

FROM YAMABUSHI TO MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAINING IN THE MARTIAL ARTS

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ABSTRACT. Yamabushi were forest spirits who lived in the regions of Japan. They did not lead their lives in urban agglomerations, and appeared around monasteries or on mountain paths. They mostly posed no danger to humans, intervening in the lives of martial arts masters, providing them with secret fighting techniques. They had a more psychological training role, which led to exceptional results for the history of martial arts. After the fall of the samurai class and the secular development of Japanese society, these spirits of the forests will be replaced by psychologists, who will try to bring superior performance to the work of martial arts athletes. Using hypnosis, manipulations of the human psyche, but also of the masses, methods of eliminating emotions, up to their annihilation, many countries resorted to high-level psychologists, whose aim was to train an athlete from the point of view psychologically, incapable of being tributary to emotions. With all the methods used, some even taken from the field of military psychology, the athletes' results were not superior to the majority. Not all athletes managed to overcome all their obstacles, some, instead, failed completely, their lives were changed forever, being unable to adapt to the society in which they live. The studies below represent a series of research in the field of psychology of martial arts, with updated data at the time of writing the article.

Keywords: *Yamabushi; judo, martial arts, ninjutsu; hypnose; manipulation of the masses; handling the individual; the Autogenic Training Schutz, ronnin.*

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Introduction

Throughout the history of Japanese martial arts, but also in other regions of the Far East, there have been numerous practitioners of martial arts. The most famous remain the samurai, and in China, the fighters from the Shaolin Monastery. We do not know exactly what the samurai training methods were, since they were transmitted in code, in the form of Kata (Barbos, 2014), but we have numerous writings that relate the meeting of samurai, but also of ronin (former samurai left without masters), with various strange creatures, half-man-half-bird or animal, whom the people called forest spirits (*Yamabushi*).

Although repulsive at first glance, with asymmetrical features, and even fear-inspiring, the Yamabushi were forest spirits that did not harm humans, but could, in certain situations, become a real danger to any human being. Yamabushi appeared at key moments in a martial arts practitioner's life, when the fighter wanted a real change in life, but the path to follow was unclear. Once present, they became the fighter's mentors and psychologists, giving him guidance and true psychological assistance, and never failed in their training, no matter how difficult that fighter was. With their help, a series of martial arts were born, some transforming into peaceful forms, in which the opponent is only immobilized, and not killed.

After martial arts are banned in Japan, starting from the 19th century, fighters become fewer and fewer, so are accounts of encounters with forest spirits. The Western world, based on strictly scientific knowledge, brings the art of war to sports forms, eliminating any military form of combat, but also any trace of mysticism and religion, and the first forms of entertainment are born.

Since any conflict, even a simulated one, involves mental stress, sports psychologists intervened, becoming memories of Yamabushi, taking over the role in the psychological preparation of the fighting athlete. Results for psychologists are expected after more than a hundred years of scientific studies related to the psychology of the human being. No psychologist has been able to take on the role of a Yamabushi, and the results are quite modest, even if they have used some of the most modern research methods.

Motivation of the study

The study started from the research of numerous documents related to the performances of samurai warriors, and which brought to light the fact that these fighters had a separate psychology from the mass population. Beyond physical performance, which can be shown to be related to genetic inheritance and the body's ability to adapt to numerous changes, what amazes the world of

science is the mental capacity to achieve exceptional performance. Their power to withstand extremely high stress situations, to the mental resistance to bear fights and long-term harassment, without having benefited from a science of psychology or some psychologist.

The studies conducted, some already published, tried to explain what exactly made Yamabushi superior to a reputed psychologist specializing in military psychology. Why did a samurai, after training with a forest spirit, and being subjected to numerous war conflicts, not suffer from post-war traumatic syndrome? What was actually at the basis of the samurai's performance, and why does the sports or military psychologist fail to detect it?

How the sports psychologist actually modified the athlete's behavior, along with the coach, to the point where the athlete became a form of manipulation under the strict control of the professional sports industry.

Theoretical framework

Who were the Yamabushi?

Yamabushi, were at first popularly known as yamahoshi, an isolated group of mythological beings who lived in the less traveled forests, or forests around monasteries in the mountains of Japan. These were actually human, and less mythological, beings who chose the "way of training and testing" or "the way to spiritual power through discipline" (*shugendō* a philosophical system with roots as far back as the Kōya Hijiri monks of the 8th and 9th centuries (Picken, 1994). The father of this religious movement was *En no Gyōja*, believed to have lived between 634-700/7, and who founded the Shugendō religion, a syncretism of Taoism, Shintoism, esoteric Buddhism (Shingon Mikkyō and Tendai sects) and shamanism traditional Japanese (Blacker, 1999).

To understand the role of these characters, who will be considered mythology over time, the doctrine of this Shugendō religion must be understood, a doctrine taken over and assimilated by all members of the community.

According to this doctrine, (and we also find these ideas in other peoples outside the space of Asia), there are several worlds that coexist simultaneously with the world in which man lives. Even though they are separate, worlds outside our space repeatedly intervene in this earthly life. Those from the parallel world send their representatives to earth in the form of gods, and the most important are the Tantric Buddhist goddess Fudō Myōō, along with Dainichi Nyorai, by worshiping and observing the rituals required by the Buddhist Tantric goddess, man can obtain powers and performances out of common, which no ordinary man can achieve (Hitoshi, 2001).

These gods create their sacred places in the mountains, where believers practice rituals called “*mountain practices*” (*nyūbu shugyō*).

The ritual of practices in the monastery

The martial arts practitioner seeking enlightenment had to turn to the advice and practice of a Shinto priest, the Tao, and in the case of our study, a *kenja*, *kenza*, and *shugenja*, practitioners of the Shugendō religion. The fighter had to choose the period in which he wanted to be initiated at the monastery, and most of the time, he chose the spring period, the winter, being the most difficult period for such a ritual. He presented himself with a letter of recommendation, which he received from other masters who practiced in the Shugendō sect, and in its absence they brought offerings (*kuyōhō*) in honor of deities, flowers and recited various mantras (Hitoshi, 2001).

After the period of accommodation, the fighter was initiated into the esoteric part of the cult, called *shōkanjō*, and then followed the initiation into *genjutsu*, the mystical art of fighting and obtaining miraculous powers (walking on extremely sharp objects, passing through fire, or even resistance to boiling in oil, etc.) (Hitoshi, 1989). This practice would fascinate the entire world outside the Asian space to this day. The performance of these fighters exceeds anything known about the science of the human body. These performances will never be found in sports practices.

No fighter left the monastery without being initiated into the art of incantations (*kaji*), which would later be introduced into the Ninjutsu arts as a mandatory form of study, and ninjutsu schools would also introduce the learning of *fuju*, *majinai* methods from here, used for healing after injuries.

Yamabushi become mythological characters after many of the uninitiated come into contact with their special qualities. Uninitiated in the art of this religion, laymen have created hundreds of legends, presenting the half-man-half-bird, who haunts the forests, and sometimes initiates samurai or ronin in the art of secret combat. They would be known as *sendatsu*, or spiritual mountain guides, and in other regions, *tengu*, whose deeds would become legends to this day.

All these initiations were aimed at achieving the highest performance, calling on psychological practice, which influences the application of combat techniques, but also survival in combat situations.

The emergence of modern psychology in the martial arts

The Japanese feudal system is abolished in the 19th century, a process that lasts almost 150 years. The warrior class was outlawed. What remains of Japanese combat systems are beginning to be abandoned, but on the other

hand, efforts are being made to preserve them. The only way this could be done was by transforming it into a sporting form, as would happen with the systems of *kenjutsu*, which would become *kendo* (Ozawa, 1997).

Over time, the competition becomes such a powerful financial form that it turns into a profitable industry that will change the lives of millions of athletes. In order to continuously perform, the human body is exploited to the maximum, using the most bizarre psychological methods in preparation. Many of them will be transferred, upon abandoning the sports career, in the manipulation of the groups of which the athlete will be a part.

Hypnosis

The term hypnosis appears only in 1820, when Étienne Félix d'Henin de Cuvillers, takes the term from the Greek language (*hypnos* = sleep), and defines it as a state of nervous sleep. Starting from 1857, this practice is embraced in the circles of European high society, along with spiritualism and other occult practices, so that later, it expands throughout the social space, and of course, also in the world of sports psychology (Hartman, 2000).

Among the first countries to use hypnosis to enhance sports performance was Russia, which, beginning in 1956, employed 11 psychologists specializing in hypnotic techniques to train the Russian Olympic team for the Melbourne Olympics. The result was that the Russian team got the most medals. The methods used by these hypnotists were not only limited to improving sports performance, but also to changing their behavior (Paccagnella, 2004).

Martial arts, which have become sports, resorted, in addition to hypnosis, to manipulations by trainers, with the aim of transforming the athlete into a being capable of fighting without any emotion, any human empathy. Japan has been accused in both judo and 22 other sports of using abusive training methods, which include beatings with the kendo stick, using the sword (Katana), holding children's heads under water to simulate drowning. The Association of Parents of Judo Accident Victims in Japan sued clubs and training centers because between 1983 and 2012, at least 110 died during training (Japan, 2011).

Manipulation and anguish is another method used to induce athletes to continue their sporting activity. These interventions, with the aim of strengthening the self, actually transform the athlete's behavior into a selfish one, and not infrequently, when they reach leadership positions, the athlete uses numerous methods of influence, through emotional blackmail of subordinates, only to maintain its leadership status.

The technique of autogenic training developed by Schultz (Nelson, 1998) is day present in all martial arts training. The athlete is taught that he is able to modify his own behavior through proper concentration. In many situations, psychologists advise athletes to endlessly suggest to themselves the idea that

they are so perfect and special that after hundreds of sessions, both their thinking and behavior change. Over the years, they are unable to adapt in a democratic society, becoming dictatorial leaders, convinced that they are the most important personalities of the time, misunderstood by those around them.

In many situations, martial artists do not respond immediately to hypnosis programs or Schultz autogenic training. This is a normal subconscious reaction, and the coach and therapist begin to intervene through methods much more difficult for the athlete to control, called projection (Rosenthal, 2017).

Following the methods of sports training for a martial arts competition, the athlete who has reached the competitive evaluation phase actually highlights the physical training, because his emotional reactions get out of control, and his displays of anger and aggression towards those around are hard to control (Reynes, 2004).

Discussions and conclusions

The performances achieved by yamabushi practitioners can never be achieved by any martial arts athlete as long as he does not practice the methods existing within this sect or other Asian religious systems. The goals of the two categories of practitioners are different. While traditional Asian training systems are based on attaining the state of *Enlightenment* without any other material compensation, sports forms strictly pursue material compensation and image in the society in which one lives. To reach the state of Enlightenment, the martial arts practitioner would go through the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, a form of 10 mandatory rules, which are aimed at forming morals before benefiting from fighting techniques (Kumārajīva, 1981).

The intervention of psychologists beyond professional ethics, as happens in many countries with an authoritarian regime, transforms, in many cases, the athlete's behavior in a negative way, bringing him to the stage where he is unable to fit into a social system, and where he establishes himself, he reveals an authoritarian personality, who emotionally blackmails his subordinates, resorts to methods of physical and psychological manipulation, eliminating any supposed competition around him (Stark, 2007).

The sports industry, the numerous giant companies, the mass media and some symbols related to material gains, completely cancel the moral values of religions, secularizing the entire human existence. The methods used by Buddhist, Taoist, Shinto monks, etc, in order to achieve exceptional physical and mental performances, do not find their place in the world of sports. Religious practices in sports are considered mysticism, and eliminated. The athlete's positive moral values develop in favorable social contexts, and only if mentors give them this chance.

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