

The Truth of the Ancient Ways: A Critical Biography of the Swordsman Yamaoka Tesshu

Anatoliy Anshin



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Among practitioners of Japanese martial arts both in Japan and overseas there is hardly a person not knowing the name of famous swordsman Yamaoka Tesshu, who is also renowned for his calligraphy and pursuits of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. Despite this, for over a century Tesshu's figure, buried under numerous anecdotes and mythical stories, has presented a contrasting combination of broad popularity with the absence of critical biographies and the lack of verified data.

In this book, Anatoliy Anshin draws from his doctoral dissertation to create the first critical biography on Tesshu, over 120 years after his death in 1888. Based on scrupulous investigation of primary and secondary sources, Anshin shows that Tesshu's whole life was an uncompromising quest for the authentic Japanese swordsmanship, which had been practically lost by his time. Anshin further analyzes how this quest eventually led Tesshu to play the central role in the bloodless surrender of Edo Castle - one of the most important events in the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Looking at everything, from the beginning and development of Tesshu's thoughts and belief systems to establishing his own swordsmanship school called Itto Shoden Muto-ryu, Anshin chronologically highlights Tesshu's dramatic life path. This path reflects like a mirror centuries-old cultural history of Japanese warrior class, the samurai, and its martial arts.

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