

Fukuda to study judo—an unusual gesture for that time—as a mark of respect for her grandfather.^{[3][15]} She began training in judo in 1935, as one of only 24 women training at the Kodokan.^{[2][3][10]} Apart from instruction by judo's founder, Fukuda also learned from Kyuzo Mifune.^[10]

Judo career

Fukuda, standing at only 4' 11" (150 cm) and weighing less than 100 lb. (45 kg), became a judo instructor in 1937.^{[11][13]} She also earned a degree in Japanese literature from Showa Women's University.^{[10][11]} In 1953, she was promoted to the rank of 5th *dan* in judo.^[16] She traveled to the USA later that year, at the invitation of a judo club in Oakland, California, and stayed for almost two years before returning to Japan.^[1] Fukuda next traveled to the US in 1966, giving seminars in California.^[1] At that time, she was one of only four women in the world ranked at 5th *dan* in judo, and was one of only two female instructors at the Kodokan (the other being Masako Noritomi, also ranked 5th *dan*).^[13] In 1966, she demonstrated her art at Mills College, and the institution immediately offered her a teaching position; she accepted, and taught there from 1967 to 1978.^{[1][10][15][17]}



Fukuda has taught judo in San Francisco for most of her life

During this time, Fukuda lived at the Noe Valley home of one of her students, Shelley Fernandez, and taught judo there in addition to her teaching at the college.^[1] When the class sizes grew, she shifted the classes to the Sokoji Zen Buddhist temple in the Japantown, San Francisco.^{[1][10][15]} She named her school the Soko Joshi Judo Club.^[1] Having settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, Fukuda gave up her Japanese citizenship to become a US citizen.^[1]

Around 1972, following a letter campaign against the rule prohibiting women from being promoted higher than 5th *dan*, Fukuda became the first woman promoted to 6th *dan* by the Kodokan.^{[6][7][10][14]} In 1973, she published *Born for the Mat: A Kodokan kata textbook for women*, an instructional book for women about the *kata* (patterns) of Kodokan judo.^{[10][15][18]} In 1974, she established the annual Joshi Judo Camp to give female judo practitioners the opportunity to train together.^[11] That year, she was one of only three women in the world ranked 6th *dan* in judo.^[10]

In 1990, Fukuda was awarded Japan's Order of the Sacred Treasure, 4th Class (Gold Rays with Rosette), and the United States Judo Incorporated (USJI) Henry Stone Lifetime Contribution to American Judo Award.^{[1][11]} In 2004, she published *Ju-No-Kata: A Kodokan textbook, revised and expanded from Born for the Mat*, a pictorial guide for performing Ju-no-kata, one of the seven Kodokan *kata*.^[19] Fukuda has served as a technical adviser for US Women's Judo and the USJI Kata Judges' Certification Sub-committee.^[11] She has also served as a National Kata Judge, and was a faculty member of the USJI National Teachers' Institute, a member of the USJF Promotion Committee, and a member of the USJF and USJI Women's Sub-committee.^[11]

Fukuda holds the rank of 9th *dan*, the second-highest in judo, from two organizations,^[1] and in July 2011 received the rank of 10th *dan* from a third organization.^[6] In 2001, she was awarded a rare red belt (marking 9th *dan* rank) in judo by the USJF for her lifelong contribution to the art.^{[1][3]} On January 8,

2006, at its annual New Year's *Kagami Biraki* celebration, the Kodokan promoted Fukuda to the rank of 9th *dan*—the first time it had awarded this rank to a woman.^{[20][21][22]} On July 28, 2011, the promotion board of USA Judo awarded Fukuda the rank of 10th *dan*.^{[6][7]}

Later life

Fukuda still teaches judo three times each week, hosts the annual Fukuda Invitational Kata Championships, and teaches at the annual Joshi Judo Camp.^{[1][11][23]} She has established the Keiko Fukuda Judo Scholarship to encourage and enable women to continue their formal training in the art.^[24] Apart from teaching in the USA, she has also taught in Australia, Canada, France, Norway, and the Philippines.^[11] Fukuda's personal motto is: "Be gentle, kind, and beautiful, yet firm and strong, both mentally and physically."^{[1][5]}