

Koryu-no-kata and the Key Thoughts of Aikido **Produced by Kenji Tomiki**

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Contents

1. What is Tomiki's basic thoughts on katas?
(1) Practicality / *Kuzushi* (2) Controlling / No wounding (3) *Ido-ryoku*
 2. The meaning of Koryu-no-kata
(1) The spirit of Koryu-no-kata
(2) Behavioral patterns
(3) As a significant tool to improve your practical ability
 3. The difference between *kata* and *embu* or *embu-kyogi*
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1. What are Tomiki's basic thoughts on katas?

The aikido that Professor Kenji Tomiki produced was comprised of two parts: 1) Tomiki's thoughts on martial arts and 2) combative sports and his training system. Each of the parts that follow includes the following key points:

(1) Practicality

Tomiki thought that practicality in a real fight, kata and randori is indispensable to aikido following Jigoro Kano's way of thinking (See, Shishida, 2010, 2011), so he emphasized the ability to completely defend against any attacks in practice, and showed a little criticism to Morihei Ueshiba's showy demonstrations after Ueshiba's success in Tokyo in prewar times, though he respected his excellent skill. Because the practicality of jujutsu/judo/aikido is realized just by *kuzushi* (balance breaking) or *tsukuri* (two factors of *kuzushi*), Tomiki emphasized its importance to aikido a few years before his death.

That is why I hastily constructed **the training system of *tsukuri*** while consecutively asking him about the sequence of the training system at the summer training camp of Waseda University Aikido Club (hereafter WUAC) in 1978. Mr. T. Nariyama also joined the camp at that time. The training system of *tsukuri* was

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composed of two training systems, that of atemi-waza and kansetsu-waza. The two Shihans (Nariyama and Shishida), as Tomiki's two successors in those days, made an effort to diffuse the system all over the world. I felt, however, something strange several years later. WUAC's students who practiced seriously did not always become greater practitioners by following the system. They continued to win at the students' championships without using the training system, so it was apparent that the training system is not always crucial. I have not denied this, but I do not force students to practice it.

Long afterward, I gradually realized our misunderstanding. I understood that the training system of kansetsu-waza was not always real *kuzushi* but only method to break balance at some specialized situations. I also noticed that the training system for atemi-waza included only half of what was needed for *tsukuri*. Thanks to Master Tadayuki Sato's instruction, I saw the importance of acquiring the skill of how to follow an opponent after initially touching him with a palm. [See, Shishida, 2015 a, b]

The people who left the JAA later in 2012 seem to have had a strong belief that the training system is complete. Since around 2007, they promoted the belief that Shishida rejected the *tsukuri* training system, instead of promoting that Shishida studied how to improve our system in a scientific way. On the other hand, I thought that *kuzushi* is not a method in itself, but it is something delicate that lies hidden behind the method, namely, the power of balance breaking.

We should understand that it is impossible to determine a criteria or a fundamental method unless we improve skills through a scientific process with a humble mind. We have to study *kuzushi* according to each technique, because the training system of *tsukuri* is one of several methods that may appear in several different occasions.

(2) Controlling / No wounding

The basic 17 was created as the kata of Toshu randori. Once thinking of the 5 elbow techniques or 4 wrist techniques, you can understand that the spirit of each technique has a consistency, which means controlling without injury.

Atemi-waza was originally a major part of jujutsu techniques that strikes on a vital point, so it injures an opponent. But Tomiki changed it to a palm or an arm for the sake of safety. You will be able to understand if you learn a correct *zanshin* of the way of *kote-gaeshi*, for example.

Some instructors emphasize the form of *kime* (to apply a technique piercingly) after pressing the uke down on a mat by *kotehineri* at the kata of the basic 17. It comes from ignorance about Tomiki's basic thoughts on the basic 17.

Ex., In **Kotehineri**, **Kotegaeshi**, Tenkai-kotehineri, or Tenkai-kotegaeshi

(3) Ido-ryoku²

The previous two Shihans of the JAA believed that Ido-ryoku is the ability of a flash movement to an opponent. So one of my friends translated it as a locomotive

² Precisely, Ido-ryoku is not included in the category of Tomiki's basic thoughts in katas but in the basic category of thoughts on techniques.

power, and everyone practiced it a lot, based on that description.

But now I can define Ido-ryoku as **the effectiveness of physical movement** that works even without a locomotive power in a mutual relation between two practitioners. I think that the reason why this misunderstanding happened to us was due to the limited knowledge of the two Shihans those days. They did not know, for example, Tomiki's important instruction about how to move with gradual steps and its theory. Tomiki mentioned, "A straight line has unlimited dots. Try to move on all dots in the line", according to Mr. Tadayuki Sato. It is the basic practice that we have to practice in the way of slow and steady movement.

Ex., **In Oshitaoshi, Udegaeshi**, Hikitaoshi, Udehineri, or Ushiroate

2. The meaning of Koryu-no-kata

(1) The spirit of Koryu-no-kata

The spirit of Koryu-no-kata is not the same as the kata of randori or the basic 17. This kata was formed while referring to the spirit and form of katas in the Kodokan Judo with the Japanese behavioral pattern of assuming the conditions of a real fight. So if necessary, a practitioner can show the form of *kime* while careful to avoid injuring one's partner. Tomiki hates ostentation, or to show strength by applying *kime* too much, such as when a partner shows his defeat by tapping the mat strongly.

(2) Behavioral patterns

The behavioral patterns are determined by Tomiki and his senior student Master Hideo Oba, while referring to the way of the Kodokan and various Japanese martial arts. The behavioral patterns are also influenced by the samurai code. However, since around 30 years ago, the behavioral patterns in the Koryu-no-kata (Koryu Daisan) in particular has been gradually changing far from the original that Tomiki & Oba had created.

(3) As a significant tool to improve your practical ability

The Koryu-no-kata is not a tool to demonstrate at a grading test or *embu-kyogi* but to improve your skill, so we have to be keen to study the balance breaking of each technique after having acquired the method of practice.

3. The difference between *kata* and *embu* or *embu-kyogi*

Tomiki had never referred to *embu* in his life. Judging from my long experience in aikido and study, the word *embu* (to practice martial arts) was used as a part of the name of a training field or room (*embu-jo*) in early modern times. *Embu-jo* also came to mean demonstration of martial arts at a field or a room. Since in around 1973, *embu-kyogi* started to be held as a public event at the student championship of Tomiki Aikido. Master Oba seems to have added *embu-kyogi* (*embu*) to the randori event in the all Japan student championship in 1971. He seems to have wanted to encourage students in the Kansai area who only practice *kata*. According to Mr. T. Sato, Tomiki mentioned only the fact to him with dissatisfied look when he visited Tomiki to report that he joined the *embu-kyogi* with Koryu-Daigo-no-kata. Judging from the common sense of Japanese martial arts, *embu-kyogi* is out of the question to him, because it is impossible to avoid that practitioners come who want to exaggerate their performance to make a false show of power. Exaggeration is at the opposite end of the practicality in aikido that Tomiki pursued. On the other hand, *kata* is a tool to improve practical skill, the power of scientific investigation, and character building, compared with *embu* that is just a display of power. We have to understand that Tomiki's goal are those above mentioned through *kata* and randori, and that he has no concept of *embu* for realizing his goal.

With consideration based on the facts, we should improve the way that *embu-kyogi* should be. The spirit of evaluation methods of *embu-kyogi* will be considered as follows:

- Not to value the exaggeration and affectation by a showy demonstration, so to deduct points for them.
- To value a simple and refined demonstration. An air of austere elegance.
- Not to decide the outcome of a contest if two demonstrations are disparate in elegance.

The affirmation of a draw in a contest.

So we have a responsibility to train good sommeliers who can distinguish the delicate difference between similar performances through our own study and practice with a beginner's heart, if we want to keep up this event with the spirit of Tomiki's basic thoughts.

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