

## **Kaicho Kawata Shigemasa**

Source: Interview with Kawata Shigemasa Sensei by Brett Sampson 4th Dan and Kohji Doi 5th Dan

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### **How old are you and what is your rank?**

I am 70 years old. I have two 9th Dan Certificates.

### **Did the JKA Board or someone else award this rank?**

In 1985 I was awarded the 9th Dan Hansi by Master Tani, and in 2002 I was awarded 9th Dan by the Rengo-kai, the biggest association of all karate style instructors in Japan.

### **How long have you been doing karate/martial arts?**

I have been training in karate for 50 years.

### **How did you get into it?**

After World War II Japan was not a good place for people to live in peace. Everybody tried to keep his family safe. Their hearts were selfish. Dark minds were over Japan. I was 18 years old then. I was young. In those days I ate a lot so I had to work hard to live. There were many dangerous situations around me. People quarreled easily. I also quarrelled easily. Someone had to control these young people after the war. At first I believed that I should be strong enough to fight against others and I wanted to learn how to fight. I made up my mind to learn karate and became a student of Iga Sensei, who was a student of Master Tani.

Historically Japanese had the Samurai Spirit. Samurai will not show his hunger to others. This is a Japanese proverb, and means that even if we are hungry, we will endure until we can eat. I became able to control myself because I was a student of karate and was taught the Samurai Spirit by the instructor, Iga Sensei. I was young and trained my body and studied karate technique. In those days I was eager to use karate to fight as others did. No one tried to fight against me. I had nothing to quarrel about.

Mr. Iga told me I was to succeed his position in karate in the company. Soon Iga Sensei disappeared from the company and was no longer a Tani student. I was a worker in the company, which was one of the biggest dockyards in Japan. There were some karate students left in the company. We kept training and I founded the karate club there. I decided to study karate at Tani Sensei's with my club members. Since then I had been a student of Master Tani.

### **Have you trained in any other styles?**

No. I knew there were many types of karate, but I liked Master Tani very much. He trained and studied hard himself, and taught us his theory of karate. Often he showed us new movements following his theory. There was no one else who could teach karate using his own theory. In those days Master Tani was the best karate instructor in Japan.

I had no reason to learn karate from other teachers.

**What has kept you going in karate for so long?**

Of course, I like karate. It is good for my health and building my body. Now I have many karate students. They want me to teach karate and ask me to give the correct movements of every kata. Now there are few senior students of Master Tani. I am his highest student. I have the responsibility to succeed his theory and pass it to next generation. I need many more years to do that.

**What legacy or memory of yourself do you hope to leave people with?**

Tani's theory is the best. Nowadays karate has become a sport. Samurai never learnt it as a sport, but as combat for their lives. Tani's theory is this. There are two ways to learn karate. One is as a sport. The other is for combat. I have to pick up techniques and spiritual lessons from both of these and make up a new theory as Master Tani did. If I could do so, the "Kawata-ha" name would continue and people could continue to learn good karate - both sports karate and combat karate.

**What has been the most difficult thing you've had to do?**

Shukokai divided into three groups after Master Tani died. Tani Sensei gave me permission to build a new group, "Kawata-ha", in 1993 (before we had a great earthquake in Kobe). My senior students did not agree to make Kawata-ha while Master Tani was still alive. I agreed with them. On his death, Tani Sensei left no words which showed his will. One of the senior teachers made a group using the name of "Shukokai". The new group with Tani's son used the same name. The two groups began to quarrel over the use of the "Shukokai" name. I was sorry to see this. Why did they quarrel? They were brothers and sisters under Tani Sensei. I feel these groups should become family again. I will challenge this difficult problem. Someday we will be family again as before. I will do my best to build up a new Shukokai, which accepts every group of Tani Sensei. I believe I am the only man that can tell and teach Tani theory and Tani-ha katas. So I must do everything for that purpose.

**Do you think western culture has affected karate practice? If so, how, and has it been mostly positive or negative?**

Japanese karate has become more sport. Traditional karate instructors are against this tendency, but every big game is held under World Karate Federation (WKF) rules. Japanese karate students are happy to have games under WKF rules. Japanese introduced karate to the world and had games under Japanese rules. Western people could not win the game. They wanted to win. They began to have opinions on the rules. They made up new rules which were more for Western people. The new rules would sportier. On this point, western culture has affected karate practice. Most Japanese have positively accepted sport karate. Even young kids can be students. Parents are glad that their children can learn karate in safety. The young karate population is growing. This growth of the population is good for the karate world.

I have an opinion that karate is traditionally a combat. Good manners come from the Samurai Spirit. Traditional karate life gives us good manners, spiritual strength and mutual respect. We can train our body through practicing sport karate. I believe we can

train our mind through studying traditional karate. I am not negative on sport karate. We can enjoy karate movement with each other. Western culture has changed karate into sport. We must not forget that there is an other karate, a combat karate full of Samurai Spirit. I will combine these two types of karate.

**What lesson do you most often repeat to your students? (What are you known for saying?)**

In kata, every movement has a meaning or reason. It is essential to learn the bunkai for each kata. Karate begins with “rei” (bowing), ends with rei. Rei means greeting, respect, thanks, and so on.

**Who was your instructor?**

After starting with Igawa Sensei at Kawasaki Company Ltd, Tani Sensei was my instructor.

**What are the most important things you learned from him?**

Tani Sensei taught me how karate can allow humans to develop and improve their lives, to teach them to be good citizens and lead a positive life. Tani Sensei was great. He gave me the chance to become a good citizen.

**What is your competition history?**

There was no competition till 1950. There was no sport karate. Sport karate was not popular at all. There were some trials. After these trial games there were many fallen teeth on the floor. Because there were many accidents, many instructors felt the necessity to hold future games under some rules. At the beginning, the players attacked directly without using any tools that would guard both players. The fight was a battle. I competed as a 2nd Dan when it was very dangerous and injuries were common.

**How do you think competitions have affected karate and the martial arts in general?**

Generally speaking, in sports, players compete with each other and have games to decide the best one. When they have games, they need rules that players obey. The rules decide the techniques in the games. Competitions have affected karate a lot. For example, in kata competition, all the players should pick up one of shitei katas. Those katas are only dances. In kumite the judges must be careful about the technique the players use and have to decide instantly whether it is worth pointing or not. They should not have a strong, selfish standard to give a point. They should admit the opinions of one another. I prefer the combat side of karate to sports karate, with an emphasis on the “martial” side of training. The feeling is essential to develop the proper spirit.

**Can a kata be judged on how it looks in a contest, or only by how the applications feel when applied?**

Kata judgement is controlled by the subjective view of the judge. Of course kata movement should be correct under the karate theory. The judges should consider strength, speed, breath, eye direction, kiai, etc. Kata should be an exhibition of your

inner spirit. This can be judged when viewing a kata performed properly.

**How is Shukokai different to the style from which it came?**

Every traditional culture in Japan has kept changing. First, imitate the technique. Second, break it. Third, make it. Tani Sensei learned karate from Mabuni Sensei. First, he imitated Mabuni Sensei. After training with Mabuni Sensei and receiving 5th Dan, he studied and made up a new theory where he added the reasons to every movement. Tani Sensei added his own theory to Mabuni Sensei's Shito-ryu. In those days Mabuni Sensei had some senior students who were technically old enough to open a new group. Tani Sensei opened Tani-ha, and he named his group Shukokai. The Chinese letters mean, "Let's be together and train." Of course it is essentially the same as Mabuni and other Shito ryu styles.

**Why did you decide to found the style, and when did you do it?**

Tani-ha means Mabuni Sensei's karate and Tani Sensei's theory. After both of the big teachers died, someone should succeed to their karate. I was permitted to open Kawata-ha in 1993 by Tani Sensei. I decided to succeed to Tani Sensei's karate after his death and founded Kawata-ha and named my group "Seikukai" in 1999. The Chinese letters of the name means the group of students learning correct karate. Kawata-ha means Tani Sensei's karate and my theory. It is essentially the same as Tani and other Shito ryu styles.

**What do you think of Australia and the attitude and skill level of students here?**

I find the Australians to be very polite and better than common Japanese. I am also surprised that Westerners often have a higher skill level than the Japanese. Many years ago when I travelled to Europe with Tani Sensei, I thought their skill level was inferior, but now the situation has been reversed.

**What do you most enjoy doing outside of karate?**

Painting watercolours, calligraphy, fishing, and drinking a little whisky occasionally.