

An overview of unarmed methods

The unarmed methods studied in the Seirin Dojo are collectively referred to as 体術 “Taijutsu” (literally “body art”). The term “Taijutsu” relates more to the method of using the entire body’s natural strength and structure to deliver strikes, throws, joint locks and other techniques, instead of forcefully relying on muscle and power to be the primary method of practice.

What sets the Taijutsu traditions apart from other modern cognate forms of martial arts (Karate-do, Kendo, Aikido, Judo, etc.) is that the techniques which are still studied today were formed on the battlefields of Japan before nationwide peace was achieved by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. During the 250 years of peace that followed, the warrior class, their skills no longer needed on the battlefield, began to turn to more humanitarian endeavors. The martial arts that were founded during this time of peace hold perfection of character as more important than combat effectiveness. Taijutsu is unique in that combat effectiveness is still held at the highest level; techniques not being diluted to accommodate safety. This means that there is no tournament competition, as techniques are studied for real-life situations only.

Participants generally practice with a partner, taking turns performing the role of 受 Uke (receiver of a technique). The instructor will typically demonstrate a basic technique (基本 Kihon) with an Uke at the beginning of class, and the students will pair up and attempt the technique just shown. As the class progresses, numerous 変化 Henka (variations) of the Kihon will be shown. It is this limitless world of variations that the student is expected to enter so that he/she can spontaneously create a technique from nothing should the need arise, as real-life situations rarely play themselves out as a 型 Kata (series of movements, form) shown in class. This real-fight method of training (実践型 / 真剣型 Jissen Gata/ Shinken Gata) provides a progressive environment allowing each individual to express themselves in their own unique way, using the arts as a guide. In this way, the student does not fit the art, the art adapts to the student.

Dojo training consists of methods and principles of personal self-protection dealing with a variety of life-threatening situations. Students of the Seirin School will also learn more than just physical defense skills; they also study a multitude of topics and subjects as part of the martial arts training, including Japanese history, culture, language, civilization, and the study of other arts and their related histories. Hence, martial arts training can be seen as an anthropological study.

Taijutsu is comprised of several sub-arts, broken down into three main areas of study:

体変術 Taihenjutsu

The characters for the word Taihenjutsu have this meaning:

体 Tai/Karada - Body
変 Hen/Kawaru - Change
術 Jutsu - Art

Putting them together, one could say that the art of Taihenjutsu means “the art of changing the body”. Here we think of changing the body’s “position”. So in reference to Taijutsu, this art would entail ways of moving the body through a variety of methods. These could be 捌き Sabaki (footwork), 回転 Kaiten (rolling), 飛び Tobi (leaping), or any other skill that involves placing the body into a position to defend, evade, protect or attack by utilizing a movement or series of movements. Though some of the Ryu studied in the Seirin Dojo contain highly specialized methods of Taihenjutsu, all of the schools have a foundation in the proper receiving of techniques and body movement that is similar to one another. This is the first main area focused on by all new students for the first three rank promotions. Learning how to be hit and minimize injury, how to hit the ground avoiding injury and rebounding, and how to position the body in an evasive manner are the first critical steps toward learning the art of Taijutsu.

打拳体術 Dakentaijutsu

The characters for the word Dakentaijutsu break down this way:

打 Da/Uchi - To hit

拳 Ken/Kobushi - Fist
術 Jutsu - Art

Dakentaijutsu involves the many different methods of striking found in the Taijutsu. “Daken” can simply mean to “strike with the fist”. But with the addition of “Taijutsu” it takes on a different meaning. “Dakentaijutsu” could be read as “use of the body to strike like a fist”, or even “skill with the body in striking like a fist”. There is a saying “Ken Tai Ichi Jo”, which translates as “the body and weapon are one”. This means that the strikes do not need to depend on forceful strength and muscle. Simply aligning the body and using the science of striking found in the Taijutsu can give devastating results. The schools that we study have highly specialized methods of striking, and unique striking targets on the body as well. We spend a great deal of time learning two specific methods of striking in the school. The first is a form of striking called 骨子術 Koshijutsu, which comes from the 玉虎流 Gyokko Ryu school (one of the oldest martial arts to exist in Japan). This method of striking utilizes special types of fists and body weapons to deliver strikes and kicks to the soft tissue of the body. The second school of striking that we spend a good amount of time learning is from the 虎到流 Koto Ryu, and it is referred to as 骨法術 Koppojutsu. This school utilizes special strikes and kicks that attack an opponent’s structure, breaking and dislocating bones and joints in addition to other elements.

柔体術 Jutaijutsu

Jutaijutsu breaks down like this:

柔 Ju/Yawara - Soft, gentle
体 Tai/Karada - Body
術 Jutsu - Art

Much like Dakentaijutsu above, Jutaijutsu becomes more than just “Jujutsu” when Taijutsu is an influence. The character for “Ju” can mean “soft, gentle” or even “weak”. “Jutaijutsu” could then be read as “skill with an adaptable body” or “art of the body in a gentle and supple way”. So how much stronger can the grappling arts become (methods of locking, immobilizing, choking, pinning, escaping and throwing) when taking on the attributes of Taijutsu? Imagine a much smaller person using their entire body power to successfully throw someone much bigger and heavier, and you start to get the point. This person is obviously overpowered, if measuring by sheer size and musculature. But Taijutsu is that science that makes it all work fluidly and effortlessly. Students learn techniques of Jutaijutsu from two major schools; 高木楊心流 Takagi Yoshin Ryu and 神伝不動流 Shinden Fudo Ryu.

Instruction is given in a broad manner, covering the basic methods of the main three sub-arts that comprise Taijutsu, until the level of First Degree Black Belt has been achieved (初段 Shodan). From Shodan and up, students take their polished skills and apply them to studying the movements of the individual schools that make up the arts. This is done through the practice of Kata; two person training forms that focus on a unique topic, movement or secret pertaining to a particular school. We call this 実践型 Jissen Gata, which means “real fight training forms”.