



**Interview from Downunder – part 1**  
**by Kevin Wong, Ren Shin Kan, Walthamstow**

In Australia, I took the opportunity of meeting with Colin Hackett Sensei, Shido-in Yondan so Hombu. The following article is the interview I did with him and his vision of what he sees as the way forward for his aikido organisation in Australia.

**Profile**

Colin Hackett was a student of the late Shihan William Smith MBE and Shihan Gordon Jones (6th Dan) before the time when the UKA was formed back in the 1970s. Colin left the UK back in the 1980s and went to Australia where he briefly trained with Aiki-Kai Australia before establishing the Australasian Aikikai which is affiliated to the UKA. He currently teaches Aikido and Iaido in the Central Coast of New South Wales and actively organises and promotes the art out there.

***(Q1) What was the Aikido scene like when you first arrived in Australia?***

Well Kevin, it was and still is very fragmented. You have organizations that preach this and organizations that preach that. You had to do your research if you were thinking of entering into practice. But for me it was quite easy. I was an Aikikai follower. A supporter of the Doshu and Hombu Dojo.



***(Q2) Was there much of a difference between the Aikido that you practiced from the one that existed in Australia?***

Yes a big difference. I think mainly because Australia had Sugano Sensei, and the U.K. had Chiba Sensei as their representatives from Hombu Dojo. Although these two well respected Sensei's were both uchi-deshi to O'Sensei with each spending over ten years in their allotted countries and both ably equipped to deliver the goods, they are like chalk and cheese!

***(Q3) What led you to establish your Aikido school and the Australasian Aikikai (AA) organisation?***

Well first came Central Coast Aikido (now Aikikai) because I thought that if I could attract a few students perhaps I could have a couple of dojos covering the Central Coast

region. But things kind of took off and with more dojos outside of the coast i.e. Sydney, Newcastle and Adelaide, there was need for a change of name to cover these satellite dojos, so the Australasian Aikikai was born.

But to get back to your original question it evolved out of total frustration and dissatisfaction with Aiki-Kai Australia. Not only because of the standard of Aikido on offer, but they thought they had a monopoly on the art.

Membership and training fees were high. If you joined you could only practice at Aiki-Kai dojos and no-where else. You couldn't attend any other courses hosted by different organizations. The list goes on. So many of my Aikido friends whom I associate with and visit to practice at their dojos, were officially at one time Aiki-Kai members. Even now they (the Aiki-Kai) have



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no visiting teachers except Sugano Sensei. It kind of reminds me of the time when Japan closed its doors to foreigners and went into isolation.

They are very blinkered, and their Aikido is not progressing. It's stagnating through ignorance and a necessity to control the situation.

**(Q4) What were the challenges that you faced then and what do you see as the future challenges as the head of the Australasian Aikikai organisation?**

My first challenge was myself! Sounds funny doesn't it, but Mr William Smith Shihan M.B.E. always stressed the point that contentment was paramount to one's progression as a human being, but this is so difficult to find. You can spend all your life searching, only to find that what

you seek is right in front of your face. With that in mind, there was only one positive action and I opened a small dojo on the Central Coast at Gosford, in the local youth centre some 9 years ago. Gosh! Time does fly by when you're having fun. Next year will mark Central Coast Aikikai's tenth birthday. I will have to organise a big party and have a few beers!!

Future challenges are to be successful. Have lots of students with a common bond and eventually obtain Hombu Dojo recognition for the Australasian Aikikai. I know it's going to take a lot of hard work from a lot of people but it's a challenge that I feel we are all up for and that we are all working together to achieve!

**(Q5) The United Kingdom Aikikai (UKA), as the mother organisation that**

***you are affiliated to, has always been thought of as a progressive organisation while still maintaining the virtues of traditional Aikido. How does the AA fit into this and are there any differences in your direction from it?***

No differences at all. I am totally committed to the U.K.A. in body, mind and direction and of course Gordon Jones Shihan whom I've known for over 30 years. My allegiance has always been (and will continue to be) to firstly honour, respect, and keep the name of my teacher William Smith Shihan in my heart, give 100% support to the U.K.A. and of course follow the direction of Shihan Gordon Jones and Hombu Dojo.

**(The final part of this interview will be in the next edition of The Scribe. Editor)**

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**"Martial Art" by Andrew Humphreys Te Shin Kai**

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s I was able to see a lot of martial art films as the movie industry was packed with them. With the commercial release of the VCR in the late 1970s and early 1980s the film industry took advantage of new and expanded audiences. The martial arts movie industry took advantages of this. The Canon Group seemed to release a new film on videos every week. I got to see a lot of these films. This was mainly due to a good friend of mine who's aunt owned a video store. In our early teens we would look forward to the

latest Chuck Norris release and wonder what ever Ninjas could do next. They had already achieved everything else, including flying unaided.

Due to the general influence and buzz of martial arts (1986) it seemed only natural that those watching such films would end up training. The outcome was that I and some other friends enrolled in Karate classes at a local youth centre in my home town. Some twenty years later (2007) I am the only one of the original group of friends who still practices, though I

am not the only one excited about the next Ninja film release. My friend's aunt now runs a DVD store.

Martial arts films consist of mighty battles performed over 15 minute periods at the highlight of a three hour epic. These heroes have usually been left orphaned and then either or raised by a monk in a monastery (where the hero is subjected to the abuses of training) or he is raised by an old man in a forest. He has long beard. Years later the hero extracts revenge



of some kind on the villains in the film. This usually takes 15 minutes or so (see note above). Is this a real and accurate image of martial arts?

During my time as a student and teacher my perception of martial arts has changed. As I have practiced, studied and traveled my opinions have matured. And I have thought about what the martial arts and the term martial arts means.

To help me I broke down Martial Arts in to its two components and analysed what is they mean individually to come to a conclusion.

### “Martial”

The word martial can be described in the following ways:

- ***inclined or disposed to war; warlike: The ancient Romans were a martial people.***
- ***of, suitable for, or associated with war or the armed forces: martial music.***
- ***characteristic of or befitting a warrior: a martial stride.***
- ***c.1374, from L. *martialis* "of Mars or war," from Mars (gen. Martis), Roman god of war. Martial law first recorded 1533. Martial arts, 1933, translates Japanese *bujutsu*.***

Throughout the above references there is a link to warfare. Mars is the god of war and has somewhat stamped his name to the adjective. Martial Arts also translate into ***bujutsu*** a

Japanese term. The most famous practitioners of ***bu-jutsu*** were the ***Samurai***. They were professional warriors who were member of the hereditary warrior class in feudal Japan. They were most noted for their high level of personal honour and holding true to traditions. As warriors they were used by warlords or ***Shogun***. The samurai excelled in during the feudal period that ran roughly from ***1160 to 1603***. During this time there are many stories of Samurais being great warriors including those of ***Myamoto Musashi (1584 – 1645)*** author of the ***Go Rin no Sho (Book of Five Rings)***. ***Musashi*** was noted to have killed his first man at the age of 13. Later on in life he was an advisor and artist.

In ***1603*** the ***Edo*** or ***Tokugawa*** period internal stability within Japan lead the ***Samurai*** to take on bureaucratic and advisory roles. Others were revered as artists and poets. Though their skills were as warriors were not needed, they were still revered as martial in the way that they continued to carry out their respective duties. Through being martial they maintained the tradition of the Samurai and adapted it into other skills and ways of life.

So what does this have to do with Aikido as a martial art? Does the way that we practice makes us martial? If we practice harder and faster do we naturally become martial artists? I think not. I feel that anyone can train martially.

It is not ***“how”*** we train but in the ***“manner”*** that we train. Some practitioners prefer to train hard and fast. It may be all that they know, However, I have known some people who view yoga as a martial art, and even the first martial art. Yoga has no benefit of self preservation but it is embraced by many as a positive addition to a way of life I believe have completed a little wider reading that being ***“martial”*** is all about the ***“manner”*** in which you conduct yourself and this needn't be just within the dojo. Being positive and confident are martial traits. These can be used on and off the mat. ***“Martial”*** is not just about how effectively and quickly you can disarm someone with a knife.

Within Aikido there is ***“irimi”*** or to enter. To me this is the positive use of being martial. To be able meet one's attacker head on and positively, but with control and intelligence shows a martial translation. By maintaining the traditions of Aikido are we also not being martial. Though the Samurai were not so much needed as warriors from ***1603***, they existed officially within society until their abolishment until ***1868***. As Aikidoka, we are carrying on the tradition of older budo through its modern translation of Aikido. Is that not martial?

### “Art”

The noun art contains many references in any larger dictionary. The ones relevant or most relevant are:





**- the quality, production, expression, or realm, according to aesthetic principles, of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance.**

**- a field, genre, or category of art: Dance is an art.**

**- any field using the skills or techniques of art: advertising art; industrial art.**

**- the principles or methods governing any craft or branch of learning: the art of baking; the art of selling.**

**- the craft or trade using these principles or methods.**

**- skill in conducting any human activity: a master at the art of conversation.**

From the above descriptions I feel that there is a common link between all. That is of expression. Art in fact is about expression, be it painting, sculptures dance or theatre. Expression allows individuality to come to the fore.

Within Aikido I feel that expression is undervalued. By expressing yourself as a teacher, student or "artist" on the mat you are expanding your ability to perform a technique. When you express yourself you naturally expand yourself. For the more technically minded this can be seen when executing kokyu-ho. If you are inexpressive and just "go through the motions", you may perform the technique to a satisfactory level. However, if you practice and express yourself, expand your body, limbs and hara you are allowing yourself to control and project your partner at greater levels.

When you express yourself and open up your body to the art, you are also allowing yourself to increase your ability of movement. Movement is all important in Aikido. Are not basic movements referred to "taisabaki", body movement? Without this I feel that Aikido would change and aspects of it would diminish to the point of non-existence.

Once we understand how to express ourselves through body movement we can develop our skill of the art. Have studied other martial arts, I know that Aikido is more demanding in different ways than other arts. I am not saying it is better, but different skills are required by practitioners of Aikido than others.

Once we understand the art we are in a better position to expand on our knowledge of it. Again, this is a vital part of Aikido, else how would we learn to develop body art, and general understandings of a different culture. These all add up to a gathering of principles through practice which we then further explore, expand and develop.

### Concluding thoughts

I feel that there is a general public misunderstanding of what the martial arts are. This understanding has been helped along by the movie industry, and flying Ninjas. In general I feel that the martial in martial arts relates to the attitude and commitment to practice. You do not need to train hard and fast to be martial. Being martial is combining what you are doing within

your life and being positive about it in the process. This can apply to your Aikido training too!

The art form from Aikido comes from the expression of your practice and the individualism you transfer from your technique. The art form needs to be preserved and further understood drawn from practice and interpretation. This can be aided by Aikidoka training with a wide variety of instructors and then applying what is being taught. Many artists spent years with their masters learning the basics and then create their own creations and impressions and as Aikidoka we should do the same.

Aikido is a "martial art" either way you look at it. To me however, the meaning of the term for me has changed. Martial art does not only refer to feudal Japan and interpretations made by Hollywood for our amusement, but is an expression of what and how we train, We no longer need to train for 100% preservation, but we can train to condition ourselves and our intelligence so that we can express our art. How will you decide how Aikido is a "martial art" for yourself?

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