**Background**

Kata are formal pattern exercises containing idealised model movements to illustrate specific combative principles. They can be thought of as representing the grammar of judo, and Jigoro Kanō himself stated that the proper study of judo had to involve both randori and kata.

Over the last five years or so the international judo community has witnessed a renaissance in kata practice, driven largely by the increasing organisation of international kata championships. Notwithstanding this recent upturn in interest, the true educational cohesion between randori and kata has been largely lost during the progressive ‘sportification’ of judo — which is now often reduced to a crude conglomerate of isolated throws merely based on power, endurance, and athletic achievement.

There are ten Kōdōkan-recognised kata in judo today, this is despite most popular sources wrongly claiming that there would be only seven or eight or nine official Kōdōkan kata. They are as follows:

1. Nage-no-kata: Forms of Throwing;
2. Katame-no-kata: Forms of Controlling;
4. Kōdōkan goshinjutsu: Kōdōkan Self-Defence;
5. Jū-no-kata: Forms of Non-resistance;
6. Itsutsu-no-kata: The Five Forms;
7. Koshiki-no-kata: The Antique Forms;
8. Seiryoku-zen'yō Kokumin-Taiiku: National Physical Education According to the (Principles of) Best Use of Energy;
9. Joshi (jūdō) goshinshō: Methods of Self-Defence for Women;
In recent years, the ‘tenth’ kata, Gō-no-kata [Figure 1], has become the subject of renewed interest within jūdō circles. However, finding accurate information on the Gō-no-kata or locating a skilled teacher for this form is very difficult with, until recently, enquiries to the Kōdōkan resulting in no response, or a response stating that Gō-no-kata does not or does no longer exist, would have been discarded by Kanō and should not be studied. A further complication is that much of the information in circulation on the Gō-no-kata is ambiguous or wrong. This is due mainly to modern jūdō authors failing to recognise important mistakes contained in early Western jūdō books, as well as the fabrication in recent years of a hoax Gō-no-kata containing blows, and allegedly based on a fusion of jūdō and karate techniques.

Inter alia these factors have led many to believe that the kata had been lost.

Despite being popularly thought of as defunct, the Gō-no-kata survives today, having initially been preserved in Tōkyō by a small group of senior jūdōka, and now also by a handful of experts abroad. To be particularly credited for the preservation of Gō-no-kata, are Yoshiyuki Kuhara-sensei, 9th dan (until his death in 1985), and more recently, his nephew Toshiyasu Ochiai-sensei, 8th dan [Figure 2]. Evidence also that the Kōdōkan is now moving slowly to recognise Gō-no-kata as a legitimate and existing kata comes via Toshirō Daigo-sensei, 10th dan’s broad multi-part article on kata — “Kōdōkan jūdō Kata ni Tsuite” (“About the Kata of Kōdōkan

Figure 3 - The Ten Techniques of the Gō-no-kata

Figure 4 - Hidari-seoi-nage (From De Crée & Jones, 2009, page 89, figure 6, with permission of the publisher of the Archives of Budo, International Scientific Literature, Inc., USA)
jūdō") — which was serialized in seven parts in the contemporary Kōdōkan periodical "jūdō" from the last months of 2008 until the first months of 2009.

We aim in the present article to remove the confusion and mystery which surrounds the Gō-no-kata. The material that follows is a summarised synthesis of our more extensive work on this topic published elsewhere, and which was based on careful critical analysis of the available literature and rare source material on this kata, as well as interviews with top-experts.

**Gō-no-kata**

The Gō-no-kata was created during the period of transition from jūjutsu to jūdō and is a consolidated set of primitive jūdō forms practised in a defensive jigotai position. It is loosely derived from techniques in Kitō-ryū and Tenjin Shin'yō-ryū jūjutsu that Jigorō Kanō shihan had studied and is also among the oldest of the Kōdōkan kata. Initially called the Gō-Jū-no-kata and designed to complement the Jū-no-kata, the kata consists of ten techniques [Figure 3] whereby at first both (Tori and Uke) confront each other with force against force (gō), but later Tori makes best use of Uke’s force (jū) for a decisive move (kime) [Figures 4, 5 and 6].

The Gō-no-kata provides a framework for the correct learning of the basics of jūdō without throwing. It teaches Tori to use force effectively — without ever relying on force as the primary means to overcome Uke. Additionally, the Gō-no-kata teaches the precision use of one’s body — especially how to use both focused strength and yielding at critical timings during jūdō techniques. The Gō-no-kata also serves as an intense jūdō-based exercise to foster will (shī), spirit (ki) and strength (ryoku).

Original comments provided by Kanō-shihan in an early Kōdōkan periodical, "Yūkō-no-katsudō" show beyond any doubt that the Gō-no-kata was and is a special and never completed set of ten exercises for two people:

"Gō-no-kata or at times called Gō-Jū-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.

Kanō-shihan’s own writings therefore indicate that he was not entirely satisfied with some elements of the Gō-no-kata and so abandoned, or at least, delayed its final revision. Kanō-shihan died before having been able to rework, revise or expand the Gō-no-kata — however, he never rejected the kata or its practice and it would be overstating the case to suggest otherwise.

**Concluding Remarks**

The evidence at hand confirms that Gō-no-kata is neither lost, nor a kata of blows resulting from a fusion of jūdō and karate techniques, as has been suggested previously. Rather, Gō-no-kata was designed by Jigorō Kanō-shihan to provide useful insights into the theoretical fundamentals of Kōdōkan jūdō (the basic principle of conquering force with giving way) as well as a training exercise for improving fitness and core strength.

The reader interested in learning more about the Gō-no-kata is directed to a trilogy of papers written by Professor De Crée and Dr Jones and published in 2009 in Volume 5 of the “Archives of Budo” — an online international peer-reviewed journal covering various aspects of education and research in martial arts, combat sports, and related areas — and the references therein.

**Reference**


**Note**

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