



The Kano Society Bulletin



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In This Edition

This *Bulletin* explores *Koshiki-no-kata*, *kata's* origins and training methods, and provides views on the *tatami*, *kuzushi*, the *ippon* and *zanshin*. It remembers Hidetoshi Nakanishi and reflects on Jigoro Kano's enduring wisdom.

Editor's Comments

The Society mourns Hidetoshi Nakanishi, 8th Dan, 1983 Lightweight World Champion and former *Budokwai* instructor, who has died following a courageous battle with blood cancer.

I hope you enjoy this issue of our journal. Thanks to John Bowen for proofreading. Any remaining errors are mine.

Contributions

The Kano Society's main work is this online publication. We welcome all relevant contributions to "The *Bulletin*".

Dr Llyr Jones

Koshiki-no-Kata and Armour – What the Texts Say Emanuele Bertolani, edited by Llyr Jones



Jigoro Kano-shihan performing *Koshiki-no-kata*

The phrase "*I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it*" is often attributed to Voltaire, but it is actually a paraphrase of the French philosopher's thought that first appeared in *The Friends of Voltaire*, written by the English author Evelyn Beatrice Hall and published in 1906.

Freedom of speech is an established concept. This does not mean that all ideas are equally defensible. Nevertheless, I would like to begin by reiterating once again that everyone has the right to their own opinions.

From various quarters, and with considerable insistence, I have been reading doubts and reservations concerning *Koshiki-no-kata* [Forms of the Ancient/Old Style] and therefore *Kito-ryu-no-kata* [Forms of the School of Rising and Falling], which can be summarised as follows:

1. Some techniques have little practical value in battle.
2. Not all attacks, or indeed not all techniques, assume that *Tori* and *Uke* are wearing armour.

For example, the execution of *Shikoro-gaeshi* [Twisting the neckplates] is challenged on the grounds that, and I quote, on a battlefield there may be "*stones and sharp objects*", and therefore it would make no sense to deliberately fall heavily onto one's back.

Let's look at the bigger picture.

The precursor to *Koshiki-no-kata* is *Kito-ryu-no-kata*. The origins of *Kito-ryu* lie in the tradition of *yoroi kumiuchi* 鎧組討ち [combat in armour]. Although the earliest school whose foundation can be established with reasonable certainty is *Takenouchi-ryu*, dating to the first half of the 1500s, the dynamics of *yoroi kumiuchi* are frequently described in the *gunki monogatari* [war tales] – a literary category comprising epic stories written between the 12th and 16th centuries that recount the events of Japan's internal wars.

These are not precise descriptions of the techniques themselves, but they are consistent with the principle of *yoroi kumiuchi* – the objective is to bring an armoured opponent to the ground and then finish him with a bladed weapon.



Yoroi kumiuchi

Yoroi kumiuchi, and the techniques developed for it, must therefore be understood from this perspective – hand-to-hand combat to the death, which could end only with the death of one of the combatants and their subsequent beheading. Consequently, arguing about the practical usefulness of *shikoro gaeshi* on the basis that *Tori* falls heavily onto their back is, in my view, an inherently weak argument. More importantly, it reveals a deeper and more interesting problem – the idea that any technique in a *kata* must be applied *ad litteram* [according to the letter i.e. literally].

The problem has two interconnected aspects – one logical and one philological. The *Kito-ryu-no-kata* contains 21 techniques, and even people of the 21st century with no experience of the realities of a 16th century Japanese battlefield can easily deduce that the number of variables on a battlefield is vastly greater than the number of techniques.

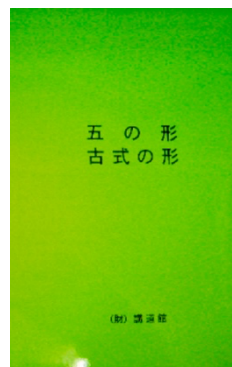
Therefore, we must conclude that the *Kito-ryu-no-kata* is not a repertoire of independent techniques to be used *ad litteram* on the battlefield, but rather a reasoned and coherent system for transmitting a principle. This view is exemplified by Jigoro Kano's well-known comparison of *kata* to grammar and *randori* to a sentence.

The second aspect concerns the name of the school and how it is described in its explanatory documents. The terms 組討ち *kumiuchi*, from *kumu* 組む [to intertwine, come into close contact in hand-to-hand combat], and *utsu* 討つ [to wound or kill with a weapon] and *kacchu* 甲冑 [complete armour including a helmet] occur regularly.

And this brings us to the second issue – are *Kito-ryu-no-kata*, and therefore *Koshiki-no-kata*, to be performed as though *Tori* and *Uke* were wearing armour?

Here too, it is legitimate and plausible to believe that a particular attack appears more appropriate for an unarmoured opponent, but personal opinion does not carry the same weight as textual evidence.

The Kodokan Literature



Kodokan – Koshiki-no-kata Instructional Booklet
(Japanese-booklet also includes *Itsutsu-no-kata*)



Kodokan – Koshiki-no-kata Instructional Booklet
(English language)

The *Kodokan's Koshiki-no-Kata* instructional booklet [1] published in 2008 (official translation in 2011, latest translation 2014) states:

“この形は、往時の武士が甲冑を身に着けた鎧組打ちの投げ技を主としたもので [...]”

“*This kata consists primarily of the throwing techniques of yoroi kumiuchi used by warriors of former times who wore armour...*”

This passage provides two important pieces of information – it directly connects the throwing techniques with *yoroi kumiuchi*, and it specifies that the people practising it were *bushi* [warriors or *samurai*] wearing armour. This is relevant because, whereas ordinary infantry, known as *ashigaru* 足軽, were deployed with minimal equipment and consisted essentially of conscripts recruited from among farmers and craftsmen, the *bushi* belonged to a distinct class and went onto the battlefield wearing full armour. One could object that the sentence describes an actual historical reality, but there is no doubt that it represents the official *Kodokan* position regarding the performance of *Koshiki-no-kata* – the throwing techniques of *Koshiki-no-kata* derive from the throwing techniques of combat wearing armour.

In 1953, the teachers Sumiyuki Kotani and Tadao Otaki prepared the volume *Judo no Kata* [2], which states:

“この形は重い具足を身に着けて行いう形でありま
すから [...]”

“*Since this is a kata performed while wearing heavy gusoku...*”

The term *gusoku* is an abbreviated form of *tosei gusoku* [modern/current armour]. This was an evolution of *o-yoroi* armour that developed between the Muromachi period (1336–1573) and the end of the Sengoku period, culminating in the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Changes in the practicalities of warfare, including the growing importance of

the spear and the introduction of firearms, prompted efforts to adapt armour by making it stronger and more robust. In summary, it is sufficient to say that these developments resulted in armour that was heavier than earlier forms.

Because the manufacture of armour was artisanal and made for a specific individual, it is not possible to identify an average armour weight as though it were an industrially produced item. Surviving examples of *tosei gusoku* range from a minimum of 10kg to a maximum of 27kg in the case of Ii Naomasa's armour, with Honda Tadakatsu's armour weighing 15kg and Date Masamune's 20kg.



Tosei gusoku



O-yoroi

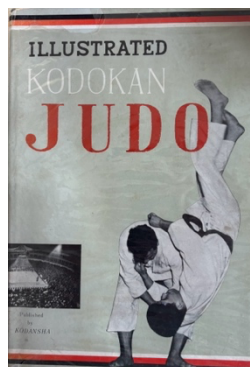
Assuming, therefore, that Kotani and Otaki deliberately employed this technical term with full awareness of its meaning, referring specifically to the type of armour that emerged during the period in which the techniques incorporated into *Kito-ryu-no-kata* were being developed, it is plausible that performing *Kito-ryu-no-kata* requires *Tori* and *Uke* to move and respond as though they were wearing *tosei gusoku* weighing at least 10kg.

Furthermore, since the purpose of *tosei gusoku* was to increase protection rather than reduce it, the area between the part of the armour protecting the chest and the part protecting the neck was not exposed. Consequently, there are certainly techniques in *Kito-ryu-no-kata*, and therefore in *Ko-shiki-no-kata*, that contain an attack toward the upper chest and involve gripping the lapels of the *keikogi*. However, the existence of a lapel grip does not, in itself, justify the conclusion that the technique was necessarily intended for use against an unarmoured opponent.

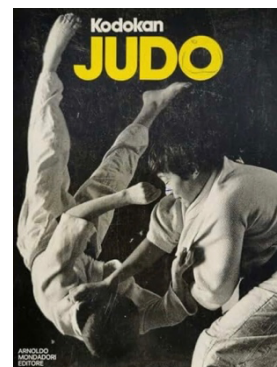
First, because the *kata* does not teach the precise movement that must necessarily be applied in a particular circumstance – rather, it teaches the principle that must be adapted to the reality of the moment. Second, because from a textual standpoint there is evidence supporting *Kito-ryu* as an expression of *yoroi kumiuchi*, but none of the *Kito-ryu densho*, nor the exegetical texts such as the *Toka shu*, *Toka mondo*, and *Judo uchu mondo*, nor indeed the *Kito-ryu ju-jutsu torikata omune*, composed by Yoshida Okunojo Aritsune in 1638, suggest that the opponent is unarmoured.

The manual (*Illustrated*) *Kodokan Judo* [3], first published in the mid-1950s and subsequently released in Italy with Cesare Barioli's Italian translation [4], states:

“...it is essential to perform the movements while imagining that you are clad in heavy armour.”



Kodokan Judo –
published in 1956



Kodokan Judo –
Italian Translation

It is important to emphasise that the text does not distinguish between *Tori* and *Uke*. In the absence of such a distinction, the instruction to perform the *kata* as though one were wearing heavy armour applies to both.

In *Sekai Judo Shi* [*World History of Judo*], published in 1967 [5], Sanzo Maruyama states:

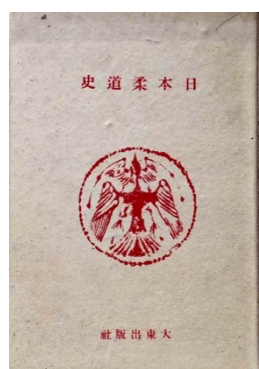
“この形が鎧を着用した態で行うからであって”

“Because this kata is performed in the posture of someone wearing armour...”

Similarly, the book *Dai Nippon Judo Shi* [*History of Judo in Greater Japan*] published by the Kodokan in 1939 [6], shortly after Kano's death, states:

“「受」も「取」も甲冑を着けた所謂戦所組打の態である”

“Both Uke and Tori assume the posture of what is known as battlefield kumiuchi, wearing armour.”



Sekai Judo Shi
by Sanzo Maruyama



Dai Nippon Judo Shi
published by The Kodokan

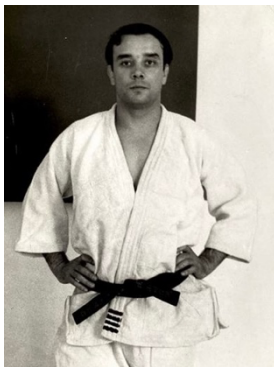
It is therefore possible to trace a continuous line from 1939 to the present day, during which the *Kodokan* has consistently stated that performing *Koshiki-no-kata* requires assuming a posture, and executing the movements, as though *Tori* and *Uke* were wearing heavy armour.

Non-Kodokan Literature

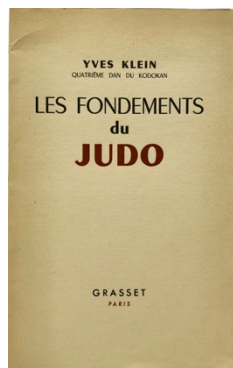
Important texts produced by authors who were not institutionally connected to the *Kodokan* arrive at an identical conclusion.

Writing in 1954, the French artist and *judoka* Yves Klein (1928-1962) expresses a similar viewpoint in *Les Fondements du Judo* [*Fundamentals of Judo*] [7]:

“because in Koshiki no Kata tori and uke are assumed to be dressed in the heavy armour of the samurai...”

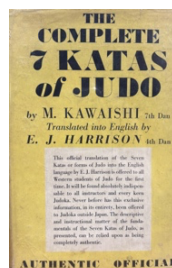
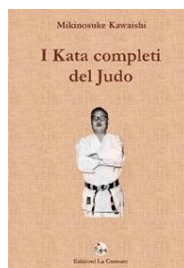
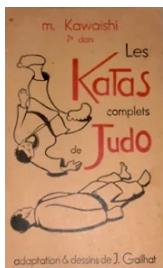


Yves Klein



Les Fondements du Judo

Mikinosuke Kawaishi (1899-1969), widely regarded as one of the ‘fathers’ of the French *judo* tradition and often positioned in contrast to the post-Kano *Kodokan* tradition, authored *Les Katas complets de Judo* [8]. Originally written in French, the work was later translated into Italian by Marco Marzagalli and published as *I Kata completi del Judo* [9]. An English translation by E. J. Harrison followed in 1957, published in London by W. Foulsham & Co. under the title *The Complete 7 Katas of Judo* [10].

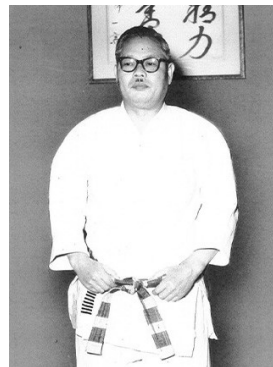


The French-, Italian-, and English-language editions, respectively, of Kawaishi's seminal *kata* textbook

Kawaishi writes:

“Koshiki no Kata is therefore the most alive, the truest, the closest to real combat [...] it includes numerous throwing forms, generally sutemi, which the performers must execute while imagining that they are wearing the feudal Yoroï armour.”

The overall meaning of this passage is clear. It rejects the objection that *Koshiki-no-kata* is not a genuine *kata* intended for actual combat, while also providing further support for the view that it should be performed while imagining that one is wearing armour.



Mikinosuke Kawaishi



Paolo Malaguti

The recently published two-volume study *Koshiki no Kata* by Paolo Malaguti adopts a similar position. The first volume [11] examines *Omote*, the formal and traditional sequence of *Koshiki-no-kata*, while the second [12] addresses *Ura*, the reverse sequence, with its greater emphasis on dynamic movements performed from a standing position, evasion, and counteraction.

Malaguti writes (original in Italian):

“The movements of tori and uke originally involved wearing armour weighing approximately 20–25kg.”



Paolo Malaguti's two-volume study on *Koshiki no Kata*

The Kito-ryu Documents

The final step is to examine the *densho* of *Kito-ryu* and some of its most important exegetical texts.

Ibaraki Sensai, considered by many to be the founder of *Kitō-ryū*, wrote a text entitled *Gyoyoshu* 行用集 in 1655. It states:

“此起倒流乱と立ることは、組打の理法なり。”

“The reason this school is called ‘Kito-ryu no Midare’ derives from the principles of armoured hand-to-hand combat.”

Another text, entitled “Kito ryu ikki mae” 起倒流一騎前, states:

“是は当流の心持兎角着用しては一方へ片ぶくは悪し”

“This is the principle of our school: when wearing [armour], it is nevertheless wrong to lean to one side.”

A third text, entitled “Kito ryu judo yoroi kumiuchi no hiketsu” 起倒流柔道鎧組打討之秘訣, states:

“この組討に形有性鏡皆伝に至て甲冑を着用し伝授す”

“In this kumiuchi there are forms (*kata*); upon reaching the complete transmission of *seikyō* 性, they are taught while wearing armour.”

Seikyō is the title of the last of the five principal *densho* of *Kito-ryu*, the one conferred as *menkyō kaiden*, representing complete transmission of the school's teachings.

Thus, multiple exegetical texts of *Kito-ryu* establish a direct connection between *Kito-ryu* and *yoroi kumiuchi* and specify that the *menkyō kaiden* of the school involved teaching the *Kito-ryu* forms while wearing armour.

In light of these sources, the issue cannot be reduced to the immediate plausibility of a single technique viewed through modern eyes. *Koshiki-no-kata*, as the heir to *Kito-ryu-no-kata*, must be understood within the framework of *yoroi kumiuchi* and the transmission of principles associated with armoured combat.

One may debate the way in which these principles were preserved, transformed, or formalised within *Kodokan Judo*. It is considerably harder to argue that the reference to armour is a marginal, arbitrary addition with no textual foundation.



Shikoro-gaeshi from a *Koshiki-no-kata* demonstration at the All-Japan Judo Championships

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n.d. = no date of publication

n.p. = no place of publication / publisher info. unavailable

In Memoriam: Hidetoshi Nakanishi (1958 – 2026) After Patrick Bigot



Hidetoshi Nakanishi

Introduction

Distinguished Japanese *judoka*, Hidetoshi Nakanishi 8th Dan died in Japan on 12 September 2026 after battling cancer for several years. He was an elite-level competitor in the lightweight category (-71 kg), winning gold at the 1983 World Championships. Nakanishi also won the Japanese weight-category championships twice, and the Kodokan Cup once.

Standing at 1.68 m tall, Nakanishi went on to become a professor in the Department of Martial Arts within the Faculty of Physical Education, as well as director of the *judo* club at Tokai University. His widow, Michiko Nakanishi (née Saijo), was also an accomplished *judoka*, winning the -56 kg division at the Japanese Women's Weight Category Championships in 1981 and 1985.

Early Life

Hidetoshi Nakanishi was born on 3 June 1958 in Umi-machi, Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan. He came from a family with a long tradition of village *sumo* wrestling. His father, Seizo, and other family members had achieved the rank of *Ozeki*, *sumo*'s second-highest rank. From an early age, Nakanishi practised *sumo* regularly with his father and older brother.

In his fourth year of primary school at Umi Elementary School, he joined the local Waka-kusukai *dojo*, which led him to take up *judo*. When he entered Umi Junior High School, he joined their *judo* club and devoted himself completely to the sport. The training was rigorous both in quality and quantity, comparable to that of high-school students. It was said that techniques such as chokes and arm locks, which were prohibited for junior-high school students, were regularly incorporated.

Nakanishi recalled – *"I was so absorbed in training that I wondered when I would ever stop, and before I knew it, I had become a final-year student"*.

When deciding on a high school in 1974, Nakanishi was recruited by the *judo* coach of a local prefectural high school. Out of respect for the teacher, he took the school's entrance exam without hesitation but was surprised to learn he had failed. The coach, deeply apologetic after learning of the failure, visited Nakanishi's family to express his regrets and recommended the Tokai University Fifth High School (now known as the Tokai University Fukuoka High School) instead. Backed by his father's encouragement, Nakanishi accepted the recommendation and enrolled.

Training under Yasushi Matsumoto

Although the high school was not far enough from home to make public transport impractical, Nakanishi decided to leave his family home and live at its dormitory so that he could concentrate on *judo*.

His meeting with the coach, former Japanese champion Yasushi Matsumoto, was memorable. As soon as Matsumoto saw Nakanishi move into the dormitory, he grumbled *"You are so small"* and continued *"If you're small, you have to use two or three times as many techniques as the others during training. If you keep training and use your techniques as much as possible, you will inevitably become strong. If you do that, the world title won't be an unreachable dream"*.

At the time, Nakanishi did not fully understand what Matsumoto meant, but the words *"world title"* remained engraved in his memory and encouraged him to devote his high-school years to *judo*.

One day, while Nakanishi was training with all his energy and determination, an elbow injury prevented him from performing his signature shoulder throw. As a right-handed *judoka*, he decided to try a different technique – an unconventional left-handed shoulder throw. It proved highly effective, throwing his opponent to the *tatami*.

After training, Nakanishi began perfecting this technique, whose name he did not even know, in order to make it his own. Matsumoto told him – *"It is an elegant technique"* and went on to explain *"It is called a sleeve-grip hip throw, Isao Okano used it too"*.

From then on, after the main training session, Nakanishi practised with the heaviest member of the club as his *randori* partner, and this technique became his signature move. By mastering this fundamental technique, he was also able to develop variations of other techniques, including both left- and right-handed shoulder throws.

Breakthrough at Tokai University

When Nakanishi entered Tokai University in April 1977, the judo coach, Nobuyuki Sato, taught him the importance of goal-setting. He established four goals:

1. Become the best *judoka* in Japan in the -71 kg category;
2. Become a regular member of the University competition team;
3. Compete in the All-Japan Championships (which were held in an open-weight category);
4. Win the World Championships, or the Olympics.

At the time, Tokai University provided an excellent training environment. Its students included Yasuhiro Yamashita, one year ahead of Nakanishi and newly crowned Japanese champion; Kiyoto Katsuki, a leading competitor in the -71 kg category; and Katsuhiko Kashiwazaki, who was aiming for a world title in the -65 kg category, one weight class below Nakanishi's. National teams from around the world also came to train there.

Because of his strength and endurance, Nakanishi was regarded by the other members of the club as an 'iron man' and before he even realised it, he had been selected as a member of the team for team competitions.

Nakanishi credited his strict father with instilling his tenacity and diligence, as well as his strong aversion to dishonesty. He recalled - *"The atmosphere during training was completely different when the coach was there compared with when he wasn't. I wanted the coach to watch me, but I remembered that it was meaningless if I didn't work harder when he was absent."* Nakanishi added *"I wasn't born a genius, so I always had the feeling that even the slightest relaxation would make me fall behind"*.

In his third year at university, he was selected to represent Japan in the -71 kg category at the Soviet International Championships and competed in his first international tournament. Although he was more anxious than excited about the competition, he won his first matches without difficulty. In the final, he faced Soviet competitor Tamaz Namgalauli and finished second after his opponent took advantage of a momentary lapse. Despite it being his first international tournament, and at a time when Japanese competitors struggled to establish themselves in Soviet international tournaments, the result gave Nakanishi a clear understanding of what it meant to compete against the world's best.

After four years at university, Nakanishi had achieved only his second goal – becoming a regular member of the university team. He therefore decided to devote himself even more fully to judo and entered Tokai University's graduate school in 1981 – sharing a house with Yamashita, who was one year his senior, and training with him.

In April 1982, he competed in the All-Japan Judo Championships in the -71 kg category alongside his rival Tsuguyasu Nakauchi, a 4th Dan. He fulfilled a long-held dream and

showed his determination by winning his first bout. In September of the same year, he won the Japanese weight-category championships, defeating Takahiro Nishida and becoming Japanese champion in his division.

The following March, he finished second in the Kodokan Cup, then won the Japanese weight-category championships in July for the second consecutive year, cementing his position as the leading *judoka* in his category. In October, he was selected for the Moscow World Championships.



Hidetoshi Nakanishi at the 1982 *Tournoi de Paris* where he won the -71 kg Weight Category

1983 World Championships – Moscow

During the tournament, Nakanishi saw a poster featuring a photograph of himself in the final of the Soviet International Championships three years earlier, where he had lost to Tamaz Namgalauli. Seeing that photograph only strengthened his determination.

In the third round, he faced Namgalauli again, and after neutralising his opponent's signature technique, Nakanishi scored a waza-ari with *kouchi-gari*, avenging his previous defeat. In the final, he defeated Italy's Ezio Gamba, the 1980 Moscow Olympic Champion, with *kuzure-kami-shiho-gatame* – winning the title and finally becoming World Champion. It had taken him six years to achieve the four goals he had set when he entered university.

Retirement and Coaching Career

At the Los Angeles Olympics in August 1984, Nakanishi lost his first bout to South Korean Ahn Byung-keun, probably because of a rib-cartilage injury. He also received a penalty and ultimately finished fifth. He also finished third at the Japanese Championships in May 1984 and 1985 in the selected weight categories. At the 1985 Kodokan Cup, he lost to Toshihiko Koga, who had just entered his third year at Setagaya Gakuen High School – finishing third again. This was seen as something of a passing of the torch.

After completing his graduate studies at Tokai University and working for the Wakayama Prefectural Board of Education, Nakanishi became Head Coach for *judo* at the International Budo University – a partner institution of Tokai University. He remained in post until March 1990, during which time he coached and developed many young *judoka*. He later returned to Tokai as Assistant Coach of its *judo* programme. He was a guest instructor at the London Budokwai from September 1985 till September 1986 the first time and then returned for a shorter period in 1990 when writing and promoting his book.

In 1996, Nakanishi was appointed Head Coach at Tokai. However, the University was going through a difficult period, and from 1997 to 2001, the team failed to finish among the top four at the All-Japan Intercollegiate *Judo* Championships. Nakanishi, who was serious by nature, recalled “*When we couldn't win, I felt responsible for everything*”. He credited the encouragement and support of his wife, Michiko, as well as the words of his eldest son, Tsutomu “*When I grow up, I'll take your place and beat that university*”.

In 2004, Nakanishi took charge of the Tokai University *judo* club again and that year, they fielded a team that included Shin Ogi, Toshihiro Imai and Itsuki Masubuchi at the All-Japan Intercollegiate *Judo* Championships. In the final against Kokushikan University, which included Yohei Takai, third team member Kazuyuki Murakami threw his opponent with *ura-nage*, giving Tokai University its first national title in eight years. A photograph of Nakanishi firmly shaking the hand of club president Yasuhiro Yamashita at that moment was published in numerous newspapers and magazines.

From then on, he established a highly successful period for Tokai University. In particular, from 2008 to 2014, the University dominated the competition, winning seven consecutive championships – an unprecedented achievement.

Nakanishi continued his coaching career for many years, passing on to current athletes what he had learned during his competitive career. Reflecting humbly on his coaching career, he said, “*When I lost at the Olympics, I felt a sense of failure, but Kenzo Nakamura and Kosei Inoue accomplished what I had left unfinished*”. He added “*They went on to win the Olympics and World Championships, and I came to think that my own failures had been useful*”.

Nakanishi also regularly performed *Koshiki-no-kata* at the Japanese National *Judo* Kata Championships alongside Yuji Matsumoto, 7th Dan of the Kanagawa Prefectural Police.



Hidetoshi Nakanishi performing *Koshiki-no-kata* at a 2019 *Kagami-biraki* Ceremony

For more than forty years, Nakanishi-sensei remained a constant presence in Yasuhiro Yamashita's life. Most recently, he supported Yamashita-sensei through the gradual process of his physical and psychological recovery from the severe cervical spinal-cord injury he sustained in October 2023.



Hidetoshi Nakanishi delivering a Technical Masterclass at the JudoScotland National Training Centre in Ratho



Hidetoshi Nakanishi with JudoScotland President Emeritus and IJF 10th Dan, George Kerr

Nakanishi Hachidan [8th Dan] Farewell

Nakanishi-sensei's tsuya [funeral wake] was held on the evening of Tuesday, 15 September 2026, followed by the funeral on Wednesday, 16 September. More than 700 people attended the wake, where they gathered to pay their final respects and spend a last moment with Nakanishi-sensei. Around 100 people attended the funeral the following day.

"In life, nothing is a fatal blow – except death itself."
Hidetoshi Nakanishi

Below are photographs from the memorial event, along with *judo* artefacts featured in the commemorative display honouring Nakanishi-sensei.



Farewell Ceremony for Hidetoshi Nakanishi (3)



Farewell Ceremony for Hidetoshi Nakanishi (1)



Hidetoshi Nakanishi – Judo Artefacts (1)



Farewell Ceremony for Hidetoshi Nakanishi (2)



Hidetoshi Nakanishi – Judo Artefacts (2)



Hidetoshi Nakanishi – Judo Artefacts (3)

Embodying Judo's Original Method of Training

Based on observations by Kento Iwanaga

Introduction

One of the central values in *judo* training is the integration of *kata* and *randori* as a unified practice. *Kata* and *randori* are often described as the two wheels of the same cart, yet in practice they are rarely trained together within a single session. However, meaningful development in judo requires both to be pursued in parallel.

Kata serves to refine and condition the body while reinforcing fundamental principles and correct movement. *Randori*, in contrast, provides the opportunity to apply those principles dynamically through free practice.

When training incorporates both methods together, the principles underlying techniques and their individual characteristics become far clearer than through *randori*-focused practice alone.

Kata as Randori

Nage-no-kata should be approached with the understanding that it is fundamentally a form of *randori*. When training becomes excessively focused on *kata* alone, movement can become rigid and overly formalised, causing techniques, throws, and *ukemi* to drift away from practical reality.

Conversely, when training becomes overly centred on *randori*, the freedom of attack and defence can lead to neglect of fundamental movements and the essential principles underlying technique. A balanced approach begins with conditioning the body through fundamental movement, followed by *kata* practice, and then carrying the awareness cultivated through *kata* into *randori*. In this way, training becomes focused on embodying genuine principles rather than merely reproducing outward form.

The same timing, exchanges, explosiveness, sharpness, and intensity found in *randori* should also be present in *kata*. For this reason, *uchikomi* and *nage-komi* can be incorporated into *kata* practice in the same manner as in *randori* training. To avoid imbalance, techniques should be practiced equally on both the left and right sides.

Kata should not be evaluated solely according to superficial beauty or rigid formalism. The highest priority must remain the expression of underlying principles. When authentic attack-and-defence exchanges are genuinely expressed, the body may naturally lose perfect balance at times, and *Uke*'s body may rebound during *ukemi*. These are not flaws if they arise naturally from correct application of principle.

Uke should not jump voluntarily merely to receive a throw, and exaggerated movements performed only for dramatic effect are unnecessary when they lack genuine technical meaning. Although attention often centres on *Tori*'s execution, proper attacks and defences by *Uke* are equally essential for expressing the principles contained within the technique. The fundamental approach to understanding, learning, and teaching technique remains the same in both *kata* and *randori*.

Expression

Kata can be understood as the process of spending significant time together with a partner, deeply examining attack-and-defence exchanges and underlying principles, discussing them repeatedly, and ultimately creating and expressing them together as *Uke* and *Tori*. That expression extends beyond visible body movements or technical principles observable during performance. It also includes the internal mental state, the emotions experienced in the moment, and the connection formed between two practitioners through their exchange. In this sense, *kata* is not merely a demonstration of movement, but a manifestation of shared understanding and embodied principle.

Kata should not be viewed simply as a performance judged by external beauty of form. Rather, it represents the culmination of an entire process of study, training, reflection, and technical development. Its essence lies not in comparison with others, but in expressing through the body the time spent confronting both oneself and one's partner, together with the experiences, discipline, techniques, and convictions developed throughout that journey.

As a martial art, technical system, educational method, cultural tradition, and sport, *judo* contains many dimensions. *Kata* practice reveals the depth that exists within all of these aspects. Through *kata* training, practitioners can encounter the history and culture transmitted by previous generations through technique itself. By engaging in deep reflection and repeated practice in order to inherit and preserve these traditions, meaningful opportunities are created for personal growth and sincere self-confrontation. Continued training and research from broader perspectives can further contribute to the promotion, development, and preservation of *Kodokan Judo*.

The path of practice remains an ongoing process of searching, discovering, creating, and progressing toward higher ideals, deeper abilities, clearer understanding, and even the uncertainties that continue to inspire further study.

The Silent Teacher – The *Tatami*



Tatami – Main Dojo – The Budokwai

The *tatami* is more than just a surface – it is a mirror. Every time someone steps onto those mats, they leave their ego at the edge. The *tatami* doesn't care about grade, age, or status. It only cares about effort, discipline, and a willingness to fall and get back up again. It is there that true character is revealed.

The *tatami* teaches more than technique. It teaches life's most important lessons – humility in defeat, respect for training partners, and how to remain calm in the middle of a storm. It is a sacred space where sweat, disciplined effort, and perseverance shape people into better versions of themselves. The mats become a sanctuary, a classroom, and, in time, a home.

"The tatami is the only place where you discover the truth about who you truly are."

Traditional Dojo Wisdom

Kuzushi

In *judo*, strength is useless if your opponent is perfectly balanced. *Kuzushi* is the invisible key that unlocks every door on the *tatami*. It is the art of unbalancing your opponent before they even realise they are in danger. Without *kuzushi*, a throw is just a struggle – with it, it becomes a masterpiece.

The beauty of *judo* lies in the moment when a smaller person uses a single pull or push to make a giant stumble. It is the ultimate expression of *Seiryoku Zenyo*. It teaches us that in life, as on the mat, timing and direction are more important than raw force.

"True judo is not about how hard you can pull, but how well you can lead your opponent into their own downfall."

Kyuzo Mifune

Ippon – Judo's Full Point

In many sports, athletes compete for points. In *judo*, practitioners compete for the soul of the match – the *ippon*.

An *ippon* throw is the ultimate expression of perfection. It is the moment when timing, technique, and spirit align so perfectly that the contest ends instantly. Rather than wearing down an opponent over time, the *ippon* is about a single decisive explosion of skill that leaves no doubt. Witnessing a perfect *ippon* is more than watching a sport – it is witnessing the physical embodiment of *Seiryoku Zenyo* [maximum efficiency with minimum effort]. It is the reason *judoka* fall, sweat, and keep returning to the *tatami*.

"One ippon is worth a thousand points. It is the heart of judo."

Traditional Dojo Wisdom.

The Silent Victory – The Art of *Zanshin*



Zanshin

Many people wonder why a *judoka* often remains perfectly calm after scoring a massive *ippon*. In a world filled with loud celebrations, *judo* teaches the art of *Zanshin* [lingering awareness].

Zanshin is the state of mind in which a *judoka* remains focused and prepared even after the contest has been won. It represents the ultimate form of respect toward an opponent. By avoiding excessive celebration, the *judoka* honours the opponent's effort while maintaining the dignity of the *dojo*. It serves as a reminder that victory is temporary, but character and discipline are permanent. In *judo*, winning is never viewed as the end of the journey, but simply another step on the path of self-improvement.

In Judo Nothing is Natural

In *dojo*, one often hears:
“Stay natural. Be natural.”

The phrase sounds simple. Reassuring.
Yet it conceals a far more demanding truth: in *judo*, almost nothing is natural.

From the moment one enters the *dojo*, the body is asked to abandon its habitual responses.
One bows – first to the *tatami*, then to the people.
This is not instinctive behaviour; it is education.

Kano placed *rei* at the foundation of practice not as etiquette alone, but as a discipline of the self.
The place, the rules, and the shared practice take precedence over ego and domination.
Nothing is natural in these rituals repeated day after day.
Nothing is natural in accepting *ukemi* – falling willingly.
Nothing is natural in repeating technique without immediately seeking victory.

Human beings instinctively seek self-preservation.
They stiffen when balance is threatened.
They avoid discomfort.
They resist loss of control.

Judo asks for the opposite.

Even movement must be learned.
In daily life, we walk by repeatedly breaking balance.
In *judo*, through *shintai*, we learn to move while maintaining continuity and connection.
We slide rather than step, preserving readiness and stability.

This is not instinctive.
It is acquired through repetition, correction, and attention.
With time it becomes fluid, but it is never spontaneous at the outset.

The so-called ‘*natural posture*’, *shizen-tai*, is itself a construction.
Under pressure, the human body contracts – the shoulders rise, breathing tightens, balance freezes.
Judo requires the opposite – an upright posture, stable yet available, free of unnecessary tension.

That posture is not given by nature.
It is built slowly, often against deeply ingrained reflexes.

The same applies to defeat.
Instinctively, one seeks to avoid it, deny it, or justify it.
Judo does not teach us to enjoy losing, but to remain intact when defeat occurs.

On the *tatami*, one falls repeatedly.
Kuzushi precedes understanding.
Failure precedes mastery.
One returns to practice not out of pride, but out of commitment to the process.

Judo does not erase defeat – it teaches us not to be ruled by it.

None of this is natural.
It is learned.
Repeated.
Internalised.

Over time, what once felt restrictive becomes efficient.
What demanded effort begins to express *Seiryoku Zenyo* – the best use of energy.
What appears spontaneous is in fact the product of long discipline.

Judo does not reveal an original, untouched nature.
It forms a more appropriate way of acting.

This is the core of Jigoro Kano’s vision.
Judo is not governed by instinct, but by mastery:
Mastery of the body,
Mastery of emotions,
Mastery of relationships – to others, and to failure itself.

Judo is a school of counter-reflex.

Rei before confrontation.
Kuzushi before force.
Ju before resistance.
Repetition before haste.
Progress before victory.

What is learned on the *tatami* extends beyond *judo*.
Remaining upright under pressure.
Staying lucid in failure.
Continuing forward without rigidity.

Do is not a metaphor.
It is a way of conducting oneself.

In *judo*, nothing is natural.
And that is precisely why it educates.
Because it does not flatter instinct.
Because it does not confuse winning with growing.
Because it aims at *Jita Kyohei* – mutual welfare and benefit – through self-transformation.

The *judoka*’s ‘naturalness’ is not a starting point.
It is a patient construction,
accessible to all,
and profoundly human.



WHERE DID KATA COME FROM?

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF FORMAL PREARRANGED TRAINING PATTERNS? © by Steve Scott



Kata translates to “form” or “pattern” and is a prearranged pattern of techniques used in most martial arts of Asian origin. Most gendai (modern) Japanese martial arts such as judo, karate, kendo and aikido use kata. This practice is a carryover from the use of kata in the koryu (ancient) martial arts such as jujutsu, kenjutsu, and other fighting arts of Japan. But is the concept and practice of formal, prearranged training patterns (kata) Japanese in origin?

Almost every culture on earth has some kind of fighting style unique to the people of that culture. Some fighting styles are more organized than others and some of these indigenous fighting styles evolved into sports. It's interesting that in some cultures wrestling was predominant and in other cultures boxing/striking systems were more common. In cultures where warring feudal powers were dominant, numerous systems of armed and unarmed fighting flourished. Japan is one such place where warring feudal factions developed many systems of martial combat.

While there is a history of feudal fighting styles in Europe, Africa, Indonesia, and even in the Americas, none of the fighting styles have any history of including the prearranged and formalized movement patterns that we now know as kata. The wrestlers, boxers and pankration fighters of ancient Greece and Rome had organized and sophisticated methods of training, but never included formal, prearranged patterns of movement. The closest thing used in any of these fighting disciplines would be different forms of training that we might now call “shadow boxing” but it was never formalized prearranged patterns.

Many Asian cultures had their own fighting styles and sports but didn't use formalized training or technique patterns as part of their training practices. Mongolian wrestling (bok), Georgian wrestling (chida-oba), or Malaysian fighting styles (pencak silat) all have structured training, but not the prearranged patterns as used in China. Thailand's muay Thai boxing has ceremonial movements prior to a fight, but this isn't the same as a formal prearranged training exercise.

From my study and research, my conclusion is that the prearranged patterns of movement that are now used in many martial arts originated in China with their various fighting styles hundreds of years ago. I'm willing to see more information from historians who specialize in this, but a logical explanation of how and why kata is used exclusively in Asian martial arts is that the practice spread from China into neighboring regions and cultures. Historically, China has made extensive use of prearranged fighting patterns in order to pass down the techniques from teacher to student. So it's certainly plausible that when the various Chinese fighting styles spread to other places, the use of prearranged training patterns were very much part of it.

I can't pinpoint when or where prearranged training patterns (kata) were first used in Japanese fighting systems. My inclination is that at some point, possibly prior to or during the Tokugawa period (starting 1603), they were introduced by imported Chinese or Formosan influences. I don't believe kata is Japanese in origin. My reasoning for this is sumo. Considered to be the oldest native fighting activity or sport in Japan, sumo does not have, or ever had, kata. It seems logical that if prearranged training patterns were native to Japanese fighting styles, the oldest fighting style, sumo, would have included them centuries ago.

The formal, prearranged training patterns (kata) now familiar in judo, karate and other Japanese martial arts and used in other Asian martial arts such as Korean taekwondo appear (from my research) to have origins in China. If martial arts historians or others have specific information on the origins of kata, I would welcome it and enjoy reading it.

Timeless Wisdom from Jigoro Kano on Personal Growth and Self-Improvement

Jose A. Gonzalez after Spring Nguyen



Jigoro Kano

Jigoro Kano's quotes offer a wealth of wisdom that transcends time, discipline, and the practice of *judo*. Rooted in fundamental *judo* principles, his teachings extend far beyond physical training to broader lessons about life, personal growth, self-improvement, and effectiveness. Kano emphasises that true achievement is not measured by winning or seeking external validation, but by continually striving to become a better version of oneself and using one's abilities to make a positive contribution to society.

Although many of Kano's ideas are familiar, they remain inspiring and motivating each time they are read, reflected upon, and discussed. His thoughts serve as a reflective mirror, cutting through the noise of everyday life and directing our attention towards what truly matters: growth, discipline, harmony, and contributing to something greater than ourselves. It is this enduring relevance and ability to inspire reflection that led us to compile some of the quotes we consider most inspiring.

"The purpose of Judo is to perfect the self."

This quote from Jigoro Kano underscores the idea that *judo* is not merely about physical combat but about personal development.

"Maximum efficiency with minimum effort."

This principle, often abbreviated as *Seiryoku Zenyo* in Japanese, is at the heart of *judo* techniques.

"Judo is the path to the most efficient use of physical and mental energy."

Here, Kano emphasises the integration of body and mind, fostering a balanced approach to challenges.

"One must be gentle in what is essential and strong in what is crucial."

This underscores the importance of discernment. In personal relationships, this quote from Jigoro Kano teaches the value of empathy and strategic decision-making.

"The ultimate goal of judo is to promote an invincible spirit."

This testifies to the mental strength developed through the practice of *judo*. Jigoro Kano believed that an invincible spirit comes from overcoming adversity.

"In judo, you must move with your opponent."

This emphasises cooperation and mutual benefit, known as *Jita Kyoei* [Mutual Prosperity for Self and Others]. Jigoro Kano intended to promote not only physical movement but also social harmony, where success is shared.

"Training should be conducted in the spirit of judo friendship."

This reflects Jigoro Kano's vision of a supportive community.

"Perfection of character is more important than perfection of technique."

This emphasises moral development over technical skill, highlighting Kano's focus on holistic growth.

"Judo is not about strength – it's about technique and timing."

Jigoro Kano used this to level the playing field, allowing even the smallest individuals to succeed through their abilities.

"Always strive to improve yourself every day."

This encompasses a lifelong quest for well-being.

"The goal of judo is self-improvement."

This is used to encourage the development of students. Teachers draw upon Jigoro Kano's quotes to promote self-discipline and lifelong learning, making them integral to character-building programmes.

Renjuku Academy

The Kano Society is pleased to endorse the *Judo* Black Belt Association's "Renjuku Academy" as an outstanding *judo* education programme. Its comprehensive 12-month home-study curriculum delivers a rigorous and immersive experience, with a focus on five fundamental domains of *judo* leadership:



1. Biomechanics of *Judo*
2. *Judo* as Physical Education
3. *Kata*
4. *Judo* History and Philosophy
5. *Judo* Terminology



The demanding programme concludes with the submission of a formal dissertation on any aspect of *judo*.

<http://www.judoblackbelt.com>

Judo Collections



The "Bowen Collection" at the University of Bath Library houses an extensive archive on *judo*, compiled by *judoka* and scholar Richard Bowen during the course of his research for numerous books and publications.

Complementing this is the personal book collection of Syd Hoare, which features many rare and valuable *judo* texts – some in Japanese – gifted to him by Trevor Leggett. In addition to the books, the collection includes a bound volume of Syd Hoare's educational articles and lectures.

Also held at the University is the "Woodard (*Judo*) Collection," a valuable archive focused on the history of women's *judo*, assembled by Marion and Graham Woodard.

Together, these collections form a rich resource for current and future *judo* researchers. They are available for reference use only (not for loan) and can be viewed between 09:00 and 1700 hrs.



Contact: Kanosociety@cyberbirch.com