

INTERVIEW SERIES WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF JAPAN-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS (No. 12)

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Self-Introduction

My name is Justin Khoo. I'm the Secretary-General for Malaysia Judo Federation (MJF), South East Asia Judo Federation. I'm also the Deputy President of Penang Judo Association.



Introduction of your organization

In 1958, we were known as the Penang Judo Club. Forty years down the road, we changed from Penang Judo Club to Penang Judo Association. The Judo Training Center was at Macalister Road where, back in the 50s, it was very active. We had a lot of Japanese Judo practitioners who were working for the

factories in Penang. After most of them returned around the 70s and 80s, the number of Japanese Judo practitioners declined. Currently, our training center has shifted from the Macalister area to the Tanjung Tokong area. Presently, we have two coaches. The first coach is Md Nashriq, who is taking care of the Penang Branch Judo Center. The second coach is Looi Qi Min, who is responsible for the mainland branch. Both of them are graduates of the International Budo University (IBU).

In terms of performance, I'm quite proud to say that our students have achieved quite satisfying results. One of our students became the first Malaysian Judo player to ever achieve a medal in the Commonwealth Games, which was back in 2022. Currently, we are three-time overall champions in the Malaysia Games, better known as SUKMA. At the recent SUKMA, we were not only the overall champions, but also the largest gold contributor for the Penang contingent with six gold medals.



What is your relationship with Japan?

My relationship with Japan is very interesting. At the age of 3+, I stayed in Japan for a short time because my father was posted to Japan to study orthopedics and my mom, who was a teacher, followed along. So, I stayed in Japan for about six months. Then, I was sent back to Malaysia and stayed with my grandparents.

Fast forward, I attended the Budo Specialization Program, a one-year program at the International Budo University (IBU). I started learning Judo in Japan at the age of 19. This university required students to pick up Japanese culture, and based on the Culture Department, they offered two types of Japanese culture – either Judo or Kendo. Naturally, as a badminton player, I was more comfortable holding something in my hand, so I chose Kendo. However, at that time there was no Kendo class in Penang, so my father suggested that I learn Judo. At that time, I was studying in Kedah, and I would travel three times a week to Penang to learn the Ukemi falls in Judo. After three months, I went to Japan to further my studies. Basically, that's how I got involved with Japan and started to learn Judo at the International Budo University (IBU).

How is your involvement in Japanese related activities?

I've been in touch with a lot of Judo institutions in Japan, for example, the Kōdōkan Judo Institute. Kōdōkan Sensei would visit us almost every year, and we would organize training camps for our Judo players in Penang, as well as for all the Judo players throughout Malaysia. We also have examinations conducted by Kōdōkan, and we are very close with them. Other than that, the Penang Judo Association has signed a memorandum of understanding with Waseda University in Tokyo and Okayama Shoka University in Okayama. That's how we've been working to promote Judo.



Locally in Penang, we've been actively doing demonstrations during the Penang Bon Odori. We have joined the event for a couple of years already. This is how we keep in touch with the Japanese community here in Penang.

What is the most interesting element about Japan?

I would say the discipline. They are a very disciplined society. Another thing that I noticed is that a lot of them don't give up easily. When they start something, they will try their best, and that is really something that I learned a lot during my time in university in Japan.

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

There are three persons, and all of them are my Judo teachers. They are Sensei Kashiwazaki, Sensei Koshino, and Sensei Otani. Sensei Kashiwazaki and Sensei Koshino are from the International Budo University (IBU). Sensei Otani is from Okayama Shoka University. I met Otani Sensei at a different time, but I still learned a lot from him.

I learned from Kashiwazaki Sensei to be highly disciplined. He was really strict with us, and he taught me to be mentally tough as well. At first, when I learned Judo, I thought he didn't like me because he was scolding me all the time. Sometimes, he would walk around with a Shinai bamboo and just hit me on my back. Upon graduation, he called me to his room and explained the reason why he was scolding me all the time. It was because he had a different way of showing his affection. Until today, I'm still keeping in touch with him because he is the Sensei who presented me with my black belt. I am always thankful to him for all the lessons. To me, he is like a parent who really cares about his child.

Sensei Koshino is one of the coaches at the International Budo University. From

him, I learned about breaking through limits. Every single day, for him, we needed to break through our limits. Every time when practicing Judo, I would fight with him for at least half an hour, but most of the time it was 45 minutes. He would just throw me until I was tired, and he would always say, "Don't give up."

Finally, Sensei Otani, whom I met later in life, in my 30s. From him, I learned to be kind and humble. I'm really thankful to have met this kind gentleman. Unfortunately, he is not feeling well right now, but we are still keeping in touch. Hopefully, he can recover from his sickness. These three Sensei have actually helped shape me a lot because I am a judoka. Judo is like one's life, and how you train in Judo reflects how you live. I've been using all the lessons that I've learned from them to lead my life today.

What is your favorite place in Japan?

Actually, I haven't really explored Japan yet. But I truly enjoyed my time in Tokyo. When I was young, I watched a lot of Disney cartoons. That was something I looked forward to, especially since Disneyland is in Tokyo. I enjoyed exploring every small place in Tokyo like Ueno, Akihabara, Shinjuku, and Shibuya.

What is your favorite Japanese food?

The Japanese food that I really love the most is Japanese curry. As a student, we learned to cook a lot of Japanese dishes. Every day I cooked for myself. Even today, if I have friends visiting and I need to cook, Japanese curry would be my special dish. It is my favorite food as well as my children's.

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

Punctuality and being really organized. These two are not commonly practiced everywhere, and I've learned so much about being punctual and respectful at the same time. I always like being punctual as much as possible, but sometimes unforeseen circumstances occur, such as traffic jams. Still, whatever I do, I'll try my best to be punctual. This is what I really admire about Japanese customs and culture.

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

Currently, we are working with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). We have a coach who just arrived in December. We are slowly promoting Judo activities. Recently, we held some demonstrations for Japanese weekend class students, and we did some Judo promotions there. From time to time, we invite many Judo athletes from all the universities we've signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with and we organize Judo camps for the entire Malaysia, including Penang.



Our plan at the moment is to get as many friends and Judo athletes as possible to come, visit, train in Judo, have fun, and make friends. When funds permit, we send our students to Japan for training as well as for studying. Sometimes, we work with the government to provide funding for our Judo athletes to go to Japan for their studies. Most of the students are fully supported by their families. However, the association will do whatever we can to assist and sponsor them. Most of the time, I will send them to my university, International Budo University (IBU). We also receive invitations from Okayama Shoka University. We have students who are married to Japanese citizens, living and working in Japan. So far, we have sent four students to study in Japan at the International Budo University (IBU).