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Counter techniques against Judo: the process of forming Aikido in 1930s

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INTRODUCTION

Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) the aikido founder was engaged in developing modern aikido from ancient *Daito-ryu-aiki-jujutsu* (originally called *Daito-ryu*) around 1930. Part of this development was involved in creation of techniques designed to counter judo techniques. In my article from 2006 for ISHPES, *The Process of Forming Aikido and Admiral Isamu Takeshita: Through the Analysis of Takeshita's diary from 1925 to 1931*, I introduced a manuscript written by Admiral Takeshita. The manuscript says clearly that Ueshiba taught techniques intended for use as counter attacks against judo techniques. This is consistent with Kenji Tomiki's statement: Tomiki was unable to find a chance to break Ueshiba's balance with judo techniques when sparring with Ueshiba in the summer of 1927 [1]. In other words, Tomiki was unable to enter the defensive sphere of Ueshiba. That was reason why Tomiki, a skilful judo practitioner, became Ueshiba's apprentice and continued practicing aikido with him for decades. Because of the lack of historical documents, it is not clear what kind of skills Ueshiba performed in those days or how Ueshiba's skills developed over time.

This article will clarify the process of forming aikido in 1930s through analyzing Ueshiba's 147 counter

techniques against judo. This analysis based upon Takeshita's notes *Kon*, which were written between spring 1930 and winter 1931. The *Kon* is a 252-page set of notes, which have not been studied in the academic literature regarding aikido in Japan despite it has been known among aikido practitioners. These notes contain 1,095 techniques classified into 39 forms of fighting [2]. Author focus on 147 techniques described as "Tai judo" or counter techniques against judo.

Author will also compare Ueshiba's counter techniques against judo with the techniques of *Kito-ryu jujutsu* (originally called *Kito-ryu*), one of the most influential martial arts styles of the Edo era (1600-1868). It is well known that Jigoro Kano created judo through the study of two kinds of jujutsu, *Kito-ryu* and *Tenjin-shinyo-ryu*. Interestingly, that Ueshiba also studied *Kito-ryu* and judo before he learned *Daito-ryu*. The study of *Kito-ryu* within the context of both aikido and judo can be significant not only to recognize aikido history but also to understand the technical relation between aikido and judo. Even though aikido became popular in recent decades over the world, almost nobody knows how it was established.

This article is a revised version of the paper, which author has presented at the Joint World Congress of the ISHPES and the ISSA at the University of

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Copenhagen, between July 31 and August 5, 2007. The comments received after that conference have helped author significantly in revising and improving this article.

1. Counter Techniques against Judo in the Takeshita's notes *Kon*

For the first eight techniques out of the 147 judo counter-techniques, Takeshita describes only how to apply each counter-technique without mentioning the nature of the judo attack, which designed to counter. For technique No.9 he gives a brief description of the judo attack, e.g. "when his hands are about to touch my collar and sleeve". For techniques 10 to 12, Takeshita gives again only the method for applying the counter-attack described in No.9. However, in Author's opinion the techniques numbered 10, 11, and 12 are different variations of the technique No.9 and thus refer to different ways to deal with the attack. The same form of description maintains to the end.

After examination, author classified the 147 counter-techniques as dealing with 51 methods of attacking using judo techniques (See, Table 1), which are clearly described in the *Kon*. Afterwards classified (these 51 judo attacks) into 20 patterns by removing repeated methods etc (See, Table 2). We can understand the trend of Ueshiba's study against judo through these two tables. However, all of the 147 techniques should be examine to understand their substantial content. The result of the examination is as follows:

- 1) All of the techniques except No. 36 are standing techniques. Many of the techniques applied instantly to case of attack, because skilled judo practitioners break an opponent's balance as soon as they grab their opponent's clothes somewhere. We can see the instantaneous nature of most counter techniques in the following expressions: as soon as an opponent tries to touch the collar and sleeve (No. 9 and 26); both sleeves (No. 13 and 23); right sleeve (No. 20); tries to touch with both hands extended (No. 14). Granted that when fighting against an excellent judo practitioner, balance breaking is required just before grasped at the collar(s) or sleeve(s).
- 2) The expression "*Kokyu wo ire*" means "show sprit" use in 37 passages in the 147 techniques. Based on examination of these 37 passages, this expression refers to the usage of the hand blade(s) in order to break balance, and it is the same as the skill of *aiki*, which is, in *Daito-ryu*, the skill of breaking an opponent's balance in a flash by straining hand(s).

- 3) There are around 32 expressions "*Hikiotosu*" or "pulling an opponent down", which is a kind of throwing technique. This throwing technique in Japanese martial arts like judo and sumo intends to throw down by the direct use of hands and hips. Special features of "*Hikiotosu*" include moving backward while arcing downward and sitting down swiftly to drop one's body weight. *Hikiotoshi* is applying without a direct use of the hip as a fulcrum on which to tip the opponent, but with both centripetal and centrifugal force arising by body movement. Those are numbers 1, 2, 8, 9, 12, 15, 20, 21, 27, 29, 33, 34, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 47, 55, 61, 62, 75, 82, 86, 87, 89, 135, 137. With one of the reasons, there are so many throwing techniques like *Hikiotoshi* showing that Ueshiba was under the influence of *Kito-ryu* etc. Development noted in the *Kon* in 1931 may be crucial to understand the postwar development of aikido in that aikido would share with judo the quality of emphasizing the practice of relatively safe techniques and skills.
- 4) Ueshiba also devised techniques to control an opponent (68, 92, 104, 105, 114, and 147) which were not many in the comparison to the number of counter-attacks that involved throws. These controlling techniques are joint techniques against wrist, elbow, knee etc., and, therefore, there is the risk of suffering injuries like fractures and sprains.

2. The relation to *Kito-ryu*

Kito-ryu formed during the early time of the Edo era (1600-1868) and propagates in several prefectures (Nakajima, 2007) [3]. Judo founder Jigoro Kano had learned *Kito-ryu* before developing Judo, thus *Kito-ryu* became one of the most famous schools of Japanese Jujutsu.

The *Kata* (forms) [4] of *Kito-ryu*, authorized by the judo headquarters Kodokan those days inherited as the *Koshiki-no-kata*, which consists of 21 techniques in two parts (14 and 7 forms). All of the techniques differ from *Atemi-waza* or striking and kicking techniques but deal with the art of throwing down showed at the pictures of *Shashin Kaisetsu Kodokan Judo* [5] where Jigoro Kano demonstrates it. *Atemi-waza* is almost insignificant because the *Kata* builds it on the assumption of a fight between two people whom were armor. Obviously, there are also no techniques where two people grasp each other by the collar and sleeve.

The greater part of the 14 techniques consists of a kind of *Hikiotoshi*. Nine *Hikiotoshi* perform with

Table 1: The 51 methods of attacking in Ueshiba's techniques.

1	When he grasps my collar and sleeve with both hands	27	When he applies a technique grasping my front collar with his right hand, and putting my left hand in front of a belt
2	The moment he grasps both my sleeves using both hands	28	When he grasps my collar and sleeve in an ordinary way
3	When he approaches extending both hands	29	When he, from the front, grasps both sides of my collar with both hands
4	When he grasps both my sleeves using both hands	30	When he grasp both sides of my collar and hangs on
5	The moment his left hand reaches for my right sleeve	31	When he bends his arm in a spot of elbow and hangs on
6	When he grasps both my sleeves	32	When he grasps my left collar by right hand from an upper position and my right wrist with his left hand
7	The moment he grasps both my sleeves	33	When he applies <i>Uchimata</i> after breaking my balance with <i>Tsurikomi</i>
8	The moment he grasps my collar and sleeves	34	When he applies the right <i>Hanegoshi</i> after bending knees while breaking the opponent's balance with <i>Tsurikomi</i>
9	When a tall man grasps my left shoulder by right hand from an upper position	35	When he applies <i>Ohsotogari</i>
10	This is the counter techniques of No. 32 and No. 33. The moment he presses my right hand against his chest with his left hand	36	In case of lying on back, when he puts his leg on my right hand after grasping it by both hands, and applies <i>Gyaku</i> or a joint technique while extending it on my throat and chest [<i>Udehishigi-juji-gatame</i>]
11	The moment he grasps my collar and sleeves	37	When he makes a posture of <i>Hanmi</i> after he grasps my front collar with his right hand and my right sleeve with his left hand, and takes a step backward from left leg
12	The moment he clings to my collar and sleeves	38	When he grasps my right collar only with his right hand
13	When he grasps both my sleeves	39	When he tries to pull down
14	When he, from the front, grasps both sleeves by both hands, or grasps my left collar with his right hand and my right chest with his left hand	40	When he applies a throwing technique after pulling me near him or pulling me up, after he grasps the front of my belt in lower direction with his right hand and my right sleeve with his left hand
15	When he grasps my left sleeve with his right hand	41	When he applies <i>Hanegoshi</i>
16	The moment he grasps both sleeves with both hands	42	When he applies <i>right-Koshinage</i>
17	When he grasps my left sleeve with his right hand	43	When he applies <i>Hizaguruma</i>
18	When he grasps my left sleeve with his right hand	44	When he applies <i>right-Koshinage</i>
19	When he extends both hands	45	When he grasps my collar with his right hand and my right wrist with his left hand
20	When he grasps my right sleeve with his left hand	46	When he approaches extending both hands
21	When he grasps both sleeves with both hands	47	When he grasps my right sleeve with his left hand
22	When his left hand reaches to my right sleeve	48	When he grasps my left collar with his right hand and my sleeve with his left hand
23	When he approaches extending both hands	49	When he grasp both my sleeves with both hands
24	When he grasps both my sleeves with both his hands	50	The moment he extends both my hands
25	The moment he grasps both my sleeves	51	When he grasps both my wrists
26	When he grasps my left collar or left sleeve with his right hand from an upper position		

Note: All these descriptions are written clearly and can be made out from Isamu Takeshita's notes "*Kon*".

kneeling down and one *Hikiotoshi* perform with squatting, while the remaining four are *Sutemi-waza* [6], or "sacrifice techniques" in which the defender must throw itself into lying position while performing the techniques.

In the *Koshiki-no-kata*, a balance breaking that makes use of the momentum produced by body movement often applies in the 14 techniques, whilst Ueshiba uses

"*Kokyu wo ire*" or "*aiki*". Especially two techniques, numbers 5 and 6, perform clearly with handling the body and hands to neutralize the attack just before an opponent is touching. It is conceivable that pulling an opponent down by utilizing his own weight and terrestrial gravitation is quite effective at throwing down a heavy person. "*Mizunagare* (No. 5)" and "*Hikiotoshi* (No.6) in the *Koshiki-no-kata* are very similar to the *Hikiotoshi* described by Ueshiba in the "*Kon*".



Table 2: The 20 Judo attack categories countered by Ueshiba's 51 techniques against Judo.

	Judo Attack	The number in the 51 techniques against judo
1	Grasps at a collar and a sleeve	1, 8, 11, 12, 37, 48
2	Grasps at both sleeves	2, 4, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 24, 25, 49
3	Grasps at both collars	29, 30
4	Grasps at left collar	14, 26, 32 (also at a wrist), 45
5	Grasps at the front of right collar	38
6	Grasps at the front of the collar	27
7	Grasps at the left sleeve	17, 18, 26.
8	Grasps at the right sleeve	5, 20, 22, 40 (also front of belt), 47
9	Seizes the left shoulder	9
10	Tries to grasp with both hands	3, 19, 23, 46, 50
11	Grasps at both wrists	51
12	(obscure passages)	31
13	Applies the judo technique: Uchimata (after doing Tsurikomi)	33
14	Applies the judo technique: right Hanegoshi	34
15	Applies the judo technique: Osotogari	35
16	Applies the judo pinning technique: Udehishigi Juji gatame	36
17	Applies the judo technique: Hikiotoshi	39
18	Applies the judo technique: Hanegosh	41
19	Applies the judo technique: right Koshinage	42, 44
20	Applies the judo technique: Hizaguruma	43

Note: The classification in this table is based on Isamu Takeshita's 1930 notebook, "Kon".

Ueshiba learned *Kito-ryu* for about one year from the age of 18, and bayonet fighting in the army for three years. After that, he learned judo for two years with a good instructor Kiyochi Takagi [7] from the age of 24 to 26. Ueshiba learned *Daito-ryu* from the age of 28, and later he became one of the highest-ranking instructors in the school [8]. Once we compare his skills in around 1930 with the features of *Daito-ryu*, we can easily find that his martial art puts emphasis on throwing techniques. Hence, Ueshiba's counter techniques against judo apparently have a unique quality in that Ueshiba always tried to counter *before* the grasping of body or clothes took place. On the other hand, he was under the influence *Daito-ryu* with skill "*kokyu-wo-ire*," which is almost the same skill as the *aiki* of *Daito-ryu*.

Unfortunately, historical sources are not sufficient in this matter, so far. But, as a temporary result, it is reasonable to conclude that Ueshiba, with his talent and efforts, had been devising a unique skill, based on methods of *Kito-ryu*, judo and *Daito-ryu* as a part of his jujutsu, later called aikido, while also forming another, separate, part dealing with techniques against sword and spear.

SUMMARY

- (1) Ueshiba's martial art emphasizes on throwing techniques. Once we compare his skill in around 1930 with the features of *Daito-ryu*.
- (2) Ueshiba's counter techniques against judo have a unique quality in that Ueshiba always tried to fight before the grasping of body or clothes.
- (3) Ueshiba was under influence *Daito-ryu* from his skill "*kokyu-wo-ire*," which was almost the same as the skill referred to as *aiki* in *Daito-ryu*.

Concluding Ueshiba with his talent and efforts, had been devising a unique skill based on methods of *Kito-ryu*, judo, and *Daito-ryu* as a part of his jujutsu, later called aikido, at the same time also forming another part dealing with techniques against sword and spear.

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2. Ryuta Kudo, my graduate student, investigated these figures for my study (2007B-234) supported by a research grant from Waseda University.
3. Nakajima, Tetsuya: The historical realities of *Kito-ryu* jujutsu at the early modern age, a master of thesis, Waseda University, Tokyo, 2007.
4. Kenji Tomiki well explained the term *Kata* as follows in his book *Judo Appendix: Aikido* (Tomiki, 1956, pp.11-12). "Exercises in the forms are practiced in accordance with the process and method of attack and defense; every action and movement is prescribed according to reason, and shows the student the fundamental techniques of attack and defense."
5. Kodokan ed.: *Shashin-kaisetsu Kodokan Judo. Kodon-sha*. Tokyo, 1951.
6. "Throwing in a lying position is the technique of bringing down one's opponent by utilizing the momentum produced by laying down one's own body." (Tomiki, 1956, pp. 10).

7. Kiyochi Takagi (1894-1972) was only 18 year old in 1907, when Ueshiba started to practice judo. If Takagi was really Ueshiba's instructor, he should have been very strong in judo. Incidentally, Takagi won the invitational judo meeting for under twenty in 1913, run by *Dai-nihon-butoku-kai*, the most prestigious organization of Japanese martial arts in prewar days. Later he was promoted to 9th dan. (See, Kano, Y, Daigo, T, et al., 1999, p. 295.)

8. Ueshiba, Kishomaru: Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba (Revised edition), *Shuppan Geijutsu-sha*. Tokyo, 1999, pp. 72-73, p. 301.

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