

History of the Kenpo hakama as it was told to me

The use of the hakama appeared between the 13th and 14th centuries. The hakama was traditionally worn by the Samurai. The Samurai were the Japanese warriors used to police the island of Okinawa. It was during Japan's occupation of the island of Okinawa that the hakama became popular formal wear among the Okinawans.

As time passed, the political significance of the Samurai diminished on the island of Okinawa, and the wearing of the hakama gained greater popularity among the indigenous men of the island. Many merchants began wearing the hakama for business affairs; it soon began to appear in ceremonial and wedding events. And finally, nearly every male adopted the hakama as part of their formal attire.

It was also during this time that many martial arts schools included the hakama as official dojo attire. The use of the hakama in the dojo is intended to symbolize the spirit and seven virtues of Budo: Each pleat of the hakama represents a virtue: jin (benevolence), gi (honor and justice), rei (courtesy and etiquette), chi (wisdom and intelligence), shin (sincerity), chu (loyalty), kon (piety).

Unfortunately the hardships of postwar Japan would soon nearly extinguish the use of the hakama, within the dojo, due to the lack of raw materials and economic hardships. In an attempt to keep the spirit of budo alive, martial arts students found creative ways to produce and/or borrow the hakama: many manufactured hakamas out of distress air raid blackout curtains, students also sacrificed their futons to produce makeshift hakamas, and finally many unsuspecting fathers, uncles, and grandfathers, discovered they too would be victimized by the 'Has anyone seen my hakama' frenzy.

Finally it was suggested / accepted by many instructors to discontinue the wearing of the hakama. While others dojos began adopting new guidelines concerning the use of the hakama: Some dojos emphatically required the wearing of hakama, while others only requested women to wear them out of modesty; a few adopted the policy of only allowing Shodan and above to wear it. Whatever policies that were adopted, they were instituted to ease the student's dojo financial burdens of postwar Japan.

It was during the early 1900's that the use of the karate gi and hakama, became the official dojo attire for many Okinawa and Japanese martial arts clubs, regardless of one's social class. Gichin Funakoshi, is one of many instructors who helped to establish a formal standardized martial arts uniform. He realized that the implementation of strict guidelines concerning the dojo gi among students, affluent or not, would assist in facilitating an atmosphere of equality within the dojo among all the students.

Thus hoping to belay the inherent social class structure discrepancies associated with the close physical interaction between the affluent and non-affluent students. The wearing of the hakama is intended to symbolize the spirit and virtues of budo. The obi kyu (karate belts) ranks varied from 6 kyus to 10 kyus, depending on the style of martial arts one studied. As time passed new obi colors were added.

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The attire worn by the students of the BCC Kenpo Club is a black gi, black hakama, and an obi worn on the outside on the hakama. In our system of kenpo we wear the obi on the outside of the hakama for two reasons: First, the traditional dojo attire began as the gi and hakama, so it was decided that one should tie the obi over the hakama; secondly, if one is required to wear an obi to distinguish ranking within the dojo. Wearing the obi on the outside of the hakama quickly settles any questions kyu/dan concerns.