

Shufa, the Art of Chinese Calligraphy and shodo, the Art of Japanese Calligraphy, by Alex Angehrn

Shodo 書道 literally translates as «way of writing». 道 «way» also has the meanings of «art» and «method». Thus the meaning of *shodo* 書道 might be described as «the art of writing methodically, practiced as a way of life».

Already before Chinese writing came to Japan around the 5th century, Chinese calligraphy, *shufa* (书法) was much more than a means of communication. In ancient China, the art of writing was considered the most important art along with poetry and painting. Initially, writing was used by the ancient Chinese to communicate with the gods and particularly for oracles, but long after writing was not more limited to spiritual purposes, it was practiced with respect and reverence, and was associated with power. People with the ability of writing qualified for civil service and acquired the right to exercise power.

There was the believe that character traits such as moral integrity, independence and inner energy manifested in the writing. Learning Chinese calligraphy was therefore always understood as a means of personal development.

> *Right: The character 紙 «paper» written by Alex Angehrn. Chinese and Japanese calligraphy offers a wide range of opportunities for personal expression.*



In addition to the Chinese script, various Buddhist teachings reached Japan. With these new teachings, the Japanese merged their deep reverence for nature and natural materials from their own natural religion, *shinto*. The calligraphy materials were already revered in China as the four treasures of the scholar's room (文房四宝). These items that a literati needed for writing and painting are brush, ink, inkstone and paper.

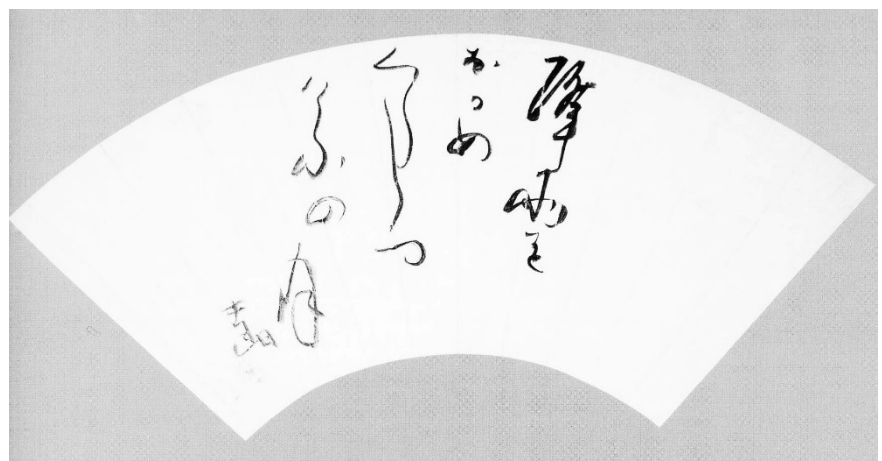
The aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, *shufa*, has always been imbued with the principles of nature and the living. With the development of the independent Japanese calligraphy, *shodo*, this closeness to nature was further refined. In Japan, the calligraphy style *karayo* (唐様), based on China, and the purely Japanese calligraphy style, *wayo* (和様), developed.

> Right: «Growling Tiger» by Ryu Kobi (1714-1792), a Japanese calligraphy in Chinese style *karayo*.¹



Of the Buddhist teachings, Zen Buddhism in particular was popular with the samurai elite. The mindfulness of every moment taught by Zen thus became the basis for all arts in Japan, understood as a path (道). Derived from this were the martial arts, with the collective term *budo* 武道 «way of martial art», but also other paths such as the tea ceremony (茶道) *sado* or *chado* and the flower path *kado* (華道) also called *ikebana*. Japanese calligraphy *shodo* 書道, understood as a path of mindfulness, is imbued with this spirit.

> Right: «Falling Rain» by Inoue Shiro (1741-1821), example of the Japanese *wayo* calligraphy style, on a fan.²



¹ Aus «77 Dances» von Stephen Addiss (Seite 22)

² Aus «77 Dances» von Stephen Addiss (Seite 170)