

# Kodokan Judo: Japan's Cultural Gift to the World

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***Most Americans today are familiar with such foreign terms as Karate, Tae Kwon Do, and Kung Fu. We all commonly see these martial arts practiced on television, movies, and in Martial Arts schools present in our communities. Though Japanese Judo is the oldest Asian Martial Art taught and practiced in the U.S., it is perhaps the least well known in the U.S. today. Many younger Americans now either don't know what Judo is, or only recognize the name from watching an old James Bond film or some 1960s TV program. Regrettably, most Americans really don't know what Judo is really all about, and why it is truly Japan's unique cultural gift to the world.***

Judo was developed by Professor Jigoro Kano, who was born during the period in Japanese history known as the Meiji Restoration. The Meiji Restoration occurred in the late 19th century and was characterized by Japan's increased contact and ties with Europe and the United States. This resulted in a "Westernization" of Japan to some degree, with the introduction and incorporation of many western practices into Japanese culture (this period was loosely described...though not always accurately, in the recent film "The Last Samurai"). As Professor Kano was born during this transitional period, he himself became a transitional figure in Japanese history. Professor Kano, who spoke and wrote fluent English, was well educated and came from a wealthy family. Because of his poor health as a child he became involved in Ju Jutsu training as a young boy in order to strengthen his body. Ju Jutsu, often translated as the "gentle art", was an unarmed form of self-defense and combat used by the Samurai, which reached its peak in development during the Tokugawa period (1600-1867). Though he studied many forms of Ju Jutsu, Professor Kano focused his training on two schools: Tenshin Shinyo Ryu and Kito Ryu. The Tenshin Shinyo Ryu emphasized grappling and striking techniques, while the Kito Ryu school focused on throwing techniques. Professor Kano

made several unique observations. First, there was no systematic approach to teaching the techniques, or in classifying the techniques used in Ju Jutsu. Specifically, there was no underlying principle governing how the techniques worked. Second, Kano noted that one school only practiced Kata (pre-arranged fighting forms), while the other school only practiced actual fighting. So, Professor Kano sought to find the underlying principles of how the techniques worked, and how they should be applied. He concluded that no matter what the technique is, three important elements had to be present in order for the

techniques to be successful: Kuzushi (breaking the balance of your opponent), Tsukuri (the proper placement of your body relative to your opponent), and Kake (the actual execution of the technique). Kano then studied the major techniques of Ju Jutsu and applied these principles to them, and then discarded those techniques that were not efficient and had no rational principle of operation behind them. This led Professor Kano ultimately to one of his major insights, which was the principle of Seiryoku Zenyo, or the principle of maximum efficient use of power. In other words, no matter what your objective is, you should find the most efficient use of your physical and mental powers to achieve that objective. Professor Kano's next major insight was to combine the practice of Kata and actual fighting (Randori, or free practice) into one system. Finally, Kano believed that the ultimate goal of training should not be merely self-defense, but instead should be the betterment of oneself, and the creation of an individual who could better serve one's community and society. This led Professor Kano to his next major principle: Jita Kyoei (mutual welfare and benefit). Judo should be practiced in such a way that everyone benefits and improves. The person that you train

with is no longer your enemy, but is your partner. Thus, Kano systematized the techniques of Ju Jutsu, discarding those techniques that were not efficient, and then named his new system Judo, or the Gentle Way. The complete name is Kodokan Judo, where Kodokan means the place where the way of Judo is practiced and studied. Judo then clearly stood apart from Ju Jutsu because of its emphasis on the application of scientific principle to the use of technique and on the focus on self-improvement and contribution to society by the individual. After proving himself and the effectiveness of his new Judo, Professor Kano managed to get Judo incorporated into the Japanese Educational system.



Performed at Tour of Asia organized by UCF Asian Student Association

