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A Comment on Modern *Kendō*

By *Kunikichi Kaneko**

Genetically speaking, *Kendō* (the word "*Kendō*" will be used in this account although it is of comparatively recent origin), on the Japanese art of fencing, existed originally as a means of the struggle for existence and was, as such, handed down from generation to generation. It is an art or technique of killing or wounding an enemy by skillfully using a sword.

Nevertheless, along with the change of times, accompanied by the change and improvement of defensive weapons, *Kendō* underwent a drastic change with the result that the use of a real sword was discarded in favor of that of a bamboo sword (known as "*shinai*"). Furthermore, the art and technique of *Kendō* were systematized to a high degree, and the arena for displaying the technique was changed from the battlefield to the drill hall. The object of *Kendō* lay no longer in killing or wounding the enemy. *Kendō* now came to be regarded as a type of physical training and be taught and practised as a sport. Accordingly, although its art and technique are based on the art of using a real sword, the fact of the matter is that the art and technique of handling a *shinai* (i. e., bamboo sword) is taught and that technical instruction and guidance are given in conformity to the regulations of competitive sports. The *Kendō* match is played according to an established rule and measures are taken to ward off danger. In a word, the modern *Kendō* is a technique of handling the bamboo sword, the contestants' will being subject to certain restriction.

Nevertheless, in conducting instruction and guidance in *Kendō*, which has turned into a technique heterogeneous to its prototype, terminology peculiar to the original *Kendō* is still in use, much to the annoyance of beginners. Such being the case, I am of the opinion that *Kendō* may be more effectively taught if the use of words, difficult for the layman to understand, which are nevertheless characteristic of *Kendō*, is avoided

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as much as possible and guidance is given in such a manner as enables beginners to understand the art of *Kendō* in a natural way.

Next, I take up the question of the practice suit. It is true that the suit worn in practising *Kendō* or in playing a *Kendō* match is sufficiently effective in the functional aspect. For all that, as to whether the conventional *Kendō* practice suit is commensurate with the present-day mode of conducting athletic sports, I fear it is far from favorably impressing the general public. Viewed from the standpoint of popularizing *Kendō*, the problem of identification by means of clothes (both individual identification and team identification) calls for further deliberation for designing and research. Particularly, in these days when the interest in coloring is being popularized, a pertinent method of identifying *Kendō* players is, in my opinion, necessary for deeply impressing the general public with the presence of *Kendō* among athletic sports. I wish to stress that the aforesaid method of identification has to do with the popularization and general appreciation of *Kendō*.

Next, I desire to refer to the method of instructing beginners in *Kendō*. In the first place, they should be taught the basic technique. It is necessary for the instructor to guide them, grasping pertinently the exterior and interior aspects of the technique. There would be neither progress nor significance if he were to give instruction such as has been handed down from of old. Efforts should be made in order to devise a method of teaching befitting to *Kendō* as a competitive sport. Correct technique should be based on correct fundamental action. Furthermore, the conventional technique that has been taken over stands in need of improvement as well as research. In conducting *Kendō* instruction, the teacher should avoid sticking to the formality involved in the technique. He should teach free technique on the basis of the movement of the body. Accordingly, *Kendō* techniques based on bodily movement are classified as shown below. In my opinion, the teaching of techniques based on the movement of the body, which are interrelated, is more effective than other forms of teaching.

Classification of Techniques :

1. Offensive Techniques
 - a. Continuous technique
(including ward off technique)
 - b. Carry on the shoulder technique
 - c. Single hand technique

(including over the head technique)

d. Approach technique

(step back technique)

Note: The techniques (c) and (d) may also be regarded as defensive techniques.

2. Defensive Techniques:

a. Left technique

b. Right technique

c. Back technique

Note: The above-mentioned designations represent the revised names of their respective conventional counterparts.