

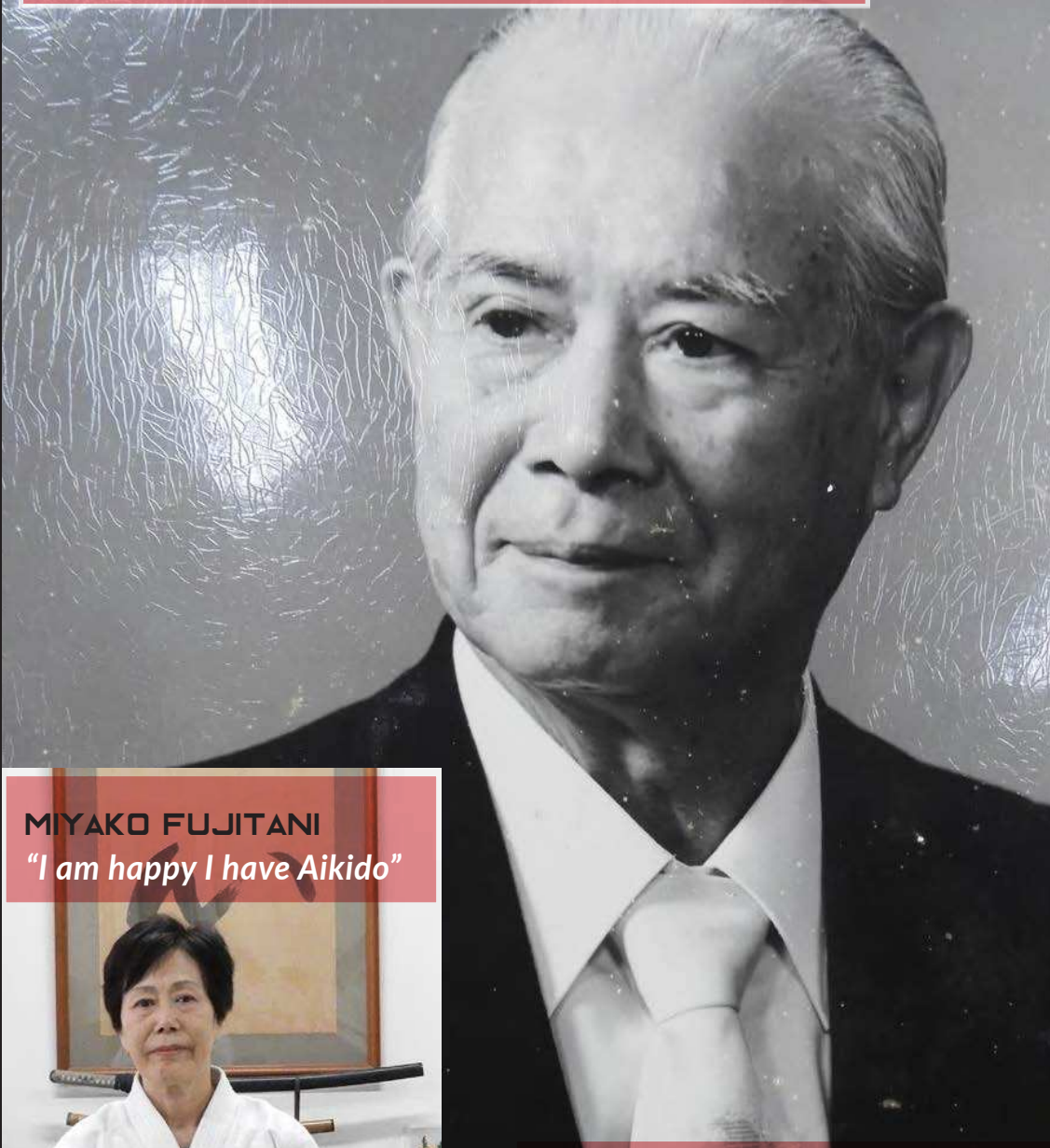


# MAGAZINE OF TRADITIONAL BUDO

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Remembering SEIKICHI UEHARA and MOTOBU UDUNDI



*"Karate never ends",* by JAVIER RODRIGUEZ DEL CAMPO



We interviewed SCHLATT, author of the Dictionary of Shotokan Karatedo

MIYAKO FUJITANI  
*"I am happy I have Aikido"*



Kagami Biraki, starting the budoka's new year





INTERVIEW

# MIYAKO FUJITANI, 7 DAN, AIKIKAI

## I AM GLAD I HAVE AIKIDO

PHOTOS MAGAZINE OF TRADITIONAL BUDDO



*Fujitani sensei*



*Fujitani sensei and Italian aikidoka and friend Gianfranco Scimone*

**M**iyako Fujitani has a long career as an aikido instructor in Osaka, where she has been teaching the art for more than 40 years. During all that time of teaching she has had her share of bitterness and happiness. From the joyful times when her dojo was popular and classes were full of students -due in part to the fact that her then husband, Steven Seagal, was teaching there- to the time when he left her and their two children in order to seek a cinema career in the USA. She then had to start from scratches, fighting to survive and to feed her two kids. There were times that only one student would show up for class.

**H**owever, little by little, Miyako Fujitani didn't give up and got on her feet again, even stronger than before, something that she credits to the love of her children and the loyalty of the generation of new students that emerged after that. Today she is a very respected figure in Osaka, a real female warrior who holds a 7° dan from the Aikikai. We met Fujitani sensei last November at her dojo in Osaka.

**I**t was a Saturday morning, just before the class was due to begin, which allowed us to watch the whole sessions and to attest how she takes the extra mile to ensure that her pupils understand what she wants to transmit. The dojo was full of students of both sexes and different levels and the class was conducted in an atmosphere of seriousness but, at the same time, cheerful camaraderie.

**O**ur gratitude to Italian aikidoka resident in Japan, Gianfranco Scimone, for all his assistance arranging the visit to the Tenshin Dojo and the interview with Fujitani sensei that follows.



*Miyako Fujitani sensei, 7° Dan, Aikikai*



*Ten Shin calligraphy in Fujitani Sensei's dojo shomen*

- **Traditional Budo: Sensei, could you tell us about your past and what moved you to take up aikido?**

- Miyako Fujitani: Before aikido I did classic ballet and tea ceremony, actually I have certification as tea ceremony master. I started aikido due to the fact that my father, who died when I was six years old, was a violent person. I didn't want to be like him and wanted to become strong. My older brother was doing judo on the floor right below where I was studying ballet. I saw him training and said: "I want to do judo", but my brother told me: "you are a girl so do aikido."

- **TB: If I may ask, was your father physically violent towards you or your family?**

- MF: Well, he didn't hit me. My older sister is six years older than me and my brother eight so, being the youngest, he would always pick on me even though I had not done anything wrong. He would try to throw me out of the house grabbing me by my legs and trying to pull me outside while I would grab on to a pole so he couldn't. I got seriously injured once because he dislocated my shoulder doing that. Then I started to not feel embarrassed by this anymore and to stand up to him.

- **TB: Why did he do that to you?**

- MF: I don't know, I never did anything to deserve that violence. Probably because I was the smallest and I was easier to physically handle.

- **TB: Where did you start aikido and who was your master?**

- MF: I started in Kobe but with a group of shodan aikidoka who were teaching there, without a formal master. They were affiliated to the Aikikai of Tokyo.

- **TB: Were there many women learning Aikido at that time?**

- MF: Very few. I was the youngest, the majority of the women there were University students. I was attending High School.

- **TB: What part of the training did you like the most and what part did you like the least?**

- MF: At first, I loved the ukemi (breakfalls/the projections your opponent take). I didn't like the grappling or the joint locks or luxation techniques. I didn't start to really be aware of this until my joints were being damaged and got extremely painful.

One day, Jacob Bucchi, who was a 5th dan, came to my dojo and did shiho nage to me but since I was standing, I fell on a wrong angle and was really hurt afterwards. Here we don't use ukemi for shiho nage. Our 3<sup>o</sup> and 2<sup>o</sup> kyus program is mainly about luxations. Aikido doesn't only teach these techniques and how to align yourself, or even hurt others, but also to treat them. So, if you are stiff, we can help you to be soft. I don't really like dojos that only teach students as long as they are capable to throw you. Our aikido is softer and more elegant.

- **TB: We understand that your shodan test was done under aikido's founder Morihei Ueshiba sensei, is that correct?**

- MF: Yes, it took place in Osaka in front of O-sensei in 1967 when I was 19 or 20 years old. He died two years later.

- **TB: Do you remember how you did in that test?**

- MF: Of course I remember everything. I didn't have much stamina that day and, on top of that, my uke stank to alcohol. It was obvious that he had been drinking the night before and I think he came to the exam right from the bar. He would breath heavily on me during techniques so I had to stop my breathing while that since it was so unpleasant, and that took my energy away. I wanted to breathe from my ears or eyes, that is how unbearable it was. In any case, I did my best and I managed to pass.

- **TB: What memories do you have of Ueshiba sensei?**

- MF: I never had direct contact with him but he would group the female students and show us his technique. He always referred himself Jii (old man or grandpa). He was always with Ms. Sunadomari, an assistant from Kyushu. I don't know if there was "something" between them (laughs), but she was always with him, helping him in everything. I believe the Sunadomari Dojo still exists today in Kyushu. Ueshiba sensei would always demonstrate this trick attack with her, a kind of faint to trick the opponent. At that time, I also thought that our art was a budo of very long history but there I was doing aikido with O-sensei who had founded the system and was still alive... I felt kind of dumb becoming aware that aikido was quite young and short in history (laugh). I was convinced that its creator must have been long dead by then.

- **TB : In Budo practice generally, and in aikido particularly, the awareness of ki places an important role. Do you encourage this awareness, or provide specific training for your students to develop ki?**

- MF: I acknowledge ki but I don't teach it because ki is something to experience with your body. You cannot teach ki to a person who, for instance, is used to tense his/her muscles or uses lots of force, it is just not possible. The way you manage your maai (the distance and space between the opponent) and prepare yourself against an attacker who can have a weapon, that is ki, that is ki practice.

- **TB : It is correct then to say then that you do not consider ki as an abstract concept but that you believe in ki as a tangible internal force, or energy, that can be used to the budoka's advantage. For instance, Koichi Tohei sensei who, as you know, was a student of Morihei Ueshiba, based his own aikido system around ki.**

- MF: Ki does exist in the same way that the teachings of aikido come from the universe and nature, what happens is that there are teachers within "ki organizations" who are frauds. I have seen these people "teach" without the slightest concept of ki, and I have tested them by checking whether they could feel my own ki. They even failed to see what I was doing or whether I was extending my ki or not. I thought "how can these people teach ki if they don't even know it themselves?" On the other hand, what Tohei sensei taught was real. If you extend your arm and make a fist the ki goes back to your body so your arm would bend.



*Making herself sure that her younger students understand what she explains*



*A sempai leads the warming up*



*Fujitani sensei addresses students prior to the start of the class*





*Applying kote gaeshi*

But if you extend your fingers the ki flows outward so your arm won't bend (Fujitani sensei refers here to the "unbendable arm" exercise used in the Shinshin Toitsu Aikido that Tohei sensei founded, Editor). You can't do this by force but by feeling it. There is a huge difference between closing your fist and opening it. However, what Tohei sensei taught about Ukemi is totally wrong and although some of his other training methods have often been ridiculed by other sensei I would never ridicule something truly good. The closing and the opening of the fist and the flow of the ki energy does truly exist.

- TB : The "father" of modern Karate Do, Gichin Funakoshi sensei, used to say that there is not first attack in karate, while Ueshiba sensei said that aikido does not have attacks. Do you think O-sensei was implying the same philosophy?

- MF: I think that most probably Ueshiba sensei was emphasizing that in aikido there are not punching techniques or kicks. At the beginning, the system did have punches and kicks but it evolved until present day aikido. For instance, kicks were removed because when you kick, you are standing only on one leg and that can bring disadvantages for the kicker because of a weak balance.

- Gianfranco Scimone : Is that the reason why you have ukemi instead of attacks?

- MF: No, aikido is very often misinterpreted like that. Aikido is me being able to use whatever techniques when you attack a certain way. We lead the opponent into attacking us a certain way so that we can counterattack however we choose, via submission for example. That is aikido and many people have the wrong idea. We don't start the fight but, when we need to fight, we allow them to grab us the way we want so we can immediately counter that using whatever technique we desire. So, it's not we were grabbed so we have to do something. We are always the ones that control the fight by leading the opponents so that we can do whatever we want with them. We make the situation. That is "sen-no-sen", to look beyond and beyond. To grab is not sen-no-sen.

- Gianfranco Scimone: Like irimi nage?

- MF: No, if you move before the irimi nage what happens? We move right before they cut from above. Irimi nage is for another set of circumstances.

- TB : Aikido being a system which takes advantage of the strength of the attacker, has obvious similarities with other martial arts like judo or sumo. What part of aikido do you think the rest of the martial arts could benefit from? Like for example karate or kendo.

- MF: Well, let me point out that to be grabbed and to use that to your advantage is a quality unique to aikido. In judo and sumo it's better not to be grabbed since that would be a disadvantage. Aikido is the only art where being grabbed is an advantage because there are techniques that teaches us what to do in such situation. Some people ask, can you only do aikido when you are grabbed? But it's easier to use our techniques if we are not grabbed. I do not know of other martial art where this is considered advantageous; in sumo it is a disadvantage to have your mawashi (thick belt used by sumo fighter) grabbed, in judo it is a disadvantage to have your judogi grabbed. All martial arts are like that but the way you take that disadvantage and transform it into an advantage is a feature of aikido only so I think aikido practice could benefit any budoka.

- BT : Why do you think aikido is one of the most popular martial arts for women?

- MF: I think it is because, as O-sensei often said,

you don't need strength in aikido, you use your opponent's. There was a time in this dojo when there was quite a number of female students but during a period many students were using force and got injured so many women thought they couldn't do it and there was a blank of women aikidoka for a while. Back then, Steven's (former husband aikido instructor and movie star Steven Seagal, Editor) techniques were very good and perfect for women to easily work on, not as grotesque as they are now.

- BT: When was the Tenshin Dojo founded and who build it?

- MF: Although the Tenshin Dojo's origin goes back to Kobe, it had another name back then. I changed it when I started teaching there at 21 years of age. Later, another aikido instructor with whom I was working, named Kobayashi, encouraged the move to Osaka.

- BT: When did you move it to Osaka?

- MF: After I married Steven. During the three months previous to building this dojo I was in the U.S., where we met. When I came back, I found out that Kobayashi sensei had been doing a lot of bad things here, especially matters related to money management.



*Like most aikido teachers, Fujitani sensei shows no force when throwing an opponent*

I gave him 20 million yen to stop teaching and leave, and created the Tenshin dojo here. This name was given to me by the head representative of the Omoto kyo religion in Japan, which is the religion that O-sensei practiced. Tenshin is also written on his tombstone in his graveyard in Tanabe which, coincidentally, is the same cemetery where my deceased family rest.

- TB: What does Tenshin mean?

- MF: It means Heaven's Heart or Devine Spirit.

- TB: Did you affiliate yourself with Aikikai right away after you opened your dojo?

- MF: Yes, they accepted me right away.

- TB: At that time did Steven Seagal practice Aikido with you as a student or was he an instructor?

- MF: He was just a shodan, but I placed him as the top instructor although I was nidan. I was there in Los Angeles and saw his shodan test. I came back to Japan first and then he followed.

- TB: So, you were definitely his sempai?

- MF: Of course, as I just said, I was already nidan when he got his shodan. His sensei was asleep during Steven's examination. He was always sleeping.

- TB: What was the name of his aikido teacher?

- MF: His sensei was no other than Koichi Tohei. He always said that the aikido he did he never learned it from O-sensei and that is precisely why I thought he wasn't good although, of course, I never said that to him (laugh). He used to say "my aikido is mine".

- TB: Today is not that estrange in Japan to see dojos run by women but, how did the Aikikai then see the idea of an aikido dojo with a woman as chief instructor?

- MF: The Aikikai's reaction was very positive and I always got their support, to the point that O-sensei's son came to visit me. A very nice gentleman who went through a lot too. He was betrayed by many students close to O-sensei who wanted to be the next grand master once O-sensei died. After Steven left and I became the next chief instructor of this dojo everybody left too. So Kisshomaru Ueshiba sensei, the second generation Aikikai grand master, understood me very well. We shared the same kind on painful betrayals.

- TB: What year was that?

- MF: 42 years ago. I was taking care of my son Kentaro while Steven taught. I was training though. I taught again once we divorced and my son was still in elementary school. I had no idea what was happening when he abandoned me. I still cry about this. I was so heartbroken at that time. My friend Gianfranco took me to Osaka castle to cheer me up, gave me flowers and even organized a party when I was going through such a hard time.

- TB: May we ask under what circumstances and why did Steven Seagal leave this dojo and family?

- MF: Well, he was having affairs with different women from here and there while we were married. He even got involved with some of the female students. Then he went to the United States and got involved with yet another woman over there. He lied to the people in Hollywood. What I didn't know was that at the time I was having problems with Kobayashi, he was writing a script about it that later took to Hollywood, saying that he had such a big dojo and that he was a sensei, and this and that... and everybody over there believed him. He even said that this was his own dojo. When those news reached Japan everybody from the newspapers and TV came here to see the "gaijin's dojo". Next thing I knew was that he was going to marry another woman, Kelly LeBrock I believe it was, so he asked me for a divorce assuring me that he was going to send me money which I still haven't received to this day.

- TB: Apparently, he has said more than once that he was the only gaijin to have opened a dojo in Osaka but, from what you tell us, this was all yours.

- MF: Yes, all mine; he landed here with two possessions: a broken pair of jeans and one silver fork. He always said "it is mine, mine!" about the fork. That was all he had. He came to Japan after receiving a cash settlement from a karate show at the Japan Center in Los Angeles where he broke his knee. With that money he bought his ticket to Japan. He never owned a dojo here.

- TB: How many children you had with Steven?

- MF: Two, a boy and a girl

- TB: Did they stay with you in Japan after he left?

- MF: Yes, they grew up here although they live in Los Angeles now.



Both sensei and student prepare for yokomen uchi



But the student gets projected



- TB: With their father?

- MF: No, they never did. And now he is in Russia, he has been granted Russian citizenship. His father is Russian and his mother from Ireland. He lied about their nationalities before. He is a French citizen too.

- TB: Sensei, considering that Budo is a long journey, can you tell us about benefits can students obtain from Aikido in the short and long run?

- MF: Without getting into Ki or anything complicated, they can learn simple foot work and timing. They think they are not using so much force but when they begin, they do. So, from the very start, I teach them that strength is not necessary and try them to understand aikido through the techniques. Aikido is not something so easily explained. In karate, for instance, you would block and counterattack but in aikido we don't block. We don't clash at the same level as the opponent that's why it's so difficult. Timing is very important which I emphasize a lot. I teach something totally different from what they do at the Tokyo branch which I am sorry to say is wrong. I teach a smoother way with the precise timing so the techniques can be executed more smoothly.

- TB: So, within the Aikikai, you have your own methodology, is that it?

- MF: I believe that it's a mistake to be doing absolutely nothing in aikido until the last moment, or to count one, two, three, four... as you do the techniques. O-sensei always said, "don't count, do all the techniques as you say one instead of dividing it into so many counts, it has to run smoothly." I didn't understand that at first but now I do. To a beginner we count from one to two. but O-sensei always got angry when we included so many counts. Everything has to flow as one and I believe that's the real aikido.

- TB: What kobudo weapons do you use with aikido here?

- MF: We do some training with the Bokken, Jo and Tanto and also use them in demonstrations.

- TB: Finally, sensei, can you tell us what aikido is for you?

- MF: When I divorced, I hated administering the dojo because once Steven left, all the dojo students left with him and I was all alone and very embarrassed.

People would come and ask to see a class but I didn't have students. I wanted to crawl into a hole. I had not done anything wrong. Some students would come from other dojos very arrogantly as if they owned the place. And once I started to get a few students someone would bad-mouth me to them: "she is weak so go somewhere else." So, I really hated that time and this dojo. Some people even rumored that Steven left me because I was bad (laugh). So, old time students truly believed that. Even when he was here Steven would bad-mouth me among the students. That's why when he left everybody followed him. However, as I lied in bed at night, I would imagine what I have now, the happy me and where I am now. I would use my imagination watching my children grow up and me having grandchildren and I would wonder whether the day would come when I would feel happy for having aikido. That was what helped me to reach here. I love teaching youngsters with joy and today I can truly and happily say "I am glad I have aikido".

- TB: Fujitani sensei, thank you very much for your time.

- MF: Thanks to you both for coming all the way from Tokyo to see me and my dojo.



Class in progress



Group photo after class ended