Dear AKR Members

A Letter of Gratitude

I, **Choi Ho Young**, passed the 8th Dan Examination conducted at the Yeonsuwon Korea on 1 November 2026. I am writing this letter to share my joy and honour with you.

First and foremost, I give thanks to God, who watched over me and enabled me to continue challenging myself with a positive spirit despite my physical limitations. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my beloved family, whose support and encouragement enabled me to continue pursuing this goal through nine examination attempts. Although I will not mention them individually by name, I sincerely thank the many instructors in Korea who trained with me and generously shared their guidance and knowledge over the years. My sincere thanks also go to the friends and examination partners who prepared alongside me and offered their support throughout the process.

Most importantly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all my fellow Kendo practitioners in Australia.

Practising Kendo Together

I am but only one among many who practise Kendo together in the Australian Kendo community. The reason I was able to pass the 8th Dan Examination is because I have had the privilege of training alongside so many dedicated kendo practitioners over many years. Without the members of our Kendo community, and without the mutual teaching and learning that we have shared together, I could never have imagined achieving such an honour. I would especially like to thank the colleagues who have walked the path of Kendo together with me. Although we train in different dojos, we have encouraged one another, learned from one another, and worked together for our mutual development.

I am also deeply grateful to those who have contributed to the growth and development of Kendo in Australia, particularly the members of the NSW Kendo Association. Training together with all of you has always been a great source of motivation and inspiration to me.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to the senior pioneers of Australian Kendo who are no longer with us. Through their dedication and efforts, Kendo was introduced, nurtured, and developed in Australia. For their contributions, I offer my sincere gratitude and respect.

Below I would like to share my Kendo journey.

My Kendo and the Challenge of 8th Dan

I love Kendo itself.
My purpose in practising Kendo has always been self-improvement.
Kendo has provided me with vitality, physical and mental wellbeing, and a meaningful way to live my life.

Over the years, I have been involved in many aspects of Kendo, including teaching, grading examinations, refereeing, competitions, and organisational activities. However, I have always regarded these as part of the journey rather than the ultimate goal. From the beginning, my primary purpose in Kendo has been personal growth through training.

In truth, I never started Kendo with the ambition of becoming an 8th Dan. I was simply someone who constantly wondered how I could improve my Kendo and become better. After passing 7th Dan after three attempts in 2012, I decided to set a long-term goal and begin preparing for 8th Dan.

Physical Challenges and Training

Soon after making that decision, life presented an unexpected challenge.
In 2014, a large tumour was discovered in my left thigh. Following surgery and treatment, I spent nearly five years recovering. As a result of the surgery, much of the muscle in my left thigh was removed, leaving me with a permanent physical disability.

Fortunately, I never felt resentment toward my circumstances. Instead, I was grateful that I could still continue practising Kendo. Before the operation, there had even been discussion about the possibility of amputation. Thanks to an outstanding surgeon and much good fortune, the operation was successful and I was able to continue my kendo journey.

After recovery, I began carefully study my own physical limitations and look for ways to adapt. At the dojo, I trained alongside everyone else. On days when I could not attend, I followed my own training programme. I spent many hours experimenting with footwork and body movement, searching for methods that suited my physical condition. I practised repetitive striking and movement drills several times per week, often performing hundreds of repetitions in a single session.

Progress was never dramatic, but over time those small improvements accumulated. Most importantly, I learned to accept my reality positively and work within it. I believe that this positive attitude contributed not only to my physical recovery but also to my continued development in kendo.

Lessons Learned Through Failure

The 8th Dan Examination was never easy.

During my preparation, I sought advice and guidance from many senior teachers and 8th Dan instructors in Korea. Their advice helped me recognise many weaknesses in my Kendo. At times I became discouraged. On some occasions I even felt embarrassed by my own shortcomings.

Looking back, however, I realise that my greatest difficulties were not physical. They were mental. Anxiety about my disability, loss of confidence, impatience, feelings of inadequacy, and fear of failure often became greater obstacles than my injured leg itself.

I should have stood in the examination hall with confidence, yet on many occasions I stood there burdened by doubt. Fortunately, consistent training gradually improved my physical condition and stamina. This gave me some confidence and allowed me to maintain hope.

Although there was little visible improvement during the early examination attempts, over time I gradually noticed small signs of progress. Those small improvements helped me regain confidence.

Through repeated failures and continued effort, I learned the value of humility, patience, perseverance, and the willingness to accept advice from others. I also learned that improvement often comes much more slowly than we would like. Countless hours of training may result in only the smallest visible change. Yet those small changes eventually become meaningful progress.

Perhaps most importantly, I have really experienced that mental and psychological pressure can become a greater obstacle than physical limitations. At the same time, I learned that confidence developed through adversity can become a powerful source of strength, both in kendo and in life.

Reflections on the Journey

Before my ninth examination, I spent many hours wondering what I would do if I failed again. To be honest, had I failed, I would most likely have attempted the examination one final time the following year.

Whenever I failed an examination, I was never truly discouraged. The reason was simple. More than anyone else, I knew where my Kendo was lacking. I simply returned to training, worked on those weaknesses, and prepared myself once again.

Although I now look back on those years with gratitude, I cannot deny that the process brought considerable pressure and many difficult moments. Improving

one's Kendo and pursuing meaningful goals requires commitment, perseverance, and effort.

Yet those experiences also taught me valuable lessons and helped me grow both as a kendo practitioner and as a person. Even now, I do not regard passing 8th Dan as the end of my journey. Rather, I see it as an opportunity to continue learning and improving.

Looking back, there is one story that still makes me smile.

A teacher once encouraged a candidate who had repeatedly failed the 8th Dan Examination.
"Train harder, and next time make sure you pass."
The candidate replied:
"Although I failed, I feel that I learned a great deal and that my Kendo has improved because of it."
The teacher immediately responded:
"Then perhaps you should keep failing forever. You'll keep learning, and your Kendo will keep improving!"
Even today, that story still brings a smile to my face.

Closing Thoughts

Thank you for taking the time to read my story and accept my heartfelt gratitude.

If these experiences can provide even a small amount of encouragement to fellow practitioners who are facing challenges due to age, injury, illness, or difficult circumstances, I will be truly grateful.

I will continue practising Kendo with all of you just as I always have. Although I have now passed the 8th Dan Examination, I remain exactly the same person I was before. I am simply a person who practises kendo together with all of you. My hope is to continue learning, improving, and sharing the path of Kendo with my fellow practitioners for many years to come.

I look forward to the opportunity to meet you somewhere, someday, and practise kendo together once again.

Wishing all of you and your families good health, peace, and happiness.

With deepest gratitude and respect,

Choi Ho Young

24th November 2026