

SMAA JOURNAL



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ANNOUNCEMENTS

2026 SMAA DUES

This is a reminder that SMAA membership fees were due on January 1, 2026. 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
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Editor: H. E. Davey Sensei

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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=gq5Nika6Ge0&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.

What Traditional Okinawan Karate Really was Compared to What Traditional Karate is Today

By Steve Wilson

Today, many karate practitioners think that studying traditional karate means deciding to train in karate, finding a dojo, walking in, and signing up for lessons. Once you join, tradition includes wearing a white dogi (uniform), a colored belt as you advance, receiving certificates of rank, lining up in large classes of practitioners to train, and learning the Japanese names for karate techniques and commands. From a technical viewpoint, the above qualifies as "tradition," because the above has been a long-standing practice. However, all karate originated in Okinawa, and the above is not traditional in regard to what was originally traditional Okinawan karate.

The contrast between old-style Okinawan ti/te (the precursor to karate) and modern karate is enormous, not just in training methods, but in

purpose, culture, pedagogy, and even worldview. In fact, today it is very difficult to even find a teacher, who really knows what the original Okinawan karate



*Shimizu Shun Sensei, SMAA Senior Advisor,
teaching Goju Ryu karate-do*

was, and it is getting more difficult to find these few remaining teachers each year.

Below is a clear, but summarized and structured breakdown, that captures the major differences and the reasons behind old-style Okinawan karate (te) and typical modern karate.

PURPOSE: SELF-PROTECTION VS. PUBLIC EDUCATION

Old Okinawan te (1800s-early 1900s) was often oriented in this way:

- It was primarily a civilian self-defense art for close-quarters encounters.
- Techniques were tailored for life-and-death situations, often involving open-hand techniques, gouging, grappling, joint destruction, and vital-point striking.
- Training was meant to protect oneself from bandits, drunken brawlers, or armed attackers, not for sport or performance.
- There was no concept of formal uniforms, belts, ranks or styles, as we know them today.

Modern karate is often oriented in this way:

- Sport competition
- Physical fitness/improved health
- Character development
- Mass instruction
- Techniques are standardized, regulated, and often sanitized for safety.

Many schools emphasize kata performance, point sparring, or general fitness over combative realism.

TRAINING ENVIRONMENT: PRIVATE, HARSH, AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION VS. PUBLIC AND STRUCTURED INSTRUCTION

Old Okinawan te:

- Training was private, often in a teacher's home or yard.
- Students trained in fundoshi (underwear) or everyday clothing; there were no dogi, no belts, and no certificates of rank.
- Classes often lasted for hours.
- Lessons were one-on-one or in very small groups, allowing for personalized correction, deep transmission of principles and strategies, and secrecy of training and techniques.
- Training was intense and repetitive, sometimes spending months on a single movement.
- Teachers chose kata for a student based on the student's body type and ability.

Modern karate:

- Training features large classes in commercial dojos, universities, or community centers.
- Uniforms and belt systems create structure and visual hierarchy.
- The curriculum is standardized for group instruction.
- Students progress through a standardized syllabus rather than the teacher's personal judgment.
- Classes average one-hour in duration, although some dojo have two-hour classes.

STUDENT SELECTION: RECOMMENDATION VS. OPEN ENROLLMENT

Old Okinawan te:

- Students were accepted only by recommendation or personal trust.
- Teachers were concerned with not training criminals, revealing family secrets, and losing face if a student misbehaved in public.
- A teacher might have only a handful of students in their lifetime.
- One-on-one private transmission was the only way that the entire system was conveyed from master to student.

Modern karate:

- Anyone can join. The teacher may not know what the student's character is initially.
- Schools often rely on tuition to stay open, so enrollment is open.
- The art is democratized, which is good for accessibility, but it changes the culture.
- Students may not initially know if the instructor is legitimate and qualified.

CURRICULUM: DEPTH VS. BREADTH

Old Okinawan te:

- A student might learn one kata for years (and only three or four kata total), a handful of core techniques that they were expected to master, and practical applications (oyo/bunkai) were taught privately.
- The emphasis was on close-range fighting, open-hand techniques, joint locks, throws, vital-point striking, gouging, strangling, and body conditioning.

- Kata was a mnemonic device (something designed to aid memory) more than a performance.

Modern karate:

- Students learn many standardized kata and kihon ("basics") that primarily emphasize closed-hand techniques, along with structured kumite (sparring) drills
- Applications are often simplified or symbolic.
- Sport rules influence technique selection.
- Kata may be more oriented toward performance.

CONDITIONING: FOUNDATIONAL VS. OPTIONAL

Old Okinawan te:

- Conditioning was central through the use of makiwara (a "rolled straw" punching post), chishi (a "power stone" conditioning tool), nigiri-game ("gripping jars"), ishi-sashi ("stone padlocks" for arm and grip conditioning), sanchin testing through shime (literally "tightening" to test a student's posture, skeletal alignment, and muscle tension while they perform the important sanchin kata), as well as ude tanren and keri tanren ("arm conditioning" and "kick conditioning").
- The goal was to develop "karate strength" and to forge the body for real combat.

Modern karate:

- Conditioning varies widely and is sometimes absent, although some traditional dojo preserve it, while many modern schools minimize it for safety or convenience, and because class times are shorter.

- Some dojo only use the Hojo Undo (“Supplementary Exercises”) equipment mentioned above before or after regular training, and it is expected that students practice it on their own.
- Sport karate point sparring prioritizes speed and light contact over impact conditioning. No dangerous techniques or contact are permitted.

The traditions of the original Okinawan te systems (Shuri, Naha, and Tomari) were very different from what is considered traditional karate today. Both are traditional from a technical definition, but the two traditions are very different.

As stated in the beginning, even the purpose/reason for training has often completely changed. The way people train today has changed compared to the original methods of training. For 99-percent of modern students, the relationship between the teacher and the student has also changed. And teachers today, who may have 30–500 students (or even thousands) probably cannot have the same relationship or offer the detailed training that students of the past had when teachers taught few students; and all students were taught privately.

There is an important book titled the *Bubishi*, and it includes herbal remedies, joint locks, pressure points, killing techniques, disabling techniques, and everything in-between. Okinawan te originally includes joint locks (kansetsu waza), vital points

techniques (kyusho-jutsu), wrestling (tegumi), strangulation techniques (shime waza), throwing techniques (nage waza) and striking techniques, which include tsuki (“punching”), nukite (“piercing hand” fingertip strikes), ippon ken (“single-knuckle fist” index finger strikes), nakadaka ippon ken (“middle finger single-knuckle fist” strikes), boshi ken (“thumb tip fist” strikes) and more. Relatively few systems thoroughly teach all of the above techniques today.

The indigenous combat arts of Okinawa have been referred to as te, ti, tode, and bujutsu; the name eventually changed to karate. Miyagi Chojun Sensei (founder of Goju Ryu) used to refer to what he taught simply as bu (“martial”). The combat arts of Okinawa have always been evolving and still are today.

Many people try to find and train in the original Okinawa te/ti, but it is difficult to find that system in whole being taught and practiced today. Even though there are a few systems that refer to themselves today as ti, they are not the same system of ti, in whole, that was being taught in the 1800’s and earlier. The original tradition of Okinawan ti, has given way to new traditions, usually now referred to as karate.

About the Author: Steve Wilson has trained in Goju Ryu karate since 1973 and Okinawan kobudo since 1979. He is the chairman and chief instructor of the Okinawan Goju Ryu Kenkyu Kai and an SMAA associate member.

A Review of *Budo Renaissance Man: The Martial Arts Journey of Nicklaus Suino*

By Tracy Geist

Budo Renaissance Man: The Martial Arts Journey of Nicklaus Suino is a compelling biography that goes beyond a standard profile of a martial artist. Written

by Robert E. Wolfe, II, the book chronicles the life of instructor Nicklaus Suino and uses his story to explore the broader philosophical principles of self-improvement and purpose.



Suino Sensei (front) teaching iaido

BOOK HIGHLIGHTS

A “renaissance” approach to life:

The book positions Suino Sensei’s accomplishments in martial arts as a starting point for his success in many other fields, including his work as an author, attorney, entrepreneur, and life coach. It presents him as an inspirational figure who applies lessons from the dojo to a wide range of pursuits.

Deep and accessible writing:

Mr. Wolfe’s concise and accessible prose makes the book enjoyable and easy to read. It successfully translates complex philosophical ideas and technical martial arts concepts into understandable terms, making it appealing to both martial arts enthusiasts and general readers alike.

A journey of personal growth:

The biography is more than a list of achievements; it’s a story of personal evolution and growth. It highlights how martial arts can serve as a path to developing confidence, humility, and self-reflection, inspiring readers to consider their own journeys of self-discovery.

Focus on balance and wellness:

By detailing Suino Sensei’s life mission of learning and sharing the fundamental principles of success, the book invites readers to witness and learn alongside him. This allows for an intimate view into one person’s quest for balance and overall wellness, encouraging readers to challenge their own perceived limitations.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

Martial artists:

Those currently training in martial arts or thinking of starting will find valuable insights into the philosophy and practice of Japanese martial arts, drawing from Suino Sensei’s extensive experience.

Individuals seeking inspiration:

If you are in search of purpose, looking for motivation, or interested in the broader concepts of personal development, this biography offers a thoughtful and inspiring perspective on what it means to be a “renaissance person” in the modern world.

Educators and students:

The book’s themes of growth, curiosity, and embracing challenges make it particularly well-suited for high school students and young people preparing to venture out into the world. Its inspiring message has been used to spark meaningful discussions in classroom settings.

FINAL VERDICT

Budo Renaissance Man is a highly recommended read that is both engaging and introspective. By chronicling the life of an influential martial arts teacher, the book successfully balances technical

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knowledge with a powerful message of lifelong learning and holistic personal growth. It is an authentic and inspiring account that will resonate with anyone looking to cultivate discipline, find purpose, and become a more well-rounded individual.

About the Reviewer: This is Tracy Geist's second book review for the *SMAA Journal*. She is an American member of the SMAA, who lives in Pennsylvania and studies Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu iaido.

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