

A study on the tradition of Judo : Focusing on “qualitative thoughts on traditional Japanese values”

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Abstract

This study aimed to re-evaluate the diverse values of Judo from the perspective of physical techniques. It also attempted to clarify the various values in the Budo in order to further advance Judo while embracing its local and global characteristics.

The dilution of the culture of modern Judo is gaining attention as one of its problems, and the concepts of competition and victory are typical examples. However, the competitive nature of Judo is a valuable concept. Therefore, its traditional nature has to be maintained while including competitiveness. “Human development” is closely related to the tradition of Budo, and an attempt at “human development” is closely linked to the traditional idea of education in Japan. Thus, it clearly exhibits exposure to valuable concepts in conjunction with the learning of physical skills. In addition, it can be regarded as an activity that represents the culture of a “Path” that involves multifaceted growth at the same time. A discussion of aspects like that will also reveal some of the qualitative thoughts on traditional values unique to Japan.

Key words; Judo, Budo, Physical technique

I. The problem

Judo is a traditional Japanese Budo that was modernized into a sport by Kano. Therefore, local characteristics are incorporated to a great extent not only in the movement of the body but also in abstract values such as thought and purpose. Thus, one can easily imagine how globalization has addressed those unique characteristics of Judo. In the words of Murata, “internationalization allows Judo to exist only as a competitive sport.”¹⁾

This type of cultural transformation frequently becomes a major problem and leads to the loss of cultural essence. A discussion of the cultural alteration of Judo provides the best example. As Imafuku contends, “Judo has been presented to the world while the rules of competition have been changed, and now Judo, which is no longer Judo, is sweeping the world.”²⁾ This statement is a

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warning that Judo was losing its essential value. In other words, the globalization of Judo, which seeks to disseminate one of the unique cultural practices of Japan, reveals the local characteristics of each region; at the same time, it is linked to them and promotes diverse development.

From this point of view, the current study has focused on the concept of competition in Judo and it has considered the actual educational concept behind the Budo, which is understood as its intrinsic nature.

II. Purpose of this study

The current study aimed to determine the presence and originality of Judo in competition and education and to ascertain its current status. In addition, this endeavor should provide insight into globalization of Judo that reflects its local characteristics.

III. Judo and competition

Although it is based on traditional concepts, Judo is a practice that has been greatly influenced by globalization. To ascertain those changes, two words, namely, local and global, need to be correctly defined. According to the dictionary, global is “spanning the entire world,”³⁾ and local is “limited to a certain area or region.”⁴⁾

However, the two are not simply opposites. Aoki points out that globalization, which means “spreading around the world,”⁵⁾ has rendered individuals aware of cultural diversity in the course of steps to make the world more uniform. Phrased differently and to borrow the words of Aoki, differences in culture, values, lifestyles, and goals have become more evident with the progress of globalization.⁶⁾ Culture is closely related to way of life; thus, passing on a culture’s characteristics amidst globalization is an extremely difficult endeavor.

Judo has developed through various means across regions, but international competitions continue to be based on universal rules. Nevertheless, a universal value exists in competing (winning) even in a society composed of diverse values. Sarado asserts that the pursuit of victory and honor is pleasing and that humans seek to stand out from others. Thus, he states that people seek victory even if nothing else is available.⁷⁾ In addition, Huizinga argues that this propensity tends to be broadly interpreted to mean that the validity of the superiority obtained by winning is generally better. In addition, he points out that a construct greater than the value of the victory is generated.⁸⁾ That phenomenon leads to a strong attachment to victory (competition) and can lead to many harmful effects.

Recently, the National Judo Tournament for Elementary School Grades was abolished on the grounds that “overemphasizing competition among elementary school students who are still developing physically and mentally is not desirable.”⁹⁾ As demonstrated by these examples, the awareness of many problems associated with a competition format is widespread in the world of competitive Judo. Even when he was alive, Jigoro Kano considered Judo inadequate for mental and

physical training because the activities of student clubs at the time were very competition-oriented.¹⁰⁾ Thus, one can infer that there is room for discussion of the relationship between Judo and the concept of competition.

Alternatively, however, scholars have pointed out that competition is of great value to Judo. Ariyama argues that the contradiction arising from the degeneration of techniques due to theoretical developments could be prevented by introducing the competitive aspects of modern sports.¹¹⁾ In addition, Risei states that, “Kodokan Judo is not simply about emphasizing the rigorous aspect of Budo but is also something that soothes the soul, and in other words, it is embodied with the true meaning of sports.”¹²⁾ Kano also advocates the benefits of competitive matches¹³⁾ and he associates the potential for *Ishinhu* (ways of soothing the soul)¹⁴⁾ with the nature of Judo as a sport. Specifically, Kano can be interpreted to strongly advocate for the value of competition. Moreover, even if one were to examine the technical development of Judo, one would find that many practices and types of training have led to changes. Therefore, the development of Judo requires competition. In other words, competitive aspects are important for Judo.

Judo has developed with competition from its origin to the present. Therefore, one can understand that competition had an important role. Alternatively, however, controlling the human desire to compete was a major issue. In other words, passing on the traditional characteristics of Judo was also an important issue to address. Nakamura said that, “sports is a culture of quantitative thoughts on values. If sports can be thought of as a culture of qualitative thoughts on values, then Budo can be considered a form of comprehensive education.”¹⁵⁾ This perception of qualitative thoughts on values explained the original characteristics of Judo. Now that Judo is attracting attention as a sport, its qualitative thoughts on values that are unique to Japan need to be re-evaluated and disseminated while considering this trend.

IV. Judo and education

In understanding the qualitative thoughts on values particular to Japan, the educational component of Judo and Budo is very important. First, recreation is considered to be the original purpose of sports, so the educational aspect emerged once the culture matured. However, Budo has sought to teach skills and train human beings since the emergence of its predecessor, known as *Bujutsu* (battlefield Budo). This origin is also one of the reasons why “physical aspects” involving training were so important in Budo.

Kataoka defined physical education as a set of practices and said the following¹⁶⁾:

these techniques are not exercise techniques nor are they techniques that are limited in application to exercise settings. They are a set of practices that transcends the individuality of each person and that encompasses a person’s whole life based on universal aspects. They are set of practices related to the common denominator of being a human being, as symbolized by the body, and are irrespective of a person’s social status or occupation.

In other words, his argument is that physical education should not be viewed as a simple form of exercise that aims to improve physical ability. Instead, it is a systematic activity related to the entirety of human life. In addition, it is connected to a unique educational view observed in Judo and other Budo. Therefore, the results of Judo and Budo training needs to be comprehensively considered as part of character development when looking back on tradition.

Tomozoe describes the nature of character development in physical education as follows: "human development is achieved through the interaction of sports and actual human beings. At the same time, sports itself is created dialectically and transformed by human subjective action."¹⁷⁾ Similarly, Takizawa argues that "the body as defined by culture has its own physical culture, and the development of that primitive culture leads to physical culture."¹⁸⁾ This mutual relationship between culture and human beings is closely related to the traditional Japanese concept of education; at the same time, it is one of the clues in understanding tradition.

The mutual relationship between culture and human beings can also be observed in education through the two katas of Japanese culture. According to Ikuta, ancient Japanese traditional performing arts and Budo aimed to imbue the body with a cultural Kata through mere repetition and they focused primarily on training physical skills. However, the objective is to acquire and pass on "techniques," which exceeds the mere learning and teaching of physical skills.¹⁹⁾ In addition, Minamoto classifies the concept of Kata into four types.²⁰⁾ However, the Kata described by Ikuta is Kata as a style and Kata as a form, which are directly related to the aspects of a culture. In addition, type as style is responsible for the variable aspects of a culture whereas type as form is responsible for its constant aspects.²¹⁾ One can thus understand that learning through patterns is a method of learning which Kata plays an important role not only as a means of developing as a person but also in inheriting culture.

Culture is not limited to superficial material culture but is also a collection of diverse values. At the same time, the learning of physical skills acquired through the study of Kata indicates exposure to a wealth of cultural values. In other words, the link between the learning of physical skills and exposure to values is closely related to qualitative thoughts on values unique to Japan. The practice of simultaneously cultivating the mind and body, which is characteristic of Judo and other Budo, is frequently expressed as "mind-body training."²²⁾ Yuasa explains how Budo uses that method of training:²³⁾

In the history of Japan, samurai ruled for a long time since the Kamakura Shogunate. ... Therefore, even samurai were required to know arts such as poetic verse, love poems, and the tea ceremony. ... "Bun (Literature)" includes religion, learning, and art. It is a product of the workings of the "mind" such as knowledge and aesthetic sensibility. In contrast, "Bu (Budo)" is the training of physical skills. In other words, the training of "Bun (Literature)" and "Bu (Budo)," or "mind" and "body," was regarded as inseparable in Japanese history. This is why Budo are closely related to Buddhism and the arts and they are characterized by a high degree of inner spirituality.

The simultaneous training of the mind and body and efforts to integrate the two originally had different elements, such as being *bunbu-ryodo* (well-rounded), and that combined training can be understood as a single growth process to gain mental and physical knowledge. Character development, which simultaneously involves multifaceted growth, is commonly viewed as a Path in Japan. According to Yuasa, “A Path leads to the perfection of a person’s core, which involves the unification of both mental and physical ability.”²⁴⁾ In other words, a Path is “in contrast to the Chinese ‘Tao,’ which is the way of the universe; the Japanese Path emphasizes engaging in ‘traditional activities.’”²⁵⁾

According to Yano, the physical patterns represented by Kata are considered a Path and include their aesthetic aspects.²⁶⁾ Moreover, this discussion ties the unique Japanese sense of values to aesthetics. Considering the concept of a Path from the modern perspective reveals some of the qualitative thoughts on values particular to Japan. It will also reveal the presence of human development.

V. Conclusion

This study has sought to re-evaluate the various values of Judo from the viewpoint of physical techniques. This attempt has elucidated the diverse values contained in Judo, which seeks to develop further while including local and global characteristics.

Until recently, Budo such as Judo were considered traditional sports in Japan, but their traditional aspects have not been clearly defined. However, their inherent cultural aspects have been diluted with the advance of globalization; thus, those aspects and values need to be identified and defined.

The concept of competition and victory can be cited as a factor for the degradation of Judo. However, the cultural changes in Judo need to be managed while including such elements. The value of Budo is based on their qualitative thoughts on values, but tradition plays an important role in the educational aspect of Budo.

Personal development through Budo is closely related to traditional Japanese educational concepts. Traditional Japanese performing arts and Budo are said to aim to master and inherit techniques beyond the mere learning and teaching of physical techniques. In other words, human development through Budo clearly exhibits exposure to a wealth of values that accompanies the learning of physical skills and that reveals a Path involving multifaceted growth. Such discussions will elevate values unique to Japan to the level of aesthetics and will clarify some of the specific qualitative thoughts on values in Japan.

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