

ABOUT

A HISTORY OF JUDO

by Syd Hoare 8th Dan

On reading the many short accounts of judo history – every judo book has a page or two on it -I soon realized that history in the conventional sense barely enters into any of them and that few serious attempts had been made to address some of the many questions surrounding Jigoro Kano the founder and his judo. The rise of judo and the Kodokan is usually described in cosy terms – chiefly increasing membership and bigger dojos - oblivious of events in the outside world which appeared to have little influence on them. But this was far from the case.

Japan's emergence from self-imposed feudal isolation and its rapid rise as a modern power occurred roughly about the same time that judo appeared. During this period there were two World wars, the Russian Revolution, the great Kanto earthquake of 1923 when over 100,000 died in Tokyo, two wars on the Asian continent namely the Japanese war against Russia (1904-5) and the war against China (1894-95) the rise of communism, the depression of the 1920-30s and the rise of Hitler and National Socialism. It was a hugely dangerous time for the world and Japan and it stayed dangerous up to the end of the Pacific war.

The first significant fact about these wars from a judo point of view was that patriotic Japanese youths flooded into the judo and sumo dojos to learn a martial art. Short of enlisting it was their contribution to the war effort. Judo grew very rapidly and the increasing membership soon outgrew the small early Kodokan dojos. Note that many centuries earlier sumo was one of the ancestors of judo and that one thousand years later on people were flocking to it and judo for much the same reasons. So what was the sumo-judo connection? What does judo owe sumo? Did jujitsu not benefit from this surge of patriotic/jingoistic interest?

Japan itself was emerging from centuries of feudal sleep but had to modernize and do it very quickly because aggressive Western powers (US, Russia, Britain) were knocking at the door demanding to trade. One key aspect requiring modernization was the Japanese education system. Basic education for the masses existed already especially in the small Buddhist temple schools (teragoya) and the few schools for aristocratic children but there was not much to speak of. The Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 led the way and here the nation found men like Kano ready to guide Japanese education into the 20th century.

Kano was born in 1860 and it is just possible that he could have played a part in urging or drafting the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education which dominated Japanese education till 1948. As you will see in my book the Kano family had a strong connection with the Imperial household and it is a connection which you will struggle to find in virtually all judo histories. The largely Confucian Imperial Rescript set the background for Japanese education especially with its Five Article Oath (Gokajo no

Seimon) and many of the details of the early 'modern' education system of Japan were modelled on the French and American systems. Foreign specialists were imported and the brightest Japanese students were sent abroad to study.

Like most judo people I believed that judo history began in 1882 when Kano opened his small school and dojo in the Eisho-temple in Tokyo but a little work soon exposed the fact that judo was based on jujitsu which were based on kumi-uchi (samurai grappling) which was based on military sumo which was based on the Chikara kurabe of the ancient myths and so on and as I delved further back into each, fresh questions arose which soon exposed contradictions in the standard histories.

The big turning point for judo was when the Portuguese ships sailed to Japan in the 16th century and introduced the musket to the Japanese. Incidentally the Japanese soldier adapted far more quickly to this than the British did cf. the charge of the Light Brigade. This turned warfare on its head because a single bullet could bring down a horse or penetrate the samurai armour. At a stroke this changed warfare making the sword wielding mounted samurai virtually redundant. This undermined traditional warfare and it coincided with the unification of Japan under one feudal lord which led to over 260 years of peace. Jujitsu developed during this period but did it really flourish or was only lip service paid to it by the feudal clans. One wonders how competent these peace-time samurai were?

Before the word ju-jitsu emerged in the 17th century the samurai trained in kumi-uchi (grappling) mixed in with sword fighting. One wonders why the word kumi-uchi or the word 'sumo' was not used instead of 'jujitsu' to describe the mostly unarmed combat (jujitsu) of the samurai? Kano in one of his lectures said that he named his art ju-do out of respect to his two ju-jitsu teachers. Does judo owe more to sumo than jujitsu? I noticed when I got involved in sumo that there seemed to be quite a tension between Japanese judo and sumo.

Eventually Japan was forced to open up and while Kano was consolidating his art others were doing similar things such as the Tokyo police and German doctors working and lecturing in Tokyo. There are some very intriguing questions here.

The history of judo soon proved to be very interesting indeed and Jigoro Kano emerged as an enigmatic character. He did not become a martial arts teacher in the normal way (by first being a very strong and unbeatable fighter), in fact his jujitsu training years were quite short - his time was limited and the demands on him were many (he was already a high ranking teacher and bureaucrat).and he had started to run out of jujitsu teachers of the two jujitsu styles he trained in.

For seven years he taught at the Gakushuin (Aristocrats college) but his main teaching job was to head Japan's first male secondary school teacher training college in Tokyo and this was more than enough to keep him fully occupied for over 27 years. Here he was able to set the standard for Japanese teacher training in secondary schools for the whole country. He was also a Japanese Ministry of Education councillor responsible for specific policy tasks (such as choosing school textbooks and teacher training) and he lectured at Komaba Agricultural university in politics, philosophy and economics. In addition he ran his own Kano-juku school). The question soon arose in my mind,

was Kano more of an educationalist than a judo teacher or was it vice versa? Which was more important to him? How did one effect the other?

Of course conventional history did intrude into judo and this I have tried to show in my book. Also I have exposed the influence that politics played through the feudal philosophy of Budo and the creation of the Butokukai organization in 1895 which in turn was used to help the war effort. It was not by chance that the word Budo was banned by the Allies in 1946 and that organizations such as the Butokukai with its strong Budo connection were shut down by them. The Kodokan escaped this but why? Perhaps judo survived because of its strong educational slant and the impeccable connections of its founder?

There were a few problems with writing the book. The first was Japanese which is not generally regarded as an easy language. Japanese sentences can be quite long and rambling and even though you turn the many subordinate clauses into passable English the whole sentence may not make a lot of sense especially if there are a lot of negatives in them. So sometimes you have to keep as close to the original as possible which does not always flow and at other times paraphrase it in modern English.

My judo teacher Trevor Leggett who wrote over thirty books highlighted another language problem. In his *Zen and the Ways* he wrote, "It must be said that Japanese are prone to use words very loosely. The same thing may be called spirit, essence of mind, true self, way of heaven, the great ultimate and so on." The word Budo is a case in point. It can mean the Way of the Warrior or the Military Way or a martial art or the martial arts in general.

Aside from the language problems the Japanese attitude to history is another stumbling block. History was often written from a Confucian point of view. The warts and all type histories are not to the liking of the Japanese. There is usually a consensus about past history and this consensus (and harmony) must be maintained. So you will find a whole raft of historians all saying much the same thing. For example the *Honcho Bugei Shoden* (A short account of Japanese Martial Arts) written in 1716 was regarded for many decades as the authoritative account of Japanese jujitsu - but not nowadays. Occasionally a maverick will break ranks and upset them all with new information and ideas but with the passage of time he too may become part of consensus. It is a slow process.

Footnotes were another minor problem but since I was not writing a D.Phil dissertation I have not put in a lot. Perhaps less than one in a hundred foreign judoka would have enough Japanese to check the references and footnote-sprinkled dissertations do not make for easy reading. The Japanese language of a hundred years ago is quite a bit different to modern Japanese. From reactions received so far about the book few appear to be able to read Japanese or even identify the areas where I know I might be on shaky ground.

Finally Japanese judo history is awash with competing factions and claims. Real experts in many subjects exist in Japan and if you want to do a scholarly job on something they need to be found and talked to. Otherwise you may get led astray. Japan is a highly competitive society full of people striving for status of one kind or another. A question – What are the factions in present day judo?

As already mentioned Jigoro Kano and the Omi Hiei Taisha wing of the Kano family had strong connections with the Japanese Imperial family and while he lectured at the Gakushuin (Aristocrats School) he was responsible for the education of the young aristocrats and the future emperor Taisho. Later in life this same emperor appointed Kano to the Kizokuin (Japanese House of Lords) where he served his country for many years during the key period up to the outbreak of the Pacific war in 1941.

It would seem that such is the reverence for the Japanese Imperial family in Japan that it would be highly presumptive for any individual to mention any connection with the Imperial family at all. I would hazard a guess that most of those who came into contact with Kano would have been aware of the connection though little or nothing would have been said. Kano guided judo through some very difficult times up to his death in 1938 and as it seems largely unopposed by the militarists. His imperial connections must certainly have helped him in this.

As above is how I have treated the absolutely fascinating history of judo. I have tried to produce a readable account understandable by most judoka and believe that many interesting facts and stories have been brought to light. There is much that a diligent D.Phil student could get working on. Enjoy or as Kano the educationalist might say Learn and enjoy!

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