

A History of Judo (Contexts).

Having looked at several articles and essays charting the history of Judo the Kodokan and the teachings of Jigoro Kano I was struck by the similarity of approach by many of the authors. Neil Olenkamp's short article on Kodokan Judo is typical of most which rather crudely paraphrased runs along the lines of Judo is derived from Jujutsu. Kano had mastered a number of styles of jujutsu including Kito-Ryu and Tenjin-shinyo Ryu and having found the jujutsu schools wanting (it is of interest that in 1879, Kano participated in a jujutsu demonstration given for former United States president Ulysses S. Grant when he visited Japan) and having a somewhat ill-disciplined reputation he developed his own system based on modern sporting methods and founded in 1882 the Kodokan Judo Institute in Tokyo. What has intrigued me is what were the contexts of this departure from the old to the new and so this brief article seeks to explore some of those contexts.

As a brief summary and without delving too far back into the history of Japan the Edo period ran from 1603 to 1867 and followed periods of inter clan warfare. It started with the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu defeated the Hideyori loyalists and other Western rivals, achieving almost unlimited power and wealth. In 1603, Ieyasu was appointed Shogun by the emperor and established his government in Edo (Tokyo). After the destruction of the Toyotomi clan in 1615 when Ieyasu captured Osaka Castle, he and his successors had practically no rivals, and peace prevailed throughout the Edo period. The Tokugawa shoguns continued to rule Japan for 250 years with an emphasis for the warrior class (samurai who were at the top of the rigid social hierarchy – Shinokosho – and in turn they were further subdivided by class down to the lowliest ronin) on martial arts but also on literature, philosophy and the arts. The other events of great significance was in 1633 when Shogun Iemitsu forbade travelling abroad and almost completely isolated Japan in 1639 by reducing the contacts to the outside world to very limited trade relations with China and the Netherlands in the port of Nagasaki. In addition, all foreign books were banned. Although isolated from the rest of the world over this period change inevitably occurred and the ancient martial arts of Japan (Bujutsu) created for the warrior class began to lose importance as the martial ways (Budo) created for the commoner gained ascendancy. Budo was not simply a collection of fighting techniques but also a spiritual discipline, a way of life.

As the power of the Tokugawa clan declined towards the later part of the Edo period (economic decline, natural disasters which brought civil unrest and western powers such as the USA trying by force to open up trade with Japan) so even the most ultra conservative (often the samurai) saw the need for change and for Japan to open up. In 1867-68, the Tokugawa government fell because of political pressure (the formation of the Satsuma/Choshu Alliance in 1866 against the Tokugawa Shogunate), and the power of Emperor Meiji was restored. What followed was a period of rapid change for Japan with markets opened up to foreign countries (often backed by the threat of gunboat diplomacy). There was a wish among many in Japan to combine western advances and technology with traditional, eastern values. The rigidities of the class system started to break down with the samurai previously at the top of the pile being arguably the greatest losers and major reforms were instituted to the education system which was initially based on the French system and over time the German. Some sense of this change and turbulence is conveyed in the 2003 Edward Zwick film "The Last Samurai". It should be remembered that it was within this milieu that Jigori

Kano grew up and developed, he was eight years old when the Meiji restoration began and such radical changes in society within his early years must have influenced his thinking. There may be evidence for this in his approach to change some of the martial arts by adopting unifying principles for the techniques he had learned and the establishment of the key principle of Seiryoku Zenyo (maximum efficiency in mental and physical energy).

The other break from the past was that Kano's Judo appears to be more systematic and organised in his approach to martial arts. Kano's system involves three major sets of techniques: throwing (nage waza), groundwork (katame waza) and striking (atemi waza). The throwing techniques, drawn from his knowledge of Kito ryu jujutsu, subdivided into standing (tachi waza) and sacrifice (sutemi waza) techniques. Further standing techniques included hand (te waza), hip (koshi waza) and foot (ashi waza) throws and sacrifice techniques included full sacrifice (ma sutemi waza) and side sacrifice (yoko sutemi waza) throws. Kano's groundwork and striking techniques derive from Tenshin-Shinyo ryu jujutsu. Groundwork (newaza) was categorised into holds (osaekomi waza), strangulations (shime waza) and joint locks (kansetsu waza). Originally striking techniques were used including fists, elbows, hand-edges, fingers, knees and feet as striking points. These once again were categorised into upper (ude ate) and lower limb blows (ashi ate). Higher ranking students were also expected to know the art of resuscitation (kappo), so as to conduct their training in a safe and responsible manner. As students progressed through the sub divisions and up the rankings they were taught and attempted techniques of increasing difficulty. Within Kano's Dojo four main teaching methods were used; randori (free practice of all Judo techniques), kata (pre-arranged forms), ko (his systematic lecturing), and mondo (periods of question and answer). This systematic approach seems to exemplify the spirit of the times.

It should be remembered that Kano was by profession an educator and that Japanese education was going through a process of rapid and radical change which was epitomised in Kodokan Judo. Kano graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1881 in what would have been for Japan thoroughly modern studies of political science and economics. It is significant that Kano chose teaching over the career route that was expected of him, finance. Kano had a distinguished career in education and seems to have been influenced by the contemporary American educator John Dewey and his advocacy of experiential learning. Kano's educational philosophies mirror his systematic judo programme and Japanese educational programmes of the late 19th and early 20th century, developing minds, bodies, and spirits in equal proportion, increase patriotism and loyalty, teach public morality, and increase physical strength and stamina. In conclusion finances loss has certainly been Jodo's gain and Jigoro Kano was certainly a man of his time and place.

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