
HANDING OVER TO SHIHAN OF THE KSK ACADEMY

Sensei Pascal Lecourt is the French member in the KSK Academy's Shihankai. To publish his interview in the spring of the year 2009 proceeds from a very particular intention. Because at dawn of his next birthday (that we'll worthy celebrate !), a come back on his past of Sensei Kase's student resonate as an echo in the homage of the one who, in the next year, would have being eighty old.

When did you start Karate-Do and who were your teachers?



I started Karate-Do in 1975 when I was 16 years old. It was adolescence, often perturbed and perturbing for most young men in lack of freedom. I was quite an "instinctive" child and I wanted action. After three years of Judo, I started looking at Karate-Do which seemed closer to what I was seeking to find. I did my first steps with one of Sensei Kase's students, Sensei Gerald Dumont. The soil was already prepared; he sewed the seeds of passion, developing a way of life which has never left me since. I found everything I needed through training: realism in action, self control, discipline, apprenticeship and knowledge or recognition of oneself.

I quickly turned away from competition, in spite of being selected very soon for the French Championships, in which I made a very promising start, because the "playing" attitude drew me away from my sense of freedom and realism.

When and how did you meet Sensei Kase?

One year after I started Karate, in June 1976, Sensei Dumont left Normandy to settle definitely in Brittany. At the time, Sensei Kase's Karate-Do was already different from the Shotokan that was being developed all over France and it was impossible for me to train passionately, as I wished, in my home town's few Dojos. I therefore naturally turned towards the courses Sensei Kase gave twice a month in different towns throughout France, and to those directed by Sensei Dumont in Brittany. It is difficult to imagine the efforts engaged at the time, for an adolescent, traveling across the country, sometimes hitch hiking or on a moped, going to "suffer" for a few hours, but my destiny was on the move.



What made you choose Sensei Kase's teaching; the Kase-ha form?

The choice of Sensei imposed itself on me. First of all because he was my first teacher's Master and he represented a form of training and teaching that I had already recognized as being realistic, even though this form of Karate-Do sometimes seemed inaccessible to me due to the necessary efforts and constraints which seemed impossible to go through. I was fascinated by the Master's aura ... a man coming straight out of feudal Japan. And our choices are often dictated by our destiny.

Have you always followed him regularly, and since when?

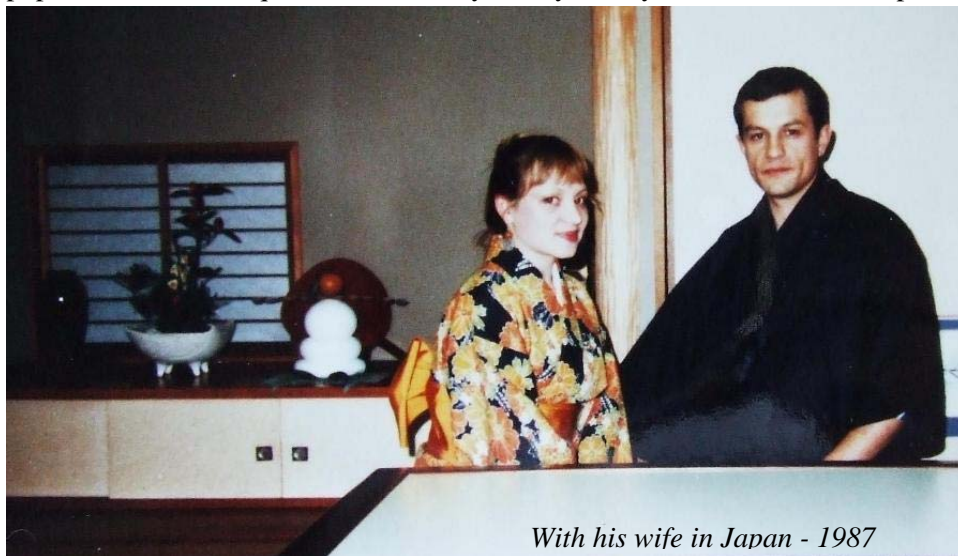
As a matter of fact, I was never formed at any other school than Sensei Kase's since I started Karate in 1975. At the time, Sensei was in dissidence with the French Karate Federation. He left his Dojo in Paris, created the



"France Karate Association" and as I mentioned earlier, directed courses twice a month throughout France, which I went to, including a few abroad like the one held at Crystal Palace near London. Sensei Kase also brought other experts to France for international courses such as Sensei Enoeda, Sensei Shirai, Sensei Myazaki, Sensei Naito and other Japanese instructors from who knows where. The courses were held in towns like Annecy, Royan, Fréjus or Paris. I bounced from one course to another "submerged" in training with a man who fascinated me more and more each day.

How long have you been teaching?

As I have always been on the edge of conformism, I started teaching very soon, around 1978, to a handful of pupils, friends or acquaintances, totally anonymously as I neither had diploma nor authorization to conduct



With his wife in Japan - 1987

courses at the time. I therefore gave lessons after dark in places lent to me here and there until 1980.

I then passed my diploma to teach, opened several Dojos and quite naturally became a professional. But it sounds better than it was, as I only earned the equivalent of a hundred odd Euros to begin with. It was a very hard period of my life during which I was only interested in training in Karate-Do, and I put all my energy into following this path. I trained

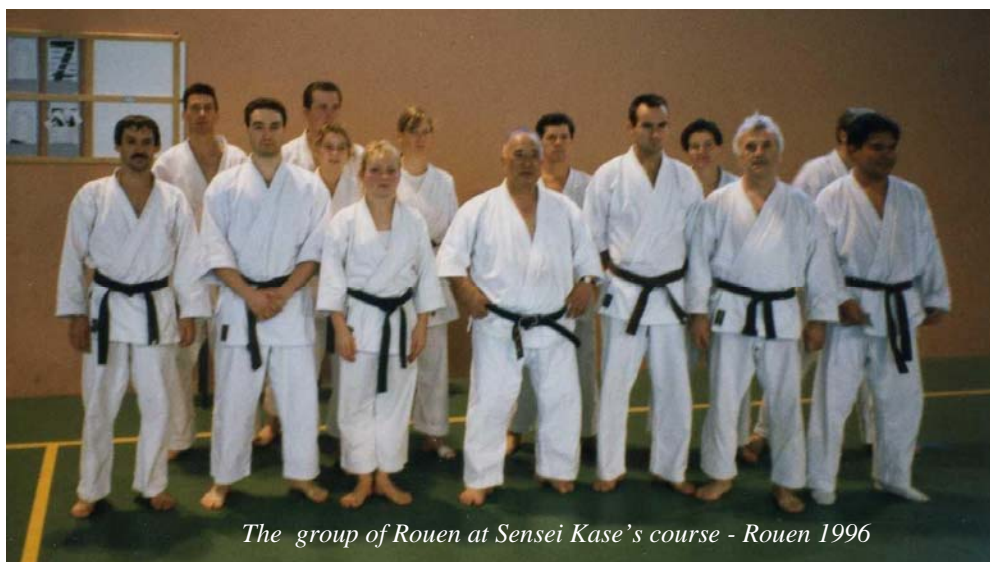
every day and sometimes even at night. I only lived for and from Karate-Do.



Do you think Sensei Kase's teaching can be preserved, or could it be influenced by the life and personality of each person?

I would not say that it is Sensei Kase's teaching that should be preserved but his research, and the link in the chain which must continue.

The roots of traditional Budo originated in the history of Japan and are based on the very principles of life. The history of our school shows that exceptional men have left their mark on the accessibility to this Way. Sensei Yoshitaka Funakoshi and Sensei Kase were two examples of these men in the past century. It is our duty to hand down this heritage and to pursue their research. Nothing is immobile, and life originates from movement.



The group of Rouen at Sensei Kase's course - Rouen 1996

However, it remains evident that our own life as a man, our culture, our experience in training and teaching, and our ability to discern what we believe is right and wrong, will in their own way, contribute to a new chapter of this adventure...

But beyond the technique, we must especially immerse ourselves in the Kase Ha spirit of which we are the guardians. The difficulty will no doubt

arise from ego, because the influence of our wants and needs may alter the passing on of the learning which leads to the Way.



If you only teach one aspect of Karate Do, like for example breathing (or another theme) because it corresponds more to the needs of the moment, to your morphology or to your own knowledge, it might lead pupils away from a global approach of training in which the spirit reigns. To my mind, we shouldn't insist too much on what we think is important for ourselves, but give everybody access to the knowledge so that everybody may draw the best benefit for himself. The global teaching of Budo, should enable each person to rise individually to the highest possible level.

The Way is also linked with humanity, whatever path we take. The handing down of the learning should not be limited to our own research or to our preferences in such or such a domain.

Today you are one of the guardians of Sensei Kase's teaching; to your opinion, what are the main qualities for a good Karateka?

In the Kase Ha School, the spirit is more important than technique, even though technique is necessary to improve human qualities; your question is very difficult as it is important to have a global view of the Karateka. Let's say that technically the Karateka would need the following qualities:



- To seek difficulty in effort, because this, I think, is the basis for progress. What is easy to accomplish only satisfies ego, it should only be of secondary importance.

- Sensei Kase often said "faster, lower, and stronger". These qualities demand constant research and lead to permanent self questioning.

- With experience, I think an internal eye is necessary to make technical progress and to improve control of movement because it enables perception of the beginning and evolution of movement throughout the body.

- Availability and fluidity of the body enables circulation and development of energy and enables to open up towards the three elements that Sensei Kase spoke of: "Ten-Shi-Jin"(sky, earth and man).

On the human point of view he should develop the following qualities: Patience, determination, passion, curiosity, and humility marked with realism. Constantly improve human qualities and especially, improve the negative aspects of the character by constantly seeking balance in life.

Faith in the Way and unflinching confidence in the teacher is essential. Finally, seek a notion that Sensei Kase cherished: freedom.

I think the main difficulty is to know how to define these notions of freedom, mental and physical expression with regards to the difficulties and rigour of Budo.

To finish, I quote the Chinese philosopher Shao Yung: "Know how to lose your mind in order to free it".



The form Kase-ha is a way of research within the Shotokan style. Do you think the morphology predisposes each person to such or such a style, or is it the mental side? For example, the open hand enables cosmic energy to penetrate the body and anchor it in the ground, reinforcing stability of the body around its centre of gravity. It is quite some work to seek this sensation, don't you think?



When speaking of the Way of Budo, the style has no importance "there is only one summit to the mountain, but many ways of getting there" the Masters of traditional arts used to say. The form Kase Ha is effectively a universal way of research; its specificity resides in the way you get there. As for what predetermines such and such a person to follow the way, it depends on as many factors as there are personalities and courses of life.

Cosmic energy is, to my mind, often mixed up with kime or muscular power. For example, a Kyudo Master (Japanese art of the bow and arrow) doesn't use the strength of the body to draw his bow and the energy he uses is in opposition to muscular force. Kime is technical power; Ki develops it and enables to go beyond the conscience of the body after a

certain age and level. It is an aspect which may seem abstract to the beginner, but it leads to the spirituality of traditional arts which, in turn, leads to the fourth dimension that our Master used to speak about.

You are one of the guardians of the heritage that Sensei Kase choose when he created the International Academy in 2002. You must be proud as it is a big responsibility. What do you think about it?

Far beyond pride, we must be conscious of the responsibility upon us. Not for ourselves, but for the future generations. As Budoka, our path is already traced, but having inherited a form of teaching, it is our duty to pass it down and to make it known.



The honor we have received will only make sense if we put all our energy into doing this. In the past, in Japan, for a Samurai to fail a mission brought him inevitably to perform "seppuku". Let's hope we don't get that far....

You have created your own organization in your country; can you please speak to us about its organization and its influence?

France Shotokan Ryu **Kase Ha**¹ was born on 11 August 2005, eight months after the death of Sensei Kase. It couldn't have been created during his lifetime, by respect for him who taught here in France. Since then, 246 people nationwide have signed up is still very low. However, we organize gasshukus are regularly frequented by a loyal core of a hundred practitioners. The programs developed during these gasshukus are studied in clubs, under the guidance of instructors who are present at gasshuku.

Three years of existence, it's too early to describe the influence. I would like it more obvious. But, most important is the spirit in which we work, and our instructors are in this regard and in quality, relays the first importance.

However, if the premium quality practitioners is paramount, we must also say that their number is the guarantor of the survival of our association. We must generate a virtuous group. And for that I am counting on all and each of them.



1st gasshuku FSK-Ha - Rouen June 2005

For you, what are the factors of development of the Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha? And what are the perspectives of evolution of the KSKA?

When Sensei Kase created the SRKIA, the two main axes were:

Unite instructors from different countries, 3rd Dan and above, to develop the teaching and practice of the Kase Ha style so that they, in turn, may hand down the teaching to their pupils,

Create a small group of about fifteen high level pupils and bring them to the highest level of Budo. These "Ushi Denshi" would then become the spear head of the organization and the guardians of the Kase Ha spirit and research for handing down a method and learning.



KSK Academy - Memorial Kase 2008 - Honbu Dojo Hasselt

¹ <http://www.kase-ha.com>



Sensei Kase had a precise idea of what he wanted his school to become and he was the only one capable of reaching this objective. As he isn't here any more, I think we should rethink this objective. My colleagues from the KSKA Shihankaï don't agree, but I'm sure we still need a pyramidal structure allowing access to as many people as possible including beginners so that they can get accustomed to our school.

We were lucky to have been directly guided by the Master early, and we certainly needed this personal contact with him to build our way to his image. It would be a shame to do without "new" minds to hand down the essential. Moreover, the strength and credibility of an international organization this size needs numbers, and even if its management demands great efforts, today's young students will become tomorrow's instructors and we cannot risk altering their training by delegating our responsibility in handing down a school as rigorous and as complicated as the Kase Ha school. For the pyramid to be stable and be able to grow, like a big tree, its base must be large and solid. I know several noble and pure minded white and brown belts in Europe, with an excellent technique; they would be worth having in our organization. Others, on the contrary, take profit from the KSKA for other reasons than love of training or teaching the Kase Ha form. I don't believe we have reached our "cruising speed" yet. This being so, my vision of a perfect KSKA organization is probably a little idealistic.



This is probably due to the pain which is still present since the loss of the Founder.

All I hope is that the energy and spirit that originated after the Master's death, which I'm happy about, will remain sincere as long as possible and will not give way to political or financial pressure, or personal interests.

When we asked him the question: "what shall we do after your death?", Sensei Kase used to say: "Just look at my photo and... remember!"

Sensei Kase was very rigorous and he often surprised his occidental pupils by his spontaneity; could you tell us an anecdote amongst those which have marked all these years of practice at his side?

As with all my KSKA colleagues and any of Sensei Kase's close pupils in general, there would be many anecdotes worth mentioning.

As for me, all sorts of stories occurred over these 30 years close to the Master without interruption, whether in Japan, during the many Karate courses or in private. The one which comes to mind to illustrate the expression "rigorous and spontaneous" happened on our return journey from a course in Portugal.

Sensei asked me what time my flight back to Paris was, and remarked that it was the same time as his: "it's not a coincidence" he said with a big smile. At the airport in the

embarkation room, we were talking about the previous course and about all sorts, about life, mankind, training.... When it was time to embark, he was explaining very precise points about the Wankan kata which was the theme of the course.

In the shuttle towards the plane he continued his explanations giving precise details, and we were the last to get off the bus.

While pursuing his explanations and as all the passengers were already in the plane and the air hostesses at the foot of the gangway, Sensei performed the kata Wankan on the tarmac to demonstrate his explanations. I stood beside him and watched as he executed the kata alone at the foot of the plane under the passenger's and crew's surprise and smiles of amusement.

An unreal atmosphere could be felt from the scene. I decided to do the part of Wankan he'd been talking about; he corrected me, and after that we went back to the normal course of our journey as if nothing had happened. "Karate is life, life is Karate" he used to say...

