

A History of the Kodengan

by William S. Morris, Phd.

In preparing the manuscript of "The Esoteric Principles of Judo" I have used photographs of an original Torah no Maki diploma awarded to Bud Estes of the Chico, California, Judo Academy; a translation of his own diploma prepared in 1939 for Ray Law of Law's Judo School in Oakland, California, by Mr. Akira Miyazaki¹ of the Imperial Japanese Embassy; and some notes translated by Mr. S. Yanagihara of Judo International in San Francisco, California. In addition, I am indebted to a number of Japanese and Chinese students attending Napa Junior College for suggestions on rendering specific characters, and finally, I must thank Mr. Shimizu, Editor of the Japanese newspaper Hokubei Mainichi, for resolving several last-minute questions.

In general, however, I have sought to render the spirit rather than the letter of the text insofar as I was able to recognize it; consequently, several passages differ markedly from earlier translations. Those familiar with the difficulties of rendering complex Sino-Japanese philosophical concepts into English will, I hope, not judge the result too harshly.

This text suggests the reason so many people find in the martial arts a fascination and deep meaning that exceeds any simple preoccupation with sport or physical culture, but it is not my purpose to offer a detailed explication here of Professor Okazaki's philosophy of judo. The text speaks for itself.

Professor Henry Seishiro Okazaki, the Father of American Jujitsu, founded the Kodengan in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1929, and dedicated it to the propagation of judo and jujitsu among Americans of all racial groups.

"Kodengan" means "School of Ancient Tradition" and denotes both his school in Honolulu and the Okazaki or Kodengan Jujitsu system. Both the Professor and the Okazaki system were for many years the focus of controversy, but this inspiring and methodical system for teaching self defense jujitsu in combination with competitive judo remains one of the most respected self defense systems in the United States today.

To his earliest disciples, Professor Okazaki presented a diploma in the form of a Torah no Maki, or scroll, which he personally inscribed. The scroll detailed the history of jujitsu² - or judo, as it was then beginning to be called - a personal history of the Master himself, lists of the arts or courses the disciple had mastered interspersed with certain admonitions, precepts, and cautions, which, taken together, set forth in his own words the Master's philosophy of judo.

Professor Okazaki thought of judo first as a means of developing character and second as a method of physical and mental development. This statement of "The Esoteric Principles of Judo," embodying as it does both Zen Buddhist and Confucian ethical concepts, remains as valid today as when it was first written and certainly deserves the thoughtful consideration of all who practice the martial arts.

1 Mr. Miyazaki translated M. Anderson's diploma.

2 Notes to Spelling: There are several common ways of rendering Jujitsu because prior to 1957 there was no agreed to method for romanizing Japanese words. Depending on which dictionary one bought the spelling could be: JiuJitsu, JiuJutsu, JuJitsu or Jujutsu. Since 1957, there has been an official method and agreed to standard. Today the proper spelling is Jujutsu. However, where Jujitsu is used as part of a name its spelling is kept as used. When it is used to describe the Art and Science then the approved spelling is used.

Professor Okazaki, as the text shows, uses the words judo and ju-jitsu interchangeably for reasons which become clear when one realizes that the word judo, or "gentle way," which stressed the ethical and philosophical concept of do, or a "way" in harmony with natural law, was just beginning to supplant the older term jujitsu, or "gentle practice," as a popular generic term for the whole of the Japanese national art of self defense formerly practiced by the Samurai or "warrior class."

More recently, however, the Japanese have stressed judo as a sport based on jujitsu rather than a defense art, and consequently the word jujitsu remains the only generic term denoting the entire art.

Vast Influence

Overlooked today and almost forgotten is the name of Henry Seishiro Okazaki, founder of the American Jiu Jitsu Institute of Hawaii, who deserves more than any other the fame of being first to teach Jiu Jitsu to any American without distinction as to race, color, or creed.

Even though his distinctive contributions to the introduction and development of Judo and Jiu Jitsu in the United States has been slighted or ignored in the published histories of the martial arts, his system- the Kodokan – remains the most widely taught system of self-defense Jiu Jitsu in this country today.

His influence on American professional wrestling has been far more extensive than is generally recognized; his innovations in methods of instructions are widely imitated, and his system of kappos and restorations massage is conceded to be the most complete and effective system of its kind.

The influence of his teachings was felt directly and indirectly. Even a casual perusal of Field Manual 21-150, Unarmed Defense for the American Soldier, June 30, 1942, reveals to the informed observer that the official basis for self-defense instructions in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II was the Okazaki Jiu Jitsu System, just as subsequent official changes in the manual reflect the growing post-war influence of the Kodokan Judo Institute of Japan.

The reason for the curious silence on the subject of Master Okazaki seems to stem from the postwar ascendancy of the Kodokan Judo Institute of Japan, which has progressively absorbed or drawn into its sphere of influence most, but not all, of the older Jiu Jitsu schools.

In England the names of Yukio Tani (1899), S.K. Uyenshi (1900), and G. Koizumi (1906), are still known and honored. In France Mikonosuke Kawaishi is credited with having founded a distinctive system of Judo and Jiu Jitsu adapted to the French temperament.

Both the French and the British Jiu Jitsu systems allied themselves with the Kodokan in the early 1920s for purposes of accreditation and black belt degree registration and consequently adapted the sports Judo curriculum.

The American Jiu Jitsu Institute, however, remained autonomous from its beginning, although Master Okazaki acknowledged, following the visit of Master Kano to his school in Honolulu, that "...what was formerly learned through the practice of Jiu Jitsu has now been reduced to a fine moral principle called Judo - 'the way of gentleness'."

Although he subsequently renamed his school The American Judo and Jiu Jitsu Institute, Okazaki's use of the word Judo indicates he felt it stood for a moral principle rather than a particular school (*Ryugi*).

Poor Health

Born in Fukushima Prefecture on the Island of Honshu, Japan, January 28, 1890, Henry Okazaki came to Hawaii in 1906, when he was 16 years old. Informed by a doctor that he was suffering from a lung disease, Henry Okazaki took up Jiu Jitsu under Master Kichimatsu Tanaka at the Shinyu-Kai Dojo in an effort to regain his health.

He devoted himself to the martial arts, practicing relentlessly six nights a week, and in the course of time completely recovered. Believing that his new life and superb health were due entirely to the practice of Jiu Jitsu he determined to dedicate the rest of his life to its practice and propagation.

Masters Arts

During the following years, Master Okazaki studied under various masters in Hilo, Hawaii, and mastered the Yoshin, Iwaga, and Kosogabe schools of Jiu Jitsu. At the same time, he acquired the art of Ryukyuan boxing (Karate) from a Japanese of Okinawa Prefecture, the technique of Filipino knife play from a Filipino, the art of throwing a dirk from Spaniard, the ancient and forbidden deadly art of Lua from a Hawaiian, and the Chinese art of Kung Fu from Master Wo Chong, a 78-year-old Chinese from Kohala. He did not restrict himself exclusively to oriental martial arts but studied American boxing and wrestling with a view to adapting Jiu Jitsu to American styles of fighting.

Accepts Challenge

In 1921, Okazaki accepted a challenge from a heavyweight professional boxer, K.O. Morris, who claimed to have toured Japan and defeated Judo and Jiu Jitsu men with boxing. Okazaki threw the challenger and broke his arm, decisively defeating his opponent, although sustaining himself a broken nose in the process. This victory did much to enhance the reputation of Jiu Jitsu in the Islands and abroad.

In 1924 Okazaki toured Japan and studied Shibukawaryu, Yoshin-ryu, and Namba- Shoshin-ryu systems of Jiu Jitsu. At Kodokan he was awarded a rank of 3rd Degree (Sandan).

Busy Trip

While in Japan, he visited more than fifty dojos, mastered 675 different kinds of techniques or forms, and made a special study of kappo and sehukujitsu (sic) (restorative massage) as well as physical therapy. Gradually he evolved a system of self-defense Jiu Jitsu comprising courses for men, women and children, and including methods of defense against knife, sword, club, gun, and bayonet.

Starts Business

For a time following his return from Japan, Okazaki taught Jiu Jitsu on Maui, testing and improving his system. Then, in 1930, he moved to Honolulu and opened the Nikko Sanatorium of Restoration Massage. His Sanatorium was the first accredited massage school in the Territory at that time. He was instrumental in getting the government to require certification for massage practice and establishing means for certificating massage schools.

Many famous personalities came to the Sanatorium to meet, be taught by or treated by Okazaki. Among the more famous were President Franklin D. Roosevelt, actress Shirley Temple, actor George Burns and Olympic athlete / actor Johnny Weismuller.

However, Okazaki was lacking in business experience and might have failed but for Pete Baron, a prominent masseur and physical therapist in Hawaii. Pete taught Okazaki how to operate a commercial massage sanatorium and trained him in Swedish massage techniques. In appreciation, Okazaki offered to teach Baron Jiu Jitsu.

At that time, both Judo and Jiu Jitsu were regarded as secrets to be passed on only to those of Japanese ancestry and many members of the Japanese community in Hilo frowned heavily on Okazaki for teaching non-Japanese, even though Professor Kano had been making world tours promoting the study of Kodokan Judo.

Names System

Okazaki called the system he evolved Danzan Ryu – the Hawaiian Island System. Another name associated with his school and system is Kodenkan – the School of the Ancient Tradition.

Builds Gym

Baron urged Okazaki to throw open Jiu Jitsu instruction to any worthy American regardless of national origin and to train disciples who would introduce Jiu Jitsu throughout the United States. Recognizing the merit of this suggestion, Okazaki agreed and classes began. The first class only had three students who practiced break falls on a concrete floor, but realizing that these spartan conditions discouraged new students, Okazaki procured thirty mats.

His classes attracted so many students that in 1936 he built a facility in Honolulu. The name of his Dojo, Kodenkan, remained unchanged.

Towards the end of the 1930's several of Professor Okazaki's senior students decided to venture out on their own (with Okazaki's permission) and began opening Jujutsu classes in Hawaii. This was clearly out of a need to expand this popular activity as evident by the overflowing classes at the Kodenkan. As a result, these new schools would soon graduate their own students.

In order to maintain cohesion among the various schools, Okazaki organized a guild in 1936, which was first called the Hawaiian Jiu Jitsu Guild. The Guild changed its name in 1939 to The American Jujitsu Guild which became a Corporate body in 1941 under Royal Hawaiian Charter. It was to undergo yet one more name change and become The American Jiu Jitsu Institute of Hawaii in 1943.

While attempting to form his first Guild, Okazaki called together many Jujutsu masters. At one meeting, one Jujutsu master decided to challenge Professor Okazaki in an effort to upbraid him and cause him to change his teachings. Professor Okazaki quickly defeated this challenger and held the man helpless with a leglock. Then with complete disdain, he further insulted his challenger.

This did little to endear him to his community, but Professor Okazaki's point was made! He was his own man and would not be coerced by anyone of the Japanese community. He would continue to teach all based on their own merit.

Kodenkan

The Japanese characters which comprise the name of the Judo and Jujutsu school of our founder, Professor Henry S. Okazaki of Hawaii have the following meaning:

The first character **Ko** means “ancient”, of “olden times”, or “senior”. The second character **den** denotes “transmission” or “tradition”. The third character **kan** means “school”. The name Kodenkan, therefore, may be translated in two ways. Each way accurately renders the characters and each way accurately characterizes the Okazaki Judo and Jujitsu System.

First, Kodenkan may be translated as “The School of the Ancient Tradition, and in fact, the Okazaki system is a synthesis of the best Arts of the ancient Jujutsu schools.

In a second sense, however, Kodenkan may be rendered as “The school in which seniors transmit the tradition”. This translation describes the method of instruction taught in the Kodenkan: senior students teach junior students in the spirit which Professor Okazaki declared embodied the spirit of the Hawaiian word **kokua** - “to cooperate, or help one another.” By helping to teach the junior students under the supervision of the school head, the senior students not only increased their own knowledge and improved their own techniques, but also quickly became trained instructors of the courses they mastered.

The System

The system is remarkably simple and ingenious. After strenuous warm-up exercises, the beginner first practices break falls which Professor Okazaki termed Sutemi. The falling techniques, though more extensive, resemble those of Aikido more than those of sports Judo, because the emphasis was, then as now, on self defense rather than sport. Concurrent with Sutemi practice, the beginner is taught the twenty self-defense hand arts called Yawara. Essentially, these arts resemble basic escapes and wrist flexes of Daitoryu Aikijutsu, from which they were originally adapted. (They also are closely associated with Chinese Chin Na.)

After learning to fall safely, the beginner is taught Nage no Kata - 20 throws, Shime no Kata - 25 submission arts, and Oku no Kata - 25 combination arts. These katas constitute his basic instruction in Judo and are prerequisites for promotion to green belt and third brown belt. In addition he learns the rudiments of massage and lomi-lomi (a Hawaiian massage using the feet) Women may elect to pursue a special course in ladies' Yawara.

As he progresses to senior brown belt rank, the student begins studying the first of the black belt Jiu Jitsu arts, Shinin no Maki; and when he attains black belt rank, he is taught kappo and restoration massage; the knife, club, and gun defense arts; and the special police arts. There is also a special course for Ladies self defense that has evolved over time from Master Okazaki's original course.

Instruction in the higher black belt arts continues gradually up to fifth rank and includes two series of secret Jiu Jitsu arts: Shinyo no Maki and Shinjin no Maki, as well as Kappo Sappo (cure or kill), for like all the ancient Jiu Jitsu systems, the Okazaki system provides a system of restoration for every deadly art, and the two are taught concurrently.

In the Dojo, Master Okazaki stressed the ancient principles of philosophical and moral training while retaining the best of the Arts of self-defense and restoration. Judo and Jujutsu were thus combined into a working Art taught simultaneously, achieving a true synthesis of ancient and modern Arts in a complete system of self defense and character development.

The Contract

In keeping with the promise to Pete Baron to promote the teaching of Jujutsu in the United States, Professor Okazaki told several of his students that if they promised to teach his system to all without regard to race, he would teach them what he knew and train them as diligently as he could. Okazaki took several and began their training anew. This was not inside on the mat, but outside on the concrete. He taught them the fundamentals of rolling and falling on the hard surface. To encourage absolute precision in technique, he would lay two thick boards down parallel to each other, leaving just barely enough room between them for a man to lie in the falling position. Then he instructed the students in this special class to fall between these two boards. The graduates have noted that those in this class learned to fall relaxed and with absolute precision, because of the concrete and the boards. Any error in form or aim was immediately and painfully apparent. The harsh training proved too much for some in that class and they quit. But some stayed. They related that when they were finally allowed inside on the mats again that the mats felt just like pillows to them. The training had taught them to fall from just about anything – completely relaxed. By then, Sutemi had become completely ingrained and would provide the basis on which they would develop form in the Arts they already knew and those they would later be taught.

Fame

Okazaki became widely known and respected in the Islands, not merely as a teacher of Jujutsu, but as a physical therapist. On one occasion he was called upon to treat President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who suffered from insomnia during a state visit to Honolulu.

In the early 30s, Okazaki achieved a brief literary fame when one of his students wrote a science-fiction story for the Amazing Stories Quarterly in which one of the characters was based on the professor himself.

Pearl Harbor

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor Okazaki was twice arrested and interned, but his American friends and students quickly came to his rescue and affected his release. The Hawaiian Jiu Jitsu Institute was thrown open to servicemen stationed in the islands, and many studied there.

Spread of Okazaki Judo and Jujutsu

In spite of opposition from members of his own race, Okazaki persevered, and his system of teaching spread throughout the Islands. Wrestlers on the tour dropped in to observe and remained to study techniques, and consequently the term Sutemi for break fall still survives among American professional wrestlers as do many of the more spectacular throws and mat pins drawn from the advanced katas.

As Professor Okazaki's students returned to the mainland, some began their own Jujutsu schools. Among them were Professor Law, who established his school in Oakland late in 1939, followed by Professor Bud Estes, who established his school in Chico on May 1, 1940. They in turn were followed shortly by Professor Rickerts and Professor Cahill and others as well.

Professor Okazaki had dreamed of having a school teaching his system in every state in the Union and, in 1940, some of the immediate students of Professor Okazaki met in the Bay Area to form an organization to promote Danzan Ryu here on the mainland of the United States. After several meetings, the beginning of the war on December 7, 1941 brought a sudden end to such effort because of difficulty in traveling.

After the war was over, the Professor's students again banded together to attempt to make a reality of Professor Okazaki's dream of having a school teaching his system in every state of the Union and in 1949 a number of disciples whom the Professor had initiated into the highest Arts of Danzan Ryu established the American Judo and Jujitsu Federation (AJJF) to implement this dream which now seemed well on its way to ultimate realization.

On May 21, 1958, the A.J.J.F. Incorporated as a non-profit organization. It set forth as its purpose "to maintain the highest principles of the science of Judo and Jiu Jitsu and to propagate its teachings and philosophy to all persons regardless of race, color, creed, or religion, and in accordance with democratic American principles."

Great Debt

In 1951, Master Okazaki died. His fight to overcome a lung disease 45 years earlier had been the opening round in a successful effort to open the door to Judo for thousands of Americans who owe their participation in the Martial Arts to his work.

It is a great debt.