

# Etiquette at Kendo World Championships

## ~Etiquette of Foreign Players and Etiquette expected from Japanese Players~

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### 1. Introduction

Since the first Kendo World Championships were held in Tokyo (Nihon Budokan) in 1970 under the auspices of the International Kendo Federation (below, IKF), thirty-eight years have gone by. The Championships are held once every three years rotating between Asia, Europe and America. The news that the invincible Japanese men's team was beaten for the first time in history during the 13th World Championships (December 2006) in Taipei (Gymnasium Taiwan University) was unheard of. Next year, the 14th World Championships are scheduled for Sao Paulo, Brazil.

These Championships, that began with the first World Championships with seventeen participating countries and areas as a two sections event, male individuals and team, hosted a female goodwill match at the 10th Championships, a female individuals section was added during the 11th Championships and at the 12th Championships a female team section was added as an official event. At the 13th Championships 44 countries participated with a total of 432 players, 286 males and 146 females, and at present the Championships have developed to a scale worthy of an international tournament both in name and reality.

Looking back over four tournaments from the 10th through the 13th Championships in which the author participated as member of the Japanese team and organizing committee, and by giving a presentation on etiquette of players of various countries and the etiquette that is expected of Japanese players, the author would like to take this opportunity to reconsider etiquette.

### 2. Etiquette of Foreign Players during the World Championships

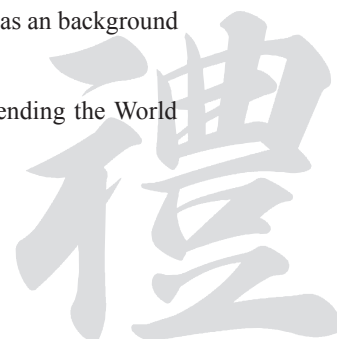
As you know, the IKF, with the All Japan Kendo Federation (below, AJKF) as model, has begun to internationalize 'kendo as budo' placing emphasis on kendo's traditional and cultural nature. Even today, after thirty-eight years have passed since the establishment of the IKF, kendo, which originated in our country, has spread and developed without changing the original form of bogu and shinai, match and referee rules. Therefore, the match and referee rules implemented during the IKF World Kendo Championships and those that have been established by the AJKF are the same. Of course, the actions of ritsurei and sonkyo are performed with AJKF etiquette. Even the team from Korea, which is the only member country that has its own etiquette and who omitted sonkyo from tournaments within Korea, observes the AJKF etiquette while performing at the World Championships.

Etiquette of foreign players at four Championships is as follows.

#### ① Looking at all participating players

During all four Championships players whose etiquette was disorderly were extremely rare (etiquette was better than at a regional tournament in Japan). However, observations were made of female players, whose history as an official section is short, receiving reprimands on etiquette from the referee during matches. This has as an background the prevalent condition of countries that forcibly dispatch relatively inexperienced female players.

But, one can observe all countries giving thorough guidance to their selected players upon attending the World





Championships. This could also be said to be the result of energetic popularization activities of ‘kendo as budo’, including etiquette, by dispatching teachers from the AJKF, dispatching kendo coaches from the Young People Foreign Cooperation Section of the International Cooperation Projects Group, or individuals teaching abroad.

## ② Technical Superiority and Etiquette

More than the superiority in etiquette, the differences in etiquette based on the level of technical expertise within each country, draw attention. Especially, the actions of batto and noto and the posture during sonkyo are more refined depending on how high the competitive level of the player is. The etiquette of medalist level players is splendid, without regard to the country of origin. One can say that etiquette will be refined in proportion to progress in the technical level.

## ③ Wearing kendogi, hakama and armor, and Etiquette

Similar to technical measures, the wearing of the dogi and etiquette are interrelated, the better a player wears the kendo outfit the better his etiquette will be. Concretely, the etiquette movements will be gradual and dignified. In Japan, not a small number of dan degree holders interpret kendo as having a strong ‘showy’ demonstration element with etiquette included within technical superiority. It is inferred that the orientation of foreign players, similar to Japanese players, who look for ‘beauty’ in proportion to the level of proficiency in kendo is growing stronger.

## ④ The beautiful Etiquette of European players

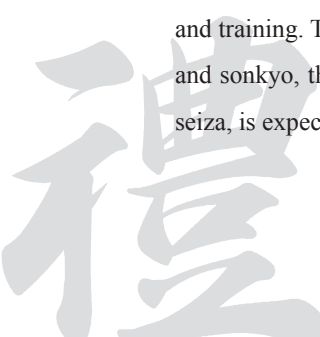
If we compare every country, the etiquette of European players is beautiful. Not a few players have competitive skills that enable them to end in the higher places at tournaments and their etiquette inside the match area can be compared to players from medalist countries. In the Asian and American zones, there are many players with Japanese ancestry, but in European countries the number of such players is extremely low. Since most European players’ motivation to begin practicing kendo is an interest in ‘Japanese culture’, ‘budo’, ‘bushido’, and so on, it can be said that their high level of awareness for ‘interpreting kendo as budo’ appears in their etiquette.

## ⑤ Awareness of the ‘bow’ as resulting from differences in race and culture

The ‘bow’ in kendo doesn’t end with ritsurei and sonkyo, it extends into a wide area including behavior outside the arena, like posture and behavior while waiting before a match, when putting on one’s armor, when entering or leaving the arena, and so on. There are foreign players who express joy after winning a match at the World Championships. In Japan this same kind of behavior would be severely cautioned as a ‘lack of etiquette towards one’s opponent’. In this sense it cannot be denied that Japanese players’ awareness of the ‘bow’ is somewhat different. However, this is not a matter of mentality and the level of understanding, the author sees this as a phenomenon originating in differences in race and culture.

## 3. Etiquette expected from Japanese Players

Japanese players are selected for the World Championships during a strengthening training camp that is held once every three years. Players selected on the basis of the results of each tournament and profession within Japan are in fierce competition with each other, but the national selection isn’t based solely on tournament results. Excellent technique is an obvious factor, but several elements like etiquette, posture and behavior, and training attitude, form the basis for selection. Especially concerning etiquette, guidance is carefully and thoroughly applied through talks and training. The habituation of etiquette that will function as an example for other countries, beginning with ritsurei and sonkyo, the way to hold shinai and men during displacements, taking off the bogu and the proper way to sit in seiza, is expected to be observed in great detail from the Japanese selection.



It needs no mention that during the 13th World Championships, everything, the technical contents, etiquette and behavior within the arena was of the highest world standard as befits the grandmaster of budo (kendo). At these Championships the moment they lost to the American team, a disturbance beyond imagination would have been expected to occur. However, the conduct of the Japanese team whose etiquette was dignified and resolute, received overwhelming applause from the players of all countries as well as the spectators, was thereafter highly praised in the news papers. Not a few players will remember, although the longing for the ‘strong Japanese selection’ at World Championships will vanish, their impression of the ‘beauty of the Japanese selection’. Not only strike and stab movements, but also ‘etiquette’ form an important element in ‘the beauty’ of kendo.

Looking back on four Kendo World Championships, one realizes that the best way to send the budo spirit out into the world lies hidden in the behavior within the arena, in the first place with the Japanese selection’s etiquette. It cannot be denied that progress in technical level within all countries will from now on compel us to fight tough matches in order to win. Therefore, in order to protect ‘kendo as budo’, an awareness and attitude that treasure the ‘bow’ even more than before will become an absolute requirement for the Japanese selection.

#### 4. In Conclusion

As you know, in April 2005, kendo became a member of the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) and there is great concern about where kendo will go from now on. Now that the dispute about Olympic membership is also surfacing, we cannot hope strongly enough that the road to internationalization and transition into a sport, which will abandon kendo’s spiritual nature as budo, will be avoided. God forbid that the pursuit of rationalization as a sport would result in a simplification of the etiquette that is at present used during international tournaments.

Hereafter engaging in the instruction of our juniors at the NIFS, which is the only corporate national university offering a specialist budo curriculum, we would be very pleased indeed if the present symposium would enable us to once more recognize the spirit behind the ‘bow’.

#### References

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