

Kano - Radical or Traditionalist ?

or

Are Kata and Shiai The Same Thing ?

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This paper is a transcript of a lecture delivered by Mr. G. R. Gleeson at the opening of the National Technical Conference of the British Judo Association held in Birmingham on September 6, 1987. Mr. Gleeson was one of the early pioneers to have studied for an extensive period in Japan after the war. He was a member of the British team and captained it during one of Britain's successful episodes when they won the European Championships three years running. He went on to serve full time for 14 years as the BJA National Coach and is now the General Secretary of the British Association of National Coaches in which time he has assisted with the formation and development of the National Coaching Foundation. International author Geof Gleeson has provided us with this full transcript of his lecture for which we are most grateful and it is herewith published for the benefit of our coaches, potential coaches and member clubs.

INTRODUCTION

Proceedings commenced with the playing of a tape of the last movements of Beethoven's 9th Symphony during which time colour slides of works of Yves Klein and Rene Magritte were displayed on a large screen.

TALK

You may well ask what are these for? What have they to do with Judo? Because I have put them on, they must have something to do with it. We shall see!

My first question: Is knowing the superficialities of things sufficient for understanding those things?

Does it really make any difference to know that Beethoven was deaf when he wrote that glorious piece of music and therefore he never heard it? Does it matter to know that the artist of these pictures, an extremely influential modernist, Yves Klein, was a failed judoman? Does it really matter that Magritte buried himself in suburbia, so that he could attack reality and criticise how it affects imagery?

Some people will argue not: the thing is good enough of itself. They will say, know its superficiality and you will know all you need to know about it. If the "thing" is banal, trivial and inconsequential, that may well be true; to know more than its outward appearance in such conditions may well be making mountains out of molehills.

But, if it is important, if it is a significant part of the quality of life, then the more that is known about “it”, the more understanding there will be, the more comprehension there will be, and therefore the more benefit will be accrued from the “thing”. Every possible aspect of the subject must be examined and analysed; speculations made, formed into propositions, and then presented for criticism and refutation, wherever possible.

My mentor in these matters is Karl Popper. He wrote:

"In this way (questioning nature) the freedom and boldness of our theoretical creations can be controlled and tempered by self-criticism and by the severest tests we can design. It is here, through our initial methods of testing, that scientific rigour and logic enter empirical science."

Conjectures and Refutations¹

The two most important factors to be studied in Judo are the two *K*'s- **KANO** and **KATA**. Yet they are seldom looked at, or if they are, the head is quickly turned away in case there is embarrassment due to ignorance. Not always the fault of the embarrassed, often it is usually because they have been brought up to believe that neither K has anything to offer the fighting man.

Because of this custom of ignoring the two *K*'s, both are encrusted with cobwebs and clichés, both blurring their outlines and values. I want to try and brush aside some of those cobwebs and clichés.

First, let us have a look at ...

KANO

You all know the essential facts of his life. Born in 1860 in a small town- Mikage- about 280 miles from Tokyo. Supposed to have invented Judo during or just after his stay at the university when he was 21 years old. The stabilisation of his system was the victory of his Judo team over a Jujutsu team. Judo lived happily ever after. In 1909 Kano was made Japan's representative on the International Olympic Committee and died on his way home from an IOC meeting in Egypt in 1938.

A somewhat thinly painted picture of the man, who not only developed Judo, but according to his son-in-law, Takasaki, was one of Japan's major educational figures of the Meiji period. Let me try and paint in some more of the picture.

First we must go back to the 17th century, the founding of the Tokugawa dynasty and then move quickly forward to the two most important decades in Kano's life, the 1880's and 1890's. The establishment of the Tokugawa dynasty was the start of the greatest bureaucracy the world has seen. It had two major objectives:

- To perpetuate the Tokugawa forever;
- To emasculate the samurai, so it lost all ability to revolt.

It almost succeeded in both.

Ogyu Sorais one of the leading intellectuals of the 18th century was very critical of the ruling samurai as a class.

"It is the height of folly to neglect to rule the country by means of the arts of peace and to imagine that good government can be achieved by sticking out one's

elbows and assuming a fearful countenance, terrifying the people with the threat of punishment and attempting to belabour the country into obedience."

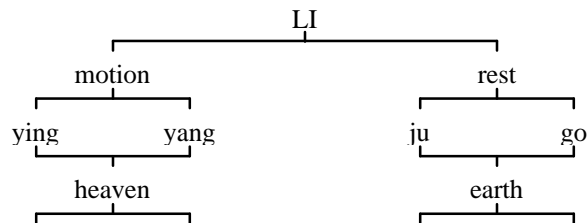
Taiheisaku.²

Many samurai accepted that criticism and although a facade of fighting ideology was maintained, many moved over into administration at local and central government level. They became tax collectors and tax assessors, clerks and political manipulators.

The religion of the samurai, Zen, also came in for such destructive criticism. Those intellectuals known as the kokugakusha, suggested that Zen was anti-state and its emphasis on the strength of the individual was not what an authoritarian state wanted- as both Hitler and George Orwell showed much later, in their own special way. So Sorai and his successors, gradually replaced Zen with Confucianism, or more precisely neo-Confucianism, a doctrine they said more suitable for the future of Japan.³

Certainly by the 19th century this school of neo-Confucianism was very influential. The two major protagonists of this school which I would like to bring to your attention are, firstly, Shao Yung (11th century) and the second, Wang Eang Ming (16th century) or O Yo Mei, as he was known to the Japanese.⁴

Shao devised a whole cosmological structure, capable of rationalising the world. A kind of high management tree.⁵ At its head was the Great Principal Li and then came the in-line management tiers below it:



The “ju” and “go” is of particular interest to the Judo fraternity. (This was elaborated on.) Although Shao's personal influence was not great in Japan, his successor's, Wang Yang Ming, was, and he transmitted much of Shao's teaching, particularly the “Great Management Structure” to Japan. His own contribution was an exposition on the inter-relationship between the body and the mind, summed up in his phrase "The Master of the body is the Mind." A notion very attractive to the Japanese.⁶ Wang was a great scholar, a philosopher, a successful general, a poet and of course a calligrapher. Further cause for the Japanese to admire him.

By the time of the American invasion of Japan in the 1850ís, the O Yo Mei school was a well established system of study in Japan. It was time however, when the Tokugawa dynasty was ready to fall apart at any puff from the wind of change. A wind not from inside the country, the Tokugawa had done too good a job for that, but certainly from outside. The Americans made that wind and brought the whole fragile feudal structure crashing down.

By the 1860's, when the foreigners were well established, the Japanese saw in the ideology of the West many similarities with their own neo-Confucianist policy, but because it was foreign it was more acceptable. (We know all about that!) They saw the amalgamation of the two ideologies as a great opportunity to modernise Japan, spiritually as well as materially.⁷ The 1870's saw a major syncretising movement. A great drive towards a liberalisation for the Japanese people in general and for the Japanese individuals in particular. It was to be done by exploiting the example of the British Empire and by denigrating feudal Japan as symbolised by the anachronistic samurai image.

In many ways Kano personified that time. The Kano biographies do not go out of their way to make him of samurai stock, which is, by itself, significant. His parents had the foresight to send him to the Ikueisha High School which specialised in English and other foreign languages. It showed clearly the astute thinking of a middle class, future-looking, bourgeoisie Japanese family, determined to move progressively into the 20th century.

From there he **won** himself a place at the newly established Tokyo University in 1878. The leader of the Kaiseisho, the college that became Tokyo University, was a man named Nishi who had also been principal of Kano's school, the Ikueisha.⁸ So Kano may well have had a considerably nepotistic advantage at the University. His subjects again were astutely selected; English and politics.

Being the only university in Japan at the time, it was being continually combed by government agents for promising talent. If they spotted anyone, they were fixed for life.

"Those who graduated (from other than Tokyo University) were at a disadvantage because of **legal discrimination** in favour of Tokyo University applications to the civil service as well as because they had inferior education.... Tokyo University graduates could expect more than twice as much as low-rank civil servants and ten times as much as a labourer."

Earl K. H. Kinworth⁹

Kano was almost certainly selected early in his university days as a man with a future. I am convinced, although I cannot prove it, that the whole jujutsu/physical educational job was given to him as a part of his training for a future government position. How else could he have founded the Kodokan? We all know how much we knew at the age of 21- very little! It would have been so much more understandable if he had received government funds to buy his dojo. The big two team punch-up would simply have been a cover up, a camouflage to hide the fact that Kano was a small time Sports Council.

Immediately on graduation in 1881, in English and politics, Kano got a job as a lecturer in the Gakushuin, the most prestigious college in Japan. Bergamini writes that by the early years of the 19th century it was training all the leaders of World War II.¹⁰

In Kano's day it was not that ultra-nationalist, but it certainly was very pro-Japan. In 1888, Kano was appointed Vice Principal, so he must have made a good impression on the powers-that-be and shown that he was a good modern Japanese man.

In 1889, like many other chosen leaders of Japan, he was sent off for a three year study tour of Europe. He visited Rome, Berlin, Paris, Stockholm and London. His mission, to study their educational systems in general and physical education in particular. Upon his return, he was given a government position and made Principal of the Shihan Gakko, also previously headed by Nishi. (It's nice to have friends.)

Notice the place of Judo in his life. Very much the part-time hobby. This is most apparent when some of his original concepts are studied. There are glaring faults in them, just as you would expect from an amateur teacher. For example, his ideas on movement analysis, as in the kata nage-no-kata.

What is important of course is his philosophy, and it is here that he earns our greatest respect. It is a philosophy formulated whilst he was at Tokyo University.

At that time it was dominated by English Utilitarianism. The Anglophile Kato, a major influence at the university, was a rabid John Stuart Mill fan and had translated all his writings into Japanese and insisted they

were the foundation texts of all courses at the university. In addition most lectures had to be given in English and staff had to speak English in the staff rooms.⁸

Mill, and the whole pantheon of Victorian philosophers, Spencer, Kingsley, Arnold, Darwin and Smiles, plus the odd Comte and Hegel, were the top of the pops reading list that Japanese wanted to read. Certainly Kano would have been steeped in English Utilitarianism. His famous maxims prove that- they could have been written by Arnold himself and found in his *Culture and Anarchy*.¹¹ (At this point, a slide was used to depict the following.)

JI TA KYO EI

SEI RYOKU ZEN YO

It was this code of morality that Kano felt Japanese youth needed and he used Judo as a means of imposing it on them. Judo ethics are Smilesian ethics, with a touch of Chinese idealism.

Of course Kano was a radical. Any man of that time (1890) if he wanted to get on in the world, had to be that- and he was one of the best radicals, but he was sensible enough not to ignore history and past ideals.

His subsidiary subjects at the university were Chinese classics. He certainly would have studied Wang Yang Ming, and therefore would have got the general notions from there to sustain his philosophy of Judo. For example, the concepts of ju and go.

So Judo was an eclectic system of education that was very popular in 1890 but came in for much criticism in the 1920's, but that is another story.

The other K Ö

KATA

Kata is about a lot of things. It is about competition, about discipline, about aesthetics, but mostly about image. The image of action.

Let me take you back to the Magritte slides. Magritte is a very realistic painter. His replication of items are extremely life like, almost photographic. But it is his tectonic relationship of the objects and then the relationship to it and us, the viewer, that strikes such a bizarre note. Every worthwhile painting is a philosophic statement and, here, Magritte is saying relationships between things are more important than the things themselves. It is a lesson that dogmatic kata instructors have not learnt yet. A mindless nage-no-kata, done in this way, regardless of relationships, is like a Magritte painting. The throws have a remarkable similarity with what is done in competition, but the relationships are absent and therefore makes them totally wrong. The overall effect is bizarre; in short, again like Magritte's pictures, it starts off with the parts looking real enough, but the overall effect is nonsense.¹²

In Judo we are concerned with skill, or rather the acquisition of skill.

How does one learn skill? To answer absolutely is of course impossible, but we can have some intriguing stabs at it. For example, how can one define skill? I offer the following:

"...a response to a set of ephemeral circumstances, that entails a process of movement that aspires to a preconceived result."

The trouble with a definition of this kind is that it raises one hell of a problem for the coach. No two sets of ephemeral circumstances can be the same, therefore no two skills can be the same. However much a fighter says his best throw is uchi-mata, and he does that same throw in all his contests, **no two** of them are ever the same! So how does he learn a skill that is never the same twice? Repetition, uchikomi cannot be the answer, because the whole essence of uchikomi is to repeat the **same** action over and over again. Whatever that is developing it is not a skill or is it?

How do we recognise, learn something which we have never met before? Usually we isolate certain aspects of it and then make a quick span comparison, to anything similar we have met before. Not the same, but similar. The more working models we have acquired during our learning experiences, the better chance we will have of classifying the new experience correctly, thereby learning it. If we have no previous experimental models, or too few, or worse still, if we make the wrong comparison, we will not learn the new experience and indeed we may block the whole learning process.

Here is the source of that Judo curse- the grading syllabus. It purports to offer an accurate model, a permanent model, a model of performance for others to copy. That concept of learning by imitation is totally bogus, and has done more than any other learning process to destroy Judo skills. A defender of a grading syllabus may well say that the illustrations utilised in a syllabus are not showing skills but techniques, but that of course is worse than ever, for there is no such thing as technique. Shock. horror!!

By that I mean, if technique is considered as being the right way of doing a particular action, inferring in turn that it has a quality that is basic or fundamental to that action, then there is no such thing. If there is such a thing as technique, it simply means a personal prejudice. It is an opinion, a personal opinion of the best way to do an action. There is really nothing sacrosanct about such a "technique." It is a shorthand for saying, "in my opinion that's the way to do it." Which is as valuable as the value of the knowledge and experience held by the person who said it.

The primary purpose of kata is to provide a wide range of forms, of reference models to make spontaneous comparisons with. Not just one dogmatic image that inculcates the attitude that any deviation from that dogmatic model is wrong.

When I was training in the Kodokan, we were taught kata every Saturday afternoon by all the expert 8th Dan and over. Everyone taught kata differently. There was never a hint that there was only one way of doing nage-no-kata. They knew better. It was only in 1962 that some clown had the notion of producing a standard performance. It's like the present clowns at the Department of Education and Science. They want a national core curriculum. How can education be standardised? What a disaster that was- standardising the kata I mean. It shows a profound ignorance of the whole concept of education. A living, throbbing thing, cannot be standardised.

Kata has a long history. The first great advocator was Plato.¹³ He proposed that creative thought gyrates around the notion of form and content. The world's taxonomy is dictated by form and in its turn form is dictated by content. It is a notion that spreads out across India- with the conquests of Alexander- and on into China, along with the Greek image of Buddha ...

(At this point slides of Buddha were projected)

Ö and on into Japan where the "words" are kata (Hsing Ch) and ki (Chhi, Chinese). Plato's description of the two is ...

Form (kata) is finite.

Content (ki) is infinite.

Unfortunately many instructors of kata do not know this simple formulation and erroneously promulgate the notion that both kata and ki are finite. That must be wrong because limited content constrains form and if form is the totality of the phenomena, content must not and cannot be constrained.

Kano being much influenced by J. S. Mill was apparently convinced that the inductive approach to learning was the best method to acquire knowledge and skill, i.e. one begins by examining the small things and then moves along to analysing the big things. Many leading artists evolve their painting styles in this way. They begin with the specifics and as they grow old, they move into abstract paintings. I think particularly of Chagall, Bomberg to some extent, and of course the great Turner. So with Kano, he moved from the specificity of randori skill, the randori-no-kata, moved through the ju and go-no-kata phase, and finished with the itsutsu-no-kata. This last kata is a materialisation of Chapter 8 of Book III, in Mill's *A System of Logic*.¹⁴ Here Mill outlines five canons of enquiry into selected phenomena. The five principles that Kano outlines could be said to coincide with these five canons, and is a remarkable attempt to illustrate various types of forces through a physical dynamic. An experiment attempted by very few others- and they are usually mystics; people like Gurdjieff, Castaneda and the Sufi.

Arnhem, in his excellent book on *Visual Thinking*, discusses the essentiality of using images as symbols of abstract action to compare spontaneous real action to:

"A symbol gives particular shape to types of things or constellations of forces."

Man thinks in abstractions. When he wishes to categorise, when learning a new piece of skill, he converts the present into a symbol and then compares it with a previous symbol. Here is where uchikomi could have value; if its proper function is recognised and appreciated.

Kata is a sequence of "symbols" available for comparisons, not accurate prescriptive shapes that are supposed to be copied photographically, but generalised symbols for quick reference when there is a need of a bit of spontaneous creativity.

How do you train spontaneous creativity? To my knowledge no sports coaching programme even mentions it, let alone tells how it should be done. If skill is an instantaneous response to instantaneous situations, the experimental feedback process must be trained so that it becomes even more efficient.

Somehow the training has got to be structured. Every instructor or coach agrees with that whether he advocates uchikomi or tactical planning. That's why Kano said, kata is the most important part of training, because that's what kata is- structured training. But how is that structure to be built when we do not know what its ultimate purpose is? Here is the great paradox, the great enigma.

One way to tackle it would be to first analyse the form that is constrained by its content- that is orthodox kata. Then, second, to analyse the content that creates the form- that is shiai. Compare the two; note the differences- if there are any- and that may offer a clue as to how to design a new type of training programme: a programme that Judo so desperately needs.

Let us look at Kano's version of the form that is throwing, called nage-no-kata.

1. It is of course structured: the sequence has a pattern and it can be easily read.
2. Selections of certain actions are made that facilitate performance.
3. There is a time constraint- a beginning and an end.

4. There is mutual agreement that certain rules and codes of behaviour are accepted and implemented.
5. Both performers know what is to happen and both are a part of that happening.
6. There is a successful performer and a failed one.
7. There are no variations in the sequence of movements.

Now look at shiai. The only significant difference is item 7. In shiai there are no limitations of variations on the opportunities to attack. It is of course the critical difference; can we structure a kata that has variable conditions built in to train the competitor to respond differently to them every time he attacks?

Skill is a reflection of personality. How do we build that into a shiai-no-kata? Kano gave us a strong clue in the ju-no-kata. Here he tries to show how to generate a situation and then allows the skill to be created by that situation, How can we exploit that relationship? How do we structure situations that produce response skills to those situations?

Koshiki-no-kata illustrates the concept that one principle of throwing can be implemented in many ways. As opposed to the nage-no-kata which shows how various principles of throwing can produce various types of throwing. Can we use that idea to include into our new kata?

By mixing all of Kano's katas, we will be able to find something of a solution to the question of how to build a shiai-no-kata. But it will need a lot of work. Coaches especially will need to study kata much harder than they do now. Not as a fossilised remnant of the past but as virile guides to the future.

In many ways, Kano, because he was a part-time Judo teacher, did not know what he was doing. Look at the katame-no-kata, a dismal failure, a nonsense, not worth the time it takes to learn the sequence. Yet because of that ignorance, added to his philosophy of action, he was able to offer propositions that puts him into the class of genius. For that we are indebted to him; he has given us something to really think about!

A SUMMARY

Kano

1. Kano was from a very astute middle class family.
2. His education was impregnated and dominated by English Utilitarianism as shown by Ji Ta Kyo Ei and Sei Ryoku Zen Yo.
3. He was a professional state bureaucrat who, on the side, organised a specialist Judo “school” that in its early days was probably subsidised by government funds. It was used to supplement the state school system.
4. The essence of this “school” teaching comes from English morality; self help, help others, be just and protect the weak.
5. Competition, other than as a means to the above end, was looked on with great suspicion as the source of self-conceit, false pride, greed and bullying. Such characteristics can destroy the individual and society as a whole.

This ideology was compromised later in the early years of the 20th century when a reaction set in against foreign liberalism.

Kata

1. Kata is structured training, as opposed to unstructured training that is called randori. Randori is largely a waste of learning time. because it is unstructured.
2. Kata must not be fixed, permanent or stereotyped; that destroys skill.

3. Kata is to stimulate original thought and action. It should produce sequences of movement that have not been done before and may well not be done again.
4. Kata is for training spontaneous creativity; the hardest job amongst the coach's responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Judo training has reached a critical point in its development. It has lost its way. The leaders, the coaches, are no longer sure what it is they are supposed to be doing.

Are they training for long-term contests of attrition, where skill is in little demand, with only the ability to stop the opponent winning? Long sessions of randori may help to achieve this objective.

Or are they training for short sharp bursts of sophisticated skills, that can win in the short contest time available to the competitor? If so, nothing is organised to this end.

The coaches are no longer being educated. They are expected to find out things for themselves. That is not good enough. The only thing you can find out for yourself is prejudice.

The National Coaching Foundation is offering a coach education service. The British Judo Association is intending to use it; a very commendable decision, but the packages on offer are for general coaching; they are not sport specific. Who is going to translate them into packages for Judo coaches?

There is much to be done. I think Judo can be the most exciting spectator sport of all- I too have my prejudices. But it must be taught right and presented right. I wish you every success in doing that.

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