

# SHOW, DON'T TELL: MAKING MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES MATTER

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## ABSTRACT

How can we make martial arts studies matter? Returning to the issues of triviality and legitimation raised in the Spring 2017 editorial, in this essay we explore various strategies for conveying the intellectual importance of our work to a scholarly but non-specialist readership. In recent years the field of martial arts studies has made impressive strides in terms of both growth and public exposure. Yet this success suggests that increasingly gatekeepers in the form of editors, funding bodies and promotion committees will have an impact on the development of our field. Appealing to such readers is a critical next step in the creation of martial arts studies. The first draft of this editorial was presented by Benjamin Judkins as a keynote at the July 2017 Martial Arts Studies Conference at Cardiff University. It has subsequently been edited to reflect the opinions of both authors and the current context.

## KEYWORDS

Martial Arts Studies, Martial Arts, Disciplinarity, legitimation, triviality, field building.

## ARE MARTIAL ARTS TRIVIAL?

Do the martial arts matter? And how can we as scholars more effectively discuss their social impact when writing to a scholarly, but non-specialized, audience? Or, to put the question differently: How do we move beyond simply talking about these practices and instead *show* our readers their actual significance?

Consider the following vintage Japanese postcard printed in the 1930s. It is one of the more powerful images of the traditional Asian martial arts which we have come across in the last couple of years. At first glance, it might seem unremarkable. Here we have two young men practicing judo in the dojo of a local educational institution, much like young men in Japan have been doing for decades and continue to do to this day.



Figure 1: Vintage Japanese postcard, pre-WWII. The main inscriptions at the top and bottom read: 'Celebration/ Commemoration of the Principal's Homecoming' followed by 'Kodo-kai', the hosting organization (Translation by Jared Miracle).

While the Asian martial arts are often associated with a sense of peace or harmony (often for entirely orientalist reasons), this image is unsettling. One's eyes are immediately drawn to the racks of waiting rifles on the wall behind our martial artists, and beneath these racks we can see a row of hanging bayonets. Rifles and bayonets were stored in similar fashion in the barracks where Japanese soldiers worked, ate and slept during their occupation of various parts of Asia and the Pacific. The weapons in this image were likely intended for the school's drill team and military education classes. Their presence was not intended to cause a sense of alarm to contemporary Japanese viewers, who were simply supposed to register a well-stocked 'modern' educational facility.

The very banality of the scene invites the flowering of subconscious associations within our mind's eye. Compulsory military training became an increasingly pronounced component of the Japanese educational system during the 1930s, at much the same time that Japanese aggression in China increased. Indeed, this was an important decade for the Japanese martial arts. Disciplines like kendo, as taught in schools, were reformed to strip them of their sportive elements to better prepare students for battlefield encounters [Hurst 1998; Bennett 2015]. *Jukendo*, or bayonet fencing (which has recently been in the news due to the protests that erupted over plans to once again make it available in some Japanese schools), took on an increasingly ideological character and became the most commonly practiced Budo in the immediate run-up to the Second World War [xinhua.net 2017; Bennett 2015].

Yet, this image is powerful precisely because none of that is shown. We do not need to see Japanese naval landing forces in Shanghai, or soldiers digging pill boxes on Pacific Islands, to know roughly what year it is. We do not need elaborate backstories to understand who these young men are, or what their future holds. And no one who looks at an image such as this is going to ask whether the martial arts are 'trivial'. Nothing answers that question quite like a row of neatly polished bayonets making an appearance in a judo dojo on the eve of WWII.

Do the martial arts matter and, by extension, does martial arts studies matter? Questions of triviality versus substance are interesting to us as social scientists because they have a cyclic quality to them. We are privileged to live in a time when we can ask that question in earnest. In 1941, people may have been asking whether kendo was an effective training mechanism for practical swordsmanship [Gainty 2015]. But no one saw the physical, social or ideological aspects of these systems as trivial. During the post-WWII period, the American occupation forces in Japan moved to regulate and even ban some martial arts organizations and activities because they understood that these things create social externalities that reach far beyond the realm of individual practice.

These observations were not restricted to discussions of the Japanese martial arts. Consider this photograph, printed as part of an American newspaper report on the Chinese resistance to the Japanese occupation in Guangdong on June 7th, 1939 [figure 2].



Figure 2: 'BACK TO WEAPONS OF FOREFATHERS IN WAR WITH JAPAN.' Miss Tam Tai-men, a female guerrilla fighter who was active in the area near Macao. Acme Photo, 1939.

Here we see a female Chinese militia leader, silhouetted against a stark sky. The empty expanse at the top of the frame visually highlights the blade of her long handled *dadao*, or 'big knife'. While American newspaper readers in the 1930s knew little about the details of the Chinese military, their exotic blades had acquired an iconic status, much like their counterpart, the Japanese katana.<sup>1</sup> We obviously cannot see where the woman's gaze is directed, nor do we need to. We do not need to see an artillery scarred landscape to understand who she is and what is about to happen.

A backstory is ultimately unnecessary to grasp the social significance of the martial arts in China during the 1930s. Indeed, it is fascinating to compare these contrasting images of Japanese and Chinese martial artists, both caught up in the opening stages of the same conflict. On the one hand, Japanese consumers are meant to understand how their disciplined arts were producing effective and unquestionably loyal soldiers for the state's highly modern army.

In contrast, American voters, wondering about the wisdom of sending war aid to China, were assured that this country's martial traditions would produce heroes and heroines willing to stand up and oppose the Japanese no matter the personal cost. While not a modern and disciplined fighting force, such brave individuals should receive more than our empathy. They should also receive our support. It is the essential simplicity of these images, as well as their direct appeal to group identity, that made their message effective.

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1           Indeed, a fascination with the seemingly exotic weapons of Chinese martial arts, and particularly their oversized blades, was already well established among the Western reading public by the outbreak of the Boxer Uprising in 1900. Chinese propaganda efforts during the 1930s often emphasized the bravery of 'Big Sword Troops'. These efforts were so successful that by the time of America's entrance into WWII the *dadao* was appearing in newspaper headlines, newsreels and even children's trading cards.

In the editorial of the Summer 2017 issue of *Martial Arts Studies*, we asked whether martial arts studies is trivial. These images suggest that the answers to this question are not always obvious. We cannot really engage such a question without making explicit our scope and domain conditions. Who is our intended audience? To whom do these arts matter, or not matter? When is this question being asked? Is the year 1939, or 2009? Through what theoretical lens should we evaluate the question of substance?

There is much that could be said about each of these conditions. For the sake of brevity, let us restrict the current discussion to how we can make martial arts studies matter in the current era. Likewise, the audience that we must consider is not mysterious, though it has its complexities. Perhaps we should start there.

In our own writings, we try to imagine ourselves being read by an audience of three different people. The first of these could be any reader of this journal. To succeed, our writing must speak to, and build from, critical conversations that are already happening within the martial arts studies literature. Yet, as the editors of this journal, we frequently encounter scholars who are writing about the martial arts who do not yet know that our field exists, or who cannot quite figure out where the bridges lie between their own projects and those discussed in the larger literature. It is important that we continue to work to expand the scope of our discussion, bringing more of these voices into the conversation.

Second, we imagine writing for a certain type of practicing martial artist. While not a professional academic, this individual generally has at least some university education and a burning passion for their chosen style. They would like to see their art discussed with the same rigor and conceptual toolkit that they were introduced to in school, and yet they want to be able to see their personal experience in the resulting analysis. Keeping the lines of communication open between dedicated scholars and practitioners is vital as it better ensures that we will continue to have access to the sorts of data that the field needs to develop interpretive or causal theories in the future.

The final, and in many respects most challenging, reader that we must consider is a fellow academic who has no long-term interest in martial arts. What such readers really need is an assurance that our discussion is both factually, theoretically and methodologically sound and helpfully *relevant*. More precisely, can martial arts studies scholarship speak to the big questions in their discipline?

At the current moment, our books and articles are likely to encounter all three of these types of reader. And this creates a challenge when asking what we can do to make martial arts studies matter. Simply put, not every reader, academic committee or funding organization is looking for the same sort of thing. Our first conclusion is that we must be increasingly conscious of the complexity and heterogeneity of our audience at every stage in the research process.

It is this last aspect of the puzzle that brings us back to our introductory photographs and the title of this work. In truth, it has never been difficult to make the martial arts matter in a narrow disciplinary sense.

One first locates a critical debate in the discipline – for instance, how national identity is invented and stabilized through the creation of an imagined past. You find an aspect of martial arts history, practice or representation that speaks to these specific questions. Next, one writes a case study or two in which the martial arts are used to stake out a position in this debate, critique some leading thinkers, and advance a theory of one's own.<sup>2</sup>

Success within a disciplinary framework is formulaic by design. This is because every discipline (and every department) generates and publicizes its own standards of evaluation. Knowing how our work will be evaluated, we know something about how to go about doing it. And in some respects, this remains a critical exercise. As a purely practical matter, martial arts studies must be seen to make contributions to the disciplines before anyone will be willing to engage with us on a more fundamental level. And success in the disciplinary realm is usually a prerequisite for young scholars seeking promotion and tenure.

Still, when writing for other parts of our audience, things become more complicated. Martial arts studies draws its strength from the fact that it is a resolutely interdisciplinary exercise [Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011; Bowman 2015]. As a community, we do not all share the same methodological orientation. We come from many fields, from all areas of the globe, and we study fighting systems from every hemisphere. And we have no interest in challenging that to impose a narrow understanding of what 'good martial arts studies' must be, or to define substantive relevance in theoretical or methodological terms.

That said, how do we make martial arts studies matter in the absence of shared disciplinary or methodological perspectives, or even a shared consensus on what things should be central to an academic discussion? Bowman has noted that our field is currently in a 'pre-paradigmatic state' [Bowman 2016: 118], but the question remains as to whether this is solely the result of its relative youth or if there is something more fundamental about its constitution that will continue to promote heterogeneous development.

It may be helpful to remember that we are not the first group of writers to face such a challenge. Lacking an audience with a unified personal perspective, storytellers and filmmakers long ago discovered that the best way to create understanding was to cultivate within their audience a sense of personal investment and empathy. If we want to continue to encourage the growth of martial arts studies, we will need to do the same sort of thing as we increasingly encounter editors, colleagues and funding officers who, while not necessarily hostile to our project, will likely have never heard of nor thought that much about it before.

To draw on the classic piece of advice often attributed to Anton Chekhov: It will never be enough to simply *tell* these individuals that they should be excited about martial arts studies. Rather, we need to write in such a way that we *show* them what we can contribute and demonstrate the unique perspectives that will be lost if our voices are not represented at the table.

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2 Examples of authors who have successfully coopted a disciplinary framework to present work on the martial arts to a broader audience include Meir Shahar [2008], Peter Vail [2014] and Lauren Miller Griffith [2016].

## CONNECTING WITH A NON-SPECIALIST AUDIENCE

How then do we 'show' that martial arts, and by extension martial arts studies, matter? Again, the introductory images of the judo dojo and the female militia leader provide some hints for reaching a non-specialist audience. Or perhaps we want to think about some of our favorite martial arts films and what makes for an effective visual story. After all, it seems highly unlikely that many of us would be practicing the martial arts today, let alone researching them, if not for the massive explosion of enthusiasm that these films ignited within the global public consciousness starting in the 1970s [Bowman 2017: 144-147].

Authorities on screenplays have noted that good stories often share three basic characteristics. First, they feature an active protagonist who reveals their character through the choices they make [Field 2005]. Second, some aspect of this character's beliefs, either about themselves or society, is challenged, thereby allowing the character to develop a meaningful story arc. This is what K. M. Weiland poetically termed 'the lie your character believes', and heaven only knows that we have a few of these in the martial arts [Weiland 2016]. Thirdly, effective writing needs to show that something is at stake. The audience must feel that the actions of the characters have meaningful consequences both for themselves and for other individuals in society.

The images of the judo students and the female militia leaders, while single photographs rather than entire screenplays, draw their audience in (and by extension reassure them that the martial arts matter) precisely because they hit each of these points in a remarkably effective way. The female militia leader is clearly an active protagonist. The lie that she believes is that her efforts, even in the absence of Allied military aid, will influence the outcome of the war. That belief defines her story arc. And obviously there will be meaningful consequences for what happens next if American military aid is not forthcoming.

These same three hints, with a bit of translation, can also help us to communicate more effectively when discussing our own academic research with a non-specialist audience. It is not simply enough for us, or half a dozen of our close colleagues, to understand why some aspect of the martial arts matter. We must get much better at conveying these insights to groups of people who have less of a personal or professional connection to these questions. Editors and funding bodies are right at the top of that list. And these same three principles of communication – developing an active protagonist, describing complete story arcs, and emphasizing meaningful consequences – can (with a bit of tweaking) be the keys to demonstrating that martial arts studies, as a field, really matters.

### AN ACTIVE PROTAGONIST

Let us begin with the idea of having an 'active protagonist'. In a screenplay, or even a photograph, there is usually little question as to who or what the protagonist is. Luckily, academic theorizing, whether interpretive or positive in nature, also forces us to focus our attention on certain key actors or variables. In the social sciences, we sometimes make a distinction between independent variables, by which we mean basic causal forces, and dependent variables, the thing that is being explained. The question then becomes: Where do the martial arts fit into this equation?

If we always approach these questions from the perspective of the various disciplines, where we start off by saying, 'I am a political scientist', or anthropologist or historian 'who researches martial arts', a certain bias can enter our research design without our realization. After all, the big debates within the field of political science often take political and social institutions as the key factors in any situation, and then go on to ask how other groups (like martial arts movements) are coopted and subordinated to these larger political processes.

Perhaps, as in the previous example, the martial arts come to be tolerated, or even supported, by the state as they can provide a unifying mythology that serves the instrumental needs of a nationalist agenda. That is basically the story that Andrew Morris told during his examination of the Central Guoshu Institute which was an organization backed by the Chinese state and the ruling KMT party during the 1930s [Morris 2004]. In a project like this, the martial arts organization is examined, but only as an extension (or subsystem) of a larger and more fundamental project.

These can be very interesting sorts of questions, and they clearly focus on the martial arts. Morris made important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between the modern Chinese martial arts and society. Yet, as the dependent variable, or the thing that is explained and interpreted, the martial arts are being cast in the role of a 'passive protagonist'. As voluntary social institutions, these groups may face dilemmas, but because (in many of these models) their agency is limited, the choices they make reveal little information about their values or identities. In this sort of structure, the martial arts might function as a lens for political or social analysis, but they are only one potential lens among many. Beyond a case study or two, both we and our editors will be forced to ask: Is it necessary to look at the martial arts at all? Why not labor movements, or film industries, or sports leagues?

A wide range of other voluntary associations or popular culture phenomena, most of which are better understood and more respectable, would work just as well. Or, to return to our original metaphor, passive protagonists can help us to explore the world. In the long run, however, narrators tend not to be very interesting guides.

In the hands of a skilled story teller, active protagonists reveal their character to the audience not through exposition, nor as victims of fate. Rather, the actions that they take reveal their core identities, values and strategies for navigating a challenging environment. In our own writing, we can replicate this insight by remembering that individuals often join martial arts groups precisely because they seek to make changes in their own lives or in their communities.

Rather than simply accepting elite views of what a modern Asian state should be, authors like Hurst, Gainty and Morris have demonstrated that martial artists in both China and Japan spent much of the 1920s and 1930s actively opposing Western-inflected elite opinion and championing their own vision of what modern Japanese and Chinese societies should be. Through savvy public relations work and strategic alliances, martial artists in both states enjoyed more success than one might have expected in both carving out a niche for themselves and using government resources to spread their ideas throughout society. It was not the Ministry of Education's idea to put all of those kendo classes

in Japanese schools during the early 20th century. Rather, the classes were the result of decades of concerted lobbying by Japanese martial arts organizations and individuals [Hurst 1998; Morris 2004; Gainty 2015].

In the work of authors like Hurst, Gainty and Morris, the martial arts are transformed into independent variables that have a measurable effect on a broad range of other social institutions. More precisely, the martial arts of the 1920s and 1930s cannot be ignored because they generated many interesting social externalities. No longer are the martial arts merely a lens. Cases such as these reveal that martial arts studies is more than an adjunct to the preexisting disciplines, it is a critical tool for understanding fundamental aspects of the human experience.

In practice, any sufficiently complex research agenda has the potential to approach martial arts as both dependent and independent variables. The arrows of social meaning and causality are often deeply recursive, and some mix between the two will be necessary. But we make the best case for the existence of martial arts studies as a truly independent research area when we discuss the martial arts as an active protagonist.

## GIVING THE MARTIAL ARTS A STORY ARC THE BALANCE BETWEEN THEORY AND DATA

Now that we have established the martial arts as a potentially important social force, what do we intend to do with it? Good screenplays encourage the audience to empathize with the protagonist as their actions reveal fundamental insights about who they are, and demonstrate how their view of the world evolves. In short, the martial arts need to do something. They need a story arc.

Luckily for us, engaging story arcs often focus on the process by which a character comes to realize that some of their beliefs, either about themselves or the world, are either false or mythic in nature. It is when a confrontation between myth and reality finally erupts that we discover who our protagonists are. Identities, desires and relationships are clarified in these confrontations.

It seems that there are few areas of social life in which marketing myths, half-truths, lies and legends collide more frequently, or forcefully, than in the martial arts. It is very difficult for anyone to think about the historic European martial arts without envisioning a world in which noble knights charged around on white horses. Michael Ryan's work on Venezuelan stick fighting, which Judkins recently reviewed for this journal, evokes images of small farmers resisting waves of outside oppression with nothing but their machismo and polished hardwood garrotes [Ryan 2016; Judkins 2017]. And it seems that every Chinese folk martial art practiced today feels obliged to trace its origins to an imaginary burning of the Shaolin temple or forfeit its right to be called 'kung fu'.

This does not exhaust the potential misunderstandings that define the martial arts. For every internally generated legend, historical exaggeration or marketing myth, there is also an externally imposed social narrative. In France and the Netherlands, various actors,

including successive governments, decided that kickboxing would be a good cultural fit for the immigrant Muslim community and encouraged the sport as an aid to cultural assimilation. As Jasmijn Rana points out in her article 'Producing Healthy Citizens', it is hard to imagine programs like this working when *only* Muslim youth are encouraged to join kickboxing classes while all the rest of the citizens are given public pools and swimming leagues [Rana 2014]. While all parents in the United States instinctively 'know' that taekwondo classes are a wonderful mechanism to instill self-discipline in children (the trait that society seems to value above all others), they also 'know' that there is something just a little bit off about adults who continue with these hobbies, rather than turning to more serious pursuits. These adult practitioners get internet parody videos rather than praise.<sup>3</sup>

Bowman offers a detailed examination of the stories that we tell ourselves in *Mythologies of Martial Arts* [Bowman 2017]. In light of this study, it seems difficult not to see the many ways in which the martial arts, and their social position in the modern world, have been shaped by these myths. There is an undeniable thrill that comes with the discovery that apparently common-sense propositions might be anything but. This might lead to attempts to debunk certain popular misconceptions. But in all cases students of martial arts studies should first strive to understand the social externalities (either positive or negative) that these myths generate.

Or, put differently, how is it that the lies that you believe about your own practice impact other people who have never thought of themselves as martial artists? Students and instructors might believe anything they want. Those beliefs, however, are not without consequence. Douglas Wile, in his article 'Fighting Words', explores at length the implications of current Chinese language debates on the origins of taijiquan the impact of which reaches far beyond a handful of history buffs [Wile 2017]. He suggests that this discussion touches on central questions of Chinese identity, academic freedom and the Party's control of traditional culture. This seemingly arcane dispute has political implications for everyone.

To fully explore such topics, one must first find the appropriate balance between theoretical development and empirical exploration. It is impossible to identify the interesting puzzles that surround the martial arts without a well-polished theoretical lens. Such questions only emerge when observed phenomena contradict our expectations. And these expectations are inevitably a result of the theories that we hold, whether we are conscious of them or not.

Nevertheless, if we fail to dive into the empirical data, we will never be able to convince the non-specialist readers that these social discourses and causal mechanisms have a substantive impact on the broader community. Again, that is the bar we are striving to reach when we attempt to show that martial arts studies, as an interdisciplinary project, matters and brings something to the table that more traditional approaches might not.

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<sup>3</sup> Among other examples, Master Ken's incredibly humorous videos on YouTube seem to mock the adult martial artist who has failed to put away childish desires and fantasies. For a more detailed discussion of his comedy, see Bowman [2017: 20-24].

## MEANINGFUL CONSEQUENCE

This brings us to the last point of discussion. We need to convey clearly to our audience that their understanding of all of this will have meaningful consequences. This is one area where we believe that the martial arts studies literature has often come up short.

After all, who wants to preach to the choir? We do not need to convince our colleagues and interlocutors within the field that the reconstruction of Spanish fencing systems, or the detailed documentation of traditional wrestling practices, really matters. Any one of us could come up with half a dozen research questions to pursue through the study of those disciplines before reaching the end of this essay. Nor do we need to convince the cross-over audiences composed of actual practitioners who enjoy many of our books and articles. The very fact that they are willing to wade through an ethnography on some aspect of boxing, or yet another history of Japanese swordsmanship, speaks to a level of obsession that makes any apologies unnecessary.

At the same time, it seems that there is a great deal of low hanging fruit that remains un-plucked. In the opening editorial to the Summer 2017 issue, we observed that there are very few discussions of actual violence coming out of the field of martial arts studies, even though this is a pressing theoretical and policy issue. It is also a problem that students of the martial arts might be uniquely qualified to speak to.<sup>4</sup> Nor is there only one conversation to have. Violence exists in many modalities, from interpersonal to interstate conflict. The nature of martial arts schools means that they have often been implicated in, or been forced to respond to, community violence in pretty much every region of the globe.

A few voices in the historical and anthropological literature have already picked up on these threads, but much more remains to be done. As a field, we are well-positioned to examine the current trend towards greater levels of organized ethno-nationalist, social and political conflict. How should we approach the rise of organized groups dedicated to promoting brawling and other forms of violence at political protests? Can we speak to the somewhat complex connections between various forms of terrorism and martial arts training? And what insights might martial culture open on the nature of domestic abuse? I doubt that these topics will reflect many of our individual experiences within the martial arts, of course, and there is always a bias towards writing what you know. That is another bit of advice that you might get from a screenwriter. Yet, there is an urgent need to begin to tackle these many faces of violence.

Still, we do not wish to downplay our accomplishments. They are important to consider as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Sixt Wetzler addressed the question of violence at length in his keynote at the July 2017 Martial Arts Studies Conference in Cardiff University. His presentation is currently being written up for publication and will hopefully appear as a chapter in the forthcoming book **The Martial Arts Studies Reader**, which will be published by Rowman & Littlefield International in due course.

In the last few years, martial arts studies has firmly planted its feet on a new and more difficult path. For decades, pioneers like Burton, Draeger and Hurst attempted to bring the study of the martial arts into the academy [Burton 1884; Draeger 1979a, 1979b; Hurst 1998]. And yet, for a variety of reasons, they failed. Hopology never gained the traction that martial arts studies currently enjoys, remaining essentially a hobby, and the few real successes that emerged, such as Hurst's study of the armed martial arts of Japan, or Esherick's work on the Boxer Uprising, tended to fall within the confines of disciplinary-bounded discussions [Esherick 1987].

The current view looks very different. Rather than studies of traditional fighting systems or combat sports being a personal eccentricity, something that an individual scholar might pursue in lonely isolation in addition to their 'serious' academic work (or as a limited addendum to it), the martial arts are now receiving a degree of respect within the academic world. We no longer ask whether it might be possible to treat the martial arts as an academic subject of enquiry. The evidence rests all around us, in ever growing piles of recent publications and manuscripts awaiting review.

The last few years have seen the creation of academic journals, research networks, a book series, and well-attended annual conferences held in multiple locations around the globe. Top university and academic presses have taken on an increasing number of martial arts studies manuscripts, and their appetite for these sorts of projects only seems to be growing.

All of this is good news. And yet, a moment of reflection reveals that this rapid success has also raised the stakes. A university press can only publish so many monographs in a calendar year. This means that our acquisition editors must argue not just that our project is interesting, but that it is more important, and will generate more enthusiasm, than some other project.

More graduate students in fields like anthropology, cultural studies and history are focusing their dissertations on martial arts related research projects than ever before. And every year a number of these students hit a highly competitive job market full of interesting and well-qualified candidates. Likewise, the increase in university press publications reminds us that the first generation of assistant professors to have written in this area is rapidly coming up for tenure review. And as part of that process they will need to demonstrate to several individuals that not only were they capable of getting works of martial arts studies published, but that these projects have made critical contributions both within and beyond their disciplines.

The question we posed in the editorial of the last issue of this journal may have been somewhat rhetorical. It is unlikely that anyone reading these pages believes that the martial arts, or martial arts studies, is trivial. Trivialities do not inspire so many individuals to write books and research articles or embark on transoceanic fieldwork.

This same understanding may not be shared by the funding bodies, tenure committees, and acquisitions editors who are even now getting their own vote on whether, and how, martial arts studies continues to develop. Ironically, the success that we have enjoyed up to this point has

moved us into a position where we are likely to meet such gatekeepers with increased frequency.

Our next challenge as a field will be to establish a regular presence at the various large disciplinary meetings that dominate the academic calendar, further increasing the visibility of our work. Beyond that we need to find the sources of funding necessary to institutionalize the gains that we have already made. These are exciting opportunities and we are fortunate to be working from a solid foundation. Yet, making martial arts studies matter within the larger academic context is a challenge precisely because of our past success in professionalizing the discussion.

Rather than repeatedly explaining the many ways in which the martial arts have mattered, we need to show these gatekeepers what we as a field can do. We must demonstrate the unique insights that we can bring to the table. Not everyone will approach that goal from the same perspective, and that is one of the strengths of the interdisciplinary approach. When we strive to treat the martial arts as an active protagonist (or as an independent variable), we make a stronger case for the intellectual independence of martial arts studies. When we balance theoretical insight with historical, ethnographic or sociological data, we have the best chance of reaching non-specialist readers and convincing them that the martial arts generate externalities that extend beyond the realm of the individual hobbyist. Lastly, by emphasizing the meaningful consequences of these discourses and practices, we answer the question of whether the martial arts are 'trivial'.

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