

Shodô-Brushes

Special shodô brushes are used for East Asian calligraphy. They are not easily available in good quality in the West. In this blog article you will find further sources of supply and information on buying and handling the brushes.



Special calligraphy brushes in various sizes are used for shodô. I import suitable brushes for my students from Japan. Under

<https://www.sansui-angehrn.ch/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MaterialsEnglish.pdf>

I have listed sources of supply with products that I have tested.

Japanese and Chinese brushes have tips made from goat, weasel or horse hair, to name just the most common. The hairs at the tip of the brush should be pointed, of equal length and must not stick out. Alternatively, there are also special brush pens called fude. These fine pens are designed for writing Chinese characters.

For beginners in shodô, brushes that offer a good balance between elasticity and control are recommended. Goat hair brushes are well suited to this as they are soft and more forgiving of mistakes. The beginner brushes I offer have a mixture of elastic marten hair and soft goat hair. The valuable marten hair forms the centre or the foremost tip.

The tip of new brushes is in a plastic cover that protects the hairs. This is a transport protection that must be disposed of as soon as you start working with the brush. If you put

used brushes in this cover, the hairs of the brush are easily damaged or start to mould! Used brushes should never be stored in an airtight container.

Initially, the brush hairs are fixed with glue. This glue must be removed before first use. Open the brush hairs with your fingers by holding the brush under cold water and gently pressing the hairs sideways. The hairs will soon give way and become soft. Keep doing this until the tip of the brush is soft and open.

Calligraphy brushes usually have a loop at the end of the handle from which you can hang the brush. If you hang the brush on this loop after washing it, any remaining ink collects in the tip where it is easy to remove.

The esteem in which the Japanese hold shodô brushes is expressed in the tradition of ritual brush burning. This ritual is known as Kuyô, 'ritual offering', and is a ceremony in which old or worn brushes are burnt to pay respect and honour them. This ceremony often takes place in temples and is an expression of the calligrapher's gratitude to their most important tool. In the photo below, the used brushes are carried to the temple on a stretcher.

