

Taiji Kase, the imprint of a master

© Martín Fernández Rincón, Albacete (Spain 2000)

Taiji Kase Shotokan Ryu was born in (Chiva) Japan on January 9th, 1929 and he died in Paris on November 24th, 2004 at the age of 75.

Married and father of two daughters, he has dedicated his life to the practice and instruction of karate-do. He suffered a heart attack on the 31st of May 1999, from which he had to be reanimated with electroshock, and stayed 20 days in the American Hospital in Paris. This has not prevented him from continuing with his aim of elevating Karate to its highest peak, allowing all Karate practitioners access to the deeper aspects of this admirable and fascinating art.

When Taiji Kase was 6 years old, he had already started practicing Judo, obtaining his 2nd DAN in 1944. This same year, he began practicing Karate-Do. This happened after seeing in a bookstore the book "Karate-do Kyohan" written by Sensei Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957). He was very impressed by it because, although he already knew Judo, Kendo and Aikido, he was not familiar with Karate-do. He then decided to meet Gichin Funakoshi, who took him on as his pupil in the Shotokan-Dojo, after being assured by young Kase is interest. Taiji Kase was then 15 years old and remembering those days, he told us the following story:

In 1944 the people who owned a Katana, firearm or practiced Karate had to inform the police about it, because they considered it a weapon, which was not the case with the other martial arts. At this time, he was practicing both Judo and Karate. When he was about to obtain his 3rd Dan in Judo, he had to stop practicing it, since Karate took most of his time. And also he said smiling sometimes in the Judo randori (combat) he used Karate techniques and did not let his opponents practice. He also practiced some Aikido, getting to know Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of this art, and Noriaki Inoue, Aikido master of Shigeru Egami, both masters -he said had an incredible level. Master Kase was not only coached by Gichin Funakoshi, but also by other masters and instructors, as we will see in his interview.

At the end of March 1945, when he was only 16 years old, he enlisted in the Navy, joining the Kamikaze special force. However, the war ended in August of that same year, that is why he is still with us today. He usually says that since he could have died in the war and is alive, he never has a reason to be sad. And this is so, because you can always see him smiling or with a special inner mood.

He graduated from the University of Senshu with a degree in Economic Science, in March 1951. And says cheerfully, that sometimes, since he was training, he did not have enough time to prepare for the exams, and what he did was sign as captain of the Karate team, getting good results.

When the war ended, the Shotokan Shotokan had been destroyed due to the bombing. Yoshitaka Funakoshi (1906-1945) had died from lung gangrene or something similar, and all of his surviving pupils were scattered all around Japan. Master Kase was not able to find a Dojo in which to practice, so he went back to Judo, until Gichin Funakoshi got the Shotokan group together again.

In 1946 he obtained the Shodan (1st Dan) in Karate-Do and in 1949, when he was captain of the team in the Senshu University, he obtained the Sandan (3rd Dan). In this same exam, the captain of the Chuo University (Takagi) and the one of Takushoku (Shimamura), also obtained their 3rd Dan. Master Shimamura was Sempai (senior) of

the well known master Nishiyama, who obtained the Sandan approximately a year later than Taiji Kase, Takagi and Shimamura.

Master Kase joined the J.K.A. (Japan Karate Association) in order to be a professional teacher, which was what he had always wanted to be. However, he has always performed a special Karate. Even though he was Chief instructor in the European J.K.A., he has always kept in touch with masters from the N.K.S. Nihon Karate-do Shotokai, although these two groups: J.K.A. (Kyokai) and the N.K.S., became separated at the death of master Gichin Funakoshi due to different disagreements. However, it was normal for Master Kase to keep up this relationship, since one of his main instructors was Genshin Hironishi (1913-1981), Chief Instructor of the Shotokan Dojo and President of the Japanese Shotokai, after the death of Egami (1912-1981) and till his death in December 1999. He also has an excellent relationship with Jotaru Takagi, current president of the N.K.S., both being from the same generation and training colleagues. Okuyama Tadao was another of his instructors with whom he kept in touch sporadically, on his trips to Japan. We will also talk about him.

With respect to the comments mentioning that he did not follow the J.K.A. standards, he just says that his Karate is Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha, meaning Shotokan with the qualities he has added his personal touch.

In Japan, one of his tasks was to train the J.K.A. instructors in Kumite (combat), among who were: Enoeda, Ochi, Shirai and many others. Something little known is that he was in charge of taking care of the challenges against J.K.A.

In the post-war period (1945-1952), when Japan was under the control of the American police, he won many fights and ended up with real combat experience. He mentions now that that is not the true Budo spirit, but under those circumstances.

In 1964 he left Japan to teach in the following countries and continents:

In 1964 he spent three months in South Africa. In 1965 he taught in South Africa with masters Kanazawa, Enoeda and Shirai. That same year he taught a seminar tour in U.S.A. and Germany. From October 1965 to March 1966 he was in The Netherlands and Belgium. From March to August 1967 he went to Milan (Italy) to help Master Shirai establish himself, until 1967 when he arrived in France and settled permanently in Paris.

During his first months in Paris he had to prove himself and therefore had to combat with the French Karate champions and experts. Little by little he demonstrated that his Karate was far superior, and had nothing to do with their knowledge up to then. According to Henry Plée, pioneer of French Karate, - once you saw Taiji Kase in action, you admired and respected him because, "he goes directly to the essential, technique for him is only the means. What is really important is the result".

Another important date is when in 1986, he decided to close up his Dojo in Paris, and go around the world teaching his art, which is what he has been doing.

With respect to the different Karate evolution stages, he personally divides them into: the Okinawa, the Japanese and the Yoshitaka stage. And although he would never say this, his pupils, followers and their generations would add one more, the Sensei Taiji Kase stage.

In the 80's he published two books including eighteen Superior Katas and five Heian, with the applications of the Kata as main technical steps. These books have been published several times.

In 1989, together with master Hiroshi Shirai, with whom he was bound by a great friendship, he founded the WKSA [World Karate Shotokan Academy]. He was its president until 2001, year when he decided to create his own association.

For this new association, in accordance with his students will, the name “Kase Ha” was proposed and the new born organization was therefore called Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha Instructors Academy [SRKHIA].

Its main idea is to define in a clear way the foundations of master Taiji Kase Karate and to assure the correct transmission of his legacy to posterity.

For that task he trusted on his oldest students, creating the Shiankai, a technical committee that is in charge of the elaboration and collection of proposals, activities coordination, course promotions, trainings or meetings for the diffusion of the way of Karate-Do.

Even though Sensei Kase controls the complete Karate arsenal, his leg techniques were what really amazed everybody especially the Ushiro Geri and Kaiten Geri, he created. Furthermore, the same thing happened with his open hand techniques, his fast and precise movements and the Kamaes, another of his specialties. But more than anything, what I like most is his efficiency and the way he has managed to transmit the finer aspects of Budo, and Karate in particular. For all these reasons, it might seem that Master Kase is only a warrior, a Samurai. But, those of us who have had the fortune of knowing him personally, know that besides being a Samurai, he is an affectionate person with a great personality and modest, an example of harmony between body and spirit.

He radiates this harmony in abundance, which does not prevent him from being strict and forceful when necessary. With respect to his daily life, he divides his time among his family, the daily practice (in a room in his home), and reading old books of Budo, poetry and philosophy among others.