

FIVE YEARS AND TWELVE MONTHS THAT CHANGED THE STUDY OF MARTIAL ARTS FOREVER

PAUL BOWMAN & BENJAMIN N. JUDKINS

This is the tenth issue of *Martial Arts Studies*, published almost exactly five years after issue 1. Over those five years the academic study of martial arts has come to look very different from when we began. In many ways, arriving at five years of bi-annual publications, with each of our issues containing influential and innovative scholarship, feels like a landmark achievement. But we are also now twelve months into our relationship with COVID-19. As much as five years of *Martial Arts Studies* has profoundly changed our field, COVID-19 has – in very different ways – changed the study of martial arts, possibly forever.

Five years ago, we were still engaging the question of whether martial arts studies could ever be an academic field. After four years – twelve months ago – the field of martial arts studies was starting to feel fully realised, and that we were settling down into what now felt like business as usual. Then the pandemic hit, causing tumult, turmoil and transformation. Twelve months in, the consequences are still unfolding, for all countries and cultures, and in many social, cultural, and economic realms.

Seeing research through into writing, then on through peer review and ultimately into publication, takes time. This means that the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet made its presence felt in all of the articles in this issue of *Martial Arts Studies*. Rather, what we see in them is the coming of age of our field: clear, confident and compelling contributions, from different disciplinary realms, using different methodologies, each contributing to an ongoing set of debates. Through them we can see that the academic field of martial arts studies found its feet and its voice – or rather, its range of voices – very quickly. The field is now flourishing around many mature scholarly theories, multiple vibrant conversations, multiplying research questions, and numerous productive approaches and methodologies. It is now apparent that although martial arts studies may have one broadly shared focus, it

DOI

10.18573/mas.117

CITATION

Bowman, Paul, and Benjamin N. Judkins. 2020. 'Five Years and Twelve Months that Changed the Study of Martial Arts Forever'. *Martial Arts Studies* 10, 1-8. doi: 10.18573/mas.117

Editorial

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certainly has neither an exclusive methodology, nor one shared set of values, nor even a set cluster of questions. It is, rather, a complex discursive constellation structured by a shared investment in its objects (which go by interconnected, overlapping names and conceptions – from ‘martial arts’ to ‘combat sports’, ‘combatives’ to ‘self-defence’, and so on), realised through an interacting body of multi- and interdisciplinary approaches.

Through our sustained engagement with the key terms and concepts that structure our activities, we have learned so much about the nature of our diversely shared objects and organising interests over recent years. There are now many methodologies available to students, teachers and researchers, from many disciplines. We have published several seminal and influential contributions in the pages of this journal over the last five years. But we have not done so alone. At the same time as we have been developing this publication, many other journals, book series, conference series, and collections have flourished. All are contributing to the enrichment of the complex, interlocking, interacting discursive constellation of martial arts studies. All are playing a role in developing the ways that we are able to study martial arts, working out what we can say we know about them, and exploring the dynamics and implications of how we conceptualise and approach them.

After five years, though, perhaps it is also now time to take a look at the field itself, as it is taking form and made manifest in the pages of such journals as ours.

ENGENDERING RELATIONS

The ten issues of this journal that we have published over the last five years contain 103 items including editorials, research articles, book reviews, conference reports, and more. Contributions have come from all over the world, and from a very wide range of academic disciplines. We have published the research of serious scholars at all stages, from graduate students to emeritus professors. All of this bodes very well for the future dynamism and inclusivity of the field. Less pleasing is the realisation that only slightly more than 10% of the contributions have come from female writers.

We could probably have predicted this gender imbalance at the outset of our project. Some will say that it is not something we should beat ourselves up about, and that it merely reflects ‘the way things are’. But an academic journal such as this is not merely a *reflection* of some pre-existing external state of affairs. Rather, it plays a part in the *construction* of that state of affairs. We take this situation seriously and see it as something to be engaged much more proactively in coming issues.

We know there are many established and emergent female scholars of martial arts, culture, politics, economics and society out there. We know that martial arts are not a subject that ‘only men are into’. So, we

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need to ask why women are underrepresented in our publication lists. What might the gender breakdown in our publication history mean? Are there obvious or obscure bars on access? Does it relate to issues inherent to our practice or to wider institutional, cultural, political or socioeconomic factors? Is it a reflection of the differential way in which publication and promotion pressures are felt in the academy at large? In a context such as this – i.e., a journal that we know to be playing a key role in the construction of a vibrant, dynamic and sustainable academic discourse – we feel a responsibility to engage with such questions. And we will.

Nor is this the only imbalance we perceive. It is true that many scholars from many different disciplines from all around the world have published research in our journal. So far, the nascent field of martial arts studies has succeeded in engaging researchers in Europe, North America and increasingly South America in a shared conversation. We have also made a concerted effort to engage with scholars from other linguistic, national and cultural contexts (e.g., issue 6, which focused on new Japanese research). Yet, much work that continues to be published globally emerges from self-contained fields in specific countries (such as Japan, China and Korea) and it tends to have more narrowly defined research interests – often oriented along national or nationalist lines – rather than those of the modern ‘Western’ arts, humanities and social sciences. We believe that finding ways to increase the level of engagement between these often linguistically, nationally (or even nationalistically) and conceptually separated scholarly communities and literatures remains another priority to be pursued over the coming years.

As scholars, we must be aware of conceptual, disciplinary, g/local, regional, and (inter)national differences in approaches to martial arts. The field of martial arts studies must proceed with awareness of and sensitivity to the different kinds of research being published by different communities as a precondition of hoping to engage with them productively.

Over recent years, there had been growing signs that different national and disciplinary constituencies and communities of researchers were reaching out to each other more often, in the form of innovative collaborations around conferences, publications, and so on. Unfortunately, like so much else since the emergence of COVID-19, many of these nascent efforts have been put on hold. But we feel it remains part of our remit to try to foster connections and relationships across all manner of ostensible border or boundary.

PRACTICE IN AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Despite the work still to be done, had there been no global pandemic, the maturing of our field and the five-year anniversary of its premier journal would have been an unequivocally jubilant moment for martial

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arts studies. In fact, it would have provided justifiable grounds for some sort of 'quinquennial' gathering, to mark and reflect on work to date, and to engage with future orientations. Unfortunately, as we all know so well, gatherings are now at best fraught, at worst impossible; and besides, celebrations of any kind feel inappropriate in the current moment.

These are social facts, and ones that are currently having a profound impact on the practice of martial arts. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the last 12 months have had more of an impact on the way that martial arts are practiced, desired and even imagined than any single event of the five decades that came before. As scholars we are faced with a moment of profound transformation as the pandemic, with its myriad challenging consequences for close-proximity, close-contact, physical interactions of all kinds, may well have intervened decisively into the future of martial arts. The question facing us now is what that future might look like, and what COVID-19 might mean for the ongoing contours of martial art practices.

It is basically a truism that any large-scale shift in teaching structures or consumer preferences will create new patterns of winners and losers throughout the marketplace for martial arts. Some of these shifts might manifest as the acceleration of trends that have been underway for some time. In other cases, we could witness unexpected reversals of fortunes.

The field of martial arts studies has long been concerned with the mediatization of fighting practices. For instance, authors have asked how popular films create patterns of cross-cultural desire. Now more than ever we might enquire into the ways in which the sudden abundance of free training material on social media might impact the ways students understand their art. The recent advent of Facebook, Skype, Google, Zoom, Teams and other online classes and remote learning platforms have served to accelerate this trend in ways that few of us could have predicted. Even styles that until recently defined their self-image primarily through the 'reality' of their embodied sparring or rolling have been forced to find new ways of reaching out to students as restrictions on athletic and social gatherings have forced more students to embrace solo training, and/or computer-mediated (solo) training.

OUR CONTRIBUTIONS

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the current era will be simply sustaining the desire to continually train for activities that cannot be undertaken now, or even for the foreseeable future. What does it mean to be a martial artist when some of the most common avenues for the expression of that identity have been foreclosed? It is easy to look at the current landscape and wonder how many small and often struggling schools will survive the current period. Yet the more pressing question is whether the current era will change what students and consumers desire on a much more fundamental level.

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Paul Bowman undertakes a personal exploration of these questions in the final article of the present collection. He suggests that we may be seeing a serious reversal in trends that defined the trajectory of the martial arts over the last decade or more. This was an era in which arts such as BJJ and MMA were the clear winners of both cultural and market-based competition. The claimed reality of their practice, bolstered by the highly physical and combative nature of their training, increasingly displaced more traditional martial arts that emphasized forms or sets as their major learning modality. Yet the hard truth is that one really can engage in meaningful solo practice in many traditional arts, whereas it is not always clear what 'solo practice' even means when it comes to modern combat styles that depend on close physical proximity to a large number of training partners to make progress. Likewise, even traditional weapons arts – perhaps the least 'realistic', 'practical' or 'relevant' set of skills that one might study in modern society – are possibly also posed to boom in an era when students want to engage in a combative experience while also maintaining at least two metres of distance between themselves and their training partners.

Whether through shifts in educational technology, or by nudging our desires on an almost subconscious level, it seems likely that the current pandemic will become an inflection point in the evolution and development of the modern martial arts. Some of these changes may be easy to predict. Other consequences are sure to be a surprise. Again, this journal will seek to tackle these questions in coming issues.

The first article in this issue helps to set the stage for a deeper discussion of precisely these complex questions. In 'Tàolù – The Mastery of Space', Daniel Mroz asks us to reconsider what exactly practitioners experience or seek to learn when they practice solo sets within the Chinese martial arts, and why these practices have enjoyed such an extraordinary longevity in a variety of cultural settings. To come to terms with taolu, Mroz adopts an interdisciplinary approach revealing the importance of theatrical and ritual practice in both their initial development and continuing phenomenology, in what will surely come to be regarded as a classic in the study of taolu and solo form training.

Similarly, the current issue makes a number of important contributions to our understanding of Chinese martial arts as social and political entities. Nowhere is this more clear than in Douglas Wile's 'Marx, Myth and Metaphysics: China Debates the Essence of Taijiquan'. Drawing on textual material from current online discussions, as well as recent ideological spectrum surveys, Wile explores how different understandings of taijiquan's history sit on a 'liberal-conservative' axis in China. He concludes by asking whether modern movement science has the potential to throw light on the essential uniqueness of this set of practices.

Yupeng Jiao echoes certain themes in both Mroz and Wile's work in his own investigation of Southern China's violent martial arts networks

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during the first half of the 20th century. 'Rural Wandering Martial Arts Networks and Invulnerability Rituals in Modern China' provides readers with a detailed case study of two rival groups, clearly illustrating why communities suffering from the threat of banditry often turned to unorthodox teachers. However, Jiao's research also suggests that the presence of such groups tended to destabilize rural environments, leading to the spread of even greater levels of violence. Further, it is not possible to separate the martial arts practiced by these villagers from their larger ritual, cultural and magical contexts.

In 'The Construction of Chinese Martial Arts in the Writings of John Dudgeon, Herbert Giles and Joseph Needham', Tommaso Gianni continues the historical investigation of the Chinese martial arts. Yet rather than dealing specifically with their practice, Gianni examines how early Western observers shaped anglophone discussions of these arts. It would be impossible to overstate the importance of writers such as Dudgeon, Giles and Needham in setting the academic and cultural agenda of subsequent generations of scholars. As such, we must come to terms with their treatment of these fighting practices to better understand how they came to be understood in the West. Gianni's article makes a valuable contribution to this project.

The next article, while also historical in its fundamental orientation, turns its attention to the introduction of jujutsu to the United Kingdom in the early 20th century and the establishment of the Golden Dojo in Piccadilly Circus by Sadakazu Uyenishi in 1903. David Brough's important study examines this critical institution and explores the ways in which it would lay the foundation for a future politicisation of jujutsu as a mechanism of women's self-defence and physical equality. While Uyenishi left the U.K. in 1907, his dojo lived on through his now well-known students, William and Edith Garrud.

In 'Wrestling, Warships and Nationalism in Japanese-American Relations', Martin Meyer offers readers a fascinating glimpse into the ways that metaphors of wrestling bodies and warships have become entwined over the years. Unsurprisingly, this process has tended to reach its peak in times of geopolitical rivalry. Meyer begins his investigation by looking at the cultural and symbolic role of wrestling bodies in Admiral Perry's initial confrontation with Japan. Next he examines echoes of those early clashes in the very different worlds of sumo and American pro wrestling in the early 1990s.

The martial arts of Vietnam have yet to receive sustained attention within the martial arts studies literature. Augustus Roe begins to address this in 'An Investigation into Local Attitudes Towards the Effectiveness and Relevance of Traditional Vietnamese Martial Arts'. His article reports the findings of a statistical survey examining local beliefs regarding the effectiveness and relevance of traditional Vietnamese fighting systems. To do this he undertook a survey of 100 individuals in Hanoi who were already familiar with the martial

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arts community. These results were then analysed in light of other demographic data including age, gender and martial arts background, providing readers with our first assessment of local attitudes towards Vietnamese fighting systems.

Of course, the field of martial arts studies does not confine itself only to the practice of formal martial arts. The theories and methods that developed here can be fruitfully applied to a wide range of combative, competitive and even playful activities. This point is elegantly illustrated by Thabata Castelo Branco Telles and Cristiano Roque Antunes Barreira in their study 'Ssireum: Approaching Korean Wrestling'. Ssireum itself is a type of revived or reinvented Korean folk wrestling, with growing popularity and strong institutional Korean backing today. After describing this practice and its current revival the authors examine certain gendered aspects of its practice. They conclude with an assessment of whether this game could fruitfully be adopted outside of Korea and its potential to function as a tool to broaden cultural diversity through embodied knowledges.

In 'Martial Arts Leadership: Cultural and Regional Differences in Motivations, Leadership and Communication', Sonja Bickford presents the results of a cross-national leadership survey comparing responses from martial artists in seven different countries. Her findings may be of great interest to both instructors and students. Specifically, for instructors, understanding what students look for in a club in terms of values and characteristics sought through training and leadership styles is critical. Her work could be used to help instructors develop motivational or instructional methods to best achieve their respective goals.

Karsten Øvretveit's article, 'Capacity and Confidence: What can be gleaned from the link between perceived and actual physical ability in Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioners?', begins by noting that despite Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu's quick growth in recent years, the attrition rate is notoriously high, particularly among inexperienced practitioners. Progression in the sport requires persistence in the face of repeated defeat in training, which may require certain psychological characteristics, or at least the ability to cultivate such characteristics. Although BJJ is highly technical, performance is also influenced by physical fitness. Yet fitness may also be related to the psychological approach to the sport, which is key in a practice that challenges several aspects of one's self-efficacy, particularly in the early stages of development. Through exploratory data analysis, this article elucidates the relationship between perceived and actual physical ability in BJJ practitioners. Since self-efficacy is concerned with belief in the ability to produce a desired outcome, and does not necessarily reflect actual skill, Øvretveit finds the potential psychological advantage of physical fitness likely to be applicable to practitioners at all levels of competence.

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The final article in the issue has already been mentioned in relation to some of the topics outlined briefly above. In 'Metamorphoses of Martial Arts: Meditations on Motivations and Motive Forces during the COVID-19 Pandemic', Paul Bowman explores our current moment and what it may suggest about the future. Through a personal examination of two different metaphors of transformation he investigates the ways in which the current pandemic has impacted both his own practice and the situation in the martial arts community at large. Bowman pays special attention to how our desire for different sorts of experiences within the martial arts may be changing in light of COVID-19, and how this might advantage certain types of activities, or even modes of practice, over others.

The issue then concludes with additional contributions. The first is a detailed book review in which Kyle Barrowman discusses Luke White's recent monograph, *Legacies of the Drunken Master* [University of Hawaii Press 2020]. Finally, Gitanjali Kolanad offers a personal obituary for the late professor, martial artist and theatre director, Phillip Zarrilli (8 March 1947 – 28 April 2020). Zarrilli was one of the true pioneers of martial arts studies and his works have inspired many researchers and practitioners in multiple ways. Undoubtedly many readers of the journal will fondly remember his keynote address at the 2016 Martial Arts Studies Conference at Cardiff University.¹ Our field will be coming to terms with his intellectual legacies for many years to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Finally, in this editorial, after ten often tricky and always time-consuming issues over five successful years of *Martial Arts Studies*, we would like to offer a quick note of heartfelt thanks to our designer, Hugh Griffiths. Since day one, Hugh has proved the exception to the marketing rule that 'you don't see good design'. While the most effective design may often be effectively 'invisible' in some contexts, we know for a fact that a large part of the attraction of our journal is its striking visual appearance. *Martial Arts Studies* is not only notable for the scholarship it contains, but also for the undiluted elegance of its appearance. For all aspects of its appearance, all credit goes to Hugh Griffiths, who has worked indefatigably on our journal since the very beginning – always entirely for free and always entirely out of the goodness of his heart. (He doesn't even have an interest in martial arts, if you can believe such a thing!) So, Hugh, from Paul and Ben: thank you – sincerely.

1 Professor Zarrilli's opening keynote address to the 2016 Martial Arts Studies Conference at Cardiff University is available on the Martial Arts Studies YouTube Channel, here: https://youtu.be/ot6SDV_hmTU

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Cardiff University Press
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Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org

Journal DOI

10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

Issue DOI

10.18573/mas.i10

Accepted for publication 30 October 2020

Martial Arts Studies

Journal design by Hugh Griffiths

MAS.CARDIFFUNIVERSITYPRESS.ORG

TWITTER.COM/MASTUDIES

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

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