

Tsurune in Australia

Today, I would like to introduce Mr Gavin Downs, the first President of the Melbourne Kyudo Kai (MKK).

Established in 2013, the MKK is currently in its eighth year of operation this year. It is the first club of its kind in Australia and has the largest member base of all Kyudo clubs in the country. At MKK, there are regular *keiko* (training sessions) where members can practice shooting from a distance of 28m, the official distance for *kinteki* (close-range shooting).

The MKK is a not-for-profit association listed under the International Kyudo Federation (IKF). Every year, members can participate in the Asia-Oceania Kyudo Seminar and the Special Overseas Provisional Chuo *Shinsa* (*Dan* grading examinations).

When I met Gavin for the first time, I could feel his unique *ki* from his presence and he struck me as a polite and self-possessed person. Although Gavin has never lived in Japan, he has previously travelled to Japan to receive intense training in Kyudo, where he trained under a Master who holds *Hanshi Hachidan* (8th *Dan*, 10th being the highest). Through his hard work, Gavin currently holds *Yondan* (4th *Dan*), and is one of the only three people in Australia to have achieved *Yondan* or above.

According to Gavin, Kyudo is more than hitting the target with an arrow. Rather, it is a traditional Japanese martial art with focuses on etiquette and manners, sharing similarities with Japanese tea ceremony, *ikebana* (Japanese flower arrangement), calligraphy, and kendo. Kyudo is the oldest form of *kobudō* (traditional Japanese martial arts), and the term *budo* (martial arts) was originally *yumi no do*, literally translating to 'the way of the bow'. The spirit of modern day Kyudo is expressed as "*Shin Zen Bi*" meaning truth, goodness, and beauty – the ultimate objective of Kyudo highlighting the importance of harmony and etiquette.

At the moment, there are no permanent Kyudo halls in Melbourne, so the members of MKK train every Sunday for three hours from 9:30am at the sports centre of Victoria University. When I went to observe one Sunday, I saw about 20 members practicing diligently under the instruction of *Dan* holders, including Gavin.

At MKK, there are around 30 regular members and introductory courses also take place throughout the year. Unfortunately, the courses have been put on hold since last year, and there are over 60 people currently on the waiting list (for the latest details, please check the MKK website: <https://melbournekyudo.org.au/>). Kyudo is also gaining popularity through the Japanese anime "*Tsurune: Kazemai Kōkō Kyūdō-bu*", which inspired a lot of people to try the sport.

Unlike Kendo and Judo which have been practiced in Australia for decades, it has only been 8 years since Kyudo was introduced in Australia – and it was Gavin who was instrumental in promoting the awareness of Kyudo in Australia. Gavin mentioned that it was particularly difficult to find a venue to practice Kyudo, but was finally able to secure a place to practice with the support of Victoria University. Eventually, Gavin hopes to secure a permanent practice hall to use as *Kyudojo* where he can practice more – currently, he only has access to the sports centre for three hours each week, during which he has to do everything from the setup to coaching and packing up, making it difficult for him to find time for his own practice.

One of the characteristics of Kyudo is the possibility of online competitions. While human opponents are required for sports such as Kendo and Judo, in Kyudo, each player can draw a bow and compete the number of hits, given that the conditions are the same. MKK has previously conducted online competitions with Kyudo clubs interstate, and even overseas. Perhaps one day, it might even be possible to have Kyudo coaching sessions online!

When online Kyudo sessions become more common, I believe that the popularity of Kyudo in Australia will grow further – with more people becoming interested in Japanese culture. We, as the Consulate-General of Japan in Melbourne, would like provide as much support as possible to the MKK to promote the understanding of traditional Japanese culture here in Australia.

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