



**Aikido & Judo:
An Early History
1/9/93**

Dedication

To my daughter Colleen and her first small steps along the way.

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Author's Note

It is difficult for anyone to write a conceptual article about either Aikido or Judo because the nature of both arts is inherently experiential rather than intellectual. My intention in this article is not to compare in detail and contrast Aikido vs Judo from the perspective of techniques or training methods. Rather the intention is to point out some of the complementary aspects of the two arts and their mutual heritage

This essay was originally written in 1993 to commemorate my daughter's initiation to Judo training at our local YMCA. Perhaps it will be of some value now for my students and fellow martial artists.

Common Roots

Both *Aikido* and *Judo* are modern disciplines that have their origins in the martial arts of feudal Japan. Japan's feudal period traces back to the 1st century C.E. and lasted until the 17th century C.E. This period was marked by recurring civil wars, and two Mongolian invasions which contributed to the rise of a professional warrior class known as the *samurai* or *bushi*. Over time, the samurai class developed into a distinct cast or sub-culture with its own code of conduct known as *bushido* (the way of the warrior).

Interpretations of bushido were not monolithic over time or across different samurai clans. However three reoccurring values were common:

1. Absolute loyalty to ones superiors
2. Resolute acceptance of death
3. Rigorous self-discipline

While the intellectual underpinnings for the bushido theme of *loyalty to ones' superiors* was primarily supported by the influence of Chinese Confucianism in Japan, *resolute acceptance of death* and *rigorous self-discipline* found their spiritual support in Zen Buddhism. The arrival of Zen monks from China at the *Shogun's* court at Karmakura, during the 12th century CE, accelerated the philosophical development of bushido and Japanese martial arts by contributing concepts like *non-attachment*, *no-mind*, and *un-movability*.¹¹ While the development of martial arts flourished under the samurai, it was this unique combination, over a protracted period of time, of: practical need, cultural context, and philosophical underpinnings that allowed Japanese martial arts to develop to such a high level.

Early Japanese martial arts were known as *bujutsu* or "warrior techniques". Many different systems of *bujutsu* were developed for different circumstances. Some of these included *ken-jitsu* which was developed for fighting with swords, *yari-jitsu* which was developed for fighting with spears, and *jujitsu* which was developed for unarmed fighting. Each system of fighting techniques had many styles (i.e. *ryu*). Often these styles were related to a specific region, clan, or religious temple. For example, *jujitsu* had many different styles including *Sosuichitsu Ryu*, and *Takenouchi Ryu* which preceded *Judo*, *Yagu Ryu* and *Daito Ryu Aikijitsu* which proceeded *Aikido*, and *Tenjin-Shinto Ryu* and *Kito Ryu* which are common to the family tree of both *Judo* and *Aikido*.^{1,5}

During the *Tokugawa* (A.K.A *Edo*) period (1600-1868 C.E.) Japan endured a long period of political stability, isolation, and peace. Without the opportunity for war, the samurai were unable to apply their *bujutsu* skills in the manner that they were originally intended. As a result, there was more opportunity to reflect on the those aspects of *bujutsu* that were specifically related to self development.

There are many texts that have survived from the *Tokugawa* era which stress the relevance of *bujutsu* to self-realization and personal perfection as opposed to simple victory on the battlefield. Most of those that are available in translations are related to sword styles and Zen

Buddhism. The works of Yagu Muneyoshi, Yagu Munenori, Takuan Soto, Miyamoto Musashi, and others are available in English translation and depict the philosophical state of bujutsu at the beginning of the Tokugawa period ^{7, 8, 9, 10}

Notable among these documents is a text from the Shin-no-Shin-To Ryu jujitsu school of the late 18th century C.E. ⁶

Here is an excerpt:

...My own teacher used to explain a technique to us only roughly and then say: “Now you have the root, and to complete the Way you have to train ruthlessly, crushing flesh and bone, for a long time, never forgetting that the basis of our tradition is mental training.”

For soft (i.e. *ju*) to control the hard (i.e. *go*), the first thing to train is the inner principle (i.e. *ri*) in the right way. Hardness and strength are indeed most valuable in life, but people do not know how much to use. He who loves to dominate others, in fact ends up under the domination of others.

Force only goes so far, small when it arises, but great when it is fully committed. This is the basis of human passion. To discover the means (i.e. *ju* technique) for using force selectively, by first yielding to the other man and then using the lead so gained, is *jutsu*. The most important thing is to practice ruthlessly; sleeping, walking; do not abandon control of the heart. First one specializes in technique till he comes to the end of technique and (then) bases everything on the heart itself – this is the way of practice.

Ki (i.e. “vital energy”) should fill the body. When it is active, it is *yang* (i.e. positive energy), when it is passive it is *yin* (i.e. negative energy). In our school, we stress performing techniques (i.e. *waza*) by using *ki*, but *ki* is not something visible. If the body is defective in *ki*, the promptings of what is needed are not followed completely. (For example) One can be seated in a correct posture, the body may be at ease and relaxed and the *ki* principle seems to fill it. Then when one moves to take up something, by that action, one’s *ki* tends to get concentrated in the lead side of their body, and in the end, the flow of *ki* is impeded.

The secret teaching of our school is to cultivate *ki* in the one square inch area (just below the navel) and not let the heart cling to outer things, but hold firm at that point as a the base.

Then though in movement when active, or when sitting or standing, the basic principle of *ki* is kept right and the functioning *ki* is quite free, so that when strength is put into the left side, the right side is not empty of it, and when the right side is engaged, the left side is not left blank. And so it is with front and back.

Rising and sitting, moving and still, the even *ki* pervades all, and this is called “immovable awareness” (i.e. *fu-do-chi*). A tradition says, “While this is retained, there is success.”

The *ki* must fill all and no part must lack it. Then it is full of functioning, yet does not move; like a top spun by a child, though functioning in turning, it is as it were unmoving...

The long period of peace during the Tokugawa era marked the end of pre-modern Japan. The next period of Japanese history known as the *Meiji Restoration* (1868 – 1912 C.E.) saw the abolition of the samurai class and the end of the feudal society that had originally fostered bushido. The adoption of a modern style conscript army during the Meiji Restoration rendered the original intents and context of bujutsu irrelevant and inappropriate. Japanese martial arts were on the verge of passing into historical obscurity, except as they might be preserved in isolation as historical anachronisms. In fact this is what did happen to many of the classical schools of bujutsu.

However, just as the *ju* in jujutsu means “flexible” or “pliable”, some Japanese martial arts underwent a transformation after the Meiji Restoration. That transformation was one of moving from *bushido* and *bujutsu* to *budo*. No longer were Japanese martial arts the exclusive domain of the samurai class, no longer were they associated with the constraints of feudal loyalty. Now they were removed from the immediate needs of the battlefield and allowed to be refined and followed with an increased emphasis on self-actualization, based on devotion to martial arts practice.

Sword fighting was the first type of bujutsu to undergo this transition from *ken-jutsu* to *Kendo* during the Tokugawa period.¹² For unarmed fighting, the transition from *bujutsu* to *budo* occurred in the last decade of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century. There were three individual who were primarily responsible for this transformation.

The most significant was Jigoro Kano (1860-1938 C.E.). As the father of Judo, Kano went beyond anything that had been accomplished by an prior martial arts master. Kano not only took many of the old forms of jujutsu and shaped them into Judo, but he opened up the martial arts by working to get Judo accepted as a standard part of the Japanese physical education curriculum and accepted internationally as an Olympic event.

Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957 C.E.) was a contemporary of Kano. Like Kano, Funakoshi was originally a professional educator and he dedicated his life work to opening up what had previously been secretive bujutsu arts. Funakoshi was the father of Japanese Karate, being the first person to bring what was then an obscure art from the minor provincial Japanese island of Okinawa. Kano’s endorsement of Funakoshi’s art was instrumental in its gaining acceptance in mainland Japan. This corroboration is well documented in Funakoshi’s biography.¹³

Morihei Ueshiba (1882-1969 C.E.) was another contemporary of Kano who also benefited from his support and encouragement. Ueshiba was the founder of Aikido. While primarily an unarmed form of budo, Aikido does still contain techniques derived from earlier weapons-based bujutsu. Ueshiba was a devotee of an eclectic sect of the Shinto religion called Omoto-kyo.¹ Unlike Kano or Funakoshi, Ueshiba was not so much motivated by a vision of universal physical education, but rather by a personal drive to achieve expression and validation of his own spiritual beliefs through budo practice. This is not to suggest that Ueshiba lacked a forward vision for his budo style, rather Ueshiba preferred to concentrate on the development of esoteric Aikido as it relates to technique, leaving the work of pedagogy for his students.

Ueshiba had studied many forms of bujutsu as a youth. Ueshiba’s experience with Judo began in earnest after his discharge from the army following his service in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905 C.E.). At that time Ueshiba returned to the family property in Tanabe where his father, Yoroku Ueshiba, had built a dojo and invited the noted teacher Kiyochi Takagi (later 9th Dan in Judo) to give Judo lessons.¹

The founders of judo and Aikido did meet in 1930. Jigoro Kano proved himself to be supportive of Aikido in much the same way he had been supportive of Funakoshi's Karate-do.

One account of the meeting, as related by Kazuhiko Ikeda³, goes like this:

...In 1930, Jigoro Kano paid a visit to the Ueshiba dojo. Upon seeing Ueshiba's technique, Kano expressed the following: "I propagated Judo among the public during the Edo period by developing taijutsu (i.e. "body arts" or "unarmed" techniques) into Judo. In this way, bujutsu were converted into sport. It would have been virtually impossible to preserve budo in their original form. When I observe Aiki, I realized that this is the true budo. Therefore, I would like to enroll three of my most promising and talented disciples in your dojo. Please train them in Aikido." Those selected to study Aikido from the Kodokan (i.e. Judo headquarters) were Mochizuki Minoru, Nagaoka Takeda, and Kenji Tomiki...

Another rendition¹ of the encounter recalls it this way:

... Jigoro Kano paid a visit to the Mejiro (a neighborhood in Toshima, Tokyo) dojo in October 1930. Kano, a cosmopolitan, English speaking intellectual, was in most respects the diametrical opposite of the old-fashioned mystical Morihei; but he (i.e. Kano) too was dazzled by Morihei's techniques. "This is the ideal budo! True Judo!", Kano exclaimed after witnessing Morihei's performance. Kano humbly asked Morihei to accept two of his senior students as trainees. Morihei's agreed and Kano had them report to him regularly the results of their training with the master. There is another story that Kano and Morihei met again and after Morihei toyed with four or five of Kano's best students, he asked the Judo patriarch rather sharply, "Just what kind of budo are you teaching at the Kodokan?" Somewhat sheepishly, Kano replied, "Our system is more of a form of physical education than pure budo."...

The personality, background, and teaching style of the two founders were very different. Kano had a PhD from Cambridge University and was president of a prominent college in Tokyo. He was capable of organizing his thoughts clearly and lucidly enunciating scientific principles. He had a superb talent for organization, bringing a uniform system of Judo to international acceptance. His teaching methods would employ the explanation of underlying precepts in a well organized program. Kano's intent was to develop a system that was universal in nature and capable of being taught to the world with a minimum chance of miscomprehension. Kano was a person of modern outlook with a deep respect and appreciation for traditional ways.⁴

Ueshiba, on the other hand was a person of pre-modern tradition. He did not have much in the way of formal education; temple-based basic education and later training at an abacus academy. However, Ueshiba was a kinesthetic genius whose understanding and mastery of martial arts were highly intuitive. Often Ueshiba would explain Aikido in terminology that his students could not understand. Ueshiba would describe the underlying principles of Aikido by using analogies from the Japanese creation myths (i.e. the *Kojiki*, "The Record of Ancient Matters") and references to esoteric spiritualistic concepts similar to western concepts of grace, sin, and divine interventions.

This lack of a sophisticated pedagogy has been respectfully suggested by many of Ueshiba's disciples and is captured somewhat more candidly in this interview with Koichi Tohei.¹⁵

...Looking back on what Ueshiba Sensei did, it is clear that he would apply his techniques only after leading his opponent's mind. By contrast, we (students) were all trying to lead our opponents' bodies, and then trying to figure out how to throw them. Naturally they would resist and become impossible to throw.

In order to lead your opponent's mind, you must first have complete control over your own mind. If you can't control your own mind, you can't expect to be able to lead the minds of others.

Actually, in that sense, Ueshiba Sensei was not able to control his own mind; he would easily lose his temper or start saying completely nonsensical things. He had something to say, but could not express it without falling back on the Omoto religion. In this sense, I think it is pointless to imitate Ueshiba Sensei's inability to control his own mind...."

(Ueshiba Sensei,) would say things like: "There is nothing that I do not understand; the things I say even scholars and saints are incapable of understanding, and even I, though I am saying them, do not understand..."

It is impossible to understand this kind of talk! Even the relaxation Ueshiba Sensei taught was not explained in words, but rather something he demonstrated with his body...

In addition to the direct interactions between Kano and Ueshiba, the relation of Aikido and Judo was also shaped by the many students that have been followers of both arts. One of the most significant of these was Kenji Tomiki who tried to carry over some of the pedagogy of Judo into Aikido.⁴

... In 1936, Kano asked Tomiki to "incorporate into Judo the types of techniques that you are studying under Ueshiba. The difficulty is in developing a viable training method (for techniques that are potentially destructive as taught in old jujutsu)." Kano died in 1938 before completing his goal of incorporating *kakuritaisei no waza* (i.e. fighting techniques from distant positions) into competitive Judo. In 1940 Ueshiba awarded Tomiki the Aikido mastery status of *menkyo-kaiden*. In 1941 Tomiki was asked by the new head of the Kotokan to work on a committee along with Nagaoka and others to study *kakuri-taisei no waza*. Perhaps because of his role model experiences with Kano, Tomiki worked to systematize Aikido techniques into a system that could be better understood and taught. In 1952, Ueshiba invited Tomiki to introduce these innovations into the Tokyo Aikikai headquarters dojo. However, there was significant resistance from other senior instructors and after a brief attempt, Tomiki discontinued the effort and went on to teach his own methods at Wasada University...

Following the establishment of the Aikido headquarters dojo (i.e. *Hombu*) in Tokyo in 1948, Ueshiba adopted the modern Judo-style kyu-dan ranking system. Ueshiba considered the 8th Dan ranking to be the equivalent to the menkyo-kaiden teaching license that were used in the bujutsu styles that he had studied.¹

Methods of Practice

Senta Yamada, a *Shihan* (i.e. master teacher) in both Tomiki style *Aikido* and *Judo* has described the methods of practice of *Aikido* and *Judo* as follows²:

... The techniques of randori (i.e. freestyle exercises designed for education and sport) in Judo include: naga-waza (i.e. throws), katami-waza (i.e. grappling), shime-waza (i.e. strangle and choke holds), and kansetu-waza (i.e. bone locks). Aikido employs a number of kansetu-waza, but these typically differ from Judo kansetu-waza .

In Judo, most bone locks are applied during mat work, and then exclusively against the elbow joint. In Aikido, these bone locks are applied to any joint from the hand to the shoulder and are typically applied without allowing the attacker to get a firm hold.

Aikido also employs atemi-waza (i.e. strikes) which is used to control the distance between the attacker and the defender.

In Judo, randori typically takes the form of a controlled contest with strict rules that provide each player with an equal footing and taking advantage of the ability to utilize the Judo gi (i.e. uniform) as a handle for many techniques. Aikido randori practice does not include contests, therefore minimizing the dangers of injury while applying or receiving bone locks. Instead of two competitors with an equal footing, participants in Aikido randori assume the roles of attacker and defender. Because the techniques are applied at greater distance than Judo, there is no mat work and little dependence on the security of the attacker's hold of the defender's clothing. This allows for a greater ability for practice by older people and practice between people with significant differences in body size...

In a series of articles appearing in *Scientific American*, Jearl Walker¹⁴ observed many of the similarities between Judo and Aikido techniques. Both Aikido and Judo look to disrupt an opponent's balance as the primary method for defending against an attack. However, Walker also noticed a significant difference in application of the techniques. The Judo techniques tended to emphasize the principle of leverage over by creating a fulcrum so that a smaller mass could move a larger mass. In Judo, initiative (i.e. *sen*) is used to get the attacker into a position where the defender had the "mechanical advantage" and leverage can be applied. The Aikido techniques tended to emphasize momentum. Here initiative is used to deflect and/or accelerate an attacker's motions to the point of destabilization through overextension.

... Like Judo, Aikido is a martial art that demands an intuitive understanding of the physics of forces, torques, stability and rotational motion...The grace that each requires is not easily conveyed, but each technique can be broken into components that can be examined in terms of classical physics.Aikido is similar to judo in that it seeks to overcome the opponent's stability...Aikido employs many of the same principles of physics that are found in Judo....As in much of aikido, your opponent actually throws himself. He cannot prevent your forward motion because of the unstable posture in which you initially place him.

Even if he has superior body weight, he cannot stop the motion by pulling downward on your raised wrists. In such a position he can pull only along the length of your arms. The torque due to such a pull is zero because there is no “lever” ...

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