

SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

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Martial arts in psycho-physical culture

Submission: 12.04.2015; acceptance: 24.05.2015

Key words: martial arts, culture, physicality, spirituality, asceticism

Abstract

Background and Aim. The authors will discuss the nature of the relationship between the various martial arts and the “psycho-physical culture”. We will approach this topic from the perspectives of the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts, martial arts systemic anthropology, and the sociology of psycho-physical systems.

Methods. The main method of research has been a qualitative content analysis of the literature (scientific and popular) acquired through a query library. We studied material gathered under the theme “Martial Arts” in the Library of the University of Rzeszów, as well as a list of recommended literature suggested by the International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society (IMACSSS) Results. Four dimensions have been traditionally investigated to justify the assignment of martial arts to the area of psycho-physical culture. These are: (1) The presence in most martial arts of an original philosophy, especially one demanding a code of ethics; (2) A close, almost “genetic” relationships between martial arts and various applicable religious systems and traditions of applied social ethics; (3) The continuing emphasis on the area of physical culture as it relates to personality development and human spirituality; and (4) the presence in schools of martial arts of ceremonial events attached to “passages” in personal growth. Ascetic practice, as it is traditionally associated with the martial arts, reveals itself most often in the third of these dimensions. For example, when various forms of *Budo* are treated as educational systems, traditional ceremonies are associated with stages of personal maturity. Consequently, we best understand the martial arts as a form of psycho-physical culture. As much as possible, this would include the ‘internal arts’ of the discipline, and the smallest - “combat sports” which continue to be popular.

Conclusions. Martial Arts, as a specific cultural phenomenon, are beyond the limited scope of popular sports culture and physical culture, and so any reductionist approach to their importance will not work. Martial arts must also be studied within the field of psycho-physical culture. This imperative applies especially to the ‘internal arts’ of the disciplines. The practice of various martial arts is always a key factor in an individual’s attainment of a full self-realization, but their mastery allows ongoing personal development across many diverse dimensions of personal growth.

Introduction

The publication *Martial arts in physical culture* [Cynarski, Sieber, Szajna 2014] draws attention to the value of defining martial arts beyond the limited scope of basic physical culture. The authors of this study address the nature of the relationship between “martial arts” and “psycho-physical culture”, to which they also include a “high culture” that might be mainly spiritual in nature. In the light of holistic education, as it is generally practiced, they avoid the simplistic separation of physical culture from other areas of current cultures.

Culture is a set of values and standards assimilated into the process of maturing and socialization

within any society. The term ‘inculturation’ is used when values and norms from foreign cultural circles are internalized [*cf.* Durozoi, Russell 1997: 143-144]. Martial arts are a special kind of particular phenomenon that, in spite of a foreign cultural origin, are accepted and cultivated now within nations and societies worldwide. Martial arts are the product of higher social strata—an elite group such as knights— and their embrace is a social reality, not just an area of reflection of philosophers. In particular, the ethics of “a warrior’s pathway” is currently very visible in a wide range of formal institutions [*cf.* Bolelli 2008; Cynarski 2009, 2013; Piwowarski 2011, 2012].

The perspective for reflection and explanation given here is the Humanist Theory of Martial Arts, including a martial arts systematic anthropology and a sociology of psychophysical systems [Cynarski, Obodynski 2003, 2011; Cynarski 2004, 2009, 2011, 2012; Green, Svinth 2010]. Therefore, we use the definition of martial arts according the Martial Arts Humanities Theory [Cynarski 2004; Cynarski, Skowron 2014]: “**Martial arts’ is a historic category of flawless methods of unarmed combat fights, and the use of weapons combined with a spiritual element** (personal development, also in transcendent sphere)”.

As its source of literature for review, this study adopts the set theme “Martial Arts” through the Library of the University of Rzeszów, and as a list of “Recommended Literature” of IMACSSS - the International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society [www.imacsss.com 2015]. Moreover, the authors supplemented this source with further literature and employed qualitative content analysis as the main method of research in of the literature (both scientific and popularized works), acquired through a query library [Krippendorff 2004].

The forms of martial arts prepared one to fight to the death (acceptance of death), and so involved a “religious” justification [cf. Westbrook, Ratti 1997]. The warrior ethos in its modernised version such as the *Bushido* by Nitobe [1993] included ways of self-defence, self-realization, and self-expression [cf. Tokarski 1989].

An analysis of the rich aspect of symbolic culture in martial arts is deliberately omitted from this study because giving adequate consideration to that topic would require a separate study.

Martial arts and corporality

We plan to discuss practices necessary for the development of a high and outstanding level of physical fitness as the condition of mastery necessary for most fighting techniques. But remember, martial arts is not just about fighting and combat.

Nishida Kitaro or Watsuji Tetsuro, in more detail than many of their intellectual heirs such as Yuasa Yasuo [1987, 1993] and Nagatomo Shigenori [1992a, b], refine and precisely focus on the body and the cultivation of a persona-an individual identity. In spite of the idiosyncratic variability to be expected in these practices, there is an underlying commonality. It is self-cultivation and self-expression through a committed practice of martial arts.

Can we speak of a *perfected body-mind method* that marks an achievement where the unified mind and body manifests itself without fail? This concept of a perfected a *body-mind* and *spirit unity* is of particular interest to any formal philosophy of sport, as it stresses that a truly

unified mind is not an ontological given, but an earned metaphysical realization. It is through *shugyo* (*ascesis*) a lifelong process of cultivation best embodied in Japanese martial arts (particularly *Budo* pathways) and self-cultivation arts that we come to realize this harmonious *body-mind-spirit*.

“Within the context of martial arts being used as a psycho-educational form of education, the body fulfils, above all, the role of a tool to be used on the way towards enlightenment and wisdom. The development of the body is often utilized specifically for spiritual progress. Improving one’s physical abilities is therefore an ascetic journey of physical perfectionism and technical accomplishment all towards achieving spiritual mastery. In some cases, spiritual development is described in terms of energy (*qi, ki*) and connected with the degree of wellness in one’s health.” [Cynarski, Obodynski 2011b]

We can see here that there is a relationship of mind and body fitness to the level of excellence in one’s unique spirit. Mastery of one’s own spirit is integral to the evolution of the main objective of martial arts. The purpose of any stage in the evolution of any properly trained body is the movement toward a state of harmony between the different elements of one’s personality.

Martial arts and spirituality

The roots of the spirituality of different martial arts rests in their unique history - the place of origin, the spiritual culture of the time, their creator’s outlook, and a number of other factors. Generally, in most cases, the spirituality of a warrior’s pathway in the martial arts practiced today is religiously neutral, especially with the religious teachings being non-contradictory to the practices of major, monotheistic religions - Christianity, Islam and Judaism [Olszewski 1995; Cynarski 2006]. Martial arts prepare us to fight in self-defence, but they affirm an attitude of non-violence, and have been adopted in countries with radically-diverse cultures.

Forms of martial arts were, at their sources, often connected with the spirituality of different religions, sometimes practiced in temples, or by members of the clergy and followers of various cults such as shamanism. Today, these cultural traditions are sometimes evident in a ritual (a ceremony in a gym), recurring names and iconic symbolism. Adept *kung-fu* cultivation of the Shaolin fist style does not require a commitment to the Buddhist faith, we note. Here are some martial arts traditions and their associations with various religions:

- *Neijia* and other internal styles from the ancient Chinese tradition – mainly Taoism [Lie 1995; Maliszewski 1996; Huang 2000; Baka 2008];
- *Waijia* – external styles *wushu kung-fu* – Confucianism and Buddhism [Bolelli 2008; Simpkins C., Simpkins A. 2007; Shahar 2008];

- *Aikido* and old Japanese fencing schools – mainly *Shinto* religion [Ueshiba 1997, 2007; Gembal 2004; Otake 2007];
- Karate (*karatedo*) – originally on Okinawa - Neo-Confucianism [Fechner, Rucinski 1985; Olszewski 1995; Saldern 1998; Egami 2002; Cynarski 2014b].

The European chivalric traditions, -fencing, for example, in a Polish school (*Signum Polonicum*) - are linked to the Roman Catholic religion [Piwowarczyk 2007; Sawicki 2012; Cynarski 2014a]. This school retains gestures resulting from a centuries-old tradition of Christian knighthood.

Multiform martial arts phenomenon can be combined with a variety of religious traditions, but also vice-versa. For some, they may still be a substitute for religion. So sometimes we see: *Aikido*, as the art of harmony and peace, ecological *taiji quan*, or even *Wing Chun kung-fu* [cf. Green, Svinth 2010; Brown, Jennings, Molle 2009; Jennings, Brown, Sparkes 2010; Brown, Jennings, Sparkes 2014].

Generally, the warrior's pathway (Jap. *budo*) retains the ethical principles that are relatively universal / universalist [Harrison 1912; Kiyota, Kinoshita 1990; Lind 1998; Saldern 1998; Maroteaux 2007; Cynarski 2009; Matsunaga 2009; Piwowarski 2011; Hall 2012].

Martial arts and Yoga and Asceticism

Already *Aikido* (the conceptual approach to harmonizing energy in different schools) and the idea of *Ido* (the endless road and perpetual movement school - Idokan Poland Association), are forms of educational systems rather than fighting curricula [Gembal 2004; Cynarski 2009]. They fall within the broad category of conceptual - 'psycho-physical systems' [McFarlane 1990; Raimondo 2007]. So we can speak about the philosophy and sociology of psycho-physical systems that help to improve personality [Cynarski 2011, 2012] Such philosophies as these would not apply to many combat sports.

Such spiritual improvement, even transgression and transcendence on a "soul-level", are possible only within the ethics required in accordance with the 'Way of Heaven' (referred to by both Lao Tzu and Confucius). A fifteenth-century school of martial arts *Tenshinshoden Katorishinto-ryu* recommends attention to moral virtue, intellect and wisdom [Otake 2007], due to the *Shinto* tradition, an important part of the Buddhist canon, and *Bushido* [Nitobe 1993].

Only adherence to normative ethical values and the simultaneous exercise of the body and the mind can achieve a level of mastery in the martial art (martial way), within the context of any valid humanistic theory of martial arts [Cynarski 2004: 184-190]. An effective and true asceticism demands strenuous physical exercises and technical-tactical expertise in the chosen martial

art, and even the practice of meditation or prayer as well.

A specific 'yoga of fighting' can be based on various forms of religious faith, spirituality and a sense of the *sacrum* [cf. Kauz 1977; Maliszewski 1996; Tokarski 1989]. In a context of a "humanistic theory", the idea of personal self-realisation is apparent, though in different ways, in various forms of Chinese [Huang 2000; Baka 2008], Korean [Kim, Back 2000] Japanese [Lind 1998], and other martial arts [Tokarski 1989].

We can identify three categories of spirituality present in the field of martial arts across ethnic and cultural traditions:

1. **The presence of the original philosophy, especially ethics;**
2. **Genetic relationships with various religious systems and social ethics** (as Confucianism);
3. **Today's objectives beyond the dimension of formal physical culture** (matters related to personality and human spirituality).

Ascetic practice is the concretized function of the third category, for general educational purposes, when various forms of *Budo* are treated as educational systems. Ascetic practices justify the necessity of understanding the martial arts as a form of psycho-physical culture. As much as possible, this would include 'internal arts', and - the smallest 'combat sports', according to a typology consisting of five martial arts [Bolelli 2008: 115-140].

We can also stress the fourth category, which is **the presence of a specific (in martial arts schools) ceremonial** - ritual, hierarchy, which is an area of cultural studies that go beyond the science of sport and physical culture [cf. Lind 1998; Jones 2002; Lowry 2006; Cynarski 2014b].

Martial arts, as 'systems of psycho-physical practices', lead students to transgression (overcoming physical limitations, improving the character / personality) and transcendence (going beyond the corporality; identifying and pursuing objectives that are metaphysical). A master of martial arts is not only a great fighter, but also a wise man - the one who has attained spiritual wisdom.

Discussion

The results of this research show that the environment of martial arts generally complies with the principles of normative ethics that are consistent with the ethos practiced in most martial arts. In particular, in Poland for example, the main, normative base for the martial arts environment is Christianity (Catholicism) [Cynarski 2006: 136-420]. Martial arts developed in Poland, and derivative from the Christian tradition of chivalry, also combine teaching techniques of the Roman Catholic faith tradition. [cf. Piwowarczyk 2007; Sawicki 2012; Cynarski 2014a].

Eugen Herrigel [1987], in his popular writing, describes *kyudo* as a form of religious practice of Zen

Buddhism. However, in Japan, the philosophy and spirit of *kyudo* are accented only as “a path of virtue,” “truth, goodness and beauty”, and “perfection in human being” [Matsuo 2010: 78-79]. These values are quite generic and extensive.

Spiritual preparation in classical *jujutsu* and *kenjutsu* originally covered self-learning in life-threatening situations, and then (since the seventeenth century) they were incorporated into the “school of intuition” science (*yomeigaku*)¹. According to this school, “consciousness is the beginning of the action, and the action is the object of consciousness” [Habersetzer 1989: 36]. Spiritual energy that is desired (*seishin*), a peaceful state of mind (*heijoshin*) and an “uncluttered spirit” (*munen mushin*) are important concepts used in education today, albeit with varying degrees of success [cf. McFarlane 1990; Light 2014].

Zen Buddhism or “Combat Zen” was the ideological background for *kenjutsu* [Murakami, Sakai, Karukome 2013] and early *kendo* [Donohue 2002: 223]. But, probably more important were values of the noble pathway [cf. Maroteaux 2007].

David Jones [2002] indicates the ritual dimension of martial arts. Some variety of martial arts is well described by the theory of martial arts as performance art [Klens-Bigman 2002]. Martial arts, with specialized aesthetic practices, became an area for group expression and self-expression. It is difficult to say how much personal expression in motion, in the forms of *karate* or *iaido* is an external show, and how much of it is an experience much more internalized [cf. Tokarski 1989; Klens-Bigman 2002; Cynarski 2012].

Juliusz Piwowarski [2011] emphasizes the “ethos” dimension of martial arts and today’s topicality of the Bushido Code in its humanized form. These traditions can then be applied in the education of the uniformed services. Generally, however, the philosophy of martial arts helps in the creation of a living, unique individual. These practices are still internalized by the people of martial arts and used in educational systems developed today throughout the world [cf. Matsunaga *et al.* 2009; Cynarski, Lee-Barron 2014].

Conclusion

Martial arts, as a specific cultural phenomenon, are beyond the scope of sports culture and physical culture, and so any reductionist approach to them is seriously flawed. They should be studied and understood best in the field of psycho-physical culture. This important thesis applies most important to those disciplines that we recognize as having “internal arts” (*neijia wushu, aikido*), but not exclusively to just these.

Martial arts have vital qualities that assist human development and enable a transgressive and transcendent dimension to a person’s education. An enlightened self-realization becomes possible. Martial arts are a multilateral approach to improving the human condition and, moreover, concurrently maintain a transgressive dimension. As a group of related disciplines, martial arts function as forms of self-realization, within the meaning of humanistic psychology.

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¹ Chinese school Wang Yang Ming.

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Sztuki walki w kulturze psychofizycznej

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, kultura, cielesność, duchowość, asceza

Abstrakt

Perspektywa teoretyczna i cel. Autorzy podjęli problem określenia relacji sztuk walki do „kultury psychofizycznej”, w tym do kultury wysokiej, *stricte* duchowej. Czynią to z perspektywy Humanistycznej Teorii Sztuk Walki, systemowej antropologii sztuk walki i socjologii systemów psychofizycznych.

Metoda. Jako źródło przyjęto m.in. zbiór tematyczny „Sztuki walki” Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego i listę „Literatury rekomendowanej” przez *International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society* – Międzynarodowe Towarzystwo Naukowe Sztuk i Sportów Walki. Sięgnięto także do innej jeszcze literatury przedmiotu. Natomiast główną metodą badań jest jakościowa analiza treści literatury przedmiotu (naukowej i popularyzatorskiej), pozyskanej w drodze kwerendy bibliotecznej.

Wyniki. Stwierdzono wystąpienie czterech kategorii uzasadniających przyporządkowanie sztuk walki do obszaru kultury psychofizycznej. Są to: (1) Obecność oryginalnej filozofii, a zwłaszcza etyki; (2) Genetyczne związki z różnymi systemami religijnymi (np. buddyzm, shintoizm, taoizm) i etyki społecznej (jak np. konfucjanizm); (3), Dzisiejsze cele wykraczające poza obszar kultury fizycznej, gdyż odnoszące się do osobowości i duchowości człowieka; i (4) obecność w szkołach sztuk walki specyficznego ceremoniału (rytuał, etykieta na sali ćwiczeń). Ascetyczna funkcja praktyki jest konkretyzacją kategorii trzeciej. Podobnie - cele ogólnie-educacyjne, gdy różne postaci *budo* traktujemy jako systemy edukacyjne. Łącznie uzasadnia to twierdzenie o konieczności określania sztuk walki, jako postaci kultury psychofizycznej. W największym stopniu dotyczyłoby to „stylów wewnętrznych”, w najmniejszym zaś – sportów walki. Wnioski. Sztuki walki, jako specyficzny fenomen kulturowy, wykraczają poza zakres kultury sportowej i kultury fizycznej, toteż błędne jest ich redukcjonistyczne postrzeganie. Powinny być rozpatrywane w obszarze kultury psychofizycznej. Dotyczy to zwłaszcza „stylów wewnętrznych”, ale nie tylko. Sztuki walki wielostronnie doskonalą człowieka i zachowują wymiar transgresyjny. Są też formą samorealizacji.