



# The Different Spellings Of Jujutsu, Jujitsu And Jiu Jitsu, And What They Actually Mean

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If you've been following my blogs on this issue (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or LinkedIn) it should be clear that it's not just about how you spell it. The different spellings are actual *portals* to different styles/systems, and the cultural practices and ways that characterize and differentiate them. The

point is that Jujutsu systems are significantly different from Jujitsu, or Jiu Jitsu systems, in more ways than just techniques, or ways and practices.

Genuine Japanese, or Japanese-based systems use Romaji (Roman letters) and the correct spelling under Romaji is Jujutsu. Jutsu in Romaji means “art” or “craft”. Of note is the fact that Jigoro Kano himself (the founder of Judo) began using the Romaji spelling of Jujutsu as early as 1887, in a paper entitled “Jujutsu and the Origins of Judo” (with T. Lindsay). Finally, the Kodokan, among other major Japanese martial arts organizations, fully adopted Romaji spelling and we see it used in reference to Kodokan Goshin Jutsu, the Nage No Kata, the Katame No Kata, and in the spelling of all techniques employed in Judo and Jujutsu.

Western, or Westernized systems rarely employ Romaji and spell their arts as Jujitsu or Ju-Jitsu. While some overlaps exist between these systems (Jujutsu and Jujitsu/Ju-jitsu, that is), Western, or Westernized systems have for the most part moved away from Japanese Ways & Practices and their brand of Jujitsu/Ju-jitsu has a strong Western flavor. For example, their dojo practices tend to be more relaxed; the use of Japanese terminology is rarely employed, or misused; and dress (the uniform) often reflects Western practices or preferences. One item that stands out is the fact that Westerners often cover their jackets with patches, and work out by wearing t-shirts under their jacket. In traditional Jujutsu systems such “adornments” are frowned upon on the mat.

Jitsu in Romaji does not mean art; rather, it means “reality” or “truth”, a fact that escapes many who claim to be practicing Traditional Japanese Jujutsu, but who continue to spell it as Jujitsu/Ju Jitsu.

Jiu-Jitsu is a spelling form that was sometimes used in the early part of the 20th century, before Romaji became the accepted form for Japanese, or Japanese-based systems. This spelling form was popularized in Brazil and today, Jiu-jitsu (as they spell it) is most often associated with Brazilian fighting arts.

Finally, Traditional Jujutsu systems have combat and self defense as their primary focus. Western Jujitsu systems tend to stress both self defense and, sport competition, while Brazilian Jiu Jitsu systems are primarily focused on competition, with some self defense included for students who may be interested. And, the cultural practices, ways and traditions, including the use

of Japanese terminology in the dojo, tend to differ in many ways among the three systems discussed in this paper.

In summary:

1. The term Jujutsu is used by Japanese, or genuine Japanese-based systems and it's based on Romaji (the Romanization of the Japanese Language). Their primary focus tends to be combat and self defense

2. The terms Jujitsu/Ju-jitsu are used to denote Western, or highly westernized systems (the latter may have some weak links to Japanese systems). Such systems, for the most part, do not employ Romaji and their primary focus tends to be self defense with some emphasis on sport competition

3. The term Jiu Jitsu mostly characterizes Brazilian systems, although this form crops up rather infrequently as an early (early 20th century, that is) Western misinterpretation of the hiragana employed to represent the sound of the Kanji for the ju and jutsu sounds. Such styles also do not employ Romaji.

Their primary focus tends to be competition, although self defense is sometimes included for interested students.

For those readers who may be interested, two of the best sources of Romaji are Hepburn's dictionary (1887) and Henshall's book (1988). Romaji was officially adopted by the Japanese Government in the early 1950s and is taught in Japanese schools.

Addendum: [A Word About the Origins of Romaji \(Roman Letters\)](#)

The earliest Japanese romanization system was based on [Portuguese spelling](#). It was developed around 1548 by a Japanese [Catholic](#) named Yajiro. [Jesuit](#) priests used the system in a series of printed [Catholic](#) books so that [missionaries](#) could preach, and teach their converts without having to learn to read Japanese Kanji. Later, Romaji was also adopted by Westerners to enable them to communicate, and trade with the Japanese. Romaji underwent a number of iterations until its culmination in the Hepburn System, in 1887. As Romaji increased in popularity, especially as a way of communicating with Westerners who found Japanese difficult to learn, the system started to make its way into the Japanese Martial Arts and was

adopted, in great numbers, by Jujutsuka, Karateka, Judoka and Aikidoka, among other Japanese martial artists.

Finally, it is important to note that the different spellings of Jujutsu, Jujitsu or Jiu Jitsu do not simply reflect surface level stylistic spelling variations. They are, in fact, portals, or gateways to different cultural ways and practices, traditions, and styles of Jujutsu/Ju-Jitsu/Jiu Jitsu. Clearly, this issue is about more than just how you spell it.