

Interview with Toshiro Fujioka sensei for SHIBUMI magazine

Toshiro Fujioka Sensei was born in March 1956 in the city of Kumamoto, capital of Kumamoto Prefecture, on the island of Kyushu.

Fujioka Sensei lived as a boarding student at Eiichi Miyazato Sensei's Jundokan dojo, Hanshi 10th dan, being the last student admitted by the s in such a regime

In 1978, following Ryoichi Onaga Sensei's proposal to run the OGKK dojo in Alicante, Fujioka Sensei, at the age of 22 and a 2nd dan black belt, decided to move to a country completely different from his own and with uncertain expectations for the future

With constancy, Fujioka Sensei began to materialize his work by leading the dojo and forming a group of students enthusiastic about Gôjû ryû Karate. Fujioka Sensei contributed his help, not only within the dojo, but also outside it, serving as president of the Association of Japanese in Alicante

All this disinterested help, this social and humanistic footprint led to his being distinguished in 2009 by the Japanese Consul General in Spain, Mr Teruaki Nagasaki. Later, in 2017, Fujioka Sensei was also distinguished by the Japanese Ambassador to Spain for his outstanding contribution to the promotion of friendly relations between Japan and other countries

Fujioka Sensei is Kyoshi 8th dan of Gôjû ryû Karate, has been recognized for his work in teaching Gôjû ryû Karate by different federations, both in the Valencian Community, and nationally

In 2019, on the occasion of his last trip to Okinawa and coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the OGKK, Fujioka Sensei was honoured with a diploma of appreciation for his entire dedication to the expansion and promotion of the Okinawa Gôjû Ryû Karate-dô Kyokai, a distinction presented to him by Koei Teruya Sensei, Hanshi 10th dan and president of the OGKK.

Could you tell us how you got started in the practice and study of traditional Karate?

In my younger years we watched action films. Those films caused me a great sensation and prompted my interest in studying martial arts. I went to a dôjô near my house with a classmate and it was there that I was initiated into the practice of Karate.

What memories do you have of your experience as an intern of Eiichi Miyazato Sensei at the Jundokan in Okinawa?

For me, my sensei was unique and embodied the closest idea we can have of a leader. Eiichi Miyazato Sensei was a professor at the Okinawa Police Academy. My life at that time was concentrated on Karate. I would get up at six in the morning to do the maintenance and cleaning of the dojo, as well as helping my teacher with his household chores and practicing Karate. All this work could take up fourteen hours a day from Monday to Sunday. Being a boarding student meant being a member of Sensei's family.

How can you describe it was in that time to study at Eiichi Miyazato Sensei's Jundokan?

Eichi Miyazato Sensei was a very respected person in the whole Karate community. As an anecdote I remember an occasion in which he called a student with a fourth dan degree to comment on a detail, and he crossed the dôjô in a hurry. I, who was a white belt at the time, was impressed by the attitude of respect this student showed towards the Sensei. In Okinawa there is a saying that says: "You should never step in your teacher's shadow". That was the first thing I learned with Miyazato Sensei: respect for the sensei.

Could you tell us about the sempai-kohai relationship in the Jundokan dôjô? What memories do you have of your sempais?

I spent four years studying at the Jundokan. The main characteristic of the practice is freedom. The dôjô is open from ten in the morning until ten at night. You were free to practice when you wanted to. When you enter for the first time, the students with second or third dan help you with the daily work and we could say that the classes are private. This system allows for faster progression if there is, of course, collaboration and interest on the part of the student. The training is very personal, face to face with your sempai. Another feature was

Miyazato Sensei's. They were generally focused so that the student himself would look for his answers, which forced him to study in depth. Miyazato Sensei used to tell the story of a bird whose owner always fed it in his mouth. On one occasion, that man had to travel to Japan and the bird, which could not eat by itself, died. This story represents very well the teaching philosophy of the Jundokan, where the student takes direct responsibility for his or her own training. I especially remember Shinko Gima Sensei, at that time the third dan. He taught me the basic kata - co Gekisai dai ichi. He made me repeat it up to fifty times. It was very important to maintain a correct attitude towards the effort made by the sempai to instruct us, without it, you would not receive any teaching. I also remember Shinzo Chinen Sensei, who besides helping me with aspects related to Karate was for me like a guardian angel. I was young at that time and had the normal needs of that age. Shinzo Chinen Sensei helped me a lot in my personal relationship with Miyazato Sensei

Do you believe that the practice of Martial Arts forges a character capable of dealing with the challenges of life itself, as you did when you started your journey to Spain?

Of course, that was not easy for me. I only bought the one-way ticket. I really didn't know what was going to happen. Imagine, when I was only twenty-two years old, in a country so far away, the nostalgia and loneliness I could feel. These circumstances were also difficult for me. In addition, I could speak Japanese and English, but I could not express myself in Spanish, which frustrated my work as a teacher. In Spain the dôjôs are usually closed during the summer months and at the beginning I could not afford my accommodation, which forced me to sleep for a few months in the dôjô, using a bunk bed given to me by a student. All these situations made me seriously consider returning to Okinawa, but I spoke with my sempai, Ryoichi Onaga Sensei, who was instrumental in making me think about my intention. His words helped me to insist on the path I had decided on and to continue on it despite the adversities. That was in 1979 and I have come to this day. While I was at the Jundokan I learned very well the relationship that Karate has with one's life. As an internal student, I was doing cleaning work ordered by Miyazato Sensei. Later I understood that those were not simple tasks, but lessons with which the Sensei taught me how to be a real karateka. Removing stones or nails scattered in front of the dojo, that some unconscious person could use, was only a way to be warned and to be aware that my task could avoid a conflict, before it came to happen.

We live in a society with a lot of information, comforts, excessive consumerism, competitiveness, etc. All this seems to have cornered Martial Arts in small groups. Is there space today for the study of classical Martial Arts?

Understanding Karate, and in particular Gôjû ryû, is complicated. This style has an important influence of Chinese concepts. Today there is an excessive tendency to obtain results quickly, for example, by lifting weights to develop the muscles in a short space of time. But in classical Karate many concepts are difficult to observe: muchimi, fluidity, sensation, zanshin, etc. It takes years to see these results.

The development of Karate in Japan was boosted by organising university competitions that promoted Karate among young people. Miyazato Sensei believed that Karate should be promoted from the neighbourhood dojo. For him, minorities were also important. In general, no one lived from teaching Karate in Okinawa

You have been teaching for 42 years, a very considerable time. What would you advise those of us who start teaching?

Above all, I would stress patience. You have to be patient, understand the learning rhythms of the students. To be a good educator you have to have a lot of psychology, especially at the child level. I am still learning, both from children and adults, after so many years of teaching.

On 29 June 2017, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs decorated you for your outstanding contribution to the promotion of friendly relations between Japan and other countries. What did it mean to you, Sensei, to receive this distinction?

Honestly, I received it with surprise. Until then I had only received distinctions related to the world of Karate, in federations or associations. This distinction came as a surprise to me. I knew that there were other Japanese teachers in Spain before me and that they too could be distinguished by the Consulate. I was surprised to learn that some of them were aware of this distinction towards me.

Do you think that this distinction can serve as an example to future generations of students and do you think that this decoration can make them understand that the study of Karate

goes beyond the technical aspects?

In particular, and disinterestedly, I have always helped the Japanese Consulate in various situations where Japanese citizens have had problems with passports, translation, etc. It is important for practitioners to understand that the values that are continually worked on in the Martial Arts extend beyond the boundaries of a dôjô, through the exercise of selfless assistance, courtesy and goodwill.

What is your opinion about the practice of Gôjû ryû at present?

Our Karate association -OGKK- is made up of a considerable group of people. We maintain the line of work of the Okinawan Gôjû ryû, we are in contact with the Okinawan dôjôs, we organize courses and seminars continuously and, in addition, a European gasshuku every two years.

You are Kyoshi 8th Dan, director of the Okinawa Gôjû ryû Karate-dô Kyokai, director of arbitration and official assistant to Hanshi Ryoichi Onaga. What does it mean to you to work alongside Onaga Sensei in the dissemination and practice of Gôjû ryû in Spain and Europe?

For me, my sempai, Sensei Onaga, is an exemplary person, both on a technical and personal level. On a technical level, many Okinawan masters recognize that he is excellent. Today, at the age of seventy-two, he continues with the same mentality as when he first arrived in Spain, continually motivated to teach and spread the Gôjû ryû. Over time his Karate has matured to an admirable level.

There are a number of rules that govern the life of a dôjô, such as: rei shiki, dôjô kun, sôji, etc. It seems that in many dôjôs these customs are in disuse due to modernity or the spirit of sport that prevails in them. Why do you think this situation arises? What can these rules contribute to the education of the student?

It is important to teach these values to students. Sometimes we can understand that they are entirely to blame, but we must also put the focus on the teacher. The teacher must teach the various rules that govern the life of the dojo to avoid reaching unethical and immoral situations.

In Kanryo Higashionna's time, the main focus of teaching was based on the moral formation of the student. We are talking about a time

when Karate was a system of self-defense with which you could kill a person, this meant that: "you could not give a gun to just anyone!

Character (shin) was very important in order to learn Karate. Without a good character you did not receive any teaching.

The practice of a Budô like Karate encompasses the balanced study of Shin-Gi-Tai (spirit, technique, body). Today, the feeling is that the part that represents the values of traditional Karate (Shin) is in disuse. What importance do you give to the transmission of these values among the young students of your dôjô?

Today, sport is very much focused on physical health, but less on mental aspects. Martial Arts also deals with the mental field, respect and education. This is why it is so important to understand the reason for the salute.

Sometimes, when we go to a championship, I tell the children and their parents that they must also learn from defeat. Winning is nice, but overcoming the sadness of defeat is also nice.