

Early History of Ju-Jitsu, Part I

by Dennis Helm, Godan.

The rise and fall of Jujitsu before the Imperial ordinance of 1871

Under the Feudal System of Japan, several military arts flourished among the samurai class. Examples of these arts are archery, fencing, horsemanship, the use of spears, the Katana – sword of the Samurai – and other weapons. All of these forms were more or less familiar to the people of most European nations. Virtually all of the martial arts have been practiced in the Western World with an excellence equal to the Japanese, although their forms and methods were not quite the same as those practiced in Japan. The skill of gaining victory by yielding to the opponent's strength appears to be an art peculiar to Japan: no similar art form has ever been known or practiced in any European country.

Although the origin of Jujitsu is not clear, and no fixed date of its first appearance can be ascertained, there is no doubt that it is a purely Japanese art. Further, it has not been derived from ancient Chinese Martial Arts as some scholars of the martial arts have proposed. It has been a common belief of various researchers that a Chinese priest named Chin Genpin brought the art of Kempo, "kicking and striking", to Japan around 1659. In 1659, Chin Genpin became a naturalized Japanese subject and died in 1671.

While engaged in the practice of Jujitsu at the Kokushij Temple in Tokyo, he taught three ronin (out of work samurai) named Fukuno, Isogai, and Miura. After extensive development of their skills, they founded three different Jujitsu Ryu independently of one another. It is not possible that Chin Genpin first introduced Jujitsu into Japan, because Chinese Kempo – which may have been brought over by him – is quite different from Japanese Jujitsu, and because some arts resembling Jujitsu can be traced back to before the time of Chin Genpin in Japan.

Evidence that Jujitsu prevailed in Japan in ancient times is indicated by an incident, which occurred in 24 B. C., when the Emperor Suinin ordered two strong men named Sukune and Kuehaya to wrestle in his presence. This struggle to test the strength and courage of the two ancient giants consisted mainly of kicking, hitting, and gouging with Sukune gaining advantage of his opponent by breaking his ribs, after which he "trampled" upon his loins and back until Kuehaya was fatally injured. Although this incident is generally cited as being the origin of wrestling in Japan, it would seem that it was actually more in the nature of Jujitsu in view of the fact that Kuehaya was kicked and gouged to death.

Sumo wrestling is the national sport of Japan, but it is not the only nationalistic sport derived from the ancient court wrestling of the Nara emperors. When wrestling was banned by edict in 1175 A. D., an atmosphere fostering creative development of all types of hand –to-hand fighting arts was started under the influence of the military. This developmental period lasted several centuries and continued even after the Portuguese explorers arrived in 1543. Ultimately, no less than 725 official documented systems of Jujitsu were developed all of which concentrated on situations in which no "major" weapons were involved. All together, these systems were called Jujitsu.

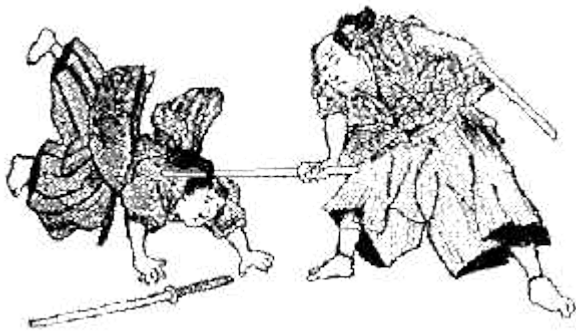
As it is not possible to discuss all of the different branches (Ryu) of Jujitsu, this writing will mention a few of those, which are generally considered to be the most significant developments in the art. The oldest Jujitsu movement is the Takenouchi-Ryu, purported to have been originated by Takenouchi Hisamori, a native of Sakushu, in the year of 1532. This branch taught Kogusoku, or the art of seizing, which is somewhat different from the pure art of Jujitsu. The Takenouchi-Ryu may be regarded as the primal system for the teaching of arts similar to Jujitsu. Fukuno Schichiroemon of Temba originated a second system called the Kito-Ryu. This Ryu `appeared in the middle of the seventeenth century. Prominence of the "Art of Throwing" (Nage-waza) and "Form Practice (Kata) gave the Kito-Ryu great prestige and popularity. In close connection with this branch was a third branch called the Jikishin-Ryu, whose founder was Terada Kanemon, a native of Unsho, and the contemporary of Fukono. Both Fukuno and Terada lived about the middle of the seventeenth century in somewhat close relationship to each other. They established two separate systems of Jujitsu some years before the time of Chin Genpin. These two systems appear to be the oldest of all the varied systems of Jujitsu.

Inugami Nagakatsu of Omi founded the Kiushin-Ryu. The date of its founding is uncertain, and there are some reasons to believe that this branch was derived from the Kito-Ryu. Inugami Genpin, the grandson of the founder, attained such eminence through his skill at the Kiushin-Ryu that he came to be regarded as the founder of the school. The Sakiguchi-Ryu, Founded by Shinbukawa Bangoro, are two other well-known Ryu of Jujitsu. The Yoshin-Ryu, or the Miura-Ryu, and the Tenjin-Ryu were also prominent systems.

The Yoshin system, founded by Yoshin Miura, taught that many illnesses were the result of a disproportionate use of mind and body. Miura devised several Jujitsu methods involving "arresting devices". After a lengthy study with two of his disciples, he developed fifty-one arresting methods. His students, following his death, established systems of their own, further expanding his teachings.

The Tenjin-Shinyo-Ryu was founded by Matayemon Iso, a student of the Yoshin-Ryu. After several years of studying, Iso set out to tour the country and, at the same time, test his ability. Every where he traveled he competed with renowned masters in Jujitsu tournaments. His proficiency was such that he never lost a contest.

The branches of Jujitsu grew during the feudal period, particularly during the time of Iyemitsu, the third and ablest of the Tokugawa Shogun, under whose government feudalism was completely established in Japan. The art of Jujitsu continued in various provinces in Japan until the later part of the eighteenth century, when it began to decline with the impending fall of feudalism. Later, Jujitsu fell into disuse with the abolition of the feudal system (1860-1865) and became almost extinct



Dennis Helm is the author of *2000 YEARS: Jujitsu and Kodokan Judo*

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