

IN MEMORIAM



MASTER HIROSHI FUJIMOTO 1925—2012

Early years

Master Fujimoto was born on 23rd September 1925.

He started practising Kendo at the age of eight and Judo at the age of thirteen.

He began Karate at the age of eighteen when he entered Doshisha University in Kyoto and joined its Karate Club. He is four years junior to Master Tani, another Doshisha graduate and founder of Tani-ha Shito-ryu Shukokai. The instructor of the club was Master Kenwa Mabuni, founder of Shito-ryu, but he only taught Goju-ryu (Naha-te) at the club. The young Hiroshi Fujimoto trained hard and eventually became captain of the club.

In November 1947, he and eight other students visited Tokyo and trained and competed with students of seven universities. On that occasion, he did a demonstration in front of many karate-kas including Master Gichin Funakoshi, founder of Shotokan karate.

This visit triggered an exchange between universities in the Kanto area (around Tokyo) and those in the Kansai area (around Osaka and Kyoto), which led to the formation of the "All Japan University Karate Federation".

Master Fujimoto received the title of Goju-ryu Shihan from Master Kenwa Mabuni on 10th January 1950. He was one of the strongest Karate-ka under Master Mabuni and Master Mabuni often sent him to teach at clubs and dojos as his representative. I have met several old Shito-ryu instructors who remembered Master Fujimoto and all of them talked about him with respect.

But, his life changing experience was just around the corner. He saw an advertisement for an Okinawan festival in central Osaka and decided to go as a spectator. Among dancing and music there was to be a karate demonstration which he awaited with great interest, as you can imagine. However, the demonstration consisted of a few people, Okinawan immigrants working in Osaka, just demonstrating some katas. Not satisfied with this, Master Fujimoto went backstage and challenged these karate people. The leader of the group was Master Seijiro Sakihama and Master Toma, one of his disciples, took the challenge. To his surprise, Master Fujimoto's attack just bounced back from the body of Master Toma and one seemingly gentle blow he received in response nearly made him faint. So he immediately asked Master Sakihama to take him as a student but Master Sakihama declined, citing that he only taught Okinawans.

But Master Fujimoto did not give up. He went to the organizer of the festival and obtained the address of Master Sakihama. He visited the home of Master Sakihama next day and asked again to become his student but was declined again. He kept visiting the home and repeated his request everyday for the next few weeks until Master Sakihama finally admitted him as a student. Master Sakihama is the founder of Jugo-Shizen-ryu (soft & hard, natural style). He studied karate under Master Kanemori Kinjo and Master Kanbun Unchi, founder of Uechi-ryu.

Master Fujimoto studied diligently and became one of the three main disciples of Master Sakihama.

Working life

After graduating from university, Master Fujimoto became a journalist working for "Mainichi Daily News", the English version of "Mainichi Shinbun" which is one of the three main quality newspapers of Japan. Among other things, he covered the Vietnam war and spent some time in Vietnam. He eventually became the editor of the paper.

When "Encyclopaedia Britannica" started its operation in Japan, Master Fujimoto was recruited as the CEO of the company "Encyclopaedia Britannica Japan".

After some years, he retired from the company and started teaching "journalism" and "journalistic English" at Doshisha University in Kyoto, then at Baika University in Osaka.

As his career shows, he was a firm believer of *Bumbu Ryodo* ('one has to study both literary and martial arts').

Teaching

He did not believe in teaching Karate to the wider public and only taught students at Doshisha University Karate Club in the early days. Unfortunately, a few incidents at the club made him stop teaching and he declined to teach for 16 years. He started teaching again in 1982 when Master Yamashita successfully persuaded him. I was lucky enough to be there. Initially there were five people training with him, Messrs Ishigaki, Ogawa and myself together with Masters Yamashita and Uehara.

Since coming back to Europe in 1985, I visited Japan every year to train with him. I also invited him to Europe twice in the 90's.

A small group of graduates of the club was formed in 1994 and he started teaching the group.

In 2010, Master Fujimoto issued certificates called "Inga" to three members of this group as well as to myself, to appoint us as his successors.

He had learnt three katas from Master Sakihama: Uechi-Sanchin, Higaonna-Seisan and Sanrinryu (also called Santairyu) and, over the years, made some changes to them. He once told me that he made them softer and smoother. He started to call his way "En-ryu" (circular style).

Farewell to an exceptional man

Master Fujimoto suffered a mild brain haemorrhage some years ago and a heart attack two years ago. Although he had a successful bypass operation, he had been weakened a lot by those events. He spent a normal evening at home on the 5th of June but was taken ill on the morning of the 6th and died in the evening in hospital.

In my opinion, he was the best karate-ka of his generation. I have never seen anybody better than him. He took karate very seriously but never took himself too seriously. He was always kind and warm. I learnt a lot from him, not just karate but how to behave as a human being. I believe our senior members who met and trained with him all agree with me. I will miss him greatly but am also determined that it is my responsibility to carry on his legacy, together with Master Tani's, as one of his successors.

K. Tomiyama

