

Jujutsu Ryu Names

by: Ben Haryo

When the Japanese Martial Arts were spreading to the world outside of Japan, the Japanese Senseis were facing a formidable language barrier. Japanese is a language not very widely spoken all around the world, so most of the Gaijin (foreigners) who study martial arts with them simply cannot speak Japanese.

Fortunately for the Japanese Sensei, many of their foreign students were very talented, so they could learn the techniques of their styles without having to understand the Japanese language, or the complicated Kanji characters related to the Japanese martial arts. And thus, many non-Japanese could become very proficient in the Japanese martial arts without being proficient in the language or Kanji as well.

Many Non-Japanese consider Kanji an unbelievably difficult subject, and they are right. Learning how to read Kanji is very difficult indeed. To start with, there are literally thousands of Kanji characters, which could be spelled in many ways and could mean many things in relation to the context in which they are used or to the characters written next to themselves. It is not a surprise that even the Japanese themselves use the numbering system (also called Nelson Numbers) for their Kanji, so they could be identified and properly interpreted.

However, knowing a little bit about the Japanese language and related Kanji characters will certainly be an enriching experience for the serious (Non-Japanese) students of the Japanese martial arts. At the very least, we must know the meaning of the Kanji characters

which we use to spell our Ryū-Ha (style of martial arts). Let's begin with the names of some Jūjutsu styles within the American Ju-Jitsu Association (AJA).

Budoshin Ju-Jitsu

One of the most famous styles within the AJA is Budoshin Ju-Jitsu. Being a new member of AJA, I have never actually seen the Kanji used by Prof. Kirby and Prof. Seki to spell "Budoshin". However, from my experience, I assume that the name "Budoshin" might have come from three Kanji characters which are very commonly used in the martial arts. They are "Bu", "Dō", and "Shin". Let's look at these three characters in depth.

The character "Bu" 武 (N51†) is an ancient Kanji. In China, they spell it "Wu". This character loosely means *Martial Art*. It could also mean *samurai*, *knight*, *soldier*, or even *chivalrous*.

The word "Dō" could be spelled in various ways and could mean many things. Based on my observations, I assume that the "Do" in "Budoshin" refers to 道 (N4724), which means a *way* or *path*. So if the character "Bu" above is followed by the character "Do", it could be translated as "Budō" which means *The Martial Way*, *The Knightly Way* or *The Way of the Samurai Warrior*. One of the most important things for a Samurai Warrior is honor. The "Budō" is therefore a code of honor for the Samurai. Thus, you can also legitimately translate "Budō" as *The Honorable Way*.

The character "Shin" could also be spelled many ways each with a different meaning. It could mean *God* or *Spirit* 神 (N3245). It could mean *body* 身 (N4601). However, I chose 心 (N1645) which means *heart*. If we are to combine these three words : "Bū", "Dō" and "Shin", then we will get "Budōshin", a word with could be translated in so many ways! I can assure you that all translation and interpretation of "Budōshin" will be a great one.

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Prof. Kirby once said that Budoshin means *to conduct oneself in an honorable manner*. This emphasis on “honor” is in tune with the literal translation of the Kanji. I personally interpret “Budōshin” as *The Samurai Heart* or even *The Honorable Attitude*. With a Western-influenced reading *The Knightly Attitude* makes sense as the Knight in Shining Armor (such as those depicted in the legend of King Arthur and The Knights of The Round Table) also values his honor above everything else. This also means that all Budoshin students must conduct themselves in an honorable manner as Prof. Kirby had said.

Yon Ryu Goshin Budo Jujutsu

In one of my correspondences with Prof. Kirby, he mentioned that

“There are a lot of Goshin Ryū Ju-Jitsu Ryū around. I don’t know how “goshin” became such a popular name for a Ryū, or more accurately many different Ryū.”

I happened to learn Jūjutsu from Mr. Ishihara, who spelled his style Goshin Budō Jūjutsu, so I can do a bit of research in the Kanji characters used to spell “Goshin”.

“Goshin Jutsu” is a familiar term in Japanese martial arts, because it literally means *Self Defense Art*. For example, within the formal exercises of Kōdōkan Jūdō there is a Kata called “Kōdōkan Goshin Jutsu” which literally means *Kōdōkan’s Self-Defense Art*. It is also used to refer to *Police Self-Defense Art*, called “Keisatsu Goshin Jutsu”, where “Keisatsu”, written as 警察 (N4439, N1334), means *police*. So it is not surprising that many Jūjutsu styles use the “Goshin” term in their name since Jūjutsu is primary a self-defense art.

The word “Goshin” is written using 護身 (N4447, N4601). 護 literally means *to protect*, while the 身 means *body*. So the word “Goshin” could mean

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body protection or *self-defense*. If the word “Goshin” is followed by 術 (“Jutsu”: N1621), it will mean *body protection art* or *self-defense art*. Add 柔 (“Jū”: N3166) and you will have “Goshin Jujutsu” or *The Gentle Art of Self-Protection*. Add 武道 (“Budō”) in the middle and you will have “Goshin Budō Jūjutsu”, which could be interpreted as *The Honorable Way of the Gentle Art for Self Protection*.

One of the Japanese Ryū-Ha that uses the name “Goshin Jutsu” is “Tanaka Tatsu Goshin Jutsu”, a style founded by Tanaka Tatsu of Tokyo in 1952. This is a modern interpretation of ancient Jūjutsu whose purpose is to promote good health through exercise and proper knowledge of self defense. They have around 150 techniques specifically designed for self-defense.

There is also another “Goshin” style which has a strong following in Japan. It is called “Nihon Goshin Aikidō”. “Nihon” 日本 means *Japan* (N2097, N96). “Aikidō” is written using 合 (N383, “Ai”, which means *fit together, coordinate* or *join*), 氣 (N2480, “Ki”, which means *spirit*), and 道 (N4724, “Do”), so 合氣道 (“Aikidō”) could be interpreted as *The Way of Coordinating the Spirit* and “Nihon Goshin Aikidō” could be interpreted as *The Japanese Way of Coordinating The Spirit for Self-Defense*.

However, this style of Aikido did not descend directly from the mainline Aikidō (Uyeshiba Morihei’s line). The founder of Nihon Goshin Aikidō, Shodo Morita, learned Jūjutsu directly under Daitō Ryū Aiki Jūjutsu grandmaster Takeda Sokaku (who happened to be Uyeshiba’s teacher as well) in the 1940s. The techniques of Nihon Goshin Aikidō resemble that of Uyeshiba’s Aikidō and Takeda’s Daitō Ryū Aiki Jūjutsu, with lots of modifications to make the art more effective as a form of self-defense. “Daitō” 大東 means *Great Eastern* (N1171, N213).

My first Jūjutsu Sensei, Mr. Ishihara, choose the name “Goshin Budō Jūjutsu” because he wants to emphasize that his style of Jūjutsu is modern self-protection but derived from the honorable ways of the Samurai. He also added “YonRyū” or *Four Streams/Styles* 四流 (N1025, N2576) at the front of the name (“YonRyū Goshin Budō Jūjutsu”) as a symbolism of

the “four fighting styles/ways” taught inside Jūjutsu: Strikes 当身 (Atemi), Throws 投 (Nage), Immobilizations 固 (Katame) and Weapons 棒術 (Bōjutsu) 短刀術 (Tantōjutsu). So his method of naming isn’t referring to a specific ancient Ryū-Ha (which he does not claim to do), but rather, it is a way to tell the world that he teaches an honorable art of self-defense which consisted of striking methods, throwing methods, immobilization methods and some weapon arts.

Danzan Ryu

The AJA Handbook (the April 1999 Edition which I have at home) stated that Danzan Ryū is among the styles recognized within the AJA. Some Danzan stylist said that Danzan means *Cedar Mountain*. I assume that they are written using 檀山流 (N2386, N1407, N2576), which literally means *Cedar Tree/Sandlewood Tree, Mountain and Style*. So “Danzan Ryū” means the *Cedar Mountain Style*. It is said that Master Okazaki (founder of Danzan Ryū) called the Hawaiian Island as “The Cedar Mountain”, and he called his style after that name. Mr. Okazaki is a Japanese immigrant who lived and taught Jūjutsu in Hawaii, so it is natural for him to consider his Jūjutsu as *The Hawaii Style*.

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Wado Ryu

These days I study a martial art called Wado Ryū with my current Sensei, Mr. C. A Taman. He was one of the fortunate martial artists who had the chance to learn Wado Ryū in the 1960s directly from Mr. Hironori Otsuka, the founder of Wado Ryū and the Wado Kai organization. This style is a combination between Jūjutsu and Okinawan Karate. “Wado” itself consisted of the characters 和 (N3268, “Wa”, means *peace*) and 道 (“Do”), so 和道, Wado Ryū, means *The Peaceful Way Style*. This style contained the kicks, punches, blocks

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and forms just like the Okinawan styles, but also incorporated throws, locks, disarms and strikes from Japanese Jujutsu. These Jujutsu techniques are not taught until Yudansha levels.

Shindo Yoshin Ryu

The ancient Jujutsu style that was used to form Wado Ryū is called Shindo Yoshin Ryū. It was founded by Matsuoka Katsunosuke (1836-1898). This style is a descendant of Yoshin Ryū which was founded by Akiyama Yoshimasa in the early 1600. The Kanji used to spell “Shindo Yoshin Ryū” are 神 (N3245, “Shin” means *God* or *Spirit*), 道 (“Do”), 楊 (N2321, “Yo”, means *willow tree*), 心 (“Shin”), and 流 (N2576, “Ryū” this one means *style*). Therefore, this style literally means *The God’s Way Willow Heart Style*. I don’t know why they chose the word “God’s Way”, but since “Shindo” could also be spelled “Shinto” (Japanese official religion), then my assumption is that this style is a spiritually-oriented one, or at least this style has religious overtones within its teachings.

神
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楊
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Conclusion

After observing the aforementioned examples, I came to the conclusion that all Masters of Jūjutsu chose a name for their Ryū/Style with their own considerations. They could name their styles according to a personal philosophy, according to the place where it was founded, and many other reasons. Therefore, by interpreting and researching the Kanji used to write that style’s name, we can gain some insight to the style’s history and philosophy. I hope this little research of mine can be useful to all of you who are interested in Jūjutsu[‡] and martial arts in general. Sayonara!

Notes:

*The notation used here for identifying specific characters reference *The Original Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary* by Andrew N. Nelson. These numbers are often referred to as “Nelson numbers” or “Classic Nelson”, one of several ways of organizing Kanji characters.

*The word “Jujutsu” could be correctly spelled in many other ways, such as “Jiu-Jitsu” or “Ju-Jitsu” without changing the meaning. Seems to me that the Americans prefer to spell it “Ju-Jitsu”, the Japanese “Jujutsu” and the Brazilians “Jiu-Jitsu”. This may be caused by local dialects. Of course this is an oversimplification and more research is needed.

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