

# Zuihitsu-Random notes on JUDO by Ronald Désormeaux

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## JUDO RON 50: Judo as an Art Form

The time is 1882; we are in a different culture and in a different country. Japan is just entering its post Samurai period and its population is divided as to which views to follow: those of the new world and its liberal aspirations or those of the old and conservative traditions yet remain independent and somewhat isolated from the entire world.

### The discovery

A young university professor by the name of Jigoro Kano (1860-1939) steps out of the ordinary academia and develops his Judo thus making the links between the two divides. In 1882 he sets up a small training hall in a Jodo Buddhist sect temple in Tokyo Japan. He not only starts to preach his new systems as part of his vision of a healthy and proud nation but puts together his ideas into his Kodokan Judo methodologies and makes available the results of his researches and teaching systems to all for consideration. He did not have long to wait before being challenged and his concepts put under the screening eyes of his peers who were teaching other forms of combat skills at the Dai Nippon Butokukai or Busen for short. Within a decade, he did get full recognition for his expertise and extra-ordinary contribution.



Professor Jigoro Kano

Researching the history of Japan's feudal and medieval times, he noted that the old Samurai class perfected their martial techniques to better serve their clan and their Lordship. Influenced by liberal thinkers and educators, he synthesized, purified and incorporated what he found to be safe systems of training into his Kodokan Corpus and delivered it as a relevant and modern educational system. Not being satisfied to teach the newer fundamental approaches which demanded the intelligent use of self-energy and by extrapolation, the strength of the nation in order to best benefit the Japanese population at large, he wished to extend the process of mutual assistance to all mankind. In doing so, he produced an ensemble of works and treaties of socio-political value and scientific accuracy. His Judo Compendium which can be read and used may in my opinion be considered as an object of ART.

It is said that we all have in our nature, the constant desire to seek ways to better ourselves and become extraordinary. Respected in both the educational and political milieu, Professor Jigoro Kano certainly did demonstrate that he had the potentials to make substantial changes, the courage to overcome the adversities of his time and the foresight to incite others into developing their inner strengths to become better human beings.

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*“He (Professor Jigoro Kano) declared the goals of the practice of Judo to be perfecting oneself physically, mentally and morally, and using those strengths for the good of society”<sup>1</sup> Risei Kano*

Professor Jigoro Kano lived by his principles and set himself as an example showing that the principles of intelligent use of energy and mutual benefits can be accomplished. He dedicated his life towards the implementation of his vision and as part of his numerous projects, developed the path of gentleness out of which we are able to abstract his methodology for success also known as KODOKAN JUDO.

Is Judo an art form?

***The question, we now put forward is: Judo is known today as a combat sport and a physical education system but can it be considered as an Art Form?***

If we accept the basic premise that ART is define by the one who accomplishes an extraordinary event or by those who admire a given activity or object produced by such a person with various emotions, feelings and spiritual appreciations, then, we can class Judo as a kind of ART form.

There are different kinds of ART. One can list many forms of Art in numerous fields of endeavors that came about or were labeled as such throughout diverse periods of history. The early Chinese history made reference to the “Art of War” and to the skillful drafting of calligraphy as ART forms. Roman architecture, medicine, mathematics, music and painting are also different kinds of Art forms that gathered the attention and the envy of many civilizations.

Their definitions and natures have been interpreted by many scholars such as Plato and Aristotle who saw Art as a form of expression where beauty and esthetics prevailed. Art was also defined by groups or guilds that recognized the advanced skills, savoir- faire and superior techniques displayed by an author or evidence of which could be observe through his or her products. The attributes of spiritual and physical characteristics of such marvel was deemed to inspire the peers group. The discoveries of superior craftsmanship or revelations as to its making incited them and the general public into appreciating the intrinsic values of the object or venerate such author for their knowledge, style and discipline and by the beauty they projected.

Concepts of arts

Some philosophical schools have taught that an Art form is normally associated with a sense of beauty having long lasting values. The Art form itself is presumed to outlast its moment of creation and maintain a certain degree of influence or contemplation. Professor Jigoro Kano having produced the Judo Compendium contained in the Kodokan Judo system has long past away but his creation is not only enduring, it has spread all over the continents. What he created then was a new vehicle or process for the Japanese population to keep fit and be useful to others whiles ensuring the conservation of the best forms associated with the ancient combat techniques.

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His methodical approach can be described as a mean to achieve the perfection of self to better serve others. His mission went beyond the provision of a rally leitmotiv; it encompassed the human production of several components known as methodologies and scientific researches that were handed down verbally and in writing to a cadre of followers who would perpetuate his approach via various teaching assignments at the Kodokan Institute and elsewhere.

### Imitation and changes

One can say that in the past 130 years, the technical portfolio introduced in the original Judo system by Professor Jigoro Kano has evolved. There have been historical changes associated with Judo's: first with the creation of the International Judo Federation in the late 1950's and with its introduction as an Olympic sport in 1964. Training methods and technical presentations have varied from time to time and styles have been perfected and adapted to suit different oriental and occidental personalities. These cosmetic changes have not altered the basic principles of "***Intelligent use of Energy and Mutual Welfare***" which were and still are the foundations of modern judo.

Is the discovery of the Judo Compendium by the neophyte produces sufficient interest to pursue his or her learning experience in the application of these two principles? Can the practice of Judo techniques raise sufficient emotions and feelings as to provide a sense of self-satisfaction and realization? Can the growth associated with the demand for technical mastery become a spiritual accomplishment to be used towards the benefit of others? If we can answer in the affirmative, we are surely defining JUDO as an ART form.

### True nature of Judo

Just what is the nature of Judo? How far is it necessary to pursue our research into the Judo philosophy to apprehend the beauty of all its components? For many, Judo is what they can describe after seeing and appreciating an exhibition, contest or Shiai. In their external displays of technical skills, the players or performers are doing their best to apply the basic principles under the most difficult situations. For most of them, the artistic values of judo reside in the skilful performance of chosen techniques. During competitive venues, they now freely express themselves within the confine of their own personality. They transfer their skills and feelings into the execution of the technique of choice which can only be expressed with perfection after years of preparation, following regimented training schedules and having been guided by experts in the field. The execution of flawless techniques is what they seek and the IPPON scoring becomes an end by itself.

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For the spectators, it is another occasion allowing them to arouse their senses at the view of superior and professional displays of judo mastery. The exhibition appeals to their needs, perceptions and understandings of what judo represent. Responding to what they see and hear, they live personal and collective moments when they can feel personal tension, concentration, silence, surprise, suspense, sorrow, disappointment, gratification and exaltation to name just a few of the sensations.

At the same time, they preserve a form of social communion with both the players and the multitude of onlookers. What they see, hear and feel pleases them to various degrees. They will easily display their pleasure or contempt with appropriate gestures as needed. There is a kind of emotional reciprocity or bounding occurring between spectators and players and whatever the outcomes, most spectators remain inspired by the courage and the savoir-faire they have witnessed.



*“Where the mystery is the deepest, is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful”<sup>iii</sup> Lao Tse*

### In depth revelations

What is observed during these public displays is only the tip of the iceberg. Judo still contains some form of mystery and its general philosophy and scientific principles are not fully comprehended unless one dares to go deeper into its practice and keep searching for its true nature. I was once reminded that if I wished to find the Judo's true nature, I had to see demonstrations of it more often, practice it more regularly, have various contacts with different players and teachers and learn to appreciate the ancient writings about it. In summary, the lectures, lessons, demonstrations, encounters and partners are all instruments contributing to our discovery. The more you get familiar with all its aspects, the more you will identify JUDO as an Art form.

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### Searching for the soul

The Judo Compendium comes alive in more discreet milieus. It is in the judo art studios and workshops known as the dojo that the more revealing parts of judo can be detected. In those training chambers, the judoka or student can seek, search for, make inquiries and discover the depth of all the elements which make the Judo Compendium into a rich treasure. Judoka have the opportunity to learn the complexity of its systems with the guidance of learned teachers who can dissect and reconstruct the applications of principles and fundamentals. In these learning venues, they can make the necessary efforts to practice their applications and distinguish when the principles are being properly applied and then, live with the consequences of their decisions.

The Judo Compendium consists of the Kodokan Gokyo, the Kata, the Randori, the Shiai and the mondo-discussions. These elements are by themselves or as a group, defining the required processes associated with the two principles; INTELLIGENT USE OF ENERGY AND MUTUAL BENEFITS. They will expose their symbolic significance and facilitate their application by influencing and stimulating the judoka to seek the pursuit of higher physical and mental goals and thus elevate his or her senses, emotions and intellectual capabilities.

### The building elements

The Kodokan Gokyo<sup>iii</sup> or five teaching elements is an ensemble of instructions concerned with the essential techniques that all students wishing to advance has to master. It is the official classification of representative techniques as executed from the natural posture. It is the regular course of instructions arranged in sequences from simple to complex. It represents the essential elements and the foundation of throwing principles: learning to walk, to receive the fall, to correctly displace the body, to ensure coordination, to find the best opportunity an opportune moment, to practice different ways of breaking the opponent's balance, to judge the right distance for entering into a technique, to apply a given technique from all directions and be prepared to counter any similar attacks. There are three divisions of instructions: Nage waza or the art of throwing, Katame waza or the art of grappling and Ate waza the art of attacking vital points in the body.

There are other discreet facets contained in the Gokyo. Some of the elusive factors associated with the learning of the Gokyo are: the breathing systems from the abdomen or hara, displacement of the hips to initiate and control body movements, right way of gripping the costume and the many variations, embarking upon the right mental frame of mind, use of premonition and identification of advanced sensorial signals etc.

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*“All works of art is an expression, not all expressions are works of art.”<sup>iv</sup>*

### The grammar

The Kata or form is an ensemble of formal movements and patterns containing idealized model movements which illustrate specific combative principles handed down from generations of teachers to Professor Jigoro Kano and reassembled by him after adding his own inventive techniques.

Kata is considered to be the grammar of judo. All the exercises need to be performed with an expression of subjectivity and feeling. Participating partners must show comprehension of the principles and demonstrate all the elements with conviction and sincerity.

The demonstration in its totality must become an emotional experience and an accurate representation of the principles. Judo Kata is an expression, an embodiment in symbols, physical movements and gestural precision all meant to portray the human experiences in close combat. Theories and techniques are fused in a deliberate exposé to be enjoyed, admired and communicated to others.

We find a variety of Kata forms depicting throwing techniques of hand, hip, foot, supine sacrifice and side sacrifice. Grappling techniques designed to teach ways and means of grappling including hold downs, strangulations and joint extension techniques. Other sets of formal techniques were designed to teach defenses against attacks using throwing, grappling and striking techniques and defending against more modern weapons. There are also forms of gentleness and flexibility thought via various forms of body movement.

Making the connection with the origin of Judo from the old Ju Jutsu schools and in particular the Kito ryu, there are sets of exercises illustrating the ways and means of applying the principles while wearing ancient armors.

The final set of pre arranged exercises is the five forms or principles of attack and defense found in nature and from which the judo principles have been inspired. Focusing energy, making greater use of incoming energy, concentrating energy and enhancing body movements to make greater use of action-reaction and avoiding violent confrontation are studied.

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## The playground

The Randori or free practice has been elaborated as a teaching aid and a practical way to experience a combat situation where free sparring amongst judoka takes place and where both players practice their attack and defense skills. Knowing that situations are constantly changing and never the same from one moment to another, Randori opens the imagination, the faculty of adaptation and response to action-reaction. This learning platform offers a chance to study various combat strategies and tactics and provides an opportunity to master the internal and external rhythm.

Judo Randori must be performed with a proper mental attitude to excel in the performance of techniques and experiment with ways and means to improve the free application the principles while at the same time, being preoccupied to respect the partner's attempts to achieve the same through mutual concessions. In Randori, there is enjoyment to be found in the performance and reciprocal satisfaction to be derived from a cooperative exercise.

## The meditation

The mondo-discussion periods are ways and means for the student to have intimate and privileged discussions with their teachers and peers in order to seek additional explanations or advices on technical matters. With the growing size of judo classes, these discussions platforms have somewhat been replaced by documentary and visual platforms. The determined students can still have access to the teacher's vast knowledge and benefit from accrued experiences.

## Conclusion

As we noted above, Professor Jigoro Kano has provided us with various complementary elements of his Judo Compendium. At various periods in our judo involvement, we can identify that all these well crafted segments provide ample occasions to:

1. Imitate and reproduce the beauty found in each original technique.
2. Apply the basic principles in different situations,
3. Experience with its mysterious elements.
4. Imagine the results of releasing our potential energy at different times.
5. Follow the symbolic dimensions contained in the forms.

For most judoka and spectators, Judo has therefore become a universal communication medium. The more we are exposed to various judo activities, the more we are bound to develop diverse degrees of mastery in the discipline and praise its concepts.

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Being able to easily identify and describe the technical and physical steps associated with individual technique is not sufficient to appreciate the true values of JUDO as passed on by the late Professor Jigoro Kano in his monumental work. His lasting Judo Compendium exposes the systems, principles and methods by which we can apply his two principles: **Efficient Use of Energy and Mutual Benefits.**

Whenever one looks at the JUDO Compendium, one is bound to discover that all parts do make a connection and a representation of the moral values espoused by the founder. As such, Judo can be considered as an art form as described by the American Heritage Dictionary when the latter identifies ART as the human effort to imitate, supplement, alter or counteract the works of nature. It is an Art form when the process provides a system of principles and methods to perform a prescribed set of activities. (High level skills or techniques through study, practice and observation)

Let us close with the words of the third Kodokan Institute president, Risei Kano who said:

*“It is most gratifying that Judo is spreading fast throughout the world. The Kodokan, ever faithful to the spirit of the founder, is anxious to see that Judo, though of Japanese origin, is made a world art, fostered and propagated by its devotees the world over for the common benefit of all people”<sup>v</sup>*

Enjoy the practice and the beauty of your ART. Always follow the gentle way.

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### References

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<sup>i</sup> Yukimitsu Kano, *Mind over Muscle*, Writings from the founder of Judo, compiled by Naoki Murata, Kodansha, Tokyo 2005

<sup>ii</sup> Lao Tse, *Tao Teh King*, translated by James Legge, Gutenberg project.

<sup>iii</sup> Risei Kano, and the Editorial Committee, *Illustrated Kodokan Judo*, Kodansha, Tokyo Japan, 1955, Chap 5

<sup>iv</sup> Dewitt H. Parker, *Principles of Aesthetics*, Chapter 11

<sup>v</sup> Risei Kano, *The Kodokan Judo*, Kodokan Institute Pamphlet, November 1951

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