

# (Tanto) Randori in Aikido

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## I. The Role of Randori in Tomiki Aikido and in Japanese Martial Arts

Many aikido techniques are similar to some of the early jujitsu techniques, evidence that aikido was originally a type of jujitsu. Master Jigoro Kano, who reformulated various jujitsu techniques and integrated them into the modern judo, proposed two practice systems: randori and kata. He guided his followers to practice using some of the techniques in randori and polish the other techniques through repetitive kata practice. (In the following discussion, the randori style that Master Kano proposed will be referred to as *kumi-randori* or randori in the contact (or closed) position). Master Kano's proposal is contrasted with the fact that the mainstream aikido schools, following Master Morihei Ueshiba's ideology, have been practicing techniques only in the form of kata. Master Tomiki, who meticulously analyzed all jujitsu techniques, further proposed *rikaku-taisei-no-randori*, i.e., randori in the non-contact (or open) position, in addition to *kumi-randori*. As a judo practitioner, Master Tomiki referred to this new style of randori as the "second randori style"; as an aikido practitioner, he referred to it as "aikido randori." Master Tomiki demonstrated how to use *atemi* techniques (thrusting at the opponent's chin or crashing against his torso) and *kansetsu* techniques (locking the opponent's wrist or elbow) in the non-contact position. In order to standardize the practice procedure, he designed a task cycle that included: *unsoku* (foot movement), *teगतana-undo* (foot and hand movement), *teगतana-awase* (person-to-person foot movement exercise with the hand blade pressed against each other's), *teगतana-no-kuzushi* (balance-breaking techniques using one's hand blade), *kakari keiko* (randori with no resistance), *hikitate keiko* (randori with partial resistance), and randori (wrestling with full resistance). In order to show the major techniques that can be used in randori, he compiled the 17 Basic Techniques and 10 Counter (or Reverse) Techniques. The original Tomiki aikido was tailored for toshu randori. The manners and courtesies for aikido practice were modeled on those for Kodo-kan judo.

Master Tomiki later realized that aikido practitioners tended to clinch in toshu randori and subsequently contrived a tanto-randori method in order to emphasize the fact that *atemi* and *kansetsu* techniques are designed to be used in the non-contact position. Later in the history of aikido competition, practitioners started neglecting the appropriate *maai* distance even in the tanto randori, and, to solve the problem, the instructors in a later generation set a new rule that allows the tanto performer (hereafter referred to as Tanto) to apply certain counter techniques under certain circumstances. This new policy solved the clinching problem to some extent but, at the same time, entailed a new problem: i.e., afraid of Tanto's counter techniques, the toshu performer (hereafter as Toshu) tended to be overly cautious in using some of the 17 basic

aikido techniques. The variety of techniques commonly used in bouts was reduced, making the randori event less attractive in the eyes of spectators. Reflecting on the above historical background, JAA has been striving to develop an ideal randori system in which the two contestants, or practice partners, can freely employ offensive and defensive tactics against each other simultaneously and on a more equal footing, using both right and left hands to apply techniques of their choice. After wiping out the characteristic shortcomings of tanto randori, we hope to implement toshu randori as an official aikido competition event and propose that a toshu randori contest be held in the international tournament scheduled for 2015, the host country for which has yet to be chosen. When the new toshu randori is introduced, Tomiki Aikido learners will be able to choose either of the two alternative courses. Those who wish to practice both toshu randori and tanto randori are advised to start with either one and learn the other afterward. Otherwise, they may practice the Basic 17 Techniques and 10 Counter Techniques, as well as breakfalls, through toshu randori first and then specialize in either style of randori.

## **II. Restructuring of the Randori Practice System and Rules for Toshu Randori Competitions**

1. Rationale behind Toshu Randori and the Basic Practice Procedure (For details, see Shihan Sato's proposal at International Aikido Festival at Kawasaki in 2013.):

The core rules for toshu randori are based on the principle that one must defend himself from blows to the face. It is hoped that the aikido practitioner will learn to dodge a punch or thrust in the face using footwork and to apply a practical defensive-and-offensive technique that is useful in real-life combat situations. Launching techniques from a safe, non-contact position would make aikido an attractive martial-arts event.

2. Excellent Characteristic Features of Toshu Randori as a Martial-arts Event:
  - (a) Both contestants can freely apply techniques of their choice on equal conditions, rather than using two different sets of offensive and defensive techniques. (The restrictions on the types of counter-techniques that Tanto are allowed to use in tanto randori would not exist in toshu randori.)
  - (b) Practitioners can train to use both right-handed and left-handed techniques in a more balanced way.
  - (c) The contestants can perform both atemi and kansetsu techniques more frequently and successfully.
  - (d) A greater variety of offensive and defensive strategies will be employed.

## **III. Restructuring of the Tanto Randori System**

1. Once a solid toshu randori system is set up, it will be possible to define the roles and purposes of tanto randori more clearly. The following are some of the specific proposals to improve the present tanto randori system.
  - (a) Tanto's stabbing should not be counted as valid unless his hand and foot movements are perfectly synchronized. This change of policy would encourage practitioners to maintain an appropriate non-contact maai distance, making their randori more presentable.
  - (b) Tanto should not be allowed to perform counter-techniques so that Toshu would lunge at Tanto decisively and apply sharp, powerful atemi and kansetsu techniques; the techniques would be polished through repeated practice.
  - (c) Meaningless or contradictory *shido* penalties should be abolished or drastically reduced.

*Tanto-otoshi*: Presently, Tanto who drops his tanto (or rubber knife) is automatically penalized. However, only the act of dropping it on purpose or slamming it on the mat should be treated as illegal.

*Jyogai-shido*: Presently, the contestant who gets off the 50-mat area is penalized whatever the reason or cause. He should be penalized only when he has purposefully done so in order to escape from the opponent's offensive technique.

*Taisabaki-shido*: If Tanto is required to stab with the synchronized hand and foot movement as above mentioned, the contestants are more likely to maintain a good non-contact-position maai, and the referee would not have to issue this type of shido frequently.

If the rules and policies for tanto randori are revised as above, a bout will not be interrupted very often, and spectators would appreciate the contestants' techniques as genuine martial-arts performance. It is hoped that contestants will stop using an undesirable strategy to win a game by collecting partial credits on the opponents' errors or violations.

2. Rules should be set in the way that the practitioner's ability to perform effective and refined techniques would be accurately evaluated, instead of his ability to win games by taking advantage of the rules.
  - (a) Presently, when Toshi applies *shomen-ate*, he is not allowed to touch any part of the opponent's body below the buttocks. However, as long as he maintains his perfect form with the palm of his main hand pressed properly against the opponent's chin, he might be permitted to use his free hand for leverage.
  - (b) If Toshi, performing a *shomen-ate*, *aigamae-ate*, or *gyakugamae-ate*, presses his hand or arm against Tanto's head or torso in the way it does not injure the latter, he should be given credit even if the latter does not fall.
  - (c) Sumo or wrestling techniques—particularly those that one might apply by holding the opponent tightly—will be prohibited.
  - (d) Presently, Toshi is not allowed to apply *tenkai* techniques (pinning techniques that involves a 180-degree turn: e.g., *tenkai-kotehimeri* or *tenkai-kotegaeshi*) with both knees touching the mat. However, there is no reason why he should not be permitted to apply a *tenkai* technique in the kneeling position.
  - (e) Toshi should be allowed to use creative techniques that are not classified as any of the basic 17 techniques as long as there is no possibility of inflicting an injury on Tanto.

#### **IV. Revival and Dissemination of the Original Kata Forms Prescribed by Masters Kenji Tomiki and Hideo Oba**

The 17 Basic Techniques, Goshin-no-kata, and other classical kata forms that Masters Tomiki and Oba compiled were based on the philosophical and technical principles for Kodokan kata forms set by Master Jigoro Kano. Regrettably, after the departure of Masters Tomiki and Oba, some instructors have started teaching reformulated versions that deviate from the original concepts. One example of an unnecessary change is related to the application of *kote-hineri*, one of the basic 17 randori techniques. Applying this technique, one twists the opponent's right-hand wrist using his own right hand and pin him on the mat; then, some practitioners proceed to put their own left hand on the

waist and take another step with the right foot forward in order to tighten the lock on the opponent's wrist. This should be considered to be an erroneous modification. All the 17 randori techniques are intended to keep the opponent under control and restrain him from getting up and striking back; no technique is designed to hurt the fallen opponent anatomically. Another example of undesirable reformulation is a type of *kotegaeshi* to further twist the wrist of the fallen opponent that one has thrown down on the mat. Such an act of exaggeration or embellishment to make kata performance more spectacular has always been disapproved in the history of Japanese martial arts. We must try to correct the undesirable changes derived from misconceptions, reflecting on the pedagogical principles proposed by Masters Tomiki and Oba.

Note: This proposal is mainly based on suggestions by Shogo Yamaguchi (an 8th-dan master).