



# The Bulletin

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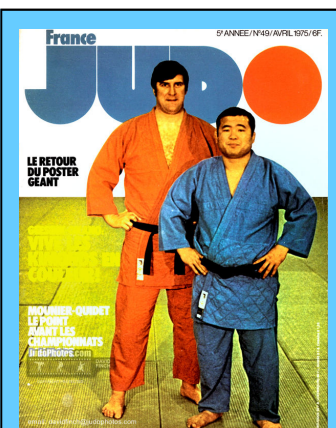
## In This Issue

- What's in a colour? The *Jūdōgi* and Japanese Aesthetics by Carl De Créé & Llŷr Jones
- Symbology of the *Kōdōkan's* Instructor's Badge by Llŷr Jones & Carl De Créé
- Richard Bowen collection
- Videos available

In this edition: Respected *jūdō* scholars Professor Carl De Créé and Dr Llŷr Jones treat us to two articles. The first is on the tradition of the white *jūdōgi* linked to Japanese aesthetics. The second is about the symbology of the *Kōdōkan* instructor's badge.

**News:** Again we remind you that we have quite a collection of video material now and would be happy to arrange showings for clubs. Remember you can buy copies through the website. Sets of Bulletins may also be purchased on CDs.

Regards Diana Birch



**Figure 1 - Anton Geesink (red) and Isao Okano (blue) pictured wearing coloured *jūdōgi* in the magazine *France JUDO*—April 1975 edition**

## The Kano Society

### What's in a colour? The *Jūdōgi* and Japanese Aesthetics: Carl De Créé & Llŷr Jones

#### Introduction

Recent years have seen the International Jūdō Federation (IJF) introduce several changes to *jūdō* – none of which were designed for the betterment of *Kōdōkan Jūdō* itself, but rather were changes implemented solely with the self-serving aim of attempting to increase *jūdō's* popular entertainment (and hence commercial and televisual) appeal. The consistency of these changes with the underlying objectives and traditions of *Kōdōkan Jūdō* was ignored, and no change exemplified this more than the 1997 introduction of the blue *jūdōgi*—a controversial and ill-judged move which almost resulted in a walk-out by the delegation from the All Japan Jūdō Federation.

Recently there has been some debate about the *jūdōgi*. Previously Yoshiaki, and co-authors [1] have contributed to the exchange by researching the historical evolution of the *jūdōgi*—in particular its form and colour in Japan. They have reported their findings in a short paper (in Japanese with an English abstract) and this present article supplements that work by providing a succinct explanation about the culture of the *jūdōgi*, and explaining why it should be white.

#### Origins of the Blue *Jūdōgi*

In the 1970s the legendary Dutch *jūdōka* Anton Geesink (1934-2010) suggested a new pedagogical approach to *jūdō* – including a new system for classifying throws, modifications for increasing safety and other changes aimed at improving refereeing. The latter he addressed by proposing changing the colours of the *jūdōgi* from both being white into one *jūdōgi* being blue, the other being red.

In April 1975 the magazine *France JUDO* published a seven-page article on Geesink's ideas. The cover of the magazine carried a photograph of Geesink and the peerless Isao Okano (also a gold medallist from the 1964 Tōkyō Olympics) wearing red and blue *jūdōgi* respectively [Figure 1]. Inside the magazine a pull-out A3 poster of the two *jūdōka* identically dressed was also included. Despite Geesink's ideas being then rejected, the idea of coloured *jūdōgi* so upset the Japanese hierarchy that Okano was ignominiously dismissed as Japanese Team Manager for the October 1975 Vienna World Championships and replaced by Nobuyuki Sato. To this day Okano-sensei has continued to be excluded from the *Kōdōkan's* promotion process and his rank has been held at 6 *dan* for over 40 years. Having essentially been misled into donning the blue *jūdōgi* Okano can only be sympathised with as an undeserving victim of Geesink's vain-glorious propaganda push.

Some 20 years later (in 1997) and after much intense debate, part of Geesink's suggestions finally did get adopted by the IJF, with the introduction of blue *jūdōgi* into international competition. (The use of red *jūdōgi* was not adopted.) The main proponent for this change was the European Jūdō Union (EJU) who had first experimented with blue *jūdōgi* at the 1988 European Championships in Pamplona, and the leading opponent was Japan. (The leading personalities on either side were François Besson (1946-2010) for the EJU and Ichiro Abe for Japan.) However, few of Geesink's original motives, such as safety were quoted, and the IJF positioned the change as improvements in terms of the visibility and ability of spectators and officials alike to follow the contests.

#### Objections to the Blue *Jūdōgi*

Those who have invested the time and effort to acquire the education which *Kōdōkan Jūdō* aims to provide (and who understand its mechanisms for doing so as envisioned by its founder, Jigorō Kanō-shihan) tend to object to the blue *jūdōgi* for the following reasons:

- **Tradition:** People like their traditions and for over a hundred years *jūdōgi* were traditionally white. Underpinning this tradition was the belief that the white *jūdōgi* symbolises the spirit and energy of *jūdō* and its core concept of *seiryoku zen'yo* (good use of mind and body).
- **Uniformity:** The *jūdō* uniform is meant to be uniform. Around 1910 Kanō introduced a standard uniform for the practice of *Kōdōkan Jūdō* so as to remove class distinction. Previously *jūdō* practice took place in everyday clothes. Kanō wanted *jūdō* to be practiced by everyone, rich and poor, as a means of education and for the betterment of society. By putting everyone in the same white, modest uniform, one could not tell a *jūdōka*'s social class and students would be judged solely on the merit of their training and effort.
- **Distortion of Jūdō:** For many, the blue *jūdōgi*—with the inane thinking behind its adoption—has come to represent the physical manifestation of what is wrong with contemporary *jūdō*. In short, today's *jūdō* has been distorted by the IJF away from an all-round pedagogy to a commercialised, garish jacketed wrestling sport.

### Japanese Aesthetics & the Blue *Jūdōgi*

Further insight into the inappropriateness of the blue *jūdōgi* can be found by considering concepts from Japanese aesthetics—including the ancient values of *wabi-sabi* 侘寂 (imperfection and transience), *shizen* 自然 (naturalness and without pretence) and *kanso* 簡素 (simplicity and the elimination of the ornate). These concepts, which are difficult to accurately translate, form the basis of many Japanese cultural and aesthetic standards on what is deemed to be tasteful or (beautiful) and are a basic part of everyday Japanese life [2].

In terms of *wabi* and *sabi* although both terms are often linked together—and used in the same sentence—they do not mean the same. *Wabi* means “austere beauty”, and *sabi* refers to “rustic patina”. Properties of *wabi* include understated elegance and simplicity. As well as *sabi*, *wabi* is often linked to *shizen* 自然 (naturalness and without pretence) and *kanso* 簡素 (simplicity and the exclusion of the ornate).

The reader interested in acquiring fur-

ther insight into the application of Japanese Aesthetics to *jūdō*—and particularly to the *Itsutsu-no-kata* 五の形 (The Five Forms)—as well as Jigorō Kanō's appreciation of the topic is referred to a recent Master's dissertation by Carl De Créé [3].

Taking the concept of *wabi-sabi* and applying it to the *jūdōgi* - it is the original, natural, unbleached cotton *jūdōgi* [Figure 2] that most conforms to *wabi-sabi* ethic. Such a *jūdōgi* will often be handmade with all the flaws and imperfections associated with such a material and such a process.



Figure 2 - A custom handmade unbleached *jūdōgi* (from De Créé [3])

Additionally, over time such a *jūdōgi* can seem to develop a character all of its own - becoming well-worn and soft and with its original yellowish colour fading to a creamy ivory “off-white” through repeated wearing and washing after practice. However, in recent years an unbleached *jūdōgi* is thought, by many students and instructors, to be a beginner's uniform - often low cost and often single weave. Something to be worn until one dedicates oneself to *jūdō* and purchases a bleached brilliant white double weave premier *jūdōgi* - often with a prominent upmarket brand manufacturer's logo sometimes with man-made polyester blended in with the cotton. The brilliant white *jūdōgi*, though not strictly adhering to the *wabi-sabi* ethic is though acceptable, whereas the blue *jūdōgi* is distinctly non-traditional, lacks simplicity and certainly does not conform to the *wabi-sabi* ethic.

It is essential to point out that obtain-

ing a high quality, unbleached *jūdōgi* today is a non-trivial task - even in Japan. Several of the leading *jūdōgi* manufacturers no longer carry them in their catalogue—though they are available on a bespoke, custom order basis. Natural *jūdōgi* also still exist as traditional true handicraft. Such *jūdōgi* will usually cost a lot more—typically about £2000.

The contrast between a natural unbleached *jūdōgi* and brilliant white bleached one can be seen in Figure 3 which shows, from Left-to-Right, three iconic French *jūdōka* namely Henri Courtine FFJDA 10 *dan*, Maurice Gruel (1920-2010) FFJDA 9 *dan* and Guy Pelletier (1921-2011) FFJDA 9 *dan*. In the photograph Courtine-sensei is wearing an unbleached *jūdōgi* and the contrast between his *jūdōgi* and that of the other two senior French sensei is obvious. (FFJDA = *La Fédération Française de Jūdō-Jūjitsu, Kendo et Disciplines Associées.*)

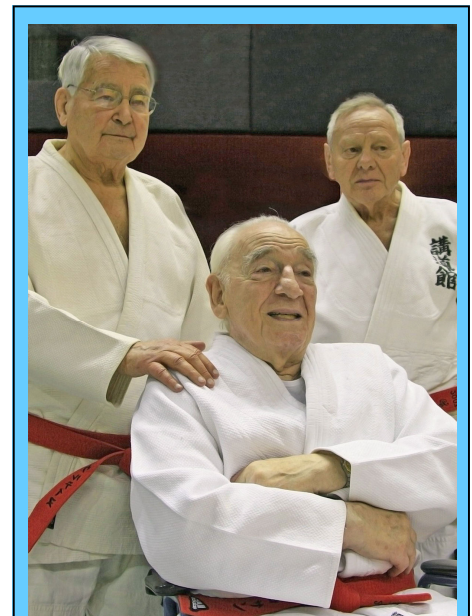


Figure 3- Henri Courtine, Maurice Gruel and Guy Pelletier. ( Photograph by Loudovic Coninx, 2008)

### Concluding Remarks

Today, many *jūdō* students and coaches believe that the colour of the *jūdōgi* is either white or blue and that either colour - or even split colour (blue trousers/white jacket of vice-versa) - is acceptable for everyday training. The reality is that no one who does not compete in a tournament that mandates their use requires a blue *jūdōgi* at all, however so low is the aware-



ness of most of the issues raised in this article that many chose to buy a blue *jūdōgi* for no reason other than they supposedly “look cool”. The issue has indeed gone beyond merely blue *jūdōgi*, with for example, black *jūdōgi* being often worn in the United States, and *jūdōgi* of sometimes other colours featuring in the various “*jūdō* leagues” in Europe and elsewhere.

The authors are though heartened by the fact that blue *jūdōgi* are not permitted at the *Kōdōkan*—a conservative organisation, who remain, to a degree, the last custodians of the concept of *jūdō* as a physical and mental education, and not just a sport [Figure 4]. In these times of significant IJF-induced change for *jūdō* it is essential to remember that traditions when lost, tend to be lost for ever—and to understand that not all innovation is good, and not all change is for the better.



Figure 4 - *Kōdōkan* signage outlawing blue *jūdōgi* (and rash guards)

## References

1. Yoshiaki, T Irie, K & Murata N. 1998. *Jūdōgi no keitai to iro ni kansuru shiteki kenkyū* (1) [A Study on Historical Changes of *Jūdō* Suit—its form and colour (1)]. *Budōgaku Kenkyū* 30(3), 40-46.
2. Izutsu T & Izutsu T. (1981). *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, The Netherlands.
3. De Créé C. (2012). *The origin, essence, biomechanical foundations, and teaching and performance challenges of the Itsutsu-no-kata* (“The Forms of Five”), *Kōdōkan jūdō’s esoteric sixth kata*. Thesis MSc in Teaching and Coaching *Jūdō*. School of Medicine & Surgery, University of Rome, Rome, Italy, 116-143.

## Symbology of the *Kōdōkan* Instructor’s Badge: Llyr Jones & Carl De Créé

### Background

Anyone who has attended a special *Kōdōkan* course for example the *Kōdōkan* International Summer Courses or an overseas *Kōdōkan Kata Seminar* such as those held in Europe (Zagreb, Croatia – 2011; Lignano, Italy – 2012; Rome, Italy - 2013) will have noticed the distinctive badge worn by the majority of the *Kōdōkan* instructors [Figure 1].

### The *Kōdōkan* Instructor’s Badge

The *Kōdōkan* instructor’s badge [Figure 2] is the *kanji* 指 set within the *yata-no-kagami* outline (the same form as the well-known *Kōdōkan* emblem) and is usually embroidered onto the *jūdōgi*. The *yata-no-kagami* 八咫鏡 is part of the Imperial Regalia of Japan and is a sacred mirror that is supposed to reflect our souls. According to myth the mirror is stored in the Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮 (Ise Grand Shrine) in Mie Prefecture, Japan. Whether that is actually true we cannot say for sure as it has not been verified by historians or other independent scholars. The reader interested in further information on the mirror/emblem is directed to an article by Senta Yamada-sensei and pub-

lished in the magazine *Judo* [1] and also to one by Professor David Waterhouse and published in issue 5 of this Bulletin [2]. It is though important to note that the use of the *yata-no-kagami* shape itself is not the exclusive monopoly of the *Kōdōkan*.

The character 指 is pronounced “*shi*” and indicates instructor, although it can also be read as “*yubi*”, which means finger, in the sense of “a pointer” - that is “someone who points (you into the right direction)” - *i.e.* an instructor. It is really an abbreviation of 指南役 *shinanyaku* which means an “instructor”, a term that was used in some classical martial arts schools; it appeared, for example, on the teachers qualification diploma’s issued by some *Kitō-ryū jūjutsu* school branches.

### Protocol Aspects

The badge itself serves to identify those “performing the function” of a *Kōdōkan* instructor more so than denoting an “appointment” or “qualification” as an instructor. Accordingly, *Kōdōkan sensei* tend not to wear the badge on a day-to-day basis, and restrict its use for special events. This makes sense as such



Figure 1 - *Kōdōkan* instructors at the 2013 *Kōdōkan* International Summer Course I “*Kata*” (Photographs © Marc Lonsdale 2013 and used with permission)



The Kano Society

PO Box 45408  
London SE26 6WG  
England

Email: [sensei@kanosociety.org](mailto:sensei@kanosociety.org)

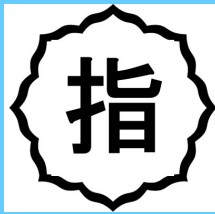
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Figure 2 - Graphic of the  
*Kōdōkan* Instructor's Emblem



courses usually have a lot of high ranking Japanese *jūdōka* present, and it is particularly helpful to have the designated *Kōdōkan* instructors easily identifiable. *Kōdōkan* instructors sometimes wear the badge while not in residence at the *Kōdōkan*, for example while giving guest instruction abroad as part of a travelling *Kōdōkan* mission, or when invited as a specific guest instructor in other establishments. However, in other circumstances it is unlikely that they would wear the badge so as to avoid the potential for misunderstanding in issues of protocol, particularly were someone of a higher *dan* rank to be present.

### Concluding Remarks

It should be noted that the *Kōdōkan* does not use the *Shōgō* 称号 system of titles—*Renshi* 錬士 (Well Trained or “Skilled” Expert), *Kyoshi* 教士 (Teaching Expert), *Hanshi* 範士 (Model Expert or Teacher by Example). Traditionally, these titles are the preserve of the *Dai Nippon Butokukai* 大日本武徳会 and also the *Kokusai Būdoin* 国際武道院. Additionally, the *Kōdōkan* does not issue formal instructors' licences - this is done by the All Japan *Jūdō* Federation 全日本柔道連盟 whose Certified *Jūdō* Leader Qualification System has “A”, “B” and “C” grades (“A” being the highest) depending on *jūdō* expertise and teaching experience [3]. Furthermore, the *Kokusai Būdoin* also award an Official Instructor License to qualified individuals in recognition of their experience and expertise as a teacher. There are seven levels of licence available—ranging from G.S1 (the highest) down to G.5.

### Reference

1. Yamada S. (1963), The story of THE KODOKAN BADGE. *Judo*, 6(VII), 16-17.
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3. AJJF. 2014. Partial Revision of the All Japan Judo Federation Official Leader Qualification System. Online notice: <http://www.judo.or.jp/p/32340>

### The Richard Bowen Collection



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. If you would like to look at an item from The Richard Bowen Collection, please contact the Subject Librarian, Peter Bradley. +44 1225 384784

A copy of the video ‘An Interlude with Richard Bowen’ has also been donated to the collection.

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