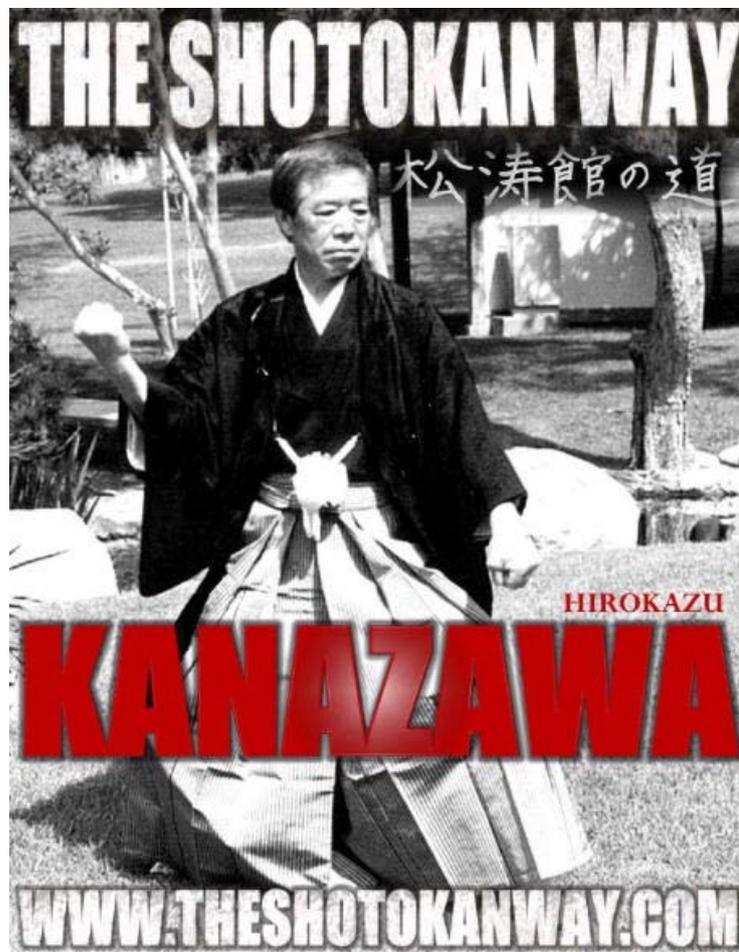


An Interview with Hirokazu Kanazawa

HIROKAZU KANAZAWA

10th Dan



Hirokazu Kanazawa 10th Dan SKIF, is one of the most senior practicing Shotokan Instructors in the world, with a name and reputation that not only draws thousands of people to attend his courses wherever he goes, but has helped establish one of, if not the largest organization in the world, Shotokan



Karate International Federation – with over two and a half million members – all following his 'Way'.



He is one of very few still teaching today to have been taught by Master Gichin Funakoshi. He was a student of Master Masatoshi Nakayama (Former Chief Instructor of the Japan Karate Association). He was a part of the first ever JKA Instructor's Course. He was a highly successful competitor, even with a broken wrist. He has spent most of his life dedicated to the promotion

and development of Shotokan...the list goes on and on. He is undeniably one of the most important figures in Shotokan history, and a huge degree of its popularity, its following and its development is owed to this gentleman who is always with a smile.

During his visit last year to the UK, teaching at Windsor, due to unforeseeable circumstances Emma and I could not interview him ourselves so at last minute David Saorin kindly stepped in to do it for us...Thanks!! I would also like to say a huge thank you to Roger Carpenter for helping us arrange this interview, Darren Jumnoodo for helping replace us and use of his Dictaphone, and Shinji Akita for help with translation. We would also like to say a huge thank you to the Legend himself for kindly giving us his precious time and sharing his experiences, knowledge and wisdom. – Shaun Banfield 08

Questions by The Shotokan Way.

Many thanks to Ged Moran and Paul Walker for Photography

(David Saorin) I'd like to just start by saying a big thank you for doing the interview. You have a very rich karate heritage, training with some of the key instructors in karate history. Could you tell us a little about your karate beginnings?

(Hirokazu Kanazawa) My Karate beginnings...my brother's classmate was a karateka, Mr. Yamashiro Hiroyoshi, and I learned a little from him, but this was not my formal karate training. Then when I went to Tokyo I started at Nippon University but I wanted to become strong at karate. Then I visit all other Universities in Tokyo and I found Takushoku University. Then I started alongside many seniors. Mr. Okazaki was my senior; Mr. Nishiyama was my senior along with many other names. The Shihan was Nakayama Sensei.

The first time I was staying in an apartment, but they took me to the karate dormitory and the training was very hard every day.

(DS) You were a part of the first JKA Instructors Course with Sensei Nakayama and others teaching. Do you have any fond memories of this time you would like to share?

(HK) Nakayama Sensei's teaching was very scientific and very logical, and I enjoyed it, but the training was very hard every day. We knew that Nakayama Sensei didn't like snakes and he would say 'if you see snake, pick him up', the same as me if I see a dog, I am frightened. Then when we were training and we were very tired we would pick up small snake and put it in front of Nakayama Sensei and training would finish.

(DS) What would you say was the most important thing Sensei Nakayama instilled in you as his student?

(HK) Nakayama Sensei was a small person, but I am tall in Japan, because people are smaller in Japan. Nakayama Sensei liked me because I was tall and my favorite was kicking techniques, jodan kicking. He enjoyed this so much

and he recognized me. Some Masters are sometimes happy and sometimes not happy, but Nakayama Sensei was always happy.

(DS) In his writing, Sensei Nakayama writes about using the central axis when using the hips. What is your view on this and how do you think the hips should be used during rotation and why?

(HK) Nakayama Sensei's opinion is very correct and very scientific, but sometimes he study so much. Central axis is ok when going very fast and if you're very strong, but my opinion is different, I have a different opinion to Nakayama Sensei and we would always discuss it. *(Editor's Note - In his writing Master Nakayama discusses using the central axis of the body when rotating. Sensei Kanazawa however advocates using the commonly phrased 'Hinge Theory'. When punching gyaku-zuki with the right hand, the left hip acts as a hinge, like a door, and as the punch travels forward that right hip goes forward to shomen from hanmi, like a door slamming shut.)*

(DS) You Sensei were fortunate enough to study with Master Funakoshi. Looking back now with the worldwide popularity of karate, does this make you feel terribly happy?

(HK) Oh yes, very happy. He was more spiritual, he had a more spiritual mentality but he also understood young people's opinions.

(DS) Did Sensei Funakoshi think that the biomechanical study of karate was important or was this something introduced solely by Nakayama Sensei?

(HK) Funakoshi Sensei did not want questions, because he thought Karate-Do was spiritual education. But Nakayama Sensei was thinking, this is very good and wanted to take it all over the world. A necessity for global practice of karate was competition. Some percent of karateka wanted competition.

(DS) In what ways do you think the Budo Approach to Karate training has a positive effect on people as human beings as well as disciplined karateka?

(HK) Budo is very good for people to become strong. You can also enjoy it like you would sport, but it's different. Budo is about helping all people become strong, a strong body and mind. Sport is about enjoyment and friendship. Budo is more about making you strong, with endless possibilities, and making you respect other people.



(DS) You place much emphasis on breathing in your karate. Was this something emphatically stressed by Nakayama Sensei or any of your other seniors, or has your study of Tai Chi influenced your attention to breathing? Would you explain your understanding of its importance within karate?

(HK) Most of my breathing techniques were developed by myself because Nakayama Sensei wanted me to find out by myself. Therefore he sent me to learn Aikido. I also started studying Tai Chi, which taught me how to relax and taught me more about the breathing. Also an Aikido Master started training in karate and we were teaching one another, then I found out by myself.

(DS) Sensei, how long have you been practicing Tai Chi and what style do you practice?

(HK) Tai Chi...During my stay in Japan, I was training with Sensei Yang, 1968, so it would have been 1958 that I started Tai Chi.

(DS) And what style do you practice?

(HK) Yang style of Tai Chi. *(Editor's note – Yang style of Tai Chi is arguably the most practiced style of Tai Chi)*

(DS) Can you tell us about ki?

(HK) I believe ki is located in the center of the body, the tanden. We have energy when we are born, and we get energy from the sky. Also, breathing aids ki. We get energy from breathing, meditation, and exercise.

(DS) Today many people do not use the Makiwara, choosing to use punch bags or pads instead. Do you believe the Makiwara to still be an important training apparatus?

(HK) Oh yes for myself, very important. Not only does it make you strong, but more important is the hara, for producing energy. Makiwara is focus training.

(DS) You Sensei Kanazawa are one Martial Artist that is popular and respected outside of Shotokan Karate. How important do you think it is to integrate the karate of other styles into your Shotokan training?



(HK) I respect all styles. All styles have good things about them, especially GojuRyu. When I was a University student, we would always go to Sensei Gogen Yamaguchi. I would visit all teachers, and trained in Okinawa. Learning and respecting other styles is very important.

(DS) You have trained with different Sensei from different styles such as Seikichi Toguchi Sensei? What was it like training with the likes of such people?

(HK) He looked after me when I visited Okinawa, and took us to many Dojos there. *(Editor's note - Sensei Kanazawa returned to Japan from his teaching in Hawaii after almost two and a half years in 1963. Then a group of twenty-one karateka, including Sensei Kanazawa and Enoeda, traveled to Okinawa to experience karate at its homeland. Sensei Kanazawa in his book 'Karate-My Life' shares funny tales of his time there and describes the trip as a 'Fantastic experience')*

(DS) You enjoyed some fantastic victories as an excellent competitor. Looking back, who would you say was your biggest competitive rival?

(HK) All of them were rivalries *(Laughing)*, and they were all great instructors. Nishiyama, Enoeda, Shirai, all brilliant.

(DS) At the beginning of your travels from Japan as a karate instructor, the main objective was to let the world know about it. Is this correct?

(HK) The JKA said *'You have to go'*, I liked karate so much and I think it's so good for everything, for body for mind, character; therefore I wanted to give it to all other people. Many people. Of course there was also friendship between countries and Japan. I enjoyed traveling all over the world teaching.

(DS) Sensei, you have been traveling to the UK to teach since 1965. How has your teaching style changed in these years that have passed?

(HK) When I came to Europe, Japanese are much shorter and Europeans tend to be taller, so therefore I was teaching mostly kicking techniques. For

example, in Empi, after the age-tsuki I would use mawashi-geri, I would teach little changes to the kata, and they became very good at kicking.

(DS) What was your impression of the UK when you first came here? How have things changed?

(HK) English people are mostly gentleman. 'Gentleman' meaning in Bushido - being kind – and they were kind to me. This is Budo spirit. I was also very happy teaching English people because they were hard training with no question. I would ask them 'Do you have question?' but by doing they would get the answer. But when I went to teach in Germany they all questioned. No question, you have to do. Both Europeans but different characters.

(DS) After such a long time in the Martial Arts, what would you say keeps you excited about learning more?

(HK) In the future, I want to find out even further - that which you're not able to see or hear – I want to look deeper, further. That's what keeps me continuing training.



(DS) You are a great Master of Kobudo including many weapons. What is your reason for this?

(HK) Karate is the family, the brother of many kobudo, Okinawan kobudo. Bo, Sai, Tonfa, Nunchaku, many kinds of kobudo is the family to karate. SKI Dojo Instructors they must do kobudo, not only karate. If they don't karate will only improve slowly. We need to practice to understand the history.

(DS) What is your favorite weapon?

(HK) Nunchaku and Bo.

(DS) After seeing your great demonstration of Iaido in the last World Championships in Tokyo, can you please tell us how long you have been training in this Martial Art and why?

(HK) I have been practicing this for a long time and I wanted to do this because of the spirit... The katana is the same as the spirit. Katana is very honest.

(DS) People say that the Martial Arts have a spiritual dimension to them. What do you think of this?

(HK) Karate, or any Martial Art is not only about technique. Technique is only the physical. But there's internal power, spiritual power, mental power, this must always be in harmony, this is an important part of the Martial Arts.

(DS) Some people say that the Martial Arts have spiritual qualities, like 'Will'. When we practice techniques it can go beyond physical power and the energy takes over, that's a spiritual experience. When you work hard, you have will, you have perseverance. Years and years of practicing the Martial Arts means you can have spiritual experiences. You sensei were explaining about one experience by a tree when you were gone in the middle of the night...that kind of spiritual experience, have you had many spiritual experiences?

(HK) You have heard of '*Mind over body*' this is also spiritual, spiritual power and goes beyond science. Sometimes I feel like I can communicate with nature...

(DS) You spoke about your time at Takushoku and how hard the training was. How did that affect your life?

(HK) It helped make me understand people. It helped me to understand respect and it gave me respect.

(DS) Why do you think it's important to learn the Martial Arts?

(HK) Very important in the Martial Arts is the development of character. If people are '*Always angry, angry*'; good fortune escapes these people. But if you are '*Thank you*', and honest, then all good things will happen and good things will happen to you. So I'm always '*Thank you, thank you, thank you*'.

(DS) Where do you see SKIF heading in the future, how do you think SKIF will continue to develop and adapt?

(HK) It will focus on the childrens' development, both physically and mentally, teaching discipline to children. Also developing other people too and keeping the relationships between people all over the world, making better relationships.

(DS) Who inspires you today in or out of karate?

(HK) There are many people, and it's very difficult to choose one person.

(DS) You practice many kata such as Nijuhachiho. Why are these kata so important do you think?



(HK) Kata is for education, and is like the arts. In the arts there are many types, so it's important to study all kata.

(DS) What is the origin of Nijuhachiho?

(HK) This kata is from Shurei, like Gankaku, Chinto. This kata developed from the White Crane and all these kata developed from the same family.

(DS) What is Sensei Kanazawa's favourite kata and why?

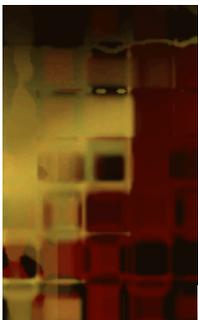
(HK) I like Gankaku very much. Therefore I wanted to do it at the Second All Japan Championship, but Nakayama Sensei said '*You have to do Sochin*', so I did and I won, but I'd wanted to do Gankaku.

(DS) Can I ask, what do you think of the WKF Sports Karate?

(HK) Sport is ok, but sport and Budo are very different. Sport is the same as a male and Budo is the same as a female, both human but very different. Male and females are opposites, same as sports and Budo. Opposite thinking.

(DS) May we just say a huge thank you for this interview, and we wish you and SKIF every success for the future! Many thanks to Akita Sensei for his translation.

(HK) OSS





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