

Through the Uchideshi Experience Carlos Blanco

I have undergone the experience of being uchideshi twice.

The first time, two winter months when I was 42. The second one, also in a cold season, I was 44.

You must be physically and spiritually committed to the experience.

Both elements are more easily accepted by young, particularly young Japanese, students. Keeping the path, not only in training but also in manners and behaviour, and especially in Japanese everyday life gets more difficult as we get older.

"The Japanese way" may sometimes be confusing for Westerners. A nice amount of mutual understanding is required from both the Japanese, to understand that westerners are trying to do their best and from the Westerners, to make an effort to comprehend, adapt to and accept different behaviours.

In doing this, both sides achieve a win-win position. On the contrary, extreme positions only lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

Japanese society is based upon a hierarchy aiming towards community. Most Western societies---and their derived behaviours---focus on individual achievements, egalitarian rights and personal dynamic growth.

A good example of these opposite approaches can be seen in the learning process. Easterners tend to enshrine "kata", a way of learning through careful repetition. Westerners on the other hand had developed "mayeutics" where questioning what is taught is the key element. Repetition vs. Questioning.

While the former approach helps tradition and values to be kept, the latter enhance development of new knowledge.

Westerners can be lazy at keeping their traditions, particularly those where authority is implied, while Easterners feel uneasy questioning while learning.

Yasuo Kobayashi soshihan first and Hiroaki Kobayashi dojocho later have devoted their lives to bridging that gap traveling and opening their Dojos to foreigners.

Every Aikido instructor should at least once undergo the experience of being uchideshi. That is to say, the experience of achieving knowledge through obedient, careful kata. It is impossible to teach without learning.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Aikido Kobayashi Dojo for allowing me to have such a constructive experience.