Gonosen-no-Kata – A Personal Perspective
By Martin Savage, edited and arranged by Llyr Jones

A Bronze medallist in the -80kg category at the 1963 (12th) European Judo Championships, Dave was a member of a golden generation of judoka that British judo was so fortunate to have, first practising and then coaching, from the 1950s onwards. The Society's sincere condolences are extended to his family.

Contributions and Comments
"The Bulletin" forms the backbone of the Kano Society’s activities. All contributions in the form of articles, photographs etc. are always welcome.

At least in name Gonosen-no-Kata hints at something more complex than just a series of counter throws but often in practice this critically important concept is overlooked.

Many judoka [judo practitioners] in the United Kingdom (UK) and Western Europe will be familiar with the Gonosen-no-Kata, if only in name, as it has been part of the British Judo Association’s (BJA) Technical Dan Grade syllabus [1] since its inception in January 2006 – see later. They may even be able to describe it as “the kata of counter throws” displaying at least a peripheral understanding of the exercise, however fewer judoka would I imagine have any deeper understanding than this.

Many judoka [judo practitioners] in the United Kingdom (UK) and Western Europe will be familiar with the Gonosen-no-Kata, if only in name, as it has been part of the British Judo Association’s (BJA) Technical Dan Grade syllabus [1] since its inception in January 2006 – see later. They may even be able to describe it as “the kata of counter throws” displaying at least a peripheral understanding of the exercise, however fewer judoka would I imagine have any deeper understanding than this.

At least in name Gonosen-no-Kata hints at something more complex than just a series of counter throws but often in practice this critically important concept is overlooked.

Many judoka [judo practitioners] in the United Kingdom (UK) and Western Europe will be familiar with the Gonosen-no-Kata, if only in name, as it has been part of the British Judo Association’s (BJA) Technical Dan Grade syllabus [1] since its inception in January 2006 – see later. They may even be able to describe it as “the kata of counter throws” displaying at least a peripheral understanding of the exercise, however fewer judoka would I imagine have any deeper understanding than this.

At least in name Gonosen-no-Kata hints at something more complex than just a series of counter throws but often in practice this critically important concept is overlooked.


**Mitsu-no-Sen**

Gonosen is one of three combative strategies collectively known as *Mitsu-no-Sen* 三つの先 [The three Sen]. The other two being *Sen-no-Sen* and *Sen-Sen-no-Sen* all originating from kenjutsu [art of sword] and attributed to the Japanese swordsman, philosopher, strategist, writer and drifter Musashi Miyamoto (1584 - 1645).

![Musashi Miyamoto wielding two bokken. Woodblock print by Kunioshi Utagawa](image)

The literal translation of Sen can be quite straightforward. It can mean “Ahead of”, “Before”, “In front of”, but it can also suggest “Taking the initiative”, “Foresight”, “Mental strategy”, “to precede one’s opponent in a decisive action”.

**Sen-no-Sen**

Sen-no-Sen is a somewhat simpler strategy in that Uke has already begun to launch his attack and Tori is responding just as Uke begins to move. It relies probably less on psychology than Sen-Sen-no-Sen and more on fast reflexes from Tori.

**Go-no-Sen**

Go-no-Sen is the most basic of the three and the most commonly used in judo. Go-no-Sen 後の先 is a concept of Japanese martial arts in which Tori retakes the initiative in combat after Uke has already started an actual attack which is well underway and not just a preparatory move or twitch. Once Uke starts to attack, Tori recovers the initiative and performs the counter technique.

While it is the most basic of the three Sen, in essence it is still more complex than Tori just waiting for an attack to come at him and then countering with an attack of his own. It is not just a counterattack, but it is more correct to say that it is a harmonisation with the movement of the attack in order to retake the initiative. The attack is contained or diverted, and the initiative seized back by Tori. This is also the principle behind most of the throws in Nage-no-Kata [Forms of Throwing] although in that case although initiative is recovered by Tori, Uke’s attack never gets beyond the kumikata [engagement positioning / grip] or kuzushi [balance-breaking] stage.

**History**

Gonosen-no-Kata is not and never has been a Kodokan-recognised kata and as such there is no universally accepted standard for its presentation. This causes many problems along with its uncertain provenance. It appeared for the first time in London in 1926 demonstrated by Keishichi Ishiguro (1897-1974) [2]. Some people say that this was nothing more than a series of counter attacks put together for the demonstration without any deeper underlying philosophy and it was later called a *kata* by British judoka with them simply copying the sequence shown by Ishiguro.
There is no definitive answer as to the origin of this kata although many people erroneously attribute its development to Mikinosuke Kawaishi (1899-1969). This error has come about due to the fact that Kawaishi was responsible for the promotion of this kata throughout Western Europe from the 1930s until the 1960s. He also authored “The Complete 7 Katas of Judo” [3] translated into English by the British journalist, author and judoka E.J. Harrison (1873-1961) in 1957, which contains a chapter on Gonosen-no-Kata and remains, still, the definitive reference text on the exercise.

If one accepts that it is reasonable for Gonosen-no-kata to be thought of as a kata, then it can be classified as a Randori-no-kata² [Forms of Free Practice] because its practice supports the development of randori [free practice] skills. Indeed, Kawaishi himself is of the opinion that Gonosen-no-kata “very happily complements the Randori-no-Kata”. The techniques of the Gonosen-no-Kata as provided by Kawaishi are as follows:

- O-soto-gari
- Hiza-guruma
- O-uchi-gari
- De-ashi-barai
- Ko-soto-gake
- Ko-uchi-gari
- Kubi-nage
- Koshi-guruma
- Hane-goshi
- Harai-goshi
- Uchi-mata
- Kata-seoi
- Sumi-gaeshi
c/b = countered by

Cari De Crée in his 2015 paper “Three Orphaned Forms of Counter Techniques – Part 1: The Gonosen-no-Kata” [2] produced the most comprehensive study on its possible origins but at the conclusion was forced to admit that the identity of its creator will in all likelihood remain lost to history. There are however good reasons for discounting Kawaishi as the creator. The most convincing being that he never claimed that he was the originator and in fact he credited “Masters” of Waseda University (a private university mainly located in Shinjuku, Tokyo) for its development without actually identifying them. It is also interesting that at the same time Kawaishi suggests that Gonosen-no-kata is practiced less in Japan than in Europe [3]:

“In Japan it is studied and practiced only in some Schools and it is especially the Kata characteristic of one of the most celebrated universities, the Waseda University.

---

¹ Randori-no-kata is the collective title for the Nage-no-Kata [Forms of Throwing] and Katame-no-Kata [Forms of Grappling] as they illustrate the principles behind techniques used in randori.

It has been created for about forty years by the Masters of this University and without doubt is practiced more in France and Europe than in Japan itself."

Also, some experts suggest that the kata was devised as early as 1910 in which case Kawaishi, at that time, was only 11 years old and if that were true, he could not really be considered the person who developed it. The details that are known to be correct is that Kawaishi did study Political Economics at Waseda from 1920 to 1924 and that techniques utilising Go-no-Sen were studied there. Whoever the originator was there is though no doubt that Kawaishi was the principal driving force behind the kata’s dissemination through Western Europe where it is still remains popular.

De Crée [2] states that despite much research he was unable to find any trace in any Japanese-language judo book of any exercise resembling or named Gonosen-no-Kata. Also, doing a Japanese language search on Google Japan does not produce a single return in text, pictures, or videos.

Although of course kaeshi-waza existed in an informal way at this time the lack of any mention of this kata certainly brings into question its existence before the Nage-waza Ura-no-Kata [Forms of Reverse Throwing Techniques] created by Kyuzo Mifune (1883-1965) [4].

The oldest source mentioning Gonosen-no-kata appears to be The Budokwai’s “Dojo Book” recording a display which included the kata in 1926, although there is some doubt about whether this was really a kata as we accept the term today or just a collection of counters which The Budokwai named Gonosen-no-Kata. In that demonstration Tori was Keishichi Ishiguro and if the kata did not exist before this event then there is certainly a case for crediting him as being the originator. At this stage Kawaishi was touring the United States (US) and did not arrive in the UK until late 1931.

When Kawaishi arrived in the UK he became an apprentice instructor to Gunji Koizumi and certainly he met Ishiguro there and was photographed with him. The oldest document connecting Kawaishi with Gonosen-no-Kata is a brochure for the 1932 International between Oxford University and a German team. The kata is listed on the program with Kawaishi as Tori and Masutaro Otani (1898-1977) as Uke.

In 1932 possibly motivated by professional jealousy over grades and pedigree The Budokwai blacklisted Kawaishi due to an alleged violation of the Aliens Restriction Act. This was followed by a smear campaign against him and in October 1935 he moved to France. However, Gonosen-no-Kata remained a mainstay of public judo exhibitions in the UK long after Kawaishi’s departure for pastures new. Those displays often featured the UK’s most prominent judoka such as Trevor (TP) Leggett (1914-2000), Geof Gleeson (1927–1994) and George Kerr (born 1937) and resident Japanese sensei and judoka such as Saburo Matsushita (born 1935), Meiji Watanabe and Kisaburo Watanabe (1936-2019).

The original reference for the next photograph which shows a Gonosen-no-Kata demonstration during the 44th Budokwai Annual Display at the Royal Albert Hall, London on 21 October 1961 names Uke only as “Mr Watanabe”.

It is important to point out that Kisaburo Watanabe, then a 5th dan, only arrived in the UK in mid 1962 (staying till 1967). Therefore, it was most probably Meiji Watanabe, a 4th dan from the London Judokedan, who was performing the kata in the photograph.

The Gonosen-no-kata is especially popular in France, the Netherlands and Germany – all countries which would have had considerable exposure to Kawaishi in his formative years in Europe.

2 There has been much confusion and mix-ups over the years between the two “Watanabes”, with not many people remembering Meiji.
Unlike Kisaburo Watanabe, Meiji Watanabe went to the UK not for the purpose of teaching judo, but to receive training in tailoring. Meiji’s father, Minoru Watanabe, ran the Ichibankan Tailor Co. Ltd. – a high class tailoring store in Tokyo.

Meiji Watanabe taught judo at The Judokan three times a week and also at Oxford University. He returned to Japan to assist his father in 1963.

It is possible that the kata was named Gonosen-no-kata to distinguish it from two other seemingly similar exercises. One is the so called Kaeshi-no-Kata [Forms of Counters], also called Kaeshi Kata [5], today favoured by the British Judo Council (BJC) and which in all likelihood was never meant to be a kata at all but just a collection of counter techniques but got called a kata due to a linguistic misinterpretation. The second, of course, is the highly refined Nagewaza Ura-no-Kata devised by Kyuzo Mifune [4] which in the opinion of many people is the significantly superior of the three. However, it might also be that Gonosen-no-Kata was given the name to emphasise it’s Go-no Sen [retaking the initiative] aspects rather than that it’s counter throwing nature.

I think if one examines the Go-no Sen or retaking the initiative aspect of the kata more closely it would be realised that the philosophy possibly lies there and not just in the counterattack. In a sense this makes the actual counter throws of secondary importance and the method of avoiding the original attack and regaining control is the crucial principle of the exercise which can be then applied in other situations. Indeed, if it were the retaking of the initiative which had been the intended core principle of this kata rather than the actual throws then this would give it much more educational credence, but is there any evidence to support this notion?

Technical Principles in Gonosen-no-Kata

I have taken the liberty of isolating possible principles which may be present in the kata, but I must stress that this just speculation on my part and a totally subjective exercise.

Recall from earlier that Gonosen-no-Kata consists of 12 nagé-waza [throwing techniques] with kaeshi-waza. The first six attacks by Uke are ashi-waza [foot and leg techniques], followed by five koshi-waza [hip techniques] and finally one te-waza [hand technique]. Again, in the technical analyses that follow “c/b” stands for “countered by”.

O-soto-gari [Large outer reap] c/b O-soto-gari: This is an example of first containing the attack with a blocking action from the abdomen and then a redirection to effect the counter throw along Uke’s “weak line”.

Hiza-guruma [Knee wheel] c/b Hiza-guruma: This is an example of an avoidance by stepping to the rear with the leg being attacked as stated by Kawaishi in his seminal book or, as is the norm now, to step over the attacking leg and into an advantageous position for the counter.

O-uchi-gari [Large inner reap] c/b De-ashi-barai [Forward foot sweep]: This illustrates how Tori blocks the attack with his abdomen and uses Uke’s rising centre-of-gravity and “lightness” as he drives into the attack to lift him. Tori turns to his left to break Uke’s balance and apply the counter. It’s worthwhile noting that Kawaishi points out that the counter begins like De-ashi-barai and finishes more like Okuri-ashi-barai [Sliding foot sweep] with the sweep being carried out against Uke’s left heel, so both his legs are effectively swept.

De-ashi-barai c/b De-ashi-barai: This is an example of a very early avoidance using the leg removed from the line of the attack to effect a counter attack.

Ko-soto-gari [Small outer reap] c/b Tai-otoshi [Body drop]: This exemplifies putting weight on the limb being attacked to block the attack and then using it as a pivot leg to change direction for a counterattack as he amplifies Uke’s forward movement using his wrists.

Ko-uchi-gari [Small inner reap] c/b Sasae-tsuri-komi-ashi [Supporting-foot Lift-pull throw]: This illustrates how Tori uses the leg Uke is attacking to make his counter without resisting the motion and using Uke’s pushing action on his upper body to effect kuzushi. A good example of the use of
the principles of “ju” [softness and flexibility] and “Seiryoku Zen yo” [Maximum Efficiency].

**Kubi-nage [Neck throw]** c/b Ushiro-goshi [Back hip throw]:
This is an example of Tori blocking and lifting Uke by getting his hips and centre-of-gravity lower than Uke’s in jigotai [defensive posture].

**Koshi-guruma [Hip wheel]** c/b Uiki-goshi [Floating hip throw]:
This can show either how Tori can block Uke’s attack, when he reaches the end of his entry with his abdomen and then move in front of Uke breaking his balance, or, as is now more usual for Tori to “beat Uke to the punch” as it were by inserting his hips in front of Uke’s as Uke enters for his throw.

**Hane-goshi [Hip spring]** c/b Sasae-tsuri-komi-ashi:
This shows how Tori can step over the attacking leg first with his right and then his left and breaks Uke’s balance to his Uke’s left front. Recently we have seen it illustrating how to take advantage of Uke being on one leg by stepping to the rear corner to unbalance him and attack his platform leg.

**Harai-goshi [Hip sweep]** c/b Utsuri-goshi [Hip transfer]:
This is an example of Tori first blocking as in Kubi-nage by lowering and using his hips and using his knees to bounce Uke off him and lift him on his hip. Then using tai-sabaki [body movement] to get his hips in front of and under Uke.

**Uchi-mata [Inner-thigh throw]** c/b Sukui-nage [Scooping throw]:
This illustrates lowering his body to catch Uke’s belt by passing his arm through Uke’s legs from the front as Uke attempts to straighten up as his throw fails.

**Kata-seoi-nage [Shoulder back-carry throw]** c/b Sumi-gaeshi [Corner throw]:
This is an example of Tori using the momentum created by Uke’s entry to escape by jumping over his body and then taking advantage of Uke’s disequilibrium to the front by countering with a forward throw. This is a fitting finale to the kata as it’s requires a very skilful action from Tori to be able to time it correctly and not get thrown.

If it is to be a genuine kata, then like Nage-no-Kata the techniques should be representative and be applicable to other throws using the same principle of retaking the initiative which is in the original.

For example, if we look at the avoidance by moving the attacked leg and countering against Uke’s standing leg that can be seen in the counter to Hiza-guruma, this principle can be applied to a Harai-goshi attack by Uke. Tori moves the attacked leg over Uke’s sweeping leg bracing against the attack and then pivoting on this foot brings his other leg behind as a platform leg and counters with O-uchi-gari along Uke’s “weak line”.

Another application of a principle extracted from the kata could be for Tori to jump around a Tai-otoshi and counter with Yoko-wakare in a similar way to the Sumi-gaeshi counter to Seoi-nage at the end of the kata.

These are only two examples and it’s very much up to the individual to distil the principle from the technique in the kata which best suits his purpose. Even if the Gonosen-no-

Kata was not originally intended to be a kata and certainly there appears to be no overall coherence or pattern to it other that it contains six leg attacks, five hip attacks and one hand attack to be countered, each individual technique contains principles which are representative and applicable.

The utilisation of any kata to improve the quality of various aspects of judo practice is perhaps their highest ideal and Gonosen-no-Kata can be put to this use in several ways.

1. Most obviously it should be practised on the opposite side.
2. Randori using only one technique with total cooperation on both sides.
3. Repeat (2) for the remainder of the exercise.
4. Randori for the entire exercise in order with total cooperation.
5. Randori with Uke really attempting the original throw and Tori trying to apply the kata counter.
6. Randori with Uke attacking strongly and Tori using the same principle but with a different counter throw.

It was stated earlier that the kata had not been standardised and there have been several ways of presenting it. The reigi [etiquette] for example may be like that of Nage-no-Kata or Ju-no-Kata. It may involve Uke and Tori reversing ends, or not, after each technique. There may be a discernible break between each of the three sets, or it might just flow straight through. Some versions just contain the counter to the original throw, others start with completing the original throw then repeating it with counter while a third method is to show the original throw, followed by the original and counter in slow motion and finished off with the original and counter at normal speed.

**The BJA and Gonosen-no-Kata**

Introduced in January 2006, the BJA’s Technical Dan Grade system comprehensively assesses a candidate’s knowledge and understanding of judo as part of the promotion process. Recall that Gonosen-no-kata has been part of the Technical Dan Grade syllabus [1] from the onset and note now that the technical content of the exercise as specified in this syllabus was that presented by Kawaiishi in his book [3].

In 2010 the then BJA Kata Working Party (KWP) recommended some alterations [6] to the standard exercise presented by Kawaiishi. Two of those changes involved only a change in terminology, however three did feature the use of substitute waza. In the case where waza substitutions were proposed – one of the initial attacks was changed, along with two of the kaeshi-waza.

In the case of the terminology changes, the first and third kaeshi-waza were renamed as follows. The first counter was renamed from O-soto-gari to O-soto-gaeshi [Large outer reaping throw counter], and the third counter renamed from De-ashi-barai to Tsubame-gaeshi [Swallow counter]. These changes merely reflected the more recent name adopted by the Kodokan for those particular counter-techniques in their list of Shinmeisho-no-Waza [Newly Accepted Techniques].
The substituted initial attack features in the seventh technique of Gonosen-no-kata where Kubi-nage was replaced with Tsuri-komi-goshi [Lift-pull hip throw]. Of course, Kubi-nage itself is a non-Kodokan recognised technique and only really features in the Kawaishi system [7]. There is no obvious technical rationale for this change except perhaps that Kubi-nage is somewhat similar to Koshi-guruma. However, Kubi-nage is normally done with Tori’s legs wide in a Taiotoshi like stance.

Contrary to popular opinion, and where a misunderstanding probably arose, Kubi-nage is not a banned technique in judo. Most likely at some point Kawaishi’s Kubi-nage was confused with a Sumo [Japanese wrestling – literally “striking one another”] neck crank throwing technique of the same name. Also, the change of attack technique proposed by the KWP did totally eliminate the risk of the inevitable confusion that could arise from two different waza having the same name.

It should be noted that none of the KWP proposed changes to Gonosen-no-kata were incorporated into the version of the exercise in the Technical Dan Grade syllabus. The syllabus’ requirement remained faithful to Kawaishi.

Gonosen-no-kata was reintroduced into the 2019 British Open Kata Championships with all the 2010 BJA Kata Working Party changes in place, with the exception that Uchi-matai-sukashi [Inner-thigh throw slip-slip] was used to counter Uchi-mata and not Sukashi Tai-otoshi. This is not so significant as both are te-waza, and it is the hands that are important in sukashi, and not the action or placement of Tori’s feet and legs. In a similar timeframe, it was made possible to obtain a BJA Kata Certificate in this very same version of Gonosen-no-kata.

Today, one element of the BJA’s thinking around Gonosen-no-kata is to use it as a “bridge” to introduce “non-kata judoka” to kata. This requires establishing a common and consistent set of technical standards which support the “marketing” of the exercise as a kata of modern, contest-relevant judo moves. It also requires accepting that it is not essential to pass Gonosen-no-kata on in its original form. Maybe this latter point does not represent a major problem, however for clarity it might be desirable to clearly rebrand the adapted exercise as “BJA Gonosen-no-Kata”?

References

****

**A Quote from Kano: “Education is the Foundation of All Achievement”**

“**In my young days I studied this art with three eminent masters of the time. The great benefit I derived from the study of it led me to make up my mind to go on with the subject more seriously, and in 1882 I started a school of my own and called it Kodokan. Kodokan literally means “a school for studying the way”, the meaning of “the way” being the concept of life itself. I named the subject I teach Judo instead of Jujutsu. In the first place I will explain to you the meaning of these words. Ju means “gentle” or “to give way”, Jutsu, an “art” or “practice”, and do, “way” or “principle” so that Jujutsu means an art or practice of gentleness or of first giving way in order ultimately to gain the victory; while Judo means the way or principle of the same”**.

****

**A Point to Ponder**

“**Active judo strengthens one’s physique, book-learning strengthens one’s mind. Both are important.”**

Brian N. Watson
November 29, 2019

****
“JUDO & LIFE”
by Brian N. Watson

This much recommended new book by Brian Watson and produced by Trafford Publishing, 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.

****

The Richard Bowen Collection

In 1949, Richard Bowen began judo training in London at the Budokwai, of which he 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.

****

www.KanoSociety.org • sensei@kanosociety.org