



The Kano Society Bulletin



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- Contemporary Contemplations on *Kata* by Llŷr Jones and Martin Savage;
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Editor's comment

We hope you enjoy this issue of *The Bulletin* which again has been produced by guest editor, Llŷr Jones.

In this edition

This edition features a thoughtful article on *kata* by Llŷr Jones and Martin Savage, as well as some perspectives on, and key tips for, *randori* by a new contributor, Rob Casey, from Endeavour Hills Judo Club in Hallam, Victoria, Australia. Our thanks to British Judo's Regional Delivery Officer, Chris Doherty, for bringing Rob's work to our attention. Expect to see more from Rob in future *Bulletins*.

Finally, this edition presents an in-depth tribute to French *judo* pioneer and kindred spirit, Luc Levannier who has sadly died. A man after the own hearts of Kano Society members, Levannier participated in the first recorded *judo* international team contest between two countries, Great Britain and France in December 1947. The tribute is compiled by (former Paris resident) Llŷr Jones.

Thank you all.

Contributions

The backbone of the Kano Society's activities is this on-line publication. We welcome contributions articles or photographs etc. to The Bulletin.

Regards Diana Birch

Contemporary Contemplations on *Kata* Llŷr Jones and Martin Savage

Introduction

The *Kodokan* explains that there are two principal ways of practicing *judo* – *kata* and *randori*. *Kata*, which literally means “form”, are practiced through a recognised system of prearranged exercises, while *randori*, which means “free practice”, is practiced spontaneously [1].



The Kanji for *Kata* as used in *Judo*

Kawamura and Daigo's comprehensive “*Kodokan New Japanese-English Dictionary of Judo*” [2] defines *kata* as “...formal movement pattern exercises containing idealised model movements illustrating specific combative principles”. This complete definition both complements and builds upon the more rudimentary one proffered in 1961 by Gleeson which positions *kata* as “...a form of training which teaches certain aspects of *judo* that *randori* does not” [3].

In their encyclopaedic *kata* text “*Judo Formal Techniques*” [4] Otaki and Draeger explain how:

“Kata is an expression of the Japanese spirit intimately connected to the artistic achievements of the Japanese people; it is virtually their “form language”. Kata touches almost everything in the Japanese sphere of daily activities, writing, architecture, bearing and demeanour, etiquette and art included. Art is the form language of humanity without exception, and therefore, on the Japanese scene, art traditionally includes the classical bugei (also called bujutsu), the martial arts or formalized martial disciplines; it also includes the classical budo, the martial ways or spiritual disciplines which stem from martial sources. Within the classical martial arts and ways are found the elements of simplicity, natural efficiency, harmony, intuition, economy of movement, and “softness” of principle that characterize all traditional Japanese art forms. It is important to grasp this significant relationship in order to comprehend the true meaning and fullness of the Japanese martial arts and ways, and, further, to understand their ancestral relationship to Kodokan judo kata.”

Jigoro Kano-*shihan* himself likened learning *kata* to the learning of grammar for the purpose of writing, and *randori* to the actual free flowing writing itself [5]. Similarly, contemporary writers have likened *kata* to the “algebra” of a *budo*, on account of the logical framework it provides for learning [6].

Principles

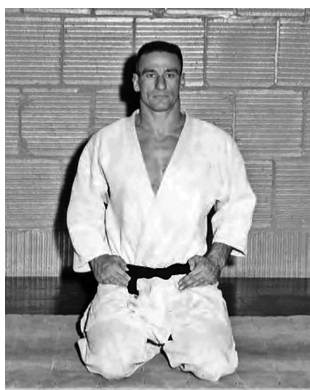
"Form is the guardian of substance" and *kata* is the perfect exemplification of this saying. It is known that Kano-shihan believed *judo*'s essence and beauty was contained within its *kata*. It is of course possible to practice (a *de facto* incomplete) *judo* without knowing *kata*, but it is impossible to practice *kata* without knowing *judo*. Irrespective of the particular *kata* being studied it must at all times be practiced with sincerity and an understanding of the fundamental principles involved. Principles are significantly more important than any specific technique, as they can be applied in an unlimited number of ways, whereas techniques are more specific, and hence limited. Of course, it is essential to adhere throughout to the ultimate goals of *judo* – namely *Seiryoku-zenyo* [Maximum efficiency] as reflected by accurate action-reaction, *debana* [opportunity], *kuzushi* [unbalancing], *zanshin* [remaining mind], and *Jita-kyoei* [Mutual welfare and benefit].

Tadao Inogai Kodokan 8th dan (writing in "Judo Kata" with the senior French *budoka* Roland Habersetzer) quotes from his chronicles as follows [7]:

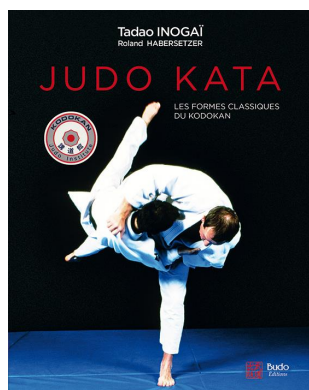
"Kata means 'basic form'. It is the mould from which basic techniques are derived. This is why the progress of these fundamental techniques must continue unaltered through time, fashions or personal tendencies. For the 'form' (movement) must ensure the survival of the 'base' (spirit of the action). It is necessary to find, again and again, in kata the same principles on which Jigoro Kano-shihan conceived his art.

- *Seiryoku-zenyo: 'Best use of energy' (for maximum efficiency with a minimum of effort, or the intelligent use of energy).*
- *Jita-kyoei: 'Mutual assistance and prosperity' (through the execution, together, of an educative technique)."*

A kata is only caricature if the two practitioners are not imbued with these two aims.



Donn Draeger
(Courtesy of The Wisconsin
Judo Hall of Fame)



"Judo Kata" by Tadao Inogai
and Roland Habersetzer

Similarly, Donn Draeger, who spent a significant proportion of his life training in *judo* at the Kodokan and other Japanese *dojo*, wrote in 1966 [8]:

"Kata is an intrinsic training method of Kodokan Judo, and it has two distinct developmental stages. The first of these is the "doing" stage – a time when we must study and practice it so that we can gain a mechanical understanding of it. It is a time when we are concerned with each and every technical detail. At this stage, kata is of little training value as a completed training tool; we are simply shaping this tool for later use.

After we have a rather good technical basis for kata and can give a rather polished performance of it, then we can put it to use and find answers to technical problems about the various techniques it embodies. This is what can be referred to as the 'using' stage. Then and only then will kata become truly useful.

Inherent in each technique of Kata are 'lessons' essential to an understanding of that technique, basic and variation factors which enhance the polished performance of the technique for randori and shiai. However, in order to be able to find those 'lessons' in the kata, the judoist must have developed his Kata out of the "doing" stage into the 'using' stage. Kata performed as an exhibition or demonstration is largely a "doing" type of kata. Kata, as a demonstration, is but a shallow and limited use of kata; it is not the primary purpose of kata though most tendencies in modern judo restrict it to this role."

Kata are also the best way to practice attack and defence in different scenarios, as they represent the fundamental foundations of *judo* that have been standardised for study. At the simplest level all of the *kata* in the Kodokan repertoire are merely practical and basic demonstrations of *judo* principles, in which the defence depends on the attack, and vice versa. This concept, for example, is well exemplified by *Ju-no-kata* [Forms of Yielding/Non-Resistance].

As well as teaching fundamental *judo* principles, *kata* can also be viewed as vehicles to preserve *judo*'s traditions, and some were placed in *Kodokan Judo* to serve as a reminder of its *koryu* [old school] heritage. These *kata* have remained (largely) unchanged over time, and preserve the principles originally defined in the *jujutsu* school of origin. In particular, *Koshiki-no-kata*, from *Kito-ryu* [School of the Rise and Fall], provides a masterclass into *kuzushi*, and *Itsutsu-no-kata*, from *Tenjin Shin'yo-ryu* [Divine True Willow School], expresses the mechanisms of attack and defence in an elevated way.

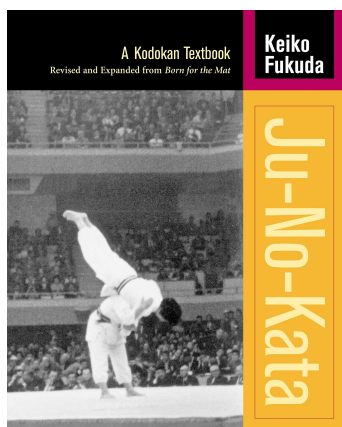


The late Shoji Inoue (*Tori*) with Jun Okajima (*Uke*) showing an ancestor to *Koshiki-no-kata* – *Kito-ryu Yoroi Kumi-uchi-no-kata* – at the Fifth IJF World Kata Judo Championships held in Kyoto, Japan on 19 and 20 October 2013

In the Introduction to her book “*Ju No Kata – A Kodokan Textbook*”, Keiko Fukuda explained how she found the answer to the question of how to best understand the principles of movement in *judo*: “I eventually found the possible answer in two *Kata* that Professor Kano had mastered in his youth: *Itsutsu-no-kata* (*Forms of Five*) and *Koshiki-no-kata* (*Forms of Ancient*). Herein are contained techniques that manifest the true principles of *Judo*...” [9].



The late Keiko Fukuda, USA Judo 10th dan, Kodokan Joshi 9th dan



“*Ju-No-Kata A Kodokan Textbook*” by Keiko Fukuda

Contemporary Perspectives

Today, the zenith of *judo* practice is viewed by most as participation in elite-level sports competitions such as the Olympic Games and World or Continental Championships, and the culture and practice of *kata* has been replaced with the culture of sports training. Against this backdrop, *kata* practice is considered by many as a meaningless and impractical waste of time. Traditionally though, the pinnacle of *judo*, like any *budo*, can be regarded as attaining the “*Ri*” phase of the *Shu-Ha-Ri* [“Protect” – “Detach” – “Separate”] concept which describes the stages of learning to mastery.

守破離

Shu-Ha-Ri

In the *Shu-Ha-Ri* concept, *Shu* is the learning the fundamentals of a system, *Ha* is internalising a system, and *Ri* is going beyond the system [10]. Moreover, it is informative to note that instruction in a *koryu* was delivered almost exclusively through *kata* under *Shu-Ha-Ri* – an approach that served them well for generations.

The respected *budoka*, teacher and author, Patrick McCarthy suggests that there are three general perspectives, or mindsets, regarding *kata* (Patrick McCarthy, personal communication, 17 February 2014). McCarthy’s original comments were based on his own experiences in *karate-do*, however they are sufficiently broad that they can be readily extrapolated to *judo*, which is done here. McCarthy’s three perspectives, generalised (by the authors) for *judo* are as follows:

- **The traditionalist’s perspective:** *Kata* must never be changed, least of all by anyone from outside the *Kodokan*.
- **The revisionist’s perspective:** Here *kata* are contemporary reinterpretations of classic traditions (e.g. *kata* developed outside the formal auspices of the *Kodokan*, by either Japanese, or non-Japanese *sensei*).
- **The sports competition perspective:** Typically, sports competitors regard *kata* practice as worthless and dysfunctional.

Next, these points are considered in turn.

Traditionalist

Kodokan Judo was founded in 1882 by Kano-*shihan* at the *Eisho-ji* temple, Tokyo. However, it is essential to recognise that at that point *judo* was not yet complete, and its *kata* had not been fully established. Nonetheless, the journey that led to their creation had been started, and during the life of the *shihan* the *judo kata* underwent some significant changes. For example, both *Nage-no-kata* and *Ju-no-kata* originally contained ten techniques, but later they were expanded to contain 15 techniques each.



Side gate to Eishoji temple, site of the original Kodokan in 1882

Consider the evolution of *Nage-no-kata* [11]. The original ten-technique *Nage-no-kata* of 1885 is lost, though it is known that in 1895 the expanded 15 technique *kata* was as follows:

Te-waza: *Uki-otoshi, Seoi-nage, Sumi-otoshi**

Koshi-waza: *Uki-goshi, Harai-goshi, Tsuru-komi-goshi*

Ashi-waza: *Okuri-ashi-harai, Sasae-tsurikomi-ashi, Uchi-mata*

Sutemi-waza: *Tomoe-nage, Ura-nage, Tsuru-otoshi**

Yoko-waza: *Yoko-guruma, Uki-waza, Tani-otoshi**

Between 1902-1904 two further modifications were made to the first and the final sets of the exercise which became:

Te-waza: *Uki-otoshi, Seoi-nage, Sukui-nage***

Yoko-waza: *Yoko-gake**, Yoko-guruma, Uki-waza*

The final modifications to *Nage-no-kata* were made in 1905 and 1906 to give the form that is known presently:

Te-waza: *Uki-otoshi, Seoi-nage, Kata-guruma**** (1906)

Koshi-waza: *Uki-goshi, Harai-goshi, Tsuru-komi-goshi*

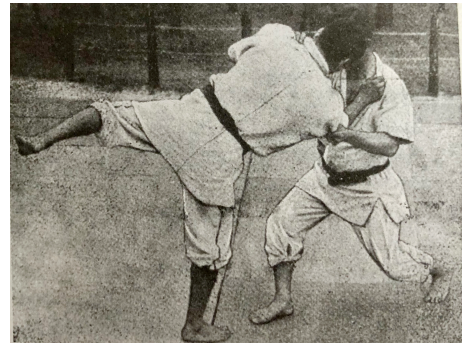
Ashi-waza: *Okuri-ashi-harai, Sasae-tsurikomi-ashi, Uchi-mata*

Sutemi-waza: *Tomoe-nage, Ura-nage, Sumi-gaeshi**** (1905)

Yoko-waza: *Yoko-gake, Yoko-guruma, Uki-waza*

Recall that *kata* are merely “forms”. As such they can be a large number of techniques performed in a sequence, or merely a single technique practiced repeatedly in pre-ordained manner. Moreover, *kata* were originally supposed to be flexible training tools, with no intent that they would only be performed in full, as ceremonial demonstrations. Indeed, the late, great John Cornish used to explain in his years as a

British national coach for *kata* that the formal demonstration of *kata* was not important, it was the training and what one learnt from the training that counted.



Uki-otoshi [Floating Drop] from *Nage-no-kata*
Tori – Yamashita, Uke – Nagaoka
(both later Kodokan 10th dan)

However, in practice, *kata*'s formal characteristics became significantly more rigid and prescriptive, with, in recent years, all efforts seemingly exerted to ensure the highest degree of standardisation possible – particularly since the advent of organised “*kata* competitions”. Certainly, the current excessive attention to overly ritualised and heavily rule-bound aesthetics has impacted on *kata*'s perceived credibility as a worthwhile training tool.

Revisionist

On the issue of *kata* developed outside the auspices of the Kodokan, Otaki and Draeger [4] write:

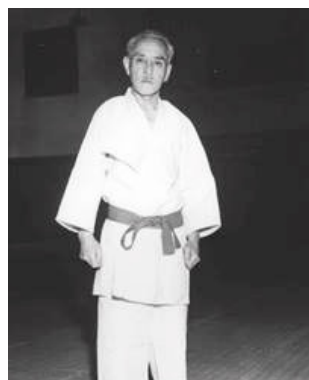
“Different practices and uses for kata have been established by judoists outside of the Kodokan, though the majority of these versions hinge on the unchanged fundamental Principle of Kodokan Judo. These kata can be referred to as private variations patterns. Included here are those which have been developed by qualified Judo teachers; some of these teachers are Kodokan men...”

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore in detail the repertoire of *judo kata* developed outside the formal auspices of the Kodokan, by either Japanese, or non-Japanese *sensei*, but worthy of note are the exercises associated with, or developed by, senior Japanese teachers such as Mikinosuke Kawaishi *Dai Nippon Butokukai / Kodokan 7th dan* and French Judo Federation 10th dan [12]; Kyuzo Mifune *Kodokan 10th dan* [13]; Kazuzo Ito *Kodokan 9th dan* [14] and Tokio Hirano *Kodokan 8th dan* [15].

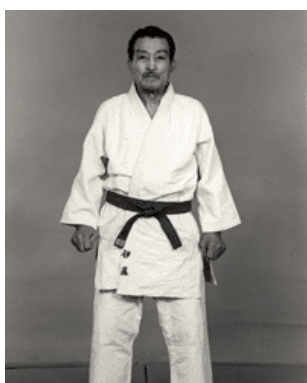
The majority of so-called *kata* that are of non-Japanese-teacher-origin (and thus by definition non-Kodokan) are little more than sequences of standard combination or counter techniques book-ended with some formal protocol, and do not merit further consideration in this article.



Mikinosuke Kawaishi
Dai Nippon Butokukai / Kodokan 7th dan and French Judo Federation 10th dan



Kyuzo Mifune
Kodokan 10th dan



Kazuzo Ito
Kodokan 9th dan



Tokio Hirano
Kodokan 8th dan

Sports Competitive

The author has written previously on how many “judo coaches” and sports competitors opine that *kata* are artificial and impractical exercises, with their practice a meaningless waste of time – at best only necessary to pass the technical skills element of a promotion examination. This perspective is today present in many countries, (with a limited number of exceptions), and will now be explored further.

Those *judoka* who see no purpose in *kata* training, and even those who are undecided about its worth, use the argument that they have practiced *kata*, and do not see how it will improve them as competitors. Underpinning their arguments is often a criticism based on the fact that the way specific *judo* techniques are performed in *kata* bears very little resemblance to how the same techniques are executed in *shiai* [contest]. In one sense those *judoka* are partially correct, but this is only because they are not viewing *kata* from the perspective of a “total” *judo* – *Kodokan Judo*.

Kano-shihan often referred to *gedan* or *kyogi judo* [“*judo* in the narrow sense”] – summed up by the 1889 statement as “a *judo* focused primarily on physical skills”. This is as opposed to *jodan* or *kogi judo* [“*judo* in the wide sense”] – summed up by the 1924 definition “*judo* is not a method of making the best use of energy for purposes of attack and defence alone, rather it is a method by which this principle can be assimilated and applied in all spheres of life”.

Kata can involve idealised model movement patterns which would not normally be useful in *randori* or *shiai*. For example, the movement pattern of the three step *tsugi-ashi* [shuffle stepping] in *Nage-no-kata*, among other things, eliminates confusing stepping patterns thereby allowing *Tori* to concentrate on certain aspects of each throw.

“Idealised model movements” implies that the patterns provide *Tori* [taker] with a perfect opportunity for making the technique work, thereby enabling the perfection of *waza* in a very controlled environment. This should be more important to the *judoka* who is concerned with *budo* as opposed to merely striving for a winning point by any means even if it is only by securing a penalty. If *Tori* cannot get his technique to work with a cooperative *Uke* [receiver] moving in this predetermined manner, then it will probably not work in *randori* or *shiai* anyhow. Important to note here is that a “cooperative *Uke*” does not mean, as commonly believed, one that “jumps” for *Tori*, but rather one that takes up the specified grips, adopts a predetermined posture and moves in a prescribed manner.

This allows *Tori* opportunities not afforded in *randori* or *shiai* – such as not having to fight for grips or getting *Uke* to move in the direction and pace that is necessary for the throw to succeed. Instead *Tori* can concentrate on the fundamental such as *kuzushi* [balance breaking], *tsukuri* [preparation] and *kake* [execution] which can then be brought closer to perfection through the various stages of *randori* where eventually *Tori* can bring off the technique with a high success rate and with good style. While being cooperative however *Uke* must attack or intend to attack when appropriate within the constraints of the *kata* which means yielding and resisting at the opportune moments.

Strength is used by *Tori* in accordance with the *Seiryoku Zenyo* concept, when it is unlikely that yielding will be successful. This proper use by *Tori* of *Uke*'s attacking strength to effect control is called *riai*. Kawamura and Daigo describe *riai* as being the underlying principle or theory of an art, which in *judo* includes avoiding attempting to control an opponent by using power, in favour of throwing them through skilful *kuzushi*, *tai-sabaki* [body shifting] and other approaches that use energy and movement in the most efficient, elegant way possible, *Seiryoku Zenyo*.

As an aside it is interesting to consider the question for formal *kata* demonstrations, if the two *judoka* are of unequal grade, who should be the most senior – *Tori* or *Uke*? One of the authors (LCJ) explored this issue with the senior *judoka* Osamu Mouri, *Kodokan* 7th dan (O. Mouri, personal communication, 8 September 2018) concluding as explained next.

In antique *koryu jujutsu* teaching scrolls, it says “*Tori-kata no Kata*” meaning the *kata* for *Tori*. Accordingly, *Tori* is the one who learns, *Uke* is the one who teaches. This is logical if one thinks of the structure of the *kata* and it being a tool to learn a technique and its underlying logic behind it. *Uke* attacks *Tori* exactly in the way as prescribed because *Uke* is teaching the way to react in that particular circumstance. *Uke* then changes the way to attack as *Uke* wants to teach some other technique and principle. The *Nage-no-kata* is an excellent example of this, as *Uke* never attacks *Tori* the same way

twice. This is the beginning of *randori* where *Uke* is no longer the teacher, and of course *Nage-no-kata* along with *Katame-no-kata*, collectively, are the *Randori-no-kata* [Forms of Free Exercise] – *kata* that illustrate the principles behind techniques used in *randori*, allowing them to be practiced with maximum efficiency [4]. Returning to the original question, for the purpose of demonstration, it may be better if the senior *judoka* is *Tori* rather than *Uke*, as *Tori* can show how to correctly react to an attack by *Uke*, but then *Uke* must be able to attack in the correct way. However, it may not matter if the roles are clearly understood as above.

Most high-grade Japanese teachers still emphasise the importance of *kata* for a *judoka*'s development, with many considering the study of *Nage-no-kata* and *Katame-no-kata* in particular, to be an important part of training for the highest level of contest success [4]:

“Sufficient kata study and practice impose a well-defined technical discipline on the judoist, one that is unattainable by only randori and contest methods. This discipline, instead of hampering the judoist, actually frees him from undue restrictions, liberates his bodily expression in movement, and teaches him economy of mental and physical energy. This process can only be understood through experience, and only through kata performance can judoists come to appreciate Judo in its fullest sense.”

The senior Japanese *budoka* Takayuki Kubota, a former self-defence instructor for the *Keishicho* [Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department] in the 1950s, impress the importance of practicing *budo* as a whole through both *kata* and contest. Writing originally about *karate-do*, Kubota laments that today, many people practice *kata* and contest as if they were two different things. He goes on to state that contest starts with *kata*, and *kata* starts with contest. Of course, the same could be said for *judo*. A lot of the problem regarding the attitudes around *kata* in *judo* is in the instruction – specifically, most teachers themselves have not been taught how to blend *kata* into their instruction to provide a balanced *judo* lesson, with goals that go beyond the winning of medals in organised tournaments.

The Canadian *judoka* and *kata* devotee, Kelly Palmer, recalled a lesson that was often repeated by the senior *Kodokan* teachers at the 2018 *Kodokan International Kata Course* (K. Palmer, personal communication, 29 July 2018)

“There are many judoka who do not study kata – they train hard, fight, do randori. They go to tournaments, and they may even become Olympic or World Champion. Is this the goal we should strive for though?”

There is only one Olympic Champion, and most of us will not reach that goal. Nevertheless, we can still be a champion in our own lives.

Be a champion for your family, for what you believe in, for what you are good at. Be a champion for yourself. There is no medal for winning in your own

life, but this is the greatest reward, and what all who train in judo should strive for.

Be a champion in your own life – that is the goal of judo.”

Concluding Remarks

Times change and it is inevitable that *judo* and its *kata* will change and develop too. This is a significant and strong indication that *judo* is vibrant and alive. However, perhaps useful parallel lessons can be drawn again from Patrick McCarthy and again on *karate-do*.

Specifically, McCarthy explains how the great Okinawan *karateka* Motobu Choki had become rather sad about the great changes that had occurred in *karate* with its rapid growth and popularity. In “*Tales of Okinawa’s Great Masters*” [Japanese-to-English translation by McCarthy], Nagamine Shoshin described Choki-sensei’s melancholy and how he lamented that *kata* had been “carelessly changed” and become a “lifeless practice”, with its practitioners “devoid of understanding” [16].

If change is unavoidable, then what is essential is that any changes are slow and indiscernible and fully consistent with the principles of *Kodokan judo*. Again, from the diaries of Inogai writing with Habersetzer [6]:

“Without tradition there is no ‘do’ [way, path for self-discovery], and without kata there is no tradition. Judo is the way in which one can use progressive forces within the educational values of a tradition.

Those who just desire promotion, ignoring the advice of high grades, are only getting themselves more lost daily. However, those who believe they can forgo any personal study, blindly contenting themselves with traditions, go around in circles, constantly unaware of the true purpose of their efforts in the dojo.”

“The ‘way’ is both static (traditional) and dynamic (self-realisation). These complementary approaches produce true harmony in the practitioner, in his gestures and thoughts, in all that he is, and in relation to all that surrounds him.”

“For all budo, kata is the thread that connects [it] with the past, and the one that leads to discovering freedom of thought and action, whilst respecting universal and eternal values.”

Actually, by progressing methodically and unhurriedly in the study of kata, judoka rediscover the principles that enthused the research of the old ju-jutsu masters, and which put them on the Path of Universal Harmony.”

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Randori by Rob Casey



Randori at the Main Dojo, Kodokan Judo Institute

Whilst often mistaken as contest training, *randori* 乱取り translates to “free practice” and is a core element of *Kodokan Judo* pedagogy. The intent of *randori* is to allow *judoka* to practice the application of techniques learnt in training. While this can be performed under contest-style conditions, it can be just as effective when practiced in a cooperative manner where *judoka* take turns in the roles of *Tori* and *Uke*. Such a cooperative approach to learning lies at the heart of *Jita-kyoei* 自他共栄 [Mutual welfare and benefit] espoused by Jigoro Kano-shihan as a core principle of judo.

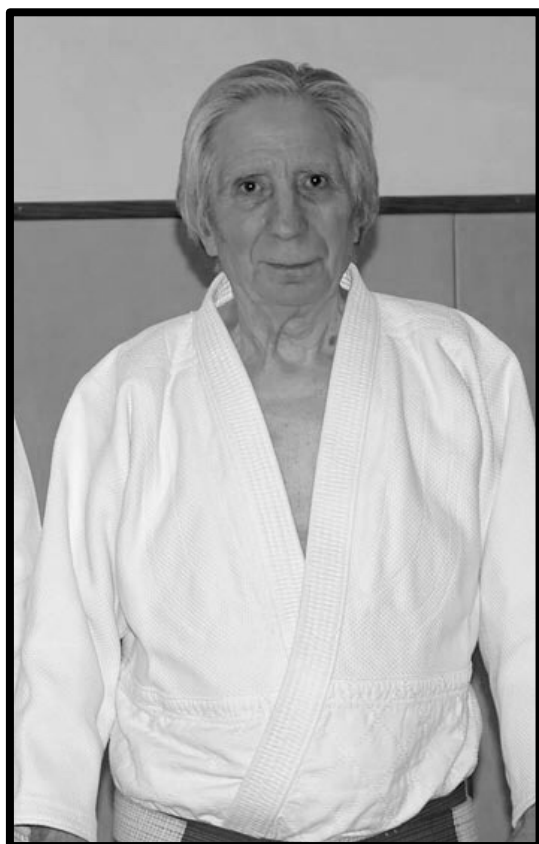
Some key points to remember for *randori*:

- There is no winner or loser in *randori*. Rather than trying to “win”, you should look at *randori* as an opportunity to exercise new techniques.
- Relax and move freely. Do not become overly tense or defensive (“stiff-arming”) as this will impede both your opponents' and your own opportunities for technique.
- Learn to feel your partner's intentions and anticipate attacks. This sense of feel will become increasingly important as you develop your skills and seek to find opportunities for techniques.
- Focus on the *kuzushi*, *tsukuri* and *kake* for each throw.
- Commit to and follow through with each technique.
- Keep your head up.
- Control your breathing.
- And most importantly, enjoy it!

Randori is an exercise in discovery and application of your *judo* technique and should be immensely rewarding. Seek to embrace *randori* as an opportunity to practice and grow your *judo*, rather than merely as a fight for dominance.

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In Memoriam: Luc Levannier (1923 – 2018) Llyr Jones (compiler)



Luc Levannier (1923-2018)

Just as Issue 38 of *“The Bulletin”* was released, the sad news of the passing, on Monday 3 December 2018, of French *judo* pioneer, Luc Levannier was received. At the time of his death he was 95 years old. Levannier devoted a significant portion of his life to *judo*, and his vision for “the way” was fully aligned with the Kano Society’s.

Joining the *Judo Club de France* on rue du Sommerard in June 1942, Levannier gained his *dan* grade at the first attempt, becoming, in 1945, French Black Belt No. 36. The celebrated *judoka*, Jean de Herdt, was the examiner.

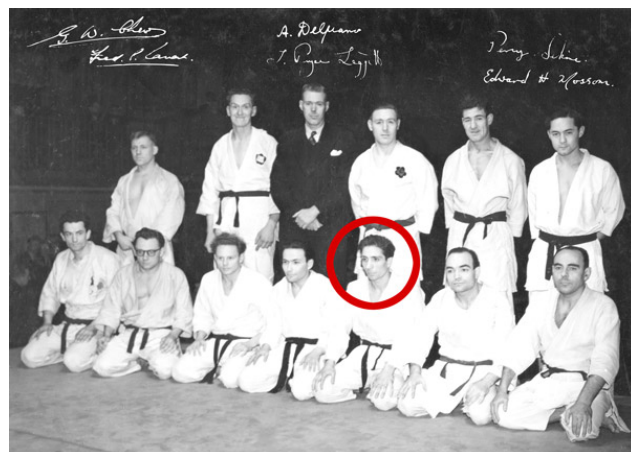
In September 1946 he opened a *judo* club in Paris, and along with Albert-Léon Meyer and André Mercier was at the origin of the first National Union of Martial Arts Teachers, then of the European Union of Judo Teachers which he led for several years.

Levannier participated in the first recorded *judo* international team contest between two countries – Great Britain versus France held on 2 December 1947 at the Seymour Hall. E.J. Harrison’s report [1] on the event states:

“The first bout of the match was between G. Chew for Great Britain and L. Levannier for

France. The Frenchman turned out to be a dangerous adversary and scored the first point with an osotgari (major exterior reaping). This was followed shortly afterwards by a hane-goshi (spring hip) from the same quarter, and so to L. Levannier (1st dan) pertains the distinction of gaining France’s sole victory in this international match.”

The next day the London press reported: *“Judo: Great Britain crush France who discover a little extra-ordinary judoka – Levannier”*.



Standing L-R: Mossom, Kauert, Leggett, Chew, Delpiano, Sekine
Kneeling L-R: De Herdt, Laglaine, Pelletier, Vallée, Levannier (circled), Beaujean, Bonet-Maury

In 1948 Levannier became Technical Director of the FFJDA, *Fédération Française de Judo, (Jujitsu, Kendo, Aikido) et Disciplines Associées* – the French Federation of *Judo, (Jujitsu, Kendo, Aikido)* and Associated Disciplines which is the National Governing Body (NGB) for *judo* in France. Two years later he was a semi-finalist in the Open-weight category of the French *Judo* Championships.

In 1952, Levannier along with Guy Pelletier (French Black Belt No. 7), Pierre Roussel (French Black Belt No. 45) and Jacques Belaud (French Black Belt No. 42) were part of a group that encountered, in Toulouse, the brilliant young Japanese *judoka*, Ichiro Abe, at the time a *Kodokan* 6th *dan*. Later, Levannier became one of the four founders of a “*Kodokan* Movement” that recognised and followed the path embodied by Abe-sensei where education, finesse, speed, movement and balance breaking were prioritised over competition and opposing strength with strength. This “beautiful *judo*” philosophy earned him the nickname of “the French Mifune”. As a natural consequence of this approach, Levannier was opposed to the methods of Kawaishi which had gained some traction in France.

In 1953 he became Technical Director of the *Fédération Belge de Judo* (FBJ) that is the Belgian *Judo* Federation.

In October 1985, Luc Levannier, along with a group of enthusiasts and friends founded *L’École Française de*

Judo/Jujutsu Traditionnel (EFJJT) – the French School of Judo / Traditional Jujutsu as a center for study, training and practice. His *dojo*, the *Shiseikan*, on rue Lecourbe in Paris always defended the values of Jigoro Kano.

Throughout his life, Levannier remained dedicated to the traditional *judo* of the founder, Kano-*shihan*. He was known to have opined that “the values of *judo* have been distorted. The Japanese have lost their discipline to the benefit of wrestlers from the Eastern countries. Traditional, *judo* must be ‘the harmony of flexibility’, but contemporary *judo* has become the ‘opposition of forces’. “To give way is not natural for the Westerners which we are. And yet, I am convinced by this quote from Lao Tzu ‘He who learns to yield is master of the force’”.

An artist and a poet at heart Levannier devoted a significant portion of his life to *judo* – shaping the “*ju*” of *judo* through the flexibility of body and of mind of his students. Tireless, passionate and always searching for better teaching methods, his creativity, spirit and work live on through his countless pupils, and also through his writings in *MonDo* – his traditional *judo* newsletter, and equivalent publication to this *Bulletin*. Luc Levannier’s death marks the passing of the last *judoka* from that first French team of 1947, and indeed from the entire event, from both nations. It also represents the passing of the last member from the group of four teachers that committed to the *judo* philosophy of Ichiro Abe in 1952.



Ichiro Abe *Kodokan* 10th *dan* and Luc Levannier, on the occasion of Abe-sensei’s visit to France in March 2009

For further information – see references [2], [3] and [4]

References

1. Harrison, E.J (1948-49). International Judo Redivus. *Judo – Budokwai Quarterly Bulletin*. 3(4), January 1948, 9-13.
2. L’École Française de Judo/Jujutsu Traditionnel. <http://www.efjtt.fr>
3. Luc Levannier: http://www.efjtt.fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2

4. Maitre Levannier: <https://dojoshiseikan.wordpress.com/2018/12/07/maitre-levannier-deces/>

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The Richard Bowen Collection



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In 1949, Richard Bowen began judo training in London at the Budokwai, of which he became Vice-President. He lived in Japan for four years to deepen his studies. A former British International, he fought in the first ever World Judo Championships in Japan in 1956. He was the author of more than eighty articles. Richard Bowen built up an extensive judo Library in the course of research for his articles and books, and he kindly donated it to the University of Bath Library. Items in the collection are for reference use only (not available for loan). Items can be viewed between 9am-5pm.