The Principles of Osaekomi in Kodokan Judo
Lýr Jones

Purpose
This article identifies and discusses five key points that apply to all the individual techniques in Osaekomi-waza [holding techniques]. The points discussed are pedagogical/didactic in nature and no attempt is made to cover the physics underpinning osaekomi-waza which are relatively simple, as osaekomi-waza essentially rely on the application of pressure.

Introduction
Of the three types of Katame-waza [Controlling techniques] in Kodokan Judo (judo), ose-komi-waza (most often written as osaekomi-waza) are arguably the most basic and are among the first techniques a student learns (IJF, n.d.). In judo, the terms ose-komi-waza and ose-waza are interchangeable, and in the original Kodokan documents that describe the meaning and background of the term, it is written therein, in Japanese, as “ose-(komi)-waza” i.e. with the “komi” not being mandatory. However, the full term is generally used in the Kodokan and, in 1906 when the katame waza were officially codified, it used the full term too.

Figure 1: Osaekomi

The term ose-komi-waza is usually translated in the West as “holding techniques”, however greater insight into the essential principles germane to all ose-komi-waza can be obtained by returning to first-principles and considering the very literal meaning of the word ose-komi in Japanese.

What Does Osaekomi Literally Mean?
The strict literal translation of the term ose-komi-waza is not “holding techniques”, but rather “pressuring techniques”. Extrapolated, the term “pressuring” or “to exert pressure” also means “to control”, so “controlling techniques”. Were it to mean “holding” in the conventional sense then it could, for example, be used when holding a glass of beer or a plastic cup of coffee, which it cannot – as this would imply squashing the cup so that the coffee would be come out all over oneself.

Figure 2: Do-ose (trunk hold)
Figure 3: Do-jime (trunk constriction)
It is worth noting that the “osae” in osaekomi is the same as what features in the Japanese term for what Brazilian Jujitsu [sic] (BJJ) players call “the guard” (i.e. controlling an opponent’s body between one’s legs) – that is do-osae [trunk hold] – see Figure 2. This implies that the opponent is kept there, i.e. between the legs, with escape attempts neutralised through pressure; it does not though imply that the opponent is forced to submit through squeezing so hard that a “body Shime-waza [Strangling technique]”, i.e. a do-jime [trunk constriction] – see Figure 3, is applied [1].

The “komi” in the combination osaekomi essentially means “to be stuck”, “to be jammed” or “to be wrapped up”. It indicates that the technique applied is very “freedom-restricting” and that Uke is actually prevented from freely moving as much as possible through Tori’s pressure and control. (It is very common in Japanese to indicate the meaning of something with two words where one of the words may, but less absolutely, already indicate the meaning. The two words combined always define the meaning much more unambiguously.)

The 1981 World Champion in the featherweight (65kg) weight category, Katsuhiko Kashiwazaki (born 1951), Kodokan 8th dan [Figure 4] of Japan, is widely regarded as one of the greatest exponents of newaza in modern times, and secured the majority of his contest-career victories in this way. Writing in the foreword to Kashiwazaki’s seminal book “Osaekomi” [Figure 5] in Ippon Books’ “Judo Masterclass Techniques” series, the noted classical music and judo journalist Nicholas Soames states [2]:

“Osaekomi – the holds of judo – is the root of all ground work. With a sound and secure knowledge of the mechanics of getting an opponent on his back and holding him there there is an understanding of judo that is second to none.” (…)

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<tr>
<th>Kodokan Recognised Osaekomi-waza (pre-1 April 2017)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Tate-shiho-gatame</td>
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<td>Kesa-gatame*</td>
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* The name Kesa-gatame was stipulated on 1 April 1997, and the use of the name Hon-kesa-gatame [Regular scarf hold] was discontinued from that date onwards.

At that time the Kodokan used the formal name Kuzure-kesa-gatame for all variants of Kesa-gatame instead of commonly used Makura-kesa-gatame [Pillow scarf hold] and Ushiro-kesa-gatame [Reverse scarf hold] which, for example, are used by the British Judo Association.

It should also be noted that Kesa-gatame and Kami-shiho-gatame are the only waza which have a formal Kuzure variant according to Kodokan classification. There are no Kuzure variants of Yoko-shiho-gatame, Tate-shiho-gatame nor Kata-gatame.

At the time when the Kodokan recognised seven official osaekomi techniques, the International Judo Federation (IJF) recognised nine, with Uki-gatame [Floating hold] and Ushiro-kesa-gatame [Reverse scarf hold] supplementing the Kodokan list [4].

On 1 April 2017, after giving further consideration, the Kodokan added three further osaekomi techniques – namely Ushiro-kesa-gatame, Uki-gatame and Ura-gatame [Reverse hold] to the list of existing official techniques to give a total of ten acknowledged techniques [5, 6] see Table 2.

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Note that the technique called Ura-gatame here is due to Kyuzo Mifune (1883-1965) Kodokan 10th dan [7, 8] and was legitimised for use in sports-competition judo by the IJF in October 2013 – see Figure 6.
A completely different technique to the one with the same name, Ura-gatame is after Mikinosuke Kawaishi (1899–1969) Dai Nippon Butokukai / Kodokan 7th dan, French Judo Federation 10th dan [9] – see Figure 7 and later.

Note that this Ura-gatame is not valid in modern sports-competition judo, but is a very effective technique nonetheless.

At the time of writing this article the Kodokan and IJF list [10] of recognised osaekomi-waza are identical, with Ura-gatame having been added to the IJF list. However, it is of course essential to acknowledge that there are literally hundreds of personal variations of these techniques that can be seen in competition or in everyday practice.

**Five Key Pedagogical/Didactic Points Germane to All Osaekomi-waza**

Based on a review of a selection of the judo literature – including books by Neil Adams and Cyril Carter [11], Moshe Feldenkrais [12], Syd Hoare [13], Katsuhiro Kashiwazaki [2], Mikinosuke Kawaishi [9], and Isao Okano [14], as well as the author’s own experience in judo the following five key points are proposed as being germane to all osaekomi-waza:

- Control;
- Body placement;
- Stability;
- Space management;
- Mobility.

The previous points will now be considered in turn.

**Control**

Tori must control Uke so that his back and at least one shoulder is in contact with the tatami [mat]. Note that control is not limited to securing Uke, but also to make Tori safe from Uke, for example, by avoiding to provide the opportunity for Uke to apply a shimewaza [choking or strangling technique]. Tori must note in particular his own use of various grips to control certain limbs of Uke, as well as his head.

In osaekomi-waza, control can be achieved from the side (with Tori at an angle or perpendicular to Uke), the top, from behind the head, from between the legs or from beneath. Note though, that in the rules of judo sports competition, for an osaekomi to be valid, Tori himself must not have his leg(s) or body controlled by Uke’s legs.

Examples of these control positions will now be given by drawing selected techniques from the ten osaekomi-waza recognised by the Kodokan and the IJF, and the non-recognised osaekomi-waza due to Kawaishi.

- **Side:** For example, Kesa-gatame and Yoko-shiho-gatame et al;
- **Top:** Tate-shiho-gatame;
- **Behind the head:** Kami-shiho-gatame and Kuzure-kami-shiho-gatame;
- **From underneath:** Ura-gatame – after Mifune [7, 8].
- **Between the legs:** Ura-gatame – the immobilisation from Underneath – after Kawaishi [9].

**Body Placement**

Tori needs to maintain close contact with Uke – positioning his body relative to Uke’s according to the principles of the particular holding technique. Tori should note in particular the position of his own legs, feet and head.

**Stability**

Tori must protect his own balance by keeping his centre of gravity low and sinking his weight. He should also use his own body parts (arms, elbows, knees, legs, and feet) as bracing points to stabilise his own position and control Uke.

**Space Management**

Tori must immobilise Uke to the greatest possible extent – thereby minimising any relative motion between himself and Uke to avoid the creation of a gap that Uke could exploit to escape the pin. Uke will be continuously attempting to open up a gap in which to rotate, and conversely Tori will be striving to close it.

**Mobility**

As well as stability it is essential for Tori to have a mobile base so that he can move and adjust his position without losing control as Uke endeavours to escape. Moreover, this enables the transition to an alternative waza should it be necessary, or the opportunity present itself. (Additionally, linking this to “space management” suppose that if Tori...
feels his osaekomi-waza is weak and Uke is likely to break it then by offering Uke a gap then Tori can then anticipate the direction in which Uke will rotate and then adjust the osaekomi-waza appropriately.

Taken together the points about body movement and repositioning made under “space management” and “mobility” are at the heart of Tai-sabaki [Body management] as applied to osaekomi. In the modern translation of Mifune’s Canon of Judo [8] this is summarised as “….they [katame waza] form the basis of techniques for adapting, which are at the core of judo’s philosophy. It is important to constantly change and adapt your techniques according to the opponent’s movements.” (...)

Concluding Remarks
Following some brief contextual material this short article has identified and discussed five key pedagogical/didactic points germane to all the individual osaekomi-waza. One need look no further than the first set of the Katame-no-kata [Forms of Control] – Osaekomi-waza – to both validate and illustrate the points discussed, – see Otaki & Draeger [15].

The Katame-no-kata is concerned with learning control - in particular, how Tori can best use his body in an efficient manner to control Uke on the ground. Tori must work on his versatility and show excellent tai-sabaki whilst grappling and Uke must strive to escape and exploit any weaknesses in Tori’s techniques. Through practicing the Katame-no-kata [Figure 1] in a realistic and dynamic manner both Tori and Uke can assimilate the lessons that the kata imparts and leverage them for the benefit of their randori [free practice] and shiai [contest].

Figure 7: Katame-no-kata

References

Acknowledgements
The author is grateful to judo scholar Carl De Crée, for the many helpful exchanges that helped shape this article.

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“JUDO & LIFE”
by Brian N. Watson

Background
This new book by Brian Watson and produced by Trafford Publishing – Figure 1, contains 48 reflective essays. Specifically, the compositions are on i) Jigoro Kano’s principles of judo, ii) personal experiences, iii) life’s challenges, and iv) matters of societal concern in contemporary Japanese and Western culture.

Kano’s Goals
The three body-mind relationship goals that Kano advised his judo students to aspire to; namely, to perfect themselves physically, intellectually and morally are all aimed at the same objective - self-improvement.

The first goal is perhaps the easiest and the one that many judoka achieve by gaining a dan grade, after a few years’ training, and perhaps by winning a few medals along the way. The next two goals are psychological in nature and usually take longer to attain.

The intellectual (second) goal is focused on educating oneself for what one wishes to become in life, whether it be an
engineer, a teacher, an accountant or whatever one’s desire. These goals, however, often require much book learning. Because “time and tide wait for no man” one must read, read and read some more in order to expand one’s vocabulary and acquire the necessary knowledge.

The third goal is mainly focused on the moral lessons that one should have learnt after completion of the previous two. These teachings should prove useful in helping one to succeed in one’s endeavours and enable one to impart proper moral guidance to others, especially the young when teaching judo.

“Judo & Life” is available at amazon.co.uk and amazon.com in both paperback and Kindle format.

In 1949, Richard Bowen began judo training in London at the Budokwai, of which became Vice-President. He lived in Japan for four years to deepen his studies. A former British International, he fought in the first ever World Judo Championships in Japan in 1956. He was the author of more than eighty articles. Richard Bowen built up an extensive judo library in the course of research for his articles and books, and he kindly donated it to the University of Bath Library. Items in the collection are for reference use only (not available for loan). Items can be viewed between 9am-5pm.