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WHAT IS JUDO? WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO SAY NOWADAYS?

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INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the European Judo Union (EJU) makes its slogan of „Judo - more than a sport!“. If, today, in 2019, this sentence has disappeared, the expression is still regularly repeated in the speeches, and we can question its relevance, on the coherence between acts and speeches, as on the historical veracity of this affirmation.

METHODS

The method consists in confronting Kanô Jigorô's writings with discourses as current practices, questioning both history and context.

JUDO, A SPORT

„Judo - more than sport!“ Faced with such an assertion, we must then be interested in the terms of the statement and ask first what a sport is, and then, if judo falls into this category, and if, finally, this definition contains it entirely. Although there may be nuances of interpretation in the different languages, since the slogan of the EJU was in English, and we are expressing ourselves in this paper in this language, we have to ask ourselves what is the definition of „sport“ in english:

- a game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a job
- all types of physical activity that people do to keep healthy or for enjoyment¹

We could multiply the examples in various dictionaries, the definitions would be similar and how not to recognize judo reading them? So, clearly, „Judo, a sport“.

ANY SPORT IS MORE THAN SPORT

What can differentiate judo from other sport(s)? Judo has values? Gymnastics or rugby too (and, in French, for example, to own values comes within the definition of „sport“). Judo is conscientiously fulfilling a citizenship mission? Is there even a sport's federation that does not claim this? Judo is a way / philosophy of life? Surfing is, too.

Since it was the EJU slogan, we could expect to find on its site a development, a demonstration of what judo is more than sport, but, unless I'm mistaken, on that date², nothing. On the other hand, there is a section entitled „Judo. The art of living“³, which features an eponymous documentary which, we are promised, „will be another proof of Judo being more than sport!“ Now, it is the juxtaposition of moving stories of people who have (re) built themselves through judo. Any sport could do the same.

In fact, all physical activity, as long as it goes beyond the simple framework of the game, of the strict competition, is, potentially, „more than sport“. This is the case of judo and, finally, if we limit ourselves to the English definition,

¹ Definition of „sport“: Cambridge Dictionay. (May 2019). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sport>

² Website accessed from March 2017 to May 2019.

³ Documentary: Judo ... The Art of Living (May 2019). Retrieved from <http://www.eju.net/judo--the-art-of-living-4258?language=en>

the assertion is true: judo is not only aimed at pleasure or recreation (although it can also be limited), so it is „more than sport“. And besides, to say that „judo is more than sport“ does not mean that it is not the case of other disciplines, it only affirms it implicitly. Should not we say, „Judo more than a sport“?

KANÔ AND SPORT

Compared to most disciplines, judo has the particularity to have a founder (but rugby or basketball⁴, for example, too), so we should therefore be interested in the way he felt about his his discipline as well as about sports. On this last point, first, Kanô Jigorô, who was appointed a member of the International Olympic Committee in 1909 (and until his death in 1938), founded the Dai nihon taiiku kyokai (Physical Education Association of Great Japan), in 1911, to organize the selections to the Olympic Games and which later gave the Japanese Olympic Committee. Having become the Japan Sport Association, it now oversees the national and local sports federations. Kanô obtained the 1940 Games in Tokyo and also organized, in 1917, the Far East Games. So, Kanô, champion of the sports movement? Let him speak:

„I thought that [the Olympic adventure] was good for promoting physical activity. [...] However, if we can not consider that the physical education offered at the Games is the most ideal, I thought that encouraging the practice was not so bad and that was one of my goals in participating.”⁵

„[...] sports are not designed for the purpose of physical education. Without concern for physical education, they pursue another objective, which is that of competition.”⁶

Therefore, it seems obvious that, for Kanô, „Judo, something else than sport“.

KANÔ AND JUDO

Judo was not created for recreational, competitive or even physical education purposes. And there, for once, we come to a distinctive point. Composed from the beginning of three „big stitches“ that are „forging the body“, „forming the spirit“, „the practice of combat”⁷, Kanô conceived it as the combination of three educations, but especially as a universal principle:

„Judo begins with a thorough study of warfare technique, extends to physical education, intellectual education, moral education and applies equally to clothing, food, habitat, social relations, the economy, and all areas of human life. [...] Judo consists in, whatever you want to do, to conceive the best objective and then to use the energy of the body and the heart most effectively. The best use of energy, the proper use of energy, are today’s judo. This is why it is not a martial technique but the name of a basic principle of human behavior.”⁸

What predominates in its creation and development is the spirit of formation of a man that Kanô does not envisage otherwise than in connection with others, with the other and where the purpose is „to complement ourselves“ and „to contribute to society”⁹ in order to achieve „mutual prosperity”¹⁰ through the study and understanding of „good use of energy”. So, clearly, „Judo, not a sport!”

⁴ Respectively William Webb Ellis (1806-1872), and James Naismith (1861-1939).

⁵ Kanô, J. (1937, March). Orinpicu taikai Tôkyô shôchi ni itaru made no jijô ni tsuite oyobi dôtoku no gensoku ni tsuite (About the circumstances that led to Tokyo’s hosting of the Olympic Games and moral principles). Chûtô Kyôiku.

⁶ Kanô, J. (1937, November). Jūdô no konpongi ni tsuite (About the fundamental meaning of judo) , Jūdô.

⁷ Kanô, J. (1915, February). Kôdôkan jūdô gaisetsu (dai-ikkai) (General explanation of Kôdôkan jūdô), Jūdô, fév.

⁸ Kanô, J. (1938). Jūdô no konpon seishin (The fundamental spirit of judo). Dai nihon jūdô-shi.

⁹ Kanô, J. (1915, February). Kôdôkan jūdô gaisetsu (dai-ikkai). op. cit.

¹⁰ Kanô, J. (1925, January). Michi chikashi to iedomo yukazareba itarazu (The path is close but if we do not go there, we do not reach it). Sakkô.

JUDO AND COMPÉTITION

However, judo competition already existed in Kanô's time. But it is important to distinguish different models. Matches with referee was set up by Kanô himself, through *tsuki nami shôbu* („monthly matches”, from 1883) and *kôhaku shiai* („meetings of reds against whites”, as early as 1884) but not in a sporting idea: the idea being, compared to the daily exercise of the *randori*, based on trial and error, to reserve a time to test its technical efficiency in a closed situation. The referee is only there to make the experience objective, to validate the action from the outside. On the other hand, from the beginning of school judo, and in a context of development of activities as well of Western ideas, inter-school competitions developed to the great displeasure of Kanô and his idea of judo, causing him to often take the pen to condemn them and multiply the warnings. Yet, he has been involved in the organization of the first championships of Japan, in 1930, warning however: „while recognizing that driving judo in the manner of a sport is a requirement of today's trend, one has to never forget, even for a moment, what is the specificity of judo”¹¹. „Judo, also of sport”.

Nevertheless, as we said, the judo that we know today, the Olympic discipline judo, is clearly a sport. And even, essentially a sport. The rules of competition govern the practice of *randori* in any dojo. Let's prohibit leg attacks and an entire part of the technical heritage disappears in a few months! Sport requires equality, and therefore we come to think only in categories of sex, age and weight when the situations of life to which judo ought to prepare us do not have to deal with.

It is important to face reality: the very need to assert the opposite represents an admission of the fact that, today, „Judo, nothing but a sport”. How did it happen?

JUDO AND BUDO

Even in Japan, judo is so confused with sport that few adults practice and most young people stop after university. Why and how did Japan itself forget that judo is no sport and made it something like „an entirely sport activity”? To understand this, one must look at the historical process.

When Kanô invented judo, he did two things: he proposed a rational synthesis of what existed, the jûjutsu, and emphasized to concentrate not on the practical object but on the underlying principle, which must allow the man to build oneself, individually as socially. He invented what was about to become budo, in the modern sense: a way of building the individual through the study of martial technique.

From 1895, the Dai nihon butoku kai („Greater Japan Martial Virtue Society”, hereinafter Butokukai) undertook this same work of synthesis from other methods of combat, including the saber, which will give, at the dawn of the 1920s, kendo, while at the same time the term budo is used to refer to these new disciplines emerging from ancient practices. However, the Butokukai had branches in all prefectures along with, since 1905, a teacher training school, and therefore a huge potential of dissemination of its methods and designs.

At the same time, Nitobe Inazô (1862-1933) published *Bushido, the soul of Japan* (1899), describing the specifically Japanese value system, then declining compared to that imported from the West, and based on the code of conduct of the ancient warriors, precisely those who practiced the warlike arts from which budo came from. With the military successes of Japan, the territorial gains, the rise of nationalism, the practitioners of budo - and especially through the Butokukai - will be the apologists of the Bushido, the custodians of the old values, perceived as a specifically Japanese way of success in the modern world, an alternative to assert and defend to the Western model.

¹¹ Kanô, J. (1929, November). Jūdō no kyōgi undō (judo as a competition discipline). Sakkō.

In the 1930s and the years of war, Butokukai was very close to militarist circles. This is why, after the defeat, while Japan is occupied by the allies, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers will forbid budo in schools. In order to be able to find their way back to school, budo had to demonstrate that they do not pretend to train the mind, but simply propose a sporting dimension, like any other physical activity. And they focused so much on this sporting aspect, that they came to deny, then to forget, any other ambition. In the end, wearing its sporting garments, judo returned to schools in 1951, and kendo in 1956.

SPORT AND SOCIETY

If Japan is, historically speaking, a special case in its relationship between budo and sports, what is striking at the global level, it is our inability to think the physical activity otherwise than through the sporting prism, and more in relation to the competition. To return to judo, which claims to be „more than sport”, even the documentary of the EJU, mentioned above, is constantly referring to it, out of which, decidedly, no way, no judo and, even, no judoka. The French Judo Federation, explains that if you are not good in competition, you can always become referee or club manager... And, why not, just judoka? Because out of the performance, no salvation! Sport does not only accommodate the capitalist model, it is its school, its spearhead, its showcase.

In judo, we even turned the *kata* into competition! That is, we have moved from a research of principles to a search for expression, to be judged from outside on the appearance. The general trend is such that the term „physical education” which has so much occupied debates between pedagogues from the mid-nineteenth century to much of the twentieth century disappears in favor of „sport”. Again, take the example of Japan and Kanô: the latter creates the Dai nihon taiiku kyokai (Physical Education Association of Greater Japan) in 1911, which became the Nihon taiiku kyokai (Japan Physical Education Association) in 1948 to become the Nihon supôtsu kyokai (Japan Sport Association)¹². This modification highlights the general and international confusion between sport and physical education.

CONCLUSION: JUDO, THINK OUT THE BOX

Thus, sport - competition - occupies the entire space of physical activity. Yet what judo has to offer us is different. The most glaring proof is before our eyes: the degree, the *dan*. *Dan* is not a ranking, it shows that in judo, it is not about being stronger than the other, but to build ourselves. What we learn is to get back on our feet, to come back again and again, to keep trying and doing our best, for a better understanding of the mechanisms that manage our lives, our social relations.

Judo is a craft. He transforms us into a craftsman of ourselves, and each into a small workshop of collective realization, of society building. And that is applicable in every life, for each of us, it does not depend on any level at all, it's just about working to be better than we were the day before, and since we have progressed, so goes the world, even infinitely.

To make, for no other purpose than to carve each time a little more, a little better, our stone, not so that it is more beautiful than that of the others, but so that it perfectly fits to the common building and take its place, both indistinct and indispensable. Judo appeals to our thirst not for perfection but for improvement. So, the problem is not that it's nothing / more / less than sport, it's about taking the idea of sport out of the question and thinking about judo with no reference to it. What judo has to say is: just work, in the dojo, our workshop, to be better than you were the day before, to make the society better and stronger than it was yesterday. And do not bother nor worry about any result nor sport or competition achievement.

Then, no need for a performative utterance when a single word is enough: „Judo”, that's all!

¹² In its official name in English, the word „sport” replaced the word „Athletic” as early as 1960.