

Eötvös Loránd University

Faculty of Arts

DOCTORAL THESIS

Balázs Szabó

**Jujutsu: its technical system and philosophy**

Source study for Japanese cultural history

Nyelvtudományi Doktori Iskola

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## 1. The goals of the dissertation and description of the problem

In my dissertation I propose to reveal the history of jujutsu, one branch of Japanese martial arts (bujutsu, bugei), the characteristics of its technical knowledge and the philosophy behind its practical side, through basic research of contemporary (Edo-era) sources. My work is based strictly on the sources, thus breaking away from the practice well established among modern jujutsu-researchers, which is to apply ideas of the present to the past in order to prove their origins. In my opinion while some of the ideas of modern martial arts theory can be without doubt traced back to certain ideas of the old texts, it is not right to anticipate their content from present circumstances. Consequently I intended to analyze their meaning as independently from modern jujutsu-theory as possible.

Through my analyses I have tried to take into account important works influential to the martial art thinking of the era, revealing their effect on the material in question. Those works (mainly Heiho kadensho by Yagyu Munenori) bore imperative authority in their age, it is hard to find a contemporary martial art source which misses to quote a few ideas from them. Nevertheless I made efforts to separate those imported contents from those of being characteristic to the given text or the school issuing it, to cast light on the area or approach with which that particular source contributed to the development of Edo-era martial arts theory.

Beyond the textual analyses, or as a complement of it I thought it to be of value to attempt to define jujutsu itself, considering that the schools with this name show such variation in their respective teaching material that to determine their characteristics was not easy even for contemporaries. The examination of formation and development of schools denoted as jujutsu helps to give a picture of the process leading from the early, general martial arts schools (sogo-bujutsu 総合武術) to specialized schools describing themselves as jujutsu. As the history of an Edo-era branch of martial arts means the history of schools, the respective part of my work aims to propose a kind of evolution history of the most important jujutsu schools.

The cultural phenomenon generally referred to as martial arts make an important but theoretically less researched area of Japanese cultural history. In the life of the leading class of Tokugawa society, the bushi, martial arts played an important role as part of their identity. Members of this class preserved the consciousness of priority of military service even transformed as they were into officials of central or local government – and martial arts were viewed as the main tool to achieve military preparedness.

Under the effects of the Tokugawa-system which brought peace and the impossibility of any social mobility, martial arts changed significantly. Starting to evolve into a form of arts, in this process heads of schools eagerly utilized the terminology and theoretical background of performing arts and other forms of Japanese culture, which had been considered to arts (gei) for long. In this evolution process effectiveness was more and more substituted by the importance of grace of movements, style of individual performance.

In the field of Japanese cultural history the study of martial art texts can provide a picture about how the bushi dealt with the theoretical challenge of re-valuating the role of the warrior in an age of peace and that of giving new content to the old values. These sources tend to maintain practicality, not to lose sight of the 'physical' side of the art, but in the same time the texts are effected by disciplines forming the intellectual life of their age: Buddhism earlier, later Confucianism, even later Shinto. The authors using borrowed expressions and teachings tried to bend those to their purpose, to use them to support their own views. Japanese way of thought is famous for the integration of theory and practice: the approach aiming to that integrity is clearly felt through the texts, which gives them importance as sources of Japanese cultural history.

I believe that my subject is important in the view of the fact that researchers of martial arts theory has concentrated almost solely on fencing schools, neglecting jujutsu. This is partly due to the special role of the sword in the life and thinking of the samurai, on the other hand founders of modern martial arts related scientific research came from fencing arts (mainly kendo), thus understandably tending to focus on these arts.

As significant branches of modern age Japanese martial arts, such as judo and aikido developed on the basis of Edo-era jujutsu, my subject can provide an insight into the answer given by traditional Japanese martial arts to the altered environment of modern age: development into a way of sports, physical education (judo) and providing psychological content to the idea of martial art by emphasizing its spiritual side (aikido). All these results and tendencies are not, or only with the risk of mistake, comprehensible if one does not take into consideration the grounds, the theoretical background of early modern jujutsu.

## 2. Structure of the dissertation and research method

My dissertation consists of four main chapters.

In Introduction I introduce the subject, giving reasons for the choice and its importance. Following that I outline the previous research conducted by various scholars as Research antecedents, discussing separately general works on martial arts theory and those focusing on jujutsu. Describing my research method I intended to clarify my approach and technique of examination when dealing with the texts. In my discussion on the subject I have taken into account the results of the scientific field of martial arts study (budogaku), partly utilizing analytic methods established here on my jujutsu sources. I made special effort to point out novel ideas characteristic of jujutsu which had made their appearance in these texts.

Elucidating the direction of my research I mention all the areas with theoretical-philosophical relevance, coming into view during my work – avoiding any attempt to foresee the results but willing to provide my reasons in determining the direction of my examinations.

The second chapter titled History and theory of jujutsu, follows through the history of jujutsu and its development in early modern Japan. Preceding the textual analysis I thought it to be of value to introduce the age which jujutsu appeared in and its special circumstances, moving on to place jujutsu in the wider context of contemporary Japanese martial arts. History of schools, achievements of headmasters appealed enormously on the sources, part of which would not be interpreted without a detailed discussion of their background and their age. I propose to summarize the environment providing the framework for the creation and development of martial art schools in general and jujutsu schools in particular. Understanding the nature of military system of the age and the situation of the warrior class helps to comprehend the process how military knowledge was systematized at martial art schools, how it developed as teaching material.

The third chapter provides analyses of the source material. In this chapter I concentrated first on Takenouchi-ryu, perhaps the most important school in jujutsu history, using it as an instance in order to give a description of the structure, purpose and style of jujutsu sources. In my dissertation I researched major texts of the following schools:

    Takenouchi-ryu 竹内流

    Oguri-ryu 小栗流

    Seigo-ryu 制剛流

Sekiguchi- ryu 関口流

Shibukawa- ryu 渋川流

Kito- ryu 起倒流

Yoshin- ryu 揚心流

Shin no Shinto- ryu 真之神道流

Edo-era jujutsu texts were written within the schools, consequently it is worthwhile to examine them in the context of the given school. Schools covered in my dissertation were chosen to represent the origins and typical development of jujutsu: among the schools one find the oldest ryuhas and those responsible for outlining the system inherited by modern forms of the art.

In choosing the texts I was led by the aim to introduce, on one hand, the basic types of sources, on the other, texts discussing the theory behind the schools' techniques, thus let us to get an insight into the intellectual side of jujutsu.

### 3. Results

3.1 In my work I have tried to point out all the characteristics that can be related to jujutsu, not mentioned in other martial art sources. In this respect I found four areas of interest:

(1) Jujutsu as cosmology, placing the art in the wider context.

The schools payed special attention to describe their art as bearer of universal meaning and values. The basis of this argument tended to be the theory of softness, flexibility as the ideal of jujutsu.

(2) The meaning of jujutsu or yawara, the theory of flexibility.

Definition and description of softness, flexibility differs in the texts of the various schools, though emphasized evenly.

(3) Definition of ki in the context of jujutsu, its development and proper usage.

Ki, that is energy or vital force is an area of jujutsu practice and theory getting special attention. In its definition and in the question of its usage jujutsu represented its own point of view.

(4) Jujutsu-specific problems of martial arts education.

An important characteristics of jujutsu was that physical strength played an important role in the execution of its techniques. As body strength is relative, individually different, this problem and the question of motivating weaker students must have been dealt with in jujutsu texts, very often leading to novel approaches in their age.

3.2 Analyses of jujutsu texts was not performed not only in Hungarian but even in Japanese yet.

Japanese language research (e. g. the work of Omori Nobumasa) touched upon jujutsu texts only as a complement of sword-related study, source-books also used by me settled for a short notice accompanying the text, mainly explaining the history of the school. Therefore I think that the research in my dissertation, with analyses and partial translation of such important texts as Takenouchi-ryu 竹内流 Heiho shoshin no tebigigusa 兵法初心手引草, Sekiguchi-ryu 関口流 Yawara Shinshin-ryu densho 柔新心流伝書 or Shibukawa-ryu 澁川 Jujutsu taiseiroku 柔術大成録, does pioneer work in the subject of scientific research of jujutsu sources.

3.3 Scientific studies on martial arts texts followed two main courses so far: either etymological research of expressions occurring in the texts in order to determine their source and original context, or locating and describing ideas from other disciplines. Little has been said of the theoretical, sometimes philosophical content buried in the texts, which has become one of the main goal of my work. Pointing those out one can draw the basic lines of jujutsu theory, which may be useful for future research.

3.4 Every author was affected by the age he or she lived in. In spite of this in the research of martial sources little attention was paid to the fact how deeply Edo-era intellectual environment affected these texts, in times giving a feeling that researchers thought of early modern intellectuality as monolithic, failing to see that the ideas determining it in the early phases changed significantly as the age moved on to middle and late periods. In my study I made every effort to show the connections that tied those texts to the mainstream of the given period of Edo-era intellectual history.

#### **4. Possibilities of future research**

Without doubt my dissertation fails to cover every possible question occurring in connection with the subject, giving space for further research, even more calling attention to the most interesting, worthwhile directions of study. In my work I intended to focus on schools and texts with such significance in the history and theoretical development of jujutsu that no essay can be written without mentioning them. Later research can take into consideration other schools and texts, resulting in significant increase of achievements.

Unabridged, critical translation of texts, which due to limited space were given in my work only in exception would result in the creation a textbook, reference book, providing future readers a chance to form their own opinions, prompting further research.

Useful and fruitful direction would be the investigation of the technical aspect of the schools, clarifying the differences and similarities in their respective systems, as we must never forget that practice and theory were considered inseparable in traditional Japanese martial arts. Research directed to this aspect could show the common origin in case of schools diverged from one another during their independent development, on the other hand locating the nature of differences emerging in the process.

Finally, as I already mentioned in Introduction, the spirituality of early modern jujutsu texts effected greatly the new schools turning up in the Meiji and Taisho eras. Further clarification of the nature of this effect would help to understand the connection modern Japanese martial arts (one of the most popular cultural export of Japan) maintain with their past, how they have changed and where they stayed faithful to the thoughts of old masters.