

# Martial Arts and Military Psychology

## Боевые искусства и воинская психология

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена исследованию влияния боевых искусств на подготовку и тренировку воинов, их психологическое состояние и способности преодолевать негативные последствия стрессовых ситуаций. Для этого в боевых искусствах были разработаны специальные методы обучения, включавшие различные психофизические практики, идеологическое обучение, воспитание особого отношения к жизни и смерти, различные индивидуальные психопрактики. Автор выделяет основные особенности и ключевые принципы психологической подготовки воинов; рассматривает религиозное влияние, а также эволюцию методов психопрактики — от шаманских практик до практик работы с сознанием. Также проводится разбор «Кодекса бусидо», как метода идеологической пропаганды и закрепления психологических установок.

**Ключевые слова:** психология, воин, самурай, боевые искусства, тренировка, культура, дзэн, бусидо, экстатическое состояние, эмоциональное потрясение, страх.

**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the study of the influence of martial arts on the preparation and training of soldiers, their psychological state and ability to overcome the negative consequences of stressful situations. For this purpose, special training methods were developed in martial arts, which included various psychophysical practices, ideological training, instilling a special attitude towards life and death, and various individual psychopractices. The author highlights the main features and key principles of psychological training of soldiers; examines religious influence, as well as the evolution of psychopractice methods — from shamanic practices to practices of working with consciousness. The “Bushido Code” is also analyzed as a method of ideological propaganda and consolidation of psychological attitudes.

**Keywords:** psychology, warrior, samurai, martial arts, training, cultural, Zen, bushido, ecstatic state, emotional shock, fear

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The fulfillment of objectives of armed forces and security forces of all countries requires not only the good physical training of personnel, but also their healthy psychological condition and high morale. Moreover, a huge gap between a comfortable civil life and rigorous military everyday activities is being observed. Due to this reason the command of armed forces and police regiments are constantly searching for methods to psychologically train personnel. Some regiments settled on traditional methods of the Japanese martial arts, where the psychological training is entwined with the study of the martial art. The Japanese police and forces of self-defence included courses of Yoshinkan Aikido into the officer training; the French Ministry of Defence settled on Aikibudo created by master Alain Floquet; the United States Army constantly conducts experiments and develops new programmes based on the martial arts, among which are “The Trojan warrior”; while the Serbian Aikido master Ljubomir Vračarević personally trained the guard of Libyan ex-president Muammar Gaddafi and Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe. Undoubtedly, a modern system and the methods of the warrior training differ from the ones used in medieval Japan, but the martial arts as a part of an incorporeal cultural legacy retained many components unchanged, and many other aspects can be reconstructed provided that similar conditions are recreated.

Warriors of different nations experience same difficulties in battles: fear, pain, the loss of relatives and friends, death. Alain Floquet describes the possibility of a negative psychological reaction of men the following way: “A danger causes emotional shock, which partially or completely suppresses the ability

to act if it finds favourable conditions for manifestation” [15, p. 70]. Therefore, overcoming and control over possible negative reactions of men in stress conditions are the purpose of the psychological training. Apart from that, the objective of the Japanese warrior training was to maintain discipline, the moral condition and loyalty towards his lord.

O.G. Syropyatov gives three types of the military psychological training: general, special and purposeful [13, p. 92]. The general psychological training is being performed during the teaching and upbringing of a warrior and aimed to establish such qualities as fortitude, heroism and courage. The upbringing of warriors in Japan, as well as many other spheres of life, was regulated by the military government. These regulations, issued by shogunate and leaders of samurai clans, contained moral and ethic principles and rules of warrior behaviour.

Japanese professor Kazushige Shingu has an interesting perspective concerning this topic: “It is not improbable that exactly the shogun created most of the restrictions in order to guarantee his political domination. From this point of view, the shogun of the Edo period was a skilled Freudian psychoanalyst. And I would like to suggest regarding such a manipulation of social dynamics as a tradition of the Japanese government” [4, p. 70]. Such psychological training was entwined with the upbringing of a warrior, based on the so-called “bushido code”, the principles of which are described in some of the most famous works of Japanese warriors: “Hagakure” by Yamamoto Tsunetomo, “Budôshoshinshû” by Daidôji Yûzan etc.

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The notion about the calling of a warrior and appropriate behaviour were laid at the level of super-ego, a refusal of fear of death was considered to be among the highest ideals of the warrior. One of the most famous sayings — “I comprehended that the Way of a Samurai is death. In the situation “or-or” choose death without hesitations. It is not difficult” [19, p. 69] – is understood as evidence of some kind of an ethic of death or even as a suicidal inclination of the samurai culture, however, the practical meaning implies that the warrior is being taught not to fear death [20].

There is a similar principle in the work of Daidōji Yūzan: “The one who is going to become a warrior considers constant thinking about death, every day and every night, from the morning of the coming year to the late night of the passing year to be his main concern” [8, p. 21]; according to the author, the strengthening of a character and the increase of fortitude are consequences of such an attitude.

Indeed, the man used to the thought of death will not be confused by this thought and will not succumb to stupor or panic in a moment of danger, instead he will act calmly and accordingly to a situation, which may save his life. Thus, we can see that this idea is not about a maniacal search of death, but simply an option of a psychological directive helping to avoid emotional shock.

Yukio Mishima describes it in the book “Hagakure Nyumon” this way: “It is not important how forced the situation is — if the man overcomes limitations and makes a choice in favour of death, then he acts freely” [11, p. 277]. The manifestation of cowardice and fear will be punished by infamy

and shame — the most horrible punishment for the Japanese warrior. The fear of shame and the aspiration for the highest ideals of the samurai codex turn out to be dominant and displacing other fears.

In contemporary research in the field of mass military psychology it is said that: “Against a background general war successes and mass battle enthusiasm even indecisive people show activity and self-dependence” [5, p. 155], however, “Research of Russian, American, German and French military specialists indicate that only about 20-25% of troopers show necessary activity in a battle (open aimed fire, purposefully move on a battlefield and so on), the rest of them show activity only under the sight of a commander. In his absence they hide in a safe place, imitate malfunctioning of machinery, weaponry, a psychological or physical trauma, or “escort” wounded troopers to the rear” [5, p. 156].

At this point it must be noted that modern American, European and Russian soldiers are not being educated from childhood according to ideals of Japanese samurais, including the honorable death in a battle and the refusal to fear death. The sense of infamy and shame for the Japanese samurais was often so strong that the free-will death by hara-kiri was considered to be the only solution. One of the most recent historical examples is related to the commander of the 4th Kwantung Army lieutenant general Uemura Mikio (1892-1946), who committed a suicide in Soviet captivity; in a death note Uemura describes his act the following way: “It is better to die valiantly and apologise to the empire rather than to live long and increase the shame” [10, p. 70].

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The thought of death for the lord and decent death in a battle served Japanese commanders as a good means of controlling their subordinates and maintaining morale. The efficiency of such propaganda was clearly demonstrated during the Second World War, when Japanese soldiers in great numbers showed examples of self-sacrifice, and kamikaze flyers shocked United States specialists. In order to understand this phenomenon the department of military information of United States ordered an investigation of the Japanese national character, which resulted in the book “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture” by Ruth Benedict. Even though the book was released in 1946, Ruth Benedict had begun her work on it in 1944 when the war was at its height and American strategists required immediate information about the enemy and its specific features. The reason for this book’s release indicates particular importance of understanding the psychological aspects of an enemy’s training [2]. It is no exaggeration to say that precisely the distinctive features of upbringing, as well as methods of manipulation of social consciousness created a particular culture and social behaviour of the Japanese, which are manifested in the spirit of collectivism and the priority of a common opinion above the individual one [21, p. 37].

Specific psychological training of warriors is more related to the training for accomplishing a certain objective and in less extension it is related to education [13, p. 92]. Methods of special training include ideomotor training, the study of main objectives and accumulation of knowledge of different combat situations, auto-training, meditation, psycho-

logical correction, psychological rehabilitation.

The psychological training for a specified purpose is performed towards an exact battle or a situation and purposed for the mobilization of mentality [13, p. 93].

Methods of special and purposeful training were developed in martial arts schools, and the study of these matters was an obligatory component in achieving the martial prowess. The history of development of psychological training methods originates from shaman and berserker traditions of Japanese warriors. The achievement of an ecstatic state of a mind through ritual practice and ascetic training lay in the foundation of such traditions. Rhythmic breathing exercises, askesis, being a hermit, dreaming, mythical experience of a contact with spirits during rituals, the use of psychedelic substances are considered to be traditional techniques to enter the field of unconsciousness, which are wide-spread in shaman traditions of different nations [1, p. 216].

Elements of the shaman and berserker traditions have remained even now in such martial arts schools as Tenshin Shōden Katori Shintō-ryū, Kashima Shinryū, Kashima Shintō-ryū etc [3]. The main feature of these schools is the story of the discovery of the divine revelation and acceptance of the teachings from god-patrons Takimikazuchi-no-Mikoto and Futsu-Nushi-no-Mikoto. One of the main conditions necessary to achieve martial prowess was the achievement of the ecstatic mind state, in which the contact with a deity or spirits took place; this state was reached through ascetic practice, exhausting exercises, prayers and rituals.

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Russian military psychologists K.M. Wolf, N.V. Polyansky and G.Y. Shumkov studying the state of a warrior during an attack established that “it is performed in a specific nervous state, which can be referred as “shock”. Moreover, the shock does not imply complete disconnection of consciousness, a loss of sensitivity and retardation of the neural system, which are being observed in cases of severe wounds and psychological traumas, instead it is a feeling similar to intoxication completely embracing the human essence” [5, p. 156].

The shock described by the Russian psychologists can be compared to battle trance, which ancient warriors deliberately tried to achieve. Modern research indicates that someone in this state is practically uncontrollable, does not control his consciousness and makes multiple tactical mistakes. The Japanese tradition implies the aspiration for establishing control over this state, which manifested in the ability to deliberately cause this state. Exactly the combination of mental and physical exercises allowed transferring the martial prowess into the level of subconsciousness, which excluded the possibility of wrong actions after reaching the new state of mind.

Traditions originating from mythological times were supplemented with practices of Buddhism, which reached Japanese islands. Ritual practices and the philosophy of the Buddhistic school Shingon and syncretic teaching of Shugendo (the way to attain miraculous abilities) became widespread, especially in ninjutsu schools. Special rituals (particular stances with a weapon, prayers, writing signs in the air, special sounds) related to the summoning of gods and spirits act as the first ways of auto-training.

This method was used for both the special and purposeful training of a warrior, for example, the summoning of a god before a battle, the ninja ritual to achieve invisibility before penetrating enemy territory and many others.

However, psychological methods of training were liberated from ritual and religious aspects only after Zen Buddhism had become wide-spread among samurais. Zen does not demand its followers to be religious, worship statues, repeat prayers or commit any other religious and cultural actions, instead Zen offers practice of working on your own mind, the way of cleansing the mind from “diseases”, such as fear, greed, hatred, anger etc [8].

Dr D. T. Suzuki describes the influence of Zen on the practice of traditional arts this way: “One of the most important features of archery and other arts practiced in Japan and, probably other Far East countries, is that it does not serve practical purposes, as well as it is not purposed for strictly esthetic pleasure. Practising such arts implies working on the mind; the purpose of this work is to reach the edges of reality. That is why an archer practises his art not only to hit his target; a sword fencer – not only to defeat an enemy; a dancer — not only for rhythmic movements of his body. First of all, they aspire to bring consciousness into harmony with the unconscious” [17, p. 13].

The German philosopher Eugen Herrigel says: “Traditionally, a Japanese man honours archery as an art and a legacy of predecessors, regarding it not as a sport, but, strange as it may sound, a cultural event. Therefore, he understands the “art” of archery not as a sporting skill achieved predominantly

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by physical exercises, but a skill whose beginning lies in mental exercises and whose very purpose is to hit a mental target; it can be said that the archer is targeting himself, and it can not be excluded that he manages to hit” [17, p. 19].

Considering these quotes it becomes clear that Zen for martial arts is a method to achieve mental perfection, the way to achieve harmony with yourself. The description of relations between psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism is given in detail in the article “Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis” by Erich Fromm [16]. Here I will simply give an example of an individual use of Zen in overcoming psychological problems.

One of the greatest sword masters and a government official of the Meiji period Yamaoka Tesshū (1836 – 1888) wrote about one of his teachers; “Asari was like no other sword master I have ever met — he was pliable outside and hard as a diamond inside. His immense mental concentration allowed him to defeat an enemy before they could do something” [12, p. 194]. The image of the invincible master returned to Tesshū many times, which became a serious psychological barrier for him: “Every day after training with different sword masters I saw Asari standing behind me as a mountain. It was impossible for me either to strike back or to dismiss this vision” [12, p. 195].

The fear of a master, the fear of a defeat turned into a phobia, a mental disorder accompanied even by hallucinations. Afterwards, through hard many years’ training and ascetic Zen practices Tesshū managed to get rid of this depressing image

and achieved the “without an enemy” state where master Asari stopped psychologically suppressing him. During a meditation Tesshū understood that the fear of the teacher had gone. When Tesshū stood before the teacher he simply confirmed that Tesshū's mind liberated from the fear.

Undoubtedly, warriors practiced sitting meditation but they could not spend as much time doing it as monks did, therefore the practice of martial arts itself had to become the practice of Zen. The meditation is commonly thought to be one of the ways to enter the unconscious [1, p. 215], in this case we see that it was used as a method of psychological correction and psychological rehabilitation. Many masters of martial arts including Yagyū Munenori, Miyamoto Musashi, Yamaoka Tesshū and many others can be found among the followers of Zen.

Now let us move to the examination of the purpose of the psychological training of Japanese warriors. Russian psychologist G.Y. Shumkov wrote that the mental state of a warrior waiting for a battle is the state of an anxious waiting characterised by a constant flow of different thoughts, impairment of attention, inability to concentrate on anything, the emotional state is characterised by tension, an expectation of something serious and heavy [5, p. 154].

One of the purposes of Zen is the achievement of the mushin state (absence of consciousness) or the non-thought state. This term is often understood incorrectly. For example, Winston L. King wrote: “Everything, absolutely everything must be “transferred” to the inner unconscious “I” [7, p. 211].

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In my view, *mushin* is precisely the liberation of the mind from unnecessary thoughts and anxiety, from the rubbish that litters it. The theory of an appropriate mental state was developed in works of Zen mentor Takuan Soho, who was the mentor of the famous master Yagyū Munenori, and, possibly, Miyamoto Musashi. Exactly in his works appears the term “*fudōshin*” — the firm spirit, which subsequently becomes one of the key principles in many schools. Takuan wrote: “To see something in front of you and not to allow a mind to focus on it – this is firmness. After all, when the mind focuses on something thoughts emerge and chaos takes hold of the mind. When the chaos dissipates and thoughts disappear the remaining mind comes into motion but at the same time resides in tranquility” [14, p. 21].

The point of this phrase can be described this way: if during a battle a warrior constantly thinks about danger and how to avoid it, then his mind will be seized by this thought and he will not be able to act freely. The *fudōshin* state — the state of a firm spirit (or a mind) — is the state, in which no external factors or tricks can confuse the warrior, he is concentrated on a task but at the same time freely controls surroundings. At the same time, Yagyū Munenori in his work clarifies that *Fudōshin* is a usual state of mind, the state in which a man experiences no fear [18]. In usual circumstances the absence of fear is a natural state of mind, but in a critical situation preservation of this state requires special training. The warrior must retain freedom of actions, whatever the circumstances are.

Yagyū Munenori writes: “The most important thing is to be mentally ready for any, even critical

situation” [18, p. 73], at the same time, you must not rest your gaze on one point, fix a mind on one place and lose vigilance. The logical continuation of the term *Fudōshin* is the term “*Zanshin*” — uninterrupted mind. *Zanshin* implies concentration on the current moment and on following the development of events. Usually, in the practice of martial arts the term *Zanshin* implies retention of concentration on the enemy and readiness to continue a battle even if the enemy is defeated. For example, after a successful technical act that allowed to slay or throw the enemy on the ground, the warrior does not hurry to celebrate victory or completely relaxes, instead he continues to monitor the enemy, ready to resume the battle if necessary. Zen teaches to be aware of actions, to track involuntary reactions of your own mind during training, to establish and eliminate their reasons.

Another important aspect of the psychological training of warriors was the ability to affect the enemy’s psychological state, suppress him and cause fear. In order to arouse fear warriors ordered frightening masks resembling evil spirits, before a battle they shouted their honorifics and the list of those they had defeated, the name of schools or masters under whose guidance they had studied. During the battle the energetic shout “*kiai*” was often used. Even today some masters demonstrate how such shout makes unprepared people to lose the sense of space, fall in stupor losing the ability to attack or defend, or simply begin to fear doing something. Japanese master Kiba Koshiro wrote about “*kiai*”: “*Kiai* can have great influence. Concentrate and shout “*kiai*” simultaneously causing the influx of physical strength and bravery to yourself and decreasing

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strength and bravery of your enemy; in this case you will be able to incapacitate the enemy” [6, p. 40].

Therefore, we see that the psychological training of a warrior is the basic element of the traditional Japanese martial arts. The versatility of the eastern martial arts allowed these traditions to survive until today in an almost intact sense and not to disappear unlike many European warrior traditions. Martial arts are the huge layer of the incorporeal cultural legacy of Japan. Works of Japanese martial arts masters are still poorly known, though their content is a truly valuable source of knowledge of psychology, strategy and the culture of Japanese warriors on a whole.

Nowadays a lot of people around the world study martial arts, undoubtedly, the level of their training and battle efficiency does not allow to compare them with the training of Japanese samurais, nonetheless other qualities are important for a society and a civil life. People studying martial arts show higher psychological resistance to stress situations, react faster to changing circumstances and show no signs of depression or panic. Naturally, the benefit of physical exercise is evident as well. The methods of martial arts may play an important role in both the physical and psychological training of troopers of the army and special security forces. At the same time the intensity and toughness of such training must differ significantly from those of a civil one. The Russian army and officers often face the problem of disobedience and deviant behaviour of soldiers enlisted from certain regions of the country. Special training of officers in the field of the martial arts and the presence of an officer-mentor experienced in the

martial arts may help to correct such a situation. It must be noted that many special regiments of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Russian armed forces included elements of the Eastern martial arts into their training and successfully use it.



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