Kōdōkan Jūdō’s Elusive Tenth Kata: The Gō-no-kata – ”Forms of Proper Use of Force” – Part 2

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Abstract

In recent years, gō-no-kata (“Prearranged forms of correct use of force”), a generally considered obsolete and reclusive ‘tenth’ kōdōkan jūdō, has become the subject of some renewed interest within jūdō circles. Most information on gō-no-kata, as available in the West, is ambiguous and often even blatantly erroneous. The purpose of the present paper is to remove the confusion and mystery which surrounds the gō-no-kata.

Background

Kata: Predetermined and choreographed physical exercises, which together with free exercises (randori) and lectures (kōgi) form the three critical pillars of Kōdōkan jūdō education.

Kōdōkan: The specific name of the his school and style of bujutsu as given by its founder Jigoro Kanō (1860–1938).

Jūdō: Jūdō is a Japanese form of pedagogy created by Jigoro Kanō, based inter alia on neoconfucianist values, traditional Japanese martial arts, and modern Western principles developed by John Dewey, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer.

In addition to the aforementioned nine kata, other – Kōdōkan and non-Kōdōkan – kata exist in jūdō. Most of these kata are not well known outside Japan and are rarely taught or practiced [1–3].

The purpose of the present paper is to provide a comprehensive study of a kata that once formed part of the Kōdōkan curriculum, but no longer features, namely the Gō-no-kata ("Prearranged forms of correct use of force"). In recent years, this generally considered obsolete ‘tenth’ kata has become the subject of some renewed interest within jūdō circles. However, much of the information in circulation on gō-no-kata, is contradictory, ambiguous, and even blatantly erroneous; at best, its contents and even its existence has been the subject of considerable speculation. In the first part of this series of three papers we showed that the origin of the misinformation on gō-no-kata can be traced back to modern jūdō authors failing to recognize both important mistakes contained in early Western jūdō books and the fabrication in recent years of a bogus gō-no-kata. In this second part, we aim to further remove this confusion and mystery which surrounds the gō-no-kata.

Our research questions are as follows:

What is the veracity of various claims made by certain publications that what they propose as gō-no-kata truly represents the historic gō-no-kata?

Does there exist a gō-no-kata in Kōdōkan jūdō?
If a ご-noonokata exists, then what is its contents and theoretical foundation?

If ご-noonokata exists, then who practices it and where can it be observed and learnt?

The second part of this series of three papers will mainly focus on the second and third of those four main questions. To address these questions and achieve our purpose, we offer a critical evaluation of the available literature and source material on this kata. Rare material drawn from original and reliable sources will also be introduced to support the drawing of definitive conclusions. This paper offers an important contribution to our knowledge of 五の形. It has a current jūdō syllabus, and also represents the only critical scholarly study of this kata in both Western languages and Japanese.

RESEARCH INTO THE ORIGINAL JAPANESE AND SCHOLARLY LITERATURE ON ご-noonokata

Common errors

It should be noted that several writings claimed by some to refer to ご-noonokata, actually refer to the 五sutsu-no-kata. To understand the root cause of this error it is necessary to explain the way the terms ご-noonokata and 五sutsu-no-kata are written (and read) in Japanese kanji. In Japanese kanji the term ご-noonokata is written as 剛の形 and 五sutsu-no-kata as 五の形. The error arises when the number five (五) in 五sutsu-no-kata is misread in its kun (＝original Japanese) pronunciation, which is ‘go’ instead of its quite different sounding on (Chinese-derived) pronunciation, hence incorrectly reading ご-noonokata instead of 五sutsu-no-kata.

Yet another common error sourced from a misunderstanding of the Japanese language is to confuse the ご-noonokata with the ご-noon-sen-no-kata (後の先の形). Go in the context of ご-noon-sen is unrelated to go in the ご-noonokata. The former go (後) means “after” or “reactive” while the latter go (剛) of course means hardness or force or resistance in the context of ご-noonokata.

As a final word of caution it is necessary to highlight that much of the available material on the ご-noonokata cited so far, contains insufficient detail to actually ‘prove’ the veracity of some of the claims made by others regarding the kata and as a consequence much of the published claims about the kata amount to little more than hearsay.

1 Also sometimes misspelled as Yoshiaki Yamashita, Japanese konji indicating names sometimes have multiple pronunciations, and the correct reading often may be known unless indicated so by the subject himself or someone else who knows for sure.

2 Also known as either Shūichi Nagaoka or Hidekazu Nagaoka.

THE QUIRKS OF HEURISTIC Jūdō LITERATURE RESEARCH

When reviewing the relevant literature in an attempt to learn more about ご-noonokata, one is confronted once again with the same issues that have troubled technical and historic research into jūdō, and ぶどう in general:

• absence of having consulted primary sources;
• absence of detailed references and footnotes;
• authors who are inexperienced in heuristics and research methods, and whose Japanese language ability is deficient, sometimes totally.

Despite some refreshing attempts over the last 20 years, still there are very few truly authoritative and annotated texts on unarmored ぶどう available in the West – notable exceptions being the works of Donn E. Draeger (1922–1982), Trevor P. Leggett (1914–2000) and Serge Mol (1970), as well as a handful of academic dissertations [4,5]. Specifically for jūdō, Draeger, Leggett, and also the translated works of Toshirō Daigo, Isao Okano and Kazuzō Kudō are of importance. Moreover, even most Japanese language jūdō books, except the few that were written by rare jūdō scholars such as Tamio Kurihara, Sanzō Maruyama [6], Shinichi Oimatsu [7], Takeshi Sakuraba [8], or Raisuke Kudō [9], often merely replicate each other’s content (without referencing, that is) or else have very little to add. It is for this reason that when errors appear in one book, they are often promulgated in subsequent other books, without much heuristic or scientific discourse, and very quickly become accepted as fact. The attribution of 五sutsu-no-kata as a creation of Jigorō Kanō might be one of the most blatant and commonly maintained ‘artifacts’ [10].

Therefore, for serious research one is forced to work almost exclusively from original Japanese sources and original source books, most of which are very old, very rare and virtually unknown in the West. Such sources, of course, are extremely difficult to obtain, usually absent in libraries, and often, when finally found, are very expensive to acquire. Academic institutions usually have little interest in jūdō, and relevant educational support organizations, such as for example, the Japan Foundation, notoriously refuse to sponsor or have anything to do with martial arts, apparently because they consider this area already sufficiently popular with the common public outside of Japan. If one does have a rare chance to lay hands on such reclusive texts, such as for example, the authoritative jūdō books by the celebrated 10th dan holders Yoshitsugu Yamashita (1865–1935), Hideichi Nagaoka (1876–1952) and Kūzō Mifune

(1883–1965), even then, one will, for the purpose of the present paper, not make much progress, since neither author reveals anything about or even mentions gö-no-kata.

It is not known for certain, precisely why there are no major written sources on the gö-no-kata, though the most prevalent speculative explanation assumes that it is because the kata already when Kanō-shihan was still alive, no longer featured as part of the Kōdōkan curriculum. In particular, given Mifune’s extensive knowledge of jūdō and his life-long work with Kanō-shihan, it would not be unreasonable to assume that he would have known the gö-no-kata. It is therefore a source of curiosity why Mifune who is also known to have devised and demonstrated various other uncommon jūdō kata (such as his own Nage- and Katame-usaża-usa-no-kata [properly called Nage-no-usa-warzna kẹnpjẹt] and his own early form of a very tortō-like Goshinjutsu) all to the apparent displeasure of Kanō, does neither show, nor even mention the gö-no-kata in any of his books.

In addition to the text known in the West as the Canon of Judo, Mifune wrote various other jūdō books – most notably (together with co-authors Kazuzō Kudō and Yoshizō Matsumoto), his large five-volume opus entitled Jūdō Kōsa [11]. This rather voluminous work contains extensive information on various technical and other aspects of jūdō and also many unique photographs e.g. Kyūzō Mifune and Kazuzō Kudō performing the itsutsu-no-kata, and Harukō Nihoshi and Keiko Fukuda showing the jū-no-kata. It can only be a matter of speculation why such an extensive work by such a great expert does not mention the gö-no-kata, but there must be an underlying reason for it as it is unlikely to be an accidental oversight. Perhaps the answer to this is found, at least partially, in the controversy in ideological approach to jūdō between Mifune and Kudō, with Mifune being a fervent advocate of the pure jū-principle, as clearly shown in his own kuki-nage-based tokui-usaza or favorite techniques, such as, sumi-otoshi, uki-otoshi, and tama-guruma, and Kudō rather arguing that initial use of force is acceptable as long as used efficiently. That being said, Kudō’s works, either those in Japanese or English, do not mention gö-no-kata either.

Furthermore, we know that there exist no works on any of the original 10-techniques forms of any of Kōdōkan jūdō’s kata, not about the original nage-no-kata, the original katame-no-kata, the original 10-techniques jū-no-kata, the original shibu-no-kata, so similarly, finding anything about the 10-techniques (never reworked, and thus original) gö-no-kata, represents a true challenge.

Two sensei who certainly mastered the gö-no-kata were the great Yaichibeï Kanemitsu and Tamio Kurihara, both 9th and 10th dan-holders, respectively. However, examination of their works (which are some of the most informed and documented among all jūdō books) similarly will yield not a trace of the gö-no-kata.

Moreover, those texts that do make some reference to gö-no-kata, such as jūdō Kyōhō by Sakujirō Yokoyama and Eisuke Ōshima first published in Japanese in 1909, and in English in 1915 [12], usually devote only half a sentence to it:

“… there are performed in the Kōdōkan some kinds of kata which were invented by Mr. Kanō, namely: itsutsu-no-kata, gö-no-kata, jū-no-kata, shobō-no-kata, etc.” (… [12]

Once more, none of these statements appearing in those works, is referenced. A further issue is to be overcome when researching the gö-no-kata is that unlike some of the other jūdō kata, such as the koshiki-no-kata or itsutsu-no-kata, and possibly kime-no-kata, the gö-no-kata appears not to have existed previously in a complete or known partial form in any koryū jūjutsu school. This means that for those other kata, even if certain details cannot be found in the oldest jūdō sources, one still has the opportunity to access much older jūjutsu texts for source material. However, since the gö-no-kata is almost certainly an original creation of Kanō-shihan, that option does not exist.

Precisely under what circumstances gö-no-kata was created or formalized is not known. There is no indication that the gö-no-kata would have featured during the 24 July 1906 conclave of leading jūjutsu and jūdō masters held at the Butokuden of the Dai Nippon Butokukai in Kyōto. This think-tank of respected jūjutsu masters presided by Jigorō Kanō had gathered to standardize and codify the official kata to be used by the Kōdōkan. (obviously, Kōdōkan goshinjutsu and goshin ōdō did not feature either, for the simple reason that these two would not be invented for almost another 50 years). Jigorō Kanō writes in his biography that this conclave only dealt really with nage-no-kata, katame-no-kata, and kime-no-kata, originally with the aim to create kata which would be nationally unified and possibly be suited for teaching outside of jūdō, as part of a national physical education [13]. Kanō had been instructed to do so by Viscount Uva, president of the Butokukai. Even jū-no-kata was not accepted by the Butokukai then, according to Kanō, most likely because its nature and contents was too far removed from classical jūjutsu, and thus considered too modernistic. Kanō had been far less satisfied with his gö-no-kata than with jū-no-kata, and had not yet revised it, hence why it still

1 Tortō (tori) literally means “grabbing the hands” and refers to a type of self-defence, that heavily relies on disarming an armed attacker, much like what is taught and used by the police.
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existed in its old 1887 ten-techniques version. Knowing that jū-no-kata would be excessive in terms of acceptance in 1906, the idea of proposing and defending his far less complete and perfected gō-no-kata to this conclave, would have been unimaginable. The impact of this is that post-1906 sources for the gō-no-kata are likely to be limited, hence complicating research into the gō-no-kata.

**Kōdōkan Periodicals**

Potential reference sources for the gō-no-kata are the various early journals published by the Kōdōkan.

The Kōdōkan started publishing its own journal in October of 1898 under the name Kokushi, 剣士, loosely meaning “The Patriot”. In December of 1914 its name was changed into jūdō 柔道, only to change again in January of 1919 to Yūkō-no-katasu 有効乃活動, this title being loosely translated as “The Efficiency of Movement”. Likely this name was too modern, since three years later, in 1922 the name was changed again, now into Taisei 大勢. Taisei has an intentional double meaning. Literally, it means “Large Crowd” or “The People”, hence suggesting that jūdō is meant for and suited to everyone; however, the name Taisei also means something else, namely “Current Thoughts”, thus suggesting a process of philosophical reflection on matters. This name must have appealed even less, since the magazine appeared barely a couple of months under that name before changing again, now into Jūdo Kai 柔道会 or “The Judo Community”. The Kai-part then was dropped in 1929, and it continued to be known under the shortened title jūdō which has been in existence ever since. It is worthwhile mentioning that a second journal, Sukhō 作興, loosely translated as “Awakening” or “Promotion” (as in the sense of “to market”) appeared for a couple of years simultaneously with jūdō.

These early journals originated from a time when jūdō had not been tainted or damaged by an overemphasis on sports-based competition and winning medals, and thus their content focused on what really mattered to Kanō, that is jūdō as an all-round means of education. These periodicals presented a view on jūdō entirely different to that promulgated today, and they contained information on how to develop one’s physical, spiritual, pedagogical and philosophical capacities.

The authors of the articles therein were great jūdō masters of the past, such as Yoshitsugu Yamashita, Hajime Isogai (1871–1947), Hideichi Nagaoka, and Kaichirō Samura (1880–1964), individuals who all achieved 10th dan. These masters were not only educated in tradition- al jūjutsu, but also who laid the foundation and conceptualization of what jūdō really is, and was meant to be. Frequent editorials and lengthy philosophical articles by Kanō himself also featured. Moreover, it was in these magazines that certain things such as the kata were introduced to the jūdō world, often a single technique per issue. The nage-no-kata, kime-no-kata and jū-no-kata were all introduced in this manner.

Accessing information from these early journals, however, is a non-trivial task. Bound reprints in large volumes exist, covering, with a few omissions, the entire period from 1898 to 1938 totaling in excess of 20,000 pages. These volumes themselves are accompanied by two booklets (of about 140 pages total) that have reprinted the original table of contents of each periodical. There exists no further index or glossary to these volumes. Accordingly, it is exceptionally difficult to locate an item of interest, apart from each time reading both booklets and subsequently verifying and reading through an entire article of interest in the actual volume. Realistically, it is almost impossible to locate anything unless it has been already found and its relevance confirmed, or unless one is prepared to undertake the painstaking process described.

De Crée [1] cites two pieces of writing on the gō-no-kata attributed to Kanō himself. They are reported as featuring in a 1921 edition of Yūkō-no-katasu [14] and a 1927 edition of Sukhō [15]. Kanō’s 1983 biography really reprints some of this information, such as the 1921 article, and thus repeats the information on gō-no-kata; so does Masao Koyasu [16]. These two items authored by Kanō-shihan himself will be discussed at a later stage. It is also likely that other, hitherto undiscovered, references on the gō-no-kata may feature somewhere in the entire oeuvre of Kōdōkan magazines or old leaflets.

**The truth about Gō-no-kata, a kata of focused strength**

To develop a deeper understanding of the conflicting ideas around the gō-no-kata the material indicating that it was complementary to the jū-no-kata is now evaluated. The oldest source retrieved so far, which contains truthful information about gō-no-kata comes from an unexpected author, namely, Sadakazu Uenishi.

1906 – Sadakazu Uenishi – The Text of Ju-jutsu as Practiced in Japan [17]

Uenishi in the preface of his book describes how the samurai, not only preserved their art of self-defense, but...
also their physical culture. The importance in combat of possessing superior physical strength had been recognized from the days of the dawn of the human race. Indeed, in era that preceded the "halterophilia" and methods of weightlifting that were introduced and gained some popularity in the early 20th century, 19th and pre-19th century development of physical strength heavily realized on working with heavy objects found in nature, or commonly used in certain handicap jobs, as well as specific exercises. Such strength-developing exercises also existed in some jūjutsu schools:

"Consider, for instance, the various exercises which have been alleged to be essential preliminaries to Jūjutsu training. Well, I have never seen any Jū-jutsu man who ever practised them. In the old style of Jū-jutsu before my time, there was I believe an exercise called tai-atarī or "toughing" exercise, in which the practitioners rushed at each other, chest to chest, somewhat in the style of the exercise called dzu-duk-ku, practised by the Sumo wrestlers, who develop their strength and hardiness by butting each other. In fact, all these "resistance" movements, concerning which certain pseudo authorities on Jū-jutsu have been so fluent, would, if of any practical value at all, be more suitable as training for the Sumo style of wrestling than for Jū-jutsu. For Sumo is contested by big heavy men, often standing about six feet in height and weighing from eighteen to twenty stone, who rely almost entirely on their strength and avoirdupois to give them the victory, not that they are without various tricks, stone, who rely almost entirely on their strength and avoirdupois to give them the victory, not that they are without various tricks.

Uenishi is correct, and the use of the names gō-no-kata and jī-no-kata in jūdō, unlike what some may think, is hardly original. Gō-no-kata in essence existed in a number of classical budō schools together with jī-no-kata as part of taiō-no-kata. Taiō-no-kata (体操の形 really means 'gymnastics' or 'calisthenics' in a broader sense. As all gymnastics, certain exercises focus more on developing greater muscular strength (gō-no-kata), whereas others focus more on stretching and increasing flexibility (jī-no-kata). Thus, such exercises existed in budō schools besides jūdō. Most commonly, these were much looser and not as a strictly codified as choreographed patterns the way they exist in jūdō. They certainly did not exist previously in a ceremonial form like they are most often today performed in jūdō. In jūjutsu, a gō-no-kata or a jī-no-kata might greatly differ from time to time depending on who was teaching, just like warm-up exercises in any jūdō club might greatly differ from time to time. In jūdō though, Kanō re-created a very specific gō-no-kata and a jī-no-kata. Moreover, he made these into exercises that represented the fundamentals and philosophy of jūdō. Thus both exercises, in addition to developing strength and flexibility, respectively, also represented the grammar of jūdō technique, and actively contributed towards better understanding jūdō, improving technique, and realizing jūdō’s principles.

1921 (November) – Jigoro Kanō – Yūkō-no-katsusudō [14]

Writing in Yūkō-no-katsusudō on the progression of learning kata, Kanō states that the gō-no-kata contains ten techniques. However, contrary to what is implied by O Helkamp [18], no listing of the techniques is provided.

"Gō-no-kata or at times called Gō-ji-no-kata, I remember having taught it some time in the past but my study was not complete; three or four out of the total ten forms in it, I did not like. I had thought of reviewing it but left it as it was. In this kata, at first both [Tori and Uke] will push, pull or twist each other hard and in the end one [Tori] will win by surrendering himself to the force. I am thinking of completing it in future and teach it in the Kōdōkan. As for now, you may study it or not study it, which is up to you." (…) [14, p. 1–6].

From this passage it can be concluded that Kanō was not entirely satisfied with a number of points in the gō-no-kata. Also, we learnt that the gō-no-kata by Kanō-shihan was deemed neither perfect, nor finished.

The key sentence in the passage is the final one, where Kanō states that he leaves it up to the judgment of the individual jūdōka whether or not to practice the gō-no-kata. Moreover, it confirms that Kanō did not reject the kata in its entirety nor did he disapprove of anyone practicing it. Even prior to Daigo-sensei’s recent lecture and paper [20,21], this suggests that the Kōdōkan’s traditional position i.e. that gō-no-kata does not or does no longer exist, or would have been discarded by Kanō and should not be studied, was overstated and open to challenge.

To add to the above conclusion, the late Trevor P. Leggett, for example, to name just one well-respected authority on jūdō, recalled having once seen the gō-no-kata being performed at the Kōdōkan in the 1930’s. Any suggestion in the sense that gō-no-kata does not exist, is thus nonsensical.

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6 Tai-atarī 体当特別y means "hitting the body", to be understood here as a toughening method.

7 Tori the person who applies a throw or other technique… [19], p. 128). Uke the person who receives a technique… (Ibid., p. 131).
It is also informative to note from the source that an original, alternative name for the gō-no-kata was gō-jū-no-kata (Forms of Hardness & Gentleness). This further reinforces the complementary nature of the gō-no-kata and jī-no-kata.

1926 – Jigoro Kanō – Shin Nihonshi – reproduced in Mind Over Muscle [22]

A lecture note by Kanō (which merely mentions the gō-no-kata) dates from 1926 and was originally published as Judo no Hattatsu 柔道の発達 “The Development of Judo” in Shin Nihonshi 新日本史 “A New History of Japan”. This lecture was recently reproduced as From Fudōtsu to Judo in the book Mind Over Muscle: Writings From the Founder of Judo compiled by Naoki Murata and translated by Nancy Ross [22, p. 8–35]:

“So few years after I established Kōdōkan jūdō, I created fifteen kata for throws and ten kata for combat called kime-no-kata (forms of self-defense). After that, the kata for yasawara were created, so most of the kata were completed by around 1887. During this time, those of us undergoing training were at our most passionate about study. We have of course, made progress since then, but it is safe to say that the technical foundation of the Kōdōkan judo of today was established at that time. Other kata that were established around that time included itsutsu-no-kata (the five forms), ten kata for katame-no-kata (forms of grappling), and ten kata for gōjū-no-kata (also known as gō-no-kata; forms of strength).” […] [22, p. 23]

As an aside, this passage raises more questions than it answers, as it suggests that the nage-no-kata and kime-no-kata were the first two jūdō kata created. The consequence of this is that it suggests that the kime-no-kata (meant, most likely, is … in its original form, that is … shōbu-no-kata) existed before the katame-no-kata which is contrary to conventional thinking.


In December 1927 Kanō wrote in Sakkō:

“… in contrast to this jū-no-kata, there is a kind of kata called gō-no-kata or gōjū-no-kata. It is a system whereby at first both (Tori and Uke) will fight with force against force, but later Tori changes to ju (softness) and wins. I used to teach it one time but as there were some points I was not satisfied with, I am not teaching it nowadays. I look forward to further refinement.”[13]

It should be noted that this Sakkō extract is also quoted in a recent French language biography of Kanō (Jigoro Kanô: Père du judo – La vie du fondateur du judo, by Michel Mazac [23, p. 160–161]), where additional contextual material on the jī-no-kata is provided.


Yves Klein (1928–1962), the famous avant-garde French artist, became fascinated with jūdō in the early 1950s and made the decision to travel to Japan to study jūdō in depth. Klein had arrived in Yokohama on September 23rd of 1952 and remained there for 15 months, until he returned to France in 1954, armed with a 4th dan degree, issued by the Kōdōkan on December 18th of 1953. Klein was unique in that he devoted great attention to kata, which was very unusual for a Westerner in those days. For Klein, kata had both spiritual and artistic properties. His 1954 oeuvre [24] is entirely devoted to kata, of which he details five: nage-no-kata, katame-no-kata, jī-no-kata, itsutsu-no-kata, and koshiki-no-kata. Klein himself functions as the tori of the first three of those kata, whereas for the last two kata he fulfills the role of the uke, with the tori part being taken care of by Jōin Oda-sensei and Sempei Asami-sensei, respectively. The presence of itsutsu-no-kata, and koshiki-no-kata in a Western book and performed by a Westerner as early as 1954 must have been a first. In his book, Klein writes the following:

“… Autrefois on pratiquait le Kata de ‘Go’ (dix techniques), qui était l’étude de la puissance, force physique, violence et contractions. Au Japon, on pratiquait encore aujourd’hui ce Kata assez étrange dans les dojos de ‘Karate’ (sorte de ‘savate’ japonaise).

On pratiquait aussi le “Shōbu-No-Kata” (dix techniques) qui était l’étude du combat de guerre.

Le “Seiryoku-zenyo-kokumintai-iku-no-kata”, souvent cité comme le 7° kata, n’est plus pratiqué aujourd’hui au Kōdōkan. (…) [24, p. 18]

[“… Formerly they used to practice ‘Gō-no-kata’ (ten techniques), which was the study of power, physical force, violence and contractions. In Japan, they still practice this rather strange Kata in ‘Karate’ (kind of Japanese ‘French boxing’) dōjō today. They also used to practice ‘Shōbu-no-kata’ (ten techniques) which was the study of the combat of war. The ‘Seiryoku-zenyo-kokumintai-iku-no-kata’, often called the 7th kata, today is no longer practiced at the Kōdōkan. (…)]

Klein, in addition to Trevor P. Leggett, was likely one of the first Westerners to mention and recognize gō-no-kata. The fact that he includes advanced kata, such as koshiki-no-kata in his book, but not gō-no-kata, may suggest that already then this kata had become rather elusive. Although, Klein does not identify the individual techniques of gō-no-kata, his merit is that he clearly and correctly states that the exercise contains ten individual techniques.
CONCLUSIONS

Serious research into the gō-no-kata is a very difficult endeavor. There is a dearth of major written sources on the kata, and what is commonly available is often unverifiable, incomplete, ambiguous or factually in error.

While research into this area remains ongoing, there exists sufficient and even ample evidence that indicates that the gō-no-kata is not, nor in any form has ever been a kata of blows, but an exercise examining the principle of efficient use of force and resistance. The literature indicates that the movements within the kata focused on the direct resistance of force (with force) right up until the very last moment when the force is overcome by skill, strategy and body movement.

Based on the original comments provided by Kanō-shihan [14,13], it is understood beyond any doubt that the gō-no-kata was and is a special and never completed set of exercises (ten in total) for two people devised by Kanō-shihan that combined several aims:

Jūdō Education: The gō-no-kata provided a framework for the correct learning of the basics of jūdō without throwing. It teaches how to use force effectively, without relying on force as one's primary means to conquer an opponent.

Physical Education: The gō-no-kata required using one’s body with precision, especially in the practice of using both focused strength and yielding at critical timings during jūdō techniques.

Physical Culture: Practice of the gō-no-kata assisted in the development of physical strength itself, in a time that power training devices were nearly nonexistent.

Psychological Benefits: It was believed that practice of the gō-no-kata contributed to increased willpower and "spiritual energy" in the sense of mens sana in corpore sano [a healthy spirit in a healthy body].

If indeed both kata were established in 1887, then it is appropriate to conclude that the gō-no-kata and the jū-no-kata were created as a complementary pair, as follows:

Gō-no-kata: Likewise, in the gō-no-kata, the gō (hardness) question is first responded to by gō and then subsequenly by jū (softness). Specifically, the gō-no-kata starts with gō but ends in jū. Thus the gō-no-kata adheres to a fundamental tenet of jūdō namely that softness controls hardness in the end.

Both kata convey the meaning of jū-nori, i.e the core principle of jūjutsu whereby one avoids opposing an opponent’s force and power directly in favor of using it to one’s advantage. They also accord with jū yoku gō wo sei suru 柔能く剛を制する, a core principle of jūdō which can be translated in a number of ways: softness overcomes hardness, flexibility overcomes stiffness, gentleness controls strength or win by yielding.

Kanō’s own writings indicate that he was not satisfied with elements of the gō-no-kata and therefore abandoned, or at least, delayed its development. Furthermore, like with Itsutsu-no-kata, Kanō never found the time afterwards to rework, revise or expand the gō-no-kata and accordingly it must be considered as unfinished. However the writings also confirm that Kanō did not reject the kata in its entirety or its practice, unlike what some claim; so the Kōdōkan is overstating the case when it suggests otherwise.

Finally, we applaud Toshirō Daigo-sensei’s recent paper [25] in which he included gō-no-kata as a legitimate and existing Kōdōkan kata. We hope that this exercise will soon be reintroduced in the Kōdōkan’s formal teaching curriculum of kata.

Notes

Japanese names in this paper are listed by given name first and family name second, instead of traditional Japanese usage which places the family name first.

For absolute rigor, long Japanese vowel sounds have been approximated using macrons (e.g. Kōdōkan) in order to indicate their Japanese pronunciation as closely as possible. However, when referring to or quoting from the literature, the relevant text or author is cited exactly as per the original source, with macrons used or omitted as appropriate.
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