

INTERVIEW SERIES WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF JAPAN-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS (No. 10)

FRANCISCUS NITHYA NATHAM

Mushinkan Academy

Self-introduction

My name is Franciscus Nithya Natham, and I am the Headmaster of Mushinkan Academy. I began my journey in Aikido at the age of three, and I have been practicing for forty years now. I have a deep passion for Kenjutsu, and our dojo has developed its own sword style, called *Mushin-ryū*. My hobbies include martial arts, painting, playing musical instruments, gaming, and photography.



Introduction of your organization

Mushinkan Dojo was founded in 1965 by Francis Ramasamy and has been involved in many programs and events by doing demonstrations, helping with Japanese culture identity, such as making an impact in Rakan Muda (*Wajah Diri*) in supporting the Look East Policy.

Kaiso Francis Ramasamy was an extraordinary martial artist who had knowledge of Judo, Kendo, and Aikido and won many world and territorial competitions in Malaysia and Japan.



Throughout the years, our dojo has developed a solid foundation. While early records were mostly paper-based, we now embrace modern digital platforms to enhance our outreach. Our

organization actively engages with the community through our website, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook.

Currently, we practice three main disciplines:

1. **Shioda Aikido**, as taught by Gozo Shioda, the founder of Yoshinkan Aikido.
2. **Mushin-ryū**, our own form of Japanese swordsmanship.
3. **Mushindo**, a spiritual therapeutic art developed deeply by *Francis Ramasamy*, which incorporates breathing techniques (*Kokyu-Ho*).

At present, we have about 30 active members, and we anticipate further growth in the coming years.



What is your relationship with Japan?

Our connection to Japan is deeply rooted in Aikido. We make it a point to travel to Japan almost every year. This year, for instance, we will be visiting the Gozo Shioda Memorial to give our respect to the founder of Yoshinkan Aikido and train together with all participants from all over the world.

Beyond martial arts training, I encourage my students to immerse themselves into Japanese culture outside the dojo. Personally, my entire

life has been intertwined with Japanese culture, and this bond has grown profoundly over time.

How is your involvement in Japanese-related activities?

In Malaysia, I actively participate in Japanese cultural events such as *Bon Odori*, *Yosakoi*, and *Akimatsuri*. I'm always eager to help and promote Japanese cultural events/activities whenever called upon by the Japanese Consulate and/or other Japanese organizations in Malaysia. I also host Japanese events/workshops done by Japanese living in Penang, within the Dojo for the students to learn about Japan and its culture and to support the local Japanese living in Penang.



What is the most interesting element about Japan?

The most fascinating aspect of Japan is its cultural ethics, particularly *reihō* (etiquette). In our dojo, we emphasize the importance of presenting oneself properly and treating others with respect. It's crucial not to take things for granted and to always uphold humility and discipline.

Who is the Japanese person who has influenced you the most?

If we speak of historical figures, the first person who inspired me was *Miyamoto Musashi*. His philosophy on swordsmanship and strategy has shaped my understanding of both martial arts and Japanese culture. Another notable figure is *Kojiro Sasaki*, Musashi's famed rival, and *Kawakami Gensai*, who was even taken into anime interpretation, though many do not know he was real. Kawakami Gensai's life as a skilfully renowned swordsman and his commitment to living with honor is truly an inspiration to me.

On a personal level, my greatest Japanese mentor is *Sonoda Sensei*, a Yoshinkan Aikido instructor in Saitama, Japan. He treats me like a son, and whenever I visit Japan, I always make it my first priority to see him and train at his dojo, Yoshin Yobu.

What is your favorite place in Japan?

My favorite place in Japan is Ueno. To me, Ueno has given me an impression of a second home. It has the energy of a modern city while still preserving a strong sense of Japanese tradition. *Ameyoko*, the night market, is one of my favorite spots, with its vibrant atmosphere and diverse food offerings.

What is your favorite Japanese food?

My favorite dish is *Chicken Teriyaki*. However, once in Japan, I quickly realized that this dish is mostly homemade and rarely found in restaurants. This discovery deepened my appreciation for authentic Japanese cuisine.

What is the Japanese custom or culture that you like the most?

I deeply admire *reiho*, the etiquette of bowing. Many people mistakenly perceive it as an act of worship, but in reality, it symbolizes respect and humility. Additionally, I am drawn to the discipline and focus required in Japanese swordsmanship (Kenjutsu, Iaijutsu, Iaido & Kendo) and traditional arts like *Chadō*, *Ikebana*, etc.

What are the future plans of your organization in terms of promoting Japan?

Our future plans include collaborating with Hanabana, a group committed to promoting Japanese culture by connecting anime and gaming communities with traditional arts and cultural practices. By creating engaging experiences that blend modern and historical elements, we aim to deepen appreciation for Japan's rich heritage.

My goal is to expand Japanese cultural appreciation by organizing more Japanese art workshops, particularly in Japanese swordsmanship, Aikido and traditional arts. Plus, volunteering in Japanese based school.

I hope to continuously foster an appreciation for Japanese traditions, and inspire more people to engage with its culture and understand the richness of Japan's heritage.

