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ranking & titles  
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online articles  
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## My Introduction to Bujutsu by Sawai Atsuhiko

**This article first appeared in the Summer 2005 issue  
of the *SMAA Newsletter*.**

When I was young I studied koshiki suiei-jutsu, which means "ancient swimming art." The dojo, or training hall, was a small lake surrounded by lavish green trees and a golf course. The American Occupation Army made it in the 1940s in a northern suburb of Kyoto. Although suiei-jutsu was developed by the bushi ("warriors") of my country in feudal times, and while it is a form of koryu bujutsu, or "old style martial arts," we practiced it as a do, or spiritual path. Unlike most forms of swimming, it is unmistakably a martial art, and its training is as hard as judo or kendo. It is definitely different from modern sport swimming as we see in the Olympics.

My teacher's teacher was from the bushi warrior class, and before World War II, he always kept a dagger in the bosom of his kimono. He was asked why he carried such a thing when he came to teach suiei-jutsu, and he answered, "If any of my students should die in the lake during my teaching session, I will kill myself with this weapon to take responsibility." Such attitudes are associated with bushido, the "way of the warrior," and they have few parallels in modern sport swimming.

There are three different primary points that distinguish ancient Japanese suiei-jutsu from modern swimming:

1. There must be beauty as well as effectiveness in the form of swimming.
2. There is no competing with others in speed.
3. You should swim quickly, but you should never be tired when you reach land.

These are the principles of Kobori Ryu, the ancient form of swimming that I studied. There have been many traditional swimming schools (ryu) in Japan, one existed in almost every clan in the Edo period (around 1600 to 1867 AD). However, now perhaps only a dozen remain across the country of Japan. There are no big differences between them. Still, each school developed their own techniques to cope with the unique terrain and geography of the area they lived in. For instance, a feudal clan facing the Pacific Ocean often contrived a way to swim swiftly in the open sea, whereas a ryu situated near a lake typically developed a method to swim there.

When I started to study suiei-jutsu, I found some young girls (of high school age) swimming with marvelous grace and elegance. The teacher whispered to me, "Men should swim with majesty and beauty. Not like that way!" I had never seen swimming like this, as I had learned the usual swimming when I was a high school boy, and I believed we had to swim as fast as possible to be considered

talented. Several years after I began to study suiei-jutsu, I was given the certification of Shihan, or "Master Teacher." Gradually with practice, I found myself never tired even after many hours of swimming. One day my teacher saw my performance from the lakeside and called out, "Now you've got it. There is some beauty in your movement." More than my certificate, that meant I had truly reached the level of Shihan. I was delighted.

### **The Techniques of Suiei-jutsu**

There are many styles of swimming in suiei-jutsu. One of them is called nukite, which literally means "crawling arms," and is similar to the free-style crawl in Western swimming. In nukite, we must keep our head and breast a little above the water surface, making it possible to see in four directions in case of a possible attack. This style was contrived for a bushi to swim with his sword and a bundle of clothes on his head.

Another style is called noshi, which literally means "stretching," and it was devised to swim up a rapid. In doing noshi, you must swim sideways, sliding a little on the back side in order to reduce the water pressure as little as possible, while stroking your arms and legs inside the water like the breast stroke of modern sport swimming. Once you are accustomed to this method, you never feel tired and can swim with a remarkable speed. You can swim slowly if you like, feeling as if you were resting on the water. This was important for the bushi, because if they were exhausted when they reached land, they would be unable to actively engage their opponents.

Bushi also learned a method called soku-geki, which literally means "leg beating." You hit the surface of the water as strongly as possible with your knees bent. The purpose of this method is to swim in any sort of shallow water. When I snorkel in Hanauma Bay in Hawaii, I use this sokugeki method in the shallow water of the coral bed (about 30 centimeters deep), and I can swim smoothly and enjoy watching the fish. If you do otherwise, you'll kick the rugged coral rocks and have your knees and legs cut and bleeding. If you practice soku-geki for five to ten minutes at the start of a swimming session, it can effectively prevent you from experiencing cramps. We also learned a way to swim with our clothes on, the aim of which is to rescue someone drowning.

The waza, or "technique," that impressed me most was the way to swim with both hands and legs tied together by two ropes. This technique was for a bushi, who had broken out of an enemy's prison, to escape and swim across the castle moat.

An expert shihan demonstrated it first to us. And my teacher surprised us by saying, "You believe you swim with the arms and legs, but you're wrong. You can swim without them. Look at a fish. Real swimming is using the whole body." This unified use of the whole body is needed (and taught) in every form of genuine bujutsu and budo.

### **From Technical Training to a Spiritual Path**

The methods in ancient Japanese martial swimming are all very practical and pragmatic at first. But gradually, as you advance in learning the techniques, you reach some level where you produce beauty in your movement, and this process from pragmatism toward formal beauty is similar to any Japanese martial art, or "do" arts such

as kendo or judo.

This tendency to progress from pure functionality to beauty and spirituality forms one of Japanese culture's pillars. We can see this same tendency in other Japanese arts like kado ("the way of flower arrangement"), chado ("the way of tea ceremony"), kodo ("the way of incense"), and others. Why did this tendency arise at all?

The elevation of all Japanese arts, crafts, and skills from their pure utilitarian function toward paths toward beauty and enlightenment occurred during the long period of peace that continued for 300 years in the Edo Period. At this time, the Tokugawa Shogunate ruled my country. Peaceful times prevailed all over Japan, while in many other parts, especially in Europe, many battles were fought for hegemony. The Tokugawa Shogun (supreme military ruler) governed Japan.

Before Tokugawa established control of Japan, many feudal lords, governing each province with military power, had been fighting with each other. This produced a period of unsettled turbulence for three centuries. During this era of constant warfare, few teachers had the time or inclination to see what existed in the martial arts beyond combative effectiveness. Toward the end of this period, Portuguese and Spanish missionaries came to Japan to spread Christianity, accompanied by some people carrying European weaponry.

In 1543 AD, a musket rifle was first introduced to this island country in the Far East. (They ignited the gunpowder with a burning straw-cord and fired a bullet.) After that, many feudal clans competed to produce guns of superior sort and fought with them. In time, the level of production progressed remarkably, with the result that the technical level was heightened in some provinces to the top level in the world. Prior to that, for 300 years, Japan did not manufacture any gun. Some muskets manufactured here toward the end of the 16th century are treasured in art museums and show marvelous artistic and technical skill. You might think it strange, but since the Tokugawa Shogun came to dominate Japan, he forbade any one, or any clan, to produce Western firearms in order to maintain the peace. This edict, among others, was one of the ways that he ushered in an almost unprecedented era of peace. During this era, teachers of bujutsu and varied Japanese cultural arts, no longer embroiled in war, began to look beyond the purely utilitarian function of these arts.

Besides this, the Tokugawa government closed all Japanese ports to the outside world to hold the peace more securely inside. This is called sakoku, which literally means "the country closed with chains."

All through these peaceful times, for three centuries, Japanese koryu budo and bujutsu, as well as other classical arts, went through a unique modification, that is, as I mentioned, the process from mere practicality to finding beauty in established forms (kata) or styles (ryu). To seek after beauty in your performance needs discipline and mental training for the practitioner. And so, bujutsu became an art. Some of its techniques lost practicality, and stylish beauty became stressed, which is a reflection of the practitioner's mind.

### **The Martial Arts and the Mind**

Practicing budo or bujutsu is not only good for our health like physical exercises, but also it teaches people about the relationship between

mind and body—in other words, the importance of unity of mind and body. Therefore, some bushi studied Zen Buddhism, because Zen sitting meditation was thought to lead to the realization of mind-body unity that is essential for mastery of the martial arts. I think what many people find most needed in doing budo is concentration. Once you lose concentration, you are sure to lose to the opponent. And concentration has much to do with the unification of mind and body.

Most people think they just have to make every effort to cultivate the power of concentration. But they are mistaken. Concentration cannot be realized just by tense effort or strained muscles.

Concentration comes to you easily by coordinating mind and body, which is natural in humans and not something to be attained artificially. In a newborn baby, you see its body and mind are one. As we grow old, we find some people losing mind-body coordination, while others sustain it and display their power of concentration in sports and budo. Why?

Some of us, or perhaps most of us, tend to lose concentration because of unneeded thoughts that we allow to enter into our minds while playing a sport or doing some martial art. Why?

This often takes place when illness, unhappiness, suffering, or any other perception that comes from living life visits us. We tend to distract our attention from what we are doing at the moment we become attached to some thought or experience. It leaves our concentration difficult to maintain. Our adult life in modern times is filled with various forms of stress, so distracting perceptions often intrude into our consciousness.

### **Martial Arts and Unification of Mind and Body**

How can we transcend our attachment to varied perceptions that enter the mind via our five senses, and thus maintain concentration? How can we get back to that innocent clear consciousness, that natural condition of mind-body unification? My teacher of Japanese yoga, Nakamura Tempu Sensei, answered these questions and presented us with twelve methods to realize concentration and calmness in the midst of activity. He called this art Shin-shin-toitsu-do, or "the Way of Mind and Body Unification."

In 2001, most of these methods—eight out of twelve—were written about in English for the first time in the book, *Japanese Yoga: The Way of Dynamic Meditation* (Stone Bridge Press), by H. E. Davey Sensei, my friend and fellow teacher of Shin-shin-toitsu-do. I'd like to encourage SMAA members to purchase this book, as it will help you to master budo. Then, I would like to describe in future essays the remaining four methods and add some supplementary advice to the eight. I think this will interest SMAA members, because Shin-shin-toitsu-do is very efficient for realizing the full potential of any ordinary person in any field of human activity. However, this is especially true for budo, and it was one of the reasons that when I was over 60 years of age, I was able to successfully begin training in Hakko Ryu jujutsu for the first time.

Nakamura Tempu Sensei invented a way anyone can walk. By following this path himself, Nakamura Sensei realized new ways of looking at life, our world, and even the universe. While his realization was similar (to some extent) to that of people who practice Zen

meditation, it was still unique in his pragmatic and simply understood explanation of Japanese yoga philosophy and practical methods. Uniting Eastern and Western methods of education, Nakamura Sensei made use of science to explain ancient Asian truths. More than this, his Shin-shin-toitsu-do amounts to a bold affirmation of human instincts and desires, innate tendencies that many teachers of meditation have vainly tried to forbid in the past.

In future issues of this journal, I'll write about the life of Nakamura Sensei, some of his methods for developing ki ("life energy"), and the amazing power of mind and body coordination. Since I am also a bugeisha ("martial artist") like many of you, I'll try to relate these ideas and methods to the bujutsu and budo of Japan, explaining how they can help martial artists in particular.

**About the Author:** Sawai Atsuhiko Sensei is Professor Emeritus of English for Kyoto Sangyo University. He is an expert in suiei-jutsu, the seldom taught ancient samurai art of combative swimming, and he has training in Nippon jujutsu. He is also a direct disciple of Nakamura Tempu Sensei, the founder of the Shin-shin-toitsu-do system of Japanese yoga, and he holds the highest possible rank in this art form. Sawai Sensei lives in Kyoto, Japan, and he is a Senior Advisor for the SMAA.

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Updated: Jun 8, 2006