

1. the motive and purpose of founding shorinji kempo and its organization

The main problem observed by Kaiso (the founder) when returning from China to a defeated Japan was an overreliance on institutional forms, a lack of individual responsibility, and a general mood of passive acceptance. In a vision stressing the importance of *the individual, the individual*, Kaiso took inspiration from Kongo Zen, to re-educate the Japanese people to strength and independence.

from the syllabus A brief history of the founding, based on the material in the syllabus, may read as follows:

- 1928: Kaiso travelled to China and learned a great variety of techniques of the masters he met during his work.
- 1945: After the defeat, Kaiso witnesses the cruelty of human actions, and
- 1946: returning to Japan, he decided to revive his country by nurturing its people, and in
- 1947: Kaiso started teaching the techniques he had learned in China in the place of Tadotsu, a small harbor town, in Kagawa Prefecture.

From there on, the effort was organized in more institutional forms:

- 1951: Kongo Zen Sohonzan Shorinji
- 1952: Nihon Shorinji Bugei Semmon Gakko
- 1957: Zen Nihon Shorinji Kempo Zemmei
- 1963: Shorinji Kempo Federation of Japan

Now the World Shorinji Kempo organizations carries the responsibility for promoting and guarding the quality of shorinji kempo, which is now (2014) practiced all over the world.

A recent initiative of WSKO is the *Unity Training*¹, such as the one I recently visited organised by the Spanish Shorinji Kempo Federation, under inspiring guidance of *Kawashima sensei*, meant to establish a uniform approach to both the techniques of shorinji kempo as well as more official issues such as the logo, the philosophy and the protocol for judging embus and refereeing randori.

why shorinji kempo As indicated above, in the material from the syllabus, shorinji kempo is based on the kongo zen philosophy:

The main purpose of kongo zen practice is to discipline the mind and body. It is particularly designed to benefit the practitioner in three areas of life: self defense, spiritual development, and improved health. As such shorinji kempo, the discipline of kongo zen, may be regarded as a vehicle to develop people who will help others, who have bravery, motivation, intelligence, and a sense of what is right ...

Reading in the philosophy of Kaiso, I am struck by some already familiar phrases:

- horizontal communication
- half for yourself, half for the others
- plan for 10 years ahead

These phrases emphasize for me, respectively, how important it is to break through hierarchic, institutionalized relations, and communicate from person to person, to maintain personal strength and refuse to be seduced by in the end powerless altruism, and to keep an eye on the future, in establishing goals and committing oneself to what is worth striving for, which includes to build a community as exemplified by shorinji kempo all over the world, where people find both individual training and mutual support.

The actuality of these visions may also be seen in our current society, where (from a more professional perspective) for example *horizontal communication* has proven its worth in innovations in a range of areas in a connected world, that is via social networks and interest groups. The other items in the philosophy may (again from a professional perspective) be seen as counterbalancing the risk of losing oneself in technology and entertainment, resulting in indifference and a lack of commitment.

Although the current situation is radically different from the one in which Kaiso founded shorinji kempo, the basic tenets of individual responsibility and strength, while building on a community, still hold strong in the world of today, that is characterized not only by technical affluence but also the de-personalization through institutionalized relations, and, let's not forget, as a remedy against an unhealthy lifestyle!

¹sk.eliens.net/note-unity.html

2. what I have gained in training shorinji kempo

Having practiced shorinji kempo for almost twenty years, the main purpose in continuing is still to exercise a proper *discipline of mind and body*, or in other words the meaning of shorinji kempo may be characterized by the Japanese word *gyo*, in its dual meaning of *calling* and *discipline*, or a habit of training responding to a need for movement and a long standing attraction for the martial arts. My attention to shorinji kempo was attracted by the phrase *shorinji kempo is an intellectual martial art*, and in a time where I worked too hard, spending many hours in front of the computer, and I also had to deal with some personal issues, I started training shorinji kempo at the age of 43, curious whether I could keep up with a group of younger people.

After some time, thanks also to appropriate training partners, I felt confident and enthusiastic to tackle the challenges in shorinji kempo, that is to participate in a *taikai*, take grading exams, attend training seminars and even visit *hombu* for the summer camps, which only strengthened my interest and determination to pursue the path of shorinji kempo, even though shorinji kempo must explicitly be considered as a method (*ho*) instead of a path or way (*do*).

Apart from being an adequate remedy against the problem of aging, as I can also see with the senior sensei in *hombu*, at the age of 62 I still enjoy training, teaching younger kenshi, and having the confidence of being able to defend myself and my family (that is my wife and two daughters of five and one and a half) against the threats and dangers that may occur when traveling in remote regions, such as the border area of Tibet and China, as we recently did during a sabbatical leave².

On a more general level, I do regard shorinji kempo as an effective counterweight against the disadvantages of an institutionalized existence, and the unhealthy life style that (too often) comes with a life of technical affluence. Also my contact with kenshi both from my own dojo as in dojos of other countries (including Japan!) is usually a refreshing experience, that breaks through fixed patterns of thought that, on closer inspection, limit my perspective on life. In other words, it is fun to train with other people and often surprising what they have to tell you!

From my professional perspective, as a professor *creative technology / new media*, I teach (both computer science and engineering) students to develop *serious games*³ which may be regarded as powerful tools for *behavioral change* and teaching (e.g. mathematical) skills, the teaching methods as well as the essential content of shorinji kempo may act as a model for a discipline or approach that effects what is often called *transformative experiences*, in the sense that it brings about a change in attitude, as well as lifestyle, and associated basic skills. And, indeed, both the self-confidence and the ability to co-develop with partners in developing martial skills, may be regarded as essential to live a life of value, overcoming selfish behavior and strive for a better life in contributing to the community.

Apart from the benefits, the inherent complexity of the system of techniques shorinji kempo teaches is in itself intriguing and proves to be a constant challenge for learning and improvement. Also, the lessons of my sensei (*Hiromi Tojo*) often provided inspiration for my own efforts at teaching.

To conclude, it is not easy to summarize what I have learned, and, quoting Kaiso, I still value to look at shorinji kempo *from a beginner's mind*, and unrelentingly set myself the goals of improving my techniques, finding a proper way to do techniques together with a partner, and getting above the possible confusion that may occur in randori exercise. Yes, I learned a lot, including control of movements and a great variety of techniques, I gained strength and martial skills, yet I am still in search for a proper balance between physical energy and spiritual development, for which shorinji kempo provides me with a unique opportunity!

A. Eliens, 22/10/2014

online version: sk.eliens.net/essay-dan-4.html

²diff.eliens.net

³serious.eliens.net