A process-sociology analysis of religious practices and Japanese martial arts

Raúl SÁNCHEZ-GARCÍA* [iD]

Polytechnic University of Madrid - UPM (Spain)

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Abstract

This paper uses primary and secondary sources to provide a process-sociological analysis of the relationship between religious practices and Japanese martial arts. It problematises the taken for granted role of Zen Buddhism as the sole influence on the development of Japanese martial arts. Such essential connection is inaccurate and anachronistic. Religious and martial practices developed as part of processes of sociogenesis (state formation) and psychogenesis (habitus) during three different key stages: (1) Medieval Japan (1185-1600): during this stage, warriors (*bushi*) progressively became the predominant rulers across the country, enforcing law by sheer force. Warriors seasoned in combat used esoteric practices (spells, magic rituals) as part of their psychological arsenal for warfare, as practical means of action. The cult of the Buddhist deity Marishiten held special interest for the *bushi* originating martial traditions (*ryu*). (2) Tokugawa shogunate (1600-1848): the pacification of the country by the central military court implied a more detached approach to martial arts by samurai. Within this milieu, the samurai acted as a retainer/bureaucrat whose main mission was to keep order in a stratified society and to serve his lord, something that Zen practices helped to incorporate in the samurai ethos. (3) Early Showa period (1926-1945): this stage featured a progressive militarisation of people and the instigation of a strong involvement towards the Japanese nation, considered as the main (symbolic) survival unit. *Budo* (martial arts) was connected to *shinto* (functioning as a 'state religion') and embodied the imperial *bushido* message. Zen provided a legitimation of violence for citizen-soldiers with a personality structure that presented self-doubts on killing someone and fear of being killed.

Keywords: Religious practices; martial arts; Norbert Elias; *habitus*; civilising processes.

Análisis de las prácticas religiosas y las artes marciales japonesas desde la sociología procesual

Resumen

Este artículo utiliza fuentes primarias y secundarias para proporcionar un análisis sociológico procesual de la relación entre las prácticas religiosas y las artes marciales japonesas. Problematiza el papel, dado por sentado, del budismo zen como la única influencia en el desarrollo de las artes marciales japonesas. Esta conexión esencial es inexacta y anacrónica. Las prácticas religiosas y marciales se desarrollaron como parte de procesos de sociogénesis (formación del estado) y psicogénesis (*habitus*) durante tres etapas clave diferentes: (1) Japón medieval (1185-1600): durante esta etapa, los guerreros (*bushi*) se convirtieron progresivamente en gobernantes, predominando en todo el país, haciendo cumplir la ley por la fuerza de las armas. Los guerreros avezados en el combate utilizaban prácticas esotéricas (hechizos, rituales mágicos) como parte de su arsenal psicológico para la guerra, como medios prácticos para la acción. El culto a la deidad budista Marishiten tuvo especial interés para el *bushi* originario de las tradiciones marciales (*ryu*). (2) Shogunato Tokugawa (1600-1848): la pacificación del país por la corte militar central implicó un enfoque más distante de las artes marciales por parte de los samuráis. Dentro de

Análise das práticas religiosas e das artes marciais japonesas a partir da sociologia processual

Resumo

Este artigo usa fontes primárias e secundárias para fornecer uma análise sociológica processual da relação entre práticas religiosas e artes marciais japonesas. Problematiza o papel dado como certo do budismo zen, como a única influência no desenvolvimento das artes marciais japonesas. Tal conexão, essencial, é imprecisa e anacrónica. As práticas religiosas e marciais se desenvolveram como parte de processos de sociogénese (formação do estado) e psicogénese (*habitus*) durante três fases principais diferentes: (1) Japão Medieval (1185-1600): durante esta fase, os guerreiros (*bushi*) tornaram-se progressivamente os governantes predominantes em todo o país, aplicando a lei pela força das armas. Os guerreiros experientes em combate usavam práticas esotéricas (feitiços, rituais mágicos) como parte de seu arsenal psicológico para a guerra, como meios práticos de ação. O culto da divindade budista Marishiten detinha um interesse especial para o *bushi* originário das tradições marciais (*ryu*). (2) Xogunato Tokugawa (1600-1848): a pacificação do país pela corte militar central implicou uma abordagem mais distanciada das artes marciais pelos samurais. Nesse meio, o samurai

este entorno, el samurái actuaba como retén/burócrata cuya misión principal era mantener el orden en una sociedad estratificada y servir a su señor, algo que las prácticas zen ayudaron a incorporar en el espíritu samurái. (3) Período Showa temprano (1926-1945): esta etapa se caracterizó por una progresiva militarización de la población y por el impulso de una fuerte implicación en relación a la nación japonesa, considerada como la principal unidad (simbólica) de supervivencia. El *budo* (artes marciales) estaba relacionado con el *shinto* (que funcionaba como una "religión de estado") y encarnaba el mensaje imperial del *bushido*. El zen proporcionó una legitimación de la violencia para aquellos ciudadanos-soldados cuya personalidad les hacía tener inseguridades sobre matar a alguien y tener miedo a ser asesinados.

Palabras clave: Prácticas religiosas; artes marciales; Norbert Elias; *habitus*; procesos civilizatorios.

agia como um reserva/burocrata, cuja principal missão era manter a ordem em uma sociedade estratificada e servir ao seu senhor, algo que as práticas zen ajudaram a incorporar ao espírito samurai. (3) Início do período Showa (1926-1945): esta fase caracterizou-se por uma progressiva militarização do povo e pela instigação de um forte envolvimento para com a nação japonesa, considerada como a principal unidade (simbólica) de sobrevivência. O *budo* (artes marciais) estava conectado ao *shinto* (funcionando como uma 'religião do estado') e incorporava a mensagem imperial do *bushido*. O zen fornecia uma legitimação da violência para cidadãos-soldados com uma estrutura de personalidade que apresentava dúvidas sobre matar alguém e medo de ser morto.

Palavras-chave: Práticas religiosas; artes marciais; Norbert Elias; *habitus*; processos civilizatórios.

1. Introduction

During the 2010s, the US Army provided Zen meditation as part of a 'Warrior mind training' to help soldiers to cope with mental issues related to combat thanks to 'the ancient samurai code of self-discipline' (quoted in Benesch, 2016, p. 1); in 2003, *The Last Samurai* film, presented some scenes in which Tom Cruise displayed supernatural combat abilities after his Zen training under his samurai captors; in 1993 a book called *Zen and the way of the sword: arming the samurai psyche* (King, 1993) identified Zen, the samurai spirit and the suicidal methods of the *tokkotai* pilots during the WWII; in 1979, Zen/kendo expert Omori Shogen visited Europe as part of a spiritual exchange called 'The Fount of East-West Culture.'; in 1977, the BBC-documentary called 'The Long Search - Land of the disappearing Buddha with Ronald Eyre' featured Shogen, highlighting the connection between Zen and martial arts. Omori had published the influential book *Zen and Budo* in 1968 and in the 1970s he had established and International Zen *dojo* (martial arts hall) in Hawaii; by the mid-70s, a seminar on Zen and martial arts was conducted in Paris by Zen Master Taisen Deshimaru and the *kendo* expert (8º Dan), Yuno sensei (Deshimaru, 1977); D.T. Suzuki's acclaimed book *Zen and Japanese Culture* was published in English 1959[1] and Eugen Herrigel's book *Zen in the Art of Archery*, was written in 1948 but published in English in 1953. The thread that binds all these beads together is the still well-established commonsensical assumption about Zen and martial arts as part and parcel of the Japanese samurai.

As D.T. Suzuki expressed in his famous book: 'Zen is the religion of the samurai warrior.' After WWII, this blend of samurai-zen was kept but shifted meaning. As Japan went from a militaristic state to a friendly country, Zen evolved from being considered as an authoritarian military ideology to an austere training for enlightenment (Sánchez-García, 2019, p. 197). Zen-samurai became the ideal blend of *bun* (literary) / *bu* (martial) paths of self-perfection, the warrior-sage to be praised and imitated by modern martial artists.

Nonetheless, this is far from being only a Western conception. It is pervading in Japan too. The Japanese collective imaginary had been fed such connections through academic or specialised analysts. For instance, since 1970 Omori Shogen taught a course on 'The practice of Zen' at Hanazono University (Kyoto) of which Omori became president from 1978 to 1982. During those years he also led an evening *zazen* club, starting with university's kendo club members but spreading to other martial arts clubs and the general public (Victoria, 2019, p. 275). Nevertheless, the link between Zen and martial arts had a long-term tradition in popular culture, at least since Yoshikawa Eiji's (1892-1962) influential, and largely fictional, portrayal of Miyamoto Musashi in his bestselling novels, first published between 1935 and 1939. After WWII, such link remained active. For instance, in 1978, the mass-market magazine *The Kendo Nippon Monthly* published a special issue title 'Sword and Zen' which featured a blend of martial-genius-enlightened-through-Zen stories, pre-modern martial arts

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[1] The original text was published in English in 1938 with the title *Zen Buddhism and its influence on Japanese Culture*.

treatises illustrating the link between Zen and swordsmanship, and practical instructions on how to meditate in a lotus posture (Bodiford, 2005, p. 69). In fact, Japanese population grew to accept such essentialist relationship, built little by little since the Meiji period as part of the 'invented traditions' of modern Japan (Vlastos, 1998), blended with notions of *bushido* and *shinto* to constitute part of the Japanese identity in times of the Imperial restoration (Benesch, 2014). As time advanced through Taisho and early Showa periods, the identification of the ancient samurai and the modern conscripted soldier grew stronger, Zen becoming an integral part of the mental aspect of combat.

Several authors have discredited already the anachronistic original relationship between Zen and the martial arts of Japanese warriors (Hall, 1997, 2014; Benesch, 2016). This paper intends to follow this path of critique but adopting the process sociological approach of Norbert Elias to understand how different religious practices influenced the training of martial arts and combative behaviour in different eras.

By adopting the long-term perspective of the process-model advocated by Elias, (2007, p. 107, 198) we will be better equipped to understand the manifold differences and contrast between the (a) pre-Tokugawa *bushi* [2], used to life and death situations in combat for which esoteric rituals were part of the magical/psychological, practical means of fighting; (b) the Tokugawa samurai, a retainer whose main mission was to keep order in a stratified society and to serve his lord, something that Zen practises helped to incorporate in the samurai ethos; and (c) modern soldier, for which Zen meditation provided a mental preparation before the actual combat, a means for controlling possible remorse or self-doubts on killing someone and fear of being killed.

As a methodological note, this process-sociological analysis depends on primary and secondary documentary sources. The use of primary sources is restricted to the original texts that have been translated into English (mainly) or the pieces of original work that experts in the field have translated in their own studies. In this sense, this paper relies on the work of highly respected scholars (mainly historians) in the different historical stages spanning a very long-term period.

The paper structure is as follows: first, it presents a short introduction of key concepts of Norbert Elias's process sociology that help us to set the comparative framework between different stages in the relationship of spiritual/religious/psychological training and martial arts. Changes in sociogenesis (state formation), psychogenesis (personality structure), and matters of involvement and detachment will be related to the general theory of the civilising process. Then, the paper analyses the characteristic features of each stage, giving special attention to the spiritual/religious/psychological training for the main martial agent of each stage: the medieval *bushi*; the Tokugawa samurai; the modern soldier. The paper finishes with some concluding remarks, differentiating three different stages with specific features on how the religious/spiritual dimension influenced Japanese martial arts during the Japanese civilising process.

2. Elias's process-sociology

Elias's process-sociology aims to explain social matters from a long-term perspective. Instead of using process reduction or static models, a process-model (Elias, 2009) tries to provide a framework of development to understand the topic. In fact, his most famous empirical study on 'civilising process' (Elias, [1939]2012) expressed such process approach. The main thesis of the author was that sociogenetic changes at a broad scale of state formation in European societies from the Middle Ages to Modernity advanced hand in hand with psychogenetic changes at a smaller scale on the psychic/emotional life of the personality structure (*habitus*) of individuals living in these societies. A progressive monopoly of violence and taxation by the state went hand in hand with greater self-steering of emotional controls by individuals. The lengthening of chains of interdependence at a societal level demanded on individuals to take more people into account, on more occasions, more often.

Nonetheless, the civilising processes always implies a more complex picture than a merely lineal forward advance. For Elias, any social process unfolds within a shifting balance

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[2] Following Sánchez-García (2019, p. 15), the text uses the terms 'warrior' or '*bushi'* for the post-Heian to pre-Tokugawa period and 'retainer' or 'samurai' for the Tokugawa period.

between civilising and decivilising trends. According to Cas Wouters (2007), there is also a balance between formalising and informalising trends. Thus, any social process can be characterized by predominant (not unique) compound trends (Sánchez-García, 2018): decivilising-informalising (a trend that Elias ([1939] 2012) identified with the fall of the Roman Empire and the feudalisation pattern in Europe); decivilising-formalising (a trend that Elias (2013) identified with the rise of the Nazis; civilising-formalising (a trend that Elias [1939](2012) identified in the European civilising process from late medieval times to modernity); and civilising-informalising (a trend that Cas Wouters (2007) identified as informalisation).

When the civilising pattern is predominant, a greater control of people over each other (sociogenesis) and a greater control of each individual over him/her-self (psychogenesis) is paralleled with a greater control over non-human events (technogenesis) which takes place through more reality-congruent knowledge that afforded useful application of technology. A more congruent knowledge of reality (being it non-human nature, our relationship with others or with ourselves) leads to a greater control over this reality. Nonetheless, the feedback cycle also works the other way around, as Elias (2013) showed in the rise of the Nazis in Germany before WWII: more fantasy-laden knowledge implies less control, which fosters more fear and fantasy solutions, and so on.

In fact, such double-bind processes address the shifting balance between involvement and detachment, which constitute the central piece of Elias's (2007) theory of knowledge. Nevertheless, Elias was not referring only to philosophers or scientists but to the way ordinary people conduct themselves in relation to the means of orientation available in the society. These means can be related to religious believes, political ideologies etc., and they present the same degree of social development as the whole society in which they are immersed.[3] In close relation to the means of orientation and involvement/detachment balance is the concept of survival units.[4] The survival unit is the social group to which conscience and feelings of individuals are attuned, constituting a referential anchorage for social bonding as a we-group and a reference for the means of orientation to build a we-image. Individuals in less differentiated societies had the clan or the tribe as a survival unit. As greater integration unfolded, states (and union of states) became established as survival units. In convoluted times, a high involvement towards the survival unit as an identity anchorage can lead towards conflict or even war against those perceived as aggressors. This is precisely what was happening in times of total war in which the medieval *bushi* lived or in times of the modern soldier of the early Showa period (1926-1945), even though the survival unit was different: the *daimyo*'s domain (*han*) in the first case and the whole Japanese nation in the second.

This paper continues our analysis of the Japanese civilising process in relation to the development of Japanese martial arts (Sánchez-García, 2019). More specifically, it deals with the understanding of the relationship between spirituality/religion and Japanese martial arts in different stages of the civilising process. The first part analyses the figure of the medieval *bushi* during a decivilising-informalising pattern, characteristic of total war occurring since Muromachi period until the unification of the country; the second part deals with the figure of the Tokugawa samurai during a civilising-formalising trend characteristic of a (greater) pacified society; the third part deals with the conscripted soldier of the modern Japanese Army up to the WWII, especially during the early Showa period, characterised by a decivilising-formalising trend in the making of a totalitarian, imperialistic Japanese state.

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[3] Oftentimes religious institutions are conceived as being opposed to armed action. Nonetheless, as Elias [1939] (2012) remarked in his analysis of the civilising process, religious institutions should not be treated as a separate domain. For instance, Adolphson (2007) provides a clear historical example on the relationship between Buddhism and armed actions in the Japanese case: temples and monks were as affected by social upheaval and political changes as the rest of society and as the gradual militarisation of society in the tenth century induced important changes within the monastic communities, so did the social challenges of the thirteenth. Far from being isolated institutions with little connection to the world outside, monasteries were part and parcel of the social developments of the Kamakura age.

[4] This concept can be defined as: "the largest group upon which an individual depends in order to secure the material resources, physical security, and means of orientation necessary for survival." (Loyal & Quilley ,2020, p. 231).

3. The medieval *bushi* in times of total war

In the transition from the Heian (794-1185) to the Kamakura period (1185-1333), the power balance the warrior group started to gain the upper hand over the court and other influential agents such as religious institutions. Such shift consolidated throughout the Muromachi (1336-1573) and Azuchi Momoyama (1574-1600) periods. Warrior power became evident in the figure of shugo daimyo (military governors), acting as aggressive local powers. Two consecutive cycles of violence, consisting in wide scale conflicts acting as elimination contests between survival units (warriors, court, temples, peasants) led to consecutive waves of unification of the country. A first one, known as Nanbokucho (Two Courts period, 1336-1392) and a subsequent, more pervasive, and intense second cycle of violence known as Sengoku (Warring States, 1467-1600) that resulted in the subsequent pacified Tokugawa rule. During such cycles, the *bushi* were dependent on the *daimyo* to a certain extent but they could shift allegiance or become *ronin* (masterless *bushi*) and fight as a mercenary. Thus, *bushi* maintained a pragmatic approach in the battlefield, as fame and power through martial prowess was a way to climb up the social ladder (see Fig 1). In this context, esoteric/religious means was just another element to add to their fighting proficiency.

Figure 1. Sociogenetic and psychogenetic features of the medieval (especially Sengoku) period.

Sociogenesis	Psychogenesis
• Constant clash of survival units. • Fleeting alliances. • Martial prowess for upwards social mobility.	• Exposure to constant threat and fear. • Extreme swings in warrior habitus.

According to historian Kuroda Toshio (1926-1993) Japanese religion during medieval times consisted of an exoteric-esoteric system, in which religious specialists studied and conveyed a variety of religious doctrines in different lineages with specific curriculum of secret initiations (Bodiford, 2005, p. 83). The esoteric knowledge of different religious sects was available since the Kamakura period and became highly developed as Muromachi period unfolded. From the Namboku period (1336–1392) through the end of the Muromachi period (1392–1573) various texts on *heiho* (a broad term implying military tactics and strategy) appeared, containing great influence from Chinese Tang style Taoist divination mixed with Buddhist, and Shugendo esoterica (Hall, 2014, p. 199). The *bushi* became more and more superstitious in a situation of total war, a typical double-bind pattern in which greater danger demanded a more fantasy laden approach. As Elias (2007) proposed, involvement/detachment balance is closely related to the safety/danger balance: "High danger breeds high involvement of the knowledge guiding action, and this breeds high danger." (Elias, 2007, p. 67). Precisely, that was the kind of dominant pattern occurring during this period, especially during Sengoku.

According to Mol (2008, p.120), during Muromachi period, there were about 89,000 different Gods of War to praise. From the election of the colour of the armour, to the bearing of charms (written on a paper, fabric or in specific parts of the armour and the weapons), or even the performance of ritual suicide and 'head inspection' of dead foes, esoteric symbolism plagued the *bushi* equipment and warfare behaviour (Mol, 2008). Sengoku *daimyo* became great developers of esoteric military methods of strategy, from divination rituals for the correct day of battle engagement, to the construction of castles and other constructions and the disposition of the battle camp. During this period, the great importance awarded to the *gunbaisha* or *gunshi* (*gunryaku* meaning 'military strategy'), a specialised strategist or tactician who was an expert in different divination traditions, attest to the central component of the esoteric dimension in the martial traditions of this era.

During the two consecutive cycles of violence and their aftermaths, composite (*sogo*) martial *ryu*[5] appeared. Examples from the first cycle included Nen *ryu* and its later development through Chujo *ryu*; examples from the second cycle included Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto *ryu*, Kashima Shinto *ryu*, Shinkage *ryu*, Itto *ryu*, Tendo *ryu*, Hozoin *ryu*.

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[5] The concept of *ryu* cannot be simply equated to the modern notion of school. It implies literally a flow that connects the martial tradition along a line of practitioners.

The composite martial *ryu* were transmitted mainly through kata (paired pre-arranged patterns) but these kata were not just a mere technical repository of the school. They contained embodied, "encrypted" information about the *ryu* (Friday, 1999), condensing also an esoteric/spiritual/psychological dimension of combat. In fact, one of the *kanji* used for *kata* (形) includes 'mental state' and 'spirit' in its meaning (Borondo, 2021, p. 2).

According to Hall (2014, p. 202), the systematization of such martial *ryu* during the Sengoku period aimed at training larger numbers of combatants in a shorter length of time, something very suitable for the massive campaigns of the era that regularly mobilized tens of thousands of men.[6] On the contrary, Karl Friday (2005) considers martial *ryu* of this period not as methods of training masses for war but as ways of self-development and cultivation for the few *bushi* immersed in those martial traditions. In any case, esoteric means were almost only available for those immersed in the martial *ryu*. Even if some of this martial knowledge could be systematized and used to train large groups of non-professional troops, it is unlikely that they could provide more than a few basic techniques, not the whole curriculum, and not probably the esoteric content, which was conveyed as a part of the curriculum of the *ryu* at advanced stages (Hall, 2014, p. 276). Thus, such knowledge and practices would remain in the hands of professional *bushi* that maintained a pragmatic approach to combat and used any means (including esoterica) necessary. This included also those *bushi* on the path for self-cultivation, seasoned warriors with a different approach from the subsequent samurai of (mid and late) Tokugawa who would follow self-perfection but without having any real experience from combat.

3.1. *Magic and psycho-physical means: an involved detachment in the medieval bushi*

As Friday (2004, p. 13) remarks, the medieval *bushi* "were no more estranged from the superhuman forces around them than were other Japanese of their age." Esoteric practices were part of the martial *ryu* curriculum, involving an interweave of elements from ancient shamanist rituals, Koshinto (ancient Shinto), Mikkyo (esoteric Buddhism), Shugendo (mountain worship), Inyo (the ying-yang philosophy), Gogyo (the philosophy of the five elements) and Dokyo (Taoism).[7] The curriculum included specific spells, incantations for personal protection in combat, avoiding bad luck or hex, but also content about more general aspects of martial strategy (*gunryaku*, also known as *heiho*, *hyoho* or *gunpo*) such as divination of best days for attacking the enemy troops (see Mol 2008 for a general overview; see Otake (2016) for the study of such matters in Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto *ryu*).

The cult of the Buddhist deity Marishiten held special interest for those *bushi* originating martial *ryu* (Knutsen, 2011; Hall, 2014).[8] Marishiten's original supernatural powers implied the control and suppression of opponents in combat. Rituals including diverse hand seals and incantation spells were performed to gain protection and invisibility. Marishiten's key role as deity of the *bushi* of the era was primarily due to the particular synergy of combative capabilities she could provide, such as invisibility, clarity and stability of mind, the ability to confuse enemies, intuition, imperturbability, selflessness, and compassion (Hall 2014, p. 244).[9]

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[6] Hall (2014, p. 276) takes a more conservative statement later on when he declares: "However, one should not assume that these schools alone were responsible for training the thousands of combatants filling the ranks of the great armies of the Warring States period (Sengoku Jidai). The majority of those combatants were not initiated into the inner "secrets" of the classical schools, although some of their commanders may have been."

[7] Some scrolls of martial traditions only contained spells. For instance, in the Morito line of Asayama Ichiden *ryu*, students receiving the license scroll, received at the same time another called Betsuden no Maki ('Separate transmission scroll') containing twenty-eight Shingon Mykkyo spells (Mol, 2008, p. 19).

[8] The presence of Marishiten and *tengu* (creatures acting as her messengers) in many documents of *koryu* (ancient *ryu*) indicates that her influence was very strong since the Muromachi period. Surviving documents of different *ryu* show images of Marishiten or *tengu*, the drawings of the *tengu* almost always placing the creature in the 'senior' or 'teaching' role (Knutsen, 2011, p. 14).

[9] According to Hall (2014, p. 169), the Marishiten tradition of Shugendo became an intermediary phase between the orthodox Buddhist tradition and the warrior rituals which appear in the late Muromachi age (1338–1573).

Esoteric Buddhist rites connected to magic were considered a kind of *shugyo* (cultivation practice). Repetitive recitation of sutras or worship were among the esoteric rites to gain direct access to the revelation of the highest 'secrets' of the art. As these secrets of the art were not originally cognitively constructed but intuited during the stress of battle or the arduous training of *shugyo*, they were viewed as spiritual revelations.

This kind of practices were very different from the kind of contemplation as proposed in Zen (Mol, 2008), which is commonsensically associated to the superior combat mentality of the samurai nowadays. Zen did not play a central role in the mental preparation for combatants at that time. For instance, the curriculum of one of the oldest existent *koryu*, Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto *ryu*, includes references to esoteric Buddhism, Confucianism, esoteric Taoism (i.e., Onmyodo) shrine worship (Shinto) but no explicit reference to Zen (Otake, 2016). According to Bodiford (2005, p. 91), this is not completely accurate. The typical Zen expression 'sword blades upward' can be found in the texts of that *ryu* from the 15th or early 16th century in which this expression appears as one crucial point for Shinto-*ryu* swordsmanship. Nonetheless, Bodiford admonishes this is not to say that a normative Zen approach to swordsmanship existed nor that Zen practices such as meditation were a key component of the psychological training of warriors. [10] It simply implies that warriors exposed to a certain extent of Zen teachings at that time were able to adopt and adapt some of these principles (such as 'sword blades up') to their own martial training.

Coming back to these esoteric rites, they provided a kind of 'spiritual armory' (Mol, 2008) or 'spiritual fortification' (Keegan, 2004, p.326) to the combatants and were connected to an extreme *habitus* of a *bushi* facing actual combat, characterized by a swing between an extreme control over pain and emotions and an extreme release of violence and brutality. These esoteric practices had a specific, pragmatic function to keep some control over non-controllable severe life and death situations.

At a group level, that was extremely useful for warlords commanding their troops. *Shutsujin* ('departure for war') rituals were used as a kind of 'mind control or psychological tools' (Mol, 2008, p. 119) to convince their troops of good omens and also that the cause of battle was just so they had nothing to fear. At an individual level, it was also extremely useful when engaging the battlefield, when *bushi* performed some shortened versions of rituals for self-protection. For instance, the *kuji in* (the nine characters) ritual, originated from Taoism but later connected to the Buddhist war deity Marishiten, was originally performed as hand postures seals. However, a shortened version called *kuji kiri* (nine characters cutting) only demanded the cuts of imaginary lines in the air with the hands. Thus, the warrior could set the right mental frame for combat almost instantaneously, without much formality (Mol, 2008, p.33).[11] The *bushi* also needed magical protection against the return of the souls of those assassinated in combat. For instance, Friday (1997, p. 87-88) presents a certain kind of action included in the curriculum of Kashima Shinryu called *todome*, which implied the stabbing of the victim on the left side in certain way to avoid the soul of the violently killed to remain trapped in this world or return to seek vengeance.

Combined with such divine protection, the *bushi* needed to keep calm under the stress of combat. As Hall (2014, p. 249) indicates: "The epitome of warriorship in many cultures including Japan, however, was to remain cool, calm, collected, and deadly." The martial *ryu* provided also pragmatic means for remaining calm.[12] According to Hall (2014, p. 251) three psycho-physical functions of combat (Volition, Steadfast/Imperturbable Mind and Cognition/Intuition) were cultivated through the kata of the martial *ryu* to work in a harmonious altered combative flow state;

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[10] Nonetheless, some scholars (e.g., Harada, 2011; Pita, 2014; Kammer, 2016) argue that Zen was fundamental for the *bushi*'s fighting skills of the Kamakura, Muromachi and Sengoku periods. It helped them in coping with the possibility of death in battle through the idea of abnegation/self-negation. These authors also considered that Zen positively provided a distinct ethical-epistemological support for the *bushi*'s intellectual development as professional warrior.

[11] Mol (2008, p. 90) also discusses the feasibility of *fudokanashibiri* (a *mikkyo* ritual for immobilising an opponent) in combat, using a shortened version.

[12] Friday (1997, p. 87) explains how Kashima Shinryu's curriculum contains a section called *gimmi* aimed at checking one's composure and regain it (if necessary) almost instantaneously.

a state of both peak level performance and physical and psychological non-arousal (Hall, 2014, p. 267). In Elias's (2007) terms, an involved detachment, a blend of magical faith and the development of pedagogical technologies (*kata*) was crucial for the *bushi*'s cool composure in combat. In the acquisition of such capacities through the constant repetition of the *kata*, the belief that the combative techniques themselves had been divinely inspired by Marishiten or other deity also played a key role. Besides, *bushi*'s faith on being protected through rituals performed under the auspices of Marishiten, gave them an extra edge of confidence in the face of battle (Hall, 2014, p. 267-8). The cult of Marishiten also helped *bushi* to deal with the trauma of battle, during the action and in the aftermath, the latter recently known as post-traumatic stress disorder. The Goddess embodied selflessness and compassion, providing a way —encoded into ritual patterns— by which the combatant could return to a civilian, non-combative state of mind (Hall, 2014, p.275).

4. The samurai during the *pax* Tokugawa

In 1600, Tokugawa forces won the definitive battle of Sekigahara for the unification of the country and Ieyasu became proclaimed as *shogun* in 1603, destroying the remaining opposition in the Osaka campaigns of 1615. The central military court (the *bakufu*) of the *shogun* in Edo connected a web of smaller military courts located in different domains (*han*) ruled by the different *daimyo*. The functioning of the whole *baku-han* system strictly segregated the population in a four-estate system (samurai-farmer-craftsman-merchant), maintaining the social privilege of a huge number of samurai, acting mainly as police forces to maintain order. With no more battles to fight, samurai underwent a progressive transformation adapted to a more pacified reality, acting oftentimes as bureaucrats (especially in the urban settings such as Edo, Kyoto or Osaka) disconnected from the land of their fiefs and completely dependent on the daimyo for their living. Martial prowess, as a way to climb the social ladder, was not possible anymore. Therefore, *bunbu ryodo* philosophy, the double path of brush (literary) and sword (martial) for self-cultivation, became an ideal model for the samurai (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Sociogenetic and psychogenetic features of the Tokugawa period.

Sociogenesis	Psychogenesis
• Social segregation in four estates. • Dual monopoly of violence (*Bakuhan*). • Closed status rank for samurai. • Samurai living in *courts*.	• Restricted identification between estates. • Intra-estate status anxiety. • Retainer/bureaucratic *habitus*.

Nonetheless, such transition unfolded progressively. During early Tokugawa (1603-1645), seasoned warriors were still encouraged to develop their ways of self-perfection through martial arts and still had the chance to experience upwards social mobility under the patronage of certain *daimyo* or even the *shogun* due to martial skill. During mid (1645-1789) and late Tokugawa (1789-1868) periods, the figure of the samurai shifted from a warrior type to a retainer/bureaucrat type. A neo-Confucian approach became the official doctrine of the shogunate and samurai's code stressed a moralized sense of honour in which military efficiency was undermined. Self-control to display proper moral example was the key sign of samurai status at a time when many samurai were becoming more dependent on merchants, going into debt to maintain a 'status consumption' (Elias, 2005) according to their estate.

Connected to these general trends, several specific changes took place within the martial traditions. Such changes were symptomatic of the progressive distancing away from the reality of combat as the era Tokugawa unfolded. The list of such changes/symptoms included: the end of composite styles due to the specialisation in martial *ryu*, featuring a predominance of the sword; spread of restraining weapons (full of hooks and stoppers) and ropes attached to police functions; spread of *kata* (pre-arranged forms) as the only method for training, sometimes degenerating into a kind of shallow practice denounced and mocked as *kaho kenpo* ('flowery swordplay'); a commercialization of martial arts expressed in the professionalization of instruction conducted in indoor facilities for training (*dojo*), the spread of martial arts to commoners, and the organization of sports-like competitions.

Within this social context, religious/spiritual training for samurai started to be connected to Zen in a much more pronounced manner than before, even though its application for combat efficiency would not be a central feature.

4.1. Zen as a disciplining practice and ideal during Tokugawa

According to Hall (2014, p. 252), the emphasis on Steadfast-/Imperturbable-Mind during Tokugawa period, with secondary emphasis on Cognition/ Intuition and an almost complete neglect of Volition in the face of real danger reflected the new adherence of martial practice to Zen and a progressive abandonment of the cult of Marishiten at a time when fighting proficiency was not needed any more in a highly pacified society. A clear example of this trend was the development of the Edo line of the Yagyu Shinkage-*ryu* (Hall, 2014, p. 281), whose head was Yagyu Munemori, a key figure in the association of Zen and swordsmanship during the period. This shift reflected the social changes of the peaceful Tokugawa period in which a blend of Zen and neo-Confucianism was infused as part of the samurai ethos as a way to perfect one's spirit within an ordered society.

This is very different from the claim of modern advocates of *ken zen itchi* ('Zen and the sword are one') who present a strong connection between Zen practices and fighting proficiency. Even though they use a loose connection of different oeuvres and authors of the Tokugawa period to support their claims, none of these texts really addresses fighting skills, or at least they addressed them in a restricted manner. Take for instance, Zen priest Takuan's (1573–1645) *The Mysterious Record of Immovable Wisdom* (17th century), which is considered the epitome of the connection between Zen Buddhism and swordsmanship, influencing Yagyu Munemori's text *The Life-giving Sword* (17th century). Takuan's text only dealt with the Steadfast-/Imperturbable-Mind (not volition or intuition) and presented more of a general Buddhist approach to matters concerning Confucianism, such as loyalty to the lord (Bodiford, 2005, p. 77). The same occurs in Zen Rinzai priest Hakuin Ekaku's (1686-1768), *Yasen Kanna* ('Evening chat on a boat'). The text explained breathing techniques that can be used by the samurai. Nonetheless, those were originally Taoist breathing techniques (Bodiford, 2005, p.7 7). Other author of the *ken zen* canon, Suzuki Shosan (1579-1655), a samurai who experienced various battles before becoming a Zen monk, did not only wrote on Zen but included elements of Taoism, Confucianism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Shinto (Benesch, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, when Suzuki discussed the use of *samadhi* (concentration of mind) acquired through Zen for the specific use of combat, he criticized the use of *zazen* (seated meditation) in the *dojo*, a practice that had become popular among samurai of the era (Hall, 2014, p. 280). According to Suzuki:

> It's best to practice zazen from the start amid hustle and bustle. A warrior, in particular, absolutely must practice zazen that works amidst war cries. Gunfire crackles, spears clash down the line, a roar goes up and the fray is on: and that's where, firmly disposed, he puts meditation into action. At a time like that, what use could he have for a zazen that prefers quiet? However fond of Buddhism a warrior may be, he'd better throw it out if it doesn't work amid war cries. (Quoted in Victoria [1997]2006: 219)

Apart from these canonical texts written by Zen monks, many of the transmission scrolls of swordsmanship *ryu* of the era contained Zen terminology. Nonetheless, the swordsmanship historian, Tominaga Kengo (1883-1960) explained it arguing that the authors, mostly illiterate warriors, relied on Zen monks to write down their message (Bodiford, 2005, p. 73). Martial arts *ryu* of the era included not only Zen but a mix of esoteric forms of Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, Taoism, and indigenous folk beliefs (Benett, 2015, p. 46). During Tokugawa period, both esoteric origins and Zen influences were connected to the martial arts in the collective imaginary. For instance, in 1715, Izawa Banryu stated in *Bushikun* (warrior lessons):

> There are vulgar types who exaggerate and boast of their swordsmanship, saying that the founder of their style prayed at such-and-such shrine and received divine initiation, or that he attained a divine dream, or he mastered his art through Zen, or that he was taught by mountains demons (tengu). All of these statements are big lies. (Quoted in Bodiford, 2005, p. 72)

This statement by Izawa belongs to the mid Tokugawa period (1645-1789) in which the professionalization of martial arts instructors led to different 'marketing strategies' such as giving more credit to the martial *ryu* by adding claims of legitimacy.

Overall, Zen during the Tokugawa period acted more as a detached disciplining ideal (retainer-bureaucrat) and practice (*zazen* to gain the Steadfast-/Imperturbable-Mind) for the samurai than an actual training for martial proficiency. A text that would be later considered key for *bushido*, *Hagakure* (1716), reduced samurais' whole existence to the maintenance of loyalty to the lord and a 'cult' of death, exhaling a longing cry of rejection towards the samurai situation in the Tokugawa era (Pita, 2014, pp. 184-185 and 288-289). In the text, a Zen priest states that "Buddhism being for old men rather than samurai" (Benesch 2014, p. 8), a rejection against the common association of *Ken Zen* of an era in which samurai combative skills had declined tremendously.

5. The modern soldier of the Japanese Army

The establishment of the Meiji government in 1868 opened the country to modern Western influences. Nonetheless, nationalistic feelings/attitudes were also playing an important role and during the 1880s, the initial positive view on things Western started to be more controversial. In 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education placed the message of the 'Imperial way' as a core assumption. The Meiji state was gaining a stronger monopoly on violence, taxation and means of orientation. Related to the means of orientation, the Meiji period witnessed a blend of nativist Japanese belief system (*shinto*), 'samurai ethics' (*bushido*) and a renewed state-nationalist Buddhism (Victoria, [1997]2006, pp. 12-13). This nativist 'reinvention' of a specific Japanese religious/moral code was a way to get some distance and autonomy not only from the Western powers but also from China to emerge as the Asian superpower.

The Zen-samurai relationship was the result of conscious efforts on the part of Zen promoters to gain patriotic legitimacy by engaging closely with the burgeoning *bushido* discourse (Benesch, 2016, p. 14). Zen was consistently identified with the 'Japanese race' and *bushido* from then on. Such message would spread throughout Japan thanks to authors such as Zen master Saku Shoen, who conceived an essentialist connection of Zen and *bushido* since the Kamakura period; Fueoka Seisen, who presented such connection in his 1927 introductory text called *A Zen Primer*; Iida Toin, who discussed the topic of 'warrior zen' in his 1934 book; or D.T. Suzuki, who developed an extensive argument on the relationship between Zen and *bushido* in his 1938 English published book *Zen Buddhism and its influence on Japanese Culture*, that would be later be revised and republished in 1959 with the title *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Suzuki was a key figure for the reception of Zen-samurai culture in the West. Nonetheless, the message had spread to the western world already before, through the influential work of Inazo Nitobe *Bushido. The Soul of Japan*, published originally in English in 1900.

It was during the Meiji period that the first truly modern martial artists emerged, commoners playing a decisive role in the blend of martial traditions and Japanese we-identity. Martial arts went from being an exclusive part of the samurai identity to become constitutive of the nation's identity, even spreading abroad. During this period as well, the link between swordsmanship and Zen was boosted by the towering figure of Yamaoka Tesshu (1836-1888), who was not only an acknowledged *kenjutsu* expert (he founded the Itto Shoden Muto *ryu*) but he also played a decisive role in the transition from the Tokugawa shogunate to the Meiji government.

The creation of the Dai Nippon Butokukai ('Greater Martial Virtue Association') in 1895, helped to install the militaristic, nationalistic notion of *bushido* (warrior's moral code) of the era through martial arts. The Dai Nippon Butokukai soon congregated within a single organization much of the classical martial traditions and further systematised their organization, methods, and rankings. Kano Jigoro, father of Kodokan Judo and a key agent in the development of modern martial arts was instrumental in devising the Dai Nippon Butokukai *kata* for *jujutsu* (1906), intervening also in the reformulation of the Dai Nippon Butokukai *kenjutsu kata* (1912).

During the so-called Taisho democracy (1912-1926), Japanese society experienced more openness, especially in urban areas. Nonetheless, it also brought integration conflicts, leading to the use of institutional violence by political parties and the progressing rise of nationalistic far-right. In the field of martial arts, a sports-like orientation was counterbalanced by the conception of martial arts as education to follow a chauvinistic imperial way. Thus, on the one hand we find the competitive aspects of martial arts such as kendo and judo and the advent of Sumo as the 'national sport', strongly connected to the identity of Japanese people. On the other hand, the Dai Nippon Butokukai clearly

opposed to such idea. In 1919, this organization instigated changes in the official denomination from *bujutsu* to *budo*, emphasizing character formation towards patriotism. By the 1920s, many people were convinced of the intricate and ancient relationship between Zen, samurai, *bushido*, and the martial arts, and this ideological mix became a core element of nationalist thought (Benesch, 2016, p. 15).

During the early Showa period (1926-45), the Japanese society underwent a progressive militarisation. It witnessed the rise of ultra-nationalistic violent organizations (*boryokudan*) composed of party politicians, military men, leaders of big business, and *yakuza*. They were a constituent part of what Siniawer (2008, p. 109) dubbed as 'Japanese fascism', emerging as a reaction against the advance of workers' movement. *Boryokudan* promoted *bushido* as a way to avoid "the corruption of national morals and beautiful customs" and to "promote harmony between labour and capital" (Siniawer, 2008, p. 17). Violence was not merely justified but glorified as a manly and patriotic way to purify the nation of foreign contagion.

The strong ties between political parties and ultra-nationalistic organisations contributed to the decline of the political system in the 1930s. Violence among parliamentarians became common in this decade.[13] The violent and unstable social order of the 1930s created a sense of distrust toward the democratic political system and the need for a strong leadership, paving the road to militarism. By 1938, the National General Mobilisation Law gave the government almost total control of economic and social life in support of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). In 1940, political parties were dissolved and replaced by the Imperial Rule Assistance Association. As Benesch (2016, p. 198) comments, the totalitarian concentration of power at the state was accompanied by "massive education campaigns and propaganda activities to promote the New Order." The monopoly over the means of orientation towards the militarisation of society was firmly established by the Japanese state (see Figure 3). One crucial vehicle to convey such message was *bushido*, used by the state to boost nationalistic-imperialist values, blending samurai ethics-Japanese nation-emperor to create a new soldier-citizen.

In summary, the Japanese state was distorting – by naturalising it – the connection of present imperial Japanese militarised society to the medieval military traditions of the samurai (Friday, 1994). This symbolic construction served to justify war efforts, becoming a powerful means of orientation full of emotional content: an idealised we-image imbued with the better and more powerful (military) version of the Japanese people. The embodiment of such military ideal blending Zen with imperial *bushido* was Lietunenant Colonel Sugimoto Goro, a war hero who died in 1937 during the second Sino-Japanese War. His posthumously published text *Taigi* ('Great Duty'), focused on absolute reverence and loyalty to the emperor and was taken as the ideal yardstick for the warrior Zen of the era.

Figure 3. Sociogenetic and psychogenetic features of the early Shōwa period.

Sociogenesis	Psychogenesis
• Dictatorial State. • Militarisation of society. • Polarization supporters-enemies.	• Soldier/citizen *habitus*. • Fantasy laden approach (Imperial Bushido). • 'Suicidal *habitus*'

The role of martial arts would be instrumental in the spread of a nationalist militarized message: *budo* (martial arts) was connected to *shinto* (functioning as a 'state religion') and embodied the imperial *bushido* message. Martial virtue-nation-emperor became the core of the national Japanese citizen/soldier. The term *kobudo* (classical or ancient *budo*) was coined at that time to get

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[12] In 1930, an attack on Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi was perpetrated by a member of an Ultra-nationalistic society; in 1931, there were planned rightist and military coups in March and October; in 1932, the Blood Oath Corps Incidents resulted in two murders and an attempted coup and assassinations were carried out by young naval officers; in 1936, an attempted coup was led by junior army officers who murdered the Finance Minister, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, and the Inspector-General of Military Education. The *coup d'état* finally failed, and the leaders of the movement were executed.

some distance and criticize *gendai budo* (modern *budo*), lacking the samurai pedigree of the classical disciplines.

Martial arts were part of a planned 'decivilising offensive' (Sánchez-García, 2022) to 'barbarise' the Japanese population. They were considered a crucial means to convey a 'militarised *habitus*' to the Japanese citizens/soldiers in their preparation for the incoming war. As one contributor of the wartime periodical *Nippon Budo* commented:

> The objectives of the practice of kendo are not only [to master] the techniques, but to become aware of the national essence (kokutai) and conscious of the national spirit, showing total loyalty to the emperor, and developing a preparedness to die for one's country. (Quoted in Bennett, 2015, p. 124; brackets original)

This military understanding of martial arts was transmitted mainly through different (1) governmental (e.g., school system) and (2) civic organizations (e.g., Dai Nippon Butokukai, *koryu*, and Kano's organisations); and (3) ultra-nationalistic societies.

(1) Since 1925, military officers were attached to school to oversee physical education (Horne, 2000, p. 79), and paramilitary drills gained preference over sports and gymnastics. In 1931, *budo* became compulsory with the revisions of Middle School Order and Normal School Order. Male students were required to train in judo or kendo and females in *kyudo* or *naginata*.

(2) The Dai Nippon Butokukai, counting with three million members during the 1940s (Gainty, 2013, p. 3) became crucial to spread the imperial credo and to incorporate the traditional *bushido* into a modernised military spirit. The Japanese state restructured it as an extra-governmental organisation in 1942. It controlled the All Student Soldier Physical Education Promotion Association, Kodokan, Nippon Kobudo Association, and the All Japan Kendo Federation and structured sections of *jukendo* (bayonet), *shagekido* (riflemanship), kendo, *naginata*, judo, aikido, and other *kobudo* disciplines as part of the military training.

(3) The sponsoring of martial artist by ultra-nationalistic societies, such as Toyama Mitsuru's (1855–1944) 'Dark Ocean Society' or the 'Amur River Society', became more conspicuously public in early Showa.

With the beginning of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the militaristic approach accelerated. In 1938, under the National Mobilisation Law, *budo* was reoriented towards a more combative application. The aim was not individual character building and self-perfection but individual self-sacrifice for the sake of the emperor and the nation. As the war advanced, the militaristic approach thrived. For instance, a guideline for *budo* lessons in middle schools from 1943 stated: 'We must inculcate a spirit of self-sacrifice and train in a fighting mentality.' (Hurst III, 1998, p. 165). Kendo was compulsory for boys in year five and above, and girls could train *naginata*.

5.1. Zen as involved detachment for modern soldier

Elias (2007) discussed the controversy of modern civilising patterns in which the monopoly of violence by the nation-states prohibited intra-state violence but glorified and boosted inter-state violence if needed. In order to foster external aggression, civilians must be ideologically convinced that the war is just, and that the threatening enemy should be destroyed. As Elias (2007, pp. 145-146) perfectly expressed:

> …the majority of people brought up in internally fairly well pacified state-societies, and thus with perhaps a strong feeling of repugnance against the use of physical violence in human relations, often find it extremely difficult to understand that and why, in inter-state relations, the use of physical violence is still a normal means of tackling rivalries and of settling conflicts. They themselves may be in conflict if they are called upon to do to the members of other human groups what they have learned to hate doing within their own group- to use violence and to kill. [14]

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[14] In a similar vein, S. L. A. Marshall, recounted in his 1947 book *Men Against Fire*, the natural reluctance of US soldiers during WWII to kill enemies: "The Army cannot unmake [Western man] (…) It must reckon with the

This same kind of problem was confronted by the imperialistic totalitarian Japanese state of the early Showa. The strategy to overcome such 'civilising brakes' was to identify samurai-soldiers-citizens with a higher cause: the figure of the emperor, not as a flesh-and-blood human being, but as the divine father of the whole nation.[15]

Despite the necessity for modernisation of Japanese warfare to cope with Western nations, a vast amount of money was invested in the spiritual training of the army in what constituted a fantasy-laden approach to the realities of modern warfare. For instance, the Kendo Deliberation Council petition of 1938 stated that even though modern warfare was fought with science and technology, final victory was attained only by soldiers 'facing the enemy front on and stabbing and cutting them.' (Bennett, 2015, p. 141). The 1928 revised text of *Tosiu Koryo* ('The essential Points of Supreme Command') remarked the supremacy of spirit to material means in combat, deleting words such as 'surrender', 'retreat', and 'defense.' At that time, some books and pamphlets to develop the military spirit appeared. For instance, *Seishin Kyokyu no Sanko* ('Guide to Spiritual Training') was published in 1928 and the two-volume *Bujin no Tokuso* ('The Moral Character of Military Men') in 1930. The message was not only intended for adults. For instance, in 1934, Nose Hiroaki's 'Patriotic Readings for Youth: On War' intended to explain to children the importance of the military, bringing together historical, religious, and tactical ideology. The indoctrination on militaristic, warrior ethics (*bushido*) on the population reached new heights since 1940, with the version of *Hagakure Bushido* focused on death, loyalty, and self-sacrifice for the nation and the emperor.[16] All this was part of a planned 'decivilising offensive' aiming at the transformation of the ordinary Japanese citizen into the Japanese soldier of the imperial Army.

Taking into account the strong tie between Zen and martial arts that had started to develop in the previous Tokugawa period, what kind of role played Zen in the escalation towards war in modern Japan? Brian D. Victoria ([1997]2006, 2002, 2019) provides an extensive historical analysis of the relationship between Zen and the escalation of right-wing violence since the Meiji period up to the WWII. For the author, Zen played a crucial role in the nationalistic/imperialistic far-right Japanese movement, justifying wars, external aggressions/invasions and internal revolutions and supporting the war efforts, sometimes even in the field. For instance, Shaku Soen (1860-1919), D. T. Suzuki's Zen master, acted as a Buddhist chaplain in the battlefield for Japanese soldiers during the Ruso-Japanese war (1904-1905). This practice extended later and during the 1930s, Buddhist chaplains were assigned to every military regiment (Victoria, [1997]2006, p. 29).

More specifically, Zen provided both a means of orientation as an ideological justification of 'just and holy war' and a disciplining means (e.g., through *zazen* meditation) to prepare citizens/soldiers to quench doubts and fears of killing or/and be killed defending the nation. For instance, in June 1942, the Soto Zen sect established 'The Wartime Center for the Development of and Instructor Corps to Train the Imperial Subjects.' The main aim of the training was 'the increase of fighting power' and the practice of *zazen* meditation was key. Intensive meditation retreats for officers were conducted by Zen masters in the unit's martial arts training halls. *Zazen* was not only

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fact that he comes from a civilisation in which aggression, connected with the taking of life, is prohibited and unacceptable. The teachings and ideals of that civilisation are against killing, against taking advantage. The fear of aggression has been expressed to him so strongly and absorbed by him so deeply and pervadingly - practically with his mother's milk- that is part of the normal man's emotional make-up. This is his greatest handicap when he enters combat." (Quoted in Keegan, 2004, p. 73)

[15] Again, Elias (2007, pp. 172-173) is illustrious in this case: "In order to mobilise populations such as these mentally for fighting a war, fairly sophisticated secular beliefs are required which can catch their imagination, hold their devotion – in short, which can command their allegiance as firmly as supernatural beliefs did in former days (…) It is not enough, in order to rouse the population of advanced contemporary nation states and to induce them to break through the revulsion against killing humans, to decry specific persons in the opposite camps. That can be done only with the help of very strong beliefs which objectify the extended self-love for their country in the form of impersonal causes."

[16] According to Elias: "The encystment of nation-centred social beliefs and ideals in that form has a clear social function; in a tense danger situation, it ensures the complete emotional identification of people with their own side. In a survival struggle such as this, the members on each side must be prepared to lay down their own lives if the fighting starts in earnest." (Elias, 2007, p. 161)

promoted among soldiers but also other collectives such as workers (renamed as 'industrial warriors') in war-industry factories (Victoria, [1997]2006, p.143-44). Yamazaki Ekiju (1882-1961), head of the Rinzai Zen sect towards the end of the war (1945-46), expressed a justification for self-sacrifice as follows:

> For Japanese there is no such thing as sacrifice. Sacrifice means to totally annihilate one's body on behalf of the imperial state. The Japanese people, however, have been one with the emperor from the beginning. In this place of absoluteness there is no sacrifice. In Japan, the relationship between His Majesty and the people is not relative but absolute. (Quoted in Victoria, [1997]2006, p. 122)

Self-sacrifice was considered of the utmost praise. The example of the laureated Ruso-Japanese Zen-trained hero, General Nogi Maresuke (1849–1912), who performed a ritual suicide joined by his wife Shizuko after Emperor Meiji passed away in 1912, established the template for the new ideal code of behaviour. Such sacrificial behaviour was discussed explicitly in Zen terms, especially during the 1930s. For instance, the Buddhist Magazine *Daihorin* presented a 1937 issue about the spiritual mindset of Japanese people when facing war. The text asserted:

> I believe that if one is called upon to die, one should not be the least bit agitated. On the contrary, one should be in a realm where something called "oneself" does not intrude even slightly. Such a real is no different from that derived from the practice of Zen. (Quoted in Victoria, [1997]2006, p. 103)

The use of Zen for revolutionary right-wing programs was also common among the civil society. Victoria (2019) presents the case of Inoue Nissho, a Zen Buddhist, a soldier of fortune, a spy for the Japanese cause in China, and a leader of a terrorist band with important connections (e.g., ultra-nationalist leader Toyama Mitsuru) that aimed at destroying the corrupted Japanese system during the 1930s (e.g., The Blood Oath Corps incident and the May 15 incident in 1932). In order to prepare his followers for the social revolution, Inoue organised a kind of unauthorised Zen group with a proper temple, training through *zazen*, *koans*, reciting mantra and fasting. As Inoue himself stated during the trials for the assassination plots: "From the beginning, I lived in Zen; therefore, I felt I was disciplining myself for the sake of the reform movement." (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p. 114). Inoue talked about using Zen for disciplining the will to be ready to achieve the required reforms by any means necessary, including killing others or be ready to kill oneself in the process. As one of Inoue followers, Onuma Sho, declared in the trial: 'Our goal was not to harm others but to destroy ourselves (…) We intended to smash ourselves, thereby allowing others to cross over on top of our bodies.' (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p. 120). That is to say, Zen was mainly intended to achieve a complete adherence, loyalty, and faith to an ideological programme. As another of Inoue followers, Yotsumoto Yoshitaka, stated in the trial: "Therefore, the zazen I practiced was revolutionary zazen. The books I read were read for the revolution. I was truly a revolutionary unsui [novice Zen monk]." (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p. 119). The readiness to kill with no doubt or remorse could be achieved through *zazen*. As Onuma explained:

> After starting my practice of zazen, I entered a state of samadhi the likes of which I had never experienced before. I felt my spirit become unified, really unified, and when I opened my eyes from their half-closed meditative position, I noticed the smoke from the incense curling up and touching the ceiling. At this point it suddenly came to me- I would be able to carry out [the assassination] that night. (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p. 120).

An example from the same age, linking directly martial arts training, Zen and ultra-right ideology was epitomised by Omori Shogen (1904-1994), a kendo expert and a very influential figure in the connection between swordsmanship and Zen. A good acquaintance of ultra-nationalist Toyama Mitsuru, Omori took part in and promoted emperor-centric organizations such as the *kinki-kai* and plotted in terrorists plans during the early Showa period to expel corrupted elite (e.g., Shinpeitai incident). Moreover, he founded the Jikishin *dojo* as a hub for training right-wing activists, some of whom would be involved in the failed insurrection of February 1936. For Omori's plan, Zen Buddhism was crucial, both as a means of orientation (ultra-nationalist ideology) and as a means for disciplining the body/spirit through arduous training. The dojo published a monthly magazine called *Kakushin* ('Essence') and the first issue of 1934 contained a main article called 'Destroy the False and Establish

the True-Risk your life in spreading the Dharma- The great essence of the Showa Restoration.' This article conceived the Showa Restoration as a 'holy war' and exhorted the Japanese people (military and civilians) to destroy internal and external enemies by integrating material and non-material combat elements. The message contained a clear Buddhist reference when stated: "Given this, how is it possible that the epoch-making, great undertaking [of the Showa Restoration] can be accomplished without the valiant, dedicated spread of the Dharma at the risk of your life?" (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p. 267) Training in the dojo would provide the required spiritual forging of the Japanese people. There, one could practice Zen, judo, kendo and *shodo* (calligraphy), all means to achieve the true 'way of the warrior' to support the Showa restoration. Victoria (2019, p. 266) provides a glimpse of the austere training regimen of the *dojo*, blending Zen, imperial *bushido* and martial arts:

> An ordinary day at the dojo began with wake-up at 6 a.m., followed by cleaning and the approximately forty-five minutes of zazen (…) This in turn was followed by a morning worship service consisting of the recitation of Shinto prayers before the hall's main altar, on which was enshrined a large tablet of the Sun goddess, mythical progenitor of the emperor. To the left of the main altar were three rows of photographs of Japan's greatest military heroes and right-wing civilian leaders. To the right was an alcove in which, together with a flower arrangement and traditional Japanese swords, was hung a large scroll reading, "Enemy Contr[ies] Surrender!" (Tekikoku Kofuku).

> From 4 to 6 p.m. every afternoon, there was martial arts practice. Judo was taught on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, while kendo was on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday (…) In addition, from the fifteenth of every month there was a five-day period of intense Zen meditation (i.e., sesshin), commencing at 4 a.m. and lasting until 10 p.m. each day.

In Omori's words, the purpose of the *sesshin* was "the realization of our great pledge [to achieve the Showa Restoration] by acquiring and indestructible and adamantine body of indomitable resolve through introspection and Zen practice." (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p. 266). Such indomitable resolve referred to the intended transformation of civilian *habitus*, quenching doubts and fears of killing others or sacrificing oneself for a greater cause. So to say, Zen was part of the 'decivilising offensive' to overcome citizen's resistance to use violence, something ingrained in the general population from a long term civilising pattern.

This use of Zen as a means of disciplining citizen-soldiers was very different from using Zen as a kind of means for fighting proficiency in the battlefield, a supposed feature of the modern soldier qua samurai warrior that authors such as D. T. Suzuki openly admired.[17] The development of *samādhi* (concentration or unification of mind) through Zen as a way to gain fighting proficiency was discussed by Vice Admiral Yamaji Kazuyoshi (1869-1963), who wrote the book *Zen no oyo* (The practical application of Zen) after his experience at the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Yamaji stated:

> In Zen there is something called samādhi (…) In the midst of war, each time I sat quietly and entered samādhi, a wise plan would suddenly appear. Furthermore, the moment I saw the enemy, a countermeasure would emerge. Still further, when faced with various problems in daily life, I found my practice of zazen very helpful to their resolution. (Quoted in Victoria, 2019, p.211)

Nonetheless, Yamaji talked from the point of view of an officer, detached from the fighting ground to optimise the battle plan.[18] The experience of the detached officer was something very different from the experience of a private immersed in the midst of gunfire in the field. In the latter

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[17] In 1906, responding to the Russo-Japanese War, Suzuki wrote in the *Journal of the Pali Text Society*: "The Lebensanschauung of Bushido is no more nor less than that of Zen. The calmness and even joyfulness of heart at the moment of death which is conspicuously observable in the Japanese, the intrepidity which is generally shown by the Japanese soldiers in the face of an overwhelming enemy; and the fairness of play to an opponent, so strongly taught by Bushido—all these come from the spirit of Zen training…" (Suzuki, quoted in Benesch, 2016, p. 13)

[18] Compared to the use of spiritual/religious elements of ancient eras, the detachment via Zen meditation to get a clearer picture contrasts with the esoteric rites that medieval warlords performed to convince their troops through complete involvement (see above section 3.1).

case, Zen would not have the same effect, or even would be useless unless specifically trained in war settings, as Suzuki Shosan already admonished during the Tokugawa period (see above *Zen in Tokugawa*).

In a nutshell, the use of Zen for modern Japanese soldiers were a means for disciplining the will (to fight, to die), abandoning any attachment to the materiality of human existence (detachment) for a higher cause (ideological involvement with the emperor-nation). Zen master Iida Toin (1863-1937) even saw death as 'a way to repay one's debt to the emperor.' (Benesch, 2016, p.13)

One could think that the blend of *bushido*-imperial nationalism-zen was really successful in converting the Japanese citizens into zealous fighters, reluctant to surrender, finding suicide as the only acceptable option. It is true that mass suicides of civilians and soldiers happened in Okinawa in 1945, that suicidal attacks were perpetrated by pilots (the famous *tokkotai*), and that *gyokusai* charges (desperate charges against superior military forces) were registered on different occasions. Nonetheless, the understanding of the complex suicidal behaviour of the Japanese people implies a further discussion of the pattern of the whole social context surrounding the Japanese population during the war (see Sánchez-García, 2019, pp. 163-165) and not a simplistic assumption about the efficacy of Zen training for sacrificial death (Ives 2009, p. 103).

Conclusions

This paper has compared the religious/spiritual influence on Japanese martial arts in three different stages of the Japanese civilising process using Norbert Elias's process-model (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative chart between different stages in the Japanese civilising process. Religious/spiritual practices relate to different social agents within specific socio and psychogenetic trends and involvement/detachment balances.

	Medieval period	Tokugawa period	Early Showa
Agents	*Bushi* (professional warriors)	Samurai (retainers, bureaucrats)	Conscripted soldier
(De)civilising trend	Decivilising-informalising	Civilising-formalising	Decivilising-formalising
Social pattern	Total war	Pacified baku-han system	Totalitarian state
Survival unit	Clan	Han	Nation-State
Habitus	Extreme warrior *habitus*	*Pacified* retainer *habitus*	*Barbarised* soldier *habitus*
Involvement/ detachment	Involved detachment (magic)	Extreme detachment (ideology)	Involved detachment (ideology)
Religious/spiritual	Esoteric practices for the pragmatics of combat efficiency.	Zen/neo-Confucianism for disciplining samurai to fit into the social order.	Shinto as a 'state religion' to convey the imperial *bushido* message. Zen for overcoming civilising resistance and disciplining people to kill/be killed for a higher cause.

Whereas the Tokugawa samurai lived within a predominant civilising (formalising) trend, the medieval *bushi* and the modern soldier of the early Showa period who fought in WWII happened to be immersed in predominant decivilising patterns, but of a different kind: decivilising informalising (total war) for the medieval *bushi* and decivilising formalising (dictatorial state) for the modern soldier. Such difference has several implications. Whereas the medieval *bushi* was bound to relatively small, shifting survival units, the modern soldier was bound to a bigger survival unit, the nation-state. An extreme *habitus* (personality structure) swinging from total control to fighting rage and a highly emotional fantasy-laden approach was present in both cases: esoterism/magic in the medieval *bushi*

and ideological chauvinism in the modern soldier. Whereas the extreme detached involvement of the medieval *bushi* was obtained through esoteric means aimed to improve fighting ability, the extreme detached involvement of the modern soldier was obtained through disciplining practices such as martial arts and *zazen*, not directly related to fighting ability but to a devotion and loyalty towards the emperor and the Japanese nation.

Compared to the two previous cases, the Tokugawa samurai's habitus was connected to a greater detachment from violence [19] within an ordered society. Inextricably bound to the *han* as a fixed survival unit, the samurai was entirely dependent on his *daimyo* for a living. Thus, complete loyalty to one's lord, not fighting proficiency, became the utmost feature of the samurai and a centrepiece of the *baku-han* means of orientation (ideology).

As this paper claims, Zen Buddhism was not bound essentially to Japanese martial arts from the beginning. The relationship between different religious practices and martial arts varied, unfolding within processes of sociogenesis and psychogenesis in different stages. For the medieval *bushi*, Zen did not play any major role and esoteric Buddhism (and other belief systems) was used as a pragmatic means for actual combat; for the Tokugawa samurai Zen became an efficient controlling/disciplining device that helped to convey neo-Confucian values of loyalty and obedience; for the modern soldier, Zen helped to quench self-doubts and fears to kill/be killed and join the symbolic we-group around the emperor and the Japanese nation.

Before finishing, a word of caution in relation to the combative application of religious/spiritual elements is in order. Despite the existence of such resources for combat, not many combatants in each stage under analysis made use of them. In medieval times, only those *bushi* pertaining to martial *ryu* obtained a deep understanding of these practices in order to really enhance fighting proficiency; during the Tokugawa period, not many samurai were serious Zen practitioners (Hurst III, 1998, p. 212) and a blend with neo-Confucianism provided an ideological adherence to the shogunate rather than an efficient fighting means; and in early Showa, most modern citizens/soldiers were just exposed to a blend of Imperial *bushido*-Zen-martial arts for ideological purposes but most of them lacked an extensive training period in Zen to develop mental skills such as *samadhi* to be efficiently applied in combat.

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[19] At least intra-estate (among samurai) violence. It is true that inter-estate violence, applied from the samurai to other groups such as peasants was permitted to a greater extent.

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Author's biographical data

Raúl Sánchez-García (Spain) is Lecturer at the Social Sciences department of the School of Sports Science (INEF), Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM). He is the secretary of the Sociology of Sport working group within the Spanish Federation of Sociology (FES) and co-editor of the academic journal *Sociología del Deporte*. His recent book *The Historical Sociology of Japanese Martial Arts* (2019) was awarded the Norbert Elias book Prize 2020. E-mail: raul.sanchezg@upm.es