

INTERVIEW SERIES WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF JAPAN-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS (No. 11)

OOI WEI NIEN

Penang Kendo Club (PKC)

Self-Introduction

My name is Wei Nien, I'm currently the President of the Penang Kendo Club and have been a member of the club for 20 years since its founding.



Introduction of your organization

The Penang Kendo Club was founded in July 2005 by Yamazaki Emi who helped to organize the first classes and put us in touch with Arimatsu Setsuo sensei, then a Japanese Police Officer who at the time held a 6th Dan rank in Kendo and was stationed at the Japanese Consulate in Penang.

Today, we are a MKA-affiliated Kendo dojo and have trained over 200 students here in Penang. Led by our current head sensei, Kawaguchi Masahiro (7th Dan Kyoshi), we currently have over 50 active practitioners including more than a dozen Dan-level members, with the rest holding a rank between 1st kyu and 7th kyu.



What is your relationship with Japan?

My relationship with all things Japanese started in high school when my father brought home a book on how to learn Japanese that he had bought at a book fair. I was 17 or 18 at the time. I tried to learn a few phrases but didn't make much progress. When I went to university, I took 2 semesters of Japanese and did fairly well. However, it was only after I graduated and started working in Penang that I decided to learn Japanese in earnest. It became my hobby, and I immersed myself in various aspects of Japanese culture, including popular culture.

I remember the golden age of J-drama in the 90s and 2000s. I also watched anime before it became mainstream in Malaysia. It was also around this time that I picked up Kendo. At some point, I gained enough fluency and confidence to communicate with native speakers, and what was previously just something I did for fun, became part of my working life too.

I was a young engineer working at an American multinational corporation in Bayan Lepas in the 2000s. When my managers discovered I could speak Japanese, they sent me to Japan for training and process transfer activities. I spent the winter of 2006 in Japan. During my time there I stayed in Tokyo; visited Chiba and Fukushima prefectures; and also managed to do some sightseeing in Kyoto. It became one of my most cherished memories.

How is your involvement in Japanese related activities?

Beyond my kendo-related activities, I am a life member of the Penang Japanese Language Society, where I

currently contribute time as a committee member. I participate in Japanese-related cultural celebrations in Penang such as Bon Odori and Yosakoi, either as a Penang Kendo Club representative or a PJLS member. Last year the Penang Kendo Club opened a stall at the Penang Bon Odori festival and it was a big hit. Members of the public were invited to wear kendo *bogu* and also allowed to use the *shinai* to hit practitioners wearing the *bogu*. We managed to introduce Kendo to the people of Penang and attract new members.



What is the most interesting element about Japan?

I find it fascinating that Japanese people are modern and yet strive to be in touch with their cultural roots.

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

My kendo sensei Kawaguchi Masahiro sensei, the head coach of Penang Kendo Club (PKC).

What is your favorite place in Japan?

Akihabara.

What is your favorite Japanese food?

Ramen.

What is the Japan custom/culture that you like the most?

I like how empathy, consideration, and respect for others are deeply embedded in Japanese society: "*omoiyari no kokoro*".

This is something I also try to apply in my personal life. I think we live in a world that desperately needs everyone to show compassion and empathy for others.

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

We hope to continue participating in Japan-related events and promote Kendo to the people of Penang.

