

# Instructions for Making Kunsu

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Zen is elegant. The environment of practice at Dainen-ji is elegant, crisp, and a direct expression of the mind of practice. The Butsudan, the flickering of candles and the burning of incense, the sounds of gongs and mokugyo, Ancestral portraits, sho and ikebana, all point directly to our reason for being in the monastery: "Shinjin Gakudo": the practise of the way through the bodymind. Each element is there to deepen and clarify the practice of each student. There is nothing extraneous to this point of practice. This is elegance.

As we gassho, sit zazen, walk in kinhin, chant, practice kata, and make great bows, we bring body, breath, speech, and mind together at one time, again and again, to fully realize practice. Zen practice is quiet and active. Knees bend as we sit, arms arc in gassho, hips swivel and legs extend as we move through time and space in the movements of kinhin and kata. We sit and move in the heat of summer and in the cold of winter. Each bodymind practising must be clothed in a way that is useful to each situation; adaptable, durable, and non-binding. In the early 1990s order to accommodate the many forms of our practice, particularly for monastics, Roshi and the Practice Council had studied different forms of monastic attire, both Eastern and Western, with a view to developing robes for the Northern Mountain Order that will reflect the clarity, simplicity, and sharpness of our practice style as well as being practical and comfortable. One such garment is the kunsu.

The kunsu, lower garment, is traditional for monastics. Variations of this very practical approach for clothing the lower body, both male and female, are in use all over Asia and Africa attesting to its versatility and appeal. Simple and elegant, the kunsu is comfortable for sitting, providing covering for the feet as well as the legs. Its folds provide ample room for the movements of kinhin and kata and never is there any binding...truly a formless form.

Black kunsu are worn by all practitioners, lay and monastic. A white kunsu is worn for jukai.

Kunsu are very easy to make. You can make it out of cotton or a cotton blend. Some microfibre fabrics are wonderful for retaining their blackness over many washings and never need ironing. Some microfiber fabrics are very thin. If you are not sure if the fabric is thick enough, put your hand behind the fabric and hold it up to an overhead light to make sure that it is not too see-through. If you can really clearly see the details of your hand, (i.e. your fingernails) that is too thin.

## **To calculate how much fabric to buy:**

### **Width:**

It is recommended to have someone help you take these measurements.

Measure your waist, (just above your navel) and write that number down. Now extend your arm to the side (not in front of you) and place the end of the tape measure against your armpit. Extend the tape measure to the tip of your longest finger, keeping your arm held straight out from the shoulder (to the side). Multiply that number by two and write it down. Add the waist and arm length numbers together and then add an extra 4 cm (approximately 1.5 inches) to allow for the seam. Please ask the person cutting the fabric in the

store to try to make the cut end as straight as possible as you will be joining the two cut ends together to form a 'tube'.

### **Length:**

Because people vary in height you will need to do some calculations of your own to determine how long your fabric needs to be. Having someone else help you take the measurements is advised.

Measure from the top of your foot to your waist.

To that measurement add 10 cm for a five cm (2") hem top and bottom)

To those measurements add 18 cm (7") to allow for the fabric to be folded over the sash (at the waist).

The total of those three numbers is the minimum length of the fabric you need to buy.

If it is longer than you need, you can use the extra piece of fabric to make the sash.

### **For the sash:**

The sash should be 4 to 5 cm wide (1.5" to 2") wide and long enough to wrap twice around your waist and easily double knot the ends.

### **How to Sew a Kunsu:**

To sew the kunsu, bring the cut ends of the fabric together and sew one seam 6.35 mm (1/4") in from the raw edge. Turn the tube you have created inside out. Fold it at the seam line and iron. Sew another seam 19 mm (3/4") in from the first. Fold at the second seam and iron flat. Sew one more seam 6.35 mm (1/4") in from the folded edge of your original seam. Now you have what is called a French seam on a completely reversible fabric tube. Hem both the top and bottom about 5 cm (2").

Kunsu can be washed with your regular dark laundry and ironed flat. If you use 100% cotton for your kunsu it will become softer and more comfortable with each washing. When it is perfectly aged it will tear and fall apart and you will need to make another. A kunsu made using a sewing machine can be finished in under an hour. Making a kunsu by hand can be fun.

The kunsu, as adapted by Roshi, is worn by monastics and can now be worn by general, associate, and public students. The simple and elegant kunsu is the ideal practice garment.

### **How to Wear a Kunsu:**

Please watch this video: <https://youtu.be/oQ2fjYxaDg>

### **Where to have a kunsu made:**

Students living in the Ottawa area can contact a seamstress who has been making garments for us for many years:

<https://wovenstreams.com/contact/>