



KOBUDŌ

Kobudo is one of the terms used to categorise the older, classical martial arts of Japan. Some scholars trace the origins of kobudo back to the 6th century, however, the techniques and strategies of the important prototypical kobudo schools that still exist today originally developed during the turbulent Muromachi period (1336–1573). Warriors par excellence organised their secret techniques and teachings into curricula, and formed their own *ryūha*, or schools of military studies. They would teach their profound, often divinely inspired martial knowledge to select disciples, and so the tradition was able to continue through generations, and centuries.

Schools teaching various fighting skills would catalogue each of the skill areas into separate scrolls. Over time, the overall curriculum of these schools tended to become somewhat disjointed; the result being the emergence of schools that would specialise primarily in swordsmanship or purely in grappling, for example.

In the latter half the Edo Period (mid 18th century), records show that there were over 500 schools of swordsmanship alone. Many arts that still exist today and specialise in one specific aspect of combat are often the products of this process.

In many areas of Japan, there still exist martial art schools that maintain the philosophies and practices of the founders, and preserve the techniques and forms with minimal alteration. These schools are

distinct from modern budo, and are often referred to as *'kobudō'* or *'koryū bujutsu'*. Broadly speaking, kobudo schools were devised for killing. Modern budo arts on the other hand, were adapted in the modern period into safer versions with rules and removal of dangerous techniques. Competition is a feature of many modern budo arts, but the majority of kobudo schools consider that such free exchanges of techniques are too dangerous, and so *kata* forms the basis of their study.

Kobudo arts are properly acknowledged as being the source of many popular modern budo arts such as kendo and judo. Kobudo schools are important historical assets, and part of the cultural heritage of Japan.

The kobudo schools that will be demonstrated in Sydney are the Hokushin Ittō-ryū tradition of swordsmanship, Daitō-ryū Aikijujutsu (grappling), and Hōzōin-ryū (spearmanship). All three of these traditions boast an illustrious history, and are rarely seen outside of Japan.

