training, Western practitioners can experience a mindset shaped by concepts like rei ("respect"), shugyo ("austere spiritual training"), and katsujinken ("the sword that gives life"). This immersion fosters humility, appreciation, connection between nations, and a deeper understanding of Japanese culture—not as outsiders borrowing a set of martial moves, but as students walking a lifelong path shaped by generations of teachers.

About the Author: H. E. Davey has studied traditional Japanese martial arts in Japan and the USA for over 50 years. His rank and teaching title within the SMAA Jujutsu Division are eighth dan and Shihan. He also started studying classical Japanese brush calligraphy and ink painting under Kobara

Ranseki Sensei, founder of Ranseki Sho Juku shodo, in 1985. He became Kobara Sensei's designated successor after his death in 2005.

His books on Japanese arts and culture are available on Amazon, and at a bookstore near you, through Michi Publishing (www.MichiPublishing.com).

SHIMIZU SENSEI JOINS THE SMAA BOARD OF ADVISORS

The SMAA is happy to welcome Shimizu Shun Sensei to the SMAA Board of Advisors. Shimizu Sensei is a dedicated karateka and respected instructor based in Saitama, Japan, just north of Tokyo. He began his budo journey many years ago, quickly falling in love with the discipline, challenge, and spirit of traditional Japanese martial arts. His training began with Goju Ryu karate-do, which he studied under Nobetsu Tadanori Sensei.

Goju Ryu (剛柔流), meaning "Hard-Soft Style," is one of the major traditional styles of Okinawan karate-do, officially founded by Miyagi Chojun Sensei in the early 1930s. The name itself was drawn from a line in the Chinese martial arts text Bubishi, which describes the balance of "go" (hard) and "ju" (soft) as essential to effective martial practice. Miyagi Sensei

was a student of Higaonna Kanryo Sensei, who'd studied martial arts in Fujian, China, and brought back the foundation of what became Naha-te.

Miyagi Sensei systematized these teachings with a philosophical and scientific outlook, giving Goju Ryu its distinctive blend of linear, forceful strikes (the "hard") and flowing circular movements, breath control, and joint locking techniques (the "soft"). In 1933, Goju Ryu became the first Okinawan karate-do style to be registered with the Dai Nippon Butokukai, marking its official recognition in Japan.

Goju Ryu is known for its rigorous body conditioning, dynamic tension breathing (ibuki), and kata practice that integrates both explosive power and fluid movement. Core kata like Sanchin emphasize internal energy, rooted stances, and focused breath, training the body's structure and mind's discipline simultaneously. More advanced forms like Kururunfa or Seipai involve evasive footwork, redirection of force, and simultaneous offense-defense.

One of Goju Ryu's most interesting contributions to martial arts is its insistence on harmonizing physical technique with the cultivation of willpower, humility, and calm awareness. Studies in kinesiology and biomechanics have shown that this blend of tension and relaxation improves neuromuscular efficiency. Philosophically, Goju Ryu reflects Eastern principles similar to Taoist yin-yang balance—recognizing that



Shimizu Shun Sensei



Shimizu Sensei, SMAA Senior Advisor

force alone is not enough, and true strength lies in adaptability.

This is the style of karate-do studied by Shimizu Sensei's teacher for decades. The late Nobetsu Sensei was a senior Goju Ryu expert, who eventually rose to the rank of 10th dan.

Before his death, he was the president and chief instructor of Goju Ryu Karate-do Nisseikai in Ageo, Saitama Prefecture, Japan, where he emphasized moral training, courtesy, and maintaining discipline, especially among the younger students in his dojo. He was known for sending monthly letters to his students urging them to preserve rei ("courtesy") in a time when he believed public morality was in decline. He traveled throughout Japan—and internationally—spreading traditional budo, and he

was featured in *The Japan Times* and other publications.

With well over two decades of continuous training under Nobetsu Sensei, Shimizu Sensei has become a leading teacher in the influential Japan Karate Federation. (The Japan Karate Federation was established in 1969 to serve as the umbrella organization unifying the major karate-do styles in Japan under one national body. It's recognized by the Japanese government and is affiliated with the Japan Olympic Association.)

His competitive career is marked by consistent success at multiple levels of JKF competition, winning gold medals and championship titles at the City, Prefectural, and Kanto Regional tournaments (spanning seven prefectures). Plus, he proudly qualified to compete in the prestigious All Japan Karate Championship.

Today, Shimizu Sensei leads Shunmei Karate Academy in Saitama City's Nishi Ward, where he teaches youth and adult students alike. He's also



Shimizu Sensei teaching Goju Ryu

**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>

visited the USA on more than one occasion to teach Goju Ryu. His approach combines precision, technique, character development, and the enduring traditions of Japanese budo. With a deep respect for karate-do's roots, and a passion for nurturing future generations, he continues to inspire students through disciplined practice and personal example.

In the future, we hope to have him teach at SMAA Seminars. We're honored to welcome Shimizu Sensei to the elite SMAA Board of Advisors!

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

