

Seeking Sav

How modern budoka are reinvigorating samurai tradition

In the South of the good ol' USA, you can expect to find a few people horsing around paddocks in Civil War army uniforms at certain times of year — but in West Virginia and North Carolina, there are some whose battle gear of preference is that of the samurai. In England, too, folks are re-enacting famous historical battles of feudal Japan, complete with authentically attired ronin and ninja. Turns out, everywhere from the samurai clans' country of origin to all the way Down Under, people are getting right into the spirit, and the outfits, of Japan's old warrior class. Here, we take a look at a few of them, including some who train in armour to better understand their bujutsu technique.

ARMoured TRAINING

Shihan Karl Koch, a student of Soke Masaaki Hatsumi's Bujinkan ninjutsu system for 33 years, is a big believer in linking the past to the present through armoured training. Members of his Hidden Mountain Bujinkan Dojo located in Durham, North Carolina, experienced a unique opportunity to try this during a seminar jointly instructed by Koch and Shihan Rob Renner, a long-time resident of Japan and student of Bujinkan leader Soke Masaaki Hatsumi. To explore the context in which many traditional techniques originated, students donned faithfully replicated traditional Japanese armour, and, to provide a modern comparison, also tried their technique while wearing military flak jackets and helmets. Their aim: to step back in time to review the origins of Bujinkan movement and project it forward into the modern world.

"The results of this exploration could only be described as eye-opening," says Koch. "Students gained insight

into how traditional armour presented a certain context, which resulted in traditional movements and techniques designed to exploit the armour itself. In turn, understanding context gave them a greater sense of when and how to adapt movement and technique as the context changed."

Wearing the samurai armour, students also discovered that many of the traditional techniques that appeared difficult or invalid when unarmoured suddenly became practical. Once validated in this original context, the techniques' key principles were then explored by the two shihans to bring them back to life in a modern setting, through performing them both without armour and in modern battle gear. This comparison of historical and modern context gave students a clearer understanding of the tradition and its application in the present.

"Such training is vital if budo is to survive and adapt to a modern world," says Koch. "And until recently, such

training was difficult to obtain, since armour was both difficult and expensive to obtain."

Now, says Koch, this link to the past has become available in the present thanks to companies manufacturing high-quality, accurate reproductions of traditional Japanese armour.

Bujinkan students are not the only ones to have discovered the value of armoured training: over in Dayton, Ohio, at the Gi Yu dojo, Sensei Sukh Sandhu is on a similar path, using "ideas from the past to serve the present".

Studying an "old" Japanese bujutsu system for over 26 years now, Sandhu uses *yoroi* (armour) to discover more about the art's originators and "the techniques they employed to wage war and carry on a confident peace".

"This warrior and his methods and code have intrigued me for as long as I can recall, but never more than at this point in my training and life," says Sandhu. "Having multiple ranks in various arts and



murai



having had the wonderful opportunities to train with many martial arts masters and legends of all disciplines, I have come to the conclusion that all martial forms have similarities and are related, regardless of the name on the top of the scroll.”

Lately, Sensei Sandhu and his students have been studying one of their *koryu* (classical) lineages, where the expectation was that most movements would be employed while wearing armour. Kukishin Ryu or ‘The School of The Nine Demon Gods’ — “The name suggests some psychological warfare, using a fearsome name to scare your enemies,” says Sandhu — is a school that dates back to about 1329, although it was then called Kishin Dakentaijutsu, according to the *Nippon no Bugei Ryu-Ha Daijiten*.

“It actually suggests there are several branches of this lineage and several heads of these schools,” Sandhu explains. “The branch we study comprises jujutsu, sword (long/short), spear, glave, staff.”

In the three different versions of the technique shown here (see the first, in armour, opposite), Sandhu references the jujutsu portion or Dakentaijutsu scrolls. The technique, called *sei on*, roughly meaning ‘to create something new’, is applied while wearing armour, as it was originally meant to be, then as it is now studied at the Gi Yu dojo, and finally in a modern jujutsu application.

“The technique was originally performed wearing armour, so in this lineage you must use low hip movement; power comes from the legs,” says Sandhu. “Attacking pressure points and ‘finishing’ the opponent is crucial.”

JAPANESE HISTORY IN THE UK

Muso Shugyo is a unique school of martial arts and ‘living history’ in Harlow, Essex, England. Founded in 1994 by Mike Graham, the school

studies the samurai arts from the 1400s through to modern-day styles. Graham, who first began training in Australia in 1973, has studied the samurai and their arts, fighting skills and history for 41 years.

“I first found these arts after visiting a ninjutsu school in Japan while on leave from the army and found my passion for things Japanese,” Graham recalls. “I have never separated the ninjutsu styles from the samurai as most ninja (*shinobi*) fought alongside the samurai and were often samurai themselves.”

The name of his school is from the pilgrimage (*muso shugyo*) that many samurai took in their lives. “The idea was for them to travel Japan and learn new styles, challenge themselves as well as find enlightenment and wisdom — all the better to make them employable and wise in their advice to the lords,” says Graham.

Muso Shugyo Ryu students study nine different sword styles, from the battlefield techniques of the warring periods to the modern *iaijutsu*, and employ all types of katana that may have been used. They also study the samurai’s other weapons of choice, the *yari* (spear), *naginata* (pole arm) and archer’s *kyudo* (bow) along with unarmed combat, both with armour and without.

“Strategy and tactics are also a big part of the syllabus and the principles can be used in all of modern day life,” says Graham. “Growing as a human being is a big part of the objective of the school, from younger members straining to deal with school issues and exams, to retirees who want to do something completely different with their lives.

“Understanding is a key part of training and to truly know what you are doing and why is just as important as the technique itself. The history also allows you to understand where it came from and is studied intensively.”

Muso Shugyo Ryu is also involved with events throughout Britain, giving talks and demonstrations to schools, museums and other martial arts groups.

Graham has trained many established Japanese martial artists over the years, with many making the trip to the UK to continue their studies, and he has worked closely with the film industry to help prepare actors for the role of samurai —

“Not just the fighting, but how to dress, act and behave like a samurai,” says Graham. “The school has many actors that attend regularly to increase the chances of getting parts. The samurai way of training to be employable is still alive today.”

Graham also sells Japanese samurai armour and supplies armour, costume and weaponry for film and television projects, as well as advising on fight choreography and scene setting.

JUJUTSU IN ARMOUR >>



1 Opponents wearing armour are in standard grappling mode, gripping where they can.



The *shidachi* (attacker) steps to the left and slides his right thumb under the *uchidachi*'s (the receiver's) face plate (*menpo*) to attack the cheek bone area, while his left hand applies pressure to the back of the opponent's right elbow.



3 Shidachi then steps in with low hips (due to the weight of the armour) and a lot of leg power to hit into Uchidachi's right leg, and performs an *osoto-gake* trip...



5 ... following the opponent to the ground and pinning him with the knee as Shidachi draws his *kobuto-wari* (helmet-crusher) to finish his foe.

侍 甲冑 Japanese Armor



Authentic Reproduction Samurai Armor

Formed in 2001, Little Star Enterprises has been the world's leading online reseller of authentic reproduction Japanese Samurai Armor. Each suit is painstakingly handcrafted by experienced armourers who use traditional as well as some modern methods & materials. Using traditional samurai armor in modern day training helps you gain greater insight into your tradition and training. Our armor is made specially for martial artists and private collectors who demand authenticity, detail, quality & affordability!

Traditional Armor for the Modern Warrior

Discount Code: BLMAG10



Our armory was formed with the belief of quality over quantity. This is why each piece of armor is skilfully handcrafted at the time of order. All of our armor is laminated with iron plates, combat ready and CUSTOMIZABLE!



Okegawa-do gusoku

Kozan

Tanko

www.Japanese-Armor.com

USA TEL: 941-929-1804



Owning Samurai Armour

BY MICHAEL J. KANE, PH.D

If looking to get your own samurai armour, consider these key points:

1. UNDERSTAND YOUR REASON FOR BUYING IT

Whether you are part of a reenacting group, practise martial arts in armour or just want an historical symbol for display, be clear on the reason. Knowing how your armour will be used and stored will help guide your choices.

2. BUY ACCURATE REPRODUCTIONS

Reproductions made in the ancient ways may cost more, but they best honour the Japanese traditions and craftsmanship. I suggest finding companies who pride themselves on accuracy. Remember, you are buying armour, not a costume.

3. MAKE SURE IT WILL FIT

Many companies state that their armour will fit 'most buyers' — meaning a medium-sized man. My advice, pay the extra for a custom fit. Little Star Enterprises, for example, only charges a small fee for custom fit and requires multiple body measures (it reminded me of being measured for a new tuxedo).

4. WILL YOU WEAR IT?

At some point you will probably want to don the armour. If you do, enjoy

the ceremony and ritual of putting on the pieces. This process will probably take 20 or 30 minutes and make sure you have a friend to help. One can truly appreciate the craftsmanship, the weight of the armour, and the endurance samurai warriors must have had. Notice the art, the juxtaposition of form and function.

5. TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS

Showing photographs is easier than wearing the armour or taking people to where it is displayed. However, respect the traditions — your armour deserves more dignity than a 'selfie' provides.

6. STRIVE FOR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

With public appearances or in pictures, don't mix genres. The samurai's traditional sword was a katana, not an English broadsword! As for other history fouls, I once saw samurai armour displayed in a Chinese restaurant. Your samurai armour is not a Halloween costume, so if you wear the armour or show pictures, know a little of the history to give to others. Become a diplomat of the ancient ways.



The club recently completed filming for two episodes of a UK TV series on 'Ancient Special Operations', covering two episodes in Japan's history: 'The Raid of the 47 Ronin' and 'Shinobi of the 1600s'.

The 47 Ronin story is familiar to many: In 1703, Japan was a land of peace, with samurai serving as civil servants and fight instructors, often training for a war that would never come. After an event at court where Lord Asano was forced

to commit suicide, the serving samurai launch a campaign unique in its time for vengeance against Lord Kira, who caused the incident. The raid carried out on Lord Kira's home by the 47 Ronin (masterless samurai) has gone down in history as a unique and effective raid by a small band of warriors heavily outnumbered. All of the club students took part in the fight scenes alongside Japanese actors in all kinds of armour and costume.

CLASSICAL JUJUTSU >>



Opponents are in standard grappling mode, gripping each other's sleeve and lapel.



Shidachi steps left and drives his thumb into Uchidachi's cheek as the other hand applies pressure to the back of his foe's right elbow...



...then he steps in with low hips, using his leg power to hit and sit into Uchidachi's right leg to 'break' the knee and perform an osoto-gake throw. Driving the head back...



...Shidachi follows his foe down and maintains pressure on the cheek.

MODERN JUJUTSU >>



Opponents are in standard grappling mode, gripping each other's sleeve and lapel.

The Shidachi moves out to the left to 'hide' and drives his right hand into Uchidachi's neck/face, while his left hand applies pressure to the back of Uchidachi's right elbow...



...then Shidachi closes in, gripping the cloth on Uchidachi's right shoulder and continuing to unbalance him as Shidachi steps through and sweeps out his opponent's near leg with *osoto-gari*.



Controlling the arm and pushing on Uchidachi's head as he falls, Shidachi drives his right shin into his foe's ribs and rolls him onto his side...



...then steps over his head, locking out his opponent's elbow against his body as Shidachi starts to press his pelvis forward to apply *juji-gatame* (arm-bar).

“Strategy and tactics are also a big part of the syllabus and the principles can be used in all of modern day life”

‘Shinobi of the 1600s’, of course, was all about ninja. “They have always been shown as invisible, evil assassins in history — but the truth is revealing,” says Graham.

“Working alongside samurai, the ninja were key in the history and peace of Japan.”

The TV episode retold the story of Hattori Hanzo, a shinobi leader who led a raid to rescue the future Shogun of Japan and his family and get them safely across enemy lines.

“Ambushed and harassed at every stage, the ninja succeeded in bringing Ieyasu Tokugawa to safety,” Graham explains. “The Tokugawa clan went on to rule Japan for the next 250 years.

“In this episode, Muso Shugyo Ryu [students] really showed their skills in a mass battlefield armoured conflict — no actors were harmed in the filming, although the armour took a few dents!”

THE SAMURAI PHILOSOPHER

Michael J Kane, a municipal court judge in Gilbert and criminal justice professor at West Virginia State University, first saw ‘real’ samurai armour in 2012. While visiting Washington, DC to view the cherry blossoms (a very Japanese tradition that those familiar with *bushido* will understand), he discovered the National Geographic Museum's exhibit called ‘Samurai: Warriors Transformed’.

“The displays included several suits of armour and artefacts; most memorable was a 16th century helmet belonging to Minamoto no Ostada, with an antler crest and cherry blossom embellishments,” recalls Kane. “What touched my conscience the most was a translation of the inscription inside the helmet: ‘When the time comes for service, the crouching dragon moves.’”

It was at this moment Kane

knew he wanted his own samurai armour.

“It was a moment of clarity, a matter of symbolism. Like many practitioners of martial arts, philosophers of wisdom, keepers of ancient ways, I practise modern-day Bushido,” he says. “No, I am not a religious fanatic, my ‘bushido-ism’ did not replace my religion, but like many practitioners of the ancient arts, my moral philosophy is greatly influenced by the ways of the samurai. Perhaps today's world needs ancient heroes.”

As a teacher of criminal justice ethics at West Virginia State, Kane believes he is one of very few in such a role in the Western world to include lessons of bushido among the other mainstream philosophical paradigms of the Greeks, Aristotle, Kantian ethics and utilitarianism.

Having generally learned very little about Asian philosophy in school, Kane's students are often intrigued by

the concepts of bushido and how they apply to our times.

“I hold sacred the samurai warrior code, and in a respectful sense, I keep it alive in college students’ moral development or, at a minimum, at least in their curriculum. The armour is a symbol of my dedication,” says the professor.

Kane displays his armour in his home study “properly” in a sitting yet ready position.

“Exceptional men in history stored their armour in this manner, waiting to be called upon to serve something greater than themselves, to serve as role models for the next generation... Men who will stand up and say, I will take this responsibility, the honour of serving is mine,” Kane muses.

“Owning samurai armour inspires this greatness. I begin to understand Minamoto no Ostada, as he inscribed in his helmet, ‘When the time comes for service, the crouching dragon moves.’” ■