

MARTIAL ARTS

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Originally, Japanese martial arts were developed to fight, to kill people, and to keep from getting killed in the process. The general term for martial arts in Japanese is *bujitsu*. There are probably 20 or more different sub-types of *bujitsu* that deal with all types of armed and unarmed combat, from mounted archery, to staff fighting, to unarmed combat.

Most warriors, or *bushi*, trained in several of the different forms as part of their military training. Then they went to fight wars for their *daimyo*, or samurai lord. At the beginning of the Meiji era in Japan (around 1868) the practice of *bujitsu* was outlawed. To comply with (or circumvent) the law at that time, many of the old schools such as *aikijitsu*, *jujitsu*, and *kenjitsu* altered their teaching and changed their names to '*~do*', meaning 'way' or 'path', and continued to teach to whatever Japanese wanted to learn. Hence, *aikijitsu* became *aikido*, *jujitsu* became *judo*, etc. Since then, the arts have been kept alive by practitioners. In some cases, several martial arts forms have become sports, thus losing much of the intended spiritual and martial content.

Martial arts can be divided roughly into two divisions: *gendai budo* (modern martial arts) and *koryu budo* or *kobujutsu*. The latter were all founded as schools of martial arts prior to the Meiji Restoration, the oldest traditions going back to around the 1500's. The *koryu* schools are very difficult to find; even your average Japanese citizen knows very little about them.

By far the most popular are the *gendai* arts. Judo and Kendo are compulsory in most public schools, depending on the size. Some public schools might have Kyudo (archery) and Shin-naginata (a long halberd weapon made from bamboo, popular with young women).

MODERN MARTIAL ARTS

Karate

The most well known in the West of all *gendai budo* is probably *Karate*. *Karate* literally means 'empty hand'. There are many types of Karate found throughout Japan and the world today. Some styles are more traditional while others focus on competition. People looking for full-contact Karate should sign up with styles like *Kyokushin-kai*. Others who want a slightly less contact style of Karate should check out *Shotokan* dojos (although even Shotokan can seem rough to the more timid on occasion). There are many others from which you can choose. For more information on Shotokan Karate, visit the [\[Japan Shotokan Karate Association\]](#) website.

Students learn to use all parts of their bodies as weapons. There are normally three parts to a Karate class:

- A. Kihon: basic techniques and combinations
- B. Kata: set sequences of offensive strikes and defensive blocks
- C. Kumite: fighting

However, while Karate does have a physical focus, it also has a strong mental focus. Students are encouraged to 'seek perfection of spirit,' to 'respect others,' and to 'refrain from violent behaviour'.

Exponents of Karate wear a training uniform called a *dogi*, usually a white folded top with white pants and a belt. Traditionally, there were no coloured belts with the exception of white, brown, and black, though some styles had a red belt that the head of the style might wear. Today, many schools have adopted the colour belt ranking system used in America.

Shorinji Kempo

Along the same lines as Karate is *Shorinji Kempo*. *Shorinji* is the Japanese pronunciation for the Shaolin Temple in China. *Kempo* is a Japanese word with a meaning similar to *Karate*. *Shorinji Kempo* was founded by *Doshin So*, who travelled to China to study martial arts and brought back what he learned to Japan. Today, *Shorinji Kempo* is headed by the late *Doshin So*'s daughter, and is the largest martial arts group in the world that is led by a woman (although it is not rare in Japan for women to head traditional schools). While *Doshin So*'s daughter is the political head of the school, Mr. Arai in Fukushima is the technical director.

Like Karate, *Shorinji Kempo* uses *kata* training as well as free sparring for teaching. At very advanced training levels, exponents learn the use of the bow. *Shorinji Kempo* has many throwing techniques. The *kata* adheres to a more Chinese methodology than traditional Japanese Karate *kata*.

Shorinji Kempo participants wear a training uniform similar to that worn in Judo. Sometimes, black robes and an *obi* (belt) that look like priests' robes are worn after the individual reaches a certain level.

More information on *Shorinji Kempo* can be found on the *Shorinji Kempo* Japan website, [\[here\]](#).

Judo

Judo is a type of wrestling involving throwing and pinning techniques. Judo literally means '*the gentle way*' and is a method of self-defence which uses throws, joint-locks, chokes and holds as well as various break-fall techniques. Punching, kicking and other strikes are not a part of this martial art. Aside from its competitive side, judo also stresses the importance of improvement of spirit.

Judo was created in 1882 by the educator *Jigor Kanno*. Since childhood, Kanno had studied martial arts and with the help of his first students, all of the non-lethal, most gentle and blending techniques were taken from five different forms of jujitsu and put together to form Judo. At some point in history, the Judo crowd (a small following of Kanno) and the Tokyo police department had a tournament. The Judo students won, and so the police adopted Judo as their martial art. Even today it is not uncommon for Judo dojos to be sponsored and run by members of the police department.

Judo became an Olympic sport in the 1960's. The gradual changing of Judo into an international sport has both good and bad points. On one hand, it is not likely that so many people have come into contact with Judo if not for Kanno's efforts to popularise it as a sport. On the other hand, some people feel that by making it a sport, it has lost a lot of its austere beauty.

Aikido

Aikido has not been turned into a sport. For people who are more interested in the traditional philosophy of Japanese martial arts, Aikido is the way to go. It may be hard to find though (check out the Asahikawa area). Aikido is the '*way of harmonizing energy.*'

Aikido utilises non-linear or circular techniques, and directing an opponent's energy against him. It is a system of self-defence that incorporates striking, kicking, joint-locking, grappling, and throwing; however, the emphasis is on throwing and rolling. Many people feel that Aikido embraces an ideology of non-violence, in much the same way that Judo does. Many Aikido dojos have no weapons training, while others teach the use of the wooden sword and the *jo* (a short staff). Aikido players wear a judo *dogi*, and black belts wear a *hakama* (pleated skirt).

Kyudo

Kyudo is Japanese archery. It utilises a very long, asymmetric bow, and this asymmetry makes accurate shooting very challenging. Unlike Western archery, where the bowstring is held by three fingers, *Kyudo-ka* wear a deerskin gauntlet and hook the bowstring with their thumb. A *keiko-gi*, *obi*, and *hakama* are required uniform, and *tabi* are worn on the feet. The bow is a holy artefact in Japanese religion, and can be seen at sumo tournaments being used as part of the ceremonial rituals. Additionally, there is a popular and prestigious Kyudo tournament held at the start of the year in Kyoto at Sanjusangendo Temple.

The shooting technique used in Kyudo was developed for ceremonial demonstrations of prowess for the benefit of the Shogun, and as such are highly ritualised and

beautiful to watch. The most common procedure is to shoot 28m at a target 36cm wide. But there are also a variety of other targets and a longer distance used in competitions. Regardless of their personal bias, all archers hold the bow in their left hand and pull the string with their right. (This writer has only ever seen one archer shoot with the opposite hand, to the amazement - and outrage - of all and sundry.)

There are several different schools with relatively minor variations in technique, but the most common is the *Ogasawara-ryu*. In the early stages of training, archers are supposed to concentrate purely on their technique, disregarding the target entirely. To that end, at some dojos they can spend their first year of training shooting only at a straw target positioned two meters away. The theory is that once perfect form is achieved, shooting accuracy will follow as a matter of course. Missing the target implies an error in form; therefore, hitting the target is a way of measuring quality of technique, rather than being the goal itself.

Like most of the other Japanese martial arts, there is a strong Zen component to Kyudo, where the best results are achieved by emptying the mind, releasing all thoughts of success or failure, and concentrating purely on form. This is extraordinarily difficult to do, and a wonderful way to relieve stress and relax the mind and body.

In addition, there is a type of Kyudo called *yabusame*, performed from horseback. The rider gallops his or her horse down a 100m track, and shoots at three evenly spaced targets. There is usually a time limit, so the rider must go as fast as possible. The sport is based on the technique of samurai charging their horses through ranks of spearmen, and trying to shoot the foot soldiers in the face, the only unarmoured target available. There are yabusame venues where training and competitions are held at Hakodate, Eniwa (near Sapporo) and Memuro (near Obihiro). The tournaments are very colourful affairs, with the horses and riders dressed in colourful traditional garb.

The [\[All Nippon Kyudo Federation\]](#) has a decent website with links to federations in other countries.

The Three Arts Covered by the Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei

Kendo

In short, *Kendo* is Japanese fencing. The word *Kendo* comes from the kanji for 'sword' and 'way'. Most people translate this as simply '*the way of the sword*' but that can be misleading as modern Kendo has nothing to do with a real sword, and very little to do with the 'way' of the sword. Instead, Kendo has developed into a sport that is characterized by fast, powerful movements, technical footwork, high levels of concentration and sportsman like competition. How deep you wish to go into the philosophical '*way of the sword*' aspect is largely left up to the individual player.

The '*sword*' used by players of Kendo is made from four pieces of bamboo, bound together by leather and string. To protect the player from injury, heavy flared pants called *hakama* and a thick, heavy cotton top called a *dogi* are worn at all times. On top of this, five pieces of armor are also worn, namely a helmet or *men*, the breastplate or *do*, gauntlets or *kote* and a type of torso protector called a *tare*. Fitted

as such, a kendo player has the option of striking the opponent in any of these areas except the *tare*, however rules exist regarding when each location is available for attack.

Kendo is difficult sport to play and even more difficult sport to watch, because it can be very confusing as to who is actually winning, or even scoring points. Unlike western fencing, where a mere touch of the blade guarantees a point, Kendo insists on correctness of strike, timing, disruption of opponents defences and '*force of will*' in order to determine what is and is not a point. Because there are both quantitative and qualitative measures that must be met when evaluating the validity of a strike, it takes a very skilled eye to understand all the intricacies of scoring a Kendo match.

Like most martial arts, Kendo is much more a mental than physical game, and people of all ages and body types can play kendo and be successful. Don't be afraid if you feel like you don't fit the stereotype of a '*martial artist*'.

That said, Kendo can be very intimidating as most dojo sessions are a full two hours of shouting at the top of your lungs. Nevertheless, I believe that Kendo is the most well-rounded martial art, and while not directly applicable to an actual confrontation (after all, no one carries around a sword anymore) the experiences and lessons learned will be invaluable to you.

The All Japan Kendo Association have an awesome website, click [\[here\]](#).

Iaido

Iaido is the art of drawing the sword, cutting with it, and putting it back in the *saya* (scabbard). Often this is done from a sitting position. Modern Iaido is a composite of forms from a variety of *koryu* sword schools in pre-arranged forms called the *seiteigata* recreational forms.

Jodo

Jodo is fighting using a short stick that comes to about the solar plexus. Like Iaido, modern Jodo is based on a *koryu* form. The *seiteigata* for Jodo number to 12 kata. Some exponents of Jodo or Iaido spend many years studying these forms. Often many people go on to train in the *koryu* forms of these arts, if training is available.

Kendo, Iaido, and Jodo are very common, at least in Japan. Most police train in Kendo and/or a combination of the three. Kendo, Iaido, and Jodo can be easily found in most city-sponsored dojos, and police dojos.

JOINING A CLASS

General rule of thumb: no matter what martial art you decide to follow, make sure you do some research. Before signing up, watch a class and even compare it with other dojos.

Like other clubs in Japan, martial arts clubs really aren't for people who just want to try it and see. If you become a member, there will be expectation that you show up on a regular basis. It's harder to change dojos once you sign up because after your first night, you may be invited to your own welcoming party.

To avoid ruffling any feathers, watch a class or two first and then decide.

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As always, the official [hajat/forum](#) is where you will find all the answers to any questions you may have regarding life in Hokkaido.

HAJET kindly asks you to use paper wisely and only print this document if you really, really must. LOVE HOKKAIDO, LOVE THE ENVIRONMENT!

USEFUL RESOURCES

Japan Shotokan Karate Association
Shorinji Kempo Japan
All Nippon Kyudo Federation
All Japan Kendo Association

www.jskajp.org
www.shorinjikempo.or.jp
www.kyudo.jp
www.kendo-fik.org

Hokkaido Association of Japan Exchange and Teaching
www.hajet.org

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