

# ***SAMURAI: THE ANCIENT WARRIOR CLASS***



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## INTRODUCTION

The definition of Bujutsu and its specializations have a long history and complex tradition. This Japanese art of combat is embodied in a variety of forms, methods and weapons which have been passed from person to person over centuries. Each of these forms constitutes a particular specialization of that art and each specialization in turn is known as a "jutsu". A word which may be translated as "method", "art", or "technique" and is suggestive of the particular way or ways in which certain physical actions are performed in the art of self defense or combat. Historically, each art or method has developed certain procedures, movements or patterns which set it apart from the procedures, movements and patterns of other arts. In the context of the Japanese art of combat, therefore, a specialization consists of a particular systematic method of procedures or movements in using a specific weapon.

Very often, a particular style of combat was identified by the name of the weapon used by its practitioners. An example of this system of identification would be KENJUTSU - that is, the art (JUTSU) of the sword (KEN). However, a combat method could also be identified by the particular functional way of using the weapon in order to achieve an opponents conquering. Among the specializations of the art of unarmed combat for example, JUJUTSU identifies the art (JUTSU) to attach to (JU) that is, the art of using your surroundings in a certain way to defeat your opponent. Frequently a main specialization of combat would produce subcategories, many of which, through constant refinement, effectively improve upon the original way to the degree of substituting for it entirely. They then become, in turn, independent specializations of combat in themselves. In such a case as KENJUTSU, the art of the sword, for example, was further refined into a deadly specialization known as IAIJUTSU - the art (JUTSU) of drawing (IAI) and at the same time

cutting with the sword, It is also the basics for NITO-KENJUTSU, the art (JUTSU) of fencing with two (NITO) swords (KEN) .

Finally, the particular style could be identified by the name of the master who had made his own style of fighting or by the name of the school where this particular style was taught.

In Japanese martial arts we find long list of particular combat styles. They are usually divided systematically according to the historical background of their teachers.

## **THE BUSHI**

The military class (BUKE) began to play a large role of history of Japan during the tenth and eleventh centuries. This was during the HEJAN period as the power of the emperor, the normal head of the YAMATO clan, was slowly beginning to fade away and die.

At the time, the country was also at the brink of spiritual stress brought about by the clash between nonotheistic (BUDDHIST) and the pantheistic belief (SHINTO).

## **THE SAMURAI**

The SAMURAI, also known as the military retainers, were in the service of the SHOGUN, or stationed in the provinces under the command of the various DAIMYO or leaders. They formed an immense standing army from the humblest foot soldier entitled to little in the way of pay or living conditions, to the highest among the warriors of the upper ranks who were permitted to ride horses and became wealthy. They all belonged to the same warrior class, the BUKE, and were known as men of war (BUSHI) or, more commonly as retainers.

In its ancient form the title of SAMURAI, had once been assigned to the leaders of these armed clans attached to the imperial court during the MURORCH period. Contracted into service the "SAMURAI" term was extended to denote all warriors who carried the long and short swords in service of the lord. The term was then translated more specially and correctly as "the one who serves".

Emerging from the mists of the eleventh

# CHART 8 MAJOR DIVISIONS WITHIN THE WARRIOR ARMY IN FEUDAL JAPAN



century, these SAMURAI had witnessed (and had also help to bring about) many changes in the social climate and structure of their land. During this period, the major holders of power in ancient Japan were those with large armies. These armies were instruments of power through which the lords could exercise their will. These armies were small armed groups composed mostly of a leader, a number of mounted horsemen, and fighters on foot.

The warrior of feudal times pledged his loyalty in a ceremony whose rights were drawn from the religion of Japanese SHINTO. Putting more focus on the cult of ancestors the pledge, was dully inscribed in the clan's records and their masters lives, whose wishes became their own. In turn, if their master was assassinated or even dies of natural causes, the faithful follower often conducted his own life in the same way that his master lived his life and even brought death to himself in the same manner. This was called JUNSHI, and it often kept a clan without its most valiant warriors. This practice became so bad that



they made this act against the law to do because whole families and clans would take there own lives in honor of the master they loved.

This custom, although it became less common, never disappeared entirely. However, one of the most famous episodes in Japanese literature dealing with the feudal period is that of the mass suicide of the forty-seven valiant warriors after they had avenged their lord.

In battle the SAMURAI fought directly under the control and orders of his superior. As a man of war, the SAMURAI had to prepare everything that his leader used or needed. This manner would be discharged indefinitely if he did not live up to his duties.

His code of honor (BUSHIDO), and all the practices related to it, stressed the point of never pausing to ponder the nature and effects of a superiors command. The superior's orders were to be followed without question, thought or discussion.

In order to enable the warrior to overcome

many mental problems with mans natural fear of death, these people were trained to think as themselves as supernatural and as not living their own lives, but that of the master. His fear of death and the supernatural was substantially reduced. Physical pain had to be taken without showing the slightest amount of pain. Pain was considered an honor, if it was in the line of duty, serving the master.

Ritualistic suicide considered the highest manifestation of command over ones own destiny and unflinching courage in the face of death, represented a privilege in the eyes of the Japanese warrior. It had begun as a simple act of lonely self determination on the battlefield, performed to escape capture or restriction at the hands of the enemy. In time it grew into a ceremony in which could rightfully be performed only be members of the buke and in accordance with mutually prescribed rules of etiquette.

At the heart of the ryu we find the mysterious figure upon whom the very existence of BUJUTSU, as well as the preservation and development of its theory and practice depend. The master of arms, the teacher, the martial arts instructor - the SENSEI.

Whether destined to be used on the battlefield or in individual confrontations, the forms of BUJUTSU and the history of the martial arts as a whole have always been deeply indebted to the SENSEI - that individual who, whether following a natural and spontaneous inclination toward combat or adapting knowledge gained in other fields of human activity to the resolution of the problems or armed and unarmed confrontations, spent the major part of his life immersed in the forms of BUJUTSU. He experimented with weapons, tested the techniques and strategies of the various specializations in real combat, and devised new styles or ways of coping effectively with the greatest number of possibilities presented by that dramatic event

within which a man could easily lose his life. Above all, he taught his methods to others. Such teachers occupy a position of some prominence in the doctrine of BUJUTSU, according to ancient cannons of history which tends to place events in a perspective strongly determined by the rolls of heroes and legends.

Within his own dojo, a Sensei was in a position of comparable in mystique to that of the emperor in KYOTO and in effective power to that of the SHOGUN in ego or the highest position. This is, of supreme authority and unchallenged prestige. A pupil was taught to walk "seven feet in the rear of his instructor", lest he should tread on his leaders shadow. The teacher showed the way and the pupil had only to follow it. Hence the pupil was not allowed to depart a step from the teachers instructions. He was permitted to reproduce but forbidden to improve on it, change it or modify it. It is not surprising, that the teacher became more sparing of his teachings as the pupil advanced with

all manner of speed, lest the student become as knowledgeable as the teacher. Pupils were taught to following the strictest of traditions and if the pupil happened to be free of mind, he was certain to provoke his instructors wrath or became excommunicated.



... to the bitter end

## WEAPONS AND TECHNIQUES

The art of spear fighting was influenced by the art of archery in relation to such basic concepts as those of trajectory and aim. In turn the art of spear fighting influenced the art of swordsmanship with its concepts of various guards, movements, and techniques of rotation and penetration in combat. In ancient, and in modern styles, the human body is employed as one with a weapon in which to subdue and opponent in innumerable ways. Each style of weapon use developed over a period of time and under various masters. Each master employed particular way of using the weapon in conjunction with the body and therefore developed a BUJUTSU specialization which became associated with that master. These methods and techniques became well known and, depended upon their effectiveness in combat, established the master as a "winner" or "loser".



The YARI and the NAGENATA in action



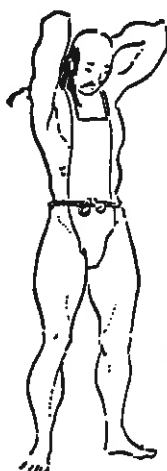
## EVOLUTION OF JAPANESE ARMOR

The armor worn by the BUSHI on the battlefield during the most ancient period of Japan's history, as well as the various other kinds of protective equipment is important in the study of the SAMURAI.

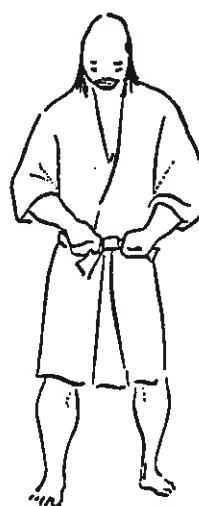
Used during the latter part of the feudal era, are of particular interest since the armor was reflective of the master served and the location of the manor. In addition this protective equipment was both reflective of and a determining factor in, the evolution of strategic use weapons employed against him in combat. As armor was developed so were weapons that could penetrate the protective gear. This development of armor and weapons was a point of constant development during this feudal period.



1) Short FUNDOSHI



2) Long FUNDOSHI



3) SHITAGI and OBI



4) KUSAKAMA



5) TABI



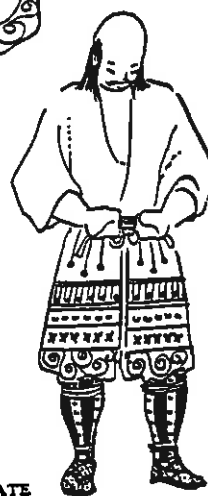
6) KYAHAN



7) WARAJI



8) SUNE-ATE



9) HAIDATE



10) YUGAKE



11) KOTE



12) WAKIBIKI



13) DO



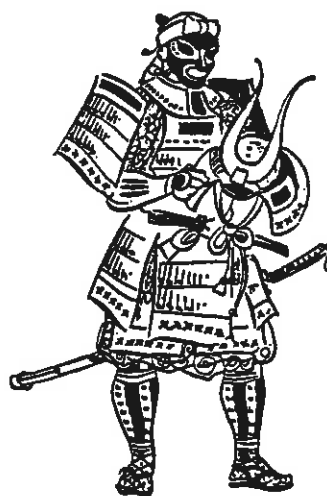
14) UWA-OBİ



15) SODE



16) DAISHO



18) MEMPO, KABUTO

## THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

The last subject I would like to write about is about the life of the SAMURAI warrior. BUDO, accordingly, identifies itself with the ultimate motivations, which were to regulate the conduct of the Japanese warrior or the Japanese fighting man in general. Budo is related, therefore, to the ethics of the military class of Japan, as well as to the disciplines which that class adopted and claimed to follow. In an effort to comply with certain moral dictates and integrate every warrior into the system as a stable mature and reliable individual.

As for SHINTO itself, there seems to be a general agreement among the scholars who investigated this ancient cult that it did not contain a moral code in the sense of norms of interior judgement and evaluation used to determine exterior conduct.

Considering BUJUTSU, therefore, as the function of combat as BUDO would be the most humane. We see that only a few people were

CHART 12  
RANKING SYSTEM IN MODERN DERIVATIONS OF FEUDAL BUJUTSU

| CATEGORY                                                                                      | RANKS (B/B stands for "black belt")                                                   |                                        |                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>DAN</b><br/>(<i>dan</i> means "step" and is generally identified by the black belt)</p> |      | B/B 10th degree ( <i>judan</i> )       | teacher<br>( <i>hanshi</i> )                 |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 9th degree ( <i>kudan</i> )        |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 8th degree ( <i>hachidan</i> )     | instructor<br>( <i>kyoshi</i> )              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 7th degree ( <i>shichidan</i> )    |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 6th degree ( <i>rokudan</i> )      | assistant<br>instructor<br>( <i>renshi</i> ) |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 5th degree ( <i>godan</i> )        |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 4th degree ( <i>yodan</i> )        |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 3rd degree ( <i>sandan</i> )       |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 2nd degree ( <i>nidan</i> )        |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | B/B 1st degree ( <i>shodan</i> )       |                                              |
| <p><b>KYU</b><br/>(<i>kyu</i> means "class" and is identified by variously colored belts)</p> |  | Student of 1st class ( <i>ikkyu</i> )  |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | Student of 2nd class ( <i>nikyu</i> )  |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | Student of 3rd class ( <i>sankyu</i> ) |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | Student of 4th class ( <i>yonkyu</i> ) |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | Student of 5th class ( <i>gokyu</i> )  |                                              |
|                                                                                               |                                                                                       | Student of 6th class ( <i>rokkyu</i> ) |                                              |

The progression in the ranking system of modern bujutsu begins with the 6th rank in the *kyu* category and proceeds upward.

successful in finding harmony in JUTSU.

Mental concentration on the various aspects of reality and meditation in depth on those aspects created a complete order of mind and thought. The wholeness of reality became to hallmark of ZEN and it's primary discipline and technique following the example set by many other Buddhist sects. They sought solitude as the proper environment for meditation. ZEN priests organized their ranks in monasteries and their history merged with that of the other militant orders of the age. In ZEN, the warrior was suppose to find balance for his life and strength for battle. ZEN has transcended the ages and even today it is part of all martial arts including ours. Shoshin Nagamine, in his text "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do" says that "...the fusing of mind and body in Karate is indescribably beautiful and spiritual. The flow of the mind, when totally absorbed in karate practice brings a person into total contact with the essence and core of his being. One is both humbled and uplifted by his knowledge of self".

## WHAT I'VE LEARNED FROM THIS PAPER

From this paper I have learned the extent of a SAMURAI's loyalty to his teacher, was beyond what is good. His loyalty is so great that he would be willing to take his own life as a result of his teachers assignation or death. Once a warrior class soldier, he was always a soldier. The samurai class lives everyday life as a soldier and in the zen BUDDHIST belief. The difference between loyalty today and in the ancient Japan is that it is not a blind loyalty. There loyalty was on undefined faith, instead of a loyalty built upon trust in knowledge.