

RESOURCES

FILM REVIEW

Mrs. Judo: Be Strong, Be Gentle, Be Beautiful

Produced and Directed by Yuriko Gamo Romer

DVD, 58 Minutes, Color

Flying Carp Productions, 2012

Reviewed by David Huebner

“Be strong, be gentle, be beautiful” is not only the essence of the art and sport of judo, but a clear six-word biographical description of the life of Fukuda Keiko, AKA Mrs. Judo. The only woman in judo’s history (since 1882) to achieve the difficult tenth-degree black belt, Fukuda’s life is not only the story of achievement in a sport, but the

struggle to overcome tradition and sexism. Japan’s men expected their wives to be at home each evening, when judo classes were taught. But Fukuda never did marry, “I was too obsessed with judo.”

In the early 1930s, Kanō Jigorō invited Fukuda, then twenty-one and standing less than five feet tall, to join a new judo class for women at the school he founded in Tokyo, the Kōdōkan. Perhaps Fukuda’s greatest accomplishment was her ability to be strong and challenge the established traditions of judo, all the while never alienating the male masters who steered the sport for generations. She even learned traditional arts Japanese women practice, such as calligraphy and the tea ceremony.



Screen capture from *Mrs. Judo: Be Strong, Be Beautiful, Be Gentle*. Source: *MrsJudoMovie.com* at <http://tinyurl.com/qgwftb8>.

The last link to judo’s founder, Kanō, Fukuda’s life was a rich history with family connections to Japanese martial arts. Her grandfather, Fukuda Hachinosuke, was a Japanese samurai and jujitsu master who died in 1880. He was also the first teacher of Kanō, who founded judo as an offshoot of jujitsu.

This documentary has picturesque photography and film; the editing is superb; and the rich landscapes, buildings, beauty, and heritage of Japan are woven throughout, including well-placed traditional Japanese music. From the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923 to modern times, the viewer also is introduced to important Japanese historical and cultural topics. Missing is any detail of the art of judo during the years of World War II, but the film’s overall texture and tone easily make up for this omission. The documentary has thirteen special features in addition to the fifty-eight-minute story. These add to the knowledge of Fukuda’s life and provide more insight into Japan’s long history and eclectic culture. The omission of World War II material notwithstanding, the film works also as an introduction to the history of judo.

Today, Fukuda Keiko’s legacy is enshrined in the Kōdōkan Judo Museum, where her remarkable story is told. Mrs. Judo died just short of her 100th birthday in 2013 and taught judo until the end. This film is dedicated to her life, but more importantly to the lives of those who can “be strong, be gentle, be beautiful,” while overcoming tradition and established norms. ■

DAVID HUEBNER is a full-time Social Studies Teacher in Columbia, Tennessee, and resides in nearby Spring Hill. He is President-Elect of the Tennessee Council for Social Studies. Active in his local community, as well as in the Tennessee Council for Social Studies and the Tennessee Geographic Alliance, David was honored as Tennessee Geography Teacher of the Year (2007), High School Teacher of the Year (National Conference for Geographic Education, 2008), and Tennessee Social Studies Teacher of the Year (2009).