

Aspects of the history of Ju Jitsu.

The martial art that we now know as jujutsu (the Japanese word is also sometimes transliterated as jujitsu or, in Great Britain, as jiu-jitsu) is closely bound up with the history of Japan and its military traditions. Although in the present-day West the word jujutsu clearly refers to a martial art containing striking, throwing, grappling, and joint-locking techniques, its meaning was not always so clear in the past. Its components-ju meaning "gentle" and jutsu meaning "art"-begin to unravel the mystery. They designate that within the Japanese martial tradition jujutsu is within the category of bujutsu, or martial art, as opposed to the category of budo, or martial way. Bujutsu were designed "for warriors by warriors," essentially practical styles whose first purpose was to achieve success on the battlefield (or, later, in the self-defense situations of everyday life.) Budo, by contrast, were built around a philosophical or ethical principle and meant to help the individual practitioner move towards self-perfection. For instance, the way of Aikido is built around an ideal of non-violence; as a result, its techniques are designed to subdue without permanently injuring an attacker. None of this implies either that bujutsu are necessarily unconcerned with ethics and philosophy, or that budo are ineffective in combat. In fact, the ethical aspect in jujutsu is strong in modern Western schools, just as it was also in many famous classical schools of the past. Nevertheless, the primary impetus for jujutsu was Japan's violent past. To introduce this theme a table is inserted below:

The Main Periods of Japanese History		
Period	Year	Characteristics
Ancient	Before 650 CE	Little is known to history. Predecessor arts of jujutsu may have developed.
Nara	650-793	The foundations of the imperial state are laid. Grappling techniques extant
Heian	794-1191	Generally, a time of peace and high cultural achievement. First jujutsu school, the Daito Ryu.
Kamakura	1192-1336	Warriors rule the state; heyday of the classical warrior. The honor code of bushido, central to the noblest jujutsu practitioners, is developed.
Ashikaga	1337-1563	Warriors rule the state; heyday of the classical warrior. The honor code of bushido, central to the noblest jujutsu practitioners, is developed.
Momoyama	1564-1602	Climax of the civil wars. Powerful warlords vie for mastery of Japan. The classical warriors are challenged by the rise of firearms.
Tokugawa	1603-1867	The powerful Tokugawa Shoguns bring domestic order and peace. Jujutsu adapts to more peaceful situations. Commoners, instead of just samurai, learn the art.
Modern	1868-Present	The Shogunate is overthrown. Rise of modernized state. Decline of jujutsu.

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Within this narrative of history the story of jujutsu is hidden, often under different names and with confusing contradictions in the sources (at least within the sources in English translation.) An analogy helps explain the situation: just as a great river such as the Potomac has many smaller tributaries that flow into it but have their own distinct names, so jujutsu had many different precursors. Instead of rivers, within the martial arts are found ryus. Although the Japanese word is difficult to translate directly, a ryu is basically a martial tradition that teaches a particular style of fighting, transmitting it down the generations. There are ryus of jujitsu extant today, for example, which may trace their history back hundreds of years. Even these may have been influenced by still earlier ryus now extinct. Over the course of Japanese history, as many as 9000 may have existed. The great river of jujutsu was always composed of many different ryus, each with their own distinctive competence. One might specialize in the use of small weapons, for example, or

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have special grappling or binding techniques. There was no central "governing authority" of jujutsu; it was just a word (and not the only one) applied to this group of dissimilar ryus.

In structure, a ryu was essentially a benevolent patriarchy led by a headmaster. This man was either descended from or chosen by a previous headmaster. The founder of a ryu was a shodai, a martial genius who often experienced a flash of insight leading to the creation of the style. The martial knowledge he created was called the Kyoden or scroll of teachings of the ryu, which was in turn divided into Shoden (beginner), Chuden (intermediate), Okuden (profound) and Hiden (secret) "essences" or teachings. Generally, only the designated successor of the headmaster received the secret teachings; perhaps this helped him preserve an advantage over even the most senior students. The training provided by a classical ryu was not only physical, but moral. To join such a ryu, a student had to agree to abide by certain rules, such as refraining from using the art improperly or divulging its secrets to outsiders. The virtues of "courage, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, obedience, discipline, patience, careful judgment, courtesy, and frugality" were inculcated. Serious violations of these principles were sometimes punished by death!

The first evidence of jujutsu-like skills is found in legend. In the mythological origins of Japan, a wrestling match between a divine being and a common person (Takeminakata-Nu-Kami) helped establish stable ownership of the earth. The divine person won this contest, which is thought to be the beginning of sumo wrestling; sumo, in turn, influenced the grappling portion of jujutsu. The Kojiki, or "Ancient Matters Record" of Japan, records another incident in 22 BCE in which Taima-Nu-Kichaja wrestled Nomi-Nu-Sukune, who threw and killed his opponent by kicking him to death. This event is sometimes taken as the beginning of jujutsu itself. Later, warriors began using a method named kumi uchi for grappling in armor. These techniques, thought to have originated in Korea, were being taught by the Kodan Ryu around the 7th century CE. Since kumi-uchi was a battlefield art, a practitioner would often use a small weapon to penetrate an opponent's armor - it was by no means an "empty hand" style alone. Later still, in the Nara period (when the Japanese imperial state was beginning to develop) the Daito Ryu of jujitsu arose. One modern author claims that this style was the ancestor of aikido, but it is unclear how he knows this to be so.

The next stage of Japanese history, the Heian period, was marked by a growth in the power of the state and a flowering of the arts. There was still a need for soldiers, however, especially in the wars against the aboriginal Ainu in the north. One of these soldiers, Shinra Suburu Yoshimitsu, in 1100 devised an art based on grappling which he called Daitoryu-Aiki-Ju-Jutsu (it is unclear if this is a variant on the Daito Ryu mentioned earlier.) The style was very effective, and like many other ryus it was kept secret with the clan Yoshimitsu served (the Minamoto.) From it were developed many other styles, some teaching the use of various weapons, some focusing on "empty hand" (weaponless) and armor grappling techniques. The capabilities achieved by these styles were very impressive; for instance, some bushi warriors could use their swords to deflect arrows fired at them!

In the twelfth century, the rise of feudalism in Japan created a new environment for the martial arts. In this "Kamakura" period, the country was ruled by a bakufu (a "tent" or military government). Much as in medieval Europe, Kamakura had a hierarchy in which warriors pledged loyalty to lords, and they in turn to the shogun or military ruler. In such an environment, an ethic named bushido, the way of the warrior, took root. The tenets of bushido included Yu, or courage, loyalty to one's lord, and a readiness for self-sacrifice. A bushi would not risk his own or another's life lightly; but if an honorable cause demanded it, he thought death a cheap price to pay for renown. One scholar has stated that the bushi of Minamoto Yoritomo's bakufu were the archetypes of the classical warrior.

In the Ashikaga and Muromachi periods of Japanese history, internal order disintegrated and there was an increasingly violent period of civil wars culminating in the last half of the sixteenth century. During this period, each region had its own style of jujitsu - there were many opportunities for comparison in the bloody battles of the time. In such melees the opponents wore excellent armor, so kicking and punching were useless. Jujitsu therefore developed with more emphasis on throwing, joint-locking, pinning, and choking than their contemporary Chinese counterparts - the powerful Chinese state preserved internal order better than Japan, meaning martial arts could profitably employ striking techniques that would be useless on a battlefield.



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The first fully identifiable jujutsu system was organized at this time, out of many pre-existing arts, by Hisamori Takenouchi in 1532. According to the legends of the ryu, Takenouchi was taught the foundations of the style by a ghostly warrior who appeared at night in a shrine where he trained. Originally, however, the Takenouchi Ryu was still only a system for grappling in armor. Not until a century later did this ryu begin to incorporate pure empty-hand methods of combat. In the meantime, both the civil wars and, in some sense, the heyday of the classical warrior began to come to an end. Firearms contributed to both developments. The powerful warlord Oda Nobunaga decided to arm his troops with muskets (introduced to Japan by Portuguese and Dutch explorers) partly because it took only six months to train a musketeer against three years to train a classical bushi in the various fighting arts, including jujutsu. Nobunaga's army defeated the warrior army of Takeda Katsuyori at the battle of Nagashino in 1575. Eventually, another powerful warlord, Tokugawa Ieyasu, unified the country and introduced the long period of peace named after him.

Jujitsu now faced a very different social environment. Instead of fighting armored in a battlefield situation, a warrior might need to defend himself in street clothes in an urban setting against an unarmored - but not necessarily unarmed - opponent. Techniques appropriate to the former situation are called katchu bujutsu; those appropriate to the latter, among which we can include modern jujutsu, are suhada bujutsu. Accordingly empty-hand techniques began to form a large part of Tokugawa era jujutsu, and by the eighteenth century the art was widespread. Another consequence of the "unarmored" population of the time was the rise of the striking component of jujitsu. In 1627, a Chinese man named Ch'en Yuan Pin introduced the southern chuan-fa ("fist way") fighting system into Japan. This knowledge formed the basis of the art of kempo, and was adapted into jujutsu as atemi strikes. The Chinese influence was also philosophical, introducing the central concept named yokugo o sei suru, "flexibility masters hardness," from Taoist beliefs. This idea, that the force of an attacker should be redirected rather than directly opposed, is at the core of many jujitsu tactics.

The long era of Tokugawa rule finally came to an end with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The shogunate was abolished, and a centralized national government established around the symbol of the Emperor. Japan rapidly began to modernize and Westernize. Jujutsu both went into decline and gave birth to new martial ways, judo and aikido. Its decline had two causes. First, the art had in many cases lost an ethical basis. Many styles had developed which could be studied by anyone, unlike the traditional ryu which were careful to admit only students with a sense of moral responsibility. Often, jujutsu practitioners were engaged in criminal or socially undesirable behavior, such as serving as bouncers at houses of prostitution or as bodyguards for yakuza (crime lords). Second, the violent no-holds-barred nature of competitions made it very dangerous to be jujutsu exponent - often, men were killed. Both of these trends were perceived by Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo. He was himself a master of jujitsu who had studied in several ryus, and perceived its dangerous nature. Therefore, Kano redesigned jujitsu to exclude the dangerous techniques, though many were retained in kata. This made safe competition and free training (randori) possible. Kano also established a strong ethical and philosophical basis for his art, which we now know as judo but which was originally known as Kano jujitsu.

Although Judo was founded in 1882, it did not capture the loyalty of the Japanese public until 1886. On June 10 of this year took place the famous battle between Judo and Jujitsu at the headquarters of the Tokyo Police. Judo was represented by fifteen champions, as was the Totsuka Yoshin Ryu of jujitsu which was the strongest of the day. The Judo champions won twelve out of the fifteen contests; the head jujitsu instructor of the Police was actually defeated and killed by one of Kano's disciples (who was also an aiki-jutsu master.) With the superiority of judo thus apparently proven, jujitsu went into decline. Classical jujitsu in Japan was replaced almost entirely by judo.

However, the result of the famous battle does not necessarily prove that jujitsu is less effective than judo. Many of Kano's disciples were themselves former jujitsu practitioners, and in fact the powerful yama-arashi (mountain storm) throw used by Saigo Shiro to defeat the police instructor was a jujitsu technique. What made the judo men so much more effective was their use of randori training in addition to kata (forms), which was the only training method of the jujitsuka at the time. Jujitsu exponents who practice randori themselves might be able to compensate for this weakness. That Judo was not a complete replacement for jujitsu is proven by the creation of taiho jutsu to preserve the striking and weapon techniques that of the latter art. In modern Japan, taiho jutsu is reserved for police and military use, a testament to its effectiveness.

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The second art to come from jujutsu, aikido, was founded by Morihei Ueshiba in 1942. Ueshiba, a Shinto mystic, had studied both Daito Ryu jujitsu, the art of aiki-jutsu, and almost two hundred other martial styles as a young man. Of these aiki-jutsu may have been the most influential in his new style; but it itself had broken off from jujutsu in the Tokugawa period. Although aikido has a very noble philosophical premise - to avoid injury both to the defender and to the attacker - it takes many years of training to become effective.

In modern Japan, the few surviving practitioners of classical jujitsu are perceived almost as antiquarians rather than participants in a living art. In the West, however, jujitsu thrives. After finding its way across the Pacific, it took strong root in both England and America (particularly on the West Coast.) Especially as judo turned more and more in the direction of sport instead of fighting, jujitsu became more popular as a method of self-defense. The same combat-emphasis that made jujitsu unpopular in the late 1800s has made it desirable in the present. This is not to say that ethics and philosophy should be unimportant to the modern jujitsu practitioner. Just as modern Japanese dojos promote Bushido and the spirit of the Zen warrior, Western practitioners should infuse jujutsu with ethical values taken both from the Japanese and their own traditions.

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