

History of Judo

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The history of judo is the history of the shift from a martial art to a modern sport. It tells first how a man, Jigoro Kano, devoted himself to the education of the youth of his country, blending traditions and modernity, using individual prowess for collective benefits.

The beginnings of judo are closely related to the specificity of Kano's life and personality. Jigoro Kano was born in the year of the monkey, on October 28th, 1860, in what was then the little village of Mikage, currently the East Nada district of the city of Kobe. Kano's birthplace was well known for sake brewing, and members of the Kano family were wealthy sake brewers. Today the brand name of the company Kiku Masamune, is still widely known. Very early in Kano's rigorous education western influences were added to Eastern traditions and teachings. One of his grandfathers was a well-known poet and a scholar of Chinese. During the 1860s Kano's father, a high-ranking official, worked for the shogunate government. A born organizer, with a strong sense of social responsibility, he contributed to the modernization of Japan, along western lines, opening Hyogo harbor to foreign trade, suggesting western-style ships. Young Kano in whom the same qualities were to be found later in life was obviously influenced by his father's spirit of enterprise.

In 1870, soon after the death of his mother, his father decided to move to Tokyo. It was then a time of great cultural and social ferment in Japan, from which Kano obviously benefited. In Tokyo, already brought up on Confucian classics, he was put into another Confucian school. At the same time he was sent for English lessons to Mitsukuri Shuhei, a renowned scholar who was to belong to a group of influential thinkers, dedicated to educational reforms. In his early teens, Kano developed a strong taste for math and showed a particular affinity for languages. Throughout his life his language abilities were exceptional. During his study of jujutsu his notes were written in English, probably to secure the confidentiality of his research at a time of intense rivalry among jujutsu schools. In his old age, he kept also his diaries in English.

As a boy Kano was frail but quick-tempered. Being extremely gifted, he studied with boys who were older and bigger and he soon understood the need to find a way to defend himself. At the age of 14 (15 according to Japanese tradition), he entered the Foreign Languages School, which was part of the Kaisei Gakko. There Kano was one of the first Japanese to play baseball, introduced one year before by two American teachers. He loved the spirit of the sport, a new concept in Meiji Japan, and certainly

found some inspiration in it later on. In 1877, he entered Toyo Teikoku (Imperial) University, currently Tokyo University. Many among the teachers and students he met there were to become leading figures in Meiji life. Because he had to deal with well-built young men coming from all over the country, he decided to learn more about the art which enabled the weak to overcome the strong. In Tokyo, it was then very hard to find anyone who knew how to teach the ancient art of jujutsu. The Kobusho, the school of martial arts, where samurai youths had been taught jujutsu in the old days, had disappeared with the Meiji Restoration movement. Besides jujutsu had been a composite of different systems, and this fragmentation had also been detrimental to the “pliant art” as it was called.

In 1877, Kano was eager to learn more about this ancient practice. After months of patient research, he finally managed to find a former Kobusho jujutsu master, Fukuda Hachinosuke. The latter became his first teacher, which was reluctantly accepted by his father who saw no future in this old tradition. Two years later, when General Ulysses Grant came to Japan, Kano knew enough to take part in a jujutsu demonstration.

Kano took over Fukuda’s school when he died, in 1877. He kept on studying with Fukuda’s teacher, Iso Masamoto, but his interest for the academic subjects he studied (philosophy, political science, economics) never flagged.

In 1881, he began to study the jujutsu of the Kito school, the spiritual side of jujutsu, with another Kobusho teacher, Iikubo Tsunetoshi, who replaced Iso after his death. This time the stress was put on the spiritual side of judo. Iikubo, an expert at throws, gave less importance to kata, but the main kata originally performed with armor, *koshiki no kata*, was kept. It was one of Kano’s favorites ; he performed it before the Emperor in 1929. The Kito school is also at the origin of the name judo. Kano deliberately chose it to underline the moral side of his system.

The year 1882 was a landmark year for Jigoro Kano. He was appointed lecturer in politics and economics at Gakushuuin (the then private school for the nobility) where he was to teach for some years and then served as a director. He also started a private school, the Kano Juku, and an English language school. Kano Juku was a preparatory school whose main goal was to build up the characters of the pupils who lived there. However, this year is said to be essentially the date of the formal beginning of his judo academy, the Kodokan, in a space rented from a small Buddhist monastery in Tokyo. The number of his students swelled rapidly, coming from all over Japan. Many left old jujutsu masters to train with Kano. The Kodokan moved several times. Kano’s method was adopted by the police and the navy, introduced to schools and universities and rapidly spread overseas. What came to be known as Kodokan judo was a synthesis of several schools of jujutsu to which he added ideas taken from interviews, readings, and forgotten techniques. In 1889, after his first foreign trip, during which he inspected educational facilities in Europe, eventually he got married and had eight children.

Kano was presented as an exceptional and brilliant educator. He occupied several positions as headmaster of various schools and Tokyo Teachers Training college. He was considered as the most articulate spokesman in educational matters. Kano's genius essentially lies in the fact he saw judo as closely linked with education and adapted it accordingly. He saw and developed the guiding principle behind jujutsu where others had just seen a collection of techniques. The ultimate goal was to make the most efficient use of mental and physical energy. Each combination of movements represented a set of ideas. He rejected the techniques which clashed with his conception of life. He paid attention to every single aspect of judo and to its potentialities : judo etiquette, the aesthetic side of judo were as much part of this mental and physical discipline as the methods of defense and attack. Judo was, from the start, a sport, because of its competitive nature and a way of life in the founder's mind. The teaching of judo became a means of fighting lethargy, negative frames of mind, anger. Contests in judo and the lessons derived from them had to be used as mirrors of the social scene.

The principles of judo worked inside and outside the dojo, in the workplace, the school, the political world, everywhere. What is fascinating about Kano's life is that, apart from the exceptional qualities of the founder of judo, the forces which were to cause the international success of this discipline were already at work in the early days of his teachings. In 1919, in Tokyo, Kano met John Dewey, the founder of the American educational system who was then a guest lecturer at the Imperial University. They exchanged views on education. Various parallels could be drawn from their philosophical concepts. On a Sunday morning, Kano took Dewey to the Kodokan to show him how his ideas could be illustrated on a mat. Dewey was fascinated : "It is really an art". He admired the way the laws of mechanics were blended with old practices and added to Buddhist Zen teachings. He immediately saw the importance of Kano's teachings : "It is much better than most of our inside formal gymnastics. The mental element is much stronger. [...] A study ought to be made here".

Kano's method derived from old-style jujutsu techniques but it definitely differed from the methods of the past. Getting rid of all dangerous, killing or maiming jujutsu waza, Kano forced opponents to grapple with one another. Thus, he restricted violence. So as to make them safer he improved falling techniques. Whereas it had always been understood mainly as a goal, victory now became a means of building people's characters. But this method differed mainly because it referred to science and rationalism. Turning his back to the traditional ways of teaching, Kano liked to explain judo techniques scientifically, studying attitudes, forces at play, problems of equilibrium, center of gravity moves. In 1895, in order to facilitate the learning process, throwing techniques were classified into five sets (go kyo no waza).

In his study of Kano's life, David Waterhouse emphasizes the complexity and the diversity of his philosophy of education. He showed how Kano

borrowed heavily from a long tradition of thought in which mostly Confucian and also Buddhist elements merged with Taoism and Shinto. A Neo-Confucian philosopher of the sixteenth century already claimed that “knowing” implied “doing”. This heritage was common to Kano and his contemporaries who equally drew from contemporary national and Western studies on education. Jigoro Kano’s strategy in the field of education was three-pronged : the acquisition of knowledge, the teaching of morality, and the training of one’s body by physical education. The san iku shugi, or “principle of the three educations” was a popular theory at the time, certainly adapted from Herbert Spencer, one of the most discussed Victorian thinkers, and others.

As an educator, Kano advocated the “three culture principle”. He made this point clear when he wrote : “a healthy body is a condition not only necessary for existence but as a foundation for mental and spiritual activities”. He insisted on the purpose of physical exercises : no matter how healthy a person may be if he does not profit society his existence is vain. Taiiku, physical education, was an important factor of Kodokan judo. In the Kodokan magazines, Kokushi (1888-1903) and Judo (1915 to the present), articles about physical education were numerous. Kano saw the training of physical education instructors as essential. When Kano was in charge of the Teachers Training college he established a physical education department there, with a wide range of sports.

Kano designed judo as a way to develop harmoniously the intellectual, moral and physical aspects of the education of young people. Kano repeatedly showed how the efficient use of one’s mind and body was the key to self-fulfillment. But, he added to this the Confucian concept of social obligation and consequently helping others to learn or teach was part of the process. Kano’s principles were summed up in the two mottoes launched by the Kodokan Cultural society founded in 1922 : Seiryoku Zenyo and Jita Kyoei, one must make good use of his spirit and physical strength for the common good and to reach self-realization.

In 1909, Japan received an invitation to take part in the International Olympic Committee from Baron de Pierre Coubertin, the father of the modern-day Olympics. Jigoro Kano was chosen as Japan’s representative. Thirteen years had passed since the First Modern Olympics were held in Athens, Greece, in 1896. However, there was still no participation from an Asian country. Jigoro Kano was the first Asian member of the IOC.

As yet, there was no general sports organization in Japan that could send athletes to the Olympics. Thus, in 1911, the Japan Amateur Athletic Association was founded and Jigoro Kano was installed as the first president. At this meeting, it was decided that Japan would participate in its first Olympics at the 5th Olympic Games to be held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1912.

This served as the basis for the development of all varieties of sports in Japan. After that time, Jigoro Kano continued his work as an IOC member, and for that purpose he travelled relentlessly within Japan and

abroad. He turned all his energies into the internationalization of sports in Japan. In 1938, in Cairo, the International Olympic Committee accepted his proposal, Tokyo was to be the site of the 12th Olympic Games. However, on May 4th, 1938, Kano died of pneumonia aboard the S. S. Hikawa Maru on his way home. He was 79 years old. Because of the war the intended Games were cancelled. In 1964, judo was accepted as an Olympic sport at the 18th Olympic Games hosted in Tokyo, Japan.
