



Enso 円相 – The Complete Circle: The Way of Combat And the Way of the Arts

By Mark Cramer

We are all aware of the reputation of the Samurai as accomplished warriors. Novels, movies, and television are replete with examples of their fighting prowess. However, fighting is usually the only aspect of the samurai's life that is examined in our culture's media. Unfortunately, our obsession with the samurai's fighting abilities gives us an incomplete and simplistic view of the complexities of the warrior class of Japan. It is true that the samurai were expected to be extremely proficient in a variety of fighting arts, but they were also expected to excel in a host of other arts. It is this latter aspect of samurai life that is too often ignored in our society giving us a simplistic view of these

warriors and the complexities of their lives.

Recently I was reading several articles on a related topic, and I came across some interesting information that offered a more accurate picture of the complexities of the life of the samurai. The warrior class in Japan rose to power during the Kamakura Period (1192 to 1333) and remained in power through the Edo Period until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.[i] From the earliest times, the literary arts and the fine arts were very much a part of the lives of the samurai. Akihiro Omi provides us with a more panoramic view of Japan's warrior class: "In addition to refining their fighting skills, the Kamakura warriors were expected to be proficient in calligraphy, painting, poetry, music and other arts." [ii]

As we can see, the warrior class of Japan was expected to be proficient in more than just the arts of war. They were also expected to be competent in the literary and the fine arts. This seems quite logical when you realize that the arts represent transient beauty, and in a similar manner the beauty of the samurai's life could be quickly cut short. Consequently, for the samurai class, all of the arts were treated as necessary parts of a complete person.[iii]

Right: *Hotei Watching a Cock Fight* by Musashi
(Ink on Paper)





It must be noted that the pursuit of all arts not was universally approved by the warrior class. While some considered Noh dancing to be inappropriate for a samurai[iv], others warned that placing the pursuit of the arts above the pursuit of the ways of combat was a dangerous endeavor.[v] Nonetheless, within Japan's warrior class it appears to be universally held that there should be a harmonious balance between the pursuit of the martial arts and the pursuit of the other arts.[vi]

As we all know, Miyamoto Musashi was Japan's preeminent samurai and is frequently referred to as the sword-saint (Kensei). In his *Book of Five Rings*, Musashi explains the connection between the way of the sword and the way of the literary arts: "It is said that the warrior's is the twofold Way of the pen and the sword, and that he should have a taste for both Ways."[vii] Additionally, along with being the victor of at least sixty duels, he was an accomplished calligrapher, artist, poet, and writer.[viii] According to Musashi's words and deeds, the ideal Japanese warrior needed to be proficient in the ways of combat, the ways of the pen, and the ways of an artist.

Japan's modern era began with the Meiji Restoration, and the samurai class was officially abolished. However, the values of the samurai class did not disappear. This was in large part due to one of the objectives of Kokutai, Japan's National Essence policy. The Japanese government's goal was to instill the ideals and values of the old samurai class into all of the social classes in a modernized Japan. The samurai's fighting spirit was to be instilled into the entire population through this program, and in this manner all conscripts into the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces would possess the qualities of Japan's warrior class.[ix]

In the 1930s, the Japanese government printed an official pamphlet spelling out the meaning of Kokutai. This National Essence document specified that the love of transient beauty was an essential Japanese characteristic of all citizens. Consequently, it was also expected that the samurai's appreciation of the arts was to be emulated by the general public in Japan.[x] In this manner, the both the samurai's fighting spirit and the samurai's appreciation of the arts continued into the modern period.



While I was reading these articles, I was reminded of something that Leo Lipinski Shihan explained to the Seiwa Kai Goju Ryu Karatedo members. He told us that Shuji Tasaki Sensei, Seiwa Kai's founder, was not only a fierce martial artist, but that he was also an Ikebana artist, a Chado (Tea Ceremony) master, and an accomplished musician. It appears that Tasaki Sensei was keeping alive the spirit of Japan's warrior class which can be traced back more than eight hundred years. He was an individual accomplished in both the martial arts and in the fine arts.

I was also reminded of something that Fujiwara Shihan, Seiwa Kai President, wrote a few years back in a letter addressed to all senior Seiwakai members and their students: "*Please be aware that you are part of a Japanese organization with Japanese cultural values. This is what Seiwakai karate is about. It is not simply karate without values.*" Consequently, we should endeavor to learn and understand those values that make us unique. I believe that these values pertain to the acquisition of the fighting spirit which is found in Japanese Goju Ryu Karatedo, and the appreciation of the transient beauty which is found in the literary and fine arts.



It seems to me that if we are going to be faithful to the values of Japan's warrior spirit, if we are going to be faithful to the values of Tasaki Sensei and our Japanese organization, then we need to ensure that the martial arts, the literary arts, and the fine arts are a part of our lives. If we cannot become proficient in arts other than Karatedo, then at the very least we need to cultivate a deep appreciation of them.

[i] Omi, Akihiro: *Classical Fighting Arts*: Vol 3. No. 2 (Issue #52) Pages 48-51

[ii] Omi, Akihiro: *Classical Fighting Arts*: Vol 3. No. 2 (Issue #52) Page 48

[iii] Wilson, William Scott: *Ideals of the Samurai*: Page 28

[iv] Wilson, William Scott: *Ideals of the Samurai*: Page 28

[v] Yuzan, Daidoji (Translated by William Scott Wilson): *Budoshoshinshu* Pages 51-55

[vi] Wilson, William Scott: *Ideals of the Samurai*: Page 28

[vii] Musashi, Miyamoto (Translated by Victor Harris): *A Book of Five Rings*: Page 17

[viii] Musashi, Miyamoto (Translated by Victor Harris): *A Book of Five Rings*: Pages 23 – 32

[ix] McCarthy Patrick: *Bubishi*: page 52

[x] Wm. Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur L. Tiedemann: *Sources of Japanese Tradition*:
<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/japan/kokutai.pdf> Page 4