



How Jujutsu Training Looked in Ancient Japan

Introduction – Before Modern Martial Arts

Long before colored belts and group classes, jujutsu was a private and disciplined art.

During the **Edo period (1603–1868)**, practice in *koryu* (classical) schools focused on **kata training, etiquette, and personal instruction**.

This article explains how traditional lessons were structured and how the system evolved with the birth of Kodokan Judo.

Where and How Was Training Conducted? Dojo and Tatami

Training took place in **private dojo** located in **samurai residences, temples, or clan estates**.

Some schools like **Takenouchi-ryu** still train near temple grounds today.

🔗 takenouchi-ryu.org

The size of a dojo was measured by **tatami mats** (approx. 0.9×1.8 m).

Typical rooms had **4½, 6, or 8 mats** – anything above 8 was considered large.

The first **Kodokan dojo** (1882, Eishō-ji temple) had **only 12 tatami**, yet it became the cradle of modern budo.

🔗 Sengoku Daimyo

Structure of Koryu Jujutsu Practice

The core of instruction was **kata-geiko** – pre-arranged drills between *tori* (executor) and *uke* (receiver).

Schools like **Tenjin Shin'yō-ryu** still emphasize step-by-step learning, progressing from *omote* (surface) to *okuden* (inner) forms.

🔗 tenyokai.com

A typical class included:

1. **Reihō** – bowing, short *mokusō* (meditative silence).
2. **Tanren / Hojō-undō** – joint mobility, *ukemi* (falling), conditioning, and weapon exercises.
3. **Kata-geiko** – paired practice under close teacher supervision.
4. **Corrections and repetitions.**
5. **Reihō** – formal closing and gratitude.

Randori (free sparring) was rare and carefully controlled (*nokori-ai*).

Only later did **Kanō Jigorō** make *randori* central to training, balancing it with *kata* in judo.

Solo or Paired Practice?

Most lessons were **partner-based**.

Solo practice included *tanren* (strength, grip, stance) or *suburi* (weapon swings).

Instruction was highly **individualized**, following the school's scrolls (*densho*) and license system (*menkyo*).

🔗 koryu.com



Lesson Duration and Frequency

Training lasted **60–120 minutes**, though intensive *shugyō* sessions could span hours or days. Schedules varied depending on season and student status – samurai often trained early mornings before duties.

Meditation and Mental Preparation

Formal **zazen** was not standard, but brief **mokusō** (quiet focus) was common. Depending on the school, **Shinto or Buddhist elements** were present, yet meditation served a practical role:

“Empty the mind before the action.”

Today, this remains as a short moment of silence at the start and end of classes.

🔗 Related post: *Zazen and Meditation in Budo* (internal link)

Warm-Up – Then and Now

Historically, warm-ups were **short and functional**: joint rotation, ukemi, simple *tanren*. Modern judo and karate expanded this into *taiso* (general physical exercises), running, and games — influenced by Japan’s 20th-century school system.

🔗 [Wikipedia: Judo](#)

Technical Content

Classical jujutsu covered broad skill sets:

- **Torite** – grips and restraints
- **Kansetsu-waza** – joint locks
- **Shime-waza** – chokes
- **Atemi-waza** – strikes
- **Kogusoku / Tantō-jutsu** – short weapons
- **Bō-jutsu / Hojojutsu** – staff and rope arts

Many of these formed the technical foundation of modern budo such as judo and aikido.

🔗 [Koryu.com – Classical Martial Traditions of Japan](#)

Licenses and Modern Belts

Originally, there were no colored belts — only the **menkyo system**:

Mokuroku → *Menkyo* → *Menkyo Kaiden*.

A *menkyo* was not an exam certificate but a **symbol of trust and full transmission**.

In 1883, **Kanō Jigorō** created the *kyū/dan* ranking system, which later spread to karate, aikido, and other modern arts.

🔗 Read also: *History of Colored Belts in Budo* (internal link)



Summary – A Typical Lesson in Edo-Era Jujutsu

1. **Entry & Etiquette** – reihō and brief mokusō.
2. **Preparation** – ukemi, tanren, hojō-undō.
3. **Core practice** – paired kata, gradual progression through scrolls.
4. **Corrections** – review and feedback.
5. **Closure** – gratitude and respect.

Lessons were **small, focused, and personal**, usually lasting 1–2 hours but extending much longer during intensive periods.

Sources & Further Reading

- [Takenouchi-ryū – Official Site](#)
 - [Tenjin Shin'yō-ryū – Tenyōkai](#)
 - Sengoku Daimyo – Tatami Layouts and Dojo Design
 - Wikipedia – Kodokan Judo History
 - [Koryu.com – Classical Martial Traditions of Japan](#)
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Internal Links (Doshira.com)

- *Dojo in Japan – Kamiza, Tatami and Etiquette*
- *Zazen and Meditation in Budo*
- *Hojo Undo – Traditional Strength Training*
- *Colored Belts and Kyū/Dan System*