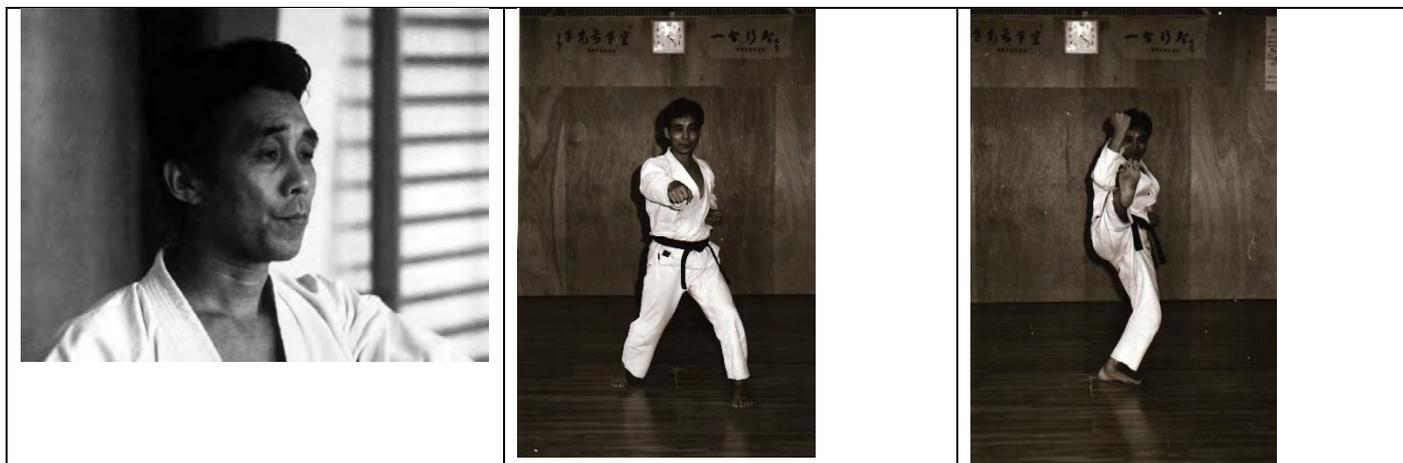


Interview of Yoshikazu KAMIGAITO Sensei by André De Rijck on January 30, 1979

Kamigaito Sensei has been working in our country for seven years. As sixth Dan Wado-Ryu, he is one of the most important of this style. He has taught at university karate clubs in Leuven and Liège, and in a variety of dojos common throughout the country. In addition to his sixth Dan Wado-Ryu, the Master has a third Dan from Nippon Kempo (Japanese Boxing).



André De Rijck (AD): Sensei Kamigaito, would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself?

SENSEI: I was born in 1937, in TAKAYAMA, a medium-sized town in the mountainous territory of CIFU-KEN Prefecture, central Japan. When I was 7 years old, my family moved to TAIWAN where my father was a schoolteacher. After the Second World War, we relocated to Japan where my father practiced the same profession.

AD: Were you already active in BUDO?

SENSEI: In Japan, we often find ourselves from an early age in an atmosphere of BUDO, although currently there is some change. My father was a serious Budoka: he practiced KENDO intensively and was at the same time skilled in the JUKEN JITSU (bayonnette fight). In the villages and towns, the FIGHT of the SUMOS was very popular among young people and, every summer, there were championships between towns and villages in which even 5- and 6-year-olds took part. Very respectable competitions were also organized in schools. During the first period of average education, I was little occupied by BUDO. One day, I stopped with KENDO's school fights to get into competition.

AD: When are you really in contact with Karate?

SENSEI: Although, already in middle school, I practiced a little Karate, I only seriously started at the university of NAGOYA where I studied 7 years. The branch I chose though, was the exact sciences, mainly biology, but I also earned a bachelor's degree in Japanese literature. The last two years I have studied physics and chemistry. During my studies, I started karate. For two years, I practiced the Shotokan style. At the same time, I was training at Nippon Kempo. At university, the training sessions were very little varied because they were very competitive. There was two hours of training a day. During these years I also tried Shito-Ryu, but than in an ordinary dojo, outside the faculty.

After university, I worked as an industrial advisor in an office of consultants in Nagoya. This office was responsible for advising in marketing, transport etc. At that time, I was training at Gojo-Ryu under the direction of Sensei TADA SEGO. Because of my work as a consultant, I often had to travel to KYOTO and OSAKA, which allowed me to make contact, again with the local dojos.

AD: And with WADO-RYU, how was that going down there?

SENSEI: I started the WADO-RYU quite late. It was in 1962 in Nagoya. I was training under the guidance of Master MIWA, who was 4th Dan. Later, the system was adopted in 10 Dan grades.

AD: How was teaching in the Dojos? Is there a big difference from education in Europe?

SENSEI: One aspect that struck me when I came to Europe is that karatekas are less supportive than in Japan. I explain this by example: shortly after my arrival in Belgium, after running a training at a club in Wallonia, they were a little angry with me after training because I had not taken care of the beginners, but only the higher levels. Well, in Japan, it's a perfectly normal thing, because advanced karatekas looked after beginners. There is an atmosphere of mutual education and when you teach a person a lesson, it has consequences for everyone. In Japan, we could talk about two kinds of Karate dojos. There are university dojos and ordinary "civilian" dojos. Between the two, there is a big difference.

In university clubs, the teaching of Karate is quite simple, but very intensive. We will, for example, work on the same technique for a very long time. The whole training is done from the perspective of the competition. This is why the number of Katas to work is limited. Moreover, these may differ in style to style. The teaching of Karate in civilian dojos takes place on much the same canvas as here in Europe. However, in Japan, the master is often an elder, a veteran of Karate. Most of the time, he observes the work of his students and gives them all kinds of advice. If the master is not there, the highest officer of the dojo takes the lead.

I myself often led the training and I regularly accompanied my master to give demonstrations.

AD: Have you often taken part in competitions?

SENSEI: Until my 34th year, I took part in competitions, especially during my university years, but also later. I have participated in many championships in my life of Karateka. Apart from a whole series of regional competitions from which I won, I was three times champion of the city of NAGOYA in the 60s. And, in 1964, I got first individual place and second place in the team at the Gifu-KEN Prefecture Championships. In 1966, I was individual champion at the Medium-JAPAN championships.

In 1967, our team finished third at the Japan All-Style Championships. It was the ZEN-NIPPON Karate-do Renmei championships. My favorite fighting techniques were at first Sokuto, then after Mawashi-Geri Chudan, movement that I could execute with excellent timing. Later, I evolved more towards manual techniques and my favorite technique, Gyaku-Tsuki, was accompanied by a Sokushin dodge movement.

AD: Have you trained often with the great Master OTSUKA, the founder of WADO-RYU?

SENSEI: The WADO-RYU style had many supporters among the students. So Sensei OTSUKA came to NAGOYA University two or three times a year to give internships. I then trained in two clubs (Karate and Nippon-Kempo) and I had a position of responsibility in the technical field of coordination. In addition, I was busy at the Student Karate Federation. When I later trained in the MIWA master's dojo, Sensei OTSUKA would come there from time to time to teach. Master MIWA was one of Sensei OTSUKA's oldest students. In the consulting office, I worked with Mister KOJIMA (KOJIMA Sensei was 7th Dan and founder of WADO-RYU Belgium) who was as well known as the great Master OTSUKA Sensei.

Through my many victories at the championships, my name was known to the grandmaster and all the ranks I obtained were directly conferred on me by him. Every year, I took part in the internships reserved for the managers of dojo at NAGOYA under the guidance of OTSUKA Sensei.

AD: Basically, what is the WADO-RYU style?

SENSEI: The four major Karate schools have their own characteristics and value scales. The WADO-RYU is, in fact, not so easy to describe exactly because it is a school still evolving. The founder of our style is still alive and continually making changes to his Karate.

The WADO-RYU system is therefore not, unlike other systems, neither fixed nor well defined. The movements of the WADO-RYU are quite opposite to those of the SHOTOKAN style. The SHOTOKAN style is, in my opinion, more static, with powerful, direct and well-defined movements. In this style, the movements are widely executed, think only of the extreme extension of the knee forward or backward in leg techniques (Mae-Geri, Mawashi-Geri?..).

In the WADO-RYU, it's all a little different. The WA concept means harmony. All universal elements for attack or defence should therefore be harmonized. It will be for example: weights, movements, speed, balance, centrifugal force, inertia... In the YAKUSOKU-KUMITE (regulated combat), the use of the body's force of gravity (gravity) is a good example.

At a higher level, we tend towards harmony, a unity between defense and attack. The many dodge movements that the WADO-RYU makes use of are actually turned at the same time to the attack. We notice this in the KAISHIN technique.

It can almost be compared to the principle of "non-resistance" of AKIDO. The WADO-RYU school is, par excellence, the school of "searching for oneself".

In the end, the WADO-RYU is less categorical than other styles because it is a natural movement that cannot be generalized, since each has its own body conformation.

Someone of high stature must look for a Karate different from another of medium size... In summary, one could say that WADO-RYU has common principles imbued with a very powerful personal element.

AD: Do you have any well-defined preferred techniques?

SENSEI: The question of preferential techniques no longer arises to me because I am of the opinion that a teacher must ignore his personal preferences and must put himself in the place of each of his students.

It must include the situations of beginners, more advanced people, children, the elderly, adults, children, men, women... A personal preference cannot guide it at all.

AD: Another question. How does the kata system in WWADO-RYU present?

SENSEI: The current WADO-RYU Karate consists of 9 katas. Before, we met about fifteen of them. I myself have learned 15 more katas. OTSUKA Sensei made changes, eliminated a few and kept only 9. There is a historical reason for this last point. It turns out that primitive Karate was trained in the form of Kihon and Kata.

The YAKUSOKU-KUMITE (settled combat) and the Jyu-Kumité (free combat) did not exist. Little by little they were introduced into training and they change or improve priorities that could only be learned through training at Katas and Kihon.

This is one of the reasons why OTSUKA Sensei has reduced the number of katas. In his book on the 9 Katas of WADO-RYU, the great Master writes in the foreword that it is not about the quantity but about the quality of the Katas.

These 9 katas are: PINAN NIDAN, PINAN SHODAN, PINAN SANDAN, PINAN YONDAN, PINAN GODAN who together with KU-SHAN-KU form a whole. The others are NAIHANCHI, SEISHAN and CHINTO. These Katas form a whole. The five PINAN Katas form the Fundamental Katas and the KU-SHAN-KU, which must be run quickly and easily, is one of the most advanced applications of PINAN.

NAIHASHI and SEISHAN are the opposite of the PINAN Katas; they do not use inertia or centrifugal force.

SEISHAN is the application of NAIHANCHI. In this Kata, there is a bit of displacement, although the attitudes are very similar to those of NAIHANCHI. It's a bit like the medium term between katas PINAN and NAIHANSHI. CHINTO is the synthesis of all movements.

AD: What are the special points of attention that Karateka must pay attention to during Karate training?

SENSEI: For Karateka, it is of enormous importance to seek harmony between all elements of karate, such as Kihon, Katas, Kumité...

There is a certain relationship between all of these elements.

An applied karateka will train to all these elements, reach a certain level, start again, and like a spiral, it will rise a little each time.

Karate training is a process of transformation. By training, you continually get to another situation, to another level. It's a bit like butterflies: a process of development of the caterpillar to the cocoon and then to the butterfly.

The master's task is to act as a catalyst in this process of karateka development.

AD: Sensei KAMIGAITO, we thank you for this interview, which took us, once again, a step further in understanding Karate.

For information, André De Rijck is 5th Dan of WADO-RYU, was among the founders of the nonprofit WADO-RYU KAMIGAITO BELGIUM VZW in 1979, is the founder of the club Tshintō Aarschot and is now founder and coach of a WADO-RYU club for many years in Moscow.

This Saturday, May 1, 2021, André De Rijck has passed away. Our friend karateka has left us but he will remain alive in our hearts. Join the stars in peace, Andre.

