

Kime-no-kata: The Heart of Judo
Bridge to the past, training for the future

A judo student's attentive study and practice can use *Kime-no-kata* (the Form of Decision, meaning its techniques are meant to end in a decisive win over an opponent), as a **bridge between traditional jujutsu and modern judo** as it embodies martial, combative aspects of *jujutsu* while allowing opportunities to demonstrate the more modern principles and philosophy that define judo in accordance with Kano's vision. This synthesis demonstrates Jigoro Kano's vision of transforming the practice of *jujutsu waza* techniques from simple combatives that preserve the core elements of effective self-defense to training for self-improvement and societal benefit. Kano's description of *Kime-no-kata* was simple; he wrote that it is "the heart of judo", confirming its central importance to the art as he envisioned it. He specifically recommended it to study "winning or losing" while noting that it has value both as physical education and as a martial art.

Preservation of Jujutsu Techniques

Kime-no-kata directly **draws its techniques from the classical jujutsu** systems *Tenshin Shinyo-ryu* and *Yoshin-ryu*, which Kano studied extensively. These schools emphasized practical combat techniques meant to neutralize opponents in real-life "actual combat" scenarios (*jissen*) of attacks and counterattacks meant to include quick, decisive and potentially lethal counterattacks.

Traditional Roots in Technique:

- The techniques of *Kime-no-kata* are simple, direct attacks against *tori* the defender / demonstrator and defenses by *uke* the attacker against a range of basic armed and unarmed attacks (e.g., being seized, strikes, knife, and sword attacks) and practical self-defense methods characteristic of *jujutsu*.
- The proper movements and tactics of the defensive role in the *kata* are informed by the essential elements of classical martial arts, such as maintaining posture, controlling distance, and exploiting the biomechanical weaknesses and openings for counterattacks created by *uke*'s attacks.

In adopting the *Koshiki-no-kata* of *Kito-ryu* more or less intact for judo, Kano sought to provide an exemplar for the study of the more complex aspects of *kuzushi* off balancing. When he developed *Kime-no-kata* from traditional *jujutsu* after studying the techniques of scores of schools, Kano sought to **provide an exemplar incorporating the basics of classic armed and unarmed attack and defense**. These two *kata* act as endpieces for a range of judo techniques, and the latter, if taught and transmitted correctly, ensures that *jujutsu*'s combat effectiveness will not be lost as judo evolves.

Transition to Modern Judo

While *Kime-no-kata* preserves a number of traditional, practical *jujutsu* techniques created hundreds of years ago, it also **provides a vehicle to practice and train the philosophic aspects of judo**, developed by Kano *shihan* a mere hundred years ago. This could be seen to embody Kano's intent to preserve and maintain judo's combat efficiency while creating a modern discipline to train personal development and learn socially responsible ethical principles to pursue better personal and social life.

Judo's Philosophical Overlay on *Kime-no-kata*

- It can be practiced and exercised to manifest *seiryoku zenyo* (maximum efficiency with minimal effort), which is evident in streamlined, efficient techniques that avoid unnecessary movements and use minimal strength to control or incapacitate *uke* the attacker.
- Its practice can incorporate *jita kyoei* (mutual benefit and welfare) by shifting the mindset of *tori* and *uke* from intent to maim or kill to controlled, skillful action to demonstrate those capabilities without harm yet develop them for actual use in self-defense.
- The latter is especially significantly shown in how practitioners can mutually benefit by working together to execute techniques with precision rather than brutality, while building skill to apply the essential *jujutsu* techniques with appropriate speed, power and lethality if needed.

Relevance to modern judo

Kime-no-kata also bridges traditional *jujutsu* and modern judo through its formal structure. Kano's great criticism of traditional *jujutsu* schools was that they lacked unifying principles, so the authors believe that he created *Kime-no-kata* to be able to demonstrate consistent principles embodied in *jujutsu* techniques.

Judo emphasizes unified principles through instruction of techniques (*kata*) and free practice (*randori*), making the art accessible to a broad, modern audience. With its standardized practice of ancient combatives techniques, *Kime-no-kata* is ideal for teaching and preserving martial knowledge across generations. This introduces important key principles – including timing of counterattacks (*go no sen*, “after the initiative” counters), awareness (*zanshin*), and interval (*maai*) – in a different environment from judo: armed and unarmed attacks with the intent to maim or kill. Another key is that *jujutsu* intervals are typically at least double interval (*bai maai* – at two outstretched arms' lengths) that of the judo basic training single interval (*maai* – about elbow to elbow distance), thus timing is greatly affected.

While not incorporating *randori*, this structured approach allows practitioners to explore the combat applications of judo in a safe, controlled, and pedagogical way, blending traditional *jujutsu* practicality with judo's modern educational framework. Approached correctly this allows *Kime-no-kata* to honor judo's lineage while demonstrating its adaptability as a martial art and training useful combatives basics.

Summary - A Living Link

Kime-no-kata is more than just a collection of techniques; we can consider it a living link between the past and present:

- It preserves the **spirit of traditional jujutsu**, reminding practitioners of judo's martial roots.
- It ensures that **martial efficacy** remains a part of judo, even after the art evolved into a sport and educational system.
- It reinforces the **philosophical ideals of judo**, *seiryoku zenyo jita kyoei* while promoting self-control, mutual respect, and ethical behavior.

In this way, *Kime-no-kata* exemplifies Jigoro Kano's vision of a modern martial art that integrates the practicality of "real combat", "attacking and defending" and "winning / losing" with exercise of the principles he believed led to personal growth and societal betterment.

Primary source:

Kano Sensei Denki Hensan Kai, ed. (1964) *Kano Jigoro*. Tokyo: Kodokan.

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