

# 柔術 It's All In The Romanization

By Professor Kai Li

A good friend asked me this morning:

"So which is it really: 'Jiu-Jitsu', 'Jujitsu', or 'Jūjutsu'?"

Excellent question. It is all in the Romanization.

In the 1800's the English used "Jiu-jitsu" and it was the popular spelling that everyone adopted. It appeared in newspapers, exhibition posters, and early books on the subject.

After WWI, American scholars in Japan felt "Jujitsu" was a more accurate Romanization for the Kanji 柔術 and popularized it. That shift can be seen in various publications of the day.

After WWII the Japanese themselves felt that the Hepburn Romanization system (ironically developed back in 1885) was the more accurate in the conversion of Japanese to English sounds, hence "Jūjutsu".

Other variants such as "Ju-Jitsu" & "Ju-Jutsu" (with hyphens) are used in France/Canada & in China/Asia respectively.

They are all the same thing though, attempts to express the kanji 柔術 in English!

No matter how you spell it in English, the kanji remains the same and translates "jūjutsu" as "the gentle art".

If you really want to have fun with it the first character 柔, "jū", can be translated as "gentle", "soft", "yielding", "flexible", "adaptable", "pliable", & "supple". The second character 術, "jutsu", can be translated as "art", "method", & "technique".

So with a little creativity we can see how this "adaptable method" has changed with the times, culture, people and environment to find a unique home in far away lands from the art Professor Henry Okazaki developed in Hawaii to the art Carlos & Helio Gracie developed in Brazil.

The influence of jūjutsu through Judo founder Dr Jigoro Kano on the rest of the world cannot be understated.

Professor Kano developed Judo as a way for practitioners of various jūjutsu systems to come together to practice safely with resistant opponents.

Shotokan Karate founder Ginchin Funakoshi & Aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba both adopted Professor Jigoro Kano's Kyu-Dan ranking system. Martial arts in Korea and around the world followed their lead. Today Kendo, Kenpo/Kempo, Kajukenbo, TaekwonDo, Hapkido, and many other systems have adopted Dr Kano's system. Even Krav Maga founder Imi Liechtenfeld can be seen wearing Judo Gi (uniforms) and obi (belts) while teaching his classes in Israel.

If you want to have even more fun, you will note that in English we read left to right horizontally as where Japanese is traditionally read right to left in vertical rows. Also, the kanji for the word "jūjutsu" and "yawara" can sometimes be written in exactly the same way.

"Yawara" can be written simply as 柔 or as 柔術 in Kanji. Sometimes both characters were used for the presentation of the boards. In any case, we have yet another opportunity to discover more about our history and the cultural context behind it.

To answer my friends question, technically "Jūjutsu" is currently the most correct. All, however are merely expressions of the same characters, 柔術 in Kanji.

Although not the common translation, I kind of like to use "Adaptable Method" as my personal expression of Jūjutsu (柔術) For me this expresses all that the art has been, is now, and has the potential to become.

In my personal experience, Kodenkan Danzan Ryu Jujitsu, Kodokan Judo, Aikido, Gracie/Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Russian Sambo, Korean Hapkido Freestyle Wrestling, Kenpo/Kempo, Kajukenbo, Kali, Arnis, Eskrima, Silat, Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do, Kickboxing, Krav Maga, Systema, and several other martial arts or combatives systems were all "Adaptable Methods" designed to help its practitioners prevail over adverse circumstances. They all changed over time and within the cultural context depending on where and when they were practiced as well as by who was practicing them.

To carefully study the work of Charles Darwin is to see "survival of the fittest" as a form of "Survival Jūjutsu". Darwin did not mean to say that the one man who was in the best physical shape was the survivor. He meant the group that worked together to make better decisions. Efficient use of energy, resources, and combined skills and the wisdom to seek shelter, make fire, and seek shelter were far more important than just being individually strong or fast. Early human beings needed to find a way to work efficiently together. Long before the kanji 柔術 existed, they needed Jūjutsu.

It is also an interesting reflection of changing times and cultural interpretations that we have so many different terms for the same thing. Why should we be surprised when the Inuit people known as the Eskimo have fifty words for snow!

So regardless of whether you choose "The Gentle Art", "Soft Technique", "Yielding Method", or any other appropriate translation, and regardless of which Romanization your school uses, we are all part of the same Ohana forging our way through adversity as wisely, as efficiently, and as gently as we can.

Have fun with it!