

# EDITORIAL

Paul Bowman and Benjamin N. Judkins

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Four decades after the tipping point of the 'kung fu craze' of the early 1970s that caused their explosion and proliferation, participation in martial arts in the Western world now rivals (and often exceeds) participation in traditional physical cultural practices connected with sport, health and exercise. Taekwondo and taiji are as common in schools, college campuses and community centres around the world as football and tennis; and mixed martial arts (MMA) are now globally bigger business than boxing and wrestling combined. The worldwide explosion in both 'traditional' and new martial arts has been enormous.

Yet, in the world of English language academic publication, the academic study of martial arts has until now remained in the shadows. This is so even though scholars from a range of disciplines have been contributing to diverse international scholarly fields via explorations of the many questions attached to martial arts, culture and society, for some time. Indeed, martial arts studies is indisputably developing in diverse academic fields and across many geographical regions. Clusters of overlapping problematics are emerging within disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies, ethnography, film studies, history, medicine, psychology, religious studies, political science, sociology, and sports studies.

These studies have developed within discrete disciplines, however, and researchers have rarely engaged in cross-disciplinary dialogue. Yet, there is ample evidence of an international appetite for a publication that could foster cross-disciplinary communication in the interlocking and overlapping realms of martial arts studies. As well as increasing publications, there are growing numbers of conferences and events, around the world.

There are regular academic conferences on martial arts in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and in many countries in Asia. Around the world, a growing number of degree programmes involve elements of martial arts studies, including some in the UK and USA. In June 2015, the UK saw the first international interdisciplinary Martial Arts Studies Conference, at Cardiff University. It was so successful that it is now established as an annual event. Participants came from the UK, Australia, Guam, North America, China, Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, South America, Germany, Finland, and France, and represented fields as diverse as anthropology, cultural studies, ethnography, film studies, history, medicine, philosophy, psychology, religious studies, sociology, and sports studies.

This wide national and disciplinary sweep was matched in a broad spectrum of work, spanning from theoretical to practical orientations. As well as pure academic work, there were talks by surgeons, security experts, diplomats, and clinicians involved in research into ways of incorporating elements of martial arts as therapy into treatment for issues such as post-stroke rehabilitation and depression.

In the UK, a martial arts studies research network ([mastudiesrn.org](http://mastudiesrn.org)) has recently been awarded funding by the UK's prestigious Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The network is now the principal UK institution for bringing researchers together in face to face events to advance the study of martial arts and to explore what studying martial arts can contribute to knowledge more widely. Each research network event engages with a cluster of questions around a specific theme, and

involves the participation of academics, researchers, practitioners, and professionals, in order to explore core social and cultural questions. In this way the research network seeks to contribute to the stimulation of multi-disciplinary conversations that advance our understanding of martial arts in broader cultural contexts.

This journal, *Martial Arts Studies*, both feeds from and back into these exciting new spaces. It aspires to stimulate and enrich the development of research and scholarship in martial arts studies by publishing the highest quality interdisciplinary work in the emergent field. For while there are many growing areas of publication on many aspects of martial arts, there has until now been very little in the way of a coherent academic discourse, and certainly very little in the way of scholarly journal presence. Even within academic book publication – which ranges from the most light and popular to the most serious and scholarly – texts often feel like they are isolated islands. *Martial Arts Studies* aims to connect some otherwise isolated disciplinary discourses by fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue in a rigorous, peer reviewed academic context.

To ensure the highest academic standards, we first assembled a prestigious editorial advisory panel, made up of many of the key and most esteemed academics from multiple disciplines from across the university and around the world. These are Oleg Benesch (University of York), Stephen Chan (SOAS, University of London), Greg Downey (Macquarie University), Douglas Farrer (University of Guam), Adam Frank (University of Central Arkansas), Thomas A. Green (Texas A&M University), T. J. Hinrichs (Cornell University), Leon Hunt (Brunel University), Felipe P. Jocano Jr (University of the Philippines, Diliman), Gina Marchetti (Hong Kong University), Meaghan Morris (The University of Sydney), Daniel Mroz (University of Ottawa), Meir Shahar (Tel Aviv University), Dale Spencer (Carleton University), Douglas Wile (Alverno College), and Phillip Zarrilli (Exeter University, Emeritus). We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all of our editorial advisory panel, for having both confidence in and enthusiasm for this project.

After establishing our editorial advisory panel, we were delighted to become an imprint of Cardiff University Press. Cardiff University is one of the UK's elite research universities, and Cardiff University Press is blazing a trail by pioneering a radically ethical open access publishing model. For, whereas many 'open access' publications actually involve hidden charges (such as charges to authors, who have to pay to publish their work), Cardiff University Press insists that open access should mean genuinely free – or, in their words, 'free in and free out': free for authors to publish, and free for anyone to read.

Consequently, we believe that *Martial Arts Studies* has started as it means to go on: with both intellectual and ethical integrity, and in the spirit of genuine open-ended interdisciplinary inquiry, open to the unexpected and as yet unknown, whilst insisting on the highest academic standards.

We could not have got this far without the invaluable assistance of several individuals and institutions. Our editorial assistant and book reviews editor, Kyle Barrowman, has been tireless in his enthusiasm and contributions to all aspects of the journal. Alice Percival at Cardiff University Press has been extremely helpful to us on some key technical matters. And Hugh Griffiths, a PhD student and colleague at Cardiff University, has been exceptionally generous and helpful in providing both a great deal of time and a high level of professional expertise in advising, devising, designing, and producing the journal. We offer our sincere thanks to all of them, and to the fellow travellers who have encouraged us to see this project through to the present exciting moment – the beginning.

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