

Sei to dô

by Jean-Claude, november 2023



. The Japanese concept *Sei to dô* brings together two notions which are both opposed and complementary, on one hand the absence of agitation or calm or immobility (*Sei*), and on the other hand, movement or action (*Dô*).

. *Sei to dô* works like *Yin-yang*. Because one exists, the other also does exist *de facto*. It is a “living” system always in motion, and subject to the principle of alternation of its two constitutive and inseparable elements. One comes from the other. One transforms into the other. The transformations and transitions from one to the other take place in permanent continuity.

. *Sei to dô* is a concept which results directly from the more general and more global notion of “Rhythm”. In this regard, *Sei to dô* appears as a particular variation of *Hyôshi*.

The periodic phenomenon which characterizes this particular rhythm is the alternation of calm (*Sei*) and movement (*Dô*), which can be expressed in numerous variations of cadence and intensity. *Sei to dô* is sometimes transcribed in a simplified and somewhat concise formula : Non action – Action.

Sei to dô - calligraphy in Gyôsho style by Jacky Ponsot

. The alternation and play of contrasts between calm (*Sei*) and action (*Dô*) are found in the unfolding form of each *Kata* of our discipline, whatever the series studied.

. On another level, if we are interested in an energetic reading of *Sei to dô*, the phases of calm or external immobility (*Sei*) correspond to potential energy which is accumulating, and to the stage of action and movement (*Dô*), it is transformed into kinetic energy.

. One of the major interests for our practice, in my opinion, manifests itself when the two opposing and complementary notions (*Sei* and *Dô*), overlap, intersect – for example as in *Kage waza*. They then enrich each other : calm in action, and action in calm.

. Finding calm in action, or how to perform each movement, including the most intense, while maintaining inner calm.

. Moving without moving or movements while remaining still. The work of external immobility of certain waiting positions (*Kamae* for example) promotes a presence and

an availability, to all one's own interior "whispers", to everything that is in motion and moves within oneself, as well as outside oneself, partners, the environment (*Zan-shin*). This postural work on external immobility is essential in several disciplines – it is common to seated postures of meditation, to the standing posture of *Tree Qi gong*. It allows you to develop sensitivity by refining your perceptions and sensations through attentive listening. Further, over time, it allows in the practice to stimulate a form of personal intuition (*Kan-ken*), which at the appropriate moment causes the movement to be triggered, without requiring reasoning or conscious thinking. It is an individual capacity that is built and acquired on the *Budô* Path, over time.

. To build an pedagogic approach to *Sei to dô* in our martial discipline *Shintô Musô Ryû Jô*, the classic reading grid *Sho* (beginning) – *Chû* (center) – *Ku* (depth), which deals precisely with “rhythms”, appears here as a great opportunity as well as a suitable tool. To support this choice, these three particular rhythms seem to “fit” rather well with the different series of *Kata* constituting our *Ryû* and give them meaning – and this is obvious for the first four series, the *Sho* rhythm for *Omote*, the *Chû* rhythm for *Chûdan* and *Ran-Ai*, the *Ku* rhythm for *Kage*.

. In an expanded vision, we could conceive that this *Sho-Chû-Ku* analysis grid with its three specific rhythms and its educational interest for the student, is in concordance and adapted to the study and practice of different kinds of disciplines or arts (Pascal Krieger Sensei).

. In *Jô*, this individual progression is of course built over time and training by experiencing each of these three rhythms successively and in order. The first to be tried and tasted is the *Sho* rhythm, then comes *Chû*, and finally *Ku*. As the personal research is never finished, the advanced practitioner (having for example already completed a first “round” of the seven series of *SMR Jô*) will be able to start again and return to explore one more time, enrich himself and taste, the first rhythm *Sho* – *we could graphically visualize these three rhythms Sho, Chû, and Ku, positioned one after the other on an oriented (progression) circle.*

. In the first two stages *Sho* and *Chû*, the practitioner invests in a systematic search for precision and simplicity (*Sho*), then fluidity (*Chû*) in each of the forms worked. Will and conscious thought are constantly called upon here. These periods correspond to the creation and installation of muscular, neurological and psychological connections, which will be optimized over time and through multiple repetitions and self-corrections.

As in all learning, this stage of acquiring a form involves the setting up of automatisms and conditioned reflexes.

At the deeper *Ku* stage, while benefiting from previous knowledge, the advanced practitioner will be able to experience spontaneity. Here, will and conscious thought somehow fade away in front of the visceral !

The practitioner reveals himself. He no longer imitates. He is just living his movements. He is expressing its own nature. He appropriates the form.

. The *Sho* rhythm and the first stage of progression to understand *Sei to dô*.

. “There is no big difficult task that cannot be broken down into small and easy tasks.”

This buddhist adage applies perfectly to the *Sho* rhythm and its very rhythmic method, used in the initial phase of learning.

. Here, the *Kata* is sequenced and broken down into a sum of elementary movements. The overall study is thus facilitated, because it allows a successive and precise study of each of the elements and an observation at each time of the corresponding sensations. For each element studied, the practitioner can concentrate on the numerous technical details, and on the first concepts offered to him *Jun-jo*, *Te no uchi*, *Shi-sei*, *Kamae*, *Me-tsuke*, *Ma-ai*, *Ha-suji*, *Sun-dome*, *Ki-ai*, *Aruki-kata*, *Ki-ken-tai-ichi*. The *Sho* rhythm, which in fact gives time to time, allows the beginner to take his time to repeat and study each element he wishes, in detail. For the beginner, this cadenced *Sho* rhythm promotes the construction of solid foundations, particularly postural ones.

. The *Sho* rhythm, by cutting each element from the next, will also facilitate memorization of the correct order of the *Kata* – order in which the different movements must be performed (*Junjo*) – it thus promotes self-recording of the precise form of the *Kata*.

. The *Sho* rhythm applied to *Sei to dô* is like a “stroboscopic” decomposition of *Kata* into two kinds of elements, *Kamae* (*Sei*) and movement (*Dô*).

. The *Sho* rhythm, sequenced and discontinuous, is particularly suited to the *Kata* of *Omote* serie. This discontinuity is due to the voluntary and systematic presence of *Kime*, which mark a precise separation between each *Kamae* (*Sei*) and each movement (*Dô*) – in analogy with a musical score, where the barlines of the score correspond to the *Kime* of the *Kata*. Thus, the *Kime* are marking the beat in the *Omote Kata*.

. The *Sho* rhythm lends itself ideally to the practice and study of *Kamae*.

Kamae – which can be translated as construction – corresponds to the construction of a physical and mental posture of availability.

All postural work of external immobility aims at full availability of body and mind. It’s about mobilizing your entire body and mind as best you can, to be present and available for all future situations, which are likely to be conflictual.

. So many elements are here to be worked on for the beginner, bone segmental alignments, body biomechanics, physical balance, roots, correct *Sei-chû-sen*, body present in a right tension, etc.

. Other benefits for the *Sho* rhythm practitioner : safety and working comfort.

The *Sho* learning rhythm with its clear and marked *Kime*, detaching phase of movement (*Dô*) and phase of calm (*Sei*), facilitates the predictability of the partner's next movement, of its precise triggering - it gives the practitioner time to wait and availability to decode the upcoming changeover, with the further certainty that this changeover (*Sei/Dô*) will necessarily take place at the end of the current calm phase. Thus, the *Sho* rhythm, by providing predictability, is procuring a feeling of protection, of security, in the work of the beginner – a first comfort zone.

. The *Chû* rhythm and the second stage of progression to understand *Sei to dô*.

. With the fluid practice, characteristic of the following rhythm *Chû*, we begin to bring the movements to life, to connect more subtly with the other (*Ki-musubi* between *Uchidachi* and *Shidachi*), to breathe “Life” into the *Kata*.

. This instilled life seems to be one of the direct consequences of the fluidity infused into the form – into the movements of the *Kata*, as well as into each transition between movements. The *Kime*, who punctuated a marked and discontinuous *Sho* rhythm, are no longer stops here but links. *Kime* then becomes pause, transition, transformation in a continuity between *Kamae* (*Sei*) and Action (*Dô*).

. In addition, other interesting consequences also seem to arise from this fluidity introduced into the form and which animates the movements.

. Breathing (*Ko-kyû-hô*) is released. It will be able to settle down, tune in and pair naturally, harmonize according to the movements and their sequences.

. Both the body and the mind will benefit from letting go. Personal affects, feelings and emotions, will naturally awaken and accompany – sometimes disrupt, sometimes guide – the practitioner in his various experiments. To cope with this *Chû* rhythm, which is more accelerated and less predictable than the *Sho* rhythm, the heart and all kinds of underlying emotions will be invited here.

. The link with the partner intensifies and is refining. This growing complicity will lead to “being in the other’s time” – a pragmatic martial objective underlying the practice of *Budô*.

. In a *Chû* rhythm, the predictability of the partner's next movement is much less obvious than in a *Sho* rhythm. The continuity and fluidity of the form no longer provide clear and systematic benchmarks, the transitions between calm (*Sei*) and action (*Dô*) occurring here in a *continuum*. As a result, the security offered by the predictability of the *Sho* form and its marked *Kime* becomes obsolete here.

Predictability, in a *Chû* rhythm, will therefore have to rely on other markers which are present in the fluidity, namely the modifications of rhythm due to variations in the rapidity, the speed of execution, that is to say in fact accelerations and decelerations in the progress of the *Kata*. During this more advanced stage of understanding the form, the *Shûgyôsha* will gradually constitute a new comfort zone, thanks to an increasingly subtle predictability, resulting from a refined decoding of the variations between the slow (*Sei*) and the rapid (*Dô*), as well as a strengthening of complicity with one's partner.

. We could design a two-stage educational approach in order to understand, build and advance *Chû* fluidity and rhythm.

For the first stage, after leaving the *Sho* rhythm, *Uchidachi* and *Shidachi* seek to perform the *Kata* while systematically maintaining continuity throughout their respective pre-established gestures, at constant speed – this way of performing a form, widely used in *Tai Chi Chuan*, is called “unwinding the silk thread”, where one must avoid any breakage, any sudden acceleration or deceleration.

In the second stage, while maintaining continuity and fluidity, the practitioner will introduce slow/fast variations in accordance with the various gestures or actions. Accelerations and decelerations will be omnipresent here, but carried out without abruptness and consciously.

. Unlike the sequenced and chopped movements of the *Sho* rhythm, the fluidity required in the *Chû* rhythm brings the practitioner towards a global and loose movement of the whole body and develops dexterity and agility. Breathing can take its rightful place and arise naturally, in connection and in agreement with the gestures of the *Kata* and the efforts involved.

. *Sei to dô* does exist in the *Chû* rhythm, but in a very different way than in the *Sho* rhythm. The desired fluidity induces and establishes continuity between the various movements, between Calm (*Sei*) and Action (*Dô*), between slowness and speed – everything flows.

. The *Chû* rhythm, by its fluidity and with its varied accelerations, is well represented by the image of water, in some of its diversities, the torrent, the stream, the river.

. The *Chû* rhythm is well suited to the practice and study of the *Chûdan* and *Ran-Ai* series.

. The practice of the two *Ran-Ai Kata* with different partners and on varied *Chû* rhythms (more or less sustained rhythms, punctual and localized or rather continuous accelerations) is an inexhaustible playground and exploration. The practitioner increases self-confidence and his comfort zone. He gradually gains in margin (*Yo-yû*), which will be essential to him in the confrontation with the following rhythm *Ku*, tighter, more intense, more surprising.

. The *Ku* rhythm and the third stage of progression to understand *Sei to dô*.

. Diligent practice of the first two rhythms, *Sho* with its search for precision and simplicity, and *Chû* with its search for continuity and fluidity, leads to the following rhythm *Ku*, more intense, more contrasted, deeper, more personal.

. The *Ku* rhythm, through its fluidity and variations in intensity between calm (*Sei*) and movement (*Dô*), is well illustrated by the image of the sea, with its depth and its waves in all possible states.

. The *Ku* rhythm is characterized by an alternation between phases of calm (*Sei*) and phases of movement (*Dô*), which very often reveal marked contrasts. The shifts between Calm (*Sei*) and Action (*Dô*) – succession of concentration/expansion, on an energetic level – are sometimes abrupt, explosive.

The omnipresence of marked contrasts between Calm (*Sei*) and Action (*Dô*), which we experience in the *Ku* rhythm and in the *Kata* of *Kage waza*, comes in particular from the development of self-confidence and one's technique, as well as from the repeated and progressive experimentation of an increasingly prolonged wait in the face of sudden, even impromptu attacks.

. The expectation (*Sei*) which precedes the action (*Dô*) is building in an external calm with contained intensity, while a strong potential energy – physical and psychic – is stored, concentrated, inside the *Shûgyôsha*. The shift into action will suddenly release a large part of kinetic energy in the movement (*Dô*) – like water from a dam that suddenly bursts.

. The quality and power of the explosiveness depend on several parameters, the brevity of the Calm (*Sei*) / Action (*Dô*) switch or the speed of switch, the contrast of the passage between the initial release (*Sei*) and the tension (*Dô*) then between tension (*Dô*) and the final release once the movement has been achieved (*Sei*), the mobilization and coordination of all parts of the body, including the mind (*Ki-ken-tai-ichi*).

. Several of our classic concepts used in *Jô* are particularly valued in *Kage waza* and the specific rhythm *Ku*, *Mu-soku*, *Kan-ken*, *Mu-shin*.

. *Mu-soku* takes all his interest in *Kage waza*. *Mu-soku*, with the explosiveness of his sudden fall, is very useful, even necessary, in certain lightning phases of attack or defense. Well adapted to the *Ku* rhythm, *Mu-soku* can even become essential if we try to wait until the very last moment to intervene, to move, to switch from calm (*Sei*) to action (*Dô*) and release explosive force.

. *Kan-ken* is a form of intuitive vision that does not involve eye vision. *Kan-ken* allows you to see what is not visible, to feel, to perceive, and for example to decode and anticipate an opposing intention to move (*Sei/Dô*), and therefore to be able to be in the right time (*Kairos*) to answer it.

Kan-ken certainly emanates from great availability – availability in correlation with *Mu-shin*. These capacities for availability and intuitive vision have been built and refined over the course of training and the multiple rhythms practiced – with the *Me-tsuke* of the learning phase, a very focused and concentrated look on one's object of vision (*Sho*), then with the *Me-tsuke* of expanded vision (*Chû*), finally with *Kan-ken* (*Kû*) which here frees itself from physiological vision alone.

. With the *Ku* rhythm, predictability no longer comes only from a very fine decoding of rhythm variations as with the *Sho* and *Chû* rhythms, but also calls upon intuitive vision (*Kan-ken*) and availability (*Mu-ga-Mu-shin*).

. *Sei to dô* reveals all its flavors in the study of the advanced series of *Shintô Musô Ryû Jô*, and more particularly in *Kage waza*, where the *Ku* rhythm, both full of intensity and personal, literally fits this series. The two opposing and complementary notions (*Sei* and *Dô*) intertwine and mutually enrich each other : calm in action (maintaining inner calm in movements), and action in calm (moving without moving, or refine one's listening, one's presence, one's sensations, one's availability to a reality in permanent movement).

By sincerely deepening this *Ku* rhythm, the practitioner will appropriate the form.

. In *Kage*, which is the shadow or *Ura* of *Omote*, the primordial work on the own interiority of the *Shûgyôsha* (*Yin / Kage*) complements the work on the exteriority, the apparent, the surface, the visible in the form (*Yang / Omote*), which was gradually led and built thanks to the first three series of the *Ryû*, *Omote*, *Chûdan* and *Ran-Ai* and their respective adapted rhythms *Sho* and *Chû*.

. Through the study of the *Ku* rhythm, the inner and personal research on availability to oneself and to others and on the increasingly fine perception of one's sensations and the various rhythms at play, will facilitate the progressive acquisition of a truly physical awareness of one's body and a form of intuitive vision.