

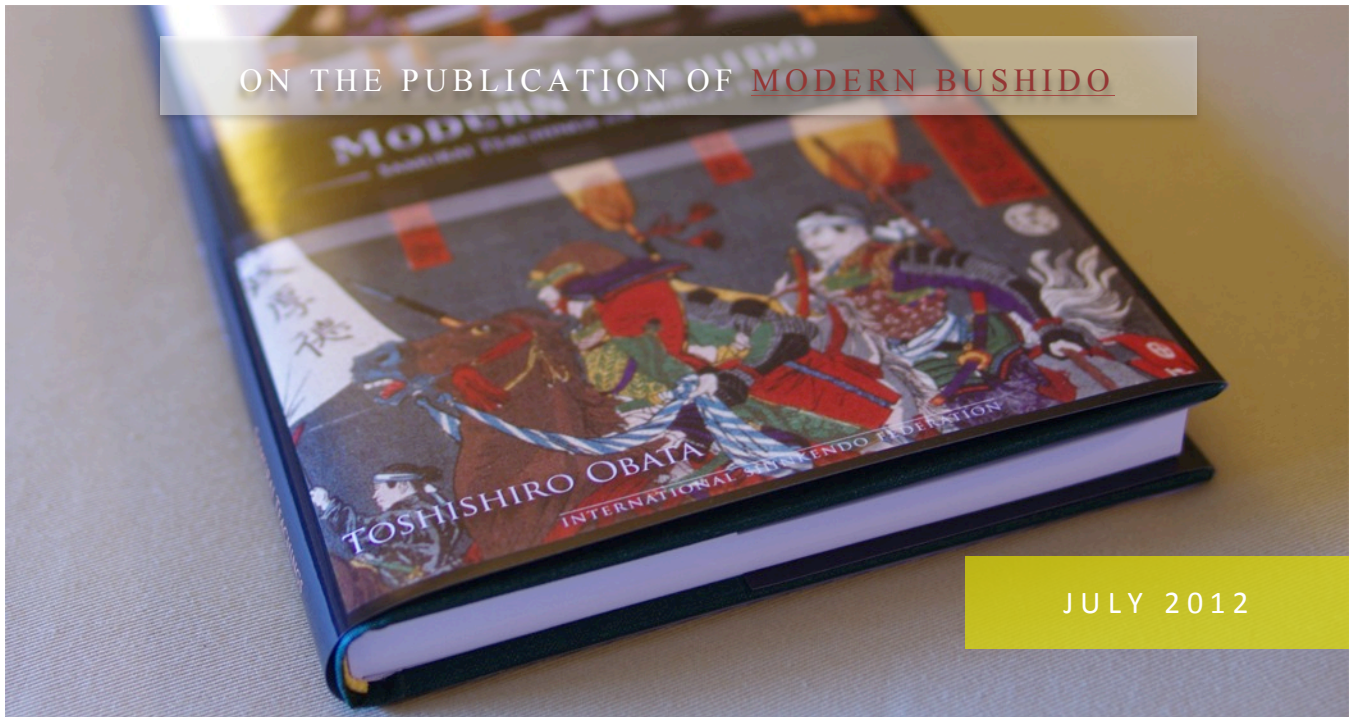

INTERNATIONAL SHINKENDO FEDERATION  
**NEWSLETTER**  
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国際真剣道連盟



## ON THE PUBLICATION OF MODERN BUSHIDO



**M**y new book, *Modern Bushido*, has recently been published and is now available. The book is not technical, but is more philosophical in nature, and provides my thoughts and background on budō. I would like everyone to read this book, as it will give you a good foundation in budō and swordsmanship. It is important to understand why we study budō and swordsmanship in the modern era, and how to utilize what we learn not only in the dōjō but in our homes and at work as well. I hope it is a book that will give you direction and guidance in your training and life.

I have taught for 45 years, and have held 245 seminars around the world. I have always tried to explain the details and the technical aspects of the techniques, but I have always had difficulty explaining past the technique to the more philosophical aspects of *Jinsei Shinkendo*.



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### EDITORS

Yoko Obata  
Nicholas Lauridsen

### AUTHORS

Andika  
Stanley Ang  
Rocco Lo Bianco  
Trevis Crane  
Grainne Delaney  
Karl Hawkins  
Chen Xuan Kai  
Nicholas Lauridsen

Michael Mason  
Yue Ning  
Howard Quick  
Shimbukan Indonesia  
Jesus M. Tamesis, Jr.  
Ian Teo  
Jeffery Tie  
Mark Weiner  
Lim Zeng Yang  
Yong Jie Yu

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Blitz Magazine  
Bobo Boom  
Cheng Cheng  
Corinna Crane  
Mischa de Brouwer  
Yue Ning  
Michishiro Obata  
Shimbukan Singapore

I believe that this book contains the information that I have always wanted to explain and teach. The true meaning of *Jinsei Shinkendo* is not simply to train hard, but to live life seriously and sincerely, and to truly incorporate the foundations and theories of swordsmanship and budō into your life.

There are many books on bushidō that are available at the moment. However, *Modern Bushido* will help you understand and see budō from a modern perspective, rather than a strictly historical one. I believe this book will be relevant to martial artists and non-martial artists alike, as swordsmanship can be the foundation for all lives and for anyone's way of living.

I would like to thank all the students who have helped with the book, as well as my family, and especially Honbu instructor Sensei Nicholas Lauridsen. 🌸

*Editor's note:* Purchases can be made through the Shinkendo.com website. Instructors are recommended to take orders for their students and contact the Honbu Dōjō directly via phone or e-mail (orders@shinkendo.com) to save on shipping and other costs.



## MODERN BUSHIDO RELEASE NOTES

EVEN A SINGLE MEETING with Obata-kaiso is enough to impress upon students of Shinkendo and Aikibujutsu – and perhaps equally upon the uninitiated – that the study of the martial arts consists of more than technique and strategy. When we choose to study these arts, we are often compelled by not only the quality of the teachings but of the teacher as an individual – his or her virtues and dispositions, approach to living, ideology, and so on. Consequently, much of the teaching is received while in seiza, and sometimes unwittingly, through oral transmission, or *kuden* (口伝), in which the philosophical and ideological dimensions of the art are taught. Long-time students and instructors are well aware of this, and I think recognize that these teachings are imparted with no less weight or consideration than the technical substance of the art.

With the publication of *Modern Bushido*, Obata-kaiso's philosophical teachings are now available to a general readership, systematized and formalized with the same rigor and clarity as the technique we study. I am pleased to have been involved in the production of this book, and would like to thank Obata-kaiso and his family for the opportunity to help bring *Modern Bushido* into print form. –NL





# SIGNS OF SUMMER

AT THE HONBU DŌJŌ

THE HONBU DŌJŌ proudly unveiled our new exterior signs in June. No longer disguised as a karaoke bar and restaurant, the Honbu Dōjō is now getting curious visitors stopping by daily.

BY Michael Mason • Honbu Dōjō



The centerpiece is our main sign, double-sided at the top of the building signpost, visible from the sidewalk in both directions and illuminated at night.

Mrs. Obata and Obata-kaiso spearheaded the effort, bringing in drafts of designs in hand-drawn form, which Yukishiro-sōke and several students then recreated with computers to test in color. Design helpers included Nicholas Lauridsen, Bryan Costanich, Bryan's friend Junko Suzuki (a professional designer – special thanks to Ms. Suzuki for donating her time), and myself.

After hundreds of design options were considered, Obata-kaiso created our final design, which incorporated elements of many of the previous ideas. Mrs. Obata then arranged with a local sign-maker for production and professional installation. The results are outstanding.

A smaller sign was also made for above the exterior doorway, replacing the old banner. (For those of you who will miss ducking your head on the way into Honbu, you may continue to do so if you wish, but it is no longer necessary.) This sign is also illuminated, and makes a very nice, professional impression as you enter the dōjō.

Thanks to all who assisted in bringing this important improvement to completion. We are all very pleased with the result.

Jinsei Shinkendo! ☀

## THE FIRST THING PART II



By Trevis Crane • Sojokan Dōjō

*For Part I of this article, see previous issue (#54)*

IN the last newsletter, I discussed the idea that through Shinkendo we are in fact communicating with our partners and that what we communicate should be chosen with conscious intent. However, intent is an intermediate stage. It is not a mode of thinking or being that forms the foundation of our experiences. It is instead a meta-mode of operation, a construct if you will, that helps shape our response to environmental stimuli.

If you look at any incoming stimulus, you'll do one of two things: you'll either not notice it or you will respond or react to it in some fashion. This suggests that there is a sensory threshold below

which a given stimulus does not register in your consciousness, but for every single stimulus above that threshold, you respond in some way. The responses are varied in manifestation, but fall into two broad categories: automatic and considered. An automatic response occurs before your decision-making mind engages, while a considered response occurs after you think about an appropriate action and then take it.

For a given stimulus that you encounter repeatedly, you can train your response to be automatic or considered. An interesting example of a trained, automatic response is filtering. As a baby, each new stimulus is considered. Is it painful? Does it make you happy? Is it loud? As the baby encounters the same,

non-threatening stimulus again and again, s/he learns to ignore it, to filter it out. This is called habituation, and it results in an automatic, greatly reduced (almost to nothing) response to mundane stimuli that we have learned are not pertinent to the situation at hand, whatever it may be, and this reduction in response happens very quickly.

Filters are useful in an evolutionary sense, because stimuli that are commonplace no longer demand attention that is better devoted to focusing on things that may hurt you. Thus the ability to automatically ignore certain things allows you to concentrate on life-threatening or otherwise important things. We use it today in much the same way, but our "important" things are, for example, working on a PowerPoint slide at work while people are talking outside my office.

Most of us have mastered the art of filtering to such a degree that we are capable of categorizing incoming stimuli almost immediately as either unimportant (unlikely to significantly impact you in either a positive or negative fashion) or as requiring our direct attention for a considered response. Overwhelmingly our days are composed of stimuli that fall into the perceived-to-be unimportant category, resulting in a mode of interaction with one's environment that is commonly referred to as "auto-pilot."

On auto-pilot, we glide through the day allowing the standard inputs to wash past us without a significant amount of consideration. This effectively raises the threshold for a sensory input to really grab our attention to something well above the threshold set by our physical ability to see, hear, smell, etc. As a

**There really is only one way to do this. We must open our eyes again. We must unclog our ears. We must remember what it is like to hear or see something for the first time.**

result, in many situations that could be educational, or could provide greater insight into the people or environment around us, we end up only interfacing with the surface veneer and miss many opportunities for a considerably richer experience.

What does this have to do with Shinkendo? Simply put – everything.

Restricting our discussion to the dojo, we are there for many reasons, but central to the dojo is the purpose of learning. Learning something new is perform an activity that requires the incoming stimuli to exceed our threshold for consideration. Thus the habituation to unimportant stimuli that we've cultivated so successfully through our lives up to the point where you walk into the dojo for the first time is now the biggest obstacle we must overcome. There really is only one way to do this. We must open our eyes again. We must unclog our ears. We must remember what it is

like to hear or see something for the first time. We must become an observer first, and a speaker or doer second. This is the first thing.

As an observer, you will see how others behave in various situations. If you are a new student, the examples set by your senpai will be your best source of information for how you should behave. This includes everything from entering the dojo to performing a given technique. If you are a more senior student,

this would include observing the newer students to see if they are in need of help, are lost, or maybe just need encouragement. And if you are an instructor or shibucho, then it should be all these and more, noting which new students are observing others (or not), which senior students are observing the new students (or not), and so on.

But observation, as a passive activity, is insufficient. If all we do is watch, without thinking critically about what we see or hear, then it is much the same as if we were to try to learn math through rote memorization without ever understanding what meaning the symbols convey. Thus, at its core, observation should be an active pursuit in which you consume the incoming information, compare it to your own experience and behavior, then use the output of this to inform your subsequent actions. ☀



## A NEW LEAF

By Howard Quick  
Shinkendo Australia

WELL, after way too much “bad” in my life recently (by “recently” I mean over the past few years) – culminating in the death a couple of days ago of Bella (one of my cats), whom I nursed and patted as she took her last couple of breaths – I’ve decided to try to turn over a new leaf. After being told over and over again that I’m “so negative” (which ironically in itself is negative), I’m trying to be a much more positive person – and it *is* difficult.

This morning, my colleague and good friend Belinda and I attended the first day of our “Dual Diploma in Business and Management” course held in Melbourne, provided for by our boss Mark, who on Thursday night participated in a CEO sleep-out event held to raise money and

awareness for the many homeless in Melbourne. As we walked into McDonalds on Elizabeth St., I looked at a guy sitting on the footpath at the entrance. “Can you spare a dollar, mate?” I think he said, to which I replied with my normal response, “Nah, mate, sorry,” and kept walking. But something was different: a million things suddenly ran through my mind and I became distracted.

While Belinda asked me what I wanted and placed the order for hotcakes, coffee, and hot chocolate, I was thinking back to the time my Shinkendo teacher and founder, Obata Toshishiro-kaiso, related an anecdote about his daughter Yoko questioning him about giving ten dollars to a homeless guy. The homeless guy asked, “Can I have

five dollars?” “No,” Obata-kaiso replied, “But you can have ten dollars.” Yoko asked, “Dad, why did you give that guy ten dollars when he only asked for five?” “Because with five dollars he can’t buy anything much to eat, but with ten he can get a meal” was his response. Another time, he parked his car near the dōjō and a homeless guy proposed, “If you give me a dollar, I’ll keep an eye on your car for you.” So he gave the guy twenty dollars, and the guy looked after his car like it belonged to the president – that time and many others. I also thought about the time another friend of mine, Gene, told me about a friend of his, who refused to give money to a homeless guy when asked for a dollar, but instead took the guy into a McDonalds and sat with him and

bought him a meal.

So as Belinda ordered our breakfast and all of these things were running through my mind, I walked over to the doorway and looked at the guy sitting there (still getting the same response from everyone else to his question) and thought... well, I don't really know what I thought, actually. I then went and ordered two Sausage and Egg McMuffins. Belinda remarked, "Thought you didn't want anything else?" I said, "I changed my mind." Belinda picked up the rest of our meal and went upstairs, but I took the McMuffins and headed outside. I said to the guy, "Mate, I won't give you money, but would you like something to eat?" and handed him the package. He said, "Cheers, mate." I walked back inside, sat down, and ate my breakfast. Belinda asked, "Where're the muffins?" I replied, "Oh, they weren't for me. I gave them to the guy out the front."

It's strange: I didn't do this to try to make myself feel good; and it really didn't make me feel good. I just thought it was a good thing to do for someone who looked like they were having it tough. When I look at people who dress funny (I'm one of them, wearing my dōgi everywhere; strangely, nobody has ever told me I look stupid) or people who do things I don't agree with, etc., I try to remember something I read somewhere a while ago: "Everybody, regardless of upbringing and beliefs, is entitled to their dignity." 🌸

## FOR THOSE WHO TAUGHT ME TO PROTECT



By Yue Ning • USC Shinkendo Club & Honbu Dōjō

WHENEVER I think about the Shinsengumi, a quote from Dickens comes to my mind:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness..."

The Bakumatsu (1853-67) was a period like that. A new era was coming. All old establishments had to be torn down. Commoners struggled to survive. Heroes forged ahead in the direction of hope and the future.

It was a volatile time when the Shinsengumi was formed and

served as a special police force in Kyoto, acting as a protector of the Edo government, taking "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians" as their mission.

Against all odds, this elite group of samurai stood at the forefront of the rolling wheel of the new age, holding the flag of "誠", wearing light blue haori, calling themselves "the wolves of Mibu," and pointing their swords toward anybody who dared to touch their beliefs or the Tokugawa government behind them. They fought against the world with pride, even after the Tokugawa Shogunate abandoned them, holding their flag straight up toward the sky until the last moment, just trying to protect the utopia they wished their country to become.



Swords were their only partners.

Sometimes I cannot help to ask: How many times did they have no choice but to hold their swords tightly and fight against their enemies? How many times did they lack sleep because they could not put their swords down for fear of ambush? How many times did they parry attacks with their swords just to survive on the battlefield? And how many times did they draw their swords and point them at those who they defined as rebels?

They risked everything for a future they couldn't even see.

"Why fight for no hope of success?" For years, I wish I could have pleaded with Hijikata Toshizo: "Why not stay away from all these wars

and battles and live someplace else quietly and peacefully?"

However, at the same time, deeply in my heart, I know I have no need to ask, since I can already imagine him wiping his katana and saying, "I hope that maybe, through my efforts, I can protect this world and the people who believe in me, in my way, with my sword."

These were the Shinsengumi, and such was their unwavering belief. And that was why they drew their swords and fought, even when nobody else was there to support them in the end.

Years have passed since the last Shinsengumi samurai past away. And today's world has already

become one where no new idea must be claimed and protected by violence. But I still admire and appreciate those who could not be written into history as heroes, as they taught me to believe that I must always fight to protect the values in my heart, and draw my sword for that reason only.

Holding this belief, I started my Shinkendo swordsmanship training. And thanks to Shinkendo, I believe I will someday have the ability to protect those I value by the sword, not only in my hand but also in my heart.

Jinsei Shinkendo. Fight on! ☀





W

e would like to express our deep, heartfelt thanks to have had the opportunity to attend the Shinkendo seminar by Obata-kaiso this past November. This visit to Singapore was his first visit to Southeast Asia.

The material imparted during the seminar was plentiful, and some of it was new to us. All of it was explained in great detail, including variations. We loved the repetition of the instructions, which served to help us remember most of what was taught. For the rest, we still have to look at our notes! Besides that, this seminar made us understand the importance of spirit and energy in training.

Obata-kaiso was a person of great detail in preparing the material he taught us during the seminar. He would not hesitate to discipline us if we made mistakes, and corrected us whenever necessary. We were taught to focus and at the same time pay attention to safety procedures. Kaiso was also a likeable person and often joked with us, making us feel comfortable around with him.

We would like to say that Shinkendo is truly a sword art form founded by a truly remarkable martial artist, and we considered ourselves to be fortunate to be trained by a true Japanese swordsmanship master.

On behalf of Shinkendo Shimbukan of Indonesia, we would like to thank Kaiso for his teachings and guidance. Dōmo arigatō gozaimashita! 🌸





BY Andika

FIRST OF ALL, I want to say thank you to Obata-kaiso for the passion and the knowledge that he shared with us during the seminar. And also I want to say thank you to my friends in Shinkendo Indonesia, to Jeffrey-sensei, and especially to my sensei, Nurham-sensei, for all of their support.

On the first day, I came to the dojo with my group from Indonesia. We arrived early, and saw many participants from other countries; we introduced ourselves to participants from Singapore, the Philippines, and Hungary. As we waited for Obata-kaiso to arrive, my heart was full of all sorts of questions, such as “What does Obata-kaiso look like?” “What is his method of teaching?” “Does he have a temper?” and so on. But when I saw Obata-kaiso walk through the door, I saw that he was

smiling at all of us, and when I offered my greetings to him, he replied kindly and gently. At that moment, I knew that this would be a good seminar.

During the seminar, Obata-kaiso taught us with great passion and in a very detailed manner. He did not want any of us to return to our countries with any misunderstanding about any technique in Shinkendo. He wants all of us to be perfect, and that is what I like the most about his method. Also, Obata-kaiso not only trained our physicals skills, but our spirit as well, especially through kiai – *ei, ya, to*. He said repeatedly, “More loud, more energy!” because skill without spirit is a waste. But keeping a balance between physical skill and spirit will generate enormous power.

Obata-kaiso also demonstrated his skill in tameshigiri, and I was so amazed – his speed, his power, his accuracy, his cutting angle, everything was so perfect. Also, he trained us in various kata, such as *ichi no tachi battōhō* and the *tanrengata*, and showed us examples of the routine training he conducts at Honbu, so that we do not get confused when we visit the Honbu Dōjō in Los Angeles someday.

At the end of the seminar, we were really exhausted, but we were satisfied as well. There is so much for us to learn, and so much to memorize, and we hope that we will not forget a single thing that Obata-kaiso taught us.

Finally, I want to say thank you again to Obata-kaiso – I wish to meet you again next year. ☀



By Stanley Ang • Shimbukan Singapore

BY THE END of the first day, I could see that all of our cups were already full.

I have had the honor of participating in the recent Shinkendo seminar in Singapore and getting to know Obata-kaiso better from two vantage points: the first was Obata-kaiso, our sensei; the second was Obata-kaiso as a person.

There were many things that I experienced and took away from the seminar. Foremost was the expression and honing of positive energy through *kiai* in class. This energy is used initially to develop our Shinkendo technique, but the larger idea is to link this positive spirit with our lives.

The training was hard, but it was also enlightening. Obata-kaiso not

only taught us new techniques and reviewed our basics, but sought to open our minds with exercises that cultivate our creativity.

The short chats that I had with Obata-kaiso during dinner and the drives back to the hotel were most enlightening: one point he mentioned was that, as Shinkendoka, we should exercise a positive spirit, set high goals, and strive to attain them, but also ensure that our goals are "not just for the sake of improving one's own life, but reflect a person who contributes to society and considers the wellbeing of others." Obata-kaiso tells all of us to use our positive energy to build and maintain our lives and our relationships with the people around us in a positive way.

Let us then practice Shinkendo



honestly, sincerely, and in earnest so that we may together, with an open mind and heart, hone our techniques correctly and maintain a spirit of *katsujinken* (活人剣), the sword that saves lives, and therefore build positive energy for ourselves and for society in general.

Jinsei Shinkendo! ☀



BY Jeffery Tie  
Shimbukan Singapore

**WHEN I FIRST** started learning Shinkendo, Lonnie Oaks-sensei was my instructor. Lonnie-sensei's dream was to invite Obata-kaiso to visit Singapore, but circumstances only permitted me to realize his dream this past November.

WHEN WE CELEBRATED Keiko Hajime in early January 2011, my *ichinen* (wish) was to plan and host a Shinkendo seminar that would be conducted by Obata-kaiso. Planning started relatively early with the logistics: arrangements were made to secure the use of a suitably sized hall, and also a suitable hotel for Kaiso's stay.

As the seminar dates approached, I could not help but wonder whether Murphy's Law would strike!

I was waiting for Kaiso at the airport when his flight landed at 3:30 AM local time, but it was actually still dinnertime in Los Angeles, so I took Kaiso for an early morning breakfast – or was it late evening supper?

Kaiso needed some time to adjust

to the time difference between LA and Singapore. During this period of rest, we took the opportunity to show him around Singapore, and he had the opportunity to sample the local culinary delights!

I'd like to share my views and impressions of the Singapore seminar on three different levels: as a student, as an instructor, and as the host organizer.

### **As a Student**

I previously attended two seminars hosted by Howard Quick-sensei in Melbourne Australia, in 2007 and 2009. After each of Obata-kaiso's seminars, I came back to Singapore filled to the brim with new ideas and new techniques.

2011 in Singapore proved no different.

We started the seminar with a Thursday evening session, followed up with full-day sessions Friday through Monday, which marked the end of the seminar. Thus it amounted to four full days of intensive training. Kaiso taught us the material that he covered in all the seminars he held this year when he visited England, France, and Hungary. This was new content for us, and for the first few hours or so many of us were lost, coping with the new terminology and then trying to relate the new terms to the appropriate movements. As the seminar progressed, we slowly improved. Kaiso also reviewed our knowledge and our execution of the basics, for which I am personally

grateful. He stressed the importance of *kiai* as well, and highlighted the importance of maintaining a high level of energy during class.

Two of the Singapore students took copious notes during the break periods, and I commissioned a video cameraman to record the seminar as a permanent record of the techniques taught to us by Kaiso. This will be an important tool to maintain the integrity of Kaiso's instruction, because if we were to rely on memory and recollection, then there would be room for error, as what we perceived may not necessarily be what was actually taught.

I will treasure this learning experience with Obata-kaiso, and will continue to work at improving myself, both in Shinkendo as well as in the philosophy of Jinsei Shinkendo.

### As an Instructor

Watching Obata-kaiso conduct this seminar was an eye-opening experience for me. Obata-kaiso holds high standards, and expects all Shinkendo students to aim high and try their best in the belief that excellence in their Shinkendo technique will eventually result in excellence in other areas of life. The defining moment for me was when Kaiso talked about setting high standards in order to achieve excellence. I must admit that the standard I accepted as an instructor for the Singapore dōjō was not what it should be, and for that I do accept responsibility. This seminar

has now redefined the bar, and I intend to demand and expect higher quality from all students at the Singapore dōjō.

Kaiso is an excellent teacher. He can be demanding, strict, sometimes a bit intimidating, but there is always an underlying touch of humor that makes his seminars so very enjoyable.

It is my intention to emulate the essence of Kaiso's teaching methods, and to express it in my own way in order to improve and upgrade the Singapore dōjō.

### As Seminar Organizer

This was the very first attempt at organizing and hosting a Shinkendo seminar in Singapore, and as such there was much that I did not know. Luckily for me, David Balogh of Hungary attended the Singapore seminar and helped me tremendously, as he had experience in seeing how the European seminars were organized.

Kaiso was kind enough to suggest areas of improvement for future seminars.

The Singapore seminar was deemed an international seminar because I invited Nurham-sensei and his students from Indonesia, and Butch Tamesis-sensei and his students from the Philippines. In addition, David Balogh from Hungary attended. Kaiso suggests that the national flags of all the participants should be displayed together with the Shinkendo nobori. This will immediately raise the gravity of the seminar. So, at the next seminar, I



will ask the international dōjō to bring their national flags!

Kaiso also knows from experience that international students may not be able to participate fully in the seminar, and some may need to depart midway through the seminar. Therefore, he suggests that a Saturday evening post-training get-together would be a good way to improve rapport between the different international dōjō.

Kaiso would also like a profile of all participating students. A picture, along with a brief description of the student, will help him in associating the written name with a face and profile description.

In closing, let me say that hosting this seminar was a very rewarding and enriching experience, not only for myself but for all who participated.

May the next Singapore seminar be better than the first!

May there be many more Shinkendo seminars in the future! 🌟



BY Yong Jie Yu

MY FIRST IMPRESSION of Obata-kaiso: now *this* is a real samurai.

I know it sounds ridiculous, but I've always wanted to be a samurai. At least in terms of spirit. I want to be as strong and confident in life as they are.

First, I was very impressed and awed by Kaiso since the first training session on Thursday. Honestly, it was Shinkendo like I've never known before. I felt tired but I also felt like we could continue doing this for days and weeks and months and years and I won't even complain. That's how much I liked the training sessions with Obata-

kaiso. It was fresh, and we had so much to learn, and Kaiso was a strict but patient instructor. I liked the way he conducted lessons. I learned so much in this short four-day seminar that it was almost overwhelming. I'm glad I took notes!

Second, I was very taken by his aura. He carried himself in a most confident way; I was drawn by his confidence. I do hope I can become stronger, both mentally and physically, like Obata-kaiso. He quickly escalated, in just one training session, to be the man I respect most. I want to learn Shinkendo like he preaches *Jinsei*

*Shinkendo* (人生真劍道), to translate this ancient art into my personal life – to be as mentally strong as the sword trains me to be physically strong, to be able to protect others as much as others are protecting me.

Third, I learned as much about one's way of life as I learned about the way of the sword through this seminar. The chats we had in between breaks and lunchtime were brief, but I was able to pick up many valuable lessons about life from Kaiso himself. And, more importantly, to me personally as a modern artist, was the short chat we had while we sent him off on the last day, in which he communicated his views on traditional and modern art forms and how they both influence us as martial artists or even basic human beings. These weren't conveyed in so many words, but I could conclude as much through the little stories he shared with me. I'm most grateful for these inspirations.

I'm truly thankful and very honored to have met Obata-kaiso.

His seminar was an eye-opener, his stories were inspirational, and his person garnered the utmost respect from me. I hope there'll be another seminar in the future; I can't wait to learn even more. Thank you very much, Jeffery-sensei, for making this seminar possible; and thank you very much, Obata-kaiso, for coming here to this little red dot and enlightening us. It was indeed an enjoyable and rewarding seminar. 🌸

## ONE'S SEARCH FOR QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



By Chen Xuan Kai • Shimbukan Singapore

WHAT IS THE ESSENCE of budō? What fuels it? What does bushidō, an ancient notion often synonymous with strict codes of conduct and fierce principles, still have to offer in this modern sophisticated age, especially for oneself? These questions are crucial, particularly for a martial artist's personal growth. But even more enlightening are the answers one gives in response to these questions.

I believe, as I have found in my own experience, that our personal answers to these questions may change as time progresses. Our level of maturity, life experience, and personal beliefs help shape the answers we put forward. And it is from these very answers that one

can examine oneself and even share insight about our own character, inner philosophy, and wisdom with others.

### **The Need for Proper Guidance (a.k.a. The Learning Process)**

Now, with that concept in mind, it is rational to believe that in order to arrive at any reasonable answer, the correct knowledge is therefore crucial. Likewise, proper guidance is a key component during any formative learning phase.

Being born into a modern society, we all know this to be true. Be it a role model or a teacher (sensei), a guide can greatly impact one's fervor for learning. Generally, a

good teacher cultivates good principles, good character, and interest as part of the learning process.

As Obata-kaiso pointed out, the need to find a good teacher who teaches proper technique and knows what he is talking about is important and perhaps also difficult to find, especially in the beginning when one is first exposed to something new without any prior experience. In such cases, I can personally relate to the fact that it is often difficult to differentiate between what is considered proper or authentic and what is not.

With regard to Japanese swordsmanship, the main reason behind my choice to join Shinkendo two years ago was because I felt that Obata-kaiso's philosophy of swordsmanship was very much in line with my own beliefs.

I believe in a well-rounded training regimen, which was something Kendo and laido could not offer entirely. In addition, after spending about three months performing research on Shinkendo and Obata-kaiso's credentials and experience, I was convinced of the legitimacy of the art and that this was indeed the right path for me. Thus, I began my first lesson in December of 2009. And I must add that I have enjoyed my time training in Shinkendo immensely.

### **Take-Home Lessons from the Seminar**

When Jeffery Tie-sensei announced last year that he would be inviting



Obata-kaiso to hold a seminar in Singapore, my heart literally skipped a beat. I halfway didn't believe it would be true, and was excited that I would have the chance to meet Kaiso in person and to see and learn directly from the headmaster himself. This would be my first up-close encounter with Obata-kaiso, so naturally I was quite nervous; nonetheless, the four days of trainings proved extremely memorable and fruitful.

During his time with us, Obata-kaiso covered numerous techniques that were fairly new to us and helped correct many technical errors in my sword form. There was a need to tear down many "old walls" and to re-learn from scratch the proper techniques. It wasn't easy for sure, but I definitely was grateful for the lessons, and felt that it was all truly worthwhile in my personal pursuit of perfection.

The seminar definitely taught me the minimum basic standards that must be met during class, in both conduct and focus, in expression of enthusiasm and energy, and in the need to constantly aim high so we may improve ourselves.

Much to my surprise, Obata-kaiso also focused a lot on the importance of *kiai*, both as a tool to resonate enthusiasm and energy in our learning and to aid in remembering techniques. This proved very interesting and very useful indeed; the results were immediately apparent after a few attempts. I will definitely keep this in mind during my future training.



Needless to say, I was very much in awe of the techniques performed by Kaiso. This made me realize how much further I have to strive in terms of skill level, and it is definitely useful to finally have a proper gauge of where I stand and how much further I have to push myself in order to achieve my goals.

Besides the technical material, Obata-kaiso also had a heart-to-heart talk with us regarding his philosophy of *Jinsei Shinkendo*. This I felt was very important as I believe in practicality and that the martial arts should be more than just physical forms and techniques. Every good art should be governed by sound principles and discipline.

Last but not least, it was truly an honor to train with Obata-kaiso and to have him as our mentor. I definitely look forward to attending his seminars again in future. I also hope to show greater improvement both in physical technique as well as character development at our next meeting. ☀



## SEMINAR EXPERIENCES



BY Ian Teo



AS I LOOK BACK NOW, thinking of the shortest of time I've got to spend under Obata-kaiso, I feel it was a real game-changer in how I saw and understood Shinkendo as a martial art and a way of life. Obata-kaiso was all that I expected him to be and more. Coming from a lifetime of martial arts, he not only knows the ins and outs of the many martial arts but also the traditional concepts used on the battlefields of yesteryear.

When I first saw Obata-kaiso, I was instantly afraid, yet in awe of his presence. His voice, stature and actions paint a man who is many years ahead of me in the ladder of excellence pertaining to the martial arts. I have had interactions with Japanese aikidō shihan before in my short time in aikidō, but none of them had his fire, charisma, and sense of humour.

Obata-kaiso taught us to aim high and to climb the ladder of excellence so that we do not become stagnant and instead continuously strive for excellence. He taught us that excellence and abundance of energy is not only for doing budō, but can be used in all aspects of life, be it in school, work, or any endeavor that we undertake in the span of our lives.

He also taught and emphasized safety in our training, and instructed us not to move too hastily if we cannot control our techniques properly. Being safe allows us to continue training and enjoy the wonderful qualities of Shinkendo, as well as life. He left a deep impression on me that he

cared deeply for all of us that were in the dōjō training under him.

When I first picked up a bokken in Shinkendo class a few years ago, I had scarcely any idea how Shinkendo would change my life, in the way I looked at techniques as well as how I would grow as a martial artist and as a person. "Shinkendo is life and life is Shinkendo" – how I interpret Obata-kaiso words is to live life to the fullest of our ability while still being wise and safe. Shinkendo is more than just a martial art – it is truly a way of life.

With Obata-kaiso's help, I was able to fix many technical mistakes and rekindle the fire that I had when I first started doing martial arts five years ago. The desire to become strong had never burned more brightly in my heart when I sadly bid farewell to Obata-kaiso on the last day of the seminar. Hopefully I will get the chance to train with him soon and learn more from his excellent example.

Lastly, I would like to encourage the Shinkendo practitioners of the world to continue striving to climb that ladder of excellence. Let's try to make Shinkendo a martial art that many wish to practice, so that we may spread Obata-kaiso's wonderful message of Shinkendo and allow people worldwide to enjoy the wonderful qualities of Shinkendo.

Onegaishimasu! ☀



BY Jesus M. Tamesis, Jr.  
Shimbukan Philippines

WE WERE ALL so excited that Obata-kaiso agreed to hold a seminar in Singapore this past November. This was his first seminar in this part of the world.

Due to finances, only two Shinkendo students from the Philippines were able to join me for the seminar this time.

I trained my students rigorously before the seminar so that they would be closer to meeting Obata-kaiso's expectations.

From the first day of the seminar to the last, Kaiso was relentless with the Shinkendo exercises, driving us to near exhaustion. But however tiring it was, it was well worth it. Nothing is more exciting than learning firsthand from the Kaiso himself!

Jinsei Shinkendo! ☀

## SINGAPORE SHINKENDO SEMINAR



By Lim Zeng Yang • Shimbukan Singapore

I HAVE BEEN LEARNING Shinkendo over the past two years under the guidance of my teacher, Jeffery Tie-sensei. Ever since I could remember, I have always had a passion for swords and the martial arts, and it has been my aspiration one day to become a great swordsman and a person that people respect. I had asked myself many times what I was truly looking for in pursuing my dream of becoming a great swordsman. I finally found my answer in Shinkendo and through meeting Obata-kaiso, a man that I truly revere.

My first impression of him was that he was a powerful man with a dignified aura, completely different from everyone that I had ever known. I was deeply impressed

through the conversations that I had with him over the following days, and felt I gleaned many of life's important lessons from his stories and experiences. I was also able to discuss Japanese swords and hear his thoughts about them. I remember that Obata-kaiso explained to me that the ideal Japanese sword should possess five elements: it does not break, it does not bend, it stays sharp, it is easy to handle, and it is beautiful to look at.

**We should all strive to aim for the peak, no matter what we choose to do, and follow through no matter how difficult it may be to achieve our goals, for it is ultimately up to us to decide if we want to make our lives more worthwhile.**

Obata-kaiso also taught me about doing more positive things to better my life and positively influence others around me, and contribute to society to make it a better place. He told me that in life, it is very easy to do things that are negative to ourselves and others around us, and these will accumulate and come to harm us even more. However, it is most difficult to do things that are positive for us and the people around us, which in turn benefit us and make our lives better when they accumulate similarly. Therefore we should all strive to do more positive things for the benefit of ourselves and others, so that our way of living improves and becomes more meaningful.

Obata-kaiso also explained to us the concept of Ko-Ge Zai-Shin (高下在心), one facet of which is the notion that we ought to conceive of ourselves as the actor and producer

of the story of our own lives. Kaiso told us that it is not good if we set our aims low in fear of potential challenges that may come along. We should all strive to aim for the peak, no matter what we choose to do, and follow through no matter how difficult it may be to achieve our goals, for it is ultimately up to us to decide if we want

to make our lives more worthwhile. It is akin to climbing a tall mountain – we should all aim for the peak of

the mountain and not the foot.

Training was from 9 in the morning to 5 in the evening, which is different from the usual training hours we have at the dōjō. Training with Obata-kaiso was very enjoyable and invigorating for me as I was able to learn how to execute techniques with more control and precision, along with learning the correct projection of our *kiai*.

Throughout the seminar, Obata-kaiso constantly stressed taking each others' safety into consideration as we hone our skills in the dōjō. He mentioned that Shinkendo has five areas of practice: Suburi, Battoho, Tanrengata, Tachiuchi, and Tameshigiri. Suburi, Battoho, and Tanrengata are areas that we can practice by ourselves, whereas for Tachiuchi we need a partner for practice in order to maximize our proficiency and understanding. Tameshigiri, on the other hand, utilizes a *shinken* (real sword), so we must also take note of our surroundings when performing our cutting techniques.

Training with a partner in tachiuchi can be very dangerous, thus we must constantly be aware of our partner and surroundings to prevent any possible injuries from occurring. We should always be aware of our partner's proficiency and should maintain practice at a level where he or she is comfortable. We should never try to go beyond his or her ability in performing the technique, as that would cause harm to both parties.


We should also learn to guide our partner in tachiuchi. If there are other students practicing tachiuchi nearby, we should remain aware and adjust our distance accordingly. This concept is also part of the philosophical teaching of Ji Ta Shizen (Self, Others & Nature): we must ensure not only our own safety, but also that of our partners and the other students in the dōjō.

Obata-kaiso corrected us many times throughout the seminar on a range of topics, such as dōjō etiquette and how we ought to behave when the lesson begins and ends. I also received numerous corrections on my techniques and habits from him personally, helping

me realize the efficiency of correct form, for which I was very grateful. Obata-kaiso also introduced to us a series of exercises which I felt were very useful for changing up our thinking patterns. These exercises will help us become more creative and improve our fine motor skills, which will also improve our proficiency in the practice of *nitōken* techniques.

At the end of the seminar, we were presented with our *menjō* (certificates). We were all delighted to receive the certificates, and I was honored to be presented with my Santen certificate by Obata-kaiso himself. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Jeffery Tiesensei for creating the opportunity for us to learn from Obata-kaiso in Singapore, and to Obata-kaiso for giving us such an enlightening and amazing experience.

I hope that there will be many more Shinkendo seminars to come and that we will be able to promote the "Life is Shinkendo" experience to many, many more people in the future!

Jinsei Shinkendo! 



# NETHERLANDS SEMINAR



APRIL – MAY 2012

**I**t's 6:00 p.m.; the day's done. It's been long and tiresome; I should be getting ready to relax on the sofa. It's Thursday. THURSDAY! Instead, dedication and commitment have me preparing for the Aikibujutsu seminar with Yukishiro-sōke. There'll be no relaxing tonight. It's time to organize my thoughts as anticipation builds. It's raining outside, but it's not depressing. It's a challenge. We must welcome the cold – that's my shugyō! My (Dutch) training! The cold rain on my hands as I cycle helps me focus. Putting on a fresh, crisp, heavy dōgi, everything else fades away. Home, work, problems, these are left outside the dōjō. We're all here to train: the same aspirations, same goals.



Mark Weiner



Grainne Delaney

Photos courtesy of Mischa de Brouwer and Bobo Boom



SHINBUKAN DŌJŌ

A clap of the hands. Line up! Tradition and experience enter the dōjō. Yukishiro-sōke is here. *Taisō ichi*, count four beats, not two. Immediately we are in full engagement, full commitment.

In *kokyūnage*, we gained new insight: timing, position, context. We learned the important focus of each move to advance to greater and greater distances. As uke, we learned the importance of *kokyūnage* in developing timing and breakfalls. Since it's a soft technique, it allows uke to stay in control of his or her own ukemi. A perfect beginning.

Timing is also the critical focus for sōtai exercises. We were made aware of the asymmetric counting and our opponent's position (1, 2 and 3, 4). Bringing this into waza, we all enjoyed the way the basics were covered. "What we thought we knew we didn't know," said one member.

## What we found interesting was the application. What happens when ikkajō/nikkajō *doesn't* work?

But it wasn't just the basics. What we found interesting was the application. What happens when ikkajō/nikkajō *doesn't* work? You use hard locks to really control uke in a practical situation. Yukishiro-sōke might say it is a soft technique, but *his* application is hard!



So is his discipline! When we are out of breath, we deserve a well-earned break, don't we? But instead: "No Breaks! I give you a break when you sit down in seiza to watch technique!"

Some things were explained with sharp clarity, some techniques we had to steal, some will remain a mystery until the next time. What was certain was that Yukishiro-sōke engaged the entire dōjō with clear instruction and context. He remained inspiring and funny without losing any definition or tension in the technique, which

continued beyond the dōjō. "Do not treat uke like a sibling; treat uke with respect!" The three hours culminated in a vigorous dose of shihōnage. ☀





**PROMINENT** at this year's seminar with Yukishiro Obata-sōke was the notion of 'metre and rhythm'. Each step, each shuffle, each sword swing and even each breath was determined by and measured into rhythmic units.



Although the manual for Shinkendo<sup>1</sup> refers to *soku* as a principle of rhythm and metre,<sup>2</sup> for me it was the first time performing most of the exercises with that kind of emphasis on rhythmic movements. At first I didn't understand why this emphasis was so present, particularly during the initial exercises. I thought that it was a merely a useful instrument, like musical metre, to set a pace for the movements.

should follow the same metre as the second count. And so on, and so on... However, the pace of the last count of each sequence, i.e. the

parts of the exercise have a four-count rhythm (attack – block – attack – block). During the seminar, we exercised also the breaking of

**But be careful. The slightest miscalculation, even if it is a fraction of a millisecond, results in a different metre...**

*kaeshiuchi* from the defender and the *jōdan uchi* from the attacker, is different – essentially, the last two counts occur at nearly the same moment for both attacker and

this rhythm – thus making this exercise into a three-count, in which the last attack and its block occur at the same time (attack – block – attack/block).



After a while I began to understand it was more than just that. It was also a subtle way of applying *heihō*<sup>1</sup>. The following example of the use of rhythm in *ni-dan uchi* encapsulates my understanding of Yukishiro-sōke's explanations.

In *ni-dan uchi*, he attacker takes the initiative and therefore sets the pace of the rhythm. The second count should follow the same metre as the first count. The third count

defender. In other words, the last count doesn't follow the prevailing metre of the exercise. The result, if done properly, is a whirling and exciting closure of both sequences. But be careful. The slightest miscalculation, even if it is a fraction of a millisecond, results in a different metre, and thus the exercise doesn't achieve its goal, i.e. practising a steady rhythmic pace.

If this exercise is done with a regular rhythm or metre, all three

Now, the meaning of the rhythm in this exercise might look simple. But it is not! One count comprises several movements for both the attacker and the defender. Although all movements fall into the same count, they are consecutive.

For *san-dan uchi*, just add a *makiuchi* at the beginning of each set. This might appear to be a simple addition, but results in an entirely distinct dynamic pattern





and rhythm. The newly adapted rhythm should first be carefully studied at a slow pace, then, after you feel comfortable with the movements, you can drive up the tempo.

Why is practising rhythm and metre then so much more than simply setting a pace for the students? And how does practising rhythm and metre relate to the practice of heihō?

The answer is simple: the defender/attacker learns how to effect a diversion by creating a comfort-zone for the opponent. This diversion is in fact accomplished through creating this comfort-zone through a steady pace of metre and rhythm. The fatal strike comes from the offbeat, unexpected count at the end. In this exercise, heihō can be optimally practised.

Although the answer is simple, putting heihō into practice is not. It is in fact, to my mind, *very* difficult to execute. Rhythm and metre, one sense of *soku*, are therefore useful and essential instruments for practicing heihō. 🌸



<sup>1</sup> *Shinkendo: Japanese Swordmanship*, Obata T. (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Rhythm and metre are conventional terms in poetry, music, dance, calligraphy and many other disciplines.

<sup>3</sup> *Heihō* is the traditionally translated as "military strategy". In this article I refer to it as "martial strategy" as referred to by o.a Obata Toshishiro, i.e. understanding time, the correct moment, you and your opponent's position, intent and rhythm within the context of the fight and using it. See also: *Heiho Okugisho: The Secret of High Strategy*, by Yamamoto Kansuke, transl. Obata, T., Obata, M., (ed. W.M. Hawley), 1994.

# YUKISHIRO OBATA NIDAI SŌKE

First European Shinkendo Seminar  
LEIDEN 2012

BY Karl Hawkins

For me, this seminar was something of an anniversary – two years almost to the day since I began studying Shinkendo and attended my first seminar – which happened to be held in Leiden with Obata-kaiso.





During this year's seminar, I could not help but reflect on how much I have progressed in terms of fitness and technique – not for the first time realising that looking forward I only see the huge distance I have yet to achieve, but looking back I can see how far I have already travelled.

company of friends both old and new. Joined together as we are to study an art as ancient as the samurai, we also find also a sense of pride, honour, and a sense of belonging somehow missing from today's modern world.

Jinsei Shinkendo! ☀



A chance to repeatedly practice certain techniques until they become engrained. To refine existing knowledge, to learn new techniques from the simplest drawing of the sword, to finally having invaluable tameshigiri proof my *yokogiri* now cuts cleanly is invaluable and highly gratifying.

I cannot highlight enough the seminar experience – the gaining of knowledge, the aching muscles, the



Toshishiro Obata's latest work,  
a treatise on samurai philosophy,  
comes to print

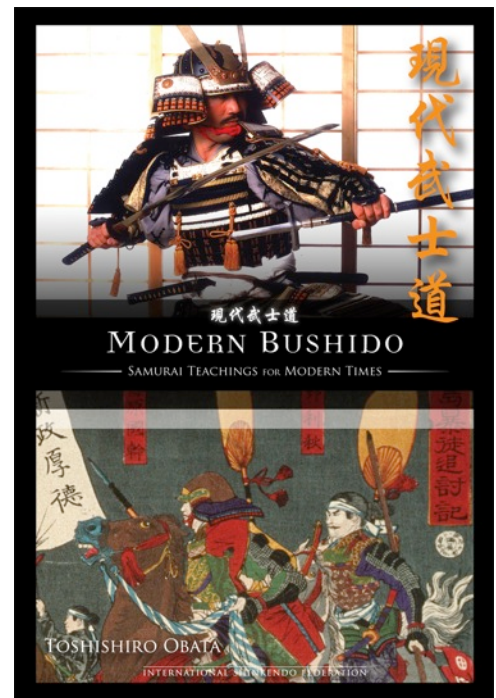
## MODERN BUSHIDO

*Samurai Teachings for Modern Times*

THE International Shinkendo Federation is pleased to announce the release of the newest work by Toshishiro Obata, *Modern Bushido: Samurai Teachings for Modern Times*. Obata's latest work is a treatise on the philosophy by which Japan's famed warrior class, the samurai, lived their lives for the better part of a millennium. Obata reveals the value of these teachings, known collectively as *bushidō*, the "way of the warrior", and explores their enduring significance and relevance in the modern day. Culling the rich fruits of the samurai legacy and transposing them into the mode and context of everyday life, *Modern Bushido* brings these teachings to a general readership and, as a whole, serves as a manual for modern living.

"Through serious study of *budō* or any discipline, we may arrive at not only great truths, but simple ones as well, which are often no less valuable. In training to the depths of our abilities and pushing our limits, we learn how to carry out our will with excellence in even the most trivial of affairs; in studying strategy that can mean the difference between life and death, we may discover, perhaps unexpectedly, a common strategy of everyday living. Even if *budō* can save your life, it is just as important to understand how to live."

Toshishiro Obata is a world-renowned martial artist and the author of a number of books on the Japanese martial arts, including *Naked Blade*, *Crimson Steel*, *Shinkendo Japanese Swordsmanship*, and *Shinkendo Tameshigiri*. He is the recipient of numerous distinctions, including holding the world record in *kabutowari*, traditional helmet-splitting. He is the founder of the Shinkendo style of Japanese swordsmanship, and currently teaches in the Little Tokyo district of Los Angeles and in seminars worldwide.



### VOLUME INFORMATION

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