

The Paradox of the White Striped Judo Black Belt

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Abstract

On January 29, 2013, 15 leading female judokas complained that coaching personnel including the national coach of the women's team had perpetrated violence and power harassment on them. The case attracted substantial public attention. Subsequent revelations also encompassed issues such as financial scandals and indecent conduct involving the federation's officials. MUNEOKA Shoji was then appointed the new President of the All Japan Judo Federation at the end of August 2013, and he began the reorganization of the federation immediately upon taking charge.

The white-striped Judo black belt symbolizes the disrespect directed at Japanese women Judo athletes. Foreign female Judo players wear ordinary black belts; however, their Japanese counterparts are compelled to wear black belts with a white stripe. Grading regulations are identical for men and women in other Japanese martial arts such as kendo or karate, and women are awarded ordinary black belts just as men. This paper elucidates the fundamental values of Judo, investigates why Kano Jigoro instituted the white-striped belt for women and probes the historical and social contexts that led to the establishment of women's Judo.

Keywords : gender, white-striped black belt, Judo, Kodokan Joshibu, Butokukai

Introduction

"One is not born, but rather becomes, woman". These famous words by Simone de Beauvoir aptly describe the embedded social and cultural gender differentiation prevailing in patriarchal societies in which men are the preferred first sex and women form the less important second sex. Similarly, men were the first sex in Japanese Judo, and women were relegated to second place (Beauvoir, 1949).

It was revealed in 2013 that 15 female Judo players who were strong international match-winning prospects for Japanese Judo had been subjected to violence and power harassment by the federation's principal officials including the all Japan women's national team manager. This case garnered substantial public attention and exerted a significant social impact.

The problems faced by the women athletes were grounded in the traditional and authoritative patriarchal culture of the All Japan Judo Federation. The organizational leaders imposed a culture of unreasonable hierarchical relationships and meted corpo-

ral punishment on weak players. In fact, women were long prohibited from engaging in Judo. When they were finally accorded the right to play, they were compelled to sport white-striped black belts that differentiated them from the male players.

The black belt symbolizes professional competence in Judo. White-striped black belts appear dimensionally diminished to half their value because of the white line running through the center of the black belt. This paper elucidates the fundamental values of Judo, examines Kano Jigoro's reasons for



Fig. 1 The White-Striped Black Belt

instituting the striped belt for women, and probes the historical and social contexts that shaped women's Judo in Japan. It also contemplates issues related to sports and gender through an analysis of Japanese Judo.

The introduction of the White-striped black belt

In the Taisho era, the white stripe symbolized schools for girls. Some people may have felt that the white-striped black belts signified disdain for female judokas but others felt that they did not indicate differences in professional competence but were, instead, merely prettier.

Jigoro Kano of the Tokyo Normal School founded Kodokan Judo in 1882. Those who joined the Kodokan women's club were upper-class girls associated with Kano's normal school or women connected to political parties. It was estimated that women judokas could be injured in matches with men. Thus, they were required to wear white-striped black belts to distinguish and protect them from harm.

However, unlike the men's Judo organization, the Kodokan women's club emphasized spiritual training, female beauty, and etiquette to train women to conform to the Japanese feminine ideal of Ryo Sai Kenbo 良妻賢母 (good wife, wise mother). This patriarchal educational ideal encouraged Japanese women to aspire to become good wives for their husbands and sagacious mothers for the apt nurture of their children.



Fig. 2 Kodokan Joshibu at the beginning of the 1930s

At the Kodokan, male judokas were prohibited from entering the women's dojo and women never associated with men other than Kano himself or with leaders designated by Kano. In that period, girls in Japan were prohibited from playing matches and were thus not accorded the opportunity to rise up the rankings.

A mixed Judo match held before the war

The Kodokan in Tokyo differentiated women from men to protect girls from injury. On the other hand, a rural organization called Dai Nippon Boutokukai¹⁾ (大日本武徳会 hereafter, Boutokukai) differed from the rules applied by Kodokan and divided majority opinion.

Katsuko Kosaki 小崎 甲子 defeated three men in five challenges in the promotion examination match held at the Boutokukai in 1932. She was the first woman to be placed in the first dan at the Boutokukai. After this feat, Kano awarded Kosaki the honor of becoming the first woman to be placed at the first dan in Kodokan.

Katsuko Kosaki was born in 1908 as the second daughter of Tendai Kosaki, the owner of the art dealership Seigendo Isemachi in Nagoya. She graduated from the Kinjo Gakuin High School Girls. Afterward, she joined the Aichi Branch of the Boutokukai in 1927 at the age of 19 and began training in Judo.

In 1929, at the age of 21, she became a favored



Fig. 3 Kosaki and Tobaru at Gifu in 1942

disciple of the 8th dan Tobar Takisaburo who was then the President of the Osaka Prefecture Judo Federation. Unlike the conventional town halls, the Aichi branch of the Butokukai included graduates of vocational Judo schools, nearby dojo owners, school physical education teachers, as well as champions at the national convention at the time when Kosaki was introduced. It was an exceptional dojo that attracted membership from many professionals and masters and was thus a gathering place for Judo aficionados. Kosaki describes her experience in this manner :

"I had a question when I was the end of the year. I have learned all the techniques ; it seems that I can not open the door. It was closed for me just because I am a woman. The people at the standard level are getting higher and higher, but I cannot afford the opportunity to compete, let alone the promotion test. I did not just come to the dojo for lessons. I aim to be the black belt, the world's first female Judoka. Moreover, since we are challenging the system itself, I do not think we can make our dreams come true if we do not do more rigorous training" (Naito, 1992).

The Butokukai, of which Kosaki was a member, women were accepted and practiced Judo with men. They were also allowed to test for promotion to the next level under the same conditions as men.

Kosaki won matches against 3 men and was promoted to the 1st dan of the Butokukai in the 5th challenge of the promotion games at the Butokukai Osaka branch in 1932. With this feat, she became the first woman to be awarded a black belt. Subsequently, Kosaki opened the first dojo for women in 1935, the Seigenkan Dojo in Osaka Tennoji. In 1939, she was designated the first female Judo Renshi, a title designating an exceptional instructor.

Kosaki's achievements transcended gender differences between men and women and her title of Judo Renshi became an accomplishment that overturned the gender concepts of her times.

At that time, the assignment of dan could be granted by two organizations, Kodokan and Budokai, and it was necessary for both associations to grant equivalent grades to dan officials. Kosaki's promotion

at the Butokukai in Osaka cast a ripple-effect on the promotion protocols of the Kodokan women's Club. Kodokan treated its female members differently and lagged behind in promoting girls to the higher levels, but after Kosaki was promoted at the Butokukai, the organization was compelled to follow suit and establish a promotion pathway for the Kodokan women's club.

The year after Kosaki was promoted at the Osaka branch of the Butokukai, Kodokan awarded the first dan to Kodan on January 18, 1933. Afterward, Morioka, Akutagawa, and others were certified as first dan women judokas on January 14, 1934, and Noritomi skipped to the second dan (Noritomi, 1972).

At that time, however, Kano did not allow women to play Judo matches at the Kodokan women's club. Instead, women judokas were adjudged through their mastery of the kata (形). The Kodokan women were thus promoted without promotion matches (shodan-jiai), solely through activities that attended to form or by Kano's letter of recommendation.

Conversely, Kosaki was victorious over three men in her promotion match at the Butokukai, (shodan-jiai). At the Kodokan, Noritomi skipped the first dan and was awarded second dan. This promotion made Noritomi the leading female Kodokan Judoka ; however, Kosaki was ahead because she had actually won matches.

Katsuko Umezu defined the 9th dan in an interview and described the formation of rankings in



Fig. 4 Masako Noritomi in the 1970s

women's Judo (Mizoguchi, 2015).

The difference between the black belt and the white-striped black belt

Kano was obliged to introduce a white-striped black belt at the Kodokan women's club. Since men and women were prohibited from practicing together, Kano distinguished men from women by designating the white-striped black belt for women to avoid women and men from mixing. Kodokan women awarded the dan were obliged to sport the white-striped black belt.

The title of an article in *The Japan Times* of March 1, 1935 reads, Mrs. Sarah Mayer has tightened the black belt in London, February 27, 1935.

Mayer was the first foreign woman to be promoted by Butokukai (Svinth, 2001).

According to Mayer's diary, she became the first foreign woman to obtain membership in the Kodokan women's club on August 8, 1934. Meyer then joined the Boutokukai and acquired the black belt. The Boutokukai awarded a solid black belt to women, while the Kodokan's black belt for women included a white stripe. Pictures of both Kosaki and Meyer show them wearing black belts without white stripes, indicating that their dan was awarded by the Boutokukai (Callan-Spenn, 2020).

After world war II, the general headquarters (GHQ) of The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers ordered the dissolution of the Butokukai, and the organization disappeared from Japan. As a result, the organization of Judo became unified under the Kodokan, which began regulating the dan system. The women's belts were also amalgamated and all women judokas, regardless of their affiliation, were required to sport the white-striped black belts. This mandate was confusing and discriminatory for many female Butokukai judokas, who were now compelled to adopt the white-striped black belt.

In the 1970s, the Kodokan women's club confirmed that women could play matches, but only at the local dojos other than Kodokan.

Women Judoka played mixed-matches

A questionnaire survey on the Kodokan women's club was administered between March and May 1973 (recovery rate : 58.6%) to 176 women judokas (89 Kodokan women's clubs and 87 others) Interestingly, the target categories of this survey were cross-tabulated by classifying the respondents into members of the Kodokan women's club and "Others". The results of the analysis revealed differences between the members of the Kodokan women's club and the female Judo players of other regions in their reported opinions and awareness about matches (Kawamura et. al, 1978) . The author of the present paper also predicted the existence of such differences.

With regard to whether women should be allowed to play Judo matches, 110 respondents (62.5%) agreed, 45 disagreed (25.5%), and 21 (11.9%) did not tender valid answers (i.e., those who could not immediately assert their opinions or those did not understand the current state). More than half the respondent women wanted to play matches, and this percentage was slightly higher in rural areas than for members of the Kodokan women's club. In terms of the game rules, 92 respondents (83.6%) desired the establishment of match rules specific to women, but 18 (16.4%) hoped to play matches under the same rules as men. Comparatively speaking, the number of local women who wanted to play by the same rules as men were higher than the number of Kodokan women's club members.

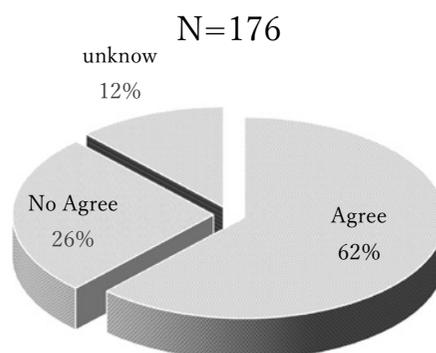


Fig. 5 Regarding the approval or disapproval of participation in women's Judo games in 1978

Feminism and Competition

On the other hand, a woman had played a match against a man before the Kodokan women's club was established in the United States.

Rusty Kanokogi joined the Brooklyn YMCA in 1955. Kanokogi came to Japan in June 1962 to train at the Kodokan center. At that time, women were not allowed to practice at the largest Kodokan dojo, which was meant only for men. Women also could not participate in Judo matches in Japan at that time, and they especially could not mix with men. Women's training was typically irregular and paid more attention to form. Nonetheless, Kanokogi was recognized for her ability, and she was given special permission to engage in a match with a man in the dojo.

According to Kanokogi, some of the Japanese leaders of the time applied the customs and rules of Japanese society within the dojo and seemed like dictators. "When the lesson was over, Sensei ordered his student to drink beer with him. The woman was there as well, pouring beer. I hated it because I thought it was like Geisha". "Young girls were doing without T-shirts in dojo (Ogura, 2012)".

Yamaguchi Kaori, the first female world champion in Japan and a pioneer in women's Judo, described the situation at the time in the following manner :

Judo is for men, and of course, the dojo not made for women. Many men did not like to practice with girls, which was a painful experience experienced by many women who supported the early days of women's Judo. It was something that had been continuing until recently. It was also a big challenge to find a partner to practice became strong in Judo. I could not even find a practice partner (Yamaguchi, 2012).

Michiko Sasahara, who worked at Mitsui Construction and represented Japan at the 61st World Championship 61kg category, said, At some universities and police, when I asked for a lesson, "because the Judo discipline seems confused when women's Judoka come". I refused for such a reason, and I just wanted to practice, but I made many regrets. I was shame sorry that they saw women's Judo with such

an eye.

Women's judo in 1970s Japan focused on melee practice and kata for Japanese women's training. They were forbidden to use waza since it was considered as being un-womanly. Moves such as Uchi-mata and Hane-goshi (跳腰) and Yoko-Shiho-gatame (横四方固) were prohibited as well. This was likely because these throws involved raising a leg high between the opponent's legs, possibly striking their private parts ; similarly, the NEWAZA involved putting pressure on the opponent's groin by twisting their judogi or pants, possibly involving touching their private parts as well. However, the same could apply to men performing these waza. The groin area is sensitive for both women and men. If anything, the existence of forbidden waza for women alone spoke to the restriction of waza based on masculine hegemony and the erotic perspective. Surprisingly, such rules were not revised for over a decade.

Techniques that ostensibly lacked femininity were taboo for women at that time. These included the Uchi Mata (内股), Ouchi-gari (大内刈), Kochi-gari (小内刈), and NEWAZA (寝技). These techniques are now the most popular Techniques among women's judokas.

Women's Judo in the 1970s

Women's Judo games held in various European countries in the 1970s, and voices were raised demanding international competitions. The appeal of jujutsu and judo for women in the West was their extraordinary quality of using the opponent's strength to throw them regardless of gender or build. It simultaneously served as an escape from gender norms and ordinary life : a space where, regardless of gender, build, social position, or place in the hierarchy, extraordinary (violent) things were permitted (wrestling, using waza on partners, holding them down, pressuring their joints, choking them, etc.). In the extraordinary space of the dojo, pairing with partners was also a form of social interaction. As with the examples of the British women's suffragette movement of the 1920s and of women's

fight to participate in world judo and the Olympics after World War II, the history of women's jujutsu and judo has likewise mirrored the history of women's social participation more generally.

In August 1972, at the International Judo Federation General Assembly held during the Munich Olympics, Italy proposed to host an international tournament for women's games. In response, at the Sports Committee of the International Judo Federation General Assembly stated in October 1975, "If the Women's Judo Championship held on three or more of the five continents, we could hold the World Women's Judo Championship" (Yamaguchi, 2012).

The Oceania Women's Judo Championship had already been accomplished in 1974. However, the European Women's Judo Championship was held in 1975, and the Pan American Women's Judo Championship occurred in 1977. The world championship for women's Judo could finally become a reality (Atkinson, 1983)

Special Meeting of the International Judo Federation in 1976 adopted the European proposal for the rules for refereeing women's Judo games (Brousse, 2005). At the same time, the All Japan Judo Federation also decided to initiate women's Judo games at its board meeting in January 1977, and in November of that same year, the Japanese federation established Kodokan Judo games rules for women.

The first Asian Women's Judo Championship was held in 1981. Thus, Judo competitions in Asia began after the other continents had already established their own championships. Women's Judo matches were held in numerous countries since 1960, in tandem with the second wave of the feminist movement in Europe. Women's Judo also became the driving force behind the adoption of the Olympic Games.

Japanese women's rules

On July 28, 1978, the first All Japan Women's Judo Championship (1st All Japan Women's Judo Championship) was held at the Kodokan Daidojo. There were four categories (50kg, 58kg, 65kg, and above

65kg), and 37 women participated in the matches. However, the rules for men and women were different.

Japanese women were required to wear short-sleeved white round-neck shirts, sport a white-striped black belt, and tie long hair. The rules applied especially for women prohibited the grabbing of hair and the use of the throw technique of *kani-basami* (蟹挟). Some other women's only rules included the prohibition from grabbing the back collar, and injunctions against extraction, choking, and arm-lock judgment as per the referee's specifications. These conditions were very different from the rules applied in international games. Thus, double rules were established for women's Judo rules, both domestically and internationally.

In Yamaguchi's opinion, the game rules for women imputed the male desire for aggression onto women. She felt that the rules insulted all female judokas because prohibitions such as "Don't grab opponent's hair" were meant only for women. According to her, all judokas, regardless of whether they were male or female, knew not to grab their opponent's hair even if it was not specifically banned. Yamaguchi thus felt that the rules were generated out of a male perspective of what could be expected from women and were thus demeaning.

Surprisingly, such rules were not revised for over a decade.

Techniques that ostensibly lacked femininity were taboo for women at that time. These included the *uchimata* (内股), *ouchi-gari* (大内刈), *kouchi-gari* (小内刈), and *newaza* (寝技). These techniques are now the most popular moves among women's judokas.

Women's Judo and the Olympic Games

The momentum to boost women's Judo accelerated in Japan in the 1980s, when the world championship was held. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1985. This statute regulated the promotion of the welfare of female workers, ensuring equal opportunities and treatment for men and women in employment. That same year, the Interna-

tional Olympic Committee Board of Directors and the General Assembly decided that Judo would be an official event from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Women's Judo then began to be recognized in Japan.

The first international women's Judo tournament was held in Japan in 1983. It continued without interruption until its 24th edition in 2006.

The Fukuoka International Convention on Meditation played a significant role in the development of women's Judo. It improved the competitiveness of Japanese athletes by inviting top-class overseas athletes to host high-level international competitions.

The nationwide Internet-based broadcasting of women's Judo has also ameliorated the appeal of women's Judo and raised awareness of the sport.

Japanese athletes in the 1980s and 1990s found it difficult to pay the high travel expenses necessary for international competitions. However, the best-ranked athletes from Europe and the United States came to Japan to play games and training camps accelerated domestic competitiveness.

Besides, as high-ranking women players participated in international games and world championships, their facial expressions and splendid Judo skills were broadcast on live television, disseminating the appeal of women's Judo throughout Japan.

Yamaguchi Kaori became the first Japanese world champion (1984) was nicknamed Onna Sanshiro 女三四郎. Ryoko Tani (originally, Tamura) hailed from Fukuoka City. She was 14 years old when she first entered and the first title in a Judo tournament. Named after the women's Judo Manga Yawara, she has become a national star and is nicknamed Yawara-Chan 柔ちゃん.

Conclusion

Kano required the Kodokan women's division to wear black belts with white lines. Women and men were forbidden to practice together and thus distinguished by the white lines in women's belts so that men and women would never be paired together in practice. Kano also felt that women's judo matches should be forbidden not on the basis of prejudice but

rather from a focus on education. He felt similarly about men and thus forbade "show business" matches. Kano was concerned about the consumption of judo within the popular culture, regardless of gender differences. As an educator, for Kano judo was about cultivation, not a form of show business.

A further reason that Kano prohibited matches in women's judo may have been an interest in creating "judo as play" (women's judo) through kata and melees as an antithesis to matches (men's judo). He may have been concerned that if he permitted women to participate in matches the same way men did, their judo would acquire the same win-at-all-costs mentality as the men, thereby losing sight of the good in "play (ludique)". Kano is also said to have spoken of "kata" as grammar and "matches" as essays (Noritomi, 1972). His perspective is reflected in comments such as "women's judo is the closest to my ideal" and "women's judo is the true inheritor of Kodokan judo".

Prewar, the Kodokan women's division constituted women's physical education for daughters of the Tokyo upper class as a part of "good wife, wise mother" education, with no matches being held. In contrast, the women of the Butoku Kai were primarily from the provincial middle class, taking part in judo in a liberal atmosphere with matches and melees held regardless of gender.

After the war, when Kodokan judo came to dominate the judo world, women's judo (unlike men's) acquired two categories: black belts (women's judo with matches) and White-Striped black belts (Kodokan women's division, doing mainly kata with no matches). Within women's judo, as well, Kodokan judo was considered the legitimate form, thereby coming to be symbolized by the White-Striped black belts.

Because the Butoku Kai ("Martial Virtue Society") and kosen (technical college) judo had collapsed after the war, a myth became established and accepted, with Kodokan judo coming to represent "legitimate judo" and the Butoku Kai and kosen judo as "heretical judo".

As interviews with women judoka indicate, the division between black belts (women's judo with

matches) and White-Striped black belts (Kodokan women's division doing mainly kata) became a form of discrimination in favor of White-Striped black belts as being the "legitimate" form of women's judo. Thus, the Kodokan myth was reinforced, and black belts without white lines came to face discrimination as illegitimate among women judoka. In short, for women's judo, the unified Judo's organization transformed the prewar structure of categories into a postwar structure of discrimination.

Since the 1980s, in particular, as the internationalization and turn toward competition in women's judo became normalized, dan-level judoka came only from the Kodokan and no longer from the Butoku Kai, further solidifying Kodokan women's judo's legitimacy and the White-Striped black belts as a symbol, even an emblem, of this legitimacy in women's judo.

Judo in postwar Japan reinterpreted Kano's unique ideology. Kano's principles for Kodokan judo, namely "maximum efficient use of energy for mutual benefit", were made internally essential, while simultaneously forming the principles of a self-confined men's village society far from Kano's ideals. This caused rampant contempt for women, acceptance of violence, and a win-at-all-costs mentality. This is the paradox of judo.

On January 29, 2013, 15 leading female judokas complained that coaching personnel including the national coach of the women's team had perpetrated violence and power harassment on them. The case attracted substantial public attention. Subsequent revelations also encompassed issues such as financial scandals and indecent conduct involving the federation's officials. MUNEOKA Shoji was then appointed the new President of the All Japan Judo Federation at the end of August 2013, and he began the reorganization of the federation immediately upon taking charge.

It may be said that the history of women's Judo represents a battle against gender bias. However, if women find it difficult to survive, men will also be affected. Judo encompasses a philosophy Kano established, called Seiryoku-Zenyo and Jita-Kyoei 精力善

用 自他共栄.

The phrase asserts: "We prosper, and others also prosper". This sentiment should be every individual's ideal of living within a society.

An obstructive and uneven society is full of gaps. People repel each other in communities that have poles of influential and uninfluential people. The gender bias will be resolved when the strong and weak, regardless of gender, realize that they must support each other.

Mixed team competitions will be adopted for the first time at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics next year. Prospective mixed team competitions will also create novel opportunities for both men and women to play active roles. The success of women's Judo can also thus serve to create new opportunities for men.

Footnotes

1. The Dai Nippon Butokukai was an important organization, with members of the imperial family as official patrons and governors as heads of its local prefectural branches. It was founded in 1895 with Prince Komatsu Akihito as its first honorary President and the prominent politician and businessman Watanabe Chifuyu as its first chairman. Senior military figures were appointed as directors, along with bureaucrats and ministers from the Home Ministry and leading martial arts practitioners. The foundation aimed to promote Japanese martial arts. With overall control over martial arts groups from around the country, the foundation was responsible for martial arts training and the granting of dan rankings. Ten years later, it became a sizable state-run organization with 1,112,414 members registered in 1906, and its influence extended beyond Japan via its branches in Europe.

At the time, there were numerous different schools of Jūjutsu. In 1906, Ōura Kanetake, chairman of the Butokukai, suggested to Kano that he should create kata forms that could be performed by all practitioners.

In response, a new committee was put together with Kano at its head, bringing together 20 instructors representing the ten significant Jūjutsu schools under the ButokokuKai. After a week of meetings, the committee came up with forms that everyone could agree on for the first time. The throwing techniques agreed upon at the time continue in the present as the officially recognized Nageno-kata of the Kodokan.

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(2020年9月8日受付)
(2020年12月10日受理)

