

Manabu 学

Issue 5

Welcome to your fifth edition of our newsletter!

We're back with more news, techniques, and event information to keep you connected. **This issue we have a special report from Luka Tokić regarding Leo's and his recent Budo-focused travels through Japan.**

Just like last time, we'll be diving into our three main sections:

Events & Seminars: Information on upcoming opportunities to train and learn together.

Insights & Techniques: A deep dive into the principles and practices of nanbudo.

YouTube Channel News: The latest videos, updates, and announcements directly from our new channel.

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Upcoming nanbudo seminars led by Leo Rafoit:

International Nanbudo Summer Seminar in Zaton

Date: 20.6.2026-27.6.2026

Instructor: Leo Rafolt

Description: Detailed information available on event link.

Register by: February 1st at mihaelzupancic@gmail.com

Facebook event link

****Final call, register your spot by May 1st 2026.****

Spaces are limited, so secure your spot as soon as possible!



Luka Tokić

Japan Budo trip report, February 2026

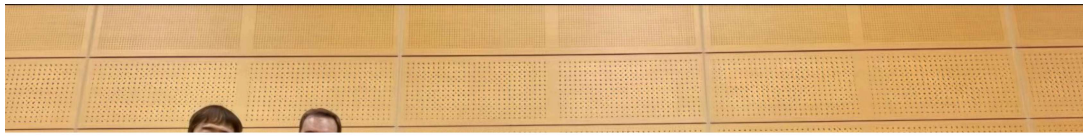
Japan is one of those places that you always want to come back to after the

first visit. I became aware of this fact last year, upon returning from a two-week Budo tour for European Nanbudoka, that Leo had organized. Last month Leo and I again spent two and a half weeks in Japan, discovering various schools of budo. We visited a group of Japanese Nanbudoka from Kobe, as well as four other Budo schools, namely Seifukai, Gyokushin-ryu, Aunkai and Hino Budo. In this report from our trip, I will try to share the insights we have received from these schools, and also briefly present their history and philosophy.

We arrived in Tokyo at the beginning of February. The weather was beautiful and we spent the first few days sightseeing and enjoying Japanese cuisine. While we were still struggling a bit with jet lag, the time for our first training has arrived. It was in Seifukai dojo in Shinagawa. Seifukai is one of many lineages of Minoru Mochizuki Sensei, a legendary figure in Japanese Budo, whose story is worth mentioning in some detail. Having started Kendo at the age of five, Mochizuki Sensei was then accepted in Kodokan, where he became one of the best students of Jigoro Kano Sensei, the founder of Judo. Kano then sent Mochizuki to study Daito-ryu Aiki-jujutsu under Morihei Ueshiba (at that time, O-Sensei still hadn't renamed his art to Aikido, and kept close ties to Koryu). Mochizuki Sensei became Ueshiba Doshu's uchideshi, and was entrusted with two Daito-ryu scrolls. Apart from Judo and Aikido, where he attained some of the highest ranks, he trained Karatedo under Gichin Funakoshi Sensei, the founder of Shotokan, and was proficient in Katori Shinto-ryu, Iaido, Kendo and some Jojutsu schools. After parting from Ueshiba Doshu, he opened a dojo in his home town of Shizuoka, where he started teaching his own vision of the martial way, heavily influenced by koryu bujutsu, and with a particular focus on sutemi (or self-sacrificing) techniques. At the heart of Mochizuki's teaching was the concept of sogo budo – the idea that a budoka should not be specialized in just one skill, like grappling or striking, but should be able to adapt to any situation, and defend against any attack. This holistic approach is most visible in the practice of jiyu waza, or free techniques, where a practitioner is attacked by multiple opponents who can be bare-handed or armed. Mochizuki was famous for his demonstrations, during which he performed a variety of techniques against opponents attacking him with sticks, glass bottles and even pieces of furniture! After his death, his students went in

different directions, establishing many schools of budo. His son Hiroo, a good friend of our teacher Nanbu Sensei, after moving to France, founded Yoseikan Budo. In Japan, two of Minoru Mochizuki's lifelong students, Nobumasa Yoshida and Terumi Washizu, established Seifukai and Gyokushin-ryu, respectively. It was those two schools that Leo and I visited first during our stay in Japan.

In Shinagawa we were warmly greeted by Yoshida sensei and his students, and then the training started. We warmed up in pairs, with a kata based primarily on kansetsu waza (joint-locking techniques), which was quite similar to Nanbudo. Then we proceeded with sutemi waza, a trademark of Mochizuki sensei. Some of the techniques Leo and I were already familiar with, as they closely resembled Nanbudo techniques, for example sukui nage, so we adapted quickly. Then, however, Sensei introduced a new, more complicated sutemi technique that I've never seen before. In short, you step next to your partner, grab his wrist with one hand, and his collar with your other hand. Then, you place your head on his chest and, turning your body around, lay on the ground. Thanks to the joint-lock on your partner's wrist and your body's precise positioning, you are supposed to send your partner flying through the air, over your body. In theory. In practice, however, even though Japanese practitioners were kindly praising my technique, I sensed my tori was assisting me a bit too much. We changed partners multiple times, but I still couldn't get it right. I saw some other, low-ranking practitioners struggling as well. At that point, Yoshida sensei said "Yame!", and came to our rescue. Sensei compared the technique with Kyudo: you should imagine that your partner's arm is a bow that you need to extend as far as possible before releasing it and sending the arrow towards the target. I was eager to try it myself. I positioned myself, and extended my partner's arm. I placed my head on his chest and swiftly turned my body. It worked! I could feel my partner becoming light and moving over me, eventually landing on tatami. The others, who were struggling before, also managed the technique well now. Sensei smiled, obviously pleased. I was amazed by how that one small piece of instruction, an intelligent analogy, completely changed the way my mind and body perceived and executed the technique. We spent the rest of the training happily drilling that same technique.



While still summing up our impressions from Seifukai, the time arrived for training in the second of the two styles derived from Mochizuki sensei that we intended to try – Gyokushin-ryu. We were already somewhat familiar with it – I tried Gyokushin for the first time last year in Japan, while Leo practiced it multiple times before. The venue for the training, different from last year, was none other than the legendary Shizuoka dojo, founded by Minoru Mochizuki Sensei. I walked around the dojo and quickly realised that its walls and shelves were full of captivating artefacts: there were a number of photos of Mochizuki sensei that you cannot find anywhere else, as well as his diplomas, from all the different styles that he practiced. And, most fascinating of all, there was his kimono and one of his red-and-white belt! I found myself immersed in history. Then the training started. After warming up in pairs with kata, again mostly based on kansetsu waza, Washizu sensei explained how strength should not come from the arms, but rather from one's back. I remembered this concept from last year when we were in Japan, so I was eager to try it again. Sensei pulled me out to demonstrate it. He grabbed my arm and told me to do a simple joint-locking technique that I was already familiar with. I concentrated hard in order to find the strength in my back, like sensei explained, but he stopped me in my tracks with ease. Then, I tried to surprise him by doing a different technique, but again to no avail. We all laughed. The situation really was comical: whatever I did, I could not free my arm from the grip of this 70-plus-year-old man! All because, while I was using my arms, he was apparently using his whole body (and 60 years of martial arts experience, of course). We then proceeded with sutemi waza, and then finally – jiyu waza. This really puts

you on the spot! There are five or more people attacking you one after another, and they can grab your arms and dogi, they can try to punch you or cut you with bokken. Responsiveness is essential here: you need to act quickly and perform the first technique that pops into your mind. Otherwise, you get stuck in overthinking and then it's all over. Leo and I instinctively mixed nanbudo techniques with Gyokushin-ryu techniques we have just learned. This is the spirit of sogo budo – combining everything you know to defend against any attack. Once you adapt to its dynamism, jiyu waza is incredibly fun and useful for developing your creativity. It is something I would strongly recommend that everyone implements in their training.



While we were training in Seifukai and Gyokushin-ryu, Yoshida sensei and Washizu sensei told us many stories of Minoru Mochizuki. We learned some of the tricks he used, like stepping on your partner's foot before doing barai, or combining Aikido-style joint-locking techniques with Judo throws. These dangerous joint-lock throws were common in Koryu bujutsu, for example in Kito-ryu school, which influenced judo. Although these techniques were eventually abandoned by Kano Sensei in order to make Judo more widely acceptable, Muchizuki Sensei kept them as part of his curriculum. Washizu Sensei recalled how he often secretly used some of their elements while competing in Judo, which often caught Judoka off guard. Hearing these stories and having the opportunity of training in Seifukai and Gyokushin-ryu felt like travelling to a different time and place.

The next on our itinerary were two quite different beasts, compared to

Seifukai and Gyokushin-ryu. The first stop was Minoru Akuzawa Sensei's dojo in Tokyo. He was first introduced to martial arts through Chinese styles, and he excelled in Sanda tournaments, winning many trophies. After meeting several individuals from the Japanese Koryu world, who focused more on core conditioning methods, instead of adhering to a particular form, he started reevaluating everything he had previously learned, and eventually decided to start his own organization, which he named Aunkai. The core idea of Aunkai is to move beyond the trappings of form and technique, and to recognize the fundamental inner principles that govern human movement, i.e., Naido. As Akuzawa Sensei says, "'technique' is only a product of a body that has been trained to intuitively understand the most natural and efficient ways to move in a martial context". This shift of focus from technique to core principles makes his teaching useful for practitioners from many different martial backgrounds. We began the training with various exercises in shiko dachi, connecting the left and right half of our body to develop a stable position. Then we started working in pairs, doing techniques that on first inspection looked a bit weird. For example, sensei instructed us to lay our hands on our partner, and push him – not with our hands, but rather with our center. Then we were supposed to punch the mitts he was holding, but without moving our hips at all. This meant I had to get rid of the habit of punching with the whole body that I was taught from the first time I did tsuki! As you can imagine, this was mentally quite exhausting. I felt I could not get anything quite right, but sensei kept encouraging me. Then our partner started gradually resisting our punches. Things were slowly starting to make sense: we were learning how to send and receive force. Then, instead of using the mitts, we switched to a belly pad. Again, sending and receiving force. Finally, after two hours of training, with our brains sweating, all the little pieces fell into place. Sensei showed the full technique. You stand in shiko dachi, with your partner facing you from the side, wearing a belly pad. You achieve a stable position. Then you lift your leg up, and step back down, using this movement to shift your center towards your partner. And then, with the momentum you created, you move your fist and hit the belly pad. Sensei demonstrated it on me. He sent a shockwave that I could feel through my whole body. I've never felt anything like it. Sensei smiled and said "This is only 10% of the power"! I

tried the technique on a guy that I was training with, and the punch left him fighting for air. I even surprised myself!



That same weekend we had another training session: Akira Hino Sensei's seminar in Osaka. Hino Sensei has a fascinating biography. Apart from studying Budo his whole life, and developing his own approach – named simply Hino Budo, he has held workshops for dancers affiliated with the Forsythe company of the famous dancer and choreographer William Forsythe. And he plays drums as well. Trying to sum up his philosophy is quite difficult, but in his own words it is expressed like this: “Human beings are capable of sensing intentional actions [...] This means that you are not supposed to move intentionally [...] The movement needs to come from a deep place of interconnectivity and kinesthetic intelligence [...] In Hino Budo all exercises are geared toward developing kinesthetic intelligence and interrelationship”. This is what Leo and I were about to experience in Osaka. Although the seminar we attended was not primarily for Budoka, and there were practitioners from many different backgrounds, one could clearly see the foundational principles of Hino Budo in all exercises we did. At the beginning of the training session, one of the attendees asked Sensei “How does one develop something like kinesthetic intelligence, which is internal, not visible on the outside?” With a smile, he replied “He doesn't!” Hino Sensei likes to joke, and humor is desirable when you're struggling with the difficult principles he is teaching. During the whole two-hour training session we focused on only one principle, and all the exercises we did were designed to guide us towards managing it. It is challenging to describe

exactly what we did, but the motif of connecting your body into one solid, immovable unit was pervasive. We worked on relaxing our bodies. Then we did a number of exercises that helped consolidate the body into a unique whole. We then did a number of exercises with one and two resisting partners. From that “wholeness”, we were able to generate incredible power that moved our partners with ease, while using no actual muscle strength. Although my description probably doesn’t do it justice, I encourage you to look up Hino Sensei’s seminars on YouTube. His abilities are quite mindblowing. And far from being impossible to learn, as Sensei joked at the beginning of the session, all attendees eventually managed to do it. I could understand why his seminars are so popular all around the world, with Budoka as well as dancers: his teaching can be incredibly useful for all people who actively use their bodies, in whatever way.



At the end of that weekend, although the trainings were not particularly physically challenging, I felt utterly exhausted. It turns out that our brains can burn more calories than our bodies!

As our Japan tour was coming to an end, there was one more stop to make: Nanbu Doshu's hometown of Kobe. Karakawa Sensei, the head of Japan Nanbudo Kyokai, organized a training session in a small dojo next to Ninomiya shrine. We were warmly greeted by Japanese Nanbudoka, and during a three-hour training session we practiced sotai, suwari waza and kata bunkai. It was so heartwarming to be able to train Nanbudo in Doshu's hometown.

After the training we continued socializing over okonomiyaki. The next day was February 13th – Doshu's birthday. As Leo and I were staying in Kyoto, we found a beautiful small temple and lit a few incense sticks for Doshu. It was a nice closure to our Japan tour.

Heiwa YouTube channel updates!

Thank you to everyone who has already subscribed to our new YouTube channel! If you haven't had a chance to visit yet, we have three short videos ready for you to watch. See what we've been up to at the dojo and subscribe to be the first to know when we post new content!

Advanced nanbudo: Kaeshi waza - nanbu sotai take kiri kaeshi/ude garami



Buki practice: Bo kaiten nage



Ippon shobu experiments



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We look forward to seeing you on the tatami!

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