

A Brief History of *Jujutsu**

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Danzan Ryu Jujutsu**

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The Nature of Jujutsu

Jujutsu is a traditional Japanese form of unarmed combat. The correct transliteration is *jujutsu*, although *jujutsu* and *jiu-jitsu* in British English are common and accepted spellings. *Ju* means "pliability," "flexibility," or "to give way." *Jutsu* means a fighting form or practice (as opposed to a *do*, which is a spiritual form of martial training). *Jujutsu*, then, means "the martial practice of giving way"; or, more broadly, "the practice of giving way without giving up or giving in."

Contrary to popular belief, *jujutsu* does not mean "the gentle art." Many techniques are far from gentle, although the strength needed to perform them can be deceptively little. Strength is a factor in most techniques, but it must be applied according to the principle of *seiryoku-zenyo*: the most efficient use of energy. One *jujutsu* master, Iso Mataemon, describes *jujutsu* this way: "The use of power in *jujutsu* is greatly necessary. But it is only when such power is not used in excess that it stands the test of the principle of *ju*. Another aspect of the use of power must be born in mind, too. From the early stages of a trainee's development in *jujutsu*, he must always be careful to avoid reliance on physical strength, for such is an obstacle in the way of his progress toward the gaining of skill in technique. After the trainee has developed a creditable technique, however, then the use of power is acceptable and, in fact, absolutely necessary to his effectiveness in dealing with an adversary. *Jujutsu* is 'pliant' and 'flexible' in this way." (Draeger, Donn. *Classical Budo*. New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1973: page 122).

Also contrary to popular belief, *jujutsu* can be both offensive and defensive. Martial philosophies usually stress restraint, but they also recognize that attack or "seizing the initiative" may be appropriate, and *jujutsu* is well suited for these occasions.

Early Accounts of *Jujutsu*

Japanese history can be divided into eight periods:

- The Ancient Period, before 650 A.D.;
- The Nara Period, from 650 to 793 A.D.;
- The Heian Period, from 794 to 1191 A.D.;
- The Kamakura Period, from 1192 to 1336 A.D.;
- The Muromachi or Ashikaga Period, from 1337 to 1563 A.D.;
- The Azuchi or Momoyama Period, from 1564 to 1602 A.D.;
- The Edo or Tokugawa Period, from 1603 to 1867 A.D.; and
- The Modern or Meiji Period, from 1868 to the present.

The first account of *jujutsu*-like tactics in Japan dates to the Ancient Period. In the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), a historical writing, there is an account of Nomino-Sukune wrestling with and finally kicking to death Tajima-no-Kehaya. This battle, which took place in 23 B.C., is usually credited with being the origin of *sumai*, a combat form of sumo wrestling that developed into several empty-hand styles of combat, *jujutsu* among them. Later, in 712 A.D., the *Nihon Shobi* (Chronicles of Japan) describes a battle in which Tatemi Kazuchi threw Tatemi Nokami "like a leaf," a description compatible with the art of *jujutsu*.

During the Nara Period, *sumai* and *sumo* were supported by the imperial family. These forms developed further in the Heian Period and began to be used in conjunction with weapons, primarily the bow, spear, and sword. *Atemi*, the art of striking vital points of the body, was practiced with the butt ends of these weapons in close-quarter fighting. These techniques became a part of what would eventually be called *jujutsu*. *Daito Ryu jujutsu* (or *aikijujutsu*), a martial tradition (or *ryu*) that emerged during the later part of this period, is the foundation on which modern *aikido* is based.

During the Kamakura Period, Japan's feudal era, the military class, or *bushi*, accelerated the development of grappling techniques, which are an important part of *jujutsu*. These techniques were used when the major weapon was lost and involved close-quarter fighting, especially with knives or short swords. *Yoroi kumi-uchi* was a form of grappling used against an opponent wearing full armor. Although these techniques were developed for armored combatants, the principles were readily transferable to unarmed and unarmored combat.

The *Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu* was founded in the 1400's during the Muromachi Period. This tradition is one of the oldest and most influential martial systems in Japan. It contained a form of grappling called *Yawara-Ge* (peacemaker) that could be used independently of weapons, although it usually involved weapons such as the *kodachi* (short sword) and was not preferred to the use of major weapons. Miyamoto Musashi, Japan's greatest swordsman, studied *Yawara-Ge*, to which he attributed his

great skill in *kakushi-jutsu*, the art of using small, concealable weapons. Another martial system, the *Muso-Jikiden Ryu*, included 100 techniques for fighting in armor that were called *Yawara-Gi* (meekness). Again, these techniques could be applied with or without a weapon. All of these arts contributed to what we today call *jujutsu*.

The Development of *Jujutsu* in Unarmed Combat

From 1467 to 1574, primarily during the Muromachi Period, constant civil wars stimulated the development of all military arts. The techniques that would become *jujutsu* were still secondary to the use of weapons, although they continued to augment the close-quarter use of weapons. For example, the *Takenouchi Ryu* (or *Takeuchi Ryu*), founded in 1532, included in-fighting techniques against an opponent clad in light armor of gauntlets and leggings. These *jujutsu-like* techniques were called *kogu soku* or *koshi no mawari* (literally, "around the hips").

The Azuchi or Momoyama Period was relatively peaceful. Presumably, empty-handed techniques continued to be developed. The term *kumi-uchi* eventually became the term for all empty-handed arts of the period.

The Edo or Tokugawa Period was an important period for *jujutsu*. Commoners were prohibited from carrying weapons and so turned to empty-handed forms of combat. During this period, the term *jujutsu* became associated with these forms and replaced the term *kumi-uchi* in general use. But commoners lacked the martial experience, the expertise with weapons from which the unarmed arts developed, and the instruction necessary to create combatively sound systems. These common forms of "*jujutsu*," such as they were, soon became the practice of criminals and of the *nanushi*, the "bouncers" in houses of prostitution. The *bushi* continued to practice their fighting forms, but these were kept secret within the *ryu*, which was often restricted to family or clan members. Some schools of *jujutsu* also became more aesthetic during this time, in that they began to develop the *practice* of the art as a value in its own right, as a form of philosophical and spiritual discipline, as well as preparation for combat. -

Jujutsu was also called simply *yawara* during the Edo Period. In the late 1600s, the *Sekiguchi Ryu* included a style of *yawara* based on *sumo* and suitable for use with weapons. The *Oguri Ryu*, founded in 1616, included techniques called *wajutsu* (the art of softness). These techniques were modified from those of *yoroi kumi-uchi* to be used against opponents wearing the street clothes of the Edo Period. The *Nagao Ryu* included what it called *taijutsu* (body arts), a general term for empty-handed techniques that became popular among commoners in the period. This *ryu* was also noted for its *kakushi-jutsu* techniques.

The Development of *Jujutsu* as a Philosophical Discipline

Kito Ryu Jujutsu was founded during the Edo Period. This *ryu*, a system of combat-effective armed and unarmed techniques, is the foundation for much of *Kodokan Judo*, including modern sport judo. Eventually, the techniques became aesthetically oriented. Terada Kan'emon, the fifth headmaster of the *Kito Ryu*, founded *Jikishin Ryu Jujutsu* after he retired from the *Kito Ryu*. He is credited with the first use of the word *judo* and with establishing for the first time the practice of empty-handed techniques as a discipline with philosophical implications.

In the early 1800's, Iso Mataemon founded the *Tenjin Shin'yo Ryu*. This *ryu* was completely devoted to *jujutsu* and emphasized *atemi* and *kata*, or form, in mastering the aesthetic and combat applications of *jujutsu*. From this time on, many martial arts also began to incorporate the concepts of Zen Buddhism into their teaching, thus formalizing the practice of the art as a philosophical discipline directed toward the Zen concept of enlightenment. Thus, *kyujutsu* (archery) began to include the practice of *kyudo*, an art devoted entirely to the discipline of drawing the bow, not to accuracy in placing arrows in a target: in *kyudo*, the arrow is usually released into a target only 2 meters away. So, too, did *kenjutsu* (sword-fighting on the battlefield) began to include *kendo* (fencing with bamboo staves and now a competitive sport) and *iaijutsu* (drawing and cutting with the sword in indoor and urban settings) began to include *iaido* (the art of sword drawing for form and technique). In contrast to the strictly martial orientation of the "*jutsu*" traditions, the "*do*" disciplines added a strong focus on *how the art was practiced*, in addition to (and sometimes instead of) the martial applications.

The "golden age" of *jujutsu* lasted from the late 1600s to the mid 1800s. After this time, the combat-effective forms of *jujutsu* rapidly disintegrated. Still, during this period, 725 martial *ryu* included techniques that could be called *jujutsu*.

In 1882, shortly after the beginning of the Meiji Period, Jigoro Kano founded *Kodokan Judo*. Professor Kano studied many of the old *jujutsu* schools and became proficient in the *Kito Ryu* and *Tenjin Shin'yo Ryu*. *Jujutsu* was still associated with criminals and cheap exhibitions of fighting "skill." Professor Kano, who was Principal of the Tokyo Higher Normal School and the first President of the Japan Society of Physical Education (an organization similar to the Amateur Athletic Association in the US) in addition to being a *jujutsu* master, made *jujutsu* a respectable form of physical education that was eventually taught in public schools throughout the country. He eliminated the obviously dangerous techniques, modified others so that they could be practiced safely, and developed a curriculum for teaching the techniques that resulted in what is called *Kodokan Judo*. Although he is remembered more his development of sport *judo*, he also preserved many of the older *jujutsu* techniques. These techniques are still taught to higher-ranking students. He also established the ranking system used by many martial arts practiced today, that of the *kyu-dan* (class-grade) system of 10 *kyu*

or student ranks, which are generally indicated by colored belts or by colored tabs on belts, and 10 *dan* or black-belt instructor ranks, which are usually distinguished by different markings on a black belt. -

Professor Kano adopted three ways to practice his system. First was *kata* (literally, "dance"), or prearranged techniques to be practiced unhurriedly, smoothly, and gracefully to develop skill and coordination. Second was *randori* (free play), a more rigorous form or practice in which two partners helped each other to learn in a friendly exchange of throws, holds, chokes, and joint-locks. Third was *shiai* (literally "battle") or competition with rules. It is said that "*kata* trains the body; *randori* trains the mind; and *shiai* trains the spirit." In creating his system, Professor Kano essentially added the principles of Zen to *jujutsu* to create judo.

Judo as we know it today has become highly competitive. This emphasis on competitiveness was probably not Professor Kano's intent, but Western influences after World War II, including the inclusion of *judo* in the Olympic Games in 1964, have made *shiai* the focus of training in many judo schools.

The Growth of Jujutsu in the United States

With the re-opening of Japan in the 1800s and the onset of the Meiji Restoration, the entire political structure of Japan changed, and for the first time, the West gained access to many aspects of Japanese culture. Practitioners of all Japanese arts began to travel the world demonstrating their skills. *Jujutsu* practitioners traveled to Europe, the United States, and South America giving exhibitions and challenging famous wrestlers and boxers to public matches. President Teddy Roosevelt was so impressed with *jujutsu* that he began to take lessons in the White House. Law enforcement and military officials quickly recognized the effectiveness of *jujutsu* as a means of subduing criminals. Dozens of small instruction manuals were printed in the United States in the early nineteenth century, touting the virtues of *jujutsu* as means of personal self defense. With the beginning of World War II, however, *jujutsu* began a vigorous growth in the United States.

During the war in the Pacific, Allied forces often engaged Japanese ground troops in hand-to-hand combat. Rather rapidly, *jujutsu* techniques began to appear in hand-to-hand combat courses and in unarmed combat field manuals of that time. Many servicemen developed an interest in learning not only the techniques of *jujutsu* but the philosophies and moral tenets that had become part of many *jujutsu* traditions.

Danzan Ryu Jujutsu

One such system, *Danzan Ryu* (“Cedar Mountain” or “Island” System, after the Hawaiian Islands where it was taught), illustrate this phenomena. Compiled by Professor Henry S. Okazaki in the 1920s and 1930s, it is also a synthesis of several of the aforementioned classical *jujutsu* systems. Crediting the practice of *jujutsu* with helping him to recover from a serious attack of tuberculosis, Professor Okazaki dedicated his life to the study of the martial arts. Learning all the *jujutsu* available to him in the Hawaiian Islands, he traveled to Japan and gained access to other classical systems, as well as to *Kodokan Judo*. Nor did he limit his studies to *jujutsu* alone but studied *sumo*, Western wrestling, Western boxing, Chinese boxing (*kung fu*), Filipino knife fighting (today usually referred to as the arts of *kali*, *escrima*, or *arnis de mano*), Hawaiian *lua* (a form of unarmed combat native to Hawaii), and Okinawan Karate. (In fact, the first karate class in the US and its territories was held in Professor Okazaki’s *jujutsu* school.) He is said to have chosen the name *Danzan Ryu* to honor his kung fu teacher, who loved the Hawaiian Islands. He named his *dojo* (school) the *Kodenkan* (in the expanded translation, The School for the Transmission of Esoteric Zen Teachings), where he sought to preserve classical *jujutsu* techniques, as well as the practice of martial arts as a spiritual discipline.

Although the *Kodenkan* was in the Territory of Hawaii, it was initially closed to Westerners. This restriction was consistent with the prevailing Japanese attitude of the time, which was to limit access to the arts and not to teach foreigners. (The notable exception to this was Professor Kano and his *Kodokan Judo* system.)

Professor Okazaki was a skilled masseur and healer – in addition to teaching *jujutsu*, he made his living as a physical therapist – who learned traditional healing and restorative arts as part of his study of *jujutsu* and other martial arts. It was through the advice and persuasion of a Swedish masseur with whom he studied that he eventually opened his school to Westerners. From the 1930s until the 1950s, thousands of American servicemen, among others, were trained in *Danzan Ryu Jujutsu* and carried their knowledge back to the mainland. Today, several organizations carry on Professor Okazaki’s teachings across the United States.

Other Forms of Jujutsu in the US

Many other styles of *jujutsu* are taught in the United States today, such as *Hakko Ryu Jujutsu*, *Juko Ryu Jujutsu*, *Miyama Ryu Jujutsu*, and the more recent import from Brazil, Brazilian or Gracie *Jujutsu*, to name but a few. Some of these styles have traditional roots; others are modern hybrid systems, compiled since World War II. In addition, several martial arts from other countries also have a *jujutsu*-like techniques, such as Korean *hapkido*, Russian *sambo*, Chinese *chin-na*, Filipino *kali*, and, of course, Western wrestling.