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The co-option of Jigoro Kano to the International Olympic Committee by Pierre de Coubertin (1909)

Abstract (200-250 words)
It was not self-evident that Pierre de Coubertin should turn to Jigorō Kanō in 1909 to make him an IOC member. At the time, he did not consider 'jiu-jitsu' to be a sport, and he knew very little about Kano's pedagogical and sporting activities. What interested him most was his position as director of the Higher Normal School in Tokyo and the fact that Japan had become a military power to be reckoned with in East Asia since its victory over Russia in 1905. At the time, Coubertin was looking for support to spread Olympism far from Europe and block the YMCA's influence in Latin America and Asia.
Civilizational differences aside, the two men have very similar biographical backgrounds: aristocratic origins, an education focused on political philosophy and the arts, the construction of their virility in the late discovery of bodily exercises, a taste for travel, a keen interest in foreign societies, an early desire to influence their country's education system, a conservative approach to modernity, the rejection of women from the field of bodily exercises.

Key words:
Kano, Coubertin, International Olympic Committee, comparative biography, education, ideology

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Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) and Jigoro Kano (1860-1938) are among the best-known sports personalities in the century and a half since sporting competitions spread around the world, the former as the renovator of the Olympic Games and the latter as the inventor of judo. Paradoxically, despite a considerable number of scholarly publications, there are no scientific editions of the whole autobiographical manuscripts and correspondence of these two figures, nor any biographies of them that have been produced according to the rules of the historian's art, i.e. without any patriotic or Olympic bias and comparing a variety of sources, including those from the ranks of their adversaries.
Coubertin's proposal to Kano in 1909 to join the International Olympic Committee was far from obvious. On the one hand, the renewal of the Games was an adventure that had failed on several occasions before 1908, and it only involved a small group of sporting communities in Western Europe and North America, to which should be added a few individuals from the British dominions (Australasia, South Africa). Moreover, at that time, Kano's reputation had hardly spread beyond Japan and the spread of jujutsu was limited to rare spectacular and commercial demonstrations in London and Paris.

In the reference work entitled *The Legacy of Kanō Jigorō, Judo and Education* (2010), from which we borrow all our information on Kano, four reasons are put forward why Coubertin chose him and Kano accepted his proposal: as well as being multilingual, he was the founder of the Kodokan judo, the promoter of athletic sports in Japan and the director of the Higher Normal School in Tokyo. According to the same authors, at their first meeting in Stockholm in 1912, Coubertin told Kano of his desire to see Japan play a leading role in the Eastern world within the Olympic movement. As for Jigorō Kanō, he would have accepted the offer with a view to promoting friendly relations with other countries, boosting Japanese interest in sport, and raising their level of athletic ability and morality. What's more, when he saw the 1912 Olympic competitions with his own eyes, he would have realized the extent to which Olympic values infuse every athlete (impeccable physical preparation, discipline, courtesy) and combine with patriotic fervor. These interpretations, which give Japan a central role in the development of the Olympic movement in Asia and which make the inventor of judo a pacifist and a promoter of 'Olympic values', which in 1909 had not yet been defined by Coubertin, deserve to be questioned.

First of all, it should be noted that Coubertin knew nothing about Kano and his work when he asked the French ambassador to Japan, Auguste Gérard, to recommend a personality involved in the dissemination of sports; secondly, that the two men met briefly in Stockholm in 1912; and thirdly, that they did not keep up any correspondence which would suggest that their pedagogical ideas were in any way similar. Furthermore, Coubertin never thought for a moment of including jujutsu in the Olympic Games programme, even though there was already a hand-to-hand event: Greco-Roman wrestling. What's more, at the time, Kano method jujutsu was above all a form of education through confrontation that existed in Japan and was not primarily intended to be transformed into a competitive practice and spread to the rest of the world. Kano himself, in a 1936 letter to Koizumi Gunji, did "not feel inclined to take any initiative (for having) judo introduced with other games and sports at the Olympic Games" and stated that "judo in reality is not a mere sport and game (but) a principle of art, life and science" (Brousse, 90). Coubertin was thinking the same in 1906: "No, it's not a sport or, at least, if we wanted to use it as such, it would be a mediocre sport; on the contrary, it is a remarkable means of defense (...) what distinguishes and enhances it is the combination of intellectual and physical qualities required to succeed in it" (Coubertin, 1933).

Based on this unlikely meeting between Coubertin and Kano, which was also a missed opportunity, the aim is to understand why their biographical paths, though geographically and culturally distant, ended up intersecting.

Family traditionalism, academicism and openness to new ideas

With an age gap of just three years, Kano and Coubertin had, after all, quite similar family origins, upbringings and schooling, as they were largely rooted in the traditions of the French and Japanese social elites. The biographical information on Coubertin is taken from my doctoral thesis in history (Clastres, 2011), the thirty or so scholarly articles I have published on him, my book on the history of the Olympic Games (Clastres, 2015) and my forthcoming biographical essay (Clastres, 2026).

The same seven years elapsed between Kano's birth in 1860 and the accession to the throne of the reformist prince Meiji, who was to lead Japan into industrial and parliamentary modernity, and between Coubertin's birth in 1863 and the fall of the Second Empire, which led to the establishment of the Third French Republic. They both belonged to families with a strong religious background and a great interest in the arts and culture. Jirosaku, Kano's father, was the son of a priest who chose the path of Confucian studies and painting, while Charles de Coubertin was trained as both a lawyer and a religious painter, which led him to become close to the Jesuits and the papacy. One notable difference was that Jirosaku then embarked on a

business career as a brewer, real estate agent and shipowner for the Imperial Navy, while Charles lived off the income from his rural estates until the end of his life. But it was from their mothers that Kano and Coubertin learned strict discipline and studied calligraphy and the Confucian classics for the former, and French authors and Latin and Greek humanities for the latter.

Both they had a hard time being uprooted from their mother's home and were sent to boarding school, at the age of nine for Kano, following the death of his mother, and Pierre at the age of ten. Kano enrolled in a public school in Tokyo with his older brother to improve his knowledge of Confucianism and familiarize himself with Western culture by taking English classes in Kanda. Three years later, his father took a further step towards modern Japan by sending him to a Tokyo boarding school where half the pupils were English and German, and where he became the whipping boy and servant (*fag*) of the strongest, modelled on the integration rituals of public schools. In the same way, Coubertin very quickly changed schools, having had a very bad experience of the boarding school run by the Jesuits, which his older brothers, much older than him, had already attended. This is why he was enrolled a year later, in 1874, in the first day school opened by the Jesuits in Paris on rue de Madrid.

Trained for senior administrative or political positions

Kano's father, like Coubertin's parents, influenced their sons to follow higher education courses that would prepare them to occupy high positions in the civil service. Their former military worlds were in the process of collapsing with the end of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1869 and the abolition of the estates, the dismantling of the samurai caste and the establishment of national conscription in 1873, and the adoption of the Japanese constitution in 1889, on the one hand, and the French Republicans' conquest of the Senate and the presidency, on the other. If it is not apocryphal, I propose to relate the anecdote according to which Jirosaku refused in 1872 to pay Kano for a jujutsu instructor on the grounds that it was a relic of the old world, to the more precise fact that a career in arms may have seemed to him to have no future. As for Coubertin, he initially toyed with the hope of a military career like his elder brothers, but he failed the entrance exam for the Saint-Cyr military academy, perhaps because he did not belong to a republican family but to a monarchist one.

Kano continued his studies at the School of Foreign Languages during the 1874-75 academic year before joining the predecessor of the Imperial University of Tokyo. For four years, he studied economics and Chinese, Indian and Western political philosophy from Descartes to Spencer, which was a way of opening himself up to the arts of government specific to the great Asian and European powers of his time. In 1881-1882, he spent more time studying moral sciences and aesthetics, with an emphasis on international law. In particular, he benefited from the teachings of a Harvard alumnus named Fennolosa, who introduced him to North American realities.

Although Coubertin completed his artistic education at home, attending the opera every week and the Academic Painting Salon every year, he was taught in much the same way as Kano: law at the Catholic University of Paris, where he apparently failed to obtain his degree, and the innovative teaching at the École libre des sciences politiques, which he attended as an auditor from 1884 to 1886. It was at this school, founded in 1872 to produce a new French elite oriented towards British and American modernity, that he discovered Tocqueville and Spencer, and was introduced to comparative constitutional law, political economy, commercial geography and the diplomatic history of Europe. He also frequented the Paris group of “Unions de la paix sociale” (Unions of Social Peace), inspired by the sociologist Frédéric Le Play, who advocated social reform, i.e. an improvement in the condition of workers, not with the aim of emancipating them, but to avoid social and political revolution. Coubertin's reformism aimed to keep power in the hands of the aristocratic and bourgeois elites who had merged into fin-de-siècle modernity.

Two heirs to the fighting culture of the traditional elites

It would be completely anachronistic to see Kano and Coubertin as sportsmen in the competitive sense we use today, as they are not known to have taken part in any competitions. At the very most, in 1879, Kano gave a demonstration in the presence of American President Ulysses Grant, who was visiting Japan at the time. We would like to know how he was able to raise his level after only two years of practice, why he was chosen and not someone else, and what the purpose of this exhibition was. Admittedly, Kano never failed to include demonstrations in his teaching, but he never fought in theatres to defeat his opponents, and he does not seem to have done much athletic exercise himself (running, jumping, throwing, swimming) that he recommended to his students. Similarly, Coubertin, who never explained the circumstances under which he became involved in sport, never took part in competitions, nor did he appear on stage practicing sports. On the contrary, he played in places where people could not see him, such as fencing halls or tennis and rowing clubs, which were socially closed to people of modest means.

It is also true that both belonged to the first generations of converts to physical exercise and that their social origins prevented them from taking part in fairs and competitions awarding prizes in kind or in cash. Kano was 17 when he was introduced to jujutsu and Coubertin was barely 20 when he discovered rowing and tennis. Coubertin would later confess to having had a hard time with the apparatus gymnastics he had been taught at the Madrid day school in his teens, and to having developed a passion for fencing much later than his sister, probably around the age of 16-18. It is no coincidence that Kano took up a martial art at a time when the samurai were disarmed, and that Coubertin did adopt fencing first, which was the sport par excellence of the sword nobility as opposed to the nobility of dress in charge of the royal administration.

In any case, the two young men carried the legacy of the code of honor of the fighting elites, which, reworked under British influence, came to be known as *fair play*. They developed the same obsession with self-control of the emotions through the tension of the body, which set them apart from other social elites of their time who opted for bodily entertainment and the pleasures of sporting appearance. Similarly, they were not on the side of the emancipation of social classes through bodily exercise. Coubertin, for example, only converted to the idea of sport for all in 1910 to counter the emergence of the first workers' and socialist sports clubs. Kano and Coubertin set themselves the goal of contributing to the virilization of the young elite with a view to patriotic uplift and, in this sense, the former contributed to Japanese expansionism in the Asia-Pacific (Mukden, Tsushima, and the Treaty of Eulsa with the Korean Empire in 1905), and the latter's contribution to the Third Republic's policy of colonial expansion, which he strongly supported (West and Equatorial Africa in the 1880s and 90s, annexation of Madagascar in 1896, protectorate of Morocco in 1912).

The same patriotic desire to emulate foreign education systems

From their respective studies, Kano and Coubertin acquired a similar interest, not to say fascination, for the social-political models of the imperial powers that dominated the world at heir time. The precociousness of their choice of a career in education is not without interest, at the age of 22 for Kano and 23 for Coubertin, as is their interest in study trips to explore foreign education systems. However, there was one essential difference between the two men: Kano was invested with high-level official responsibilities, while Coubertin was reduced to private initiatives with little effectiveness.

In 1882, aged just 22, Kano taught political science and finance at Gakushuin as a lecturer, and opened an English-style public school, "Kano Juku", at the request of his friends. He then transformed part of the temple into a dojo, the future Kodokan. He targeted children lacking in confidence and offered them an extremely strict education. In 1885, he became a full professor and administrator of the Gakushuin, while the Kodokan judo team proved its worth in a famous

tournament against the Metropolitan Police. It was around this time, in September 1889, that Jigorō Kanō embarked on a sixteen-month study tour of European education systems. After a stopover in Shanghai, in 1890 he visited Berlin, Vienna, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Amsterdam and London. He returned to Japan in January 1891 after passing through Cairo, and the following August he married Takezoe Sumako. In 1891, he recruited as his English teacher Lafcadio Hearn, an Irishman born in Greece and naturalized as a Japanese citizen after arriving in Japan in 1890 at the age of 40 and marrying the daughter of a samurai, who left a first-hand account of the beginnings of judo.
We would like to have a complete scientific edition in English of the notebooks he kept between 1889 and 1931, which are archived at the Kodokan, without any restrictions on his private life, to understand how his observations may have influenced his future projects. Similarly, light has yet to be shed on the controversy with his school's chancellor which led to him being placed on leave at the end of the summer of 1889 and then being recruited from August 1891 to January 1893 both as headmaster of Kumamoto College and as adviser to the Minister of Education. What happened to explain this sidelining and then what seems like a rehabilitation or even a promotion? What was his place in the various educational currents and what were his networks?
Because his family was based in Normandy, a short distance from the Atlantic port of Le Havre, Coubertin was able to travel to the British Isles to study society and political life almost every year from 1883 to 1888. He returned convinced that sport was the most effective means of educating the elites, not the people, for the new industrial, commercial and imperial modernity. In the winter of 1889-90, he was commissioned by the President of the Republic to observe the athletic associations of colleges and universities in the United States, and he concluded that sports education could work just as well in republican regimes as in monarchies.
For his part, Coubertin never held a position as head of a school or adviser to the Minister. However, from 1888 onwards, he tried to implement his sports reform on an experimental basis in a number of Parisian establishments, initially private institutions, then state lycées, but only in one Catholic school, that of Father Henri Didon, who suggested the Olympic motto to him. His press campaigns and lobbying of liberal governments open to monarchists who had rallied to the regime were not really successful, as sports did not begin to replace gymnastics in the French school curriculum until the 1960s.

Sporting convergence and Olympic divergence
On the threshold of the 1890s, realizing that he would not succeed in imposing his sporting reform on the Ministry of Public Education, Coubertin turned his patronage towards the development of civilian amateur sports clubs and support for competitions between young French and foreign athletes. Inspired by the Peace Congress held in Paris in 1889 and by Hodgson Pratt's project for athletic competitions between young European students, he proposed in 1892 to re-establish the Olympic Games in a modern form, i.e. with the new athletic sports, to promote international harmony. The success of the first Games in Athens in 1896 made it all the more important for him to get involved in this international sportsmen's project. As he was outvoted in 1898 within the French sports movement, and as the French government also deprived him of the organization of the Paris Games in 1900, he over-invested in his position as President of the International Olympic Committee, which he had held since 1896, and devoted himself wholeheartedly to recruiting colleagues with sufficient influence in their respective countries to protect the Olympic idea.
For his part, Kano reached the pinnacle of his career when, in 1893, he became director of the Higher Normal School in Tokyo, a position he held until 1920, apart from being sidelined in 1897. The process of exclusion-rehabilitation-promotion of the years 1889-93 was repeated in July 1897, when he was removed from his position as director and then reinstated from November 1897 to June 1898. That month, he became Director of the Office of Common

Education at the Ministry of Education, but only until the following November. It will be assumed that his dismissal and reinstatement were linked to the sports reform he was leading at the same time.
Indeed, in the context of the victorious war against China in 1894-95, he converted his school to European-inspired athletic education, while developing judo clubs in Japan. In 1894, he even organized an athletics meeting between students and teachers, and the following year he abolished the military organization of the boarding school in a more liberal British style. The year of the first games in Athens, he set up an athletics association to encourage students to take up sport and opened his private academy to Chinese students. Two more years and he made the "marathon" compulsory for students, although we don't know where he got his inspiration for this type of event. Had he heard of the event resurrected in Greece in 1896, or was he influenced by the long-distance running culture practiced in other countries such as Scandinavia? Similarly, at the start of his third term in office, the dissolution of the athletics association in 1901 and its replacement by the school council, followed by the introduction of a moral gymnastics course in 1902 and the creation of a swimming club, all look very much like a rejection of sports education and a new choice of hygienist pedagogy imposed on him.
How are we to interpret his mission at the invitation of the Chinese government from July to October 1902 and that of Yamashita Yoshiaki in May of the same year in the United States, where he introduced judo? What place should they be given in this period of intense diplomatic and military activity, from the Anglo-Japanese agreement of January 1902 to the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, and the militarization of Japanese society? Did Kano's decision in 1908 to make judo and kendo (taught since 1906) compulsory for all students, as well as running competitions, indicate that he had regained the favor of the government?
Kano and Coubertin differed on the question of whether or not women should have access to the virile dimension of sport. Coubertin remained opposed to the participation of women in sporting competitions, and in particular in the Olympic Games, until the end of his life, for two reasons: firstly, his religious and moral upbringing, which disapproved of putting women's bodies on show, and secondly, his ambition to create new men rather than new women. For Coubertin, women could practice gymnastics to better prepare themselves for motherhood, but always in a private setting. Otherwise, their role in the public arena of sport was limited to crowning the winners. Kano, for his part, adopted a similar position in that he was always opposed to women competing and practicing *randori* techniques on the grounds that they were destined for motherhood, and that it was out of the question for them to practice such self-transcendence, which could lead to injury and illness. It was within this moral framework that he welcomed the first women to the Kodokan in 1895, after seeking the advice of his wife, who was also his *sparring partner*. When he received Yasuda Kinko in 1904, he told her that there were indeed four or five young women training, but that he had devoted very little time to them because he was still wondering whether judo had any benefits for women. Later, he used Yasuda as a test to see how far he could go in his physical strengthening and judo training. Finally, it wasn't until 1926 that a women's division was created within the Kodokan.

The co-option of Kano in relation to Coubertin's Olympisation of the world

Although they shared a project for the virile education of young social elites through physical exercise for patriotic purposes, it was not a foregone conclusion that Pierre de Coubertin and Jigoro Kano would meet. In fact, they developed their respective projects in very different cultural and geographical worlds. Coubertin campaigned for Olympic competition between sporting nations for peaceful purposes, without ever forgetting French interests, while Kano was fully committed to the physical armament of Japanese youth for the purposes of imperial expansion. Kano's co-option was made official at the Olympic session in Berlin in May 1909, and the following year Japan was invited to take part in the Olympic Games in Stockholm.

How then are we to understand Coubertin's request in 1908 to the French ambassador to Japan, Auguste Gérard, who was a former classmate, to recommend the name of a Japanese who was sufficiently influential in the world of sport to co-opt him onto the IOC? Although he had been aware of the existence of jujutsu since the first demonstrations in Paris, Coubertin had never heard of Kano at that time. If he decided to ask him, it was not because he was the inventor of judo, but because he was informed that he was the head of a renowned educational institution and that he held a leading position in the spread of athletic sports in Japan. Perhaps he also has some information about the isolated successes of certain Japanese sportsmen in the West or the East.

Much better informed about military and diplomatic issues, for which he wrote a weekly column in the famous daily Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro*, Pierre de Coubertin was all the more aware of Japan's future importance in world geopolitics, as the military victory over Russia in 1905 had left a particularly strong impression on French minds. Moreover, even though he was very concerned about the influence of the YMCA sports clubs in Latin America, it is not impossible that he wanted to include Japan in his Olympic universe to block its advances in the Far East. Although it came a few years later, it should be remembered that Elwood Brown, the YMCA's sports director, set up the first *Far Eastern Games* in Manila in 1913 and was extremely active in the organization of the Inter-Allied Military Games in Paris in 1919.

If we now look at the recruits made to the IOC between the London Olympic Games in 1908 and the European war of 1914, we can see a discrepancy between the profile of Kano, who was more of an administrator and teacher committed to the development of judo and athletics, and that of the other recruits: they were almost all aristocrats, with no sporting skills, but well introduced to the various European sovereigns and therefore able to intervene in defence of the Olympic project. In the chapter he devoted to the IOC session in Budapest in 1911 in his *Olympic Memoirs*, written in 1930, Coubertin justified his choices after the event by drawing up a portrait of the ideal IOC member: "sportsmen in the true sense of the word, and not slaves to exclusive specialism, men who were international enough rather than dominated by their strictly national prejudices, and finally men capable of standing up to the technical groups". From this point of view, Kano was indeed open to a wide range of sporting practices in an amateur and chivalrous spirit of respect for the opponent. He was also intensely patriotic, as Coubertin might have been, with an obvious interest in foreign cultures.

To resist sports organizations acting against Olympic interests, Coubertin suggested to Kano, in one of his letters, that a National Olympic Committee should be created. The IOC President then had in mind what was happening in several Western countries, including France, namely the coalition of sports federations against the IOC in order to subjugate it or take its place. So, in order to prevail over them, he placed his trust in the National Olympic Committees, which had to be independent in their composition and directly attached to his authority. It is not certain that Kano understood this internal subtlety in the geopolitics of Olympism because, on 10 July 1911, he decided to create and preside over the Japan Amateur Athletic Association, rather than an Olympic Committee in the strict sense. Given the configuration of the Japanese sports scene, which was just emerging at the time, it was clearly more important for him to bring together all the amateur sports clubs (Niehaus, 2021, 8-9). Indeed, the Japanese Olympic Committee was not founded in 1911: this Olympic graft would be formalized much later.

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