EDITORIAL
PAUL BOWMAN & BENJAMIN N. JUDKINS

FIVE YEARS AND TWELVE MONTHS THAT CHANGED THE STUDY OF MARTIAL ARTS FOREVER
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**Martial Arts Studies** is part of a network of projects that connect academics, practitioners and institutions as they contribute to this rapidly expanding field of studies.

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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
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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 ourself 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
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 nationally) 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.
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 ‘Tàolū – 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.
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...
art 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.
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. 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.

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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/otS6Dv_hmTU
CONTRIBUTOR

A professor in the Theatre Department of the University of Ottawa since 2005, Daniel Mroz is director of the BFA program in stage acting and the MFA program in directing for the theatre. In the 1990s, he apprenticed as an actor with director Richard Fowler. In the early 2000s he earned his Doctorat en études et pratiques des arts from l’Université du Québec à Montréal. Daniel has directed in Canada and the United States and taught actors, directors, dancers and choreographers in Canada, the United States, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and China. His scholarly and artistic work focuses on the use of Chinese martial arts and physical culture in contemporary theatre and dance. He is a long-time practitioner of the Chinese martial arts including Choy Li Fut Kuen 蔡李佛拳, Tong Ping Taijek Kuen 唐鹏太极拳, Chén Tàijīquán 陈太极拳 and Wùdāng 武当 swordplay. His principal teacher is Tàijíquán expert Chén Zhōnghuá 陈中华. Daniel Mroz is the author of The Dancing Word, a book about the Chinese martial arts in the creation of contemporary theatre, published by Brill (2011).

TÀOŁÙ
THE MASTERY OF SPACE
DANIEL MROZ

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experience of space afforded by the practice of tàolù 套路, the prearranged movement patterns of the Chinese martial arts. It examines the roots of tàolù in Chinese martial preparation, religious self-consecration and theatrical performance. It develops the structure and phenomenology of this practice with special attention to its exponents’ perceptions of negative space. Following an interdisciplinary approach, the author contextualizes embodied, martial knowledge in terms of Chinese social history, theatre and religious praxis.

KEYWORDS

Chinese martial arts, tàolù, theatre, religious self-consecration, spatial perception

CITATION

PREAMBLE

The only persistent problem for the artist is to express a subject which is always the same and which cannot be changed, by finding a new form of expression each time.

Francis Bacon, speaking with Michel Archimbaud in 1992

[Bacon 1992: 80]

My own persistent problem is the mysterious nature of tàolù索蘺; the choreographed movement practices found in the martial arts of China. After 26 years of study, I continue to find every scholarly and practical explanation of their nature inspiring yet incomplete. The following continues the examination of this subject that I first shared in 2011 in The Dancing Word, my book on Chinese martial arts and performer training; in my examination of actor training in the Chinese and European traditions [2014]; in my chapter on acting teacher Michael Chekhov, Rudolf Steiner’s mysticism, and the cosmology of qìgōng气功 [2015]; in my co-authored study of the practices of Chinese dǎoyǐn導引 and Tibetan trulkhor [2016]; and in my recent paper about tàolù, drawn from my keynote address at the 2016 Martial Arts Studies conference in Cardiff [2017]. This paper expands my presentation at the 2020 online Martial Arts Studies conference, hosted by Aix-Marseille Université.

INTRODUCTION

Tàolù are tools for mastering space. They train us to project our imaginations into the negative space around our bodies, and to intentionally manipulate that empty space as though it were a positive object or substance.

Tàolù can be seen as proto-combative behaviour, a level of practical coordination that can be put at the service of combat. The martial movement they express exists prior to the context that will eventually give it meaning as warfare, hunting, duelling, self-consecration, meditation, sporting competition, aesthetic performance or a host of other possibilities. Tàolù are the human performance of combat and include, but also go beyond human performance in combat.

1 Where available, Chinese characters are provided when a name or term is first introduced. Mandarin is Romanized using Hanyu Pinyin. Cantonese is Romanized according to popular usage, with the Jyutping Romanization provided when a term is first used. Sanskrit, Tibetan and Thai terms have been Romanized according to popular usage.

2 As does Andrea Falk in her English dictionary of Chinese martial arts terms [2019: 70].

CULTUALLY, the martial movement of tàolù is found not only in Chinese martial arts, but also in Chinese theatres and religious practices, current and historical [Mroz 2011: 22]. They are acts of self-consecration that express martial religiosity using theatrical means. In this paper I will explore their conjoined combative, religious and theatrical expression.

Tàolù – The Mastery of Space

Daniel Mroz

Tàolù teach us how to create surprise. In fighting, surprise enables victory, or the transformation of disadvantage into dominance. In theatre, surprise is used to lead the attention of the audience. In religion, surprise creates insight when we consider the meaning of the two experiences we often prefer not to think about: death, and more critically, life.

It may seem paradoxical to associate the repetitive and formal tàolù with surprise. However, the set structures of tàolù create the possibility of mental space. In following their behavioural prescription, we accept external standards of movement. In doing so we can transform, suppress or at least negotiate with our movement habits and preferences. Having externalized our decision-making process by following the rules of tàolù, we may notice that some of our constant mental chatter and our physical tics are silenced. In this silence, lateral thoughts and unusual movement impulses can arise, and novel avenues of perception and action become available to us. We can see beyond our usual horizons and can act in new ways. As Brian Eno advises in his Oblique Strategies for artists, repetition is change, as reexperiencing patterns to saturation alters our perceptions [2005: unpaginated]. While the pattern of the tàolù won’t change in practice, each inspiration that arises offers a new variation when we move without the constraints of routine practice. It may not be obvious in contemporary curricula, but tàolù should serve to facilitate creative, free movement which can be improvised alone, in free play with a partner, in performance, in sporting competition, or in combat.

Describing the Chinese martial arts, Kāng Gewù康戈武 writes that they are characterized by qiǎo (巧), which his translator renders as ‘ingenuity’ [1995: 1].1 I suggest that ‘cunning’ is a better word for combative training that lets us reliably engineer surprise. Nevertheless, the modernist lens through which we view the Chinese martial arts can make it hard for us to think in terms of cunning.

Our contemporary experience leads us to imagine these systems in two ways: as symmetrical sporting contests, or as responses to asymmetrical
self-defence situations. We cannot ignore the powerful and positive effect that the first of these assumptions has had on the practical skill levels seen in combat sports today. From boxing and wrestling, through Judo, Sándā 斩打, Muay Thai and BJJ to the worldwide proliferation of MMA, aggressive competition and training guided by sports science has created consistently improving competence in unarmed fighting.

Since the rise of MMA in the 1990s, tàolù and their related partner training practices have fallen into some disrepute. Learning elaborate choreographies and playing flowing, collaborative martial games do not appear to be of immediate use in a fight. Most of the extraordinary players in contemporary combat sports do not train this way.3

To employ qiāo however we must not think like contemporary combat athletes. Rather we should emulate Odysseus, the archaic trickster archetype. Certainly, there was close, hand-to-hand fighting after the Greeks emerged from the Trojan Horse, but as soon as that horse was behind Troy’s walls, the war was effectively won. In the Chinese martial arts in and military strategy more generally, excellence in fighting is secondary to trickery and wisdom. As far back as the Liù Tāo 六韜, a military manual from the Zhou Dynasty, deception and surprise hold pride of place as the superior fighter does not engage in battle [Sawyer 1993: 34, 69].

Ideally, qiāo dictates the fundamental elements of an opponent’s experience before physical conflict can manifest. Contemporary Taiwanese Bāguà Quán 八卦拳 teacher Hé Jìnghán 何靜寒 explains, describing the attitude he believes his grand-teacher Yǐn Fú 尹福 to have held:

We modern people have the wrong idea about the old masters, somehow thinking that they were always fighting. No! People such as Yǐn Fú, who was a bodyguard for the Empress [Dowager], would maybe have had three fights in their entire life and only then when there was a very good reason and when they were sure they would win. If Yǐn Fú had to fight, already he had failed. His job was to keep the Imperial family safe, not to get caught up in violence. He would have been expert at all kinds of terrain, geography, weather patterns, local customs, and much more, all kinds of strategy and ways of travelling, to ensure he never had to fight.

[He, in Kozma 2011: 158-159]

We might also add the mastery of social interactions and cultural forms to this formidable list of necessary survival skills. As Sixt Wetzler proposes, these things we messily call ‘martial arts’ are our attempts to tame the chaos of violence, transforming it into patterns that allow us to perceive it more clearly [Wetzler 2018: 131-132].

CHINESE RELIGIONS AND WAR MAGICs

For millennia, and up until 1912, China explicitly understood itself as a religious state. The patterning Wetzler evokes developed over thousands of years within the larger design of Chinese religious practice. John Lagerwey describes this world view in terms of two major spiritual forces: the environment experienced as deities and spirits, and humans honoured as ancestors. In such a system, conflict was managed and understood using two kinds of rituals of propitiation. The Daoist and popular religious approaches were exorcistic, martial and earthy, associated with place and with space. The Confucian and Buddhist approaches were preoccupied with human genealogies, hierarchies and texts, and associated with ancestors and with time.

Rulers preferred the stability of Buddhist and Confucian texts that reinforced the social order. The people preferred the informality and idiosyncrasy of Daoist and popular embodied rites that exorcized troublesome spirits and directly appealed to the humble earth gods for protection and good harvests. The Daoist and popular religious rituals were more influential and widely practiced but also more poorly recorded [Lagerwey 2010: 7-13]. Even seemingly agnostic events or individuals could not escape the consequences of this binary as these understandings were deeply embedded within both local and elite cultures.

Further describing these fundamental cultural patterns, Lagerwey contrasts Dìyuán 地緣, a Daoist China of space and cosmos with Xuéyuán 血緣, a Confucian China of human lineages [2010: 19]. Dìyuán plays a vital role in the constitution of Chinese martial arts and the practice of tàolù. Xuéyuán is home to natural forces understood as spirits, and coincides totally with the actual physical environment in which conflict occurs. In this worldview, physical, tactical fighting and rituals exorcising and blessing space are in fact the same subject. In other words, martial arts are war magic, containing both physical and metaphysical techniques [Farrer 2016: 1]. The distinction between the two is a modern one that reflects Western assumptions and a fundamentally secular world view that would have been alien to most residents of imperial China.
Concretely, war magic could have included defenders stockpiling weapons, making a large offering to a local deity for protection and prominently wearing the talismans produced during that rite while patrolling their territory. The enemy encountered on such patrols was likely from nearby and would share in the same ritual culture. The defenders’ gambit was that their potential raiders would be cowed by the talismans and the good morale produced by such magical protection. An aggressor would not do something as pointless as attacking an enemy rendered invulnerable by a talisman. Should violence nevertheless erupt, the defenders could pragmatically fall back on their physical, tactical training. However, they acted magically first because it projected their power further out into space, into the territory that they wanted to secure.

This kind of war magic is usually identified with 19th century rural peasant groups such as the Hóng Qiāng Huì 红枪会 (Red Spear Society) or the Dàdāo Huì 大刀会 (Big Sword Society). Elizabeth Perry describes the spread of the Red Spears’ rituals in the 1800s as the popularization of previously marginalized practices [1980: 256], but the magic performed by these radical groups is far from peripheral to the history of Chinese martial arts. Meir Shahar recounts how imperial troops seeking supernatural protection petitioned their tutelary deities Guān Yǔ 关羽 and Mǎ Shén 马神 the Horse King in the 1500s, three hundred years earlier. War magic is a perennial aspect of Chinese martial cultures from the conventional centre to the idiosyncratic margins [2019: 378].

The success of Chinese war magic depends on its antagonists’ mutual participation in the shared world of the dìyuán, and on it’s being deployed with qiǎo. Perhaps the most famous failure of war magic was experienced by the Yīhéquán 義和拳 fighters of the Boxer Rebellion of 1899 who discovered they were not impervious to the bullets of Western colonial powers. The occupying forces didn’t participate in the dìyuán of the rebels and worse, the Boxers did not deploy their magic with qiǎo. Instead of tricking the colonial forces into believing that shooting at them would be useless, they foolishly exposed themselves to enemy gunfire. Unlike Odysseus and Yǐn Fú, the Boxers had not won before they fought. This created a false connection between martial ritual and actual combat [Farrer 2018: 37]. Despite such false connections, we cannot simply dismiss the dìyuán as a mere world of make believe that is of no consequence to ‘reality’.

These ideas may be counterintuitive to our usual ways of thinking about the Chinese martial arts. While most of the systems that are practiced today were secularized and largely reinvented between the 1910s and the 1950s, they preserved deeper cultural practices that were created in accordance with a millennial, religious worldview that is now largely forgotten. We cannot grasp the social meanings and skilled fruition of even the most ‘modern’ practices without first dealing with this neglected inheritance. In imperial China, the martial arts had the following general characteristics that are now unfamiliar to us:

- Chinese martial arts idealized cunning and taught the use of trickery before tactics and spiritual combat before physical combat;
- Chinese martial arts took place in a real, material space that was also simultaneously a religious space governed by shared cultural values, including belief in the supernatural;
- Tàolù expressed this shared vision of China as a religious space, by theatrically creating physical narratives that were experienced by their players and received by audiences.

I am not diminishing the tactical brilliance of the Chinese martial arts overall or the fighting skill of the many capable exponents with whom I’ve had the good fortune to study. Rather I point to the history and sources that can explain the nature of tàolù and the attributes that their practice cultivates.

To make an analogy, we could elect to discuss the works of J.S. Bach (1685-1750) strictly in terms of their formal musical structures with no reference to religion. Bach however was a practicing Christian who worked in a church. In his lifetime his music was received as religious expression. Furthermore, the standardized tuning named A440 which is used to play his music today, was only adopted in the 19th century. If we don’t know these things, we will still be able to enjoy contemporary performances of Bach, but we will remain ignorant of the factors that shape our experience of his music. If we attempt to speak with authority on the nature and origins of his music, we will simply be wrong.
MARTIAL MOVEMENT

Please watch the video demonstrations: 4 [vimeo.com/439431373](vimeo.com/439431373)

Let us observe the movement that makes up these ritual, martial and theatrical activities. In the video on the left, two recreational martial artists who are students of a present-day, international Choy Li Fut Kuen 慈李佛拳, coi3 lei5 faat6 kyun4 1 lineage perform a choreographed fight using double sabres and spear. Simultaneously on the right are two professional teachers of jingjù 京剧 or ‘Peking Opera’, from the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts in Beijing, demonstrating basic phrases of fight choreography with the same weapons.

There is a slight difference in the tempo-rhythms of the two choreographies, as one is a real performance by amateurs and the other is instructional material presented by professionals. The jingjù weapons are made of light and resilient wood reinforced with twine or fibreglass. The Choy Li Fut weapons, while still light and maneuverable, are made of heavier wood and metal and the spear is about one third longer. Yet these two presentations are virtually interchangeable. The contexts may be different, but the physical culture and martial movement displayed are the same. Why might this be so?

THEATRE, RELIGIOSITY, AND CHOY LI FUT KUEN

The Hung Sing Choy Li Fut Kuen School was perhaps the first martial arts studio that a contemporary person would have recognized as such. As such it is an interesting test for understanding the worldview of even relatively modern Chinese martial arts. Choy Li Fut Kuen was founded by Guangdong native Chan Heung 陳享, (Can4 Hoeng2, Chén Xiăng), 1805-1875, in 1836. He presented his style as a synthesis of three earlier practices. In 1848, Chan’s representatives opened branch studios in various locations, including Guanxi Province and the Guangdong city of Foshan. In his early career Chan was sought after as a teacher of martial arts and militia drill for smaller communities in the Pearl River Delta region. However, his creation of a chain of studios teaching a standardized curriculum, which individuals could join by paying or bartering, was a new development in the region. The Foshan Choy Li Fut Kuen schools were closed when the Red Turban Revolt (or Opera Rebellion) of 1854 was put down in 1856, and when the style resurfaced in the city in 1867 it was as the main activity offered by the newly reformed Hung Sing Association [Judkins & Nielson 2015: 97].

The Hung Sing Association was a fraternal organization that catered to the lower, working classes of Foshan, who sought social respectability through participation in an increasingly influential group. In addition to martial arts instruction, membership offered individuals a network of social connections and negotiating power in their dealings with landlords, employers, gangster-run protection rackets and the state. At its height in 1920, the Hung Sing Association had some 3000 members in Foshan, a town of about 300,000 people. Judkins and Neilson estimate that 4% of the adult, male population under the age of 40 were members and consequently had some experience of Choy Li Fut Kuen [Judkins & Nielson 2015: 97].

Although Hung Sing membership required the practice of Choy Li Fut Kuen, the association also offered other group physical activities, including military drill. In situations of violence, such as the Hung Sing Association’s involvement in the militarized aspects of the 1925 Hong Kong general strike, members armed with rifles were deployed to the picket-lines. They grabbed their guns and left Choy Li Fut’s powerful punches and its vast arsenal of archaic edged weapons behind in the studio. While violence and hand-to-hand combat were certainly a feature in the lives of the people practicing Choy Li Fut Kuen, when push came to shove, they used firearms and group action to defend their persons and their socioeconomic interests. As Ben Judkins clearly affirms, China’s modern schools of hand combat were all created in the era of firearms [Judkins & Nielson 2015: 40]. Like the vast majority of Chinese martial arts extant today, Choy Li Fut Kuen was never used on a battlefield, nor did it descend from practices that were. While its exponents may have used it for skirmishing, its principal relationship to violence was in the civilian context of duelling, and in self-defence against the kinds of limited social conflicts that Patrick McCarthy has called Habitual Acts of Physical Violence [2005: 2].

While the Choy Li Fut Kuen practiced by the members of the Hung Sing Association undoubtedly helped them to negotiate individual social positions through fisticuffs, it also intersected visibly with religious
behaviour. Choy Li Fut exponents playing tàolù enacted a magical, religious role in and for their community. The play of tàolù and Lion Dancing in a seasonal calendar of popular festivals demonstrated the adepts’ martial prowess while earning spiritual merit for the entire community. By practicing and demonstrating the arduous and humbling physical training Choy Li Fut requires, these performers consecrated and re-consecrated themselves to what Daniel Amos refers to as a *religion of the body* [1997: 31-61]. This self-consecration made them spiritually inviolable and venerable in the eyes of their community. Their demonstration of skill acquired through perseverance, or gāngfù 功夫, was a meritorious act performed on behalf of the collective. This was one of the ways that the Hung Sing Association’s plebian students could achieve status within their broader social system.

This self-consecration was also tacitly expressed in theatre. Theatre permeated public and private life in 19th century China. While professional actors belonged to a marginalized underclass, people loved the entertainment they provided and hired them not just to perform but also to teach and coach amateurs. For professional, amateur and private groups, the learning, rehearsing and presentation of theatre was beloved, constant and intense. While non-actors would never play professionally, virtually everyone was involved in performing at some level. Given its spectacular nature and emphasis on dramatic fights, it comes as no surprise that Chinese theatre, or tàolù 戏曲 employs many training methods that are virtually identical to those used in martial arts. While it would be possible to provide multiple examples, Jo Riley relates a particularly interesting case:

In 1991 I filmed a wushu club training in the village temple in Zhong Suo village in Guizhou under their master Lu Huamei, who was also the head of the village theatre company. Lu teaches tang quan style, which is in the middle level range of skills, and over three hundred villagers train regularly with him (nowadays girls included). Six small boys also take part in the training, the youngest of whom is ten years old, and the skills they learn from Lu are also observed from standing on the stage with the village theatre company when they perform. As in many villages, the village temple, martial arts training and performance indistinguishably form the cradle of acting in and spectating theatre.

[Riley 1997: 17]

Whether amateur or professional, actors portraying deities and ancestors on stage would achieve an exponential self-consecration: the actors performed martial movement and in doing so self-consecrated. Their performances presented the stage figures of ancestors and deities, a further act of self-consecration. These stage figures in turn performed martial movement within the fiction of the dramatic narrative, self-consecrating for a third time.

The Red Turban Revolt of 1854 gives some sense of the theatre’s public value in 19th century China: in an altercation over taxation with the faltering and distant imperial Qing government, a theatre troupe leader named Li Wen Mao joined forces with a secret society gangster named Chen Kai and other malcontents, eventually capturing the city of Foshan. Li’s revolutionary actors turned their rebellion into a theatrical performance, fighting and then governing in costume. Dressed as the folk-heroes, deities and ancestors they would normally play onstage, they brought the archetypal, outsized and chaotic world of myth and fiction into everyday politics in the most direct way imaginable [Lei 2006: 160-161]. When the rebellion was quelled in 1856, those actors who didn’t flee or hide their identities were massacred. Local theatre was banned for a period of 10 years.\(^6\)

The Hung Sing Association reopened its Choy Li Fut Kuen studio in 1867, eleven years after the Opera Rebellion and one year after the theatre ban was lifted. Given the sheer density of theatre being practiced in Chinese culture in the 19th century it is easy to imagine all of that commitment and effort being transferred from theatre to martial arts, bringing with it a wealth of martial choreographies.\(^7\) Regardless of the details of how this came about, the Choy Li Fut tàolù are theatrical artefacts, and demonstrate a discreet yet robust site of resistance to imperial power: ‘No officer, of course it’s not theatre, it’s Kung Fu!’

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\(^6\) The ban was not only meant to punish the actors who had risen above their station. The secret societies resisting the Qing government conducted their ideological teaching and initiations through elaborately produced amateur theatre productions, further stoking the imperial ire against local theatre artists.

\(^7\) In 2013, a day after arriving in China, I visited the class of my friend and colleague Prof. Lù Suǒsēn 吕锁森 at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts in Beijing. He introduced me to his 30-odd jīngjù students as a visiting theatre artist and immediately had me learn a partner stage-fighting choreography for the qiāng or spear, which his Finnish student, Antti Silvennoinen, taught me on the spot. Because of my previous training I learned the short, paired set very quickly. He called all the students over to watch while giving them a most thorough scolding, pointing out that they had failed to memorize the series in question after three weeks of work, whereas I, a foreigner who had arrived in Beijing the day before and who barely spoke Mandarin, could already perform it! I’d never done any jīngjù before, but I had of course trained in Choy Li Fut Kuen and its spear-play forms. I explained this to Lù, but he didn’t choose to enlighten his stunned students any further.
STRUCTURE AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF MARTIAL MOVEMENT

More recent concepts used in the teaching of Chinese physical culture may help us to further understand the theoretical and historical propositions outlined above. What makes us move? Tàolù always imply the presence of another body, even if the practitioner is training or performing alone. The impetus for movement in Chinese martial arts comes from outside of the exponent’s body. They may begin the process of movement because of an imagined natural force, an ancestor, deity, teacher or opponent. They may even have a real teacher or an actual audience to salute, but from there on in they are moving in response to the prompts and demands of an attacker, present or implied [Mroz 2017: 48].

This extraversion is fundamental to all of the developmental agendas we might attribute to Chinese martial movement. To respond competently to violence, I must reject my instinctual or preferred reactions in favour of responses that help me neutralize my aggressor using my environment. To perform capably in a martial competition or demonstration, I must externalize my decision-making process to respond to my partner’s actions and timing. To self-consecrate through training I must abandon my self-involvement and conform my body to pre-existing ritualized shapes and sequences. This rejection of habit and preference is accomplished using a durational training that, over time, changes how I perceive my body.

The externalization created through this training process is practical. When called upon to respond to an outside stimulus, such as dodging a ball, I will move faster than if I am asked to merely move as quickly as I can without the stimulus of the ball.8 In the absence of an actual ball, the solo-movement training process of the Chinese martial arts teaches me how to construct movement tasks for myself that allow me to use my imagination to access abilities normally recruited by real stimuli. I achieve this by learning to project my imagination outwards into the space around my body.

Both the Chinese martial and theatrical arts describe externalization using the five-character formula shǒu yǎn shēn fǎ bù 手 眼 身法 步, ‘the method of integrating the hand, the eye, the steps and the body’. In the theatrical version, the character for body is replaced with zhī 指 or finger [Riley 1997: 88]. Some martial arts formulations add the character for loosen or sōng 松 [Childs 2020: 84]. The formula denotes the elements that need to be differentiated and individually emptied of habitual reactions, and then reintegrated to produce an expert level of performance.

A practical example: we use our hands to eat. As we prepare to take a bite, we lean forward and drop our head while we move our hands towards our face. As a result, when we begin to learn martial movement, any action of our arms unconsciously pulls our heads forward, sabotaging our balance and disturbing our peripheral vision. In swordplay this tendency allows our training partners to tap us on our fencing-masks every time we move our sword, as our heads come forward automatically, presenting themselves as easy targets. Consciously separating the actions of the head from those of the hands is essential in learning martial movement.

Mid-20th century martial practitioner Tāng Rǔ Kūn 湯汝昆9 describes how mastering the five characters actually feels. Tāng was a teacher of the 20th century Chinese martial art named Yì Quán 意拳, founded by Wǎng Xiānzhāi 王薌齋, 1885-1963. Tāng writes that martial training produces qì gǎn 氣感 or ‘the sensations of the life force’, which are heat, weight, vibration and expansiveness [Tāng in Cohen 1997: 270].

Qì is a term with many meanings, and its use in the discussion of Chinese martial arts is contested. It’s been described by Chinese experts as everything from the sine qua non, to nothing but bogus talk [He 2006: xxvii]. For our purposes qì is a phenomenological correlate to the circulation of blood. My blood is a material substance with an obvious location and flows along predictable paths. When I practice the basic exercises of Chinese martial arts that realign and strengthen the tonic, supportive muscles of the body, both my circulation and the depth of my felt-sense of heat, weight and vibration will improve dramatically. To use Tāng’s terms, as my body empties of compulsion, it can fill with qì.

The last term on Tāng’s list is expansiveness, a euphoric subjective feeling of blending into the environment [Cohen 1997: 271]. As our experience deepens, rather than being hypnotized by ever smaller physical sensations, we reverse our inward focus and project ourselves out into the space that surrounds us. This reversal should emerge tacitly from training and then be supported directly with visualization.

Like the externalisations mentioned above, expansiveness is practical. Our ability to orient ourselves has been developed through the practice of stances, postures and stepping. We can predict the shape of our space and our position in it using our felt-sense of the position of our feet, the distribution of our mass and the orientation of our bodies. We have also learned to measure the space around us using the body of another, through partner training and collaborative martial games. Using

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8 I owe this clear example to my friend and collaborator Scott Park Phillips.

9 Tāng was the Yì Quán teacher of Ken Cohen, who is in turn my teacher. He also gave Ken a copy of his book Yi Quan Qian Shi 意拳淺釋.
These three concentric spaces are named after features and phases of Chinese cosmology. The first range is named after the \textit{bāguà} 八卦, the second is referred to as the range of \textit{tàijí} 太極 or \textit{yīnyáng} 阴阳 and the third is called \textit{wújí} 无极. These cosmological designations are surprisingly tactically concrete. At the \textit{bāguà} range, there are many possible striking actions available. At the \textit{yīnyáng tàijí} range, those possibilities have been curtailed to a few binary options and at the \textit{wújí} range, I cannot differentiate clear striking lines as my limbs are entangled with those of my opponent.

Visualization is used in solo and then in partner practice to map the space of play. As part of my training in \textit{Wùdāng} swordplay, I memorized the octagon of the \textit{bāguà} and practiced projecting it outwards in front of me to encircle my training partner. I also learned to project it downwards towards the ground to encircle myself with the eight principal directions of movement. Lastly, I was asked to visualize the vertical circle in mirror image, to be able to see how my training partner was seeing me.

Spatial Perception

How much space can we embrace with our minds? I was introduced to three magnitudes of space in my training in the swordplay of the \textit{Wùdāng Dàojiào Xuán Wǔ Pài} 武当道教玄武派. The first distance was the range at which I can, with a leap, strike my opponent with my sword, but where I hope they cannot reach me. The second distance allows me to touch my opponent with one hand while also striking them with my sword, while at the third distance, I can strike them with both my elbow and my sword.

The body of another to measure space is called \textit{extended physiological proprioception} or EPP, and we experience a version of it every time we write with a pen and feel the surface of the paper through the stylus we are holding [Simpson 1974: 146-150]. In expansiveness we combine the potential of all of these capabilities to create an imaginal rendering of the space we are moving in. We experience our body inside our mind, which is co-equal with space.

While readers will recognize these cosmological elements as a part of Chinese religion, we must recall that the ostensibly Daoist students of this swordplay system would be effortlessly familiar with such references and find them easy to recall and project.

10 I studied this approach privately with Ismet Himmet in Berlin, in the fall of 2018, for 30 hours. Ismet learned from Yóu Xuán Dé 游玄德, the head of the Wùdāng Xuánwǔ Pài in China. My recent studies with Ismet supplemented my earlier work with Chinese sword-play teachers Jason Tsou (2013), Chang Wu Na & Mei Hui Lu (2013 & 2015), and regular fencing practice with my mentor Michael Babin (2012-2018).

11 These three concentric spaces are named after features and phases of Chinese cosmology. The first range is named after the \textit{bāguà} 八卦, the second is referred to as the range of \textit{tàijí} 太極 or \textit{yīnyáng} 阴阳 and the third is called \textit{wújí} 无极. These cosmological designations are surprisingly tactically concrete. At the \textit{bāguà} range, there are many possible striking actions available. At the \textit{yīnyáng tàijí} range, those possibilities have been curtailed to a few binary options and at the \textit{wújí} range, I cannot differentiate clear striking lines as my limbs are entangled with those of my opponent.
These projections were preceded by a series of meditations done holding the jiàn or straight-sword in lying, seated and standing positions. In these shēn jiàn or ‘body and sword’, meditations, the student practices merging the felt sense of different parts of their body with the felt sense of the sword they hold. Initially the student imagines breathing in, to their lower abdomen, and breathing out along the blade of the sword, which is imagined to extend infinitely. Gradually, increasingly complex feelings and intentions are asked of the student. During training retreats, for example, students are expected to sleep beside their swords, holding a particular body shape corresponding to the handle, guard and blade of the jiàn.

The three ranges of Xuán Wǔ Pāi swordplay correlate well with the general categories of spatial perception posited by neuropsychology. Extrapersonal space, corresponding to the bāguà range, is the space that occurs outside of our reach. Peripersonal space, corresponding to the yīnyáng or tàijí range occurs within the reach of our limbs. Percutaneous space, corresponding to the wújí range, occurs at and just above the surface of our skin, where even if there is no contact, we will sense heat and motion [Elias & Saucier 2006: chapter 10.1].

A contemporary, if reductive interpretation of Tāng’s evocative term expansiveness casts it as the ability to transfer the immediate sensitivity we have at close tactile and visual range to spaces further and further from ourselves.

12 Having practiced these methods almost daily since the fall of 2018, I have noticed a marked improvement in my ability to manipulate the jiàn in solo tàolù, in practicing cuts and thrusts on a swinging, suspended brass pendulum and in free swordplay using limited targets and light protective equipment. Heavier gauntlets seriously inhibit EPP and I do not yet notice much improvement in ‘all in’ swordplay from this particular practice. I don’t spend much more than 20 minutes a day doing these meditations and I am surprised at their effect given they are static and do not model swordplay movement or fighting in a direct manner at all.
Over years this awareness developed to the point where I perceived the empty, or negative space around people and objects as a positive object. It felt as though the space was full of a thick, viscous fluid that flowed around me and my training partner, forming a vast, abstract Henry Moore sculpture made of liquid metal. Swordplay further clarified this experience as I used the positive, solid shape of the sword to craft the shape of this negative space ‘sculpture’, determining the pathways of movement of my training partner.

In my professional work as a theatre director, choreographer and teacher of stage movement I discovered that I was developing performances from beginning to end by making sequential changes to the overall shape of the negative space on stage. My mental picture of the stage space, the initial positions of the performers, the viewpoints of the audience, the height of the ceiling and the objects I had planned to use as the set were enough to set the ‘sculpture’ in motion. The change of emphasis from the positive objects I engaged with in the early years of my training to the negative space that currently preoccupies me seems characteristic of training in Chinese martial arts.

REVERSALS IN TRAINING, REVERSALS AS TRAINING

When we begin to learn traditional Chinese martial movement, we are extroverted. We hope to be able to defend ourselves from others, to demonstrate martial skill in competition or performance, and perhaps in doing so to self-consecrate in ways our community will find meritorious. Once initiated into practice, we experience a first reversal. We are asked to differentiate our bodily movement, to breathe with the abdomen in mind, to focus on the personal and internal world of sensation. When we come to express the results of this withdrawal into our soma, we encounter yet another reversal. The self-sensing that we have refined through inward focus becomes an outward projection of perception and action.

Such reversals are fundamental to the Chinese religious practice of jīn dān 金丹 or the cultivation of the golden elixir, which dates from the around the 2nd century [Pregadio 2019: 2]. It is found in Daoist and other branches of Chinese normative religion. It is composed of physical exercises and visualization, or cún xiǎng 存想. It is undertaken with the view that engaging with our mortality can lead to us towards agency and meaning, rather than to banal social and material careerism. While not literally concerned with the transmutation of metals, jīn dān takes its name and its metaphors from alchemy, comparing the reversal of the normal process of human maturation and decay with the transformation of dross into gold.

The reversals of jīn dān are also expressed in the narratives of folktales and popular theatre through the trope of divine madness. Consider Zhāng Sān Fēng 张三丰, the Daoist immortal and jīn dān master that folk tradition credits with the invention of the supposedly peaceful and enlightening martial art of Tàijí Quán 太极拳. Despite that fact that he is a spiritual being and thus an example to be imitated, he tests the tolerance and openness of all who encounter him by appearing as a filthy, contrarian drunkard who likes nothing more than a good brawl [Phillips 2019: 42-48]. While this perspective resembles a conventional, literary trope such as Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, it is important to keep in mind that jīn dān existed as a widely distributed technical and embodied process, not just as a funny story. Its reversals are specific procedures that produce particular psycho-physiological effects. For instance, in the Wǔdāng Xuǎn Wǔ Pài, an oral transmission attributed to Zhāng Sān Fēng, offers advice on adapting training to various climactic conditions:

1. Waxing Moon – practicing sword enhances qì,
2. Waning Moon – practicing slow, even open-hand movement develops force or lì (力),
3. Windy Night – hike and climb uphill to train the endurance of the lungs,
4. Rainy Night – read Daoist texts and contemplate them,
5. Midnight – meditate to become aware of our ‘human qualities’, chief among these, our mortality and our tendency to deny it.

While still quite general, the specification that training should take place at night reverses the social norm of being active by day and sleeping after dark, setting the would-be student of martial arts on the path towards jīn dān.

This reversal using internalization followed by spatialization is also found in the two formal Daoist jīn dān practices I have learned, as well as in the principal qìgōng (气功) system I practice. In the Dàojiào Qī 功効气 秘, for example, the practice of jīn dān and the worship of Zhāng Sān Fēng were essential elements of the heterodox Sānyī Jiào 三一教 sect created by Lin Zhaolin (1517-1598) whose most distinguished follower was Qī fūguāng 戚福光, 1528-1588, the Ming general today celebrated as a possible source of the martial art that became Tàijí Quán. Scott Park Phillips made this discovery correlating the religious studies archive with the more commonly trawled military history one [Phillips 2019: 48-64; see also Dean 1998, for a history of the Sānyī Jiào]. I received these instructions from Ismet Himmet, October 2018, Berlin.
Pán Dà Zuò 道教七盘大坐 of the Wǔdāng Xuánwǔ Pái,15 one passes through seven levels of consciousness by visualizing and inhabiting their representative bodies. In the Huatūn 花坛 tradition one moves from dynamic movement, sound and breath-holding called Qì Fā Gōng气發功 to the circulation of qì in the Xüān Zhūn Tān 小周天 or the small circuit of the heavens meditation; to the raising and lowering of qì in the Jīn Guān 金关 or golden light meditation; to the concentration of qì in the Jīn Zhān 金珠 or golden pearl meditation. All of this results in the creation of the Yíng Xíng 影形, the projected self.16 Finally, in a reversal worthy of Jīn dān, Zhīnéng Qìgōng 智能气功 begins with a visualization where the body expands to the ‘top and bottom of the universe’, starting, rather than closing with spatial projection.17

While all these practices are relatively quiescent, they nevertheless assume the martial movement found in tàolù as a prerequisite. When meditation or dūng 沉 gotong students lacked this training, all of the teachers I’ve studied with would introduce them to some kind of fundamental martial movements, to allow them to make the process of externalization and its reversals clearer for themselves.

CORRELATION WITH TIBETAN YOGA

As is now well-known after forty years of unprecedented study of religion in Chinese society and history, we Westerners have a congenital incapacity to see the religious dimension in China.

[Lagerwey 2010: 1]

The same is not so of South Asia, where the Western imagination has not just noticed the religious dimension but magnified and exoticized it. Turning to India, we see that Jīn dān, wherever we may find it in the practices of China, is comparable to a Yogic path. It is a series of disciplined and systematic techniques for the training and control of the human mind-body complex, which are also understood as techniques for reshaping human consciousness towards some kind of higher goal [Samuel 2008: 2].

Textual references to a wide variety of practices all named Yoga abound in Indian history. Much like the Chinese martial arts, however, almost all of what is practiced as Yoga today dates from the 1800s.

15 From Yû Xuân Dé via Ismet Himmet, since 2018.
16 From Ken Cohen, since 1998.
17 From Lió Yuăn Ming 利耀明 via Sui Meing Wong, since 1993.

The Tibetan Six Yogas of Naropa is one of the few extant pre-19th century traditions of Yoga. It follows a comparable series of reversals to the ones found in Jīn dān. The practice begins with intense physical training, called trulkhor, that includes extensive martial and theatrical movement [Phillips & Mroz 2016: 148]. The heat, weight and vibration experienced in trulkhor is turned within using visualization and breath retention to produce heat in the body, called tummo. The resulting expansiveness is used to project the imagination out of the body, into a variety of spaces. The adept visualizes and projects multiple bodies for themselves. They project themselves into the liminal space between life and death, and subjectively experience of the ejection of their consciousness into pure space [Baker 2019: 200-210].

The correlation of this process with Jīn dān is unmistakable. Historically, Vajrayana Buddhism has identified with Indian sources to discourage Chinese territorial claims. Culturally however, Tibetan Yoga was strongly influenced by Chinese Chán 佛 / Buddhist and Daoist methods developed on Mt. Wutai in Shanxi province [Baker 2012: 222]. Further, the subtle body system of energetic centres and channels or chakras and nadis now considered characteristic of Yoga and Tantra writ large, also appears to have entered the Indian tradition from China in the 8th century [Samuel 2008: 278-282].

Perhaps our easy acceptance of the religiosity of India and Tibet, and the documented influence of Chinese religion on these cultures can allow us to further explore the Chinese martial arts as religious expressions.

CONCLUSION

Tàolù are ingenious acts of martial preparation, religious self-consecration and theatrical performance. The practice of tàolù can train us to project our imaginations into the negative space around our bodies. This perception may allow us to intentionally manipulate that empty space as though it were positive object or substance. To develop this skill, we transfer the immediate sensitivity we have at close tactile and visual range to spaces further and further from ourselves.

Extended physiological proprioception, cultivated in both the open-handed and armed collaborative partner games of the Chinese martial arts, seems to play a major role in this process. As our sensitivity expands, we experience our mind occupying all of the space which it can encompass, perceiving and moving our bodies as though from outside. This phenomenological experience has its roots in the Chinese religious conception of dìyuán, the Daoist China of space and cosmos, and was originally actualized with cunning or qiǎo in the physical and metaphysical practice of martial arts as war magic.
Tradition does not provide a single term or definition for this unusual skill or attribute. Daoist traditions speak of the projected self or yīng xīng. The martial manual the Tàijí jīng 太極經 describes this ability as the state of enlightened shén míng 神明, literally a ‘radiant spirit’ [Doherty 2009: 64; Masich 2020: 1; Zhang 2016: 68-70]. Oral tradition in xǐqǔ calls it gǎn tàn chàng 感壇唱, ‘the sense of the stage’ or the ability to control the audience’s experience of space and time, creating suspense and entertainment. Turning to contemporary authors, D.S. Farrer describes the feats of spatial memory performed by the Coffee Shop Gods, the master martial artists of Singapore [Farrer 2011: 203-237]. Scott Park Phillips proposes the tangible imagination as the field in which this perception and action takes place [2019: 221]. Writing about the correlate ability of perceiving trajectories in space as tangible geometric shapes, Soviet sports psychologist Grigori Raiport describes the objective imagination [1998: 50-51]. All these terms are compelling, but there is still much research to be done: for now, we must be content to know that tàolù cultivate a very special spatial sense, about which we can always learn more.

Tàolù call upon us to examine the unseen. The implied but absent elements suggested by these choreographies are signs of their combative, theatrical and religious nature, but also of the presence of qi in their design. The fighting usage of the movements has to be filled in by the individual player or their audience. If the shape the player takes is a character from Chinese theatre, it is the viewer who recognizes that figure and places it into a story or a fragment of a story. Visualizing the fictional assailant trapped within our limbs makes us aware of the empty and the full, the xū 虛 and shí 實 or the imaginary and real elements found in our peripersonal space. This implies a larger realization of the complementary relationship between form and emptiness and the fundamentally composite nature of our reality. A well-presented tàolù might convince us that its player has fighting ability they in fact lack, or that they are in possession of special skills or war magic, where in fact there is none. From the perspective of the performer or the witness, we can experience violence transformed, exorcism, trickery, entertainment, ritual and increased depth, all because of the evoked unseen.

Tàolù play a ubiquitous, symbolic role in Chinese culture, not unlike the lóng 龙 or dragon. The lóng is a composite creature with the head of a tiger, the horns of a ram, the body of a snake, the claws of an eagle and the scales of a fish. It represents the original fusion of the nomadic hunting tribes who merged to practice agriculture along the banks of the Yellow River, becoming the Han people [Tu 1997: 4]. In the calendrical cycle of totemic animals, each creature has its own pattern of behaviour, characterized by a quality of energy or ｑ. The lóng is described as moving up, out and down, over and over, in an undulating sine wave that mirrors the progressive reversals of jīn dān. The cultivation of the spatial sense is one of the many coils revealed by this endless dragon. In combative training, theatrical performance and religious expression, the practice of tàolù actualizes this unusual and powerful experience.

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湯 汝昆. 意拳演釋. Publication information unavailable.
This article traces the mythologization, demythologization and remythologization of the origins of taijiquan in China. It describes the association of legendary immortal Zhang Sanfeng with the creation of an ‘internal’ martial art by Ming loyalists during the Ming-Qing transition, the historization of the origins by progressive intellectuals during the late Republican and Mao eras, and the reemergence of the cult of Zhang Sanfeng in the present period as a kind of fundamentalist revival. Using anonymous online informants, it documents the recent appearance of new language and philosophical paradigms – materialism and idealism, physics and metaphysics, and self-defense and self-cultivation – in debates around taijiquan’s true essence. Further, extrapolating from the latest ideological spectrum surveys, the article attempts to divine correlations between views on taijiquan’s essence and general alignments on a ‘liberal-conservative’ axis. The study concludes with an exploration of the special elusiveness of taijiquan as an object of definition and the potential for modern movement science to throw light on its essential uniqueness.
INTRODUCTION

As China marks its tenth year of annual rejections by UNESCO for the recognition of taijiquan as ‘intangible cultural heritage’, this leaves Korea’s taekkyeon as the sole Asian martial art to receive this honor. Now, adding insult to injury, both Japan and Korea are poised to apply for recognition of their own national versions of taijiquan. This revives painful memories of similar rebuffs for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which included both judo and taekwondo, and karate’s inclusion for 2020 (now 2021). Only sumo wrestling, taekwondo and capoeira enjoy the status of ‘national sports’ in their respective birthplaces, while China’s unofficial national sport is table tennis. The grounds for rejection of China’s UNESCO application has been that the language is ‘too vague’ and a tendency to ‘define concepts with other concepts’. This highlights the urgency the Chinese feel to gain recognition for their origination claims and to more clearly define the essence of the art.

In the twentieth century, the Nationalist overthrow of the Manchu dynasty, the Nationalist-Communist united front against Japan, and the Communist victory in the Civil War determined that China would enter the modern era as an independent nation, with a one-party state and socialist economy. Marxism would replace Confucianism and the Nationalist Party’s ‘Three Principles of the People’, and a ‘cult of personality’ would grow up around Chairman Mao, surpassing even that of Generalissimo Chiang. China’s unique culture would no longer be the gift to humanity of mythological figures like the Yellow Emperor, God of Agriculture, or Fu Xi, but a product of the genius of the Chinese people, who would now take credit and rightful ownership.

After 1949, both the means of material production and intangible cultural heritage were nationalized. Thus, literary Chinese would be preserved, but the bāihuà vernacular cultural heritage. Thus, literary Chinese would be preserved, but the bāihuà vernacular would become the style of everyday written communication; local dialects would be preserved, but putonghua (Mandarin) would become the lingua franca; the logographic (characters) writing system would be preserved, but strokes simplified; Hanyu pinyin would replace the myriad Western romanization systems, and the whole country would go metric. Illiteracy would be ‘swept away’ through universal education. In the realm of martial arts, family styles would be preserved, but standardized and brought under the aegis of national physical education institutes. Secrecy, mythology, and claims of invincibility and immortality would be banished, replaced by openness, history, and science.

Taijiquan’s popularity in China, its global dissemination and its reputation as a repository of the quintessence of Chinese culture has made it a kind of contested ‘Holy Land’, fought over by shifting factions in China’s ongoing culture wars. Taijiquan’s origins, once hotly debated between modernizers and traditionalists, became by the second half of the twentieth century a matter of settled history. Owing to interventions by May Fourth Movement anti-feudalists, and later, official Communist endorsement, pride of progeniture was stripped from fabled Daoist alchemist Zhang Sanfeng and awarded to late-Ming local garrison commander Chen Wānting. However, in the current ‘reformed and open’ martial arts marketplace, there is no monolithic standard of authenticity or truth, with a return to localism, lineage and even myth.

Today, in the midst of heated controversies over whether martial arts should be promoted for health or self-defense, and which style is most effective in combat, it is easy to forget those periods when its having any role in a modernizing China was called into question. During the early twentieth century, some progressives saw it as a feudal remnant, rife with magical thinking and, at best, irrelevant for the modern battlefield. During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards condemned all physical education as ‘bourgeois decadence’. Morning calisthenics were replaced by ‘Little Red Book Exercise’ and ‘Little Red Book Martial Art’: recitation of passages from Quotations of Chairman Mao with expressive gestures. Now, with global acceptance of taijiquan’s benefits for health and self-development, it has become a source of national pride and private profit.

Following Mao’s death in 1976 and overthrow of the ‘Gang of Four’, through Deng Xiaoping’s 1978 policy of ‘restoring order’ and ‘reform and openness’, to today’s ‘China dream’, ‘go global’, ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, ‘harmonious society’, and ‘civilized society’, China in the twenty-first century has become a mixed economy of state-owned and private enterprises. This duality plays out in the martial arts marketplace as the parallel development of standardized forms and national sports academies with a resurgence of legacy-brand family styles and local for-profit taiji tourism. While the former fault lines between mythologizers and historicizers reflected Nationalist versus Communist sympathies, today’s divisions are not so easily reducible to a simple one-dimensional political binary. Current debates are no less acrimonious, but new language now dominates the discourse: materialist versus idealist, physics versus metaphysics, and self-cultivation versus self-defense.
MYTH VERSUS HISTORY

One would think that Tang Hao’s, ‘Let us rise up together in the great task of establishing Chinese martial arts on a scientific basis’ [Tang 1930: 3] and Zheng Manqing’s, ‘Qi cultivation is the basis of self-strengthening and hence of national salvation. May my people rise again!’ [Zheng 1946; Wile trans., 1982: 6] would make them natural allies in the movement to promote Chinese martial arts. Both were born during the waning days of the Manchu dynasty and lived through the Nationalist Revolution, Communist Revolution, Civil War and Japanese invasion. For perspective, American readers should imagine themselves living through the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korean War, and Vietnam War, all in one lifetime, and in your own backyard (except that the Chinese Civil War lasted 20 years, and the Japanese invasion lasted 50). Both Zheng and Tang served in state-sponsored martial arts institutes, but gravitated to opposite poles of the political spectrum and ultimately died on opposite shores of the Taiwan Straits. Zheng served as personal physician to Madame Chiang and cultural ambassador from the ROC to the Chinese diaspora, and after 1949, Tang joined the PRC National Physical Culture and Sports Committee as special consultant. In normal times, the worlds of martial artists and intellectuals would rarely intersect. However, just as with the extraordinary times that produced Huang Zongxi and Qi Jiguang’s embrace of martial arts during the Ming dynasty, engaged twentieth-century intellectuals were forced to choose sides and cross class boundaries to study with martial artists from the jianghu and enlist them in the cause of national salvation.

A critical interrogation of the two quotations cited at the beginning of this section would call our attention to the two words: ‘scientific’ and ‘self-cultivation’. Although Tang and Zheng were both passionate advocates for martial arts, these words betray fundamental differences. For progressive Tang, ‘scientific’ was code for historicity, popularization, and universality; for conservative Zheng, ‘self-cultivation’ was code for ‘render unto Caesar’, turn inward, and native tradition. Students of Chinese intellectual history may also hear echoes of the Cheng/Zhu School of Principle, emphasizing discovery of the dao through objective observation, versus the Lu/Wang School of the Mind, emphasizing discovery of our innate goodness through subjective introspection. However, with Japan eager to make China the ‘jewel in the crown’ of its empire, it is not surprising that sincere Chinese patriots had divergent visions of how to save the nation.

Both Tang and Zheng spoke apocalyptically about ‘annihilation of the nation and extinction of the race’ (guowang miezhong) and linked national survival with preservation and promotion of the martial arts. However, Tang concluded that the first step in preserving the baby was to throw out the bathwater: charlatanism, superstition and professional jealousy. An iconoclast but no nihilist, Tang was a lawyer by trade, who knew the difference between fact and fiction, and how to build a case based on historical documents and field investigations. His 1930 Shaolin Wudang kao was a shot over the bow to the conservative martial arts community and established him as the Lu Xun of Chinese martial arts history – a man prepared to wash China’s dirty linen of self-delusion and superciliousness in public and let the slings and arrows be damned. His Shaolin Wudang kao exploded myths and exposed ideological fault lines. It threatened the mystique and rice bowls of professional martial artists and polarized martial arts partisans and policy makers. Although no one dared to say this out loud, some may have noted that Japan was able to reconcile emperor worship and Shinto war gods with radical modernization of the economy and military; why deny China its Daoist immortal Zhang Sanfeng and Chan Buddhist patriarch Bhodidharma?

The association of legendary Daoist alchemist and immortal Zhang Sanfeng with the creation of taijiquan begins with late Ming dynasty Huang Zongxi’s 1669 ‘Wang Zhengnan muzhiming’ (Epitaph for Wang Zhengnan) and son Baijia’s ‘Neijia quanfa’ (Martial Art of the Internal School), where we are told that the principles of a martial art based on ‘softness overcoming hardness’ were revealed to Zhang Sanfeng in a dream by Xuanwu, the God of War. The name Zhang Sanfeng, and its several homonyms, was a magnet for attribution by various esoteric practices, including martial arts, inner alchemy, bedroom arts, and even calligraphy. Thus, by a thin tissue of associations, Yang family literati patrons connected the soft-style theory of the ‘Martial Art of the Internal School’ and the Wang Zong of its genealogy to the trope of texts serendipitously ‘discovered’ by fellow Yongnian townsman Wu Yuxiang in a salt shop and credited to Zhang Sanfeng and Wang Zongyue.

Finally, we are told, Wang Zongyue’s teachings were transmitted by disciple Jiang Fa to the Chen family of Chenjiagou, Wen County, in Henan Province, where their servant Yang Luchan absorbed them by spying on his masters. The name ‘taijiquan’ does not appear in the Huang texts or in the Chen family biographies or form manuals, and one is at pains to discern any soft-style language in the early Chen family writings. As the generations that follow Chen Changxing and Yang Luchan continued to modify and transmit the art to ‘outsiders’, we witness an explosion of new family-name styles – Wu (Yuxiang), Wu (Jianquan), Hao, Sun – and mass-market publications, each featuring different, and often contradictory, accounts of origins and the cast of characters. Details apart, what is relevant for the present discussion of the dialectical divide between mythologizers and historicizers is the reactionary resurgence today of taijiquan creation myths.
Invoking a supernatural source and soft-style martial art by the Huangs and Yangs coincides with periods of aggression by ‘hard’ invaders – Manchus, Europeans, and Japanese – and begs the question of whether this should be interpreted as an allegorical strategy for cultural survival under colonial occupation, and whether metaphorical genesis encourages an enduring legacy of magical thinking in taijiquan culture? It reappears once again today in the midst of unprecedented prosperity and absence of military threat: the unholy alliance of mythos and marketing has seemingly not lost its appeal. Tang was criticized from his left by those who thought martial arts were feudal dregs, and Zheng, for his part, was criticized from his right by those who saw shortening the traditional form as heresy. In a further ironic twist, today’s advocates of historicity and science are now called ‘conservative’ (baoshou). The best analogy for Western readers would be creationism and evolution, where both views continue to coexist in the culture. From the beginning, then, the myth versus history, Shaolin versus Wudang, internal versus external, and hard versus soft dialectic has had very political meanings in China, meanings which may not be readily apparent to Western students.

In 1943, Chen Gong opined: ‘Whether Zhang Sanfeng or someone else, whoever invented this subtle and profound martial art must have been an ancient Daoist possessed of the highest wisdom and could not possibly have been a common man’ [Wile 1983, Translator’s Note, n.p.]. Fast forward to the present, a poster on the Taijiquanb blog informs us that, ‘Zhang Sanfeng is an incarnation of Xuanwu, the God of War’ [Yingxiong 2019], citing as proof his own personal visitation in a dream by the immortal and his karmically fated discovery of Ming dynasty relics in a cave associated with Master Sanfeng’s alchemical practices. The poster obviously takes the notion of immortality and ongoing revelation literally, but feels obliged to rationalize his belief by interpreting this as ‘qi (energy) and the effect of quantum entanglement’.

Zhang Sanfeng’s reemergence as the creator of taijiquan seems part of a broader movement to reconstitute his cult, along with claims by various individuals to teach the ‘original’ taijiquan, or even that Zhang created a martial art far deadlier than taijiquan, but so arduous that none dared to study it. The 2019 Baidu.com online encyclopedia entry for Zhang Sanfeng, running to over 10,000 words, treats the figure as if historical, complete with exact birth date and ascension (yuhua); being immortal, of course, there is no date for the death. Hagiography becomes biography, fiction becomes fact, and immortality becomes possibility. Most of these hagiographies place Zhang in an unbroken lineage from Laozi, who himself is the subject of a similar process of reification and divinization, complete with imperial honorifics and biographical details that span the centuries of the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The encyclopedia entry includes long disquisitions on Zhang’s ‘philosophical thought’ and ‘martial arts thought’, and concludes on a note of patriotism, saying that his teachings allow us to ‘defend ourselves against violent attack and resist foreign aggressors’ [Baidu baike 2019].

Reacting to the historicizing push by progressives, Zheng Manqing disingenuously asks: ‘Some people have indulged in wild slander, claiming that taijiquan was not created by the Immortal Zhang Sanfeng. I do not know what their motives are’ [Wile 1985: 11]. However, in his preface to the ShaoLin Wudang kao, Tang Hao explicitly stated his motivation:

My purpose in writing this little book, on the one hand, is to inform readers about the nature of so-called Shaolin and Wudang, and on the other hand, to address the conflicts and jealousies between professional martial artists in both camps. For more than ten years, they have engaged in incessant squabbling. After reading this little book, perhaps they can take a more expansive view, rise up together and work for the establishment of martial arts on a scientific basis. [Tang 1930: 7-8]

Tang paid a personal and professional price for his dissent during the Republican period, when his views were considered pro-communist and subversive. Far from seeking to consign traditional martial arts to the dustbin, however, Tang Hao hoped, by putting them on an historical and scientific basis, to assure their survival in the modern era. Like Nietzsche’s ‘God is dead’, Tang Hao’s ‘Zhang Sanfeng is dead’ aimed to ennoble human creativity and not denigrate it. He went on to produce voluminous studies of China’s physical culture, and lived to see his findings become official history, and to be honored as the father of modern martial arts studies.

As the Shaolin-Wudang paradigm took on a life of its own, it played out as the organizing principle behind the departmental structure of the Central Martial Arts Academy, where rivalry between Shaolin and Wudang departments became a virtual parody of professional Pettiness. An epic challenge match between Wang Ziping (standing in for the elderly Sun Lutang), and representing the Wudang faction, and Gao Zhendong the Shaolin, was officially declared a tie, when the referee pulled the contestants apart, fearing a fatal outcome. The year was 1928, two years after the Northern Expedition against the warlords, one year after the Shanghai Massacre of Communists and unionists, and the outset of the Civil War. This embarrassing contest must have been fresh on the mind of Tang Hao when he wrote his 1930 ShaoLin Wudang kao, and was a microcosm of the divisions tearing China apart even as the wolf was at the door and unity was most needed.

Douglas Wile
Marx, Myth and Metaphysics

In 1943, Chen Gong opined: ‘Whether Zhang Sanfeng or someone else, whoever invented this subtle and profound martial art must have been an ancient Daoist possessed of the highest wisdom and could not possibly have been a common man’ [Wile 1983, Translator’s Note, n.p.]. Fast forward to the present, a poster on the Taijiquanb blog informs us that, ‘Zhang Sanfeng is an incarnation of Xuanwu, the God of War’ [Yingxiong 2019], citing as proof his own personal visitation in a dream by the immortal and his karmically fated discovery of Ming dynasty relics in a cave associated with Master Sanfeng’s alchemical practices. The poster obviously takes the notion of immortality and ongoing revelation literally, but feels obliged to rationalize his belief by interpreting this as ‘qi (energy) and the effect of quantum entanglement’.
In the current economic environment, marketers see no harm in encouraging consumers to equate antiquity with authenticity, including supernormal origination and attenuated lineages, in the public’s endless quest for ‘the real thing’. Whereas old cleavages may have reflected political sympathies, today’s remythologization movement has been reinvigorated by famed novelist Jin Yong’s Shendiao Xialu (The Condor Heroes) and Yitian Tulongji (Heavenly Sword and Dragon Saber), and Jet Li’s portrayal of the immortal Zhang in the film Taiji Zhang Sanfeng (The Taiji Master). Once again, the old alchemist is very much alive and well in the popular imagination, enjoying a hyperreal revival. Of the several paths to apotheosis – mythology, heredity, and folklore – Zhang seems to have leapt from folklore to fiction to immortality. This demonstrates two basic strategies for instilling value, power and confidence in a practice: one is to credit it to a supernatural source, and the other is to credit it to human creativity and testable efficacy. The resurgence of Zhang Sanfeng, Wang Zongyue and Wudang Mountains origination myths would have pioneering historians Tang Hao, Xu Zhen and Gu Liuxin turning over in their graves, but resurgent cultural fundamentalism seems to be one of the side-effects of late-stage modernity.

The Wudang Mountains, the Immortal Zhang’s putative haunts, has joined Wenxian and Yongnian, hometowns of the Chens and Yangs, as taiji tourist destinations, with considerable investment in human resources, schools, accommodation, museums, and even commemorative monuments. They are in competition with the state-sponsored physical education academies that teach the simplified and standardized forms. There have always been rice bowl issues in martial arts styles, but the policy of ‘zou chu qu, yin jin lai’ (go global) has made the stakes much higher.

Tracing the two competing narratives in semi-official reference works shows a gradual but marked softening trend in the treatment of the Zhang Sanfeng legend. The 1987 Zhongguo wushu da cidian (Chinese Martial Arts Dictionary) cites Tang Hao’s findings and calls the Zhang Sanfeng tale ‘ridiculous’ and a ‘fabrication’ [Chinese Martial Arts Dictionary 1987: 15]. In their ‘Preface’, the editors explain the difficulty of bringing martial arts into the modern world with ‘feudal’ retentions on the one hand and ‘radical left’ forces on the other, together with a tendency to value practice over theory. As we enter the next decade, Xi Yuntao’s Jianming wushu cidian (Abbreviated dictionary of the martial arts), acknowledges the mythological versions in a single neutral sentence, but goes on to promote the Chen Wwangting line as ‘generally accepted’ [Xi 1990]. A decade later, the Zhongguo wushu baike quanshu (Complete Chinese martial arts encyclopedia) references the Tang dynasty Xu Xuanping and Ming dynasty Zhang Sanfeng theories, but says that Chen Wangting is accepted by most today as the historical creator [Encyclopedia 1998]. Similarly, the current online Baidu baike encyclopedia gives both Wangting and Sanfeng versions (in that order), but shares nothing disparaging about Sanfeng accounts. More tellingly, the entry devotes extensive coverage to development projects in Wen County to create a center for Chen style training, research and to lobby for UNESCO intangible cultural status. It notes that these efforts have received increasingly high-level recognition from official bodies in both martial arts and cultural departments. Although myth and history have not quite achieved intellectual parity, there is a decided shift from ideological to economic interest.

A high-profile case of remythologization is Ma Yun and Jet Li’s collaboration to create a syncretic quasi-religion based on bits and pieces of various gongfu, qigong and taijiquan styles, together with elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism to form Taiji Zen. They eschew the language of idealism, materialism or dialectics, seeking instead to leverage their economic clout and media star power to influence the Olympic Committee to accept taijiquan as a regular event, to offer a healthy spiritual home for China’s youth and to reassure the world of China’s peaceful intentions. Ma tells us that his personal three-word mantra, taken from the taiji classics, is centering (ding), following (sui) and surrendering (she). Their ambitious project includes a gongfu fantasy film, Gongshoudao, starring Ma himself in the role of a middle-aged man who dreams he becomes a martial arts superhero, as well as a Taiji Zen Institute to propagate ‘taijiquan culture’ nationally and internationally.

Comrade Ma is a confirmed member of the Communist Party, which apparently sees no contradiction in clutching billionaires to its bosom. For Ma, then, taijiquan embodies his personal ethic and the ethos of the Chinese people, and Gongshoudao is an allegory for China’s peace-loving global posture. From the Boxers to Falun dafa, from the Democracy Wall Movement to the Hong Kong protests, from laogai reeducation through labor to the Cultural Revolution’s rustication campaign, there is a strategy of reform and transformation through immersive kinesthetic experience. Whether it is apparatchiks and intellectuals ‘sent down’ to participate in manual labor or protestors dodging the police, or the more obvious qigong practices of the Boxers, Falungong, and today’s Taiji Zen/gongshoudao, we can see lessons learned from the playbook of religions, that have long used mudra, genuflexion, davening, and prostration, as well as ecstatic and ritual dance, to transport the faithful and engage the total person.

To summarize this section, we have seen the mythologization of taijiquan’s origins and efficacy in the ‘invented tradition’ of Zhang Sanfeng, its positivist demythologization as a modernizing project and the current attempt at remythologizing as a fundamentalist reaction, featuring divinization, revelatory epistemology, and mediated re-enchantment in a newly industrialized and free-market environment.
IDEALISM VERSUS MATERIALISM

The campaign that Tang Hao and his successor Gu Liuxin waged in the early twentieth century to ground taijiquan in history and rescue it from mythology plays out today in the battle between idealism (zhuyi) and materialism (weixiu zhuyi). Formerly confined to rarified philosophical debates, this more classical dichotomy harkens back to Plato and Aristotle. But why this sudden shift in discursive register in China’s taijiquan polemics? Plato’s Forms are eternal, ideal exemplars, existing outside of space and time, just as it was believed that the human soul is qualitatively distinct from the body and strives to free itself from its material prison. Aristotle, however, held that the qualities of things have no abstract, independent existence outside of substances, and that the human mind proceeds from perception to conception, finally testing theories against the objective world.

Much of Judeo-Christian theology is underpinned by idealism, and as a preoccupation of philosophy, it resurfaces in the late eighteenth century with Kant’s transcendental idealism and Hegel’s absolute idealism. Hegel’s dialectical method was reframed by Marx in the form of dialectical materialism, which in turn was embraced by Chinese communist thinkers, who interpreted all of intellectual and political history in terms of class struggle: idealism representing the interests of the ruling class and materialism the oppressed. Although Existentialism’s attack on theism, and Postmodernism’s attack on structuralism and essentialism continued the anti-idealist tradition, it is still chiefly through Marx that today’s Chinese positions are articulated.

For Marx and Mao, idealism is no innocent intellectual thought experiment, but, often in the guise of religion, a tool of the privileged to justify all forms of inequality and exploitation. Idealism offers teleological explanations for natural phenomena and seeks to regulate social behavior by appeal to revealed scripture. It explains our station in life by reincarnation or predestination, and dictates the most intimate details of sex and diet, enforced by omniscient surveillance. Based on our deeds and faith in this life, it promises rewards or punishments in an afterlife and seeks to interpret the dispositions of the gods by divination, oracles, omens and prophecy, and to influence them by prayer, supplication and sacrifice. It supports a class of priests, monks, and shamans, while rationalizing class and caste hierarchies, and taxes the poor to underwrite awe-inspiring architectural and artistic projects, and conscripts them to fight in its holy wars. The ruling class co-opts religion to buttress its claim to rule by divine right, while religion benefits from imperialism to carry out mass conversions by the word or the sword. Materialism, by contrast, according to the Maoist interpretation, seeks to empower the oppressed in their struggle for equality and dignity by directing attention to improving conditions in this life and throwing off the yoke by any means necessary.

Hegel’s idealism expressed itself as a teleological view of history, which he considered the unfolding of Spirit in time. If we divide idealists into subjectivist and objectivist, epistemological and ontological, today’s Chinese advocates of taijiquan’s idealist essence are chiefly of the objectivist/ontological stripe, meaning that they locate the ultimate reality and authority above the world of empirical experience. Confucius’s ‘mandate of Heaven’, Mozi’s ‘will of Heaven’ and Mencius’s ‘Heavenly nature’, all locate a controlling principle above the material world. Buddhism’s ‘emptiness’ can be approached both from an objectivist or subjectivist perspective, as can the Daodejing’s ‘infinite’, ‘dao’ and ‘mystery’, which can be seen as descriptions of the natural world or as a noumenal realm above the natural world. Both are nontheistic. Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism placed li (principles) as prior to and above the natural world (qi), that they govern. The Lu-Wang School of the Mind posited that, apart from the mind, there are no li, wu, or shi (principles, things, or phenomena), thus falling into the subjectivist/epistemological category. Materialist-idealist theory was pervasive in the early decades of the People’s Republic, as Marxist historians sorted traditional schools of thought – Confucian, Daoist, Legalist and Moist – into progressive or reactionary according to their proto-materialist or idealist tendencies.

With the establishment of ‘the theory of Marx and the thought of Mao’ as ideological orthodoxy, idealism became a strongly pejorative term, surviving on the margins of Mainland China as an anti-communist statement in Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas Chinese communities around the world. Thus, for some it is a badge of honor, and for others a crown of thorns. The history of established ideologies in China goes back to Legalism during the Qin, Confucianism during the Han and Neo-Confucianism during the Song. Dialectical materialism is simply the latest iteration of established ideology. With dialectics as the gold-standard of truth, both idealists and materialists claim yin-yang cosmology as the primitive version of their metaphysics and proto-science. The cosmology that idealists embrace as China’s metaphysics, dialectical materialists hold up as evidence of China’s early dialectical thinking. The sway of the yin-yang paradigm and Marxism in China is comparable to the intellectual hegemony of monotheism and democracy in the West, where even patently polytheistic religions are forced to argue that the many are all manifestations of the One, and even the most authoritarian regimes display some trappings of representative government.

How does idealism play out in the debate over the true nature of taijiquan? There are two ways: the first is the proposition that principle is prior to practice, and the second is that mind (yi) is prior to and leads the body. Moreover, these principles are revealed to humankind by demigods Huangdi and Fu Xi, sages Confucius and Laozi, and immortals like Zhang Sanfeng; they did not require a posteriori knowledge derived...
from practice. Zhang Xiaoping states the first argument of the idealist case most succinctly when he says, 'The art of taijiquan is based first on principles, and technique follows. It derives from the Yijing [Book of Changes], and its principles are based on traditional Chinese medicine' [Zhang 2013: 52]. Idealism is a time-honored strategy for conferring gravitas and infallibility on what might otherwise be dismissed as mere matter of opinion.

The second aspect is addressed by an anonymous author writing under the pen name Lingdong Taiji, who rhetorically asks how important is the classics' injunction to 'use the mind and not force'. He concludes, 'Although it is said that existence is a precondition for consciousness, nevertheless, by the same token, consciousness can influence the body, as, for example, when the mind directs the qi to sink to the dantian' [Lingdong 2019]. He reminds us that taijiquan's slow motion is intended to facilitate mental control over movement, and that achieving relaxation is a function of the imagination. Just as in medical practice, where psychology is critical to the healing process, he says that without the role of the mind, taijiquan becomes no different from dance or aerobics. Taking it a step further, an anonymous poster on the 'Dongfang Zixun' blog warns, 'I believe that zoomorphic postures are harmful to taijiquan principles and that they will inevitably result in emphasis on the physical body in combat situations, which, in reality, is tantamount to recommending hard-style techniques' [Anon. 2019]. He says that it is the spirit of the animal that should inform the movement, not a crude imitation of the outer form or brute force. Embodying the spirit ensures that taijiquan does not descend to the level of 'external' styles, but rises to the Xue Taijiquan Xu Lianshen Juqi Lun's teaching that, 'Studying taijiquan is the foundation for entering the dao'. In sum, then, the idealist case rests on the assertion that taijiquan's principles precede practice, and that the mind leads the body.

By contrast, the materialist case is a form of valorization by empiricism. Given the prestige of dialectical materialism in Mainland China, it is not surprising that attempts to align taijiquan theory with materialist ideology far outnumber the idealist. If there is any nuance of difference among proponents of taijiquan as an example of dialectical materialism in action, it is between those that emphasize the 'material' aspect and those that emphasize the 'dialectical' aspect. Representing the material side is an anonymous author, whose 'Taijiquan yu bianzhengfa' (Taijiquan and dialectics) says, 'These opposing but mutually dependent elements are objectively real, concrete entities, and not empty and void. They are observable, visible, tangible physical entities and not formulas, invisible, intangible mystical entities' [Anon. 2018c]. This is clearly a rebuttal to idealist attempts to 'spiritualize' taijiquan.

A classic expression of the dialectical emphasis in relation to taijiquan is Cao Degui's:

From beginning to end, the movements of taijiquan reflect the glory of dialectical philosophy. Every posture is the physical image and artistic expression of the dialectical method. The Chinese are a hard-working and intelligent people, who produced brilliant ancient culture, the principles of primitive dialectics, and taijiquan as the embodiment of the dialectical method.

[Cao 2010]

This echoes the words of President Xi Jinping himself, who in a Qiushi article entitled 'Dialectical Materialism is Chinese Communist Party Members' World View and Methodology' declared: 'From earliest times, China was aware of the concept of contradictions, as in "Yin and yang, this is the dao" [Xi 2019]. Completing the trifecta of dialectical materialism, the Party, and taijiquan, Li Yingjie offers this paean to taijiquan and to the Party: 'The whole nation strives to achieve good health, and taijiquan is as precious as gold. […] All of us martial artists are one big family. Perfect your taiji and follow the Party' [Li 2015]. The Party is the keeper of the flame of dialectical materialism, and taijiquan is one of its sacraments.

Amplifying the dialectical aspect of dialectical materialism and its relationship to taijiquan is He Xianquan, who gives us a primer on classical Marxist dialectics and how taijiquan exemplifies its three laws: the unity and interpenetration of opposites, the transformation of quantity into quality, and the negation of negation. According to He's analysis, movement and stillness, fullness and emptiness, opening and closing are examples of the unity of opposites, and 'hardness in the midst of softness, and softness in the midst of hardness' are seen as the interpenetration of opposites. The quantity of repetitions in practice gives rise to qualitative progress in skill, and the negation of negation reveals itself in the endless process of correction and progress through criticism and self-criticism [He 2018].

Finally, dialectical materialism is the standard by which Chinese culture itself is validated, as the 'Preface' to the Chinese Martial Arts Encyclopedia says: 'Chinese culture is a high culture that emphasizes dialectics. Although dialectical materialism is a foreign concept, our culture has many examples […] together with the principle of the unity of man and nature, and body and mind' [Ed. Com. 1998]. However, while the editors assert that traditional Chinese medicine is superior to Western medicine, socialism is superior to capitalism, and, of course, Chinese martial arts are superior to Western martial arts, they allow that these exist ‘on different levels’ and must, in effect, be judged by a double standard.

In the debate between idealists and materialists, are we dealing with a 'chicken-and-egg' dilemma, or a classic case of existence and essence?
Before the first man realized that cords or columns of air of different lengths produced different pitches when vibrated, one could argue that the basic physical principles of acoustics already existed and did not come into being only after the first string was plucked or reed was blown. Then people began to make music, and finally the principles of melody, harmony and rhythm were organized into what we call music theory. Thus, Mersenne did not dictate to the universe that a string half the length, four times the tension, or one quarter the mass produces an octave. Similarly, the laws of biophysics were discovered by man but not invented by man. The question comes down to discovery by trial-and-error or by divine revelation, just as with evolution and creation, and this is where ideology and politics enter the picture. Is there some synthesis between these theses and antitheses?

**PHYSICS VERSUS METAPHYSICS**

Before addressing the question of physics and metaphysics in the taijiquan debate, it is perhaps necessary to examine the more fundamental question of the appropriateness of considering metaphysics at all in analyzing Chinese thought. Since the 18th century European Enlightenment, there is a long lineage of thinkers who, disillusioned with Church teachings and religion in general, have sought out examples of other cultures whose best minds were free of metaphysics. Famed sinologist Joseph Needham says:

> We believe that the Chinese mind throughout the ages did not, on the whole, feel the need for metaphysics; physical Nature (with all that implied at the highest levels) sufficed. The Chinese were extremely loath to separate the One from the many, or the spiritual from the material. Organic naturalism was their *philosophia perennis*. [Needham 1969: II, xxiv]

In discussing Heidegger’s indebtedness to the *Zhuangzi*, Reinhard May says that he is ‘neither indebted to Aristotelian logic nor receptive to an ontology involving a subject-object dichotomy, nor, above all, being conditioned by any theology’ [May 1996: 229]. However, the intellectual freedom that Needham and Heidegger applauded as superior, Hajime Nakamura decodes as ‘a lack of general laws’, ‘grammatical ambiguity’ and ‘failure to distinguish genus and differentia’ [Nakamura 1964: 532]. Not sparing his own Japanese language, he finds it inferior to Greek, Sanskrit and German, and inadequate for rigorous philosophy. Precisely the opposite view is expressed by MD, TCM doctor, and taijiquan practitioner Huang Mingda, who denies that China lacks metaphysics, declaring that yin-yang theory not only qualifies as advanced cosmology, but is more intellectually sophisticated than Western science. He argues that Chinese health sciences are not limited by the narrow perspective of Newtonian physics but play by the rules of ‘organicism, entropy, and nonequilibrium thermodynamics’, making it a third epistemological model, somewhere between science and philosophy, but closer to metaphysics [Huang 2008: 1-61]. Among these cross currents of opinion, we have seen those that hold that China lacks metaphysics to its credit, lacks it to its shame, and owns it to its glory.

An anonymous poster on the ‘Taijiquan-ba’ blog stakes out a pro-empiricist position that nevertheless maintains a cautious skepticism of science. He says that those who try to analyze taijiquan with the tools of Western science are ignorant of taijiquan, science and history, and insists that taijiquan is a purely experiential fighting system that includes physical and psychological factors that defy current scientific investigation [Anon. 2013a]. Another anonymous poster on the same thread joins the chorus of pro-empiricists, when he adds, ‘The taijiquan classics are the summation and fruit of practice, and it is an error to mistake the fruit for the process’ [Anon. 2013b]. Here, of course, what is meant is that practice is the process, and theory the fruit; metaphysics makes the mistake of putting the ‘cart before the horse’, confusing ‘existence and essence’.

Seeking a way out of this metaphysical morass, Lingdong Taiji offers three reasons why taijiquan has no need for mythical and metaphysical aggrandizement. First, in its three-hundred-year history, there are continuous lineages and a rich literature of theoretical texts. Second, yin-yang is a thoroughly scientific concept and should not be considered some kind of occult knowledge. Third, now that taijiquan has been widely popularized and practiced in public places by millions, there are no secrets or miraculous powers. He concludes that the current wave of mystification has taken place because of gongfu fantasy novels and films, exaggerated claims by self-styled masters, and the expectations of longtime practitioners who, failing to manifest super-powers, are convinced they must be missing some closely held secrets [Lingdong 2019].

Recent reality checks for the ‘internal’ martial arts have resulted in public relations disasters, prompting anti-metaphysical critics like Zhang Feng to comment, ‘Comparatively, Chinese martial arts still contain too much mysterious stuff. For example, what is the actual power of so-called “gongfu”? Does the fabled “internal energy” really exist? Apart from flesh and bones, when you strike a blow with the fist, what other spiritual force is there?’ [Zhang 2017]. This echoes Jet Li’s assessment of soft-style martial arts as nothing but ‘flowery postures’ (*huajia*), or, in the vernacular, ‘beancurd boxing’ (*doufuquan*).

A perfect example of the starry-eyed student that the anti-mystifiers target is Ai Xiaofeng, who says:
When you have really penetrated this art and understand its principles, then you will have a completely new understanding and impression of whatever you experience. Now, when I listen to the dialogue in gongfu films, I feel that the actor's lines have acquired profound meaning, and are absolutely not wild imaginings or gibberish, but full of lessons on the most advanced training methods and techniques. Even the most fantastic scenes do not appear miraculous or unrealistic. [Ai 2020]

Two cultural phenomena have become lightning rods for the anti-mystifiers: gongfu fantasy films and public demonstrations of non-contact repelling (bengtiao, or geshan daniu). An anonymous poster who writes under the pseudonym Tianyi eschews the terms of metaphysics or idealism, but says that taijiquan evolved from a combat art, to a health practice, to a recreational activity, but promising non-contact striking and curing all illnesses. What we have traditionally mystified as 'spirit', 'mind', and 'qi' is simply a method for concentrating the power of one's whole being on one point. [...] During the 1970's and 80's, taijiquan was transformed into a kind of qigong, and the path of power came to be described in terms of daoyin, meridians, acupoints, and breath. [Taijizhe 2017]

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There are two types of criticisms of mystification in taijiquan. The first is wholesale condemnation, and the second attempts to explain it as a kind of semantic misunderstanding or parapsychological phenomenon. An example of the first is Wan Shengting's:

The private martial arts scene has descended into chaos, with people making wildly exaggerated claims for taijiquan, promising non-contact striking and curing all illnesses. They mystify the teachings, foster religious devotion to the organization, and worship the master. A healthy cultural art does not indulge in 'closing the gates and proclaiming oneself king'. [Wan 2017]

In this assessment, Wan offers a very dismal diagnosis of the state of the private taijiquan marketplace. The second type expresses equal revulsion, but offers a more sympathetic explanation. For example, Li Chengyin attributes belief in non-contact and minimal-contact repelling to people taking literally what they see in gongfu films and misinterpreting the function of slowness and avoidance of force in the classics. He says that taijiquan's effectiveness is simply a subtle application of the natural laws of physics [Li 2012]. An author who writes under the pseudonym 'Taijizhe' adds a tone of sarcasm in a post entitled, 'To all of you grandmasters, talking about "qi" to beginning taijiquan students is pure deceit'. Attempting to bring the discussion back down to earth, he says:

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Here, Taijizhe attributes the turn in taiji to adopting the language and goals of qigong with its acquiring the mystique of inner alchemy. Similarly, apologists for what looks like staged demonstrations of non-contact uprooting (bengtiao) attempt to psychologize the phenomenon by citing a kind of 'resonance' between minds that only works when masters and disciples are 'on the same wavelength'. Thus, they claim it is not willful deception but a kind of parapsychological cooperation.

Another writer who deploys neuroscience to demystify song (relaxing), and goes by the pseudonym Biwugong, says we should not obfuscate song but consider it a natural progression on the path to skill mastery. He compares it to the difference between marching and strolling, or the stages of mastering the biomechanics of bicycle riding [Bi 2006]. Chen Shiping interrogates the classic injunction to ‘use the mind and not force’, finding it the source of taiji’s detour into metaphysics and failing to understand that it refers only to local force rather than rooted, whole-body force. This integrated, coordinated movement produces a feeling in the sensorium that came to be called qi or jin, which is simply the Chinese name for that feeling and should not be mystified [Chen 2019]. Chen Shiping thus makes the same link between biomechanics, psychophysiology, and peak experience that Csikszentmihalyi calls 'flow' and what Tillerman calls 'entrainment'. Similarly, Chen Xiong quotes Zheng Manqing as saying, 'Taijiquan corresponds perfectly with the laws of mechanics because it is based on nature [...] Although taijiquan derives from philosophy, it can be proven by science' [Chen 2018]. Biwugong is content to give a perfectly naturalistic explanation, without embroidering, whereas Zheng accords science the role of corroborating what was already apparent to ‘philosophy’. This exemplifies the different approaches of physics and metaphysics.
SELF-DEFENSE VERSUS SELF-CULTIVATION

Martial arts and calligraphy are two functional activities – self-defense and written communication – that have been highly aestheticized and spiritualized in East Asia. There are as many distinctive styles of calligraphy as there are martial arts styles: both are used as meditative practices, requiring a kind of calm concentration, and both combine self-cultivation with performative self-expression. Self-cultivation (xiuyang) is generally understood to encompass yangsheng (physical health) and xiuxin (spiritual cultivation), with the two coming together in the practice of taijiquan. Shao Duorong highlights these dual aspects when he says, ‘Master Zhang Sanfeng created taijiquan, an art that ‘combines dao and skill’, to not only train the body and eliminate illness, but to cultivate the mind and nurture the spirit in order to banish falsehood and preserve truth, with the aim of achieving a high level of virtue’ [Shao 2018]. Most authors emphasize the original unity of self-defense and self-cultivation as a distinguishing feature of taijiquan, although in practice, individual styles and schools will often focus on one aspect at the expense of the other. Is the acquisition of skill in fighting an end in itself, or is realization of the dao an end that uses training in skill as a means? This is the question that lurks behind many debates about taiji’s essence. During the era of simplification and standardization, the pendulum swung decisively in the direction of health and recreation, but today, there is a strong push to return taijiquan to its more combative roots.

Proponents of taijiquan as a fighting art do not disavow its health benefits, as the results of thousands of studies conducted by such prestigious institutions as Harvard, Mayo, Oxford, National Institute of Health, etc., consistently show positive benefits for sleep, balance, cognition, stress, blood pressure, blood sugar, osteoporosis, as well as attention deficit in children and athletic performance. For taiji fighters, however, health benefits may be a side-effect of training but not the prime motivation. Many in China and abroad practice only the form as an abstract qigong routine and are unaware of, or not interested in, the self-defense applications. If you accept ‘health’ as the standard, then it must be compared with yoga, Pilates, Alexander, Feldenkrais, etc. If you take fighting as the standard, then it must be compared with karate, taekwondo, capoeira, etc. And if you take spiritual practice as the standard, then it must be compared with meditation, or even religion. What is unique about taijiquan is precisely its ability to be all things to all people.

Claims for the health benefits of taijiquan may be couched in either traditional Chinese medical or Western biomedical language. Of the hundreds of thousands of articles on the health benefits of taijiquan, one would be hard pressed to find a single negative review, but a few that warn against exaggerated cure-all claims. Representative of the biomedical paradigm is an anonymous poster on the 360.com website who summarizes the health benefits of regular practice in these terms: ‘It balances the central nervous system, strengthens the cardiovascular system, improves the respiratory system, and promotes mental health’ [Anon.c 2018]. The case for taiji’s health benefits expressed in terms of traditional Chinese medicine is made by Yezi, who explains:

Taijiquan is perfectly adapted to nurture the ‘three treasures – jing, qi, and shen’ [...] it addresses inner and outer, yin and yang, and maximizes the stimulation of qi and blood, while minimizing waste and loss to the body’s reserves. [...] It smoothes the flow of qi in the twelve regular and eight extra channels, with special focus on the dantian, weilü, and changqiang acupoints.

[Yezi 2019]

Safety, efficacy, and economy are common denominators for both paradigms.

The Chinese custom of full-contact public leitaí competitions, formerly banned as decivilizing, have made a comeback of late, and even taijiquan, arguably the most ‘civilized’ of all the martial arts, has been caught up in the trend. However, in the wake of a series of ignominious defeats in the ring, an article on the Tengxunwang website asks: ‘Why Can’t Taijiquan Defeat Thai Boxing; Isn’t It True That Softness Overcomes Hardness?’ Predictably this elicits a flood of posts and is just the latest in a series of soul-searching responses to much-heralded matches between taiji standard-bearers and exponents of other Asian martial arts, Western boxing, and mixed martial arts [Anon. 2019c]. Echoes of Ah Q’s ‘art of spiritual victory’ are everywhere in this debate, as taiji apologists seek to capture the high ground by claiming moral superiority.

In spite of government calls for a ‘harmonious society’ and a ‘civilized society’, advocates of taiji’s fighting essence feel that now is their moment. Chen stylist Ma Hong is one of the leaders of this offensive and he suggests that all theoretical discussions of taijiquan are a form of mystification [Ma 2004]. He says that nowadays in taijiquan circles, there is endless talk about health benefits but very little on self-defense, resulting in ‘a monotonous drum beat of articles that are flowery with no substance, making it more and more mysterious and misleading sincere students’.

Interestingly, Ma characterizes this trend as ‘conservative’, as if popularization and medicalization have become so normalized that what was once radical is now reactionary. He points out that ‘force’
Ma Changxun is a thoughtful pro-pugilist, who takes a reformist stance, straddling both self-cultivation and self-defense camps by injecting health benefits into push-hands practice. He decries the current state of push-hands, driven by its inclusion in martial arts competitions and unbecoming descent into wrestling and grappling. Like the form, push-hands can be done in a constructive way without degenerating into brutishness. Push-hands can be a way of applying and sharpening the experience of principles but not in the context of wrestling matches. Real push-hands is a form of self-cultivation and somatic sensitivity training, Ma insists, and even spectators can derive health benefits and pleasure from a kind of kinetic empathy, much like the esthetic experience of watching dance. He says that push-hands is unique for its civility, safety, and philosophical content, enabling practitioners to transcend egocentric competitiveness and react spontaneously without mental calculation. He says that ‘qi’ is simply the pleasurable feeling from letting go, releasing tension and combining skill and spontaneity in a flow, much like partner dancing. Likewise, when uprooted by a partner/opponent in a relaxed, cooperative way, it is healthy and pleasurable to both participants. Ma’s compromise, then, reconciles extremes and seeks to reform, preserve, and restore push-hands to its status as a true internal art. In a similar vein, an anonymous poster on the ‘Tianya shequ’ website takes a non-dogmatic, common-sense approach when he says: ‘If you say that taiji is good for health, I believe it; if you say it is powerful, I believe it; but if you say that it is miraculous and that Western boxing is nothing, I absolutely disagree’ [Anon. 2013]. The moderates, then, would honor the full spectrum, avoiding the extremes of declawing or depacifying.

New investigative instruments and mathematical modeling embolden us to begin asking such questions. Moreover, increased information porosity occasioned by two-way tourism, student exchanges, and above all, social media have given us access to a wide spectrum of thought on contemporary culture and institutions. Still, we are often looking through a glass darkly, and it is always instructive to remember that Deng Xiaoping, the architect of the current Reform Era, was also the one who called in the tanks to crush the Democracy Wall Movement. Chinese politics are usually analyzed by who’s up and who’s down, slogans, like ‘revolution is no crime, rebellion is justified’, and mass movements, such as the Great Leap Forward or Cultural Revolution. From these, analysts construct hypothetical factions, such as the ‘princelings’ or Communist Youth League, competing regional models of development, such as Shanghai, Chongqing and Guangzhou, and ideological configurations, such as Old Left and New Left, Liberal and Conservative, and so forth.

Social media gives us access to the private opinions of ordinary citizens, with anonymity allowing for considerable freedom of speech. This medium has afforded us a glimpse of a passionate and highly partisan debate over the origins, function, and ultimately essence of taijiquan. Recently, however, a new instrument – the social survey – has provided unusually candid, and often confounding, insights into popular opinion on a variety of topics. Launched from the West, these surveys aim to capture a cross-section of public opinion primarily of interest to economists and foreign policy makers. As a result, the Ash Center social survey (2003–2018), Hu Fu’s Asian Barometer Survey (2019), and Andreas Mulvad’s interviews with 28 Chinese intellectuals are limited in their usefulness for our purposes. However, Jennifer Pan and Xu Yiqing’s Ideological Spectrum Survey, first deployed in 2014, and with successive waves, includes several questions intended to elicit views on...
traditional culture, that, although not specifically related to martial arts, might allow us to extrapolate with cautious confidence. Of the total of fifty questions, the handful addressing attitudes towards traditional Chinese medicine, the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), Confucianism, simplified characters, and role of the ancient classics in the school curriculum are most relevant for our speculation here. The authors of the survey summarize the new alignments that their data reveal:

Individuals who are politically conservative, who emphasize the supremacy of the state and nationalism, are also likely to be economically conservative, supporting a return to socialism and state control of the economy, and culturally conservative, supporting traditional, Confucian values. In contrast, political liberals, supportive of constitutional democracy and individual liberty, are also likely to be economic liberals who support market-oriented reform and social liberals who support modern science and values such as sexual freedom. [Pan & Xu 2016: 1]

Mulvad’s ‘two-dimensional’ model attempts to complicate the ‘monochrome’ picture of authoritarian state socialists versus democratic liberals by accounting for strange bedfellows like Neo-Confucians and the Old Left, who find themselves in agreement, for example, about paternalistic leadership but split over property rights. Thus, although it seems logical to assume that those who believe that the *Yijing* ‘can explain many things well’ in the Pan and Xu survey would naturally be in agreement on the foundational role of the *Yijing* in taiji theory, we know from our findings that both idealists and materialists claim the *Yijing*, based on its dialectical method. Again, even before 1949, all but the most radical leftists were in favor of preserving the traditional martial arts, so there is no clear left-right cleavage from the beginning of the modern period. Similarly, is it safe to say that someone who ‘strongly disagrees’ with the proposition that ‘simplified characters should be promoted’ would also oppose simplification of taijiquan forms, or is the question moot, since both ‘simplifications’ are *fait accompli*? In any case, it appears that Mulvad is correct in sensing that we need ‘two dimensions’ to capture today’s configurations, and with our findings, it may even require a third. As ever, ‘politics makes strange bedfellows’.

Meiji era Japan, Nationalist era China, and Deng era People’s Republic have all sought to soften the shock of modernization with the salve of Confucianism, seen as providing continuity with tradition. Today, while Party rhetoric continues to insist on the ideological orthodoxy of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’, the country hurries headlong into the embrace of its two former heresies: capitalism and Confucianism. After all, if Christianity can make its peace with capitalism, why not Confucianism with Marxism? If Inoue Tetsujiro could insist on an unbroken line of descent of 10,000 years from the Sun Goddess to the Japanese imperial family, what is a mere 1,000 years from Zhang Sanfeng to the present?

For us, though, how would advocates of rehabilitating Confucianism align with the various positions on taijiquan? Of course, the teachings of the old Sage have been around for two and a half millennia, and with the exception of the ‘burn the (Confucian) classics and bury the (Confucian) scholars’ policy of the short-lived Qin dynasty and ‘criticize Confucius and Lin Biao’ campaign of the Cultural Revolution, Confucianism has managed to accommodate itself to a variety of regimes. Indeed, Confucianism seems to be the ‘God of the gaps’ whenever East Asia faces a spiritual vacuum.

Dialectical materialism in the context of utopian socialism provided an optimistic, millenarian vision for a time, but poverty and ideological purity lost their charm after the Cultural Revolution, and the conspicuous consumption of the current *nouveau riche* generation is not sustainable. The recent rehabilitation of Confucianism reflects a nativist impulse, but splits into two strains: one stresses the authoritarian, statist, hierarchical aspect, and the other, adopted by New Left progressive Confucians, stresses the ethical aspect of benevolence, righteousness, and even self-sacrifice in opposing tyranny, very much in the mould of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong more than a century earlier. Although ‘Confucianism’ is indisputably ‘ancient’, and taijiquan’s pedigree is largely ‘invented’, both share a claim to embodying China’s essence. It is not surprising, therefore, that valuable properties like Confucianism and taijiquan are such hotly contested cultural assets. After all, if philosophy and the arts can never be separated from politics, why should the martial arts?

**CONCLUSION**

Thinking about taijiquan’s essence, or true nature, begs the questions of whether it is inherently more multidimensional than other martial arts, or whether its popularity attracted more attention and made it a site of hotly contested claims. Certainly, Japanese martial arts have similarly evolved to embody national ethos and a ‘way of life’. Or, is it that martial arts, as a kind of performing art, are intrinsically more resistant to fixed definition than written texts or plastic arts? Debates in China today divide sharply over origins, philosophical orientation and role in society, but they are strictly structuralist, assuming that taijiquan is a stable entity with definable parameters that distinguish it from other martial arts. Is the search for taijiquan’s essence infected...
with essentialism? This is a bit like archaeologists unearthing an axe and arguing over who made it and for what purpose – utilitarian, ritual, decorative – while agreeing that it is an ‘axe’.

Comparison undoubtedly serves to highlight difference, and difference can perhaps advance our search for essence. It is common to compare taijiquan to other martial arts, and as such, it is assumed to be a survival skill, usually called ‘self-defense’; but for heuristic purposes, let us compare taijiquan to a physical activity without roots in survival, say tennis, for example. As competition, tennis is a kind of push-hands sparring with a ball, while push-hands is like rallying without a ball. Having said that, we immediately confront the distinction that many practices of taijiquan exclusively as a solo form, while tennis has not evolved a similar shadow practice. In other words, tennis’ eight strokes: service, overhead, forehand, backhand, lob, drop, slice and volley, unlike taijii’s ‘eight techniques’ – peng, lu, ji, an, cai, lie, zhou, kao – did not become the elements of a choreographed routine.

On the social level, both can provide the organizing principle for social life, and exclusive country club memberships are as coveted as ‘indoors’ discipleships. Club professionals and pro-tour stars are analogous to ‘masters’ and ‘grand masters’, although tennis rankings and titles are determined by objective criteria, and material compensation is not remotely comparable. On the biomechanical level, virtually all of taijiquan’s techniques are reducible to forehand and backhand mechanics, issuing force either through the palm or back of the hand, while ‘borrowing energy’ in tennis is a function of ball compression and string elasticity, rather than peng in the body of the practitioner. Tennis performance has undoubtedly benefited from advances in kinesiology, biomechanics and sports medicine, while taiji practice has been enriched by traditional medicine, qigong and meditation.

In tennis, preoccupation with the scoreboard militates against entering the ‘flow’ state, while taijiquan explicitly encourages subjectivity and awareness of ‘inner’ sensations. Nevertheless, on the psycho/spiritual level, although orientalist creations like ‘the Zen of tennis’, ‘inner tennis’ or ‘mindful tennis’ are appropriated as a kind of self-help therapy to address personal issues, the native Chinese approach to taiji is more often framed in terms of transpersonal goals. As a pro-longevity therapy to address personal issues, the native Chinese approach to taijiquan

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the Western musical scale, and that the movement principles of the taiji ‘classics’ are analogous to diatonic harmony theory in Western music.

Is the same lyric set to a different melody the same song? Is soccer still soccer if you allow all players to catch and throw the ball? Is blank verse poetry; is free verse poetry; and if so, how do they differ from prose? Is this all a case of Justice Stuart’s, ‘I can’t define pornography, but I know it when I see it’?

In philosophical terms, slowness, continuity, and so forth are universals and can be found in many activities, but what are the particulars that distinguish taijiquan? Or, from the Buddhist perspective, are the ‘eight techniques’, and ‘five stances’ like the ‘five skandhas’, producing the illusion of a unique and permanent entity called taijiquan? Some will only be satisfied with a definition of taijiquan that includes the belief that it is uniquely capable of cultivating internal potential energy (qi) that can be expressed (fa) as force (jin) to repel opponents, withstand blows, or therapeutically, to heal patients by touch or remote intention.

What are the criteria for judging kinetic performance? Kinetic performance can be measured on the stopwatch, scale, or scoreboard. Native ability – strength, speed, endurance, coordination – can carry the day in the schoolyard, but coaching can make the difference when all participants are athletically gifted. Social dance prizes grace and spontaneity, and stage dance unites efficiency, emotion and esthetics in an art of mute story-telling or abstract design. Ballet makes no pretense of natural movement, imposing pointe, turn out, line, and extension. The taijiquan form is, perhaps, closer to mime than to any other art, with each posture mimicking a specific self-defense technique. With no objective accountability, however, the only distinguishing characteristics to the casual observer may be slowness and a kind of faux fluidity, exhibiting synchronicity but not causality, that is, with ‘open kinetic chain’ movement, or ‘independent arm action’ – the tail wagging the dog, or simply wagging itself. However, when performed with full closed kinetic chain connection and mental absorption, the reward is rapt entrainment, like the Zhuangzi’s ‘free and easy wandering’.

Our investigation began with two quotations that express the same patriotic sentiment from opposite sides of the political aisle, and we end with another pair, two centuries and two worlds apart, that express the same biophysical formula:

Taijiquan jing (The classic of taijiquan): ‘The root (of force) is in the feet, develops in the legs, is directed by the waist, and projected through the fingers’.

[Wi1e 1983: 102]

Dr. Aaron Sciascia: ‘Force is developed in the legs and trunk in a closed kinetic chain fashion, energy is funneled through the scapula, and the energy is then transferred to the arm...’

[Sciascia 2017]

Failing to embody what the Classic of Taijiquan calls ‘one continuous flow of qi’, or what kinesiology calls the ‘closed kinetic chain’, begs the questions: Is it simply bad taiji, or not taiji at all? It is possible to throw a baseball a short distance using only a flick of the wrist, or only articulating the wrist and elbow, or only the wrist, elbow and shoulder, but a pitcher who initiates the wave from the foot, legs and torso, adding kick, stride and weight shift can launch a baseball a hundred miles an hour. Taiji taolu practice has no reality check in the form of a ball, and push-hands often degenerates into a contest of brute force or simply weight advantage.

Debates in China over ideology or Western fantasies of ‘the little old Chinese man’ [Frank 2006] make for interesting social science, but ultimately do not advance the art as much as revisiting the classics in light of their prescient consonance with modern movement science. We began our inquiry with the observation that taijiquan has been a political football in China for more than a century, and that recently the terms of the debate had changed, reflecting, perhaps, new realities and new cultural or political configurations. Certainly, taijiquan is not the flash point for political or philosophical controversies in the West, but ‘national sports’, like baseball and football, international sports like soccer, cricket and rugby, and, of course, the Olympics, are seldom free of political passions. Definition represents a kind of ownership, and the intensity of debates over ownership is a tribute to taijiquan’s success.
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RURAL WANDERING MARTIAL ARTS NETWORKS AND INVULNERABILITY RITUALS IN MODERN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The flourishing of rural martial arts groups in modern China was largely facilitated by popular beliefs in invulnerability rituals. Invulnerability rituals, defined as the ability to defend oneself from physical harms through religious rituals, played a significant role in uniting martial arts groups during the Boxer Uprising, which was well-known for targeting Christian missionaries. Through the teachings of cross-regional networks of wandering martial arts masters, invulnerability rituals were initially used for defending rural communities against bandits. After learning invulnerability rituals, people could tame demonic power by summoning the presence of martial gods. Those wandering martial arts masters were careerist teachers who first promoted the use of protective martial arts against bandits and then expanded the use of invulnerability rituals in resolving all local disputes such as lineage conflicts and competition for natural resources. These martial arts groups then became one of the most destabilizing social actors, threatening the security of people’s livelihood. Eventually, during the early People’s Republic, martial arts groups and invulnerability rituals disappeared as a result of the Communist Party’s nationwide campaigns against alleged counterrevolutionaries.
INTRODUCTION

When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came into power in 1949, it immediately launched a nationwide campaign against the alleged ‘counterrevolutionaries’ (**fan geming**). A significant portion of these counterrevolutionaries were leaders and active participants of local martial arts groups in rural China. The presence of local martial arts groups can be found almost everywhere in Chinese archives and gazetteers. Some of these communities and their predecessors were the leading groups in peasant rebellions and social unrest during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). Both the Nationalist Party and the CCP in the twentieth century viewed them with suspicion and labeled them as one of the most dangerous actors in the governance of rural society.

In this paper I focus on a case study of rural martial arts groups in Poyang County of Jiangxi Province in Southern China to understand the origin and development of these communities. Poyang County, neighboring the Poyang Lake (China’s largest freshwater lake), was a trading center of both agricultural and commercial goods in the mid-Yangtze River region. Its prosperity also led to serious social instability because of bandit activities and competition for material interests among different local groups. Based on archival sources, I argue that the emergence of martial arts groups in rural China was a protective survival strategy against endemic bandit threats. When the martial arts groups grew stronger, however, they also became a significant destabilizing force within local governance.

THE BANDIT PROBLEM

Banditry was one of the most enduring and endemic threats to people’s livelihoods in rural China before the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949. Rural residents were living in an environment that suffered constantly from capital and human losses as a consequence of bandit raids.

In his influential book, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Eric Hobsbawm argues that banditry was a form of peasant protest against exploitation and oppression. He names this bandit tradition the ‘social banditry’ [Hobsbawm 1965: 5]. Hobsbawm has a romanticized view of banditry and he believes local society regarded social bands as non-criminal and honorable. By relying on the resources and protection offered by the locals, bandits became a crucial channel whereby peasants could fight against landlordism and other forms of oppression. In Hobsbawm’s extended and refined study on banditry, he defines social bandits as: peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regarded as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported. [Hobsbawm 2000: 20]

Although Hobsbawm’s theory correctly reminds scholars of the complex social power dynamics in rural communities between the powerful and the exploited, as well as various forms of peasant struggles against oppression, his social bandit theory hardly applies to the Chinese context. The relationship between bandits and the society in China was rarely as harmonious as Hobsbawm romanticizes.

In late imperial and modern China, banditry was predominantly a product of poverty and social unrest. In his study on disorder and crime in Southern China from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, historian Robert Antony studies the class composition and the internal power structure of bandits. Building on the assumption that the mid-Qing witnessed the breakdown of the early social equilibrium that had finally led to the violent confrontation between the state and the local society, internal unrest became a defining feature of the empire. Bandits, according to Antony, were mostly predacious. Contrary to Hobsbawm’s romanticized view of social banditry, that their action was a platform against the powerful and oppression, Antony notices that bandits were primarily composed of the working poor who were in many ways living on the fringes of society. He points out that bandits were, by nature, mobile and not tied to any specific communities. The two most commonly shared features of bandits were poverty and mobility [Antony 2016: 137]. Moreover, most were only occasional bandits instead of professional lawbreakers [Antony 2016: 140]. People became bandits for survival rather than as a protest against any specific classes or power structure.

With the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911 and the subsequent power vacuum in China, bandit activities became even more omnipresent and ferocious. The Republican Era (1912-1949) witnessed the structural transformation of bandit activities, a dramatic increase in the number of bandits and even more intense militarization of the society than in the late imperial period. The first half of the twentieth century was a period of ‘banditization’ [Tiedemann 1982: 400]. After the death of autocrat Yuan Shikai in 1916, a unified power structure in China gave way to the warlords whose power bases varied fundamentally in size. None of the warlords was powerful enough to defeat his rivals, and the power and territories controlled by the warlords changed constantly over time. In order to maintain and expand the warlords’ territories, China became a highly militarized society.
As historian Phil Billingsley points out, warlordism led to a vicious cycle: on the one hand, joining the army was an attractive career that provided people with food and clothing; on the other hand, such absorption of the rural labor force further debased the productivity of rural society and finally the bankruptcy of peasant economy [Billingsley 1988: 25]. During the time of constant warfare, when the demand for food was unbearable for the rural population, joining the bandits was a rational choice for rural people who needed to make a living.

Unable to reach a stable equilibrium among the power of the warlords, constant changes in the size of the warlords' armies also produced a large number of deserted soldiers deprived of their military status. For survival, many former soldiers had no choice but to become bandits [Tai 1985: 25]. In Poyang County, a large number of bandits came from the former Sichuan Provincial Army that was stationed in Jiangxi Province. After many lost their jobs, they stayed in Jiangxi as bandits rather than going back to their homes in Sichuan [PCG12 1949: Lineage]. Their military background helped these soldier bandits, and non-soldier bandits in the future, to become equipped with modern weaponry. Soldier bandits differed dramatically from the traditional bandits before the Republican Era – instead of attacking carefully selected targets, they adopted an indiscriminate predatory attitude towards their targets, often raiding the entire rural society and destroying their targets completely. The brutalization of bandit activities made banditry an even more formidable element of everyday life in rural China [Tiedemann 1982: 422].

Although a romanticized 'Robin Hood' style of social banditry, akin to that described by Hobson, did exist in Republican China (such as the case of the White Wolf (Bailang)), banditry in most cases was a temporary survival strategy [Perry 1983]. Except for the case of soldier bandits who became outlaws after losing employment, bandit groups were primarily composed of poor peasants, similar to the pattern Robert Antony described in his study on the Qing Dynasty. Poverty was undoubtedly a determinant factor behind the prosperity of banditry. Billingsley’s case study on Henan Province shows that the fertile northern and central counties in Henan were much more immune from banditry than the poor southwestern regions in Henan [Billingsley 1988: 41]. Even within the same county, banditry was more endemic in the mountainous regions, swamps, and the less prosperous border areas where people took less care than elsewhere [Billingsley 1981: 237-38].

In Poyang County, even though the land was fertile and the Poyang Lake was agriculturally so productive, bandits remained active in the less developed regions, especially the mountainous and bushy areas, and near the provincial borders [PCG14 1949: How Bandit Leader Cao Mapi Accepted Amnesty].

Hundreds of bandit gangs raided the Poyang region regularly during the Republican Era. Among them, Cao Mapi was the most notorious figure who generated countless myths and memories among the locals. From 1939 to 1941, Cao Mapi's gang raided the Poyang area many times, including the most notorious attack on the Town of Fenggang in May of 1941 when Cao Mapi sent out more than five hundred bandit soldiers. The trophy of this raid was marvelous to the bandits: twenty thousand kilograms of cloth, one thousand kilograms of jewelry, ten rifles, ten pistols, two horses, more than ten oxen, as well as the kidnapping of three housewives and a township official [Jiangxi Historical Materials 1993: 9-14]. During China's bloody first half of the twentieth century, soldiers within formal military units could turn to banditry for various reasons (as discussed above). A substantial part of Cao Mapi’s bandit force came from the military. The military also provided the bandits with a number of modern weapons.

The Nationalist Government’s suppression of banditry in Poyang proved to be pro forma. Its military forces did occasionally respond to banditry problems located near where they were stationed when the outlaws became too strong. Yet the fact that bandit gangs frequently changed their targets and moved their bases of operation made it extremely difficult to wipe them out. In cases in which the Nationalist armies could not locate the bandit nests, to avoid being blamed by their higher authority, officers often commanded their soldiers to arrest innocent peasants and label them as traitors who had cooperated and helped to hide bandits. In the eyes of rural residents, the Nationalist armies were as bad as bandits. The job of protecting lives and homes fell to the rural residents themselves. To do this they established their own self-defense martial arts groups.

**SELF-DEFENSE AND WANDERING MARTIAL ARTS NETWORKS**

Historians came to know rural martial arts groups predominantly through the lens of peasant rebellions and social unrest in late imperial China. When introducing the history of martial arts groups, the Republican-edition Poyang County Gazetteer says that they were originally secret religious societies born from the White Lotus in the Qing Dynasty [PCG12 1949: Secret Societies]. The White Lotus Sect (Bailianjiao) was initially a lay Buddhist movement led by Monk Huuyuan of Lushan in the early fifth century [Zürcher 1972: 219-23]. According to religious scholar B. J. Ter Haar, the name ‘White Lotus’ was used by non-elites as an autonym for lay Buddhist gatherings before the mid-fourteenth century [Ter Haar 1999: 165]. From the sixteenth century on, ‘White Lotus’ was more and more frequently used by the government and finally became a generic label for all potentially...
Modern martial arts groups differed from the earlier forms of White Lotus Sects significantly. They were no longer primarily religious associations; instead, they used violence more often for practical needs, such as self-defense against banditry, rather than forming a millenarian religious perception of the world. There were hundreds of different types of martial arts groups, among which the most famous were the Big Sword Society (Dadaohui) and the Red Spear Society (Hongqianghui) in rural North China. The Big Sword Society was a leading martial arts group that participated in the Boxer Uprising at the end of the nineteenth century. Well-known for its Armor of the Golden Bell (jinzhong zhao), a martial arts technique of invulnerability, the Big Sword Society was an influential quasi-military association in the Shandong-Jiangsu border region against rebellious forces and bandits. The local authorities also tolerated the existence of the Big Sword because they helped organize self-defense against bandits. The Big Sword Society flourished in the 1890s and was a major local military force preceding the Boxer Uprising [Esherick 1988]. Evolved from the Big Sword Society, the Red Spear Society was also a martial arts group that adopted similar invulnerability rituals. In her classic book Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945, Elizabeth Perry uses the Red Spear Society as an exemplary case of a protective strategy adopted by the peasants as a form of collective violence against predatory threats, among which banditry was a primary concern [Perry 1980]. The Red Spear later became the mother model of many similar martial arts groups in rural China that adopted different names and slight modifications in their rituals [Tai 1985].

In Poyang County, the most widespread and powerful local martial arts groups were the Yellow Crane Society (Huanghehui) and the Big Sword Society. The Republican-edition Poyang County Gazetteer claims that both groups evolved from the Boxer Uprising. The gazetteer suggests that both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword came from the border region of Shandong, Henan, and Anhui Provinces [PCG12 1949: Secret Societies]. Certainly, both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword groups were well-known for their invulnerability rituals that could protect them from being harmed. Such rituals, as we will see, played a crucial role in encouraging and organizing the local people against bandits. There was even a female martial arts group called the ‘Flower Basket Society’ (Hualanhui). The Flower Basket Society also adopted the invulnerability technique: the female members carried magical flower baskets with them and used them as shields when confronting threats. They believed that the basket could protect them from all weapons, including modern artillery [PCG12 1949: Secret Societies].

The emergence of the Yellow Crane Society in Poyang was a consequence of both bandit threats and cross-regional martial arts networks. According to the gazetteer, in 1934, bandits constantly raided Poyang County. A traveler from Anhui Province noticed the situation and told the people of Poyang that he knew the rituals of invulnerability. The local people tried slicing him with a sword, and he was not injured at all. After that, a lot of young peasants began to learn the technique and established the Yellow Crane Society [PCG12 1949: Secret Societies].

During the 1950s, after interviewing a large number of former Yellow Crane Society participants during the CCP’s Anti-Bandit Campaigns, the Public Security Bureau’s investigative reports told a more nuanced story of the Yellow Crane’s origin in Poyang. In 1934, banditry was a severe problem in Poyang. To defend rural communities against bandits, a local lineage leader Wang Guowen went to Mount Jiulong of Nanjing in Jiangsu Province and invited seven martial arts masters to Poyang. Among them was the Grand Master Xiong Xinzhai, who was also known as Mr. Xiong Xueshan. Mr. Xiong established the very first Yellow Crane assembly hall in Poyang’s District 11 with a banner 'Protect Homes against Bandits (baojia yufei)'. Mr. Xiong’s assembly hall attracted more than one hundred local people to join instantly. Among the first group of students was Jin Deshan, who was originally from Anhui Province. Jin was chosen as the leader of Mr. Xiong’s disciples. In 1936, two of the seven masters died, including the Grand Master Xiong Xinzhai. Jin Deshan became the new leader of the Yellow Crane in Poyang; assisting him was the Xiong Xinzhai’s nephew known as ‘the Lame’. Under the new leadership, the Yellow Crane developed rapidly in the entire Poyang County [PPSA Z2-1-87 1953; PPSA Z2-1-134 1959].

It is noteworthy that the seven masters and the subsequent new leader, Jin Deshan, were all nonlocals. Little is known about the background of the seven masters, but the fact that Wang Guowen invited them from a mountain in Nanjing (Nanjing is about 500 km from Poyang) indicates that they were well-known among certain groups of people. It is probable that the seven masters were full-time martial arts specialists. In China, renowned martial arts schools were often affiliated with famous mountains, most notably the Shaolin School on Mount Songshan in Henan Province and the Wudang School on Mount Wudang in Hubei Province. Students went to these famous mountains.
to learn martial arts techniques. Some of them stayed on the mountain teaching new students, while most of them left the mountain and became wandering martial arts teachers wherever people needed them.

In premodern China, many wandering martial arts teachers played important roles in organizing uprisings against the government; or, they might join the unruly forces such as bandits. Historian Meir Shahar’s case study of the Shaolin Monastery shows that the Qing government was profoundly suspicious of the Shaolin School martial arts in Henan Province. Emperors from Yongzheng (1722-35) onward all feared that the Shaolin School might become the origin of rebellious forces or hide criminals during the government’s crackdown against rebellion. They strictly forbade the use of fighting monks from the Shaolin Monastery in training Qing military forces [Shahar 2008: 189-95]. The wandering martial arts specialists were also associated with the Boxer Uprising in the 1890s. Joseph Esherick’s study on the Boxer Uprising shows that the invulnerability rituals were not local practices and were brought to southwest Shandong by an outsider, possibly a ‘wandering Daoist priest’ [Esherick 1988: 104-5]. It was through this group of wandering martial artists that various types of boxing techniques and invulnerability rituals reached to a large portion of China’s hinterland.

To some poor people, learning and teaching martial arts techniques was an alluring career during times of social unrest. Jin Deshan was such a person. Born in 1894 to a poor peasant family in Anhui Province, Jin spent his childhood doing farm work as an adopted son at his uncle’s place. When he was nine, his uncle passed away. Jin’s mother took him to his grandfather’s home in rural Jiangsu Province. In 1934, when there was a massive drought in Jiangsu, Jin had no choice but to leave with another four people heading for Jiangxi Province. On their way to Poyang, all the other four died. Once arrived in Poyang, Jin immediately joined the Yellow Crane Society and became a full-time martial arts teacher [PPSA Z1-2-1058 1951]. It was through the Yellow Crane Society that Jin finally settled down and earned his reputation as a martial arts specialist.

Jin Deshan and the Lame proved to be charismatic and actionable leaders. Each Yellow Crane unit was known as an assembly hall (tang). From 1934 to 1949, the Yellow Crane Society spread to seven districts in Poyang County with at least twenty-eight assembly halls [PPSA Z2-1-134 1959]. The Grand Master usually stayed only for a short period teaching the martial arts techniques and the invulnerability rituals. Then he would train and appoint new leaders as his replacement and leave. In Poyang, the first Grand Master was Xiong Xinzhai from Nanjing. After his death in 1936, Jin Deshan became the new Grand Master [PPSA Z1-4-234 1953].

The history of the Big Sword Society in the Republican-edition Poyang County Gazetteer was almost identical to the Yellow Crane. In 1946, bandits under the leadership of Gui Changqing raided the Hengyouxiang area in Poyang frequently. Unable to bear the bandit threats, local residents went to Anhui Province and invited the Big Sword teachers to Poyang [PGC12 1949: Secret Societies]. The CCP’s investigatory report in 1953 provides more details about the Big Sword Society’s origin. In 1946, to solve the bandit problem of the Hengyouxiang area in District 12, a gentry leader Wang Zhenbo from the Xigang Village organized a meeting with the surrounding villages. They decided to go to the neighboring Zhide County in Anhui Province and invited three Big Sword masters. The three masters established the very first Big Sword assembly hall (tang) in Xigang Village. They claimed that learning the Big Sword techniques would make people invulnerable to all the weapons on the battlefield. All the people from Xigang joined the Big Sword Society [PPSA Z2-1-93 1953]. The notorious bandit leader Cao Mapi was ambushed and killed by the Big Sword Society in Zhide County. The incident took place right after the three masters from Zhide established the first Big Sword unit in Xigang Village [PPSA Z2-1-93 1953]. After that, the name of the Big Sword Society spread across Poyang County.

To many people, the Big Sword’s techniques were mythical. Many bandits were also afraid to raid the rural communities with the presence of the Big Sword Society and called the Big Sword ‘the tiger’ [PGC12 1949: Secret Societies]. The Big Sword networks developed rapidly. In May of 1947, it established units in District 2, District 3, and District 4. During the second half of the same year, the Big Sword reached to District 10, District 11, and District 14.

The associational structure of the Big Sword Society differed slightly from the Yellow Crane. Each Big Sword unit was also called an assembly hall. There was one hall master (tangzhang) who oversaw all the affairs within the unit. Below him was a hall lord (tangzhu) taking care of the candles and incense used for religious rituals. The members within a Big Sword assembly hall were organized into squads (ban) with ten people in each squad. There was one squad commander (banzhang) within each squad [PPSA Z2-1-93 1953]. Compared to the Yellow
Crane, the structure of the Big Sword was more like a fighting unit with clearly numbered units. The Yellow Crane, on the contrary, was more hierarchical, highlighting the importance of discipleship like a traditional martial arts school.

INVULNERABILITY RITUALS

Choosing to join a martial arts group meant responding to the banditry problem through violence. But how was violence understood? Ter Haar suggests that the belief in demons as the source of persistent danger to human beings was a basic notion in the religious culture of traditional China. People worshiped different deities when confronting various demonic threats, such as the deities of bridges and the deities of health. Even bandits often adopted nicknames related to demonic forces, believing that such a connection would equip them with the power of demons so that they became legitimated as killers. Ter Haar further points out that when people understood real-life enemies as demonic origins, they would fight against them not only with physical force but also through exorcizing these demonic powers. Such beliefs permeated the entire Boxer Uprising and most martial arts groups in the Republican era with religious rituals against injury [Ter Haar 2002].

Building on Ter Haar’s Chinese ‘demonological paradigm’ [Ter Haar 2002], historian William Rowe concludes that the existence of this most basic and ubiquitous demonic threat ‘made violence into a fundamental imperative of human existence […] The gruesome violence threatened by these demons must be met with an equally determined response bent on bloody and complete extermination’ [Rowe 2007: 8]. Supernatural responses to demonic power were also popular, such as summoning spirit armies against demonic forces, in Daoism and local cults [Meulenbeld 2015]. This was also true for both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword in Poyang. Fighting bandits was not only a physical war relying on might and weapons but also a demonic war that required strict regulation of all the participants’ moral behavior along with gaining power from the spiritual realm.

Invulnerability rituals, the magical martial techniques that were believed to prevent the approach of weapons or to help human bodies withstand physical harms, were considered the most crucial body of teaching within both the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword groups. The invulnerability rituals were a complex system involving everything from chanting spells and practicing spirit possession during the learning process to wearing and carrying specific clothes and weapons during the battles. Failure to follow these requirements could undermine the effectiveness of the rituals and lead to injuries and even death.

Although invulnerability rituals never represented the mainstream martial arts practices in China, they came to be widely known to the public as well as the Western world through the practices of the Armor of the Golden-Bell (jinzhong zhaoc) and the Iron-Cloth Shirt (tiehu shan) during the Boxer Uprising of 1899-1901. The Boxer Uprising was well-known in the West as a violent anti-foreign movement against Westerners and Christians in China. The Boxers practiced various forms of invulnerability rituals during the uprising. Escherick points out that the invulnerability rituals were certainly not a unified martial arts school; instead, they were simply popular self-defense techniques in Chinese popular culture [Escherick 1988: 53-58]. In tracing the historical origin of the invulnerability practice in Chinese martial arts, Shahar suggests that they were introduced from Tantric Buddhism in India through the concept of the ‘diamond body’ [Shahar 2012].

The Yellow Crane Society required a forty-nine-day learning period for the invulnerability rituals. During the forty-nine days, all the students had to sit in meditation three times a day. During each meditation session, the students needed to light joss sticks, burn yellow papers, worship the Bodhisattvas, and chant spells.¹ The spells began by listing the many deities they worshiped, ranging from the Duke of Zhou (Zhougong) to regional deities. One such spell was:

> Our gods send peace to us and protect us,
> Iron helmet and iron armor all come from the heaven,
> I shall put on the iron clothes, iron armor, and iron helmet,
> Guns, cannons, and firearms will stay away from me,
> All the nine flood dragons will gather and protect us,
> Guns, cannons, and firearms will stay away from me,
> The Six Ding and Six Jia will gather and support us,²
> Swords and axes will stay away from me.

This spell ended with the listing of another group of deities and repeating that all the weapons will stay away from us. There were various forms of spells for different fighting techniques. When fighting in real battles, they must worship the Bodhisattvas first, then put on a specific set of headgear, waist belt, bottles (hanging on the waist belt), and straw sandals for ritual use. Then they would carry a pair of swords in their hands and march forward slowly. When marching forward, they would chant ‘we [disciples] truthfully invite the merciful

¹ ‘Worshipping the Bodhisattvas (baifo)’ was a generic term in Chinese popular culture for being religious and participating in religious rituals. The ‘Bodhisattvas’ here do not refer to any specific deities.

² The ‘Six Ding and Six Jia’ are a group of martial gods in Daoism.
Guanyin Bodhisattva to come protect our bodies from injuries’. The schoolmaster would lead in the front with a huge umbrella. Once the schoolmaster opened the umbrella (when enemies were approaching), all the Yellow Crane members would become invulnerable to weapons [PPSA Z2-1-87 1953].

The invulnerability rituals of the Big Sword Society were similar but more straightforward in relation to the use of force and weapons. The Big Sword’s invulnerability rituals required a learning period of ten nights. During these ten nights, the teachers would first teach the students how to avoid being hurt by placing heavy stones on the students’ bellies, then slicing the students’ bellies and backs with swords. Then the teachers would teach them how to use swords. When fighting in real battles, everyone would wear a bamboo rain hat, carry big swords on their right hands, and chant spells such as:

    The Jade Emperor of Heaven and Earth,  
    Founder of our martial school,  
    Buddha of Seven Spirits,  
    Eternal Mother the Guanyin Bodhisattva,  
    Eternal Mother of the Lishan Mountain,  
    One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten.

At that point Big Sword members would become invulnerable to injuries during the battle [PPSA Z2-1-93 1953]. People would chant different spells under different circumstances. Each set of spells was usually associated with a specific technique in fighting, such as the spell of Blocking the Spears (Duqiang fa) and Hiding My Body (Yanshen fa). To transmit the spells, the teachers would tie a piece of yellow paper with the spells on it onto the skin of the students, and then slice the students with swords [PPSA Z1-9-8 1958].

Participants in the Yellow Crane and the Big Sword Society did take the invulnerability rituals seriously. The leaders of the martial arts groups often advertised their teachings only as the technique of invulnerability. Becoming invulnerable against the bandits was the primary driving force when people decided to join the martial arts schools. For many of those who lived under the constant threat of bandits, joining martial arts groups was simply about protecting themselves from the harms of the bandits through learning invulnerability rituals. Solving the bandit problem completely by wiping them out in the region was not their concern.

People also used invulnerability rituals in a practical way to reach specific goals in real life. Zheng Laichao, who was a member of the Zheng lineage, decided to learn and teach the invulnerability rituals of the Yellow Crane Society to his own lineage people because the Zheng lineage had serious conflicts with the Xiong lineage. In 1948, the Xiong lineage members first invited a Big Sword martial master and organized their own Big Sword Society. In April of 1948, during a feud (xiedou) between the two lineages, the Xiong lineage Big Sword Society killed two people from the Zheng lineage. Zheng Laichao then invited a Yellow Crane martial master to teach his lineage the rituals of invulnerability. Zheng Laichao also became a vice-schoolmaster. More than ten days later, in May, during the following feud between the two lineages, the Zheng lineage killed seven people from the Xiong lineage. The Zheng lineage were all amazed by the effectiveness of the invulnerability rituals of the Yellow Crane. More and more people joined the Yellow Crane after that (which will be discussed in the next section) [PPSA Z1-9-105 1958].

In another case, Zhang Yintang joined the Big Sword Society because he hoped it could bring him good fortune. Zhang was jobless and heavily addicted to gambling until he met a Big Sword teacher at his grandfather’s home in 1944. Zhang learned the invulnerability rituals from the teacher and wished to go to the Sino-Japanese War battlefront and fight against the Japanese. ‘If I could master the invulnerability rituals and go to the anti-Japanese frontline, becoming a [military] commander would be as easy as eating desserts and drinking tea’ [PPSA Z3-1-180 1957].

Failure of the invulnerability rituals would definitely undermine the credibility of the martial arts groups in people’s minds. In Zheng Laichao’s case, four months after the feud in May when the Zheng lineage killed seven people of the Xiong lineage, another feud broke out. This time, the result of the feud was quite disappointing to the Zheng lineage. The schoolmaster Zheng Wenxiang was killed in the battle, the rest of his people ran away immediately. After the death of Zheng Wenxiang, people were more and more reluctant to join the Yellow Crane [PPSA Z1-9-105 1958].

During the Chinese Civil War (1945-49) when the martial arts groups in Poyang resisted the CCP’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949, the failure of the invulnerability rituals led to the rapid disbanding of most martial arts groups in Poyang. Cheng Hong, who was a leader of the Big Sword Society and participated in a fight against the PLA, recalled later that the Big Sword forces were clearly not comparable to the PLA’s modern weapons. His people were soon smashed into disorder, and all fled away [PPSA Z1-1-105 1950].
DESTABALIZING LOCAL SOCIETY

Local martial arts groups emerged in Poyang as a protective survival strategy against widespread predatory bandit activities. But it is wrong to assume that these local groups were necessarily protective against outside threats all the time. On the contrary, once these martial arts groups gained power in Poyang and became an integral part of people’s everyday life, they began engaging in local conflicts through the use of violence, coercion, or even predatory strategies. In official archives, the intervention of martial arts groups in local violence was often labeled as ‘xiedou’.

‘Xiedou’, the most commonly used abbreviation of ‘chixie xiangdou’ (to seize weapons and fight one another), was a widespread form of violence in rural China. In the Western scholarship on China, ‘xiedou’ is often translated as ‘feud’ or ‘lineage feud’, highlighting such a phenomenon as a form of collective violence based on the boundary of kinship and bloodline.

Since the late imperial period, rural residents had been equally familiar with the enduring and endemic problems of banditry and feuding. Although feud seemed to be a natural product of traditional Chinese society that was largely built on lineage organizations, it also showed the weakness of China’s bureaucratic system which was not able to rule the local society effectively. During the Qing Dynasty, according to historian Harry Lamley, the government considered feuding a form of private conflict that differed fundamentally from other types of social unrest such as banditry and rebellion [Lamley 1977: 1]. Therefore, local officials intentionally avoided intervening in the private sphere or reporting the cases to higher authorities. Moreover, lineage leaders involved in feuding often bribed the local officials in order to avoid turning their conflicts into formal criminal cases. Thus, under such a condition of lax management from the government, feuding often led to terrible physical and mental consequences for the parties involved [Lamley 1990: 36]. Historian Lucien Bianco argues that feuding in the first half of the twentieth century showed considerable continuity from the late imperial time, including the state’s inability to respond to local disputes effectively. What was new in the twentieth century, according to Bianco, was only ‘the demographic surge and the resulting increase in density’ [Bianco 2001: 180].

Technological advancement gradually introduced modern weapons into feuding. Even during the Qing Dynasty, professional mercenaries with firearms were widely hired to participate in feuding [Lamley 1990: 49]. Feuding was not necessarily a single round of armed conflicts between lineages. In many cases, suspicion and hatred produced in one feud often developed into a vicious cycle of revenge between lineages that could potentially last for decades or even centuries. ‘Subsequent disputes were apt to revive old controversies, rekindle familiar patterns of revenge, and thus give rise to new feud cycles’ [Lamley 1977: 7].

In Poyang County, most of the feuding cases resulted from conflicts between lineages over material stakes. Among the most dominant material causes of feuding were ownership disputes of water properties, competition for natural resources, and lineage conflicts. What was unconventional but not surprising in the feuding cases in Poyang was the active participation of martial arts groups that were initially organized to defend the communities against bandits. Local martial arts teachers became martial arts careerists who promoted the use of violence whenever local conflicts occurred.

During February of 1937, a feud broke out between the Peng lineage and the Hong lineage because of ownership disputes over the polder land [PPSA Z1-1-53 1950]. Twenty-four people were killed in the first feud between the two sides in February [PPSA Z1-4-233 1953]. Leaders within the Peng lineage decided to militarize their lineage and invited martial arts masters to teach them boxing techniques and invulnerability rituals. The Peng lineage invited Jin Deshan, who had just become the new grand master of the Yellow Crane Society in 1936, to help the Peng lineage build their Yellow Crane Society. Jin Deshan set up the first Yellow Crane assembly hall in the Peng lineage and trained twenty-six students as the first group of disciples. During the following year in 1938, Jin Deshan came again and established two more Yellow Crane assembly halls with more than thirty disciples in the Peng lineage. In 1939, the second feud caused by the polder land conflict broke out between the two lineages. At least one person from the Peng lineage was killed. Jin Deshan visited the Peng lineage for the last time in 1944 and taught some twenty more students within the two 1938 assembly halls [PPSA Z1-1-53 1950].

‘Blood debt’ resulting from feuds appeared to be a driving motivation for people to join the martial arts groups. Peng Jiamao from the Peng lineage joined the Yellow Crane Society as one of the first group of students. His father was killed in the first feud between the two lineages. Although Peng Jiamao had no formal appointment within the Yellow Crane Society, he was one of the most enthusiastic students [PPSA Z1-4-233 1953]. Peng Jiwang also joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1938 after his father was killed in the first feud. He admitted that his motivation was simply hatred and revenge [PPSA Z1-4-234 1953]. Although there were only two feuds between the Peng and Hong clans in total, several males in the Peng lineage considered joining the Yellow Crane Society and protecting the Peng family from other groups as part of their lineage culture.
The adoption of the Yellow Crane Society by the Peng lineage led to a contagion effect where many neighboring lineages sought to learn the Yellow Crane invulnerability rituals. Peng Guixiang, who joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1937 following the first feud between the Peng lineage and Hong lineage, was appointed as the schoolmaster of the first Peng assembly hall. From 1938 to 1949, Peng Guixiang introduced Jin Deshan and the Lame to over eleven nearby villages and lineages. Jin and the Lame taught the Yellow Crane invulnerability rituals at these communities and helped them establish their own Yellow Crane organizations.

Material incentives played an essential role in Peng Guixiang’s ‘advertising’ the Yellow Crane techniques. When Jin Deshan and the Lame went to one community and taught the Yellow Crane techniques, they often received fifty kilograms of grain as an honorarium. Those who introduced Jin and the Lame would usually get one-third of the payment and share it with the members within their own assembly halls [PPSA Z1-1-53 1950]. In another case, Peng Wanggui from the Peng lineage joined the Yellow Crane Society in 1938. He fought during the second feud between the Peng and Hong lineages. Then, in 1948, at the invitation of the Zheng lineage, Peng Wanggui led his own Yellow Crane Society in a feud against the Xiong lineage, claiming five or six fatalities [PPSA Z1-2-162 1951-53; PPSA Z1-9-105 1958]. Although it is unknown whether Peng Wanggui received any material compensation from the Zheng lineage, local martial arts groups indeed became ‘professional mercenaries’ and dominant actors in feuding conflicts between lineages in Poyang County.

In 1948, another lineage conflict broke out between the Zheng lineage and the Xiong lineage because of disputes over taxation and conscription. The Xiong family immediately invited a few Big Sword Society masters to their village and established their own assembly halls, killing two Zheng lineage members during a feud. Being outraged, the Zheng lineage invited several Yellow Crane martial arts teachers, including the Lame, to build their Yellow Crane organizations. During the following seven days, seven Yellow Crane teachers taught the Zheng lineage people how to create charms, worship deities, practice invulnerability rituals, as well as fighting techniques [PPSA Z1-2-162 1951-53; PPSA Z1-9-105 1958].

During June of 1948, more than eighty Zheng lineage Yellow Crane Society members, and over one hundred and fifty non-members, marched to the Xiong Village with weapons and shields, firmly believing in the effectiveness of the Yellow Crane invulnerability rituals that they had just learned. They strictly followed the rituals of the Yellow Crane Society and fought bravely against the Xiong lineage. The feud began around eight o’clock in the morning and lasted for three hours. Seven people from the Xiong lineage alliance were killed while the Zheng lineage lost three people in the battle. In 1948, there were three instances of large-scale feuds between the two sides, but smaller scale conflicts broke out more than ten times. The Zheng lineage even used a machine gun during two feuds in September of 1948 and burnt several houses in the Xiong Village. However, one Zheng lineage schoolmaster, Zheng Wexiang, was killed in the feud during September, which terribly discouraged the people’s belief in the Yellow Crane Society’s invulnerability rituals. People from the Zheng lineage gradually lost interest in the Yellow Crane Society [PPSA Z1-9-105 1958].

Although both feuding cases above were directly caused by competition over material interests, the participation of the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society intensified the level of violence and vitalized the enthusiasm of the feuding participants. In these cases, we can see a clear network of wandering martial arts teachers that initially began their careers resisting bandits but later turned to supporting other forms of violent internal conflict. The job of a martial arts teacher, such as Jin Deshan and the Lame, was by nature not associated with any moral obligation in maintaining peace within the community. Most martial arts teachers were careerists who relied on their unique skills to make a living and expand their economic interests. Consequently, whenever there was a need for professional training in martial arts, there was the presence of wandering martial arts teachers.

After the death of the first Yellow Crane grandmaster Xiong Xinzhai in 1936, the new leaders Jin Deshan and the Lame became more active and expansive than their predecessors. Jin Deshan participated in building all the Yellow Crane assembly halls in the Peng lineage. The 1945 new assembly hall established by Jin Deshan in Sanmiaoqian, for example, was also constructed for the purpose of feuding. The Sanmiaoqian and Yinjiagou Villages were competing for the grassland that could be used for feeding oxen. After an initial feud broke out in 1943, people from Sanmiaoqian invited Jin Deshan and established their own Yellow Crane Society to fight against the Yinjiagou Village [PPSA Z1-4-347 1953].

Besides the martial arts groups established by local well-known teachers like Jin Deshan and the Lame, other poor people also chose the path of becoming martial arts teachers and made a living from it. Such was the case of Dong Bakui. Born in 1917, Dong was from a poor peasant family. Similar to many poor people in rural China, Dong joined a pirate gang in 1940 and robbed several ships on the Poyang Lake in the following years. In June of 1946, Dong quit his bandit career and joined the Big Sword Society. Five months later, in November, the Jiang lineage invited Dong’s Big Sword Society to participate in a feud against the Zhang lineage. Dong killed one person from the Zhang lineage in the feud. In 1947, Dong spent the whole year as a wandering Big Society
teacher in Poyang, teaching martial arts. Dong was also a leading Big Sword teacher in the feuds between the Zheng lineage and the Xiong lineage in 1948 [PPSA Z1–6-463 1955].

Although feuding was nothing new in rural society in China, the proliferation of the martial arts groups and invulnerability rituals significantly intensified these conflicts and made them a significant destabilizing social problem. During the 1950s, when people talked about the feuds between the Zheng and Xiong lineages, sometimes they referred to it as the feuds between the Yellow Crane Society and the Big Sword Society. Feuding lineages and the martial arts groups entered symbiotic relations: participants in feuds needed the martial arts groups to improve their power, while the martial arts teachers needed feuding to promote their careers. Such reciprocal ‘benefits’ turned violence into a legitimate channel for accumulating power in rural society. Under a society with little state intervention at the local level, it was the use of violence through martial arts groups that established the equilibrium between competing interest groups.

CONCLUSION

Rural martial groups, well-known for their invulnerability rituals, must be understood in the context of social insecurity in China during both the late imperial and modern times. Rebellions, regime changes, warlordism, and many other social problems had made rural China a horrible place during the Republican era. Among these threats, banditry was a prevalent issue. In order to protect their homes, local leaders invited wandering martial arts teachers from outside to teach them invulnerability rituals and organize self-defense groups. The emergence of rural martial arts groups was protective in nature. Once settled down, however, martial arts teachers and their groups took advantage of the existing internal conflicts and became careerists who promoted the use of violence in resolving local disputes. Rural martial arts groups were both the local protectors and trouble-makers.

When the CCP came into power after 1949, the elimination of bandits and existing rural power structures completely destroyed the roots which supported the existence of rural martial arts groups. Invulnerability rituals and legendary wandering martial arts masters are now just myths in martial arts literature.
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THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN DUDGEON, HERBERT GILES AND JOSEPH NEEDHAM

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ABSTRACT
This essay focuses on the early stages of the establishment of both knowledge and misconceptions about Chinese martial arts in early to mid-20th century English language writings. It uses both primary texts and critical literature, including work by John Dudgeon, Herbert A. Giles, and Joseph Needham. The study explores the ways in which their different backgrounds, purposes and interpretations of these authors produced sometimes similar and at other times contrasting images of Chinese martial arts. However, I argue that the three primary images drawn by Dudgeon, Giles, and Needham share overarching similarities, based on shared Greco-Roman assumptions about the ‘complete human being’.
INTRODUCTION

From the 16th century, China and its civilization was no longer merely an image, a fantastical country encountered only by travelling merchants such as Marco Polo. It was becoming a reality for increasing numbers of travellers. Some of these were scholars interested in researching Chinese medical, physical culture and scientific developments. Thanks to this scholarly interest, numerous Chinese achievements came to be studied by European scholars, including those practices that would eventually come to be known by such names as cong-fu or kung-fu. Consequently, it was during this period that both knowledge and misconceptions about ‘Chinese boxing’ as a corporeal practice began to spread, initially to Britain and subsequently to other European countries.

This essay focuses on these early stages in the establishment of both knowledge and misconceptions about Chinese martial arts in English language writings of the early to the middle 20th century. It studies both primary texts and critical literature, including a lengthy article of the surgeon John Dudgeon, two works by the scholar Professor Herbert A. Giles, and lastly the voluminous contributions of sinologist Joseph Needham. In comparing and contrasting these influential authors, I explore the ways in which their different backgrounds, purposes and perspectives produced sometimes similar and sometimes contrasting images of Chinese martial arts. At the same time, however, I argue that the three primary images drawn by Dudgeon, Giles, and Needham share overarching cultural conceptions, informed by Greco-Roman assumptions about the ‘complete human being’ and its relationship with Chinese conceptions. Interestingly, they also share also a general interest in the mystical force of qi and in how this was said to change the body when training or performing martial arts. In the context of this discussion, it is also useful to indicate some of the ways that subsequent waves of Western scholarship have approached the same subject.

Certainly, since the dawn of Chinese civilisation martial arts have been developed to conquer or to protect borders [Lorge 2012: 89-90], to defend people’s honour [Liu 1967: 6] or as a way to settle quarrels [Lewis 1990: 80-81]. They have been a consistently present piece of the culture. Despite this, Chinese martial arts do not seem to have not been studied adequately in western academia. Western scholars of literature have not looked at or translated much of the corpus of military treatises, and certainly not with the same degree of interest as has been shown in poetry and other literature. Indeed, Western academia has struggled to come to terms with such corporeal skills as those used throughout history to wage wars and stage fights in between and during periods of peace, stability and good government.

It has only been since the middle of 1950s – and only sporadically – that European and American scholars have studied the military culture of China through the lens of the dyad formally known as wenwu 文武 (civilising-martial) [Fried 1952; Abbink 2000: xiii, xiv]. The wenwu is a cultural pattern mentioned very early in Chinese history by Confucius in the Analects, and it is present in other East Asian cultural contexts too. In these contexts, it is said that ideally a person should cultivate both aspects; the educative and literary, on the one hand, and the more physical and martialistic, on the other. This seems to encompass a traditional schema aiming at developing a balanced person. Arguably, this is comparable to the Greek concept of paideia – a comparison that I use in this article as a shorthand way to encapsulate and communicate the terms of cross-cultural comparison for this discussion of early Western attempts to comprehend Chinese martial arts and culture.

Wenwu can be studied and used in a broad meaning, at state level, and in a narrow sense, as well at individual practice level. Arguably, the wenwu is a cultural lens through which it is possible to observe martial arts development throughout Chinese history and as a way to study the fluctuating focus of the ruling class on military or civil activities; such as when promoting one at the expense of the other and vice-versa. At time, in Chinese history, the bureaucratic state often tried to refrain or to prohibit a wide spreading of wu activities (in vain) up until the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century (the end of the Tang dynasty). Since that period, and in particular since the 10th to 13th centuries (the Song dynasty), the focus shifted toward the wen, to the exclusion from public discourse of the wu activities.

Yet among the general population there remained an interest in keeping a cultural eye on wu activities, for a variety of reasons. Indeed, later on in Chinese history this official imbalance was supported by a biased interpretation of the Confucian message, culminating in the motto developed during the last dynasty in China (The Manchu Qing, 1644-1911): ‘give importance to letters; neglect the military’ (Zhongwen qingwu 重文輕武).

When Chinese culture was experienced in Europe, it was in the context of a literati class decidedly averse to daoist practices, body culture and, consequently, martial arts. In this context, martial arts were not being given their due attention by the Chinese. This is not argued directly by any of the key authors under analysis here: Dudgeon, Giles and Needham. Rather, what such authors have done, it appears, is to locate their interpretations of martial arts within the cultural frame, in ways that associate martial practice to a civil realm, as either therapeutic, sportive or physical. Certainly, neither Dudgeon, nor Giles, nor

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1 See for example the interview with Gong Baohai 宫宝斋 published in the Pa Kua Chang Journal Vol 4, N. 5, July August 1994, pp. 3-14.
Needham mentioned once the wenwu dyad in either Chinese or English translation. Yet, I argue, the wenwu pattern should be applied to this context and indeed to a much larger frame than the paideia. This can be seen in that it has been used in many projects, even including urban planning, for instance [Gawlikowski 1989: 60].

Scholars such as Dudgeon, Giles and Needham were certainly working during a period of intellectual rediscovery and fervour as they explored a very different civilisation. It evidently seemed natural to them all to make certain comparisons to Western (Greco-Roman) concepts and socio-economic models [Dawson 1964: xii-xiii, Finlay 2000: 272-274].

The study undertaken here focuses on influential early scholars working in English between the turn of the 19th century to in the middle of the 20th century. Their aim was, first of all, to ‘break the ice’ of academic silence, and to begin to change the status of the subject area of combat and violence from being ‘taboo’ or verboten. Secondly, such scholars inaugurate the study of the body in a certain way, by looking at both civilisations’ practices of health and sport, and as a (quasi)religious search for immortality, as well as being part of Chinese scientific and technological development. Other scholars, especially since 1969, continued in the tradition of Dudgeon, Giles and Needham. Hence, their historical importance as interlocutors is clear.

1. THE ICEBREAKER

JOHN DUDGEON (1837 – 1901)

To understand the work of John Dudgeon and to appreciate his effort, we need to recall the cultural scenario and the environment he worked in. At the end of the 16th century, Italian missionaries, led by Matteo Ricci, were the main known group of Europeans to go to China, seeking to evangelize the country – or, to convert the Chinese to Christianity. A few centuries later, during the last dynasty the Qing, some British missionaries travelled to continue the evangelical project. However, some were not only men of faith; they were also men of science. Some were physicians who went to China also to observe the local forms of Chinese physical and medical culture. Therefore, they came to understand the Chinese notion of qi. Many saw the qi as a relevant matter and wanted to engage with this notion, including Tang Zonghai 唐宗海 (1851-1897). Tang used the model of steam and engine to explain it. More importantly, Tang identified the notion of qi as the cultural mark between West and East [Lei 2012:319]. An explanation of qi was necessary in order to clarify the cultural divide muddied by the Western assumption that Chinese traditional medicine is based on purely superstition elements [Gao: 102, 105].

The translation of qi and explanation of how it works was an important and difficult task. This was the goal aimed at, for instance, by The Chinese Medical Missionary Journal at the end of 19th century, via a series of publication projects and translations. John Dudgeon took part in this project with translations with the aim of trying to reverse the ‘superstition’ stereotype about Chinese medical knowledge. An important part of this publication was dedicated to the healing arts and John Dudgeon made an important and contribution, seeking to establish a positive explanation of qi within physical training. This was based on his observations of Taoist monks practicing qigong (養生, meaning ‘to nourish life’), later relabelled as qigong.2

John Hepburn Dudgeon (1837-1901) was a Scottish from Galston, Ayrshire; a protestant Presbyterian, who attended the University of Edinburgh and who later received a Master of Surgery medical degree from the University of Glasgow in 1862. In his thirties, Dudgeon’s health deteriorated due to a fever, and he was advised to travel to countries with a better climate, such as Japan, for example. Instead, contrary to all expectations, Dudgeon travelled China from north to south, where he recovered. He decided to remain in Beijing to try to understand more clearly why the Chinese had such a great longevity expectancy [Li 2009: 22-23]. He worked in Beijing for the British Legation, performing medical duties and translating documents into Chinese [British Medical Journal 1901: 16-679]. 3 In 1864, he worked at the Peking Hospital in connection with the London Missionary Society.

Dudgeon described his experience in China as like living in a huge necropolis where the ‘sanitary conditions deplorable’. In particular, he described Beijing’s environment as ‘a receptacle of all manner of filth because no one was responsible for their cleanliness’. He found the ‘absence of public toilets in Beijing irritating’, as it resulted in a metropolis-sized opened-air latrine. And yet, despite all this, he was

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2 In 1949, Huang Yueying 黄月庭 coined the term qigong. See also http://www.eastasiangovernment.org/40/Otehode-and-Penny [accessed 15 September 2019].

3 For more bibliographical information, see The British Medical Journal [1901]. March 16, p.679.
surprised by the incredibly strong immune system of the Chinese people, and found this living environment to confound all medical expectations, noting: ‘It might be supposed from the physical conditions of Peking which I have attempted to describe, that fevers and all manner of epidemics would be most fatal. This was not the case’ [Li 2009: 25].

Dudgeon wanted to know what made the Chinese people’s body constitution so strong as to be able to flourish in such conditions. He wrote, the Chinese ‘have a good many lessons yet to teach us in respect of living and practical health’ [Li 2009: 27]. He looked closely at their living habits, diet, clothing, working lives, social patterns and physical activities [Li 2009: 28-29], and he noted how different and more human-centred life appeared to be, in comparison with that of the industrialising world.

During this period, Dudgeon produced a series of accounts and translations. Some gave general information, such as the article, ‘The Population of China’; others were more specialised, such as ‘A Modern Chinese Anatomist’, ‘A Chapter in Chinese Surgery’, and his translation of the text, ‘Complete exam’ (my translation: Quanti tongkao, 金體通考).

Of most relevance to us is a work titled ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ [Dudgeon 1895]. This appears in the Li Sheng-jen bibliography as ‘Kung-Fu or Taoist Medical Gymnastics’. It is disappointing that this work is not mentioned in the pages of The British Medical Journal (a valuable source which provides key information about his life), for Dudgeon’s ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ is not only a record of Chinese ‘medical gymnastic’, it was actually only the second ever (and the first British) article to argue that martial arts (wushu 武术) – or, to use the southern Chinese term, kung fu (功夫) – had roots in the Daoist practice of qigong (literally, ‘qi work’, 氣功), and hence to promote the idea that kung fu was originally therapeutic. Given the enduring prejudice against taking seriously martial/physical culture, this omission may well be deliberate [Li 2009: 33].

The first European article to argue similar things about wushu/kung fu was written by the French missionary Pierre Martial Cibot (1727-1780). In 1779, Cibot had written an article titled ‘Notice du Cong-fou, des Bonzes Tão-séé’. In this article, he records the practice of certain postures associated with healing and relates them to Daoist alchemy. Almost a century later, Dudgeon was asked to work on this subject in order to answer specific questions that had been left unclear by Cibot and to expand generally on the subject. Specifically sought was ‘detailed information on the positions and breathing movements’ [Dudgeon 1895: 357-359]. Arguably, this work could be regarded as marking the very beginning of the era of aesthetic interest in all things Chinese, now known as chinoiserie.

Just like Tang Zonghai, Dudgeon was required to work on the idea of qi, not least because of its significance as representing the depth of the cultural division between East and West. Recent scholarship, such as that of Linda Barnes [Barnes 2004: 72-125, 126-211] and Jonathan Spence [Spence 1992: 141-54] emphasizes the profound differences that were becoming apparent between European and Chinese approaches to treating diseases in the 17th century. They also note the growing curiosity about Chinese therapies that emerged among European physicians of the time. Barnes writes: ‘Chinese and Western practitioners learned radically different and even incommensurate ways of reading the body’ – differences that indicate ‘the disparities rooted in different cosmologies’ [Barnes 2004: 85]. In particular, Barnes stresses the attention that some Europeans paid to the Chinese approach to reading the pulse in order to reach a diagnosis [Barnes 2004: 92-104], as well as interest in the conceptions of qi and its various levels of sophistication, such as the seminal essence (jing 精) and spirit (shen 神) [Barnes 2004: 87-92].

According to Barnes, the sense was that qi was the primary and principal cultural issue that needed to be dealt with if European researchers were to be able to represent approaches to physical and medical therapies to a wider European audience. However, as she writes, although ‘some writers attempted to explain core Chinese concepts to European audiences’ (for example, ‘Ten Rhijne translated qi as “Spirits”, equating it with Galen’s “animal spirits”), the problem was that, ‘while both terms involved vital force and blood — making the connection natural — it was still wrong’ [Barnes 2004: 87].

In fact, the understanding of qi went through various translations: at various times, qi was taken to be a ‘spiritual substance’, an ‘animal spirit’, a combination of circulating ‘blood and humours’, and an element coupled together with the spirits. These differences show the difficulties that Europeans had in translating and incorporating such a complex concept into the Western intellectual environment [Barnes 2004: 87-89]. Physicians were still regarding the human body as a ‘structure’ that allowed them ‘to recognize changes [...] and corresponding problems in the mechanism’s capacity to function’ [Barnes 2004: 85].

It is important to recall the problems that Europeans had when dealing with qi, because – crucially – Dudgeon never actually mentions it in ‘Kung-
fu or Medical Gymnastic’. Rather, he simply uses Western words. This suggests that Dudgeon seems to have preferred a strategy of trying to avoid confusing the reader, which the introduction of matters such as different and difficult-to-translate cultural and cosmological notions could well have done. While this seems like a reasonable strategy to use in order to keep the attention and comprehension of the reader, unfortunately, it sidesteps and defers dealing with one of the enduring and perhaps fundamental cultural questions that has recurred in Western discourses with Chinese thought since then – namely, clarification of what is perhaps the key to Chinese culture: the notion of qi.

In lieu of any philosophical explanation of qi, Dudgeon includes a brief explanation of the principles of yin (阴) and yang (阳) [Dudgeon 1895: 370-372]. However, even in this explanation, he refers to plant and animal forces: yin, allegedly a vegetative force, has to be combined with yang, allegedly a muscular force, in the production of an equilibrium of physical forces, the t'ai-chi (太極). By the end of this explanation, Dudgeon goes on to construct a universal (religious) image of kung fu, one based in an idea of the creation of physical and spiritual harmony, a harmony that he relates to Indian and Greek conceptions:

Such are the principles upon which reposes the theory of Kung-fu of the Chinese, like that of their chemical and pharmaceutical medicine, and also that of their religious, social, and philosophic doctrines; for the Chinese [...] carry always their considerations into all the elements of his nature and his constitution [...] Indeed, this will be a curious history to write [...] that of these old priests of Tao – these remains still living of the first Brahmans of India [...] Depositories of the tradition, these founders of nations carried the doctrine of Kung-fu from the common cradle into all the countries where they established themselves. [Dudgeon 1895: 371-373]

Dudgeon’s Kung Fu Was Barely a Fighting Method

The importance of this work is that, in the British construction, Chinese martial arts are rendered as a therapeutic system rather than a pure fighting art; and it all starts with a general introduction about the sense of the importance of physical motion to preserve health and strengthen the body [Dudgeon 1895: 341-375]. There are only tangential references to kung fu as something that is, was, or could be utilised in any kind of combat situation. In fact, Dudgeon rarely mentions any violent or combative implications in relation to kung fu (as it is known today). Of course, even with reference to ancient Greek and Roman contexts, Dudgeon held that contests were held primarily to reinforce the body. A similar assumption is also found in relation to other ancient societies, such as Hindu and Chinese societies. Dudgeon notes that these latter societies produced a body of literature in which the preservation of health was regarded as relating to such matters as the changes of the seasons, the climate, food, and ways to arrange the house [Dudgeon 1895: 343-344].

However, although Dudgeon was evidently not looking at the potential martial meanings of kung fu, he nevertheless came rather close when arguing that in the Chinese national curriculum kung fu included the practice of archery and horsemanship. But, Dudgeon connected it with the Greek assumption that a ‘sound mind in a sound body’ [1895: 342] was the ideal of physicians and philosophers and argued that any kind of dynamic activity provides a benefit, whether that be ‘walking, dry-rubbing or friction, [or] wrestling, etc.’ [1895: 342]. In addition, Dudgeon adds the Greek word athlos. Hence, athletae can be associated with the benefits experienced from practicing kung fu. Iccus of Tarentum and Herodicus of Selymbra were two Greek gymnasts who cured diseases through movements. In particular, as Dudgeon indicates, Herodicus used gymnastics and fighting for medical purposes: ‘Hippocrates, who was one of his pupils and superintended the exercises in his palaestra, tells us that Herodicus cured fevers by walking and wrestling, and that many found the dry fomentations did them harm’ [Dudgeon 1895: 343]. This is where it seems most possible to see the cultural parallel between the Greek paideia and the Chinese wenwu.

Reciprocally, in Dudgeon’s exploration of the culture of physical movements in China, he found that the activities familiarly referred to as gymnastics in the West were very similar to those practiced in China. He notes that, since the time of the Great Yu (大禹), the Chinese have had systems of movement to preserve health. These movements later took the shape, he notes, of military exercises (although Dudgeon does not mention martial arts) and ritual dances with shields and banners (called Tí Wǔ, 大舞) which were performed as entertainment at the imperial court. Dudgeon proposes that these dances showed a circular trajectory aimed at preventing endemic and epidemic maladies [Dudgeon 1895: 345-346].

It is unfortunate that Dudgeon was not able to continue his investigation into the culture of China. As he writes:

The result of my attention having been called to this treatment is the following article on Kung-fu, which was submitted to Dr. Roth, and by him recommended for publication. I was unwilling at the time to present to the medical profession or to the general public a subject so meagrely handled, and during all these years have waited for the convenient time to devote to it more study and research, with the view of supplying at
least sufficient details to render anyone ignorant of Chinese and medicine able to grasp the subject and determine its usefulness or otherwise as prophylactic and curative agent. Unfortunately, the press of work necessitated by the card of a large hospital and other duties, has prevented me from pursuing further this study.  
[Dudgeon 1895: 358]

Overall, however, Dudgeon had managed to build an original picture in which an ancient Chinese culture of gymnastics met an equally ancient Greek culture of palaestra. At first, one might suspect that this kind of conception could be connected to what we now call ‘eurocentrism’ – a cultural viewpoint that began to flourish after the 18th century, when observers increasingly built frames of knowledge that projected one intellectual structure onto the entire world, China included [Barnes 2004: 126]. However, it is also possible to hold a different view of his work: after all, Dudgeon was actually trying to introduce his fellow countrymen to aspects of life quality within a different social and economic system.

The Impact of Dudgeon’s Use of the Term ‘Kung-fu’

Perhaps some readers of Chinese culture today will associate the term kung fu primarily with the figure of Bruce Lee (Li Zhengfan), who first popularised this term in Western countries via prominent television and film roles in the 1960s and early 1970s. But long before this, Dudgeon had provided a brief but influential and relatively comprehensive explanation of the meanings of kung fu. First, Dudgeon mentions the ability to perform an art; second, the application of bodily exercises in the ‘prevention or treatment of disease’ [Dudgeon 1895: 347]; third, he associates this concept of physical or artistic work with the way certain ‘Taoists’ (as it was transliterated at the time) hold their postures. With respect to this third sense, Dudgeon also states that Taoists (or Daoists, in pinyin) had long been practicing kung fu in the search for the elixir vitae [Dudgeon 1895: 347]. In the last part of his discussion of the semantics of the term kung fu, Dudgeon quotes a certain Lady Manners, who in the magazine Nineteenth Century stated that the Chinese had learned gymnastics and the ‘Science of Living’ from the Indians [Dudgeon 1895: 349].

Kung fu had and still has more than one meaning: In the Mathews’ Dictionary of classical Chinese we find the term related to ‘ability’, ‘work’, and ‘service’. These three meanings have broad applications, certainly beyond the sphere of physical culture. The modern Oxford Chinese Dictionary provides some different terms, such as ‘time’, ‘effort’, and ‘workmanship’. Moreover, these three go under a variation of the original graph 工夫. They still show a broad application in meanings. However, what none of them mention is the combative. Therefore, one may be inclined to wonder where the combative meaning actually comes from.

Dudgeon’s Sources

Although sources regarding Daoism were not widely shared by missionaries at the end of the 19th century, Dudgeon did manage to see some Chinese texts. If we examine his section ‘Books on Kung-fu’ [Dudgeon 1895: 500-509], it is clear how many relevant texts were hardly known even to scholars, to say nothing of any kind of wider Western audience. Interestingly, however, a good portion of the section ‘Books on Kung-fu’ is dedicated to the figure of the Indian monk Ta-mo (達摩, which is a short version of the name for Bodhidharma) and two texts attributed to him: The Washing Sinew Book (Hsi-sui-ching 肢洗髓經) and the Transforming Meadow Book (I-chin-ching 易筋經) – which Dudgeon says is in the Indian language. The figure of Bodhidharma and the two texts are related to the Shao-lin-sze (少林寺) and the practice of martial arts and kung fu. The part ‘Books on Kungfu’ quotes eight books, out of which six are Daoist sources and two are Buddhist, attributed to the mythological Indian patriarch Ta-mo (or Damo). These connections endure: modern publications still often make these same connections.

In any case, it seems clear that Dudgeon knew that kung fu was also a combat art, even if he was not interested in its martial aspects. Interestingly, a good part of his work is concerned with the technical description of the postures included in the text, Eight Ornamental Sections (Ba-duan-ching 八段經) [Dudgeon 1895: 375-385]. The description of the movements deserves our attention. Large diagrams are preceded by a couple of lines that briefly describe to the reader how to perform the movement. For instance: ‘The eyes must first be shut, and the heart dark […] the fists must be tightly closed, and the heart at rest, and both hands placed behind the vertex (of the head); then 9 respirations’ [Dudgeon 1895: 377]. Furthermore, the majority of those movements are given as animal names. The animal is referred to in order to evoke the general movement pattern and to describe the part of the body that will benefit from the therapeutic performance. For instance:

The Tiger. Close the breath, bend the head, close the fists tightly, and assume the severe form of a tiger. The two hands are

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5 The pinyin is Xisuijing and in this text the words are in the wrong order. The correct rendering is 洗髓經.
6 In pinyin it is Yijinjing.
Giles was interested in the continental origin of ‘jiu-jitsu’ as well as them before Herbert Giles [Brownell 2008: 29; Blanchard 1995: 102]. scholar became interested in Chinese sports and games or wrote about particular about the martial arts. It seems a shame that no Western the first English scholar who wrote about sports in China and in 

The same cultural mood as described in the introduction surrounded the first English scholar who wrote about sports in China and in particular about the martial arts. It seems a shame that no Western scholar became interested in Chinese sports and games or wrote about them before Herbert Giles [Brownell 2008: 29; Blanchard 1995: 102]. Giles was interested in the continental origin of ‘jiu-jitsu’ as well as 

slowly to lift a supposed weight of 1000 catties; the breath is to be retained till the body is upright, then swallowed and carried down into the abdomen [...] By this sort of movement, the air and pulses of the body will be harmonized, and the hundred [i.e., all] diseases prevented from being produced. [Dudgeon 1895: 386-387] 

Conclusion

Dudgeon’s translations and his account of kung fu were and still are an important early contribution. The conception of kung fu evident in Dudgeon’s work suggests, first of all, that it was part of a Chinese conception of kinetic exercise; certainly not just for entertainment, but for the higher purposes of treating sick people and also involving the noble idea of a ‘sound mind in a sound body’. In other words, despite Chinese practices involving great differences from European ones, Dudgeon still saw a significant educative point, and he was very interested in bringing back to Scotland a useful practice to improve people’s health. In this sense his work perhaps ought not to be considered ‘Eurocentric’, but rather a kind of restoration of a ‘forgotten’ Greek cultural piece, revivified by a different cultural perspective.

His interest had an impact on the orientation of later publications throughout the 20th century and even into the 21st century, insofar as the association of Chinese martial arts with Daoist practices such as qigong is still widespread, indeed taken for granted – at least in popular discourses, if less so today in academic discourse. Overall, John Dudgeon was not primarily interested in looking at the combative and masculine aspect of body movement. But this had little in common with the conception of Chinese martial arts that emerged in the account of Chinese boxing produced by his contemporary, Herbert Allen Giles. Accordingly, it is to Giles’ work that we should now turn.


The Japanese culture of martial arts made its way to Britain in two stages; first, after the Sino-Japanese war (1894-5) and, second, after the Russo-Japanese war (1904-5) [Hashimoto 2011:70, 72]. The Bushido code attracted sufficient interest to cause jiu-jitsu to become available on British soil.

In the century before he wrote these works there was a prevailing image of China as totally dictated by an Imperial literati class who never gave specific historical importance to physical exercise and to martial arts. The invisibility to Western scholars of body culture and martial arts in Chinese culture perhaps reflects a Western bias against studies of the body and physical culture, but it certainly resulted in strengthening limited and limiting perspectives. The bias against examining martial arts is not just intellectual; it is also cultural. In the case of Giles’ works, however, cultural biases and assumptions played a comparatively different role. Giles did not rail against Japanese martial culture. Rather, he railed against the transplanting of Chinese martial culture.

The invisibility to Western scholars of body culture and martial arts in Chinese culture perhaps reflects a Western bias against studies of the body and physical culture, but it certainly resulted in strengthening limited and limiting perspectives. The bias against examining martial arts is not just intellectual; it is also cultural. In the case of Giles’ works, however, cultural biases and assumptions played a comparatively different role. Giles did not rail against Japanese martial culture. Rather, he railed against the transplanting of Chinese martial culture.

Overview

Giles’ oeuvre was fourfold: he produced reference works, textbooks for languages including dictionaries, translations, and lastly he worked on miscellaneous different themes, including translating specific forensic texts. Giles, together with Thomas Wade, created a method to transliterate Mandarin into alphabetic languages; this is also still used today although it is now second to the more recent standard, pinyin 拼音。Giles was a distinguished scholar, known for his style and his criticism of other works. However, his character once caused him to be removed from a diplomatic position in China, because ‘did not suffer fools gladly’ [Aylmer 1997: 4].

Giles knew that ‘life in China is not wholly made up of book-learning and commerce’ [1911: 148], and on 9th November 1905, while watching a game of rugby, he wondered about sports played in China in ancient times [1906: 508]. Among his subsequent publications is a 1906 work on Chinese sports, titled ‘Football and Polo in China’ [Giles 1906] along with another one in the same year titled ‘The Home of Jiu Jitsu’.

7 The full name is Hanyu pinyin 汉语拼音 which means literally spelled sound of Han language. This was a system created by the end of 1950s by the Chinese government.
This was included in the project Adversaria Sinica. A few years later, in 1911, a very small book called The Civilisation of China contains a brief mention of Chinese boxing (in the third chapter covering the 'Philosophy and Sport').

Giles worked to counter the image of an over-intellectualised and effeminate China, and to restore the balance of wenwu. He argued against the presumption that China did not have a valuable physical and martial culture and that the Chinese, just like the Japanese, had a significant martial tradition. Nevertheless, in Giles’ approach to martial arts, you can still see the presence of what would become some enduring cultural problems, which still recur today, related to terminology, associations with religion, and function.

A Unique Interest in Fighting Arts

Jiu-jitsu, Jiu-jutsu or Jujutsu? And Kung-hu? How difficult it has been for people to agree on how to transliterate jūjutsu (柔術), wushu (武術) and gōngfū (功夫) into alphabetic non-tonal languages. Modern readers of Japanese language may be used to seeing the term in its contemporary transliterated form, which uses the Hepburn system (i.e., ‘jutsu’). The Hepburn method was developed by the end of 19th century, in 1887; almost twenty years before the publication of the article under analysis and yet the method did not reach an adequate audience to be familiarised with. It was still too early for the British readers of Japanese language. Authors of previous publications show a couple of more different transliterations: ‘Jiujutsu’ and ‘Ju-jitsu’ still quite different from the contemporary standard ‘Jūjutsu’.

Jūjutsu made its way into the British imagination via a fascinated Rudyard Kipling, who believed it was an interesting alternative combat method to wrestling, peculiar because it was decidedly less muscular. It seemed a novel way to defeat a stronger and bigger opponent, one that fed directly into the Victorian desire for new ‘freak show’ material. All of this was enough to tease Giles to enquire into its possible continental roots.

Giles’ work opened up allows us to see that there are some omissions regarding authors and facts, and also some problematic conceptions. For instance, Giles does not clarify who wrote the Canon of Boxing (Ch’ien ching 奏經) [Giles 1906: 134], nor does he clarify the distinctions he makes between ‘exoteric’ (waijia 外家) and ‘esoteric’ (neijia 内家) self-defence arts [Giles 1906: 135]. All of this is a very important, complex and deep topic. Yet, Giles assumes he can use ‘exoteric’ and ‘esoteric’ without any kind of explanation. The critical reader is left with many questions unanswered; but, more consequentially, many uninterrogated conceptions entered and have continued to thrive in the imagination.

Sources, Resulting Images and Problems

Giles’ article on Chinese boxing represents a breakthrough in a field dogged by problems that had arisen because nobody had hitherto attempted to trace the origins of the arts by looking at the classical literature. But, Giles explored a new territory of specialised literature and translated it [Henning 2003: 26]. In so doing, he brought to the attention of English language readers a wide variety of textual sources never seen by them. These sources included the Official Histories of Qin, Han, Five Dynasties, Wei and New Tang, the Topography of Ninpo (寧波府志), the story of the Shao-lin monastery, and the military treatise, New Book of Effective Discipline (Jixiao xinshu 纪效新書) [Giles 1906: 137].

However, further exploration into the corpus of knowledge that Giles’ work opened up allows us to see that there are some omissions regarding authors and facts, and also some problematic conceptions.
of readers. Many anglophone readers have become fascinated by such distinctions. Indeed, arguably Giles has contributed to a rather mystical construction of Chinese martial arts, one that is still alive in 20th and 21st century publications.

What seems to have most caught the attention of Giles can be seen in his descriptions of jiu jitsu roots, including a variety of Chinese boxing, where he conveys his sense of the unusual gentleness of certain movements. This can be interpreted as a residue of that picture of an effeminate or over-intellectualised China [Brownell 2008: 29].

Certainly, Giles stresses the concept of gentleness in jiu jitsu and also in the movements described in the Chinese military treatise, that he quotes at length:

Boxing seems to be an accomplishment of no real value in serious warfare. At the same time, inasmuch, as a study of this art in its elementary stages involves flexibility of the arms and legs, together with activity of the body [...] holding the adversary face upwards lies its gentleness.

[Giles 1906: 137]

Consider also his comment: 'The use here of the word jou, "gentleness", is peculiarly noticeable, the Japanese term jiu jitsu being the equivalent of the Chinese jou shu "gentle art"' [Giles 1906: 137-8]. This interest and fascination, this way of looking and seeing, is undoubtedly a reflection of his overall approach to Chinese civilisation, contrasting the stereotyping image of China he had received.

Interestingly, in ‘The Home of Jiu Jitsu’, Giles uses the word ‘boxing’ or ‘boxers’ most frequently – 15 times, whereas ‘self-defence’ is used four times, and only once are other technical terms related to fighting (armed and unarmed) used. This is not simply a matter of translation. In fact, the same problem seems evident within the Chinese texts themselves, in which the words for what we are dealing with here also vary: from jiaodi (角抵, horns down) to ch’uanpo (拳搏, fight) to ch’uan (拳, in pinyin – box). For his part, in English, Giles alternates between such terms as ‘self-defence’ and ‘boxing’ or ‘science’; he also once uses the French word savate [Giles 1906: 135].

Chinese authors have usually used the word quan 拳, in combination with other key terms, to express ideas of fighting that include bare-handed fighting and weapons-based approaches. In modern Western works, there is often a drift between various words for ‘martial art’ – from wushu to kung fu and so on – because they all seem generally to refer to the same kind of human activity. Arguably, this was more acceptable in Giles’ time, when fewer people seemed interested in the topic, but it always allows confusion to flourish. Nonetheless, neither of the two authors whose work I have discussed to this point have contributed much by way of clarifying an approach to the Chinese martial arts. They have, rather, informed a huge warrior heritage; which is already unusual for that time in academic works.

The nouvelle picture

Giles produced another interesting image of martial arts in his later publication, The Civilisation of China [1911]. Here, his argument is on a broader scale as it includes sports in general, associated with thinkers, and these ‘sports’ involve martial arts. In the chapter ‘Philosophy and Sport’, Giles proposes that the activities of thinking and practicing (should) have always gone hand in hand, and that it is a shame that sports and recreational activities in China have ‘passed out of the national life, and [exist] only in the record of books’ [Giles 1911: 151].

For Giles, Chinese boxing flourished in a Buddhist monastery and gave life later in Japan to the art of self-defence called jiu jitsu. In discussing it here, he again repeats the term ‘gentle art’ (柔術). Regrettably, Giles did not expand on this very deep and controversial topic, and simply asserts and association between Chinese martial arts and religious practice. We have to wait until the 1990s for scholars to seriously tackle this [e.g., Kurland 1996, Raposa 2003, Shahar 2008].

Conclusion

Giles’ work was one of those rare contributions to the Western narrative of Chinese martial arts history, pioneering research as it did that because countered the assumptions about China in the West. Moreover, Giles was searching for the same artistic ‘strength’ in China that others saw in Japan, and argued Japanese martial arts had their origins in China. However, aspects of his work still confuse the understanding of Chinese martial arts in the West. Readers have been left unclear as to whether Chinese martial arts are simply religious practices, gymnastics, a form of dance, a science, or an Eastern version of boxing, along with how and why they were practiced in a Buddhist monastery. In addition, Giles raised the topic of exotic and esoteric distinctions, but he does not delve further into this matter.

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9 Consistent with my own argument, Susan Brownell also locates Giles’ vision, although very briefly in a subtle counter-context of Chinese conception similar to the Greek conception of a sound mind in a sound body [Brownell 2008: 29].

10 This short passage on martial arts occurs within a discussion of sports in ancient China and is followed by a whole chapter titled 'Recreation' [Giles 1911: 159-78], which includes such activities as skating, acting, gambling, and so on.
Most importantly, perhaps, Giles’ attempt to cast light on the civilisation of China and martial arts in terms of the Greek ideal of a ‘sound mind in a sound body’ (similar to Dudgeon) is significant. Certainly, today – to avoid problems of cultural and methodological problems and biases related to eurocentrism – Western scholars tend to try to build their images and understandings of Chinese martial arts using also Chinese criteria (or else they at least insist on careful self-reflexivity about categories), rather than promulgating pre-established Western criteria, categories, and values. But, as I have argued, both Dudgeon and Giles were not looking either to prove Western superiority or Eastern inferiority, but rather to perceive and examine cultural differences.

But the historical question is one of whether Giles had indeed detected a possible Chines ancestor to jiu jitsu. Again, Giles merely states that the Japanese learned it from the Chinese and add that, once the Japanese brought it home, they added something to it, and now they also teach it to the West [Giles 1906: 38]. It is these simple assertions in Giles that remain most problematic.

In the third and final section of this essay, we will end with a brief consideration of the work of Joseph Needham. This is important and illuminating because it reveals how Needham put aspects of the two earlier conceptions together: on the one hand, Dudgeon’s conception of kung fu as a Daoist therapeutic method and, on the other, Giles’ contention that oriental fighters could beat Westerners in unarmed combat.

3. A VISION OF CHINESE ‘SCIENCE AND CIVILISATION’ OF MARTIAL ARTS
JOSEPH NEEDHAM (1900 – 1995)

Noel Joseph Terence Montgomery Needham was an eccentric Londoner – a biochemist, who fell in love with China when he was working as a researcher for Cambridge University’s biochemical laboratory. My argument is that his perspective as a scientist impacted his reading of the Chinese martial arts, and that we have to take his background into consideration when engaging with his work.

As a scholar and researcher, he was sent to China to try to bridge the cultural gap between ‘West and East’. He also contributed to the Sino-British Science cooperation office in 1942, among other projects, and also helped to create the science division of UNESCO in 1946.

Science and Civilisation in China is comprised of seven volumes across twenty-seven books. Within the seven volumes, two different methods of transliteration were used: first, the Wade-Giles and, in the last volume, pinyin. But there are also exceptions to these systems – for instance, in the way he transliterated the aspirated sounds, which he rendered with the letter ‘h’. This resulted, for example, in ‘chhi’ in the place of ‘qi’. In his work on qi and other aspects of physical culture, Needham can be understood as a scientist exploring biomechanical forces within the human body. His huge body of work distinguished him as a historian of Chinese science.

Needham’s mission

Needham’s work can be regarded as a response to the belief that most of the world’s scientific and technological achievements came from Europe or the Western world. He offered the perspective that world civilisations had long influenced each, and also reported on many of the scientific and technological achievements of China that had hitherto been unacknowledged [Low 1998: 1]. Again, this worked to counter the lingering image of a culturally stagnant China [Wright 1960: 189-190, 200].

At the same time, Needham wondered why industrialisation and modernisation was not occurring in China. One of the key questions he asked and explored was why post-Renaissance inventions did not lead to an upsurge of industrialisation in China [Needham in Dawson 1964: 284]. Interestingly (and problematically), however, there is evidence that his own subjective opinions and beliefs affected his research, including his religious and political views. In fact, contrary to the view that rigorous scientific research should be impersonal and unbiased, Needham believed that every author should, so to speak, send a personal message to the readers.

He held strong positive opinions about a socialist world in which there should be a common welfare state based on a religious conception too. He also regarded such common welfare as a realisation of the Kingdom of God on Earth. All of this was part of his message to his Western colleagues – many of whom were, on the contrary, working to praise the results of capitalist industrialisation [Finlay 2000: 272-275].

The question for martial arts studies is that of how he approached such quintessentially Chinese cultural body technologies such as taijiquan and qigong.
Needham's vision of the Chinese martial arts emerges in three volumes of his Science and Civilisation in China: volume 2, volume 5 part 5, and volume 5 part 6. As a physical activity, Needham approaches these arts as a kind of alchemical technology and also as a popular interpretation of the more complex military machinery. His vision of martial arts in China military machinery can be seen to reside somewhere between the idealised gests (tales) of knight errant figures (yaoxiao, 游侠) [Needham 1994: 87], the popular image of a hero, to that of a more 'scientific' image of a Chinese therapeutic method. This is a very wide spectrum and lacking in details when he tackles the martial arts. This mainly occurs in the footnotes, where we see, for instance, 'Wu Shu' fleetingly explained as 'the military arts' and as the common name for different kinds of physical exercise and fighting techniques. Some made use only of the hands and the whole body, like the famous Chinese kung-fu or Japanese judo and karate; other used the traditional eighteen weapons' [1994: 87, footnote b].

The gests of chivalrous figures and their combat arts are included in Vol. 5, part 6, where Needham looks at military technology and culture, and how its popularity spread among the people. The proto-scientific dimension arises from his sense of its Daoist traits. However, a deeper and wider vision starts to emerge along these now-familiar lines. For instance, Needham occasionally uses the word 'art', but in the majority of cases, he uses the familiar Western word 'gymnastics', in a sense variably associated with either 'massage' or 'exercise': 'gymnastic technique', he says, is 'called tao yin, i.e. extending and contracting the body'. He speculates: 'Perhaps it derived from rain-bringing shamans dances. In later times the names kung fu and nei kung […] originated […] in Chinese, as in Greek, medicine' [1956/2005 2: 145-146].

In his uses of these words, there is always the conception either of a body in motion or a body to be treated. For Needham, Chinese boxing is often associated it with Daoism. Interestingly, though, although for Needham Daoism is a 'system of mysticism' [Needham 1956: 33], mysticism itself is not regarded as non-scientific. But, in the end, once again, we are left wondering whether Chinese kung fu is a therapeutic method or a fighting one.

However, later in his career, we find a body culture of corporeal technologies used to heal or to harm. This becomes clear in the last chapter, ‘The lore of vital spots’, in a later work written with a Chinese colleague (and lover), Celestial Lancets. This later work derives from two sources of information and inspiration: first, a translation by Herbert Giles of a text about ancient forensic medicine, titled ‘Hsi Yuan Lu’ (‘Xiyuanlu’, 洗冤錄 – ‘Instructions to Coroners’; also translated by Lu Gweidjian as The Record of Washing away of Wrongs [Needham and Lu 1980, Digital Printing 2009 :309-310]). And second, the tradition of Japanese martial art, specifically karate [314-315].

Ultimately, Needham's message and contribution in Science and Civilisation in China has similarities to both Dudgeon's work and Giles'. On the one hand, it sets out a 'natural' approach to fighting the side effects of the industrialising society (Dudgeon); on the other, it attempts to convey to Westerners the ways in which Chinese civilisation created something useful before the Western world did (Giles).

Needham's sources and legacies

Contrary to the other two scholars, whose works do not contain much in terms of bibliography, in Needham case, the reference list is huge. The bibliography for volume 5 part 5 amounts to almost two hundred pages, and it is so voluminous as to be organised into three parts, including sources in foreign languages, sources before a certain date and afterward, and journals in western languages.

It is important to note that, in his references, Needham refers to – indeed, relies upon – the works of Dudgeon and Giles. Hence, we get a sense of the impact of these two authors on his own (equally influential) thought. Needham takes the two different images – the Chinese therapeutic kung fu of Dudgeon and the Chinese boxing of Giles – and makes them converge into one of ritual dance and development through physical exercise aided by internal alchemical work.

At this point the contemporary reader familiar with the martial arts practice may even wonder whether Needham had ever seen an ordinary fighting performance when he was a diplomat in China. It certainly seems that his work is not based on personal experience. Indeed, it is true to say that a contemporary reader may have a lot more information available (especially via the internet); yet we talk about the same phenomena. This sense arises on occasions such as when Needham writes, for instance: 'Chinese boxing (chuan po) as an art with rules different from that of the West and embodying a certain element of ritual dance probably originated as a department of Taoist physical exercises' [Needham 1956: 145-146].

He also continues to confuse British boxing with Chinese fighting arts. The reader may be confused with regards to which method or style of fighting Needham may be referring to at any given point. By contrast, in his later work, Celestial Lancets, Needham and Lu go into more depth and they do provide more technical descriptions of which martial arts they have been looking at and what movements. They also classify them as originating from one source in China. Needham
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transcription method.

11

represent the reverse side of acupuncture and massage, as they can be

and also (from Celestial Lancets), the reader learns that martial arts

times these can be practiced as a form of therapeutic diverse gymnastics;

form of living (used also by Chinese alchemists) that in more modern

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times these can be practiced as a form of therapeutic diverse gymnastics;

and also (from Celestial Lancets), the reader learns that martial arts

represent the reverse side of acupuncture and massage, as they can be

used aggressively, and can be fatal.

11 This is the Chinese 'wushu' simply written according to the Japanese

transcription method.

partial conclusion

The way Needham approached it, Taoism is a bodily practice aimed

at loosening and strengthening the body, and enabling it via rituals to

transform itself, 'internally, thanks to a process called 'inner alchemy'.

Inner alchemy and spiritual alchemy are processes [Kirkland 2004:

192-193] which can be found in martial arts practices too. That is

what Needham had been looking at when he encountered the works of

Dudgeon and Giles. But Needham approached Taoism as a biochemist

and, indeed, as an amateur Morris Dancer too. I mention this because

personal passions may well be pertinent to personal interpretations.

Needham's passion for dancing quite possibly informed his perceptions

of much movement.

Furthermore, Needham presents the topic of the tradition of vital spots

and consequently recasts martial arts in a very non-European way. He

also frames it as an art 'in the service of man's aggression' [Needham and

Lu 1980: 302], thereby making the image decidedly less philosophical,

and very far from physiotherapy. Moreover, he starts to connect

Chinese boxing names together with Japanese versions, thus offering

the idea that what is true for wushu may also be true for bujutsu (武

術).11

CONCLUSION

beyond eurocentrism and into politics

This study reveals the early construction of multi-layered images of

Chinese martial arts. On a first level we have Dudgeon, who provides

a therapeutic interpretation. Giles constructs an East-Asian version of

boxing. And Needham offers a bio-energetic picture. Further research

allows us to see wider, deeper, and with more complexity. However, we

can appreciate this by looking at the cultural framework these authors

were working within, to try to understand the problematic they faced.

The images and ideas about China they were working within, through

and against, were created by the generations of previous scholars and

missionaries of the 19th and early 20th century. These were images of a

country immersed in a regressive, Confucian culture of respect for the

past which cannot be challenged, and which does offer any exploration

and innovation; a country with a love for literary learning that

overshadows body practices. Wherever body practices had been found –

as in the Daoist practice of yangsheng – this was classed as superstitious

and therefore considered unworthy [Kirkland 2004: 192-193]. Daoism

itself is a tradition which, when brought to the West, has been looked at

in its theoretical and speculative aspects mostly [Seidel 1997:39]. Few to

none were looking at its practical and physical aspects.

In this sense, despite the misunderstandings and cross-cultural

complications they were working against, my argument is that these

three scholars did important work in attempting to bridge a gap and to

work against the mainstream. All three seem to concur that the Chinese

developed body technologies for fighting, but Dudgeon and Needham

were not interested in that aspect of martial arts; only Giles was.

By looking at Dudgeon’s work from a broader perspective one can see

why his editor wanted him to stop exploring and writing. It had little
to do with the interests of the wider scholarly community of the time.

But Dudgeon was very eager to show the readers and the scientific

community how to improve living conditions and life expectancy by

using what nature provides you with, starting (and staying) with your

own body. His conclusion from his studies was simply that humans

have to move and exercise on a regular basis.

Because of this, the cultural comparison that I have made between the

Greek paideia and the wenwu remains helpful, relating as both do to

life/world and mind/body balance. None of these authors mention the

Greek ideal of paideia, however. I have used this as a conceptual device.

But what is certain is that none of this is ‘merely’ to do with exercise.

Dudgeon’s vision, for instance, goes way beyond the kinetic, and he

was, it seems, dreaming of a different lifestyle and a different social

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Dudgeon’s vision, for instance, goes way beyond the kinetic, and he

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and economic system.
There is a strong cultural and political link between Dudgeon and Needham as they worked to analyse Chinese cultural practices such as martial arts in order to establish and clarify their cultural benefits, and accordingly to offer an alternative vision for a political, economic and health system in the Western world. In other words, at the end of 19th to the middle of the 20th century, we find in their works a counter discourse to capitalism.

The work of Dudgeon was judged as not worthy of mention by the London Missionary Society because it did not fit in with the Society’s policy of converting the Chinese to Christianity. Similarly, Needham was perceived as not backing up pharmaceutical multinationals in their financial enterprises in relation to military and pharmaceutical goods. Instead, he seemed to show that China, the future big political and economic power, did not need all those Western made-by-goods [Needham 1964: 307].

Ultimately, we can say of these three authors that their works can be located within an intellectual tradition established towards the end of a period started in the 16th century; a tradition that had established what we now call a Eurocentric approach to the East Asian world. Dudgeon, Giles and Needham were at root very curious about physical activities that looked so unusual to their eyes, and each wanted to find out more. However, they were, perhaps unconsciously, also doing politics by reversing ideas and proposing sustainable solutions to Western medical problems via suggesting new type of therapies.

Dudgeon built an image in which Chinese kung fu appears to be a kind of materialisation of a Greek ideal and to offer a Chinese answer to the European medical quest for the treatment of illness without surgical intrusion into the body – a kind of sustainable method. Giles was implicitly equally inspired by the same Greek ideal, moreover he had a personal interest in the cultural activities of China and how efficient in a fight the Chinese can potentially be as a military threat. This led him into an interesting exploration of some (but not all) still-relevant texts. Needham, like Dudgeon, continued to construct an image of Chinese martial arts, comparable to the same Greek ideal, while maintaining a sense of possible Daoist origins, an awareness of the Daoist interest in the personal attainment of immortality, and the cosmologically challenging topic of vital spots. And yet again Needham, too, had a political message to be delivered to the audience: that there is a sustainable method to approach life and also that Western scientific discoveries perhaps are not completely Western.

12 China was, and still is, a huge country, perceived as a huge customer for Western products; however, China was self-sufficient, so it did not need to buy. Moreover, it was shown as a possible alternative to Western civilisation and prosperity; what a disaster for all those people who invested time and money into the Industrial Revolution for not being able to export and needing to divert to another, different market.
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THE GOLDEN SQUARE DOJO AND ITS PLACE IN BRITISH JUJUTSU HISTORY

DAVID BROUGH

ABSTRACT

In 1903, Sadakazu Uyenishi established a jujutsu dojo on Golden Square, Piccadilly Circus. For four years, following its establishment, Uyenishi was busy performing jujutsu demonstrations, taking on challengers, and teaching jujutsu. This article focusses on Uyenishi’s teaching of the Army, and of women’s classes. These particular aspects of Uyenishi’s teaching would influence physical culture in the U.K. and the British military, and would lay the foundation for a future politicisation of jujutsu as a mechanism of women’s self-defence and physical equality. Uyenishi left the U.K. in 1907 but his dojo lived on through his students William and Edith Garrud. Edith in particular became a very prominent practitioner of jujutsu and taught highly publicised classes for suffragettes. The dojo on Golden Square had been demolished by 1930, and the once burgeoning jujutsu movement had been almost completely replaced by judo. The legacy of Uyenishi and the Golden Square Dojo is significant as it influenced the ongoing jujutsu and judo movements, and has an important place in British military and political history.

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INTRODUCTION

While the Bartitsu School of Arms and Physical Culture (est. 1900 at 67b Shaftesbury Avenue, London) of Edward William Barton-Wright was the first martial arts club to introduce jujutsu to the U.K., it focused on the delivery of an eclectic group of martial arts, including French savate, la canne, and fencing. To teach jujutsu classes, Barton-Wright enlisted the help of two young Japanese men called Yukio Tani and Sadakazu Uyenishi [Keegan 2019]. By 1903, the Bartitsu Club had ceased to operate and after a brief period teaching at Pierre Vingy’s ‘New School of Self-Defence and Fencing Academy’, Sadakazu Uyenishi opened the first jujutsu dojo in the U.K., the School of Japanese Self Defence. Uyenishi opened his dojo at 31, Golden Square, Piccadilly Circus, London. Golden Square was so called as it was where horses were previously gelded, but the residents objected to the name ‘Gelding’ and so it became known as ‘Golden’ [Bowen 2011a]. The School of Japanese Self Defence is referred to, hereafter, as the Golden Square Dojo. Despite its relatively brief existence, the Golden Square Dojo had a profound influence on British martial arts, and influenced British culture in a number of ways.

SADAKAZU UYENISHI

Sadakazu Uyenishi was born in Osaka, Japan, in 1880. Uyenishi trained at the dojo of Yataro Handa in Osaka. In 1898 renowned jujutsu teacher, Mataemon Tanabe, taught at Handa’s dojo [Keegan 2019]. Thus, we can be confident that the instructors of Uyenishi were Handa and Tanabe. Whilst at the Golden Square Dojo, and with the help of his student E.H. Nelson, in 1905 Uyenishi wrote the influential Text Book of Ju Jutsu as Practised in Japan, which is one of the first authentic English textbooks on jujutsu [Bowen 2011a]. The eighth edition of this book contains a word portrait of Uyenishi by former student Percy Longhurst, which gives a good insight into Uyenishi [Uyenishi 1952: 102]: ‘Uyenishi’s talent as an instructor was equal to his skill as an exponent’ wrote Longhurst. Longhurst further states:

A sportsman according to the best Western standards, a gentleman, an artist in his own way, this bespectacled young Japanese, whose refined appearance carried no suggestion of his astonishing physical qualities and powers, a muscular development of all-over excellence that was a delight to the eye, made friends wherever he went.

[102]

Longhurst also made note of Uyenishi’s physical attributes, stating his height as 5 feet, 5 inches, weight 9 stones, 2 pounds, and made special mention of the strength of Uyenishi’s neck. Indeed, from the early demonstrations of jujutsu as part of the Bartitsu club the Japanese instructors gave demonstrations of their neck strength as well as demonstrations of their wrestling skills. A 1901 newspaper article reported that ‘Uyenishi champion light weight wrestler of Osaka’ wrestled against a professional wrestler from the Cornish and Devonshire style, with Uyenishi winning the contest convincingly. A demonstration of neck strength followed as: ‘four members of the audience were then invited to attempt to strangle one of the two Japanese by means of a rod placed across his throat. Needless to say their efforts were unavailing’ [Illustrated London News, 30th Nov. 1901: 821]. The word portrait by Longhurst also states that Uyenishi gave up competing to concentrate on teaching [Uyenishi 1952: 102]. However, although not as prolific as his compatriot Yukio Tani, we can find extensive evidence that Uyenishi participated in wrestling contests. Following his departure from Barton-Wright’s management in 1903, Uyenishi and Tani came under the management of Scottish strongman and promoter William Bankier [Keegan 2019]. Uyenishi, would now be advertised as ‘Raku’, and, ‘Jujutsu champion of the world’ (Figure 1). While the title of ‘World Champion’ was far-fetched and was simply used for showmanship and promotion (as was common [Keegan 2019]), what is clear is that Uyenishi was an impressive competitor.

An article published in 1907 described Uyenishi as the ‘greatest living exponent of the Japanese art of self-defence, jujitsu’ while he was giving nightly demonstrations at the Town Hall in Dover, and that in the 6 years since coming to the U.K. he has remained undefeated. The article goes on the note that Uyenishi ‘challenges any European to defeat him with in the space of 15 minutes, and if successful, he will forfeit the sum of £1000. If he fails to win he will forfeit £50’. The article describes a bout between Uyenishi and renowned wrestler Syd Payn, noting that Payn was defeated in exactly 10 minutes 55 seconds by ‘a very clever arm lock’. Afterwards Payn said that although he had wrestled with many Japanese in many parts of the world, Uyenishi was the best he had faced [Dover Express, 13th Sept. 1907: 8].

UYENISHI AND THE ARMY

Uyenishi spent considerable time demonstrating and teaching jujutsu to the Army. In his book, Uyenishi also listed his professional affiliations which included being the instructor to ‘The Army Gymnastic Staff Head Quarters Gymnasium in Aldershot’ [Uyenishi 1952: Title page]. In March 1905, 4 pictures were published under the title ‘Oriental Wrestling for the British Soldier at Aldershon: The Japanese Method of Self-Defence, Jiu-Jitsu, Taught by Professor Uyenishi’, showing Uyenishi demonstrating jujutsu to British soldiers. Using one of the soldiers, Uyenishi can be seen to demonstrate the moves ude-gatame (straight-arm lock), kata-guruma (shoulder wheel throw), tomo-nage (stomach throw), and ude-garami (bent arm lock) [Illustrated London News, 25th March 1905: 409].
Uyenishi formed a special officer’s class at Aldershot, and taught Army gymnastic instructors, with jujutsu contests held from time to time. Uyenishi also put on classes for the officers’ wives and daughters [Kenealy 1905]. But Uyenishi did not only demonstrate to the soldiers in Aldershot: it was reported that Uyenishi met ‘an exceptionally smart wrestler of the Household Calvery’ at Windsor Barracks in front of 1500 people. After his demonstration of jujutsu, Uyenishi invited challenges from members of the audience. Corporal Fraser of the Royal Horse Guards, a champion wrestler of his regiment obliged and fought Uyenishi in a titanic struggle which eventually ended with Uyenishi throwing Fraser over his head ‘amid scenes of great enthusiasm’. On this occasion Major-General Baden Powell was in the audience [Penny Illustrated Paper, 15 Apr. 1905: 225]. It seems Baden-Powell was suitably impressed at this demonstration and another paper commented on his reaction, where he had asked ‘how it was done?’ ‘The professor took the general’s arm above the elbow, and it dropped as if paralysed. The defender of Mafeking required no further demonstration’ Daily Mail, 7th Apr. 1905a: 3]. Baden-Powell would go on to found the scouting movement and in the first set of scout merit badges there was a ‘Master at Arms’ badge, attainment of which required participation in combat activities including jujutsu [Keegan 2019].

Uyenishi also gave a display at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. To attend this display to cadets the Army had also sent a Sergeant S.G. Dascome, reputed to be the strongest man in the Army and the Navy, to challenge Uyenishi to see what his jujutsu could do against brute strength. Uyenishi suggested that rather than fight himself, a pupil of his, who had the advantage of 5 months’ training should take up the challenge. Uyenishi’s student won by a throw over the head, followed by an arm lock [Daily Mail, 11th Apr. 1905b: 3].

UYENISHI AND LADIES’ CLASSES

An article by Evelyn Sharp for the Daily Mirror in December 1903 discussed the importance of women’s self-defence and that Uyenishi of 31, Golden Square, wanted to start a class for women. The article describes a demonstration where Uyenishi was throwing another Japanese instructor [Sharp 1903: 9]. The ‘other’ instructor could have been Yukio Tani, but could also have been Eida, who was performing demonstrations with Uyenishi at the time [New York Herald, 29th Sept. 1903: 5].

An early notable female student was Phoebe Roberts. Roberts joined the Golden Square dojo age 16 years old, and she was promoted to instructor within a year [Callan, Heffernan and Spenn 2018]. Another
famous, albeit short-lived, jujutsu school was opened in London by Yukio Tani and Taro Miyake in 1904. This was called the Japanese School of Ju-jitsu, and it was based at 305, Oxford Street. Tani and Miyake together published the book The Game of Ju-jitsu in 1906, within which can be seen Phoebe Roberts as the ‘ladies instructor’, suggesting she must have moved dojo [Miyake and Tani 1906]. The dojos seem to have worked together however. A demonstration on December 20th 1905 took place at Caxton Hall, Westminster, by the Japanese School of Ju-jitsu. At this demonstration, Tani and Miyake practised throws and locks. Also present were Uyenishi and another instructor called Kanaya. Phoebe Roberts gave a demonstration with another notable female student called Emily Diana Watts, and Watts performed a demonstration with Eida [Womanhood 1905: vii-xii]. Emily Diana Watts had also joined the Golden Square dojo in 1903 and in 1906 wrote The Fine Art of Jujitsu, which was the first English language book to describe nage no kata, a judo kata devised by Jigorō Kano [Bowen 2011a]. Another famous female student of jujutsu at this time was the music hall actor Marie Studholme, who was a student of Yukio Tani. In 1906, Studholme starred in a series of postcards with Japanese instructor, and assistant to Tani and Miyake, Juso Hirano (Figure 2). In 1907, Phoebe Roberts and Juso Hirano married [Callan, Heffernan and Spenn 2018].

In 1905, Annesley Kenealy wrote a 7-page article for The Lady’s Realm called ‘Jujitsu for Ladies’. Kenealy describes a ‘Ladies day’ at Uyenishi’s School of Japanese Self-defence (Golden Square Dojo). ‘Each lady chooses her own jujitsu costume, but all wear knickerbockers, a short tunic, and black stockings’ states Kenealy [291]. The small stature of Uyenishi is used by Kenealy to illustrate that within jujutsu, size and strength do not matter: ‘Uyenishi stands 5 foot 3 inches in his stockinged feet, and weighs but 9 stones 7lbs’ [292]. A quote attributed to Uyenishi describes the philosophy behind jujutsu:

After a violent storm, it is generally the heavier and sturdy trees which have suffered most, whereas smaller plants, possessing plenty of elasticity, easily withstand the rough usage, because they offer the minimum of resistance to the opposing force. For this reason jujitsu enables light and weak men and women to withstand heavy and strong adversaries. [Kenealy 1905: 293]

Another quote attributed to Uyenishi illustrates his fondness for teaching women:

The English ladies make the best pupils – they are so enthusiastic and keen to learn. Jujitsu does not develop big, coarse muscles. It causes an all-round use of all the muscles of the body, and success depends on cleverness in balance and quickness of action. Women’s movements and minds are always quick, and these qualities make them very apt pupils.

Jujitsu does not over-tax the strength of the most delicate lady, and it is the only system in the world which makes a weak woman more than a match for a strong muscular man. For these reasons I am teaching the art to English ladies. [Kenealy 1905: 295]

It is clear that Uyenishi tapped into a shifting social and political landscape to empower his female students with effective methods of self-defence. However, in the coming years women’s jujutsu would become more political, and be led by the most famous female student of all, Edith Garrud (see below).

In 1907 Uyenishi gave up teaching to go on tour to Spain and Portugal, giving demonstrations and challenges. On this tour, Phoebe Roberts, Juso Hirano, Taro Miyake, and Mitsuyo Maeda, and others, joined Uyenishi. A newspaper article from 1908 reported on one of Uyenishi’s contests in Spain. Here, referred to as ‘Mr Raku’ Uyenishi took on the ‘Basque peasants’ Senores Urestilla and Elzekondo in Tolosa. Even though the Basque wrestlers lacked experience, they gave Uyenishi a torrid time and the only way Uyenishi could force a victory against Urestilla was to make him bleed from the neck. The article then states San Sebastian is the next stop on the tour [New York Herald, 17th Sept. 1908: 7]. Following Uyenishi’s tour of Europe, he returned to Osaka where sometime later he died of tuberculosis [Bowen 2011a]. However, before leaving the U.K. Uyenishi passed control of the Golden Square Dojo to his students, William and Edith Garrud.

THE GOLDEN SQUARE DOJO WITHOUT UYENISHI

Husband and wife, William and Edith Garrud, had been students of Uyenishi, initially at the Bartitsu club, and then at the Golden Square Dojo [Wolf and Wolf 2013]. While training at the Golden Square Dojo the Garruds trained with the best instructors of the time including Uyenishi, Tani, Taro Miyake, Mitsuyo Maeda, and Akitaro Ohno [Garrud 1910: 355]. Another Japanese instructor, Gunji Koizumi, would also teach at the Golden Square Dojo in 1906 [Koizumi 1960]. Thus, the Garruds were well placed to lead jujutsu instruction at the Golden Square Dojo. William would teach the men and Edith the women and children’s classes.

The early part of the twentieth century witnessed a growing struggle by women fighting for the right to vote. Activists, notably members of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), a movement founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, engaged in an increasingly bitter struggle in which there were clashes with the police. Edith Garrud gave a demonstration to a WSPU group in 1908 that included Pankhurst [Wolf and Wolf 2013], and was soon advertising classes specifically for suffragettes with special rates for WSPU members. For these classes
Garrud would use her own dojo on 9, Argyll Place, Regent Street [Callan, Heffernan and Spenn 2018; Wolf and Wolf 2013].

Edith Garrud wrote an article in 1910 in which she describes jujutsu and her former instructors. Garrud describes Uyenishi being of a good family and that he learned jujutsu from childhood as a sport. She writes that Tani is the son of a policeman and lived all his life in a dojo and mastered the science as a business. Thus, Garrud had the opportunity to learn jujutsu from experts with different perspectives. Garrud’s increasing prominence and the politicisation of her jujutsu are demonstrated by this direct quote from her article:

Physical force seems the only thing in which women have not demonstrated their equality to men, and whilst we are waiting for the evolution which is slowly taking place and bringing about that equality, we might just as well take time by the forelock and use science, otherwise ju-jitsu. In this art all are equal, little or big, heavy or light, strong or weak; it is science and agility that win the victory. Is not this a forecast of the future? Science, quickness, vitality, and brains are surely equal to brute strength in politics as well as in fights. [Garrud 1910: 355]

On July 6th The Sketch published a full page spread of Garrud demonstrating jujutsu techniques in her dojo, on a man dressed as a policeman. The caption reads: ‘If you want to earn some time, throw a policeman! The jujitsu suffragette shows how a policeman may be tackled’. Garrud can be seen to demonstrate a number of techniques including kote-gaeshi (supinating wristlock), and kani-basami (scissor sweep) (Figure 3).

The footnote to the images in The Sketch describe Garrud as being only 4 feet 10 inches, and that she met with 2 policemen on the mat. She threw the first policeman within 10 seconds but lost a bout with the second. Perhaps as a disclaimer, the footnote stresses that the suffragettes who learn jujutsu do not do so to fight with the police but to protect themselves against ‘unpleasant young men’ [The Sketch 1910: 425]. In Garrud’s demonstrations she would often use husband William. One such demonstration was reported in the Daily Mirror where it was described: ‘it was a sight to make policemen weep as they thought about prospective encounters with suffragette experts. But no police were present’. The same event also included a jujutsu demonstration from Schoolgirls from Crouch End High School [Daily Mirror, 6 Mar. 1911: 5]. During her demonstrations of jujutsu Edith Garrud would wear a special red jujutsu jacket, rather than the traditional white, to make her stand out on stage [Wolf and Wolf 2013]. From between 1911–1913 Garrud would hide WSPU members wanted by the police for arson and other criminal acts committed out of anger at the lack of political change [Callan, Heffernan and Spenn 2018; Wolf and Wolf 2013]. In 1913 the WSPU formed the ‘Bodyguard’, a group of 30 or so women who were trained in jujutsu by Edith Garrud to protect Pankhurst and other prominent suffragettes [Callan, Heffernan and Spenn 2018].

In 1914 William Garrud published The Complete Jujitsuan. The book became an accepted reference text on jujutsu and remained in print for decades. Within the book William Garrud pens a dedication ‘To my trainer Professor S.K. Uyenishi “Raku”’ [Garrud 1914]. At the outbreak of World War I (WWI) the suffrage movement was suspended to help the country focus on the war effort. At this time William Garrud was too old to enlist as a regular soldier (he was 42 years old), and so joined the Volunteer Civil Force, for whom he provided free nightly jujutsu classes [Wolf and Wolf 2013]. Unfortunately, for the Garruds, their son Owen was killed in battle age 24 [Wolf and Wolf 2013].

Figure 3: Edith Garrud demonstrating kani-basami in her dojo in 1910 [The Sketch 1910: 425].
THE GOLDEN SQUARE DOJO POST WWI

After WWI, the Garruds returned to teaching at the Golden Square Dojo. An advert published in the *Boys Own Paper* in December 1922 was advertising tuition at the Golden Square Dojo [Figure 4, *Boys Own Paper* 1922: 2]. The advert names Prof. W.H. Garrud and states that the dojo has been established for 20 years. The advert also shows that Garrud was offering correspondence courses and that personal tuition could be arranged [Boys Own Paper 1922: 2].

In 1918, Gunji Koizumi, formerly of the Golden Square Dojo, formed the Budokwai at 15 Lower Grosvenor Place, Victoria, London to teach Japanese martial arts. Yukio Tani joined Koizumi as the Budokwai’s chief instructor. In Japan in 1882, Jigoro Kano had established judo, at a time when jujutsu was considered a cruel and barbaric activity. In the words of Koizumi, ‘Judo was constructed with the technical body of jujutsu, and the training is conducted in a form of competitive sport, the objective is to inculcate the principle of maximum efficiency for the advancement of the way of life’ [Koizumi 1960: 20]. Thus, judo was jujutsu with a mental and moral philosophy, and it became the most popular practise of jujutsu [Koizumi 1960].

In 1920, after a visit by Jigoro Kano to the Budokwai, Koizumi and Tani converted to judo. In these years post WWI, the momentum was going with judo as the dominant way to practise jujutsu. Prominent judoka Len Hunt started jujutsu at the Golden Square Dojo with Garrud around 1927. As reported by Richard Bowen, Hunt had described Garrud as a nice man but not very competent at judo (Garrud would have been in his fifties at this time). Also written by Bowen, one day a small man went to Hunt and said ‘You’re wasting your time here. Go to the Budokwai,’ which he duly did [Bowen 2011b: 20]. Perhaps faced with the competition of the Budokwai, or for other reasons, it was about this time that the Garruds retired from teaching [Wolf and Wolf 2013]. By 1930, the Golden Square Dojo had been demolished [Wolf and Wolf 2013]. The end of the Golden Square Dojo was not the end of jujutsu in the U.K., however. Towards the end of 1925 a British Jujitsu Society was formed, in which members were called Jujitsuans, perhaps in a nod to Garrud’s book.

Figure 4: An advert for the Golden Square Dojo that appeared in the *Boys Own Paper* in December 1922.

LEGACY OF UYENISHI AND THE GOLDEN SQUARE DOJO

It is fair to state that Uyenishi and the Golden Square Dojo had a significant effect on U.K. martial arts and society in the early twentieth century. Uyenishi’s frequent demonstrations to the military and his instruction of Army instructors influenced the physical culture and fighting techniques of British soldiers. Garrud continued this practice during WWI when he taught the Volunteer Civil Force. Several years later during WWII British Commandos would learn jujutsu techniques from the work of William E. Fairbairn [Keegan 2019; Fairbairn 1942], and James Hipkiss, a former student of Yukio Tani, wrote a book on self-defence for the Home-guard and the general public in the event of a German invasion [Hipkiss 1941]. Thus, the Golden Square Dojo had a big influence on how British Soldiers in the twentieth century trained in unarmed combat.

The Golden Square Dojo also clearly influenced women’s activism in the years before WWI. Jujutsu provided a mechanism for physical equality and empowered women by providing a means of self-defence. Uyenishi provided the encouragement and opportunity for women to learn jujutsu, and the virtues of jujutsu as a mechanism to neutralise physical disadvantage. Edith Garrud and the suffragettes later harnessed the political message to further their cause.

The Golden Square Dojo also significantly shaped the landscape of British martial arts. Uyenishi had published one of the first books on jujutsu/judo and Koizumi and Tani who had instructed at the Golden Square Dojo led the massive expansion of judo in the U.K. and Europe through the Budokwai. As mentioned above, the British Jujitsu Society continued the practise of jujutsu after the closure of the Golden Square Dojo, and this continued after WWII by organisations such as the British Jujitsu Federation, the British Jujitsu Association, and others [Keegan 2019]. Although his time in the U.K. was relatively brief, through the Golden Square Dojo, the achievements and legacy of Sadakazu Uyenishi are considerable.

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The Golden Square Dojo and its Place in British Jujutsu History

David Brough
The following article explains how the metaphors ‘wrestling body’ and ‘warship’ are combined, mutually reinforced and nationally instrumentalised in the context of sporting events. The first case study examines contentious Japanese public discussions of the possible promotion of American wrestlers to the highest rank in professional sumō. The following case explores the staging of an American actor dressed as a Japanese sumō wrestler for the purposes of patriotic dramatization in North American pro wrestling. Both incidents have metaphorical and temporal parallels which reached their respective symbolic climax in 1993.
INTRODUCTION

The 20th century, especially 1914 to 1989, is considered to be the ‘century of ideologies’ [Müller 2013]. The most influential of these is arguably nationalism, which had already been established in the preceding 150 years. At that time, the emergence of nation states and the imperialist acquisition of mostly overseas colonies was approaching its peak. Nationalist ideas affected all areas of social life, from science and culture to trade and the military. Often nationalism was combined with racist theories, the cruelest iteration of which was German National Socialism.

Nationalist propaganda prefers to reiterate heroic narratives, sometimes embedded in glorious war stories like El Cid, Vercingetorix, Lemmänkäinen or Ilmarinen [Reicher 2013: 163]. In addition to purely physical heroic attributes, however, legendary weapons have always been part of the story. King Arthur’s sword Excalibur and Siegfried’s invisibility cloak from the Song of the Nibelungs illustrate the connection between body and technology in the sense of a nationalist metaphor of strength and spirit. With the advent of huge sport events in the early 20th century, martial artists were reinterpreted as national fighting heroes, such as Joe Louis, Max Schmeling or Carlos Gracie. Similarly, battleships such as the Bismarck, the Yamato or the Hood served as symbols representing national fantasies of technical superiority.

Though fierce nationalistic symbolism in sports and military declined considerably after 1989, it continued to exist – perhaps even to this day. This thesis will be examined on the basis of two particular events. They occurred shortly after the end of the Cold War in 1993. Both illustrate a nationalistically charged Japanese-American conflict expressed through the classic metaphors of wrestling and warships. The purpose of this article is to illustrate how these events were influenced by nationalistic – and sometimes racist – agendas and how wrestlers and warships were utilised to express nationalistic ideology. Reicher’s ‘nations sports and media nations’ is the main theoretical lens used to explore images of the wrestling body [2013].

WARSHIPS AND WRESTLERS AS SYMBOLS OF POWER DURING THE PERRY EXPEDITION

In order to protect colonies and to gain influence on the world stage, many young nation states in the 19th and 20th centuries shifted to building powerful navies based on the British model. In so doing they effectively replaced castles and palaces as beacons of military architecture with warships [Benesch & Zwiženberg 2019]. These weapons were evolving at an unprecedented rate. Gunboats, which could also be used in shallow waters, were used for demonstrations of power along foreign coasts. ‘Gunboat diplomacy’ was not only the historical heritage Europe’s military vessels, but an important instrument of national prestige.

Commodore Matthew Perry relied upon gunboat diplomacy when he entered Tokyō Bay in 1853 with his fleet of the four steamships, the Mississippi, Plymouth, Saratoga and Susquehanna. As an experienced captain, and the descendant of a naval family, he was intimately familiar with the symbolic power of modern warships. Perry had even lobbied for the construction of additional vessels. He is still revered in the US today as ‘The Father of the Steam Navy’.

However, President Fillmore’s mission was not only intended to open the door for Japanese trade. Perry was instructed to pursue more immediate and pragmatic goals as well. America’s Pacific whaling fleet ‘needed Japanese ports to replenish coal and provisions’ [Blumberg 2013: 18], Washington desired new naval bases for strategic control of the Pacific, and the developing trade routes with China had to be secured [Swisher 1947: 32]. Perry’s mission was also about the repatriation of stranded American seamen.

At the time of Perry’s arrival Japan had enjoyed a 250-year period of peace. This had been initiated by the military ruler shōgun Ieyasu Tokugawa (徳川家康) following a hundred year civil war (‘Age of Warring States’). In order to prevent anti-government uprisings, the feudal lords (daimyō 大名) were tightly controlled and international relations were almost completely severed. Christianity was banned and mission-friendly foreign states were blocked. Trade with China continued via Okinawa. After the British ceased trading with Japan for commercial reasons in 1623 [Blumberg 2013: 42], only the Dutch were allowed to maintain a strictly supervised trade mission on the small, fan-shaped, artificial island of Deshima in the port of Nagasaki.

When Commodore Perry anchored at Tokyō bay in 1853 and desired to meet the Emperor, neither side was unaware of the other’s presence. Through the nanban (southern barbarian 南蛮) trade, which included books, technical instruments and scientific equipment [40], the Japanese upper class enjoyed a good understanding of current developments in medicine, natural sciences, military technology and politics around the world. Conversely, in preparation for his mission, Perry had conferred with Japan experts and translators. He prepared for his task by reading Manners and Customs of the Japanese by the famous German doctor and researcher of Japan, Philip von Siebold [40]. Nevertheless, the Japanese people, including many in government, were petrified by the

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1 In this article, Japanese names are written in the western order first name + surname.
The unchallenged presence of the kurobune (black ships, 黒船) shamed Japanese society by emphasizing its inability to respond to such a blatant intrusion. The kurobune also scared the crews of Japanese transport ships so badly that Tōkyō was cut off from its most important food source [26]. While the shogunate desperately turned to the daimyō and asked for advice in this crisis (something that had never happened before), other high-ranking officials tried to redirect the fleet to Nagasaki and prevent Perry and his crew from going ashore. Perry responded with demonstrations of his military might. He had his warships patrol the coast and insisted on reconnaissance missions in military formation. Although he had arrived in Tōkyō bay on July 8th, he celebrated the already passed American Independence Day with salute shots from his 64-pound cannons, which put the Japanese on highest alert. When going ashore Perry was accompanied by two African-American men who acted as his personal guard [31]. These were the first black men seen by the Japanese apart from the African Yasuke, who had come to Japan in 1579 as part of a troop of Jesuit missionaries and ended up as a samurai under circumstances that are still poorly understood. All of these measures served to intimidate and offend the Japanese, not only on a strategic level, but also as a symbolic attack on their then current nationalistic ideology.

Since the shogunate could not expel the Americans, despite a flurry of desperate diplomacy, it shifted to showing off muscular wrestling bodies. This was probably a reaction to the beforementioned black bodyguards of Perry. Remarkably, there exist old Japanese drawings which seem to depict the African Yasuke engaging in sumō matches. This may actually have happened as Yasuke served as a retainer of daimyō Nobunaga Oda who was a strong supporter of sumō.

Sumō wrestlers, which were unknown in the US, were used as dock workers, in order to intimidate the American sailors and provoke them to duels [Kuhaulua 1973: 33-36]. Blumberg even refers to a real sumō tournament:

[T]he Americans were invited outside to see a very special present from the Emperor to the entire crew – 200 bales of rice, each weighing between 100 and 150 pounds. Seated near these bales, they watched a procession of about fifty huge sumō wrestlers [...] The Americans had never seen men as fleshy and massive as these athletes, who had been fed special diets so that each weighed between 250 and 400 pounds. Lieutenant Preble was shocked because ‘they were entirely naked except that they wore a stout silken girdle about their loins concealing what modesty should not expose’. [...] [The sumō wrestlers] had been brought from Edo [Tōkyō] for the occasion. A wrestler named Koyanagi [owner of the highest sumō rank at the time],

Figure 1:
The Kurobune anchoring off Tōkyō. Source: https://jpsearch.go.jp

Figure 2:
called ‘the bully of the capital’, was presented to Perry by the commissioners, who urged him to feel the sumō champion’s bulging muscles and to ‘punch him in the paunch’. He gripped Koyanagi’s huge arm, then felt the neck, which, he noted, was creased like that of a prize ox. Officers also examined the wrestler, and when they uttered exclamations of disbelief, he answered with an appreciative grunt. At a given signal, each of these strong men seized two bales of rice and carried them above their heads with apparent ease. One held a sack with his teeth. Another repeatedly turned somersaults as he held on to his bales. The wrestlers brought the rice to the edge of the water. Later the sailors huffed and puffed, lifting the bales into their boats and unloading them. The Americans were then escorted to the rear of the Treaty House to watch sumō wrestling matches.

[Blumberg 2013: 82-85]

Perry understood immediately that the sumō show served as a demonstration of physical hegemony and intimidation. ‘After this Perry ordered a detachment of marines to put on an exhibition drill that would contrast with the “brutal performance” of “monsters” whose “animal natures had been carefully developed”’ [86]. Perry wrote in his diary that he felt disgusted by the ‘overfed monsters’ [Guttmann & Thompson 2001: 68] who were attacking each other ‘with brutal ferocity, […] ready to exhibit the cruel instincts of a savage nature’. Contemporary Japanese woodcuts show sumō wrestlers easily whirling the detested foreigners around (mostly portrayed as Perry himself). It is historically debated whether there were official duels on Perry’s ship between the mentioned wrestler Koyanagi with an American wrestler as well as a boxer. At least Koyanagi’s victory over the boxer is supposed to have happened [Kasahara 2009].

SUMŌ, SHINTŌ AND NATIONALISM

As in many societies, the origins of the Japanese wrestling are believed to be ancient and tinged with religious significance. Sumō (相撲) not only appears in Japan’s founding myths, but it remains a subject of modern folklore. Shrine sumō developed a cultic tradition of its own through harvest prayer celebrations [Pauly 2008: 123; Kuhaulua 1973: 25]. Sumō meets were organised as a means of divination and as funerary ceremonies to appease the deceased [Pauly 2008: 115]. Even today, the controversial Yasukuni shrine in Tōkyō honours fallen Japanese soldiers with sumō wrestling. In addition to these sophisticated cultural practices, less refined and more violent matches have existed up to the present day under the rubric of ‘street sumō’.

Figure 3:
Woodblock depicting Perry whirled around by a sumōtori. Source: https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B1_%D1%83%D1%88%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%86_%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5_%D0%BF%D0%BF%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA_%D0%BF_%D0%BD_%D0%B0_%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82_%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F.jpg
Perry’s landing jump-started Japan’s modernisation, a process which would see many indigenous traditions branded as barbaric or outdated. More than other martial arts, sumō suffered because of this social and cultural transformation. Suddenly the nudity of the fighters was found to be appalling [Möller 1990: 59]. Sumō was called ‘an uncivilised sport, the anachronistic remnant of feudal times’ [Keller & Keller 1981: 17, my translation].

It was the Emperor Meiji who averted the decline of sumō in 1884 when he declared his support for tradition by personally attending a sumō tournament. This signalled its re-traditionalization, which was fuelled by surges in nationalism inspired by Japan’s victories in wars against Russia and China [Kuhaulua 1973: 37]. With the completion of the Tōkyō Ryōgoku Kokugikan (両国国技館) building in 1909, which was designed especially for sumō tournaments, wrestling regained its high social status.

The global public was introduced to sumō through a demonstration tour of the USA and Europe in 1907-1908. A match attended by President Roosevelt even inspired a newspaper cartoon in which the visibly overburdened Roosevelt tries to lift the wrestler Hitachiyama (常陸山), on whose body current presidential problems such as “Congress”, “Panama Canal”, “Railroads”, “Financial Depression”, “Trusts”, ‘Fleet to the Pacific” and “Third Term” [104] were written. Here again we find the metaphorical connection between martial arts bodies and naval strength.

Whether in response to Koyanagi’s victory or simply as a reference to his distant relative, for the signing of Japan’s unconditional surrender on September 2, 1945 on the battleship USS Missouri, General Douglas MacArthur had the star-spangled banner of Perry’s flagship flown in from a navy museum. It is unlikely that this affront was missed by the Japanese delegation. However, sumō was not among the martial arts that the occupying powers of Japan banned as they ‘regarded it as something like popular amusement’ [Höhle 2004: 39, my translation].

Although there is broad agreement that sumō and Shintō always have been connected – e.g. through the ritualised thanksgiving sumō, shrine sumō etc. – it is disputed whether the re-traditionalization from the Meiji period only revived it, or developed it for the first time in such generality as to qualify as an invented tradition [Hobsbawm & Ranger 1982]. For each tournament, the ring (dohyō 土俵) is built from scratch with clay in precisely defined rituals and subsequently consecrated with sake. One day before the tournament starts, the dohyō is inaugurated in a festive ceremony led by referees dressed as Shintō priests (dohyōmatari 土俵祭り) and reminiscent of Shintō rituals for
As a nod to sumō origins, a rain roof is erected above the dohyō inside the tournament hall. Since 1931, this roof has been based architecturally on the most important Shintō temple in Ise [75] and crowned with a national flag to underline its national heritage.

These examples show that the connection between sumō and Shintō is exceptionally close. Although the symbiosis of martial arts and religion or spirituality is always a very complex one, the celebration of religious elements in a commercialized and also highly professional martial art is nevertheless fascinating. Similar to the case of muay thai, it suggests that religion acts as an adhesive between the sport as a traditional cultural element and the ethnic group performing it. The emphasis on ethnicity in Shintō, which in Japanese is usually described with the term *yamato-damashii* (Yamato spirit = Japanese spirit 大和魂), thus merges sumō and nationalism.

Professional sumō is divided into several divisional leagues, the highest of which being the makuuchi division (inside the curtain 幕内). The standard rank in the makuuchi is the maegashira (前頭). 34 out of 42 wrestlers belong in this category. Above maegashira there are three main ranks (san yaku 三役). These are komusubi (小結), sekiwake (関脇) and ōzeki (大関). Ōzeki translates as ‘big barrier’ which alludes to the insurmountability of these wrestlers.

2 Women may neither participate in the construction nor enter the finished ring. This strict rule also applies to functionaries. Thus the governor of Osaka (2000-2008), Fusae Ōta (大田 房江), despite her repeated complaints, was prohibited to enter the dohyō for the traditional opening speeches. Also, an incident on April 4, 2018, caused turmoil when the mayor of Makurazaki collapsed during a speech in the dohyō and two female first responders came to his aid. They were asked several times by the gōyō referees to leave the ring while performing a life-saving cardiac massage.

3 Another element of Shintō purity ritual is the throwing of salt by both sumōtori before the fight to cleanse the ring and oneself [Möller 1994: 21]. Also, the stamping up to ward off evil spirits (shiko) belongs to this same cultural complex, which goes back to the ancient Shintō myth about the foundation of Japan. The opening of the empty hands demonstrates that one is unarmed, but it is also a religious gesture. In a broader sense, the symbolic richness of the power water (chikara mizu 力水) and power paper (chikara kami 力紙), with which sumōtori clean themselves immediately before the fight, can also be added [Pauly 2008: 131]. The threefold hand sword movement with which sumōtori receive their reward after the end of the fight is interpreted as a gratitude to three protective Shintō deities [Möller 1994: 97].

4 These and the following numbers are default values. Discrepancies in the overall strength of the makuuchi as well as in the individual ranks are common.
Depending on tournament performances, sumō wrestlers move up and down these ranks. Each sumōtori belongs to a sumō stable (heya 部屋) where the training takes place. Six big sumō tournaments (honbasho 本場所) take place annually, three of which are staged in Tōkyō and one each in Ōsaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka. Starting around the year 1800, dignified ōzeki were allowed to perform a ritualised dance in front of the shōgun [Kuhaulua 1973: 54].

Doing this, the ōzeki wore a thick white ritual rope (tsuna 横綱) around the hip (yoko 橫). This rope gave the wrestler the epithet 'yokozuna' (横綱). It was not until the 1890s that this epithet was mentioned on the calligraphic tournament schedule (hanzuke 番付). Since 1903 the yokozuna has been an independent rank, which is now ranked above the ōzeki.

Still, yokozuna have the authority to perform specific Shintō rituals. This Shintō reference is evident in the lavishly folded paper strips (shide 紙垂) that denote sacred or nomenous areas and objects in Shintō. Similar shide are attached to the yokozuna rope [54].

‘Even though the yokozuna is not a god in the narrow sense, it is possible that it is seen as the embodiment of divine power. As a ‘kami vessel’, he becomes the object of religious worship. […] Shintō does not distinguish between a divinity and its manifestation’ [Möller 1990: 68-69, my translation]. Yokozuna are therefore vessels for divine beings (kami 神). As such, a candidate for yokozuna promotion must not only have an impressive record of victories, but must also show dignity and integrity. In reality, however, these guidelines are so general that appointments have repeatedly led to public debates. Less than half of all ōzeki reach the rank of yokozuna [von der Groeben & Mennemeier 2000: 61].

Due to the ‘divinity’ of their rank, yokozuna, in contrast to all other ranks, cannot be degraded [62]. They are expected to resign if their tournament performance no longer suits their outstanding rank. Sumō history is full of yokozuna who got into trouble due to inconsistent fight performances (e.g. Maedayama, Chiyonoyama, Futahaguro [detailed in Guttmann & Thompson 2001: 182-185]).

In 1958, the Yokozuna Deliberation Council (yokozuna-shingi-iinkai 横綱審議委員会) passed an appointment law which declared that ‘candidates for yokozuna shall be of outstanding character and ability’ and that they ‘shall have two consecutive tournament championships at the rank of ōzeki’ [183]. Concerning tournament wins, an exception clause was created that also allowed yokozuna promotion for equivalent performances, if the committee unanimously agrees. Due to this exemption, several mediocre ōzeki were promoted.

The nationalistic intimacy between Japan, Shintō and sumō prevented a broad globalisation of the sport like in the cases of jūdō (柔道), jūjutsu (柔術), karatedō (空手道) and aikidō (合気道). Reicher [2013] distinguishes here between a national sport (Nationensport) and a nations sport (Nationensport). A national sport has an identity-forming effect and references epic heroes or heroic stories in romantic nationalism (romantischer Nationalismus). Romantic nationalism extensively employs national iconography [163]. In contrast, a nation’s sport is a type of sporting competition whose competition rules are internationally oriented and are usually determined by large and transnational sports associations. Sporting competitions are staged as country or nationwide competitions here. The character of the international competition is the result of a competition order in which teams and athletes are assigned to nations’ [17].

Nations sports such as the Olympic Games, for example, are also a ‘political communication medium’, since ‘international sports competitions (embody) a ritualised and symbolic test of strength between countries. Such events provide an opportunity to present the nation to the outside world and are acts of affirmation of state sovereignty’ [19]. A typical characteristic of a nations sport is its professionalisation through the accumulation of economic resources, which enables international competitions and broad media coverage [56]. According to this definition, jūdō has developed from a Japanese ethnic national sport into a modern nations sport [75]. By 1920 the first European jūdō competitions were taking place and at its first Olympic appearance in 1964, the most prestigious jūdō gold medal was won by a non-Japanese athlete, the Dutchman Anton Geesink.

Although sumō is a highly professional sport with extremely sophisticated media coverage in Japan, it has never transitioned to a nations sport [54]. This is not only due to the fact that sumō is not practised as a professional sport outside Japan, but also to the visibly different staging in foreign amateur sumō. Outside Japan, sumō dispenses with almost all Shintō symbols, rituals and ceremonies. The

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5 This dohyō-iri (土俵入り) is still performed today before the makusushi fights.


referees wear boxing referee clothes instead of Shintō style clothes. There are weight classes and sometimes the competition is held on sports mats rather than in a traditional clay ring. Reicher [54] deduces from these differences that sumō actually has remained a national sport, as it is 'associated with a form of 'ethnic dignity'. Sumō is considered by many Japanese to be an exclusively Japanese practice'.

KUROBUNE ENTERING THE YOKOZUNA RANKS

As a result, very few foreigners appeared in sumō’s top divisions until the 1970s and most of these were Koreans and an American of Japanese origin [Kuhaulua 1973: 112]. All of them were visually indistinguishable from indigenous Japanese competitors. The large Japanese expatriate community in Hawaii maintained several amateur sumō clubs. Thus the Hawaiian Jesse Kuhaulua, born in 1944 in Maui, came into contact with sumō and was successfully trained by Isamu Ogasawara [Kuhaulua 1973: 41]. Kuhaulua did not have the common frame of Japanese sumō wrestlers with their pycnic physiognomy and relatively short extremities, as well as a low center of gravity which harmonises perfectly with sumō technique. Kuhaulua was tall, his legs were long and his weapons were power and mass. He entered the makuuchi under the ring name Takamiyama (高見山) as the first wrestler with visible non-Asian heritage.

When Takamiyama was on the verge to win the Nagoya tournament in 1972, a bitter discussion broke out in the Japanese public. Some felt reminded of the humiliation of the 1964 Olympic Games. Sumō’s social function as a nationalistic, and partly racist, ideology was at stake. The newspapers ran headlines like ‘National Sport in Danger! Stop Jesse!’ [169].

Interestingly, the Japanese media nicknamed Takamiyama kurobune [Guttmann & Thompson 2001: 186], referencing the humiliation by Commodore Perry a century ago. Apparently, a wrestling body could be equated with a warship and both were regarded as menaces to Japanese national pride. The reference to the kurobune also implies a warrior-military nuance, in addition to the equally inappropriate polemics of invasion. There were public discussions as to whether to play the American national anthem if Takamiyama was victorious, as well as arguments that foreign wrestlers damaged sumō’s reputation more generally.

Takamiyama was the first foreigner to win a honbasho tournament. The American ambassador, Robert Ingersoll, read out a congratulatory telegram from President Nixon in the ring. This event, in particular, was perceived as an affront to the Japanese sumō tradition. ‘With later foreign winners […] attention was paid to congratulations only being translated into Japanese’ [von der Groeben & Mennemeier 2000: 28, my translation]. Takamiyama’s dominance in the tournament (thirteen victories against two defeats) caused bitterness in the sumō community. A contemporary newspaper commentary decreed: ‘This is no joke. Can we call this our national sport? Despite his weak points, there were only two Japanese wrestlers who could manage to beat Takamiyama. I guess we can’t brag much about our national sport anymore’ [169].

It is noteworthy that Takamiyama’s advocates referred in particular to his ‘Japanese qualities’, which would have enabled him to win the tournament in the first place. The president of the sumō association called this a result of many years of training in Japan among Japanese trainers. Shoichi Kamikaze, one of the leading sumō commentators, declared similarly: ‘The notion that the national sport of sumō cannot be lost to a foreigner is an odd one. Takamiyama came to Japan nine years ago and put out more than twice as hard as other wrestlers. He’s not a foreigner. He’s a sumō wrestler of Japan’ [169]. Here we see a transformation from ethnnationalism to cultural nationalism, which is typical for nations sports. However, Takamiyama ultimately failed to live up to the Kurobune nickname. After his initial victory he never succeeded in another tournament.

Takamiyama’s achievements did inspire other Americans to take an interest in sumō. A total of 27 athletes, including 21 Hawaiians, competed in professional sumō in the next few years [von der Groeben & Mennemeier 2000: 33]. Saleva’i Faualu Atisano’e, who entered the makuuchi as Konishiki (小錦) in 1984 and won his first tournament in 1989 – 17 years after Takamiyama, was particularly noteworthy. Two years earlier Konishiki had been become the first foreign ōzeki. He defended this rank for six and a half years, earning enduring respect from the Japanese public.

Konishiki’s tournament victory in Fukuoka caused immense turmoil in Japan. Unlike Takamiyama, Konishiki held the rank of ōzeki and was thus almost eligible for yokozuna promotion. According to Shintō beliefs he would thereby become an ‘object of religious worship’ [Möller 1990: 69, my translation], a kind of Japanese saint. To make matters worse, Konishiki refused to accept Japanese citizenship, which could have defused the nationalistic discussion. Tensions peaked as Konishiki won a second tournament in Fukuoka two years later. According to the previously mentioned exception rule, he had achieved the mandatory accomplishments for promotion. However, the Yokozuna Deliberation Council hesitated to award the title without providing any explanation.

8 […] Sumō mit einer Form von ‘ethnischer Würde’ verbunden ist. Sumō ist aus der Sicht vieler Japaner eine exklusiv japanische Praxis'. My translation.
Konishiki failed to win the following January tournament, but finished with an impressing score of 12-3. He then won the Osaka tournament in March. Clearly there was no reason to deny him the yokozuna title. But after the autumn tournament a harsh anti-Konishiki sentiment had emerged. The famous former yokozuna Taihō declared that the defeat of the Japanese top wrestlers was a disgrace [von der Groeben & Mennemeier 2000: 36]. Konishiki was threatened, insulted [Möller 1990: 69] and denounced literally as the ‘second Kurobune’. Once again, the Japanese media used nationalistic, militaristic rhetoric.

After the Yokozuna Deliberation Council initial evasions, it tried to use all possible excuses to block Konishiki’s appointment. First, it was declared that the losses against maegashira Akinoshima and komusubi Tochinowaka were unworthy of a yokozuna. Moreover, Konishiki was criticised for relying too much on mass and strength, and less on ‘real’ wrestling technique (of course this also applied to countless other highly ranked sumō wrestlers – including several yokozuna). Secondly, the council published an article which called the yokozuna promotion for any non-Japanese athlete into question because they would lack (Japanese) dignity (hinkaku 品格) [Guttmann & Thompson 2001: 186]. This was clearly a nationalist and racist argument. By stating ‘sumō is first a ritual, then a drama and only third a sport’ [Reicher 2013: 53] the council put the basic idea of modern sport and equal treatment behind national-cultural symbolism. Third, the high number active yokozuna (four) and the comparatively generous yokozuna promotions in previous years were suspicious. Guttmann and Thompson [2001: 186] suspect that this was done with the intention of not generating ‘free’ yokozuna ranks that Konishiki could occupy. On the other hand, the number of active ōzeki was also unusually high and some ōzeki were promoted to yokozuna to outbalance this.

Although all four yokozuna of the period (Chiyonofuji, Ōnokuni, Kokutoumi, Asahifūji) resigned between 1991 and 1992, Konishiki was still not promoted. In 1986, Futahaguro had been promoted to yokozuna even lacking a single tournament championship. The fact that Konishiki did not receive this honour despite three tournament victories (two of them in close succession) and overall impressive performances (since 1989) left no doubt as to the deep-rooted nationalistic ideology in high-ranking sumō. Finally, council deleted the exemption clause from the two-consecutive tournament victory rule to dismiss Konishiki’s claims to the yokozuna title once and for all.

But during the Konishiki crisis another Hawaiian from Takamiyama’s stable had moved up to the sanyaku ranks. Chadwick Rowan entered the makuuchi in 1990 as Akebono (dawn 朝). After Konishiki had won the tournament in March 1992 and the dispute concerning his promotion had escalated, Akebono eventually won the following tournament in May as sekiwake. When he succeeded in the November tournament in 1992 and the following January tournament in 1993, the Yokozuna Deliberation Council had no other choice than to promote Akebono to yokozuna.

At that time, Akebono was not only the first foreign yokozuna ever but also the only one of his rank. The Japanese public reacted less hostile than expected. On the one hand, fatigue prevailed after the heated Konishiki debate. On the other, a liberal, anti-nationalistic position increasingly gained support in the Japanese public. It may also have been conducive that Akebono behaved in a Japanese-desirable manner inside and outside the ring [Reicher 2013: 53]. He showed few emotions and seemed rather distant and shy. In terms of character, he presented a significant contrast to the militaristic, xenophobic Kurobune metaphor.

With the Samoan wrestler Musashimaru (武蔵丸), who became yokozuna in 1999 after debuting in the makuuchi in 1991, the Japanese public finally made their peace with foreign yokozuna, and the vicious comparisons with foreign warships vanished. The undeniable resemblance of Musashimaru to Takamori Saigō (西郷隆盛), a Japanese national hero of the Meiji restoration [Kuehnert 2003], and his disarmingly charismatic friendliness played a huge part in this.

Eventually, the sumō association decreed that each stable must not accept more than one foreigner at a time to maintain its national sport character, although this requirement is in fact exceeded by double citizenships. Nevertheless, the four yokozuna following Musashimaru all had Mongolian roots. Out of these four, the still active Hakuho (白鵬) excels with a stellar record of 44 tournament victories (as of October 2020), amazing technical skill10 and (almost)11 flawless behaviour.

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9 ‘Sumō ist zunächst ein Ritual, danach ein Drama und erst drittens ein Sport.’
My translation.

10 In The Last Samurai Takamori Saigō is played by Ken Watanabe.
11 In contrast to extreme heavyweights such as Takamiyama, Konishiki, Akebono and Musashimaru, Hakuho is rather average 160 kg.
12 In 2008, Hakuho got into an incident after a defeat against Asashōryū, because the latter carried out an illegal push after the end of the fight. Three seconds of threatening staring in the ring led to both of them being warned by the sumō association.
NATIONALISM IN PRO WRESTLING

The majority of Americans knew nothing about sumō until the middle of the 20th century. In his biography, Takamiyama, the American sumō pioneer, reports:

A customs official in California once took a look at my size, topknot, and kimono and decided that I must be some kooky pro wrestler. And he wasn’t the only one. A lot of people came up and asked me if I had ever fought guys like Dick the Bruiser or Destroyer Freddie Blassie, and I would have to explain patiently that sumō is a bit different. [Kuhaulua 1973: 167]

The most obvious difference is that in pro wrestling generally the so-called Kayfabe code is applied. Kayfabe insists that the ring characters (called ‘gimmicks’), storylines and emotions are acted out as well as that fighting sequences and techniques are choreographed. In this way, Kayfabe separates a show from ‘real’ competition. It demands to pretend the ‘realness’ of the actions and forbids breaking the fourth wall. And it implies that the actors continue to play their gimmicks outside the ring, thus blurring the line between reality and roleplay.13

Lust is right when he concludes: ‘Less a martial art, which it imitates in its expression, pro wrestling is rather similar to dance’ [Lust 2010: 418, my translation]. In pro wrestling, the goal is not a mere victory but ‘the aesthetic quality and show-suitability of the performance’ [417]. The performance as the centre of pro wrestling is embedded in an unprecedented theatricality. It provides the narrative background of the ‘fight dance theatre’; it is meaningful for the act of fighting; and it provides the formula for the symbolic conduct of conflicts in the ring. Not only the American monopolist in the pro wrestling business, the WWE (‘World Wrestling Entertainment’, formerly WWF), defines itself as a ‘sports entertainment’ company (which it also does for legal reasons). Even the viewers themselves do not regard pro wrestling as a ‘real’ competitive sport [Woo & Kim 2003: 362].

The televised spectacular Monday Night Wars between the WWE and the WCW in the 1990s demonstrated that dramatic theatricality might be superior to ring performance.15 Not surprisingly, the results of a study by Indiana University indicated that in a two-hour pro wrestling event, only an average of 36 minutes is filled with actual performance [Oppliger 2004: 19; W’oo & Kim 2003: 363]. In the perspective of wrestlers and fans, there is no need to discuss whether pro wrestling is a ‘magic show’ [Vince McMahon in Lust 2010: 422], ‘folk theater’ [Archer & Svinth in Green 2001: 743] or a ‘soap opera with a referee’ [Chris Mortensen in Oppliger 2004: 1]. Some people interpret the Kayfabe code like a kind of method acting: ‘No one would call a production of Shakespeare fake’ [145].

As in folk theatre, wrestling gimmicks are pre-figured. In their staging – mostly based on stereotypes (e.g. ‘The Undertaker’) – as well as in their morality. Heels are bad and (baby) faces are good. Rarely does a wrestler change his gimmick. Much more common are heel turns or face turns, when a wrestler changes sides. In the 1940s, Gorgeous George was the first wrestler to consistently develop his ring personality to get as much crowd reaction as possible (in his case as a heel). In this way he even influenced the young Muhammad Ali. Gimmicks and the audience are therefore recursive [Kutzelmann 2013: 43–45]. They influence each other so much that the actual wrestling brawl sometimes falls behind. The interaction of the ring persona with each other, and especially with the audience, is much more important. Like Gorgeous George, wrestlers always try to generate as much hate (as a heel) or admiration (as a face) as possible. This crowd reaction is called ‘heat’. Costumes, ring entrances (hymns, gestures and pyrotechnics), ring managers, catch phrases, signature moves and narration (interviews and storylines) ultimately serve gimmick modelling [67].

Naturally the decisive factor of a gimmick is the athlete’s body. Especially in the 1980s the ‘hardbody’ dominated.14 The hardbody is presented as a muscle-bound larger-than-life version of American ‘white trash’. Cinematically accompanied by Schwarzenegger, Stallone, van Damme and Willis [152]; Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair and the Ultimate Warrior dominated the wrestling ring. For the main audience of pro wrestling shows at that time, these heroes embodied messianic saviours of white, masculine hegemony from the repeated assaults of financial capitalism, the counter-culture movement, war trauma, women and minority rights movements and emergent globalisation. The hardbody has always had reactionary and nationalistic elements and resonances with the white supremacy agenda.

13 The pro wrestling story is peppered with curiosities arising from this rule. For example, the (actual) brothers Owen and Bret Hart were only allowed to meet secretly during their scripted feud. Even their parents were included in the storyline and acted out their grief in the audience.

14 With a brilliant storyline, the WCW was briefly dominating the wrestling business: a group of former WWF stars were marketed as ‘infiltration commandos’ in the service of the WWF, trying to destroy the WCW as an inside job.

15 The term was coined by historian Susan Jeffords [Kutzelmann 2013: 89].
From a global perspective pro wrestling is clearly a nations sport since, despite the kayfabe code, there is a highly professional effort to deliver the best show possible to and ignite enthusiasm in the audience. Because fights are taped several times, the kayfabe code allows that the course of a fight can be tailored to different international markets. In American television, the American wrestler is allowed to win, in Japanese television the Japanese wrestler wins. Exceptions are pro wrestling leagues that are strongly limited to the domestic market, such as the Mexican Lucha Libre, which are ethnically rather seclusive and distinguish themselves from comparable leagues. While the Japanese audience is mainly interested in technical brilliance, a thrilling show is the most important factor for WWE fans. Flags, anthems and national stereotypes surround the upright redneck wrestler in his perpetual fight against the evil, the foreign and the progressive. Nationalism is the anchor point, the ethics and at the same time the driving force of the wrestling hero which legitimates his existence. 'Always somewhere the nation is somehow in danger, always competing with others, always triumphs and always defeats emerge’ [Reicher 2013: 149]. 16

The tradition of racist and nationalist heel gimmicks as antagonists of the upright hardbody is therefore as old as pro wrestling itself – worldwide. Strikingly, especially in this gimmick category, neither name, home country nor accent usually coincide with the real person behind the mask. Regarding the WWE, the German Nazi character Baron von Raschke was actually Jim Raschke who originated from Nebraska. The Iron Sheik was a native of Iran who, with the outbreak of the first Gulf War, wrestled as Colonel Mustafa from Iraq [Oppliiger 2004: 12]. Killer Kowalski (Edward Spulnik) had Polish roots but was of Canadian descent. Harold Sakata (actually Toshiyuki Sakata, 坂田 敏行), who transformed his role as Oddjob in 'Goldfinger' into his gimmick, originated from Hawaii [Beekman 2006: 91].

As a rule, the nationalist heel marches to the ring waving a foreign flag, while he loudly insults the home country of the audience. Regarding the WWE, the German Nazi character Baron von Raschke was actually Jim Raschke who originated from Nebraska. The Iron Sheik was a native of Iran who, with the outbreak of the first Gulf War, wrestled as Colonel Mustafa from Iraq [Oppliiger 2004: 12]. Killer Kowalski (Edward Spulnik) had Polish roots but was of Canadian descent. Harold Sakata (actually Toshiyuki Sakata, 坂田 敏行), who transformed his role as Oddjob in 'Goldfinger' into his gimmick, originated from Hawaii [Beekman 2006: 91].

However, anti-American nationalist gimmicks had declined in the early 1990s in the WWE. Notable exceptions were the Finnish gimmick 'Ludvig Borga' (sporting high boots to conceal his Nazi tattoos) and the Canadian gimmick 'The Mountie'. In comparison, Yokozuna was even more typecast. The Second World War ended half a century earlier and the Japanese-American relationship was peaceful. Since there was no real discord, the WWE was able to build up an extreme hatred on the part of the audience against the Japanese without risking that it would spill over outside the wrestling ring.

In former times heels were regularly chased by audiences after leaving the wrestling event [Hart 2009]. It is therefore not surprising that African-American heels were not employed in the WWE until the 1980s due to concerns that they might be lynched [Oppliiger 2004: 13]. In contrast, Yokozuna was granted a particularly disgraceful victory over face wrestler Jim Duggan with his naïve-patriotic comical gimmick the 'American Patriot'. 18 Duggan, who had been blinded by Mr. Fuji’s

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16 'Immer ist irgendwo die ‘Nation’ irgendwie in Gefahr; immer befindet sich im Wettstreit mit anderen, immer tauchen Triumphp, immer Niederlagen auf’. My translation.

17 To appease the American audience, he pulled on leggings.

18 Jim Duggan’s trademark was his raw longwood which he brought to the ring as well as his frenetic ‘U-S-A!’ chants.
salt, was subjected to Yokozuna’s dreaded finishing move, the ‘Banzai Drop’, no fewer than four times! This technique was a backward jump from the first ring rope onto the chest of the lying opponent, leaving Yokozuna sitting on the victim. Americans soldiers in the Second World War described the assaults and kamikaze attacks of Japanese infantry as ‘Banzai Charges’. Once again we find a military metaphor projected upon the wrestling body. To further increase the public’s rage, Yokozuna draped an American flag on the helpless Duggan before the fourth ‘Banzai Drop’ and then remained sitting on the flag (and the buried hero).

In the following months, the WWE built Yokozuna up to be an almost invincible monster heel [Hart 2009]. Due to his sheer weight, he could neither be thrown nor slammed. Yokozuna defeated his opponents not by using his skill and technique, but by his massiveness and strength. Interestingly, as we have seen, at the same time in Japan Konishiki was accused of owing his success to mere mass and strength. In both cases, it is therefore the huge, massive and primitive foreign body that is portrayed as the antagonist to the cunning, skilful national hero. Here we find symbolism from the biblical story of David, when the slender David defeats the mammoth Goliath with a deft stone shot. Parallels can also be drawn to stereotypical medieval romanticism, in which brave knights fight monstrous dragons.

The WWE staged the handover of Hogan’s reign to Luger as an outstanding event. On July 4, 1993, United States Independence Day, Yokozuna celebrated his triumph over Hulk Hogan and the end of the (so-called) Hulk Mania. At this event called ‘Yokozuna vs. the US’, Yokozuna (of course kayfabe) publicly claimed that Americans were too weak to slam him [Luger 2013].

This insult was intensified not only by the symbolic date of the national holiday, but also by the location – the USS Intrepid. This aircraft carrier of the Essex class (CV-11) is a museum ship stationed in New York. During the Pacific War, the USS Intrepid was feared by the Japanese as much as Perry’s kurobune fleet a hundred years before. The carrier was involved in the sinking of the two most renowned battleships of the Japanese fleet. The sister ships Yamato (大和) and Musashi (武蔵) were not only the largest battleships of all time, they were commissioned as admiral flagshipson and represented the Japanese soul like no other combat unit.

Yamato is the name of a historical province that encompassed the core of traditional Japan. Moreover, in the Japanese language Yamato is commonly equated with the nation itself, e.g. in the phrase yamato-damashii mentioned above. To this day, the Yamato is a symbol of Japanese fighting spirit and strength, but also of the honour of ‘dignified defeat’ [Morris 2020],” regularly revived in various national romantic narratives [Takekawa 2013].

Musashi is the name of another former Japanese core province, and also the name of the famous samurai Musashi Miyamoto (宮本武蔵, 1584-1645), who is both worshipped as the embodiment of the Japanese fighting spirit and adored as a sword saint. During the Pacific War, recurring Japanese reports that the Intrepid had been sunk after heavy hits turned out to be wrong. Indeed, she suffered more hits than any other American carrier in the Pacific War. Because of her unnatural resilience, the Intrepid was eventually feared in Japan as a ghost ship.

Thus in the 1993 July 4th event, the symbolic significance of the massive, invincible enemy intruder is once again intertwined with the warship metaphor. In Japanese drawings that depict Perry’s fleet, the contrast between the small graceful wooden boats with colourful, splendidly dressed Japanese sailors, and the bulky, stinking and seemingly unmanned, bestial black ships is marvellous rendered. Likewise, Yokozuna welcomed his opponents on the most impressive ship of the fleet – an aircraft carrier. A colourful, noisy crowd of American patriots, athletes, wrestlers and journalists was awaiting him. In his role as a Japanese athlete, Yokozuna, like Koyanagi, challenged the American nation to a wrestling match on an American flagship. In both cases the chosen location is the representative gateway to the world: the vibrating cultural capital (New York/ Tokyo) and not the noble administrative capital (Washington D.C./ Kyoto). The accumulation of symbolism, capital town, warship and wrestling reinforces their pictorial meaning.

The symbolic superimposition of this spectacle might seem bizarre. An American compatriot is disguised as a sumō wrestler of Japanese descent who is given the ring name of the most decorated, as well as the socially and religiously most revered, Japanese athletes. He then challenges the American nation to a (staged) match on Independence Day on the flight deck of a US warship which managed to destroy the symbolic soul of the Japanese nation in the likeness of the legendary battleship Yamato.

Yokozuna, boasting that nobody had ever lifted him off his feet, began the exhibition with twenty of the biggest, strongest athletes on the planet – NFL players, NBA players, wrestlers, powerlifters, and bodybuilders – all taking turns at trying to slam the mammoth man down, with no success. Yokozuna laughed at their feeble attempts. ‘Is this the best America has?’ he scoffed, much to the chagrin of the crowd on hand to celebrate the nation’s birthday. ‘Americans are so weak! Isn’t there anybody in America who has what it takes?’ [Luger 2013]

After no one succeeded in lifting Yokozuna, seemingly defeating the USA on its most patriotic holiday, a helicopter landed on deck. On his way to the ring, Lex Luger freed himself from his heel gimmick by
repulsing his heel manager. He faced Yokozuna as a stereotypic patriotic hero (tanned, free upper body, western boots, plain blue jeans). After an exchange of words and a few blows, the miracle happened. Yokozuna staggered towards Luger, who succeeded in lifting him horizontally and slamming him on the ground. With thundering cheers, the audience celebrated the victory of the brave national hardbody hero over the insurmountable ‘Asian’.

This nationalistic event can be compared to hockey’s ‘Miracle on Ice’ in 1980 or the ‘Match of the Century’ in chess in 1972. In the following weeks Lex Luger travelled with his new gimmick, ‘The All-American’, in a red, white, and blue tour bus (‘Lex Express’) to promote a title fight against Yokozuna. For this fight, which took place in August 1993, Luger sported trousers embroidered with Stars and Stripes and colour-matching gear. In November 1993, Luger and his team of ‘All-Americans’ vanquished Yokozuna’s ‘Foreign Fanatics’ (featuring the mentioned Ludvig Borga and the Canadian duo ‘The Quebecers’). Through these three symbolic victories against foreign evil, America’s national integrity had been restored. In all three events, nationalist iconography was reinforced by flags, national heroism and anthems.

CONCLUSION

Reicher [2013: 212] argues that ‘hard’ nationalism in sport has declined significantly in the 21st century. Using European football as an example, he explains that migration from other EU states, former colonies and non-European countries in general has contributed to the development of ‘romantic nationalism’ into ‘empty nationalism.’

In contrast to ‘romantic nationalism’, the ‘empty nationalism’ of ‘national sport’ is not based on an ethnically or regionally defined particularist culture. Rather, it is universalistic and refers to sport as a component of a generally accepted world culture. The content and form of this ‘nationalism’ is not particularly different in large parts of the world. [304].

This means that even though sumō continues to inherit the status of a national sport that has an identity-forming function for the Japanese nation, it has noticeably moved away from a nationalistic-racist ideology. Regarding the superiority of non-Japanese yokozuna in the 21st century in a 4:1 ratio, sumō probably had no other choice. It was also Akebono, who, in his function as a yokozuna, represented sumō as he exorcised evil spirits before the start of the Olympic Winter Games in Nagano in front of a worldwide audience [Guttmann & Thompson 2001: 209].

It seems, however, that the dignity of yokozuna wrestlers is drifting away from the prestige of the rank itself. After his retirement, Akebono was able to choose a career path that is rather unusual for a kami. Instead of becoming an official in the sumō organisation as others did, or taking over the management of his own stable, Akebono engaged in K-1 kickboxing. Of his many defeats, the one against Bob Sapp (2003) may be the most notable. Akebono suffered another impressive defeat in an MMA fight in Osaka in 2004 against Royce Gracie. Weighing 80 kilograms, Gracie was 140 kilograms lighter than his opponent.

In 1996 the pro wrestler Yokozuna, at that time weighing over 300 kilograms, performed a face turn. He stopped speaking in Japanese in interviews, and again took up his native English. Mr. Fuji exchanged his Japanese flag for an American one. The time of glaring nationalism, once typified by Yokozuna and Lex Lugar, is over in the WWE.

Nevertheless, the company occasionally experimented with gimmicks which had a clear political-ethnic agenda. Among these was the post-9/11 persona ‘Muhammad Hassan’ (portrayed by the Italian American Marc J. Copani), who represented Americans of Arab descent and spoke out against prejudice in his heel gimmick and praised Allah during the ring entrance.

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In both sports, pro wrestling and sumō, the significance of the monstrous wrestling body has decreased. The aforementioned Hakuhō is not only non-Japanese and the most successful sumō wrestler of all time, but also of only average size and an athlete who amazes with his technical brilliance. He has never lived up to the stereotype of a terrifying foreign giant. In show wrestling too, technical sophistication now dominates over sheer gigantism. Because of this, women’s wrestling has grown into a highly respected branch of the WWE. This obviously mirrors similar developments in the UFC. Nevertheless, the heritage of the hardbody ideology is still visible.

The focus on technical perfection, regardless of gender, stature and nationality, is a result of modern media representation which attributes a cultural-national character, or patriotic-national meaning, to specific sport events [Reicher 2013: 18], but in which the athletes or fighters themselves only represent different instances. An equation and ideologization of athlete and nation in sports (like Fischer vs. Spassky) and especially in martial arts (like Balboa vs. Drago) by the media is almost unthinkable today. The most important reason is the increasing ethnic mixing of many national teams. Actual political conflicts between nations are no longer fought between athletes but rather between officials and associations.

With the emergence of empty nationalism, the nationalist symbolism of warships has declined significantly. In the movie Battleship (2012), the international navies that are off Hawaii on the occasion of the biennial RIMPAC manoeuvre cooperate to ward off a threat from alien warships. Interestingly, the battle is mainly fought by American and Japanese ships and is won with the help of the reactivated battleship USS Missouri. Remarkably, at the beginning of the movie a rivalry between Americans and Japanese is staged in a baseball game and settled in sportive fair-play.

Aircraft carrier combat groups are still the dominant instrument in modern gunboat diplomacy. Not unlike Commodore Perry in his days, US aircraft carriers are sent out when conflicts intensify or demonstrations of power are necessary. Japan, like all highly developed but militarily second-rate nations (such as Germany, the UK and France), derives its pride primarily from technological, scientific, cultural and, indeed, sporting achievements [19].

This article showed how wrestling bodies and warships are used as metaphors of nationalism and belligerence, how these two metaphors have been combined, and in which diplomatic, warlike, sporting, and theatrical conflicts they have been applied. From the perspective of martial arts studies, this article illustrates the complex macrosociological utilisation of the wrestling body. It opens up space for further investigation that is located at the intersection of martial arts and ideological instrumentalization.

Unfortunately, many studies largely ignore the nationally motivated body image language, e.g. the National Socialist appropriation of jiu-jitsu/jujutsu by Möller [1996] and Coesfeld [2019] or the Zionist ideologization of krav maga by Bar-On Cohen [2010; 2011]. The current urgency of this issue is illustrated by the attempts of European right-wing extremists to implement their racist and nationalist agendas into mixed martial arts tournaments [Claus & Zajonc 2019]. The alleged superiority of the white male fighting body is thereby staged and celebrated in the most obvious possible way. This article warns against refilling the empty nationalism in sports as formulated by Reicher with transfigured martial arts warrior symbolism that can be misused as ideological groundwork for future nationalistic conflicts.

A notable exception is the work by Baratella [2019] on boxing.
REFERENCES


ABSTRACT

Traditional Vietnamese Martial Arts (TVMA) are practices that have not been widely studied in relation to their functions. As a result, the effectiveness and relevance of these systems in a rapidly developing nation are widely debated. This study identified local attitudes towards TVMA forms, in a bid to better understand the practices, their backgrounds, their relevance in a contemporary climate and implications for their future. Attitudes were assessed through the use of a seven-point semantic differential scale questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to one hundred participants in the Vietnamese capital city of Hanoi, all of whom had some understanding or experience of martial arts. Results were compared in relation to demographic data such as gender, age differences and martial arts backgrounds. Statistical significance was then analyzed through two-tailed T-tests. Results demonstrated conclusively that TVMA are seen as important historical, cultural, and social practices; however, the effectiveness of such systems as practical fighting arts as well as their relevance economically, is a highly divisive topic among the local population. Outcomes of the research suggest that further refinement and development of these systems are required to ensure they are not superseded by combat sports.
INTRODUCTION

Traditional martial arts can be defined by their ‘emphasis on the elements of philosophy, restraint, control, and especially the kata’ [Nosanchuk and MacNeil 1989: 154]. In contrast, the objectives of combat sports are ‘to show one’s superiority over the rivals directly on the rivals’ bodies (by employing different sets of techniques, such as throws, strangles, joint-locks, holds, punches, kicks, etc.)’ [Vertonghan et al. 2014: 656].

Through personal observation and my own experiences of Traditional Vietnamese Martial Arts (TVMA), it appears that a dichotomy has developed within the nation of Vietnam. On one side, traditional styles are viewed as skilled fighting systems, sources of patriotism and national pride, while the opposing viewpoint considers them to be less effective in terms of self-defence and less relevant in contemporary times than combat sports such as kickboxing, boxing and Brazilian jiu jitsu (BJJ).

This study utilized quantitative data collected through questionnaires to investigate attitudes of the martial-arts-literate section of Vietnamese society (i.e., those that have some level of first-hand experience of martial arts practices). The results were then analyzed to examine the attitudes towards TVMA that pervade in the current climate and discussed in terms of potential implications for the future of these styles and systems.

Within this paper, ‘effectiveness’ is defined as the application of martial arts to a self-defence scenario. It is widely considered to be a blend of speed, strength, accuracy, awareness, decisiveness and the ability to improvise [Angleman et al. 2009: 91; Indio 2012: 7]. ‘Relevance’ can be determined in relation to the outcomes of martial arts practices in the everyday lives of participants. For example: improved mental well-being as discussed by Nosanchuk and MacNeil [1989]; sense of self and national identity as discussed by Salomon & Vu [2007]; or economic/financial development as discussed by Bowman [2010: 436] can all be considered as relevant factors.

TRADITIONAL VIETNAMESE MARTIAL ARTS (TVMA)

TVMA can typically be considered within one of four distinct geographical/ethnic categories: Northern styles; Central styles; Southern styles; and Sino-Vietnamese styles [Borton & Ngoc 2003; Tran 2004; Roe 2016].

Borton and Ngoc [2003: 9] consider the Northern Vietnamese styles to have developed in response to ‘fight[ing] against invasions, especially from the armies of various Chinese dynasties’. These practices were first formalized in 1253 when ‘the Trân Dynasty established the Giảng Vô Dương, a martial arts training school for royal relatives serving as military officers’ [2003: 19]. In recent years, these styles have seen continued development for both practical and political functions. As Green and Svinth state in regards to the modern Northern Vietnamese system of Vovinam: it ‘was developed with both the practical intent of providing, after a short period of study, an efficient means of self-defence, and establishing a focus for national identity of the Vietnamese people’ [2003: 439].

Roe [2016] considers the Central Vietnamese systems of TVMA as having developed as a culmination of the Chinese-influenced ancient Vietnamese (Đại Việt) culture and other Southeast Asian practices. The central region of Vietnam has historically been home to the Siamese, Champa and Khmer civilizations, acting as ‘a melting pot for culture and customs’ [Roe 2016: 10]. An amalgamated system of armed and unarmed martial arts (referred to interchangeably as Võ Cổ Truyền/ Võ Tây Sơn/Võ Bình Định) was developed in this region during the seventeenth century under the rule of the future Emperor, Nguyen Hue. This system incorporated and adapted a blend of northern and local ethnic fighting practices to create a uniform and effective military training program. Significantly, this assisted in Nguyen Hue’s campaign to unify the nation into modern-day Vietnam and found the Tay Son Dynasty (1778-1802) [Goscha 2017: 88]. Roe states these styles of TVMA ‘considered to be of Vietnamese origin still hold a strong connection with the Vietnamese people’ [2016: 136].

Tran [2004] details the Southern Vietnamese styles of TVMA stemming from the Seven Mountains (Thất Sơn) region. He states that equivalent Chinese systems, differ in ‘historical origin, religious background and societal function of the art and its practitioners’. Furthermore, Tran [2004: 66] considers the spiritual elements of the art to be primary functions, stating that the ‘Northern (Chinese) imitation forms were created for self-cultivation and defence’, whereas the southern TVMA styles were often ‘born out of superstition and a perceived need to combat the strange and mysterious’ [67].

Finally, due to widespread trade and migration between China and the Southern Vietnamese provinces during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of Sino-Vietnamese systems developed. These practices were then adapted by the local populace over time to better suit their locations and practitioners’ physiques [Roe 2016: 129]. Common Sino-Vietnamese martial arts include Vịnh Xuân Quyền (Wing Chun), Hồng Gia Quyền (Hung Gar) and Bạch Mi Quyền (Bak Mei Pei) [Green & Svinth 2003: 458; Roe 2016: 129].
From the above, two key points can be drawn. Firstly, despite shared influences and concurrent development, modern TVMA practices can be considered as distinctly different from their Chinese and other Southeast Asian counterparts. Secondly, TVMA have served a number of important functions, including self-defence and physical fitness, as well as historical, cultural, social, economic, spiritual and political purposes.

In modern society, many traditional martial arts systems are often considered ineffective for practical purposes as a result of being ‘choreographed’ or having ‘too many rules and regulations’ [Angleman et al. 2008: 90]. Although there has been a great deal of scholarly discussion on attitudes towards Chinese traditional martial arts and their role in modern society, similar studies have not yet examined those in a Vietnamese context. As such, at this juncture, it was timely to investigate the attitudes towards traditional martial arts in the Vietnamese context.

DATA & METHODS / APPROACH

This study utilized a two-part semantic differential scale questionnaire, issued to a sample group of one hundred volunteer participants. The group included both Vietnamese nationals and long-term residents of Vietnam, all of whom had experience of traditional martial arts, combat sports or both. By selecting martial artists as participants, motivation for participation in the study was ensured, whilst the group had the ability to give realistic and knowledgeable insight into the practices. This contrasts with the general population, who typically hold significant misinterpretations about the physical practices and philosophies of traditional martial arts [Angleman et al. 2008: 90].

All volunteers were recruited in the capital city of Hanoi, therefore, the study provided only a cross-section of the city’s population rather than a national view. This is an important differentiation to make due to societal differences throughout the country, for example, in the southern city of Ho Chi Minh, the populace is widely recognized to be less patriotic and possibly resentful of the Communist-style ideals of The North [Maresca 2015]. These differences may hold relevance within martial arts contexts as various TVMA systems are funded and promoted by the government [Roe 2016: 35].

The questionnaire was administered to a mixed-gender, adult group considered to be within the typical age range for martial arts practitioners (18-65 years old) [Gaille 2018: para. 13]. Ages and genders of respondents were collected during Section A of the questionnaire to ensure test-retest reliability of the study. The sample group were recruited via word of mouth (specifically discussions with martial arts groups, instructors and school members); via the internet (targeted advertising and posts to various platforms and martial arts forums and through flyers posted in locations around the city (community notice boards, university campuses and bookstores). Each volunteer could then visit an online portal which provided them access to the questionnaire.

DATA & METHODS / INSTRUMENT DESIGN

Section A collected demographic and behavioural data, specifically participants’ ages, gender, and martial arts backgrounds and current practices. The selection mirrors the studies conducted by Rogowska and Kuśnierz [2013] and Zeng, Hipscher and Leung [2011], both of which found age and gender to be significant factors in participant attitudes towards sports.

Questions 1 – 4 served to examine any potential correlations between age, gender, level of education and participant attitudes. Question 5 allowed us to identify any cultural bias among respondents; whilst Questions 6 – 9 assessed behavioural aspects of the participants’ attitudes. The following questions were used:

1. Name (not required)
2. Age (tick boxes in ten-year increments from ‘18-24’ to ‘50+’)
3. Gender (‘Male’, ‘Female’, ‘Prefer not to say’)
4. Level of education (‘Secondary school’ - ‘Postgraduate’) 
5. Nationality (drop-down list)
6. Have you ever studied any traditional Vietnamese styles of martial arts?
7. If so, which schools or styles?
8. Have you ever studied any other combat sports or martial arts?
9. If so, which schools or styles?
10. How many months/years have you trained in total? (Tick boxes from 0-10+ years)
11. If you currently train in martial arts, how many sessions per week? (Tick boxes from 0 - 5+)
Section B provided a bilingual definition of TVMA alongside a video which demonstrated sections of ‘kata’ from ‘Võ Cổ Truyền’, one of the most popular styles of TVMA [Roe 2016: 68]. It then provided eight semantic differential scale questions in which participants rated their understanding and feelings towards TVMA practices on a scale from 1 (Very Bad) to 7 (Very Good).

Question 1 – 2 assessed the cognitive component of participants’ knowledge and assisted in potentially revealing further biases among the participants. Questions 3 – 8 then further assessed participants cognitive and affective understanding of TVMA.

The following questions were used:

1. Your understanding/knowledge of the physical practices that take place within Traditional Vietnamese martial arts training.
2. Your understanding/knowledge of the mental/philosophical practices that take place Traditional Vietnamese martial arts training.
3. Traditional Vietnamese martial arts effectiveness for self-defence.
4. Traditional Vietnamese martial arts effectiveness for fitness training.
5. Traditional Vietnamese martial arts effectiveness for developing positive behavior (e.g. discipline, self-control, integrity).
6. Traditional Vietnamese martial arts relevance as cultural / historical practices.
7. Traditional Vietnamese martial arts relevance for social aspects (e.g. meeting people, making friends, social events, etc.)
8. Traditional Vietnamese Martial Arts relevance for economic and financial development (e.g. for tourism, the film industry, international training programs etc.).

RESULTS / SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL SCALE RESPONSES

As displayed in Table 1, the sample group perceived themselves to have a reasonable understanding of both the physical and mental practices of TVMA (M=4.11 and M=4.23 respectively). This is of particular relevance as Rogowska & Kuśnierz’s [2013: 189] study found a direct correlation between how knowledgeable participants perceived themselves to be and how favourably they thought of martial arts practices.

The aspects identified as most important by participants were ‘Cultural/historical relevance’ (M=5.75) and ‘Effectiveness for health/fitness training’ (M=5.42). ‘Effectiveness for self-defence’ (M=4.28) was the second-lowest rated aspect and the most divisive (standard deviation of 1.84), and ‘Economic/financial relevance’ (M=4.14) was the lowest-rated factor overall.

Each of these areas were then considered in relation to participants’ martial arts backgrounds; age range; and genders. They were then analyzed using a two-tailed T-test to confirm statistical significance among responses (p => 0.05). These areas were identified for further investigation due to the notable division in responses of the sample group and results from previous studies that found marked differences in attitudes when using similar criteria [Rogowska & Kuśnierz 2013: 189; Zeng,
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Section B Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude Item</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q1. Physical Aspect Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2. Mental Aspect Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. Self-Defence Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Health/Fitness Effectiveness</td>
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<td>Q5. Behavioural Effectiveness</td>
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<td>Q6. Social Relevance</td>
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<td>Q7. Cultural/Historical Relevance</td>
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<td>Q8. Economic Relevance</td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2: Variations by Gender</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude Item</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q1. Physical Aspect Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2. Mental Aspect Knowledge</td>
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<td>Q3. Self-Defence Effectiveness</td>
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<td>Q5. Behavioural Effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6. Social Relevance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q7. Cultural/Historical Relevance</td>
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</table>
### Table 3: Variations by Age Range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Item</th>
<th>18-34 Responses Mean (n=69)</th>
<th>35-49 / 50+ Responses Mean (n=19)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Physical Aspect Knowledge</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.5762</td>
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<td>Q2. Mental Aspect Knowledge</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.3762</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q3. Self-Defence Effectiveness</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.0009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Health/Fitness Effectiveness</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.0124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. Behavioural Effectiveness</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.1162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. Social Relevance</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.2677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. Cultural/Historical Relevance</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.1649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. Economic Relevance</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.0257</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 4: Variations by Martial Arts Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Item</th>
<th>TVMA Responses Mean (n=47)</th>
<th>Non-TVMA Responses Mean (n=41)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Physical Aspect Knowledge</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.87</td>
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<td>Q2. Mental Aspect Knowledge</td>
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<td>Q3. Self-Defence Effectiveness</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.0177</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q4. Health/Fitness Effectiveness</td>
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<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.0078</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q5. Behavioural Effectiveness</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.0130</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6. Social Relevance</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.0086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. Cultural/Historical relevance</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8. Economic Relevance</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.0384</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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DISCUSSION

Attitudes in relation to gender

Table 2 displays that the female group identified effectiveness of TVMA for self-defence purposes to be considerably higher than the male group. This coupled with the lower-rated knowledge of female participants opposes the idea that perceived knowledge of martial arts correlates to favourable opinions as hypothesized by Rogowska and Kuśnierz's [2013: 189] study. In contrast, this data suggests that:

- A lack of martial arts knowledge may lead to a more favourable view of martial effectiveness.
- Female and male martial artists may have different perceptions of what constitutes effectiveness and may have different needs in terms of self-defence. This data is supported by studies that have shown women are more likely to face both sexual and physical violence than men ['Fundamental Rights Report' 2019: 29]. Of these, many are perpetrated by known attackers and family members [Leach & Charlotte 2017: para. 7], whereas men 'are more likely to be victims of violent crime where the perpetrator was a stranger' [2017: para. 7].

Attitudes in relation to age range

Table 3 demonstrates that the lower-age bracket identified themselves as weaker in both physical and mental understanding of TVMA. Although effectiveness for health and fitness purposes, economic and social relevance of the TVMA practices were all notably lower within responses from the younger age group, the most divisive factor by a remarkable amount, was how TVMA is considered in terms of self-defence. This data is supported by studies that have shown women are more likely to face both sexual and physical violence than men ['Fundamental Rights Report' 2019: 29]. Of these, many are perpetrated by known attackers and family members [Leach & Charlotte 2017: para. 7], whereas men 'are more likely to be victims of violent crime where the perpetrator was a stranger' [2017: para. 7].

- Different age groups have different perspectives of self-defence. This is particularly relevant as younger participants are 'more likely to be victims of violent crimes than those in older age groups' [Leach & Charlotte 2017: para. 6].
- Senior-grade (and therefore older) traditional martial arts practitioners have frequently been identified as being less aggressive than junior students [Nosanchuk & MacNeil 1989: 158]; as a result, they are more likely to utilize verbal and non-physical techniques in self-defence situations.
- The younger group may be less aware of the training practices within TVMA. The lower-rated knowledge of the younger participants, coupled with the fact that just 50% of the younger group had experienced TVMA (versus 68.4% of the older group), supports this conclusion.

Attitudes in relation to martial arts background

Combat sport practitioners marked all attitude points lower than the group with TVMA experience, highlighting that they view the practices overall less favourably than other types of martial arts. However, both groups, considered TVMA to hold significant 'cultural/historical relevance' (M=5.74), whilst being reasonably effective for self-defence (M=4.45). In terms of 'health/fitness effectiveness', the non-experienced group rated TVMA considerably lower. Possible reasons for this may include:

- Familiarity with more-progressive training and fitness methods which may oppose traditional training methods (e.g., the use of dynamic stretching rather than static stretching, despite the fact that it has been identified that 'acute static stretching may induce performance decrements' [Costa et al. 2011: 75].
- Misconceptions of the physical training exercises of TVMA. From a logistical standpoint, it was not possible to detail these practices at length during the descriptions of TVMA in the questionnaire.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

As Kraus states: there is little doubt ‘that attitudes significantly and substantially predict future behavior’ [Kraus 1995: 7]. Although there are many other variables among social behaviours, this study indicates there are two main groups of thought among the local populace (although further research is needed to confirm this and thus establish a model): (a) those that consider TVMA primarily as historical and cultural practices rather than functional combative systems and (b) those that identify TVMA as effective combative systems of martial arts.

With respect to (a), the implications of such attitudes may lead to attempts to further nationalize TVMA as cultural, spiritual, or sporting practices, similar to Japan (karate, judo), Korea (taekwondo) and China (wushu). Although this has happened to some extent already with the development of martial arts-centred tourist areas and festivals around the nation [Roe 2016: 71], schemes will need to be developed to increase the financial relevance of TVMA through tourism and training programs.

In relation to (b), the teaching of TVMA as a functional combative system will require further development and refinement of the self-defence aspects, as even many practitioners of TVMA do not view these arts as being particularly effective for self-defence purposes. However, it is arguable that this is not the primary purpose of such training, especially in Vietnam where martial arts have a long history of spiritual, nationalistic, and mental development purposes as argued by Tran [2004], Green and Svinth [2003: 439], and Roe [2016].
CONCLUSION

The results from this study have demonstrated conclusively that TVMA are identified as important practices among the local populace for social, physical, cultural, and spiritual reasons. This study has further hypothesized that TVMA are considered to be fairly effective self-defence practices, however, the extent of this is an extremely divisive point among the local populace, particularly among those of different genders, ages and martial arts backgrounds. Thus, better definitions for effectiveness need to be developed.

In response to these findings, it is suggested that a set of criteria are established which can be utilized alongside a ranked scale and applied to a particular technique (or the core techniques of a system) to determine an idea of effectiveness. Provided analysis is undertaken by suitably qualified individuals, a scale may be used in relation to footage of self-defence scenarios to develop quantitative data or as a critical training-experiment which allows martial artists to examine their own practices.

As the aspects widely considered to define effective self-defence include awareness, decisiveness, improvisation, accuracy, efficiency, strength, speed and physical fitness [Indio 2012: 7; Angleman et al. 2009: 91; Keren 2014: 9], suggested criteria to be used in a technical effectiveness scale include:

1. **Speed**
   Can the technique be applied rapidly from a neutral position? Does it have sufficient speed to meet its intended purpose?

2. **Strength**
   Does the technique have sufficient force to disable/deter an imminent threat?

3. **Accuracy**
   Can the technique meet its intended target with ease? Is the target viable?

4. **Tactical use**
   Can the technique be delivered at such a speed/from a position to surprise an opponent or gain a tactical advantage?

5. **Adaptability**
   Can the technique be adapted across ranges and/or to utilize tools, weapons or the environment to provide a tactical advantage?

6. **Protection**
   Does the technique leave the deliverer exposed/in a position to receive further damage during or after application?
REFERENCES


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The objective of this paper is to present and discuss the practice of ssireum, or Korean wrestling. The practice is a short-range combat sport where fighters are linked through a belt (satba) that each holds in order to throw the opponent down. Our study employs a method based on phenomenology to comprehend the experience of practicing ssireum through intertwinement. It also considers its history and definition, as well as the descriptions of a technical research visit carried out in South Korea in 2019. Descriptions were made considering perceptual processes and also gender issues that arise from practical experiences with ssireum. We claim that ssireum should be replicable in non-Korean environments, and could be developed as an important tool to promote engagement in fighting activities and broaden cultural diversity through embodied knowledges.
INTRODUCTION

Since democratization in the 1980s, Korean culture has spread all over the world. This includes not only its well-known technology brands, such as Samsung, Hyundai, Kia and Daewoo, and the cosmetics industry, but also popular culture, including K-pop music and film. Korean culture has also contributed to science and philosophy, for instance with Byung-Chul Han’s famous academic work on contemporary culture and society. However, in other respects, Korea remains a place or a culture yet to be discovered by non-Koreans. It is difficult to access for those who cannot speak or read Korean, as many important cultural texts are not translated to English. This includes most of the literature related to martial arts. It follows that introducing more information about Korea culture is indispensable to understanding or discussing traditional Korean fighting systems.

Ssireum is a Korean martial art, along with better known styles like taekwondo, taekkyeon, hapkido and kumdo/gumdo [Green & Svinth 2010]. Although Korea is not as globally well-known as Japan and China in the realm of martial arts, there is much to be said about this topic. First, it is essential to mention that the only UNESCO International Centre devoted to martial arts is located in South Korea (in the city of Chungju). The International Centre of Martial Arts for Youth Development and Engagement under the auspices of UNESCO (hereafter ‘ICM’) was launched following an agreement between the Government of South Korea and UNESCO in 2015. According to the centre’s website:

> The main objective of ICM is to contribute to youth development and engagement by using the philosophy and values of martial arts, contributing in cultivation of positive attitudes and personal development characteristics. In order to fulfil its mandate, ICM promotes research and knowledge sharing, organizes capacity building programs, collaborates to develop a clearing house on martial arts and fosters North-South cooperation. [ICM 2020]

These aims are aligned with the UN’s SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which include equitable participation of women in different levels of martial arts domains, and a promotion of non-violent environments, self-control and respect, especially for cultural diversity. Striving to promote this engagement and development through martial arts, this centre organizes several activities, such as the MARIE Program, from where this research on ssireum originated. This funding and research program stands for Martial Arts Research Initiative for Experts and its aims are: (1) to encourage research on martial arts by young scholars; (2) to broaden the scope of martial arts research; (3) to enhance the methodological competencies of martial arts researchers; and (4), to promote research and knowledge sharing on the positive values of martial arts. It consists of a program which includes research on martial arts as well as practical and theory classes on topics related to martial arts. Regarding practical classes, the 2019 session was focused on Korean martial arts, namely taekwondo, taekkyeon and ssireum – the latter being the focus of this paper.

Ssireum can be considered a traditional fighting modality located in both North and South Korea. It has been classified by UNESCO as an example of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) since 2018. Despite this status, it remains little known outside of the Korean peninsula. There are certainly few studies in English, which suggests scope for more research into and awareness of the practice.

The request for recognition of ssireum as an example of ICH by UNESCO did not occur in a similar way to other processes in the same situation. It was facilitated by an unprecedented agreement between North and South Korea, which made a joint request for the recognition of the sport in this category. Accordingly, in this article the term ‘Korea’ is used interchangeably to refer either to South Korea or to the whole peninsula. Where specific reference is made to it, the term North Korea will be used.

After a short discussion of methodology, the following text will be divided into: a brief history and definition of ssireum; descriptions derived from a technical visit carried out in 2019, focused on perceptual processes and gender issues; and finally a discussion and reflection on possible contributions of this practice, especially considering it in non-Korean environments.

WRESTLING WITH PHENOMENA

When approaching Asian martial arts, it is vital to employ a critical approach and adequate methodology. This is nowhere more apparent than when one comes from a different continent and culture. Regarding Japanese and Korean martial arts, Moenig and Kim note:

> The popular discourse about Asian martial arts has often been surrounded by an aura of mysticism, esotericism, and romanticism, which is so ‘pervasive’ that it even influenced the academic discussion to some degree. Moreover, the application of nationalistic motives and politics in promoting certain martial arts narratives often prevails [...] in essence, reinforcing what many people ‘want’ to believe that martial arts are. [Moenig and Kim 2019: 1-2]
In an effort to examine these hegemonic narratives, and uncovering them in both reflexive and pre-reflexive domains, we employ a phenomenological point of view. Phenomenology helps us to grasp how these martial arts are practiced through the lived experiences of their practitioners, which is important: comprehending fighting practices in both reflexive and non-reflexive ways is necessary, as practitioners’ constantly moving fighting bodies experience little time for reflection in the moment [Telles, Vaittinen & Barreira 2018].

Inspired by an ‘emersiological’ approach [Andrieu 2016], we also consider the experience of the immersion of the researcher. Emeriology seeks to be a reflexive science derived from the conscious emersion of the lived body. When immersed in an activity, the living body is aware of its movements and the situation through an embodied perception. However, it is only possible to think and reflect about what happened afterwards. In movement practices, we consider both immersion and the emersion process (after the immersion, when we go back to our daily reality), in order to describe the activity and our impressions towards it.

When we describe and discuss such experiences, we consider the importance of verbal communication, as this involves trying to put acts and experiences into a common language [Stelter 2000]. This comprehension considers the importance of understanding both reflexive and pre-reflexive processes, and it consists of a reflection about the unreflecting [Barbaras 2008].

These considerations derive from phenomenology, especially the work of Merleau-Ponty in *Phénoménologie de la perception* [1945] and *Le monde sensible et le monde d'expression* [1953/2011]. From this perspective, a movement is not only related to what we think about the world, but also to what we can do in it (and through it). This phenomenological understanding implies that a movement is never randomly executed, but that, on the contrary, it is always related to an object and to the world, even if we are not conscious of it. We do it, always engaged in a specific situation.

We subscribe to the position that a phenomenological approach can be seen as extremely relevant to studies not only of martial arts and combat sports but also to the study of all situations where bodies are engaged in movement. In embodied practices, culture, history and society appear through common gestures, rituals and shared experiences. As a combat experience, ssireum is approached here as a *corporal fight*.

In corporal fighting, the goal is to restrict the operative mobility of the corporal subject, the opponent, as well as to frustrate his or her identical intentions, thus determining the phenomenal and operative dimensions of corporal fighting, by different kinds, uses, and styles of displacement, blocking, grappling, submission holding, kicking, and striking. [Barreira 2017a: 362]

Neither the field experience nor the material to which we had access inform us of a specific elaboration of ssireum’s ethical elements beyond its norms. Even if we grasp the aesthetical element, ‘reflected in the motor-operative capacity to restrict the mobility of others’ [Barreira 2017a: 368], due to our language limitations, we may still miss its ethical aspect, which is made by a typification of a ‘cultural code of conduct that is necessarily reflected in combat attitudes’ [2017a: 368]. However, without interpreting ssireum strictly as a ‘martial art’, it should be acknowledged that the field experience of ssireum as a corporal fight confirms the demand for voluntary efforts that strengthen a sense of self and honour, as reflected in the following ‘phenomenon description’:

respecting a wide myriad of experiences and intensities, something materialises out of corporal fighting that necessarily constitutes a process of self-knowledge. This process has martial arts as an existential model of confrontation. It is guided by the emulation of a sense of honour, encompassing a sense of self-value, which, in its turn, is about the attitude assumed during a fight. Once fighting’s essential experiences have been developed, every martial art must be grasped as an existential tradition. [Barreira 2017a: 363]

Considering this existential aspect, the following aims to approach ssireum through its history, definitions in the literature, and the data collected during a field trip, in South Korea, in July 2019. These sources are presented and discussed as being intertwined and complementing each other, in order to present a more rounded and rich account of the experience of ssireum.
SSIREUM: HISTORY AND DEFINITION

According to the Korea Ssireum Association, ‘Ssireum is known as a Korean form of grappling practice, as a Korean-style belt wrestling in which wrestlers attempt to topple their opponents starting from a standard grip around each other’s waist’. They continue:

Ssireum is connected with Korean history as a traditional sport. The way we play Ssireum is by kneeling, grabbing belts, standing and playing until someone’s body from the knee up touches the ground. Men, women, and children can all freely enjoy Ssireum. Historically, Ssireum was a key part of consecration rites, festivals, public function, and any major social or national event. Whenever Korean people have gathered to celebrate something they have played Ssireum as a way to build and strengthen community ties. [Korea Ssireum Association 2014: v]

From its history as a traditional practice, we argue that ssireum is always tied to social bonding through fighting. This is not something new, as it can also be found in other fighting practices around the world, such as capoeira or other types of indigenous wrestling in Brazil (such as the huka-huka), and also the galhofa in Portugal.

The Korean Ssireum Association [2014] claims that there has never been any serious effort to develop ssireum outside Korea. However, with Korea’s increasing openness to the Western world, especially since the 1980s, the globalized sportive model seems to have been widely adopted within the peninsula. As such, ssireum is now considered a national sport, developed during the country’s modernization in the early 20th century, but also reflecting its origins as an ancient folk game. According to Sparks:

Ssireum’s history prior to the 20th century is scattered and piecemeal, but available archaeological and historical evidence suggests that it has been played in Korea for at least two thousand years. It is also clear from the same evidence that Ssireum has been played quite differently over time. Contemporary Ssireum is based on the selective retention and interpretation of some of its previous forms along with the addition of novel, modernized features. Much of what Ssireum is popularly said to represent at present is based on homogenizing local views of history in the Korean peninsula. For example, the rule structure that prohibits strikes and kicks extends the metaphor of Ssireum as a nonviolent contact sport in accordance with the portrayal of Korea as a peaceful nation. Ssireum became an extremely popular national sport during Korea’s modernization, but an international financial crisis all but destroyed it in the late 1990s. Industry leadership has continually sought ways to redevelop Ssireum. At present, this includes exporting Ssireum to foreign countries in order to create a global league. [Sparks 2011: 5]

Globalization has affected ssireum’s organization as a sport from the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. Its popularity had waned, seeing a once prosperous professional league collapse. However, it is still seen as a sport to be played at various levels throughout the public education system in addition to semi-pro and amateur leagues [Sparks 2011].

From these discussions we can see that ssireum’s social status seems to flow between that of a sport and tradition. There are many questions regarding the emergence of ssireum on the Korean peninsula, making an exact historical acknowledgement of its origins impossible. It is certainly difficult to know why different people have practiced ssireum at different times, their motivations and feelings about it, etc. Moreover, the origin of the term ‘ssireum’ also remains unclear. One suggestion is that it came from the world ‘ssauda’, meaning ‘to fight’; another suggests ‘saruda’, meaning ‘to repeat a vigorous motion’. But ssireum is widely considered to have one foot in the modern world and another in an older, traditional, agrarian society. It – or practices like it – is certainly believed by many to have been practiced in similar places in many different periods, albeit adapting according to social changes in Korean society [Korean Ssireum Association 2014]. Needless to say, its image as ancient does no harm to its cultural value, for many stakeholders.

Regarding its practical definition, ssireum is said to be ‘not just pushing, pulling, and balancing’. Rather, it is ‘a philosophy of human movement’ [Sparks 2011: 19]. Indeed, the term ‘ssireum’ has been used to refer to a kind of struggle and communication – as an action and a verb (not a noun) – in which someone ‘ssireums’ with something. So, ssireum evokes ‘a hands-on feeling of being worked over while at the same time struggling to come out on top’ [Sparks 2011: 22]. Given this, although we use ‘ssireum’ interchangeably as a noun and a verb in the following discussion, we believe it is more accurate to understand the term as a way of moving, or as a kind of action.
APPROACHING AND EXPERIENCING SSIREUM

You can’t understand anything without sand on your feet. [Sparks 2011: 28]

Over a period of five weeks in July 2019, technical visits and training in various Korean martial arts were carried out through the 3rd MARIE Program (ICM/UNESCO), including taekwondo, ssireum, and taekkyeon. Regarding Ssireum, the researchers had both a theory and a practical class and also participated as observers in a festival where we watched competitions. Both the theory and the practical classes were held at the Korea National University of Transportation, in Chungju, South Korea. Practical classes were divided into two different sessions, both leaded by a coach from the Yeungnam University Ssireum team. The first period was inside the sport facilities, on a mat, where we could learn the basic movements. The second was in an outdoor area which included a ssireum arena. This was a round, slightly raised, space covered with clean sand.

The coach and the athletes who participated in the class cautiously examined the sand to make sure it was clean and that there were no sharp objects that might interfere in the ssireum practice or hurt the practitioners and students. Two athletes from the Yeungnam University ssireum team participated in the practical activities, helping us to learn and improve the movements and techniques of ssireum wrestling.

After we learned the basic ssireum moves, we were invited to try it in a more activity-specific environment, on the sand. There we could experience not only the rules but also enjoy our attempts to fight in a match. Ssireum is also practiced with a specific belt, named sarba. The fighters wear it around their hips and one of the thighs. Their official colours are red and blue, one representing each side of the fight.

During our activity we were allowed to choose our opponents as a way of making the practical training more comfortable and enjoyable. After selecting the contestants and putting on the belts, both entered in the arena and moved to its centre to start ssireum.

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1 This paper is part of research approved by a university ethics committee (EEFERP-USP / CAE 26940419.0.0000.5659). Regarding confidentiality, we have authorization (term of consent) from ICM/UNESCO, Korea National University of Transportation and Yeungnam University Ssireum team to use their names, images and the information that appear in this paper.
Little attention has been paid to the process of starting a fight in the literature of martial arts and combat sports [Telles, Vaittinen & Barreira 2018]. However, we regard this as an important feature because it shapes the subsequent movements. We corroborate Csordas’ [1993] discussions on embodiment and somatic modes of attention (although they are not related to the fighting practices field), regarding the way in which positions, gestures and body movements are culturally incorporated.

As can be seen in Figure 3, there is a basic ritual to start ssireum: both fighters bend in front of each other and then grab the other’s belt. After bending and holding the opponent’s sathba, they both follow the judge’s command to stand up still holding the other’s belt, which is never released until the end of the combat. Understanding the process of starting a fight also suggests something about how the match itself functions as a ritual facilitated by contact with, and an awareness of, the opponent’s body.

Once the wrestlers are up, they both start moving and each tries to throw the other down. The player who first touches the ground (with any part of the body above the knee), loses. Ssireum fights are usually quick and it is not rare for them to last only a few seconds. We observe that accurate perception is needed for victory. However, this perception must be understood as a skilful bodily activity, not as an exclusively mental process [Noë 2006].

This way of moving also relies on awareness, proprioception, body scheme and learning processes, to name just a few factors. When considering perception as an action we consider it a process constituted by sensorimotor knowledge which is active, embodied, and environmentally situated. As Noë puts it:

> Perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do. [...] The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction. [...] Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of body skills. What we perceive is determined by what we do (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are ready to do. In ways I try to make precise, we enact our perceptual experience; we act it out. [Noë 2006: 1]
The question is how players comprehend the perceptual experience of ssireum. After only a brief orientation, the body learns to fight maintaining a very short distance from the opponent. It is essential to mention that one must never let go of the other’s satba, and all of the techniques involve trying to throw the opponent down using the belt (as can be seen in Figure 5). By comparison to other forms of wrestling, in ssireum there is little strategy other than keeping close to your opponent, because of the importance of the satba. This is vital not only to the performed techniques, but also in terms of maintaining a constant psychological bond with the opponent.

Of course, in the end, someone falls onto the sand. The fighter is in close contact with the opponent through the satba, but s/he is also in close contact with the environment (specifically, the sand) – both, through tactile perception. One literally touches the other and the ground during the whole fight. According to Noë:

Touch acquires content through movement. Touch is intrinsically active. It is, in effect, a kind of movement. And movement is intrinsically spatial in the sense that it unfolds in space and is thus mediated by space. [...] the only way immediately to encounter spatial qualities like distance in perception is through movement.
[2006: 97]

Although we also use vision and hearing, wrestling practices are characterized by their intimate connection with the opponent. Even though the other is also seen and heard, little can be done if s/he is not felt and touched. In terms of perception, one’s tactile perceptions must be continuously considered when considering ssireum.

**Figure 5:**
the coach with two ssireum athletes

**UNCOVERING GENDER ISSUES THROUGH A SSIREUM PRACTICE**

For many reasons, including those just mentioned, wrestling might pose challenges for mixed-gender training. Gender issues are frequently encountered in martial arts and combat sports, as these are often male dominated [Holthuysen 2011; Telles 2018]. Ssireum requires tactile interactions, and this could represent a barrier for mixed-gender training. To better understand how gender issues manifest in ssireum, this section examines our own training during the research trip.

In the practical classes there were six students, three men and three women. As there were odd numbers, the primary researcher (female, and also first author of this paper) let the other two women practice together. This was because, on the one hand, there were cultural and religious considerations (one of the other women was a Muslim, and mixed-gender short range fighting raised issues of acceptability for both of the women). On the other hand, the main researcher is a Brazilian jiujitsu practitioner who is used to training extensively with both women and men. The experience was recorded in the field diary:

The other girls paired up together and then I paired up with a guy. The coach brought a few Ssireum belts, but there weren’t enough ‘official’ ones for all of us. He decided to use a regulation belt with the guys, while the girls used the other ones, thinner ones. Honestly, I was a bit disappointed with this decision because I felt it had something to do with gender issues. However, I said nothing and respected the coach to see where it would end.

Later on, I felt I was really getting into the class and I loved trying Ssireum! Somehow it was familiar but different at the same time, as I needed to throw the other down holding their belt. It was a challenge I was eager to take. I was able to understand the basic moves and to succeed in most of them. Suddenly I realized there was an official belt left and I asked the coach to change mine, then I could keep training with the guys. Actually, it wasn’t only a gender issue, but the weaker belt I was using seemed uncomfortable comparing to the ones men were using. Mine was thinner and it was hurting me a little bit. The coach agreed and one of his athletes came to put the official belt on me. I’ve paid attention but it seemed very difficult to tie (one day, I’ll learn... – I thought). I kept training and before going to the sand area, I shared with the coach how much I’d enjoyed it. I realized he was really glad; it seemed this is something not so common for people (especially non-Koreans) to say about Ssireum, maybe because it is not as well-known as other MA&CS [martial arts and combat sports]. He replied that he could see it by the trainings that I’d liked it, telling me he’d observed I could do some moves that people usually spent weeks to get. Then he not only encouraged me to train by myself (and share a bit of Ssireum with the people in my country) but he also gave me two official satbas (the belts) to take home with me: a red one and a blue one. I couldn’t be happier!
Through the experience described above, it appeared that the coach seemed to be slightly gender biased in the beginning of the activity, as he decided to give the official belts only to the men, while the thinner ones remained with the women. However, we highlight that he was very attentive to all the students, and he was also open to the fact that someone was doing good moves and was very interested in that practice, regardless of whether it was a man or a woman.

From such experiences and descriptions, we underscore the importance of increasing the notion of sensible norm [Barreira 2017b] in such embodied movement practices. This concept relies on these activities as intersubjective phenomena, which can either lead to sporting excellence or attitudes towards violence. The empathic experience of both opponents, along with the referee’s presence, become powerful tools shaping the sensible affectivity that arises in such situations. Nor does use of the term ‘norm’ mean that we consider the fighters to be purely static objects. On the contrary, ‘norms of sensitivity are constituted and modulated empathically without surrendering to pure conventionality, since it is the sensitive nature of the body itself that informs the subjects of the limits that can be mutually recognized’ [Barreira 2017b: 291].

A sensible norm involves a constant intercorporeal agreement, which is not settled before fighting but accompanies the whole practice. Moreover, this idea relies on pre-reflexive processes, as the moving body has little time to think. Decisions are made based on habits and previous learned acts, and on the perception of the situation in relation to and with the other. If someone makes decisions based on rigid norms, s/he would not be able to change spontaneously during practice. From the example of the practical class, the coach could have been rigid, denying that woman could train with men and using a different kind of belt, for example. Moreover, a sensible norm is understood as a mouldable and fluid norm. The experience described above demonstrates how lived culture depends on relationships and is transformed by them. As Barreira notes:

The challenge faced by the fighter to correspond to the self-placed expectations will be modulated and optimised by personal tendencies which come out as lived experiences. As the practice of a martial art presumes the existence of a community, the experiences in question are intertwined with the culture of this martial art and with the fighter’s peers, especially his masters, who are models for his self-placed expectations.

[Barreira 2017a: 362-363]

Considering the modulations between individual and sociocultural understanding, an initiative allowing non-Koreans (six people from six different countries and four continents) to practice traditional Korean wrestling is extremely important to those seeking to develop a global perspective on martial arts and combat sports. Throughout this program, the main topics we could work on were youth development and gender equality. It was realized that we could not only explore such matters in our personal projects, but also through embodied practices, such as ssireum. It is also important to mention that such remarkable experiences would not have been possible without the empathic leadership of the coach.

Along with the practices we have just described, we also went to a ssireum festival, in Mungyeong, South Korea. Although we knew there were both female competitors and tournaments, we did not have the opportunity to observe any of them on the single day we went to the festival. However, we could see a lot of women supporting the athletes:

There was a gymnasium with a sand arena in the center. College and university teams would compete between themselves. It seemed SSIREUM was a very important thing not only to the athletes, but also to their families. It was common to see parents helping their kids to carry bags full of SSIREUM belts. Moreover, they got really involved with the fight, shouting and supporting their sons. I don’t understand Korean, but it seemed they knew SSIREUM and that they could talk about the techniques with them. I also saw them carrying a lot of food to give them during the fight intervals. For me, it was very similar to a Brazilian mother or father of a young fighter or player.

[field diary]

This excerpt exemplifies the importance of comprehending social experiences through non-verbal processes, as the researcher could neither understand nor communicate using a verbal language. However, visual and auditory perception were extremely helpful to the experience of such a situation, and being able to describe it further.

From a phenomenological point of view, perception is an originary act, as it is our first way to access the world. It is also relevant to mention that one usually apprehends the objects and the situation through profiles, as we can never understand something entirely [Merleau-Ponty 1945: 1953/2011]. Although we are not able to see the entire object, we can recognize it as a relief, which enables our actions. According to this perspective, we can usually perceive something or someone once we can put together the apparently separated information from what we see, hear or touch. This involves not only perceiving the object, but also a specific situation and how to be able to do something in a certain time and space. In this case, although martial arts and combat sports are often male-dominated fields, and so we suppose is ssireum, it does not mean it is a necessarily hostile place for women, at least from what we have seen at the festival and from what we have experienced in the practical classes.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
THE RELEVANCE OF SSIREUM IN NON-KOREAN ENVIRONMENTS

Embodied movement practices are continuously related to culture, history and society. These nuances may be recognizable not only through reflexive acts (especially verbal communication), but also via pre-reflexive processes. The main purpose of this research was to introduce ssireum to non-Koreans, rather than to engage in a discussion of the gendered aspects of its performance from the beginning. However, as the main researcher is a woman, this topic was intertwined with her practice and research.

Her approach to ssireum intersected with this issue, as through phenomenological perspectives our experiences flow from universal to singular approaches, as they are also guided by our perceptions and vice versa. Despite the fact that social standards for women all over the globe often do not include fighting, attentive perception and sensible norms can enable these gender issues to be better addressed. Hence, we decided to highlight a respectful and successful experience instead of listing the well documented problems women still face to engage in martial arts and combat sports. These are numerous and the literature has already covered several important ones. However, less attention has been paid to remarkably positive experiences. As Channon points out: ‘mixed and undifferentiated training can give rise to mutual understandings of the shared physical possibilities of the sexed body in ways which segregated training cannot’ [Channon 2013: 7]. We agree that such initiatives can grow globally, especially through a sensible norm [Barreira 2017b].

Finally, we raise the question of the relevance of ssireum in non-Korean environments – especially in Brazil, where the authors reside. This country already has a rich variety of traditional wrestling practices, many deriving from indigenous peoples of the Amazon and Xingu region. Moreover, grappling modalities are already well known among Brazilians, for two reasons. The first is that Brazil is known as having the largest Japanese community outside of Japan itself. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, judo and jujitsu (or jiujitsu) are present throughout the country. The second – related – reason is the prominence of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, not only in Brazil but also all over the world. Brazilian jiu-jitsu emerged from branches of judo and jujitsu practices in Brazil, especially those coming from Mitsuyo Maeda (1878-1941), derived from Jigoro Kano’s (1860-1938) Kodokan system. It is also important to add that Brazil has also developed its own style of modern wrestling, called ‘Luta livre’ or Catch wrestling. We are also aware of the growth of these activities around the globe, with numerous variations and varieties across different regions and countries, including those of Portugal with the galhofa and Spain with lucha leonesa.

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Competing Interests
The authors have no competing interests to declare.
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ABSTRACT

With the aim of better understanding the motivations for studying martial arts, and finding examples of valued leadership skills and methods in instruction, a comparison of martial artists was conducted via a survey across the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland. The framework taken to evaluate ‘leadership’ within martial arts is the theory of transformational leadership [Bass,1985] that displays certain characteristics, such as espousing ideals, acting as role models, and showing care and concern for followers. They are also noted to inspire their followers by formulating a vision and setting challenging goals, as well as stimulating them intellectually to think about old problems in innovative ways. We propose that transformational leadership theory may provide a framework for instructors. For instructors, understanding what students look for in a club in terms of values and characteristics sought through training and leadership styles is valuable. This work could help instructors understand and develop the traits and characteristics that could be used to construct motivational or instructional methods to best achieve goals in their respective curriculum.

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martial arts, leadership, communication, motivation, culture.

CITATION


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Participation in martial arts and combat sports holds international appeal, and many across the globe practice martial arts. Martial arts is defined in British and American dictionaries and by Cynarski and Skowron [2014] as extensive systems of codified practices and traditions of combat that are practiced for a variety of reasons, including self-defense, competition, physical health and fitness, as well as mental, physical and spiritual development. Thus for the purposes of this paper, martial arts will be used as the term for the collective of codified practices and traditions of combat. In countries such as France, the Netherlands, Canada, Finland, Australia, and Belgium, martial arts are on a list of the ten most practiced sports among children and adolescents [Vertonghen & Theeboom 2010]. Since the late 1990s, in the Nordic region, the increase of female participants in combat sports has been noted [Alsarve & Tjønndal 2019]. This insight informed the selection of countries in this study: the USA and Canada (North America), Australia and New Zealand (Australasia), Finland and the surrounding countries of Estonia, Sweden, Norway (from Northern Europe / Nordic Countries) as well as the United Kingdom. Since the late 1990s, combat sports have become increasingly popular among women in the Nordic region [Alsarve & Tjønndal 2019].

1. CONTEXT

According to Vertonghen & Theeboom’s [2010] literature review there has been an increased number of scientific meetings and scientific gatherings with regard to martial arts and a particular style, in addition to an increase in scientific publications regarding martial arts, over recent years. But studies of the social and psychological aspects of martial arts practice date back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s [e.g., Kroll and Carlson 1967; Pyecha 1970]. These early studies often focused on personal characteristics of martial artists, how these characteristics determined preferences for specific types of martial arts and the extent in which they changed as a result of martial arts involvement. Since then, more researchers have become interested in the outcomes of martial arts practice [Vertonghen & Theeboom 2010].

1. The Role of Martial Arts/Sports in Different Countries

In Nordic countries such as Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland, sports are seen as a voluntary and autonomous practices in relation to national and local authorities [Alsarve 2014; Alsarve & Tjønndal 2019; Halldorsson 2017]. In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, coaching positions are only paid at the highest level of sport, leaving the majority of coaching positions to be filled by unpaid coaches working voluntarily for local and regional sport clubs [Alsarve & Tjønndal 2019].

As a martial art or sport is a club sport, but yet can be seen as individual, the sport or activity may provide insight in addressing issues of leadership and communication development. This is due to the fact that martial arts have been seen for many years as ways to develop both the mind and body. A range of research has stated that developing friendships with individuals from different age grips and demographics has aided in personal development, growth, and gaining understanding towards others [Kim et al 2014]. Other benefits of martial arts, such as taekwondo, have been categorized as physical, psychological and mental – including gaining cultural awareness and understanding, leading to personal growth and development [Kim et al 2014; Jones et al 2006; Zeng, Cynarski, Baatz, & Park 2015].

What stimulates people to study and participate in martial arts has been a topic of many research projects [Twemlow, Lerma, Twemlow 1996; Lantz 2002; Kavoura et al 2012; Kim et al 2009; Cynarski 2012; Jones, Mackay, & Peters 2006; Meyer & Bittman, 2018]. Twemlow et al [1996] examined 170 students enrolled in martial arts in Kansas, USA, and assessed motivations. These were categorized as: self-defense, exercise, improving self-confidence, fun, something to do, karate movies, meditation, and aggression outlet. Lantz [2002] also assessed the development of those participating in such activities and stated that self-defense, physical vitality, concentration, respect, friendship and moral/spiritual/life skill development emerged as key motivators. Understanding the reasons – the motivation – why people chose to participate in a martial arts activity is necessary in order to better address the goals with the actual form and content of lessons or classes offered at dojos, dojangs, or other clubs. Meyer and Bittman [2018] found that Japanese and German karatedō practitioners were found to display similar motivational drivers; however underlying cultures, regional history, as well as personal experiences influenced some of the differences in motivations to start and continue training. This is important because, from a pragmatic (teaching) perspective (and to echo Twemlow et al [1996]), if a dojang does not clearly understand the motivations and needs of its students, both current and future, many may drop out. By the same token, from a more cultural or academic standpoint, it is also interesting to enquire into whether there may be cultural differences in forms of motivation in different national contexts.

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1 Studying fight and combat sports in different regions and cultures involves a suite of factors relating to language, culture, and methodology, etc., which require us to remain cognizant of the cultural and contextual complexity of the training, education, art, and sport [Figueiredo 2009; 2016].
Traits of Martial Artists

Richman and Rehberg [1986] showed that the level of performance had a positive impact on personality traits of participants (e.g., higher self-esteem). Najafi [2003] also divided his sample as a function of teaching styles and came to similar conclusions. His findings revealed that practitioners of ‘traditional’ martial arts emphasize more humility and report more overall levels of hope compared to those involved in ‘modern’ martial arts. In this study, hope was defined as ‘the motivation to accomplish the harsh task’ [Najafi 2003: 25]. Of course, it must be remembered that combat sports involve characteristics such as strength, endurance, risk-taking, strategy, toughness, masculinity and competitiveness, and these factors can be influenced by the style of martial arts. Vertonghen & Theeboom [2010] observe that martial artists have characteristics that are rewarded in many sports have been connected to hegemonic masculinity production and have, for example, emphasized strength, speed, toughness, risk-taking and durability [Alsarve 2018]. The question of what characteristics are seen as being of value in leaders and what martial arts practitioners seek to gain by practicing martial arts is the focus of this study along with the question of whether this differs across countries or regions of the globe.

Countries and Cultural Differences

Cultural recreation activities may provide a place and context where cross-cultural awareness and contacts may be learned and created [Kim et al 2014]. Kim et al [2014] study examples of cultural recreational activities such as dance, martial arts, and relaxation techniques. In this context, cross-cultural contact is defined as ‘the interaction, communication, or other social processes among people or entities from two or more different cultures’ [Commons, Galaz-Fontes, & Morse 2006: 248]. Past studies have looked at comparisons between martial arts styles and revealed differences between styles indicating that each martial art has its own qualities [Vertonghen & Theeboom 2010]. A more important focus may be on the role played by the instructor, as the style may vary based on the instructor and the type of guidance given [Jones, Mac Kay, Peters 2006; Vertonghen & Theeboom 2010].

The national culture of a country is shaped by values from the country’s past to the ongoing social changes of the present day. The cultural values of nations have significant influence in the day-to-day life of people and also in its social, economic, political and business environments [Boopathi 2014]. The impact of national culture on the management, leadership, and organizational behavior of an organization operating in a particular country is unavoidable [Francesco & Gold 1998: 18]. Thus, the study’s results are assessed with reference to national culture and norms in order to help gain an understanding of the ways it influences how martial artists lead, act, or expect self and other to behave.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are used as a rough framework for understanding the national cultural norms in the study’s countries and regions. Hofstede originally ranked countries based on four cultural dimensions: individualism/collectivism, masculine/feminine, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance [Hofstede 2003]. Callaghan, Wood, Payan, Singh, & Svensson [2012] defined Hofstede’s dimensions and explained the scores for the United States, Canada, and Australia.

On power distance, which is defined as a measure of the unequal distribution of power in society, Australia, Canada and the USA have scores that are extremely close in value. Australia and the United States are extremely close in terms of individualism (versus collectivism) which is a measure of the relationship between an individual and his fellow individuals. They are individualistic countries. On masculinity (versus femininity), a measure of the division of roles between the sexes in society, scores for Australia and the United States are again extremely close, and rather masculine, with Canada displaying less of this quality. The final of Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture is uncertainty avoidance, which is defined as a measure of how a society deals with uncertainty and is related to the propensity of a culture to establish laws and formal rules such as codes of ethics. Societies strong on uncertainty avoidance are more likely to establish formal rules to deal with unpredictability. According to Callaghan et al [2012] Australia, Canada, and the United States have extremely close scores. The Nordic countries are characterized as more ‘feministic’, where everyone is to be taken care of with low power distance, meaning leaders and followers are seen as equals [Boopathi 2014]. The Nordic countries prefer to avoid uncertainty and thus more norms, rules, and behaviors are expected. According to Hofstede [2019], Britain is low on power distance, similar to that of the Nordic countries where society believes that inequalities between people should be minimized. In addition, Brits are described as individualistic, but also a masculine society where people are success oriented and driven. The UK scores low on uncertainty avoidance and thus most are assumed to be accepting of uncertainty.
Transformational Leadership

As note by Kim et al [2014], martial arts may provide a way to seek and improve meaning, purpose, and mission in life, often providing a mind-body unification that can lead to a sense of spirituality. This deeper reflection and self-understanding leads students and members of a dojang to interact with each other in certain ways and share experiences and knowledge, often improving the environment for learning and personal development. This may be seen as leadership development. By having a chief instructor, or master, whom one looks up to and respects provides a deeper experience of the sport. This interaction with a master, according to Cynarski [2012], provides a direct experience that is both physical (movement, exercise), internal to one self (spiritual), as well as intellectual, in that one may realize one's own cognitive needs. It is proposed that this common sharing of experiences and development of a culture within the dojang can lead to lessons in communication, respect, and leadership during lessons ostensibly 'only' about martial arts, lessons that also infiltrate the individual's personal and professional life.

In seeking a model or example of a successful leader, the theory of transformational leadership should be referred to. The theory was developed by Bass [1985] and has attracted considerable attention since then [Bass 1998]. Transformational leaders display certain characteristics, such as espousing ideals, acting as role models, and showing care and concern for each subordinate. Also, they inspire their followers by formulating a vision, setting challenging goals, and stimulating people intellectually to think about old problems in innovative ways. Research has demonstrated that perceived transformational leadership is associated with increased performance in various work settings [Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway 2001].

By contrast, servant or steward leadership is different. Servant leadership is more theoretical and anecdotal rather than observable and proven [Russell & Stone 2002]. But there are ten characteristics of servant leaders as given by the CEO of the Greenleaf Center. These are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building a community [Russell & Stone 2002]. A steward leader aims to build a community of people and value others' opinions and goals, regarding the primary purpose of leaders as to serve others [van Dierendonck & Patterson 2015]. Such servant leadership may encourage a more meaningful and optimal human functioning via the creation of a strong sense of community. This sense of community in turn encourages compassionate love which is shown by humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and altruism by both leaders and followers. Van Dierendonck & Patterson [2015] propose that the culture created by a servant leader could also give rise to desired leadership characteristics such as empowerment, authenticity, stewardship and providing direction [van Dierendonck & Patterson 2015]. Spiritual leadership, in turn, rests on an assumption that leaders can positively impact the wellbeing of followers and others, while also producing positive benefits and results for stakeholders, society, and themselves [Fry 2003]. For organizations, these types of leaders may be valuable in term of being concerned about the bottom line, for example.

2. AIM, QUESTIONS, METHODS

The aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership qualities and expectations of those training (or observing the training of their children) in martial arts and whether those differ between countries. The results of the study could be applicable and of interest to instructors as well as students of martial arts – for instructors, in terms of understanding what students value in regards to leadership values and characteristics and to construct methods to best achieve students' goals in their curriculum. For practitioners or students, understanding what they have learned and how that compares to others may be of interest to prioritize the reasons for studying martial (and other examples of leadership) instruction. Thus, the overall aim is to gain an understanding of the motivations and aims of martial artists when it comes to leadership and communication, as well as the idealized leaders' characteristics.

This study answers three related questions:

1. What are the motivations and needs of individuals attending the dojangs?

2. What are the desired and ideal leaders/heroes and the main skillsets sought through training, and does that differ between countries?

3. How have the cultural and practical lessons of self-discipline and leadership, motivation, communication transferred outside the dojang?

In this comparative study of martial arts, students and parents in four regions of the world were surveyed via an online, Qualtrics, survey containing Likert scale questions, as well as ranking questions, and open ended questions regarding their experience and observations. As noted by Alsarve & Tjanndal [2019], there are strengths and value in a study using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The value in
the quantitative data is seeing the numbers which indicate significant differences between the variables while the qualitative data adds to the narrative and the reasoning for the results. Thus, this study implemented both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

A link to an electronic survey consisting of multiple choice, ranking, Likert Scale, and open-ended questions was distributed via email to key contact people in clubs and organizations in the countries of interest as well as online using social media (Facebook and Twitter). The survey was approved by the University of Nebraska-Kearney’s Institutional Review Board (IRB# #021518-1). Participants were asked about basic socio-economic status such as gender, income, education level, household size, age, and number of year they had been in martial arts, whether they are, or were going to be or aspired to be instructors, about how long they had practiced martial arts and which ones. In addition, open ended questions asked about leaders, motivations, and reasons for studying martial arts.

The overall sample consisted of a random group of members in martial arts (instructors, students, or parents of students younger than 19). The survey was open for one year from March 1, 2018 to February 28, 2019. There were a total 230 responses to the survey out of which 224 full responses were used in the analysis. The analysis was conducted via r analysis and validated through excel analysis (p-test, average, mean). In cases where no significant difference was found this was still seen as a result as it is an answer to a question posed.

Participants and Participant Overview

Participants were from eight countries (see table 1). However, for the comparative significance and numbers the following groupings were use: United States, Canada, Australasia (Australia + New Zealand), United Kingdom, and the Nordics (Finland, Norway, and Estonia). Of those responses analyzed, 47% of the survey respondents were female (n=106) and 53% male (n=118).

There was no significant difference in the respondents’ ages, their income level, education level, number of family members in martial arts, or employment status as compared to the countries and regions. It was interesting to note that there was a difference in whether respondents were from rural or urban areas per country. Respondents from Canada, United Kingdom, and Australasia reported to be from more urban areas while respondents from the Nordics and the United States reported to be from more rural areas.

The number of years the respondents had been in martial arts did not vary or change by country. On average women tend to stick to one martial art whereas men were more inclined to practice multiple disciplines. This is based on a p-value of 0.001. The percentage of people (both men and women) that practice multiple martial arts does matter (p=0.014). Out of the respondents in the United States 42% of respondents reported to be in multiple martial arts, in Canada this was 46%, Nordics 27%, Australasia 20%, and in the United Kingdom 28% of respondents reported to be practicing multiple martial arts.

Out of all of the respondents, males on average had been in martial arts longer than females. Males on average had practiced martial arts from 11-15 years whereas female respondents averaged 4-8 years. What was interesting was that how many household members practiced or participated in martial arts did not vary by country, however there was a difference overall. Males were more often the sole practitioners of martial arts in their households, however for women it was more themselves and a child or children.

Overall the reasons people joined martial arts included: for self-defense, to improve fitness, increase confidence, discipline, focus, or to train with their own child or children. On average findings state that the most important traits or characteristics emphasized by instructors in their lessons are confidence, physical fitness, and self-awareness, and the least important trait or characteristic was risk taking. Overall the participants noted that they had experienced changes in themselves in their level of confidence, awareness (both of self and environmental), and that they felt more physically fit.
Communication

In terms of leadership communication, the Nordic country respondents felt that their leaders verbally communicated about their preferred leadership expectations slightly more than the respondents in the other countries or regions. The way of speaking as a martial artist and the way students and instructors communicate was significantly different between the countries (p-value 0.019). The respondents from the Nordic countries felt that they are more encouraged and taught at their respective dojangs to speak in a certain manner as compared to martial artists in North America (both United States and Canada). Using the expected martial arts communication skills outside of the dojang was significantly different between the countries as well, where the respondents from the Nordics felt that they used those skills more than respondents in North America. The UK and Australian countries fell in between in both questions.

Motivational Drivers

Overall all respondents stated that posters and quotes in the dojang are motivational. In some dojangs they may not be present, but overall the respondents from the United Kingdom felt the strongest about this followed by Australasia and the Nordics.

Those practicing a single martial art versus multiple also felt that movie icons and legends were more frequently discussed and followed than those who practice multiple martial arts. This could be because those practicing multiple martial arts are habituated to the discussions or perhaps could discussing and following martial arts icons and legends may only be a phase during the martial arts journey.

Behaviors

Based on the results of five semi-structured questions regarding whether the martial artist/respondent felt that they used their martial artist behaviors outside of their practice: out of 119 full responses it was found that this differed significantly by country (p-value = 0.024). Table 2 shows how countries responded to whether they used martial arts/dojang behavior outside of the dojang. Responses were No = 1, Yes = 2, and Sometimes/Maybe = 3.

Leadership Characteristics

The way martial artists view role models and leaders varied significantly by gender (p-value 0.014). Overall women stated that role models’ leadership behaviors are more important to them overall then for the men. In addition, women felt that it was slightly more important that they or their family members communicate using martial arts communication expectations and/or skills outside of their dojangs (or other martial arts schools).

Based on an analysis of key words from the reposes to which characteristics successful leaders should possess, overall the respondents stated that successful leaders should possess confidence, care for others (such as empathy and courtesy), as well as being respectful. Many stated several characteristics, thus after an analysis of all terms entered, the top ten characteristics of successful leaders were: caring for others, confidence, respect, morals and ethics, determination and being able to use that as a driver to motivate, communication and being a role model of behaviors and communication (both verbal and non-verbal), along with patience.

Overall the respondents stated that after training in martial arts they felt that they were more respectful and/or polite outside the dojang, followed by having an increased awareness of both self and environment, and they felt more confident. The question of whether respondents felt strongly about whether they had grown as leaders in martial arts was slightly significant (p-value = 0.07) in that for north Americans (Canadians followed by Americans) this did not matter at all while for the Nordic martial artists this mattered more.

The respondents from the Nordics felt that they had become more self-aware through martial arts training. This was significantly different from North America respondents (both Canada and the United States) (p-value = 0.05). However, there was no significant difference in how respondents felt that they described themselves.

From a leadership perspective an instructor from the United Kingdom who has practiced martial arts for 4-5 years stated: ‘As a martial arts instructor I feel that every student is like one of my children. We want them to improve and get the best out of themselves’. This speaks to a transformational leadership style of caring for each individual follower, subordinate, or student.
Table 2 shows that the martial artists in North America, Australasia, and the United Kingdom all report using more of their martial arts behaviors outside of the dojang than their counterparts in the Nordic countries.

Why martial artists watch movies was significantly different, not between martial art styles, but by country/region (p = 0.05). The Nordics tended to watch movies more for the role models, character traits, and life lessons while martial artists in the U.K. watched more for entertainment purposes and for the actors. Martial artists in Australasia watch movies more for skills and choreography as well as the storyline, and the martial artists in the United States watched for the storyline as well as for raising their spirits or for motivational reasons. A martial artist of a single discipline (21+ years in martial arts) stated that ‘a true martial artist should also be creative’.

### Single versus Multiple Disciplines

One question was whether answers would differ between those that study taekwondo or other arts, and similarly those that practice a single art versus those that practice multiple arts. By conducting a bivariate analysis regarding the significant difference (p = 0.0001) the average time a practitioner of a single art had been training martial arts was 0-10 years, with median on 6-10 years. Those that reported practicing 2 or more different arts on average had been in martial arts for 10+ years, with a median answer of 16-20 years. It was interesting to note that there was also a significant difference between the genders practicing a single versus multiple martial art. On average males tended to report practicing multiple arts while women on average reported to be practicing one type of martial art (p = 0.0001). There were no significant differences between single versus multiple martial arts when compared to ethnicity, age, income, education level, employment status, or number of family members in martial arts. However, there was a significant difference in instructors and whether they reported to be practicing single or multiple martial arts (p = 0.0001). Out of the martial artists in a single martial art 9% wanted to be an instructor and 3% stated that they will be an instructor, while out of the martial artists in multiple disciplines 6% wanted to be instructors and 7% will be. This could be indicative of the fact that most of those who want to be instructors and report practicing multiple disciplines already are instructors and thus the percentage of those that want or will be instructors is significantly lower.

There was a significant difference between country and whether the martial artist respondent stated that they practiced one or multiple martial arts disciplines (p = 0.035). In North America there was almost an equal amount of single and multiple martial art practitioners. 57% of Americans and 54% of Canadian respondents stated that they were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Responses as Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>No = 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes = 76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes = 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>No = 0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes = 83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes = 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nordics (Finland, Estonia, Norway)</td>
<td>No = 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes = 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes = 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australasia (Australia, New Zealand)</td>
<td>No = 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes = 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes = 38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>No = 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes = 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes = 41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Percentage of respondents per country that stated whether they use martial arts behaviors outside of their dojangs.
practicing a single martial art. A majority, 89%, of the Nordic martial artist respondents were practicing a single martial art, while both Australia and the UK respondents were similar to the Nordic countries, as 79% of Australasians and 72% of British respondents stated that they practiced a single martial art.

There was a slight difference between those that practiced a single martial art and those that practiced multiple martial arts around whether they believed it to be important that their leaders in martial arts show leadership behaviors consistent or reflective of their discipline, e.g., leading by example (p = 0.07). Those in multiple martial arts deemed it to be less important than those in single martial arts. This could be due to the fact that the behaviors are already ingrained, or they are expected and thus taken as given. This is perhaps well illustrated by the following comment from a martial artist of 21+ years and practitioner of multiple martial arts: ‘For me it’s a lifestyle’. Another martial artist of 21+ years of experience in multiple martial arts stated:

> Your skills to now [sic] are like a circle, with lines extending from its center, short and long. Learn more, to where those gaps are filled, with yourself as a more complete person, reaching maximum capacity with each skill, or ability, to where your life is more like a smooth Chrystral [sic] ball, transparent and open, irritating no one, and being accepted by the many there are, as you practice the one martial art there is.

There was a marginal difference between single and multiple art practitioners in regard to how self-aware they felt after practicing martial arts (p = 0.06). Single martial artist felt that they were slightly more self-aware than those practicing multiple martial arts.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Leadership style

In seeking a leadership style such as transformational leadership or servant leadership – both of which research has shown help inspire followers, and lead to improved performance – we must compare the characteristics and expectations of leaders. Transformational leadership characteristics include having a vision, being able to communicate it, acting as role models and showing care for students or subordinates. Based on the survey results, the respondents ranked the characteristics that successful leaders should possess: confidence, care for others (such as empathy and courtesy), as well as being respectful. Many stated several characteristics; thus, after an analysis of all terms entered, the top ten characteristics were: confidence, respect, morals and ethics, determination and being able to use that as a driver to motivate, communication and being a role model of behaviors and communication (both verbal and non-verbal), and patience. A servant leader’s characteristics, however, include: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building a community. Thus, transformational and servant leadership styles may work as models for successful martial arts leaders. As put by an experienced martial artist (with 21+ years of experience): ‘Be good followers as well as leaders. The best leaders are the best servants of the students’ need to learn’. It should be noted that a vision or goal may need to be more clearly defined by the leaders and communicated to their students as the students are led during their martial arts journey. However, it is suggested, based on the findings, that the posters and quotes hanging inside the dojang are motivational/inspirational, and it is suggested that these conform to a transformational leader. Moreover, leaders’ goals should reflect the leader’s vision and aims. In addition, suggested viewing (movies) should be selected based on the reasons martial artists watch movies, all of which varies by country/region.

Overall the respondents stated that after training in martial arts they felt that they were more respectful/polite outside the dojang, followed by an increased awareness of both self and environment, and feeling more confident. For North Americans (Canadians followed by Americans) it did not matter whether they grew as leaders in martial arts, while this mattered more for the Nordic martial artists. As a martial artist from the United States stated ‘I would not be who I am today without martial arts. After training for the past 16 years (from age 5 to age 21), I’ve grown to be a role model & leader in my dojang, and I’m currently the president of two student organizations at my university’.

In looking at communication in martial arts, respondents felt that leaders in the Nordic countries verbally communicated about their preferred leadership expectations slightly more than the respondents in the other countries or regions. The respondents from the Nordic countries felt that they are more encouraged and taught (at their respective dojangs) to speak in a certain manner as compared to martial artists in North America (both United States and Canada). They also felt that they used those skills more than respondents in North America. The UK and Australasian countries fell in between in both questions. National culture and behavior norms and expectations may influence how martial artists feel about how they communicate and act in and outside of the dojang.
Influence of national culture

Based on the response, there is a question around whether those who on average have been practicing martial arts longer and/or have been practicing multiple martial arts become habituated into the martial arts mindset, behaviors, and communication (including non-verbal communication). One martial artist of a single discipline from the United States proposed: ‘Martial arts culture and benefits is [sic] largely dependent on the community (family style or classroom style) and importance of tournaments (glorifying the fight or glorifying the growth)’.

In regard to region/country, the European-influenced countries such as UK and Australasia/Nordic society: cultural expectations and behaviors may influence the choice to practice a single martial art instead of multiple. In addition, the Nordic culture of equality and respect is part of national culture and thus is arguably more expected than in other countries; thus, the Nordic countries feel that they do not use dojang/martial art specific behaviors outside of their dojang when compared to the other countries.

Limitations

Based on the survey respondents and the way they were recruited through international networks it should be noted that many respondents practiced taekwondo. Whether this shows the popularity of the sport worldwide or simply a result of the recruitment method it is hard to tell.

Recommendations

It would be interesting to better understand how others who come in contact with a martial artist outside of their dojangs (such as co-workers, supervisors, school teachers, customers, etc.) perceive the behaviors and changes in the martial artist as they continue to train.

Acknowledgements

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Capacity and confidence: What can be gleaned from the link between perceived and actual physical ability in Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioners?

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Brazilian jiu-jitsu, martial arts, combat sports, self-efficacy, perceived physical ability, physical capacity.

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Abstract

Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) is one of the most popular modern iterations of grappling-based combat sports. Progression in BJJ involves persistence in the face of repeated defeat in training, which may require certain psychological characteristics, or at least the ability to cultivate them. Although BJJ is highly technical, performance is also influenced by physical fitness, which in turn may be associated with the practitioners’ psychological approach and adherence to the sport. Through exploratory data analysis, this paper sought to elucidate the relationship between perceived and actual physical ability in BJJ practitioners. Both aerobic and muscular endurance appeared to be associated with perceived physical ability independent of factors such as rank and training experience. Conversely, maximal strength did not correlate with this construct. These findings indicate that physical fitness may be conducive to both BJJ performance and adherence through its relationship with self-efficacy. Since self-efficacy is concerned with belief in the ability to produce a subjectively desired outcome and does not necessarily reflect actual skill, the potential psychological advantage of physical fitness is likely applicable to practitioners at all levels of competence.
INTRODUCTION

Grappling-based combat sports, such as wrestling and jujutsu, have existed for centuries. Among its modern derivatives, Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) has emerged as one of the most popular styles, both as a recreational and competitive practice. It is generally considered to be a challenging art to master, with a constantly growing number of rulesets and strategies, techniques and technical variations, as well as a notable emphasis on simulated fighting in training. These aspects have implications for adherence, with the attrition rate being described as very high [Canaria 2016], particularly among the lower ranks [Huni 2019]. Many of the potential causes of attrition, such as technical and physical difficulties, external performance scrutiny by coaches and peers, and being repeatedly forced to concede defeat during simulated combat against a resisting opponent, especially at the beginning of one’s learning trajectory, are inherently related to BJJ. Thus, insight into the psychology of active practitioners and their motivational dynamics may reveal characteristics that can be targeted to improve adherence, as well as other aspects of progression and performance [Øvretveit et al. 2018].

The quest to understand the psychological underpinnings of motivation in sports and other performance settings has led to an abundance of cognitive theories. Among the most prominent concepts is Bandura’s [1977] self-efficacy, which has served as a basis for analyses and predictions of behavioral mechanisms in various performance settings, including challenging and unpleasant ones. It can be briefly described as the judgment of personal capability, which distinguishes it from similar terms such as self-esteem, a term that pertains more to feelings of self-worth [Bandura 1997]. The level of self-efficacy has been shown to correspond to the degree of performance, as well as being inversely related to emotional arousal [Bandura 1982], with incremental goal setting being crucial to its development [Bandura and Schunk 1981]. Interestingly, changes in self-efficacy may be mediated by changes in physical fitness, such as improved aerobic endurance [McAuley et al. 2000]. This suggests a positive feedback loop in which self-efficacy beliefs may cause individuals to engage in activities that lead to further development of these perceptions.

Self-efficacy tends to vary across domains, and the inherent limitations of global self-efficacy measures have resulted in various domain-specific tests [Bandura 1986]. One of these is the physical self-efficacy scale by Ryckman and colleagues [1982], which measures physical self-concept. Applications of this instrument indicate that those who perceive themselves as being physically skilled not only have higher self-esteem and strong internal locus of control but also may outperform those with lower physical self-efficacy in motor tasks [Ryckman et al. 1982]. Since self-efficacy is the belief in personal capability independent of actual capability, cultivating self-efficacy may directly influence behavior and performance in sports at a given level of capacity or skill [Feltz 1988]. The notion that mindset not only can improve performance but fundamentally alter the way athletes approach and adhere to their sport is compelling, perhaps particularly so in the context of what is generally considered mentally challenging and often discouraging activities, such as full-contact combat sports.

Traditionally, the physiological and psychological attributes of athletes are studied separately, although some overlap is not uncommon. It could be argued that this somewhat reductionistic approach, albeit often both necessary and advantageous, leaves the relationship between observations from the two disciplines relatively unexplored. Historically, constructs quantifying the experience of martial arts practitioners in training has been lacking [Sandford et al. 2020]. Recent applications of non-specific, well-established instruments indicate that BJJ practitioners are likely to adopt goals of mastery [Øvretveit et al. 2018] and that this in turn may lead to a greater training effort [Øvretveit et al. 2019]. The latter observation suggests that mindset may influence training adaptations, thus hinting at a potential link between physiological and psychological attributes among these practitioners. The present paper sought to further investigate such a link through exploratory analysis of data from recent investigations of physiological [Øvretveit 2018b] and psychological [Øvretveit et al. 2018] characteristics of BJJ practitioners. The main aim was to assess the relationship between how these practitioners perceive their physical ability and their actual physical ability, as determined by standardized laboratory measurements of various parameters of strength, endurance, and body composition. To the best of the author’s knowledge, no other study to date has interrogated these associations in this population.
MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The study sample consisted of 42 male BJJ practitioners (age: 31.9 ± 6.2 years; height: 181.9 ± 7.2 cm; body mass: 85.7 ± 10.6 kg; body fat: 12.9 ± 5.3 %) with 5.5 ± 3.7 years of training experience and 7.8 ± 3.4 hours of weekly BJJ training at the time of data collection. To ensure a certain level of experience, practitioners with < two years of consistent training or < one year of training and no competition experience were ineligible to participate. To construct a pooled dataset, anthropometric and physical performance data [Øvretveit 2018b] were linked with psychological data [Øvretveit et al. 2018] from the same cohort using anonymous subject identifiers. This data was then reanalyzed for the purpose of exploring associations between perceived and actual physical performance. The data collection protocol was reviewed by the local ethics committee, registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, and carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Perceived physical ability measurement

Perception of physical ability was measured with the Perceived Physical Ability (PPA) subscale of the Physical Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Ryckman et al. [1982] in its original language. The PPA scale is composed of ten items that cover perceptions of attributes such as strength, speed, and agility. The participants scored each item on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), giving a possible range of 10 to 60. The PPA scale has previously been shown to be reliable in various study populations [Ryckman et al. 1982; McAuley and Gill 1983; McAuley et al. 2000].

Physical performance measurements

The participants underwent same-day supervised fitness testing in an exercise laboratory [Øvretveit 2018b]. Body mass and composition were determined with segmental multifrequency bioelectrical impedance analysis (MC-980-MA, Tanita Corp., Tokyo, Japan). Maximal oxygen uptake (VO2max) was assessed with an incremental cardiopulmonary exercise test (CPET) on a motorized treadmill (PPS 55 Med, Woodway GmbH, Weil am Rhein, Germany) at a 3° inclination. Oxygen uptake (VO2) was monitored throughout the test with a calibrated respiratory analysis system (Vmax Spectra 229d, SensorMedics, Yorba Linda, CA, USA). The highest 30-second average VO2 was calculated and accepted as VO2max if the participant had met at least two of the following criteria: a VO2 plateau, being ≤ 5 beats within maximal heart rate if this was known, a respiratory exchange ratio of ≥ 1.1, and/or a blood lactate concentration of ≥ 8mM. Following the CPET, each participant performed one-repetition maximum (1RM) strength tests in the parallel squat and paused bench press. A progressive loading protocol towards failure was applied to reach 1RM within five attempts in both exercises. Additionally, one set of as many repetitions as possible of pronated-grip pull-ups was performed as a measurement of muscular endurance.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS version 25 (Chicago, IL, USA). Graphics were made using GraphPad Prism version 6 (San Diego, CA, USA). Data normality was assessed with the Shapiro-Wilk test. The reliability of the PPA measure was tested with Cronbach’s [1951] α. To evaluate relationships between PPA and physical performance and other characteristics, Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients were calculated. The independent samples t-test was used to compare PPA between practitioners based on whether they competed, instructed, or incorporated additional strength and conditioning training, as well as their style preference and previous martial art experience. Statistical significance was accepted at p < 0.05 for all observations.

RESULTS

Participants who did not rate all items on the PPA questionnaire (n = 3), or none due to language issues (n = 1), were excluded from all analyses. Preexisting injury prevented performance measurements for some; however, only one participant was unable to undergo any form of maximal exercise testing. There was no apparent association between PPA and age, rank, experience, or training volume (p > 0.05). Similarly, PPA did not correlate with anthropometric measurements such as height, body mass, body fat mass, or lean mass (p > 0.05). A significant relationship between PPA and VO2max was detected (table 1; figure 1). This relationship also held true for allometrically scaled (rS = 0.33, p < 0.05) and population-relative VO2max (rS = 0.40, p < 0.05). Although no association with maximal strength was found, PPA correlated with muscular endurance (table 1; figure 2). Similar to VO2max, the relationship between PPA and pull-ups remained significant when dividing repetitions by body mass (rS = 0.25, p < 0.05) and tended to also be significant for allometrically scaled pull-up performance (rS = 0.23, p = 0.056). No difference in PPA was found between those who competed or instructed compared to those who did not (p > 0.05). Similarly, those who regularly trained strength and/or conditioning outside of BJJ did not differ in PPA (p > 0.05). Lastly, no effect of style preference, i.e., training with or without the gi, nor previous martial art experience was observed (p > 0.05).
Table 1: Perceived physical ability and physical performance correlation matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean ± SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. PPA</td>
<td>40.1 ± 5.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Training experience (y)</td>
<td>5.3 ± 3.8</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Training volume (h week⁻¹)</td>
<td>7.7 ± 3.3</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.33*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. $\dot{V}O_2\text{ max (mL'kg}^{-1}\text{'min}^{-1}$)</td>
<td>50.6 ± 4.6</td>
<td>0.35*</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Squat (kg)</td>
<td>113.2 ± 20.4</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bench press (kg)</td>
<td>87.6 ± 16.5</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.53**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pull-ups (n)</td>
<td>9 ± 4</td>
<td>0.34*</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SD, standard deviation; PPA, perceived physical ability; $\dot{V}O_2\text{ max, maximal oxygen uptake}; ^* p < 0.05, ^*^ p < 0.01.

Figure 1: The relationship between perceived physical ability and maximal oxygen uptake

Figure 2: The relationship between perceived physical ability and muscular endurance
The PPA scale had a Cronbach’s α of 0.51, indicating poor internal consistency of this instrument in the present study sample. The most problematic items were #3 (‘My physique is rather strong’) and #9 (‘I have a strong grip’), both of which had negative corrected item-total correlations despite being ordered correctly. Removing these items resulted in an acceptable α of 0.71. Furthermore, both the strength and significance of the association between the full PPA scale and VO2max persisted with the modified scale, with a tendency for the association with pull-ups (p = 0.065).

Discussion

Confidence is an important factor for not only performance but also adherence in sport. The self-efficacy concept pertains to domain-specific belief in personal capability, which in turn can influence behavior through mechanisms such as persistence, intensity, and arousal. In its original theoretical outline, Bandura stated that ‘persistence in activities that are subjectively threatening but in fact relatively safe produces, through experiences of mastery, further enhancement of self-efficacy and corresponding reductions in defensive behavior’ [Bandura 1977: 191]. The beliefs a BJJ practitioner holds about his or her ability are presumably derived primarily from experiences on the training mat, performing technical drills, or engaging in simulated combat; situations that can often appear to be subjectively threatening yet are objectively relatively safe.

In general, involvement in martial arts may lead to positive psychological outcomes [Vertonghen and Theeboom 2010]. In BJJ specifically, the notion that persistence leads to experiences of mastery is supported by previous observations that mastery goals are prevalent among its practitioners [Øvretveit et al. 2018], something that also holds true for other grappling-based combat sports, such as judo [Gernigon and Le Bars 2000]. As these observations are made in active practitioners, i.e., those who have and continue to persist, one could argue that they are unsurprising – that mastery goals are to be expected among active combat sports practitioners because they have endured subjeetively threatening situations. And since these situations are intrinsically related to BJJ, practitioners must either adapt, suffer, or quit.

The main discoveries of the present analysis were the apparent associations between VO2max, muscular endurance, and perceptions of physical ability. As the gold standard measurement of cardiorespiratory fitness, VO2max is one of the most common and informative metrics in sports. In BJJ, which is largely an aerobic sport, it has been associated with less fatigue during simulated combat [Øvretveit 2018a]. Additionally, the fatigue resistance offered by a high VO2max may also be beneficial to the quality of technical training and recovery between matches in tournaments.

Despite this, VO2max appears to be quite similar across ranks [Andreato et al. 2017], which could be due to a ceiling effect of sport-specific BJJ training on the cardiovascular system [Øvretveit 2018b]. The presence of a ceiling effect is supported by training interventions that incorporate non-sport-specific high-intensity interval training alongside regular BJJ training, which has shown to rapidly improve VO2max compared to BJJ training alone [Øvretveit 2019]. As VO2max reflects the maximal rate of oxygen consumption, it cannot be further improved by changes in mindset, e.g., increasing the level of self-efficacy. This is in contrast to tasks involving motor skills, which can be influenced by self-efficacy beliefs, such as PPA [Ryckman et al. 1982]. If the observed relationship between VO2max and PPA in BJJ practitioners is valid, the direction, then, is likely to be from the former to the latter; aerobic endurance may have a nontrivial impact on grappling performance and/or the training experience, independent of technical skill, which in turn influences PPA through mechanisms such as subjective experiences of mastery on the mat.

Fatigue makes cowards of us all

To better understand the role of VO2max in BJJ, it is important to distinguish it from another (and in this sport perhaps more emphasized) aspect of endurance: work economy. Together with VO2max and lactate threshold, work economy, or efficiency, is considered a fundamental performance determinant in endurance sports [Joyner and Coyle 2008]. Granted, although the metabolic demand of BJJ is primarily aerobic in nature, it is not a traditional endurance sport. Thus, as opposed to cycling, cross-country skiing, rowing, or middle-to-long distance running, the traditional endurance components are less crucial. However, fatigue is an inescapable fact of all physical activity and one that is often simply caused by a transient lack of oxygen.

The technical development in BJJ has in many ways been characterized by the aim of minimizing the reliance on physical attributes [Gracie and Danaher 2003]. For instance, an athlete in top position will often try to make his opponent carry his weight, while the bottom athlete will counter this by placing his limbs in ways that create space and displaces pressure by relying on angles and bone structure rather than muscular force. This makes the goal of becoming more technically proficient, rather than just fitter, quite rational. Technical development is, of course, crucial to progressing as a practitioner and arguably more important than fitness in terms of performance. Moreover, technical proficiency is closely related to sport-specific endurance through its impact on the oxygen cost of exercise: a high-level practitioner
is typically able to perform a technique with lower metabolic cost compared to lower-level practitioners.

Technique directly impacts sport-specific endurance, because as motor learning increases metabolic cost decreases [Huang et al. 2012]. In other words, when a practitioner becomes more technically proficient, metabolic expenditure and thus the energy requirement of grappling techniques is reduced. However, as BJJ involves a resisting opponent, the cost of movement is not entirely up to the practitioner. Although technical proficiency may contribute to a reduction in the dependence on physical attributes, $V\text{O}_2\text{max}$ becomes increasingly important when techniques go from cheap to expensive, which can happen for a multitude of reasons. And research shows that it will happen both in training and competition [Andreato et al. 2016] and that a high $V\text{O}_2\text{max}$ allows for aerobic metabolism to occur at higher intensities, which can sustain performance for longer and/or repeated periods [Øvretveit 2018a]. The distinction between fitness- and technique-mediated endurance has not previously been discussed among prominent figures in the sport, such as renowned coach John Danaher [2016]:

When I watch beginners train together the single most common method of defeat is fatigue. Beginners typically lack the skills required to gain a victory through the purity of their technique and thus usually one of them is worn down to a state where they cannot maintain resistance and they succumb. The problem usually gets better with time, but remains to some degree throughout our jiu jitsu lives. Everyone has to confront and overcome this problem if they wish to remain in the sport. The problem is, most people attack the problem in the wrong way. The overwhelming majority of students deal with the problem by trying to bring about changes in their bodies – they make efforts to make themselves stronger and fitter. This is good and desirable and yes – it definitely helps to some degree.

Here, a separation between physiological and technical endurance is clearly acknowledged. Danaher [2016] continues:

However, whatever endurance improvements you make from strength and fitness increases are minuscule compared with those that come from increased mechanical efficiency in technique and pace control during a match. It will take a lot of time and training to increase your maximum bench press by just 10% – but that increase will be barely perceptible to your opponent in sparring. However, small improvements in the placement of lever and fulcrum as you apply technique throughout a match will be immediately felt by an opponent as increased force and by you as energy saving – if this is combined with pace control you will find dramatic improvements in grappling endurance without any significant changes in your physiology. [...] If you want dramatic improvements – don’t look to change your body, rather, look to change your technical insight and pace control.

Coming from the perspective of an instructor, Danaher unsurprisingly favors technical rather than physiological development as an energy management strategy. This largely makes sense from a physiological perspective as well. In BJJ, the potential for improvement by making the proverbial machine more efficient is greater than increasing the size of its engine. The world’s greatest endurance athlete would stand no chance against a BJJ practitioner with even a fairly basic skillset in a match with no time limit. Interestingly, Danaher also points at something that may underpin the PPA-$V\text{O}_2\text{max}$ relationship in BJJ: fatigue is a common way to lose, particularly among beginners. Thus, as long as skill and strategy are either lacking, as in beginners, or matched, as in competent practitioners who face an equally competent opponent, physical capacity becomes a comparably sharp weapon.

The fact that neither PPA [Øvretveit et al. 2018] nor $V\text{O}_2\text{max}$ [Øvretveit 2018b; Andreato et al. 2017] appear to be associated with BJJ rank indicates that, assuming the relationship is valid, $V\text{O}_2\text{max}$ can increase PPA through subjective beliefs in the ability to perform at any level of practice. In other words, capacity may improve confidence independent of sport-specific competence. This is consistent with the self-efficacy concept, which is mainly concerned with belief in the application and not the actual level of skill [Feltz 1988]. For the lower belts, this may be defending a chokehold longer, or just surviving five minutes of grappling at all. For the higher belts, it could mean being able to go hard every round against opponents that try their best to win. As long as the outcome is subjective, normative performance, e.g., who dominated the sparring round, is less important.

A common analogy to BJJ training is that of drowning [Harris 2012; Williams 2020]. Since oxygen is often restricted in more ways than one, drowning is an apt description of what it can feel like to be controlled by a superior practitioner, which is something every single BJJ practitioner has felt. It is an example of a ‘threatening, yet safe’ situation that is highlighted as a key ingredient in the development of self-efficacy, as well as BJJ proficiency. And in these situations, $V\text{O}_2\text{max}$ has the potential to make a practitioner more resistant to the figurative, and sometimes not too far from literal, drowning, because it reflects the ability to transport oxygen from the atmosphere to the mitochondria. By more efficiently supplying the cells of the working muscles with oxygen, an aerobically fit practitioner will likely survive longer in physiologically taxing conditions, which may or may not involve someone applying pressure to his or her trachea or carotid arteries. Although the energy demands of BJJ combat vary considerably, everybody needs oxygen at some point.
Strength is relative

Equally as strong as the PPA–$\dot{V}O_2\text{max}$ relationship was that between PPA and muscular endurance, quantified here by pull-up performance. These two attributes were also associated with each other, which was unsurprising as they both are influenced by body mass. Although the relationship between physical performance and body mass is not necessarily straightforward [Åstrand and Rodahl 1986], $\dot{V}O_2\text{max}$ is typically expressed as the maximal oxygen uptake relative to body mass, while body mass provides the sole resistance in pull-ups. Interestingly, PPA was not related to neither total body mass nor body fat mass, similar to previous findings in physically active cohorts [Morano et al. 2011]. Actual performance ability, then, might be more important to the practitioner’s perceptions than weight, and by conceivable extension, looks. Although pulling is a common movement in BJJ, the exact pull-up pattern is rarely seen. Pull-up performance may instead reflect a general strength-to-weight ratio which, in a weight class sport such as BJJ, offers a performance advantage.

Notably, neither maximal squat nor bench press strength was associated with PPA. There is no question that maximal strength can be beneficial to grappling performance and thus a potential source of confidence for the practitioners. Indeed, evidence suggests that stronger grapplers are better grapplers [Chaabene et al. 2017; Franchini et al. 2011; Silva 2012]. In BJJ specifically, more skilled practitioners have repeatedly demonstrated better performance in the bench press [da Silva et al. 2015; Marinho et al. 2016]. However, performance in these exercises typically favors larger individuals and the PPA scale may not fully capture the sport-specific benefits of being big and strong, but rather be more biased towards smaller and faster individuals, with statements involving agility, grace, and speed outnumbering those on strength.

The notion that physical fitness can mediate changes in self-efficacy is not new [McAuley et al. 2000], and the significance of physical attributes such as strength and endurance in BJJ, particularly in a competitive setting, is fairly clear. Parenthetically, as opposed to strength and conditioning training that leads to improved physical fitness, skill training, e.g., technical BJJ drilling, may actually have no meaningful effect on self-esteem [Spence et al. 2005]. Although the impact of being fit is hard to quantify, because the sport is not about being the strongest or fastest, it still matters, often a lot. Although BJJ does not tend to produce highly fit athletes [Ovretveit 2018b; Andreato et al. 2017], the likely cause is a lack of sufficient stimuli to produce adaptations above a certain level and not a lack of importance of fitness in the sport. And, assuming the relationships observed in the present study are valid, physical fitness may protect against attrition. In the context of BJJ and self-efficacy, this boils down to the notion that fitter athletes have greater belief in their ability to apply their skills, however poor or great they may be, in BJJ. Repeated application of said skills will inevitably lead to improvements which in turn will reinforce their beliefs. Conversely, unfit practitioners are physiologically more likely to crumble and quit.

LIMITATIONS

Although this exploratory analysis may offer several potential hypotheses for future research, they are not without limitations. The analyses relied on combining data from cross-sectional studies that were not specifically designed to tease out associations between perceived and actual physical ability. The study population was smaller than what is typical in sport psychology research, including studies on physical self-efficacy. Additionally, the reliability of the PPA scale was poor, with two items even demonstrating negative item-total correlations. Although a reanalysis with a modified instrument with acceptable reliability generally supported the initial observations, the poor reliability is an issue, and caution should be taken when assessing PPA in this population. A potential cause for the reliability issues could be that the scale was not translated, but administered in its original language, English. This was done because the study population consisted of practitioners from various countries, most of which spoke English as their second language and some as their first. Considering the challenges associated with novel translations of a validated instrument, this was likely the best solution for an international study sample but may have influenced outcomes. Albeit interesting and perhaps logical, the relationships between PPA and aerobic and muscular endurance are speculative. Although the present study hinted towards such associations, the findings are still inconclusive. Additional studies specifically designed to tease out this and other potential relationships between perceived and actual physical ability in BJJ practitioners are encouraged.

CONCLUSIONS

The present observations suggest that aerobic and muscular endurance may be associated with perceived physical ability in BJJ practitioners. The physical demands and structure of the sport lend support to the validity of these relationships. Although it is plausible that practitioners with a high baseline level of fitness are more likely to experience mastery on the mat, an emphasis on technical rather than physiological development is more conducive to the progression of actual, sport-specific ability. The interaction between physical fitness and self-efficacy in combat sports practitioners, both in terms of performance and adherence, is compelling yet remains speculative.
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METAMORPHOSES OF MARTIAL ARTS
MEDITATIONS ON MOTIVATIONS AND MOTIVE FORCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
PAUL BOWMAN

DOI
do: 10.18573/mas.119

ABSTRACT
In Ovid’s Metamorphosis, change takes place at the whim of the gods, albeit often for clear reasons and with clear allegorical or didactic meanings. In Kafka’s Metamorphosis, however, change is inscrutable, unfathomable, irresolvable, and simply something to be borne. The speculation animating the following reflection is that the global pandemic of 2020 induced a metamorphosis in the lifeworlds of martial artists, the psychological and emotional effects of which have been severe from the start, while the pragmatic consequences and implications for the near to mid-term future remain unclear. The future form, content, and cultural status of the entity ‘martial arts’ all remain uncertain. Future studies will undoubtedly map the changed terrain. But for now, in the midst of the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, what follows is a personal and theoretical reflection, written at a time and from a position in which there are more questions than answers. This reflection seeks to capture something of the structure of feeling of this situation and to reflect on its potential consequences for ‘martial arts’ and ‘martial artists’, as viewed from one (g)local position and perspective.

KEYWORDS
Pandemic, loss, martial arts, taiji, BJJ, identity, transformation.

CITATION
do: 10.18573/mas.119
I intend to speak of forms changed into new entities
– Ovid, Metamorphoses

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into an enormous insect.
– Kafka, Metamorphosis

PART ONE: GRIEF

Denial

By early 2020, I had already been through my own personal martial arts metamorphosis. For complex family reasons, I had switched from a lifetime of pugilistic training in 2019, in order to focus on something entirely new – grappling and groundfighting. This change immediately precipitated a kind of physical and intellectual renaissance for me. My energies, aims and interests had quickly transformed; new ideas, new research questions and projects were appearing, and I was more excited about the immediate future than I had been for some time.

Meanwhile, news reports increasingly heralded the approach of a new, sometimes fatal virus. Like many, I tried to ignore the approach of COVID-19. However, by mid-March 2020, in the UK, there was no avoiding it. My last BJJ class was a lunchtime session followed that evening by a kickboxing class with my children. After that I took the decision to pause training – ‘for a while’. Near the end of March 2020, Britain went into full lockdown. There could legally be no more face-to-face martial arts classes for anyone in the UK, for an indefinite amount of time. Reports of similar lockdowns and restrictions continued to spread across the globe.

Soon ‘a little while’ transformed into a little longer. For how long, no one had any reliable way of knowing. At first, lockdown was unnerving, uncanny. What contributed most to the eeriness was not knowing, when, how, even if, it would end. Over and above many questions, one haunted me: When could I go back to training?

Yet I was lucky, and I knew it. I am white, propertied, middle class and middle aged, with a secure job, and a house that has enough rooms and technology for everyone in the family to have their own workspace and privacy. Not only that, we also have a relatively secluded garden. And the spring weather was kind. Like many others, I soon found myself digging out and dusting down a lifetime’s collection of different pieces of training kit, from weights to weapons to punch bags and more; training alone, in the garden. Unfortunately, this did not provide me anything like a BJJ fix. So, with the money I was saving on neither commuting nor eating out nor paying expenses for the social lives of my teenage children, I bought not one but two different grappling dummies. My aim was to practice throws, locks and submissions, and to continue to develop new skills.

That was the plan. But, at the same time, there was a creeping dread, and a growing paralysis. To be able to train, I needed to learn, and to learn, I needed not only a teacher, but also a training partner. I had neither. So, I could not really train.1 As for my university work, in the early weeks, I battled on, trying to finish work projects on time – proofs, indexes, issue 9 of Martial Arts Studies, and so on. But after finishing jobs that had already been close to completion, I found I could not begin anything new. At the same time, my Cardiff University students had quickly scattered to the four winds and were all on different time zones. This meant that teaching effectively fell to pieces too. Yet I had to complete their courses. So, to deliver lectures, I would try to find the quietest room in the house, the simplest software and best platform to record, upload, and communicate them. But, talking to myself in a bedroom was as dispiriting as grappling with a lifeless dummy. With no real-time feedback of any kind, it did not feel anything at all like giving a lecture. Quite quickly, it all came to feel quite depressing.

Anger and Depression

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s ‘stages of grief’ model [Kübler-Ross and Byock 2019] is well known but often critiqued. It is most easily critiqued if one interprets it literally and simplistically. In its crudest form, the stages of grief model proposes a sequence, running from denial to anger, to bargaining, to depression, and finally to acceptance. Of course, these are descriptive terms for dominant emotional states after (literal or metaphorical) bereavement, and they can arise in any order, or even at the same time. For me, it was denial and anger that jostled for position at first. Before lockdown, like many, I denied that anything was coming or that it would have any significant effect. And I was angry that governments seemed to be over-reacting. There would be no global convulsions, no crises of any kind across societies, and certainly not in the world of martial arts training, I insisted. But then it arrived.

Like many, I still denied that it was really happening, or refused to accept that it would last very long. I felt generally annoyed, irritated,

1 Bill practitioners have long supplemented their training with high consumption of online tutorials (Spencer 2014). However, during lockdown, I entirely lost my appetite for these.
and often angry about having to miss training, about being prevented from getting my regular fix, and having my weekly routines ruined. But living in this relation, flipping and oscillating between ‘this isn’t happening’ and ‘this shouldn’t be happening’ to ‘oh my god, this really is happening’ caused my emotional state to oscillate at first between denial and anger, and then between denial and something akin to depression. As I wrote in a blog post on 30th March 2020:

Am I doing fine? I’m finding it hard to concentrate, hard to stay motivated, hard to push forward on anything, hard to take seriously the idea that I am still supposed to be teaching university students, supervising BA and MA dissertations and PhDs, still on committees, still reviewing grant applications and book and journal manuscripts, still involved in the making of strategic decisions, still the editor of academic journals, still the organiser of conferences – conferences that I don’t want to admit may not happen. I can’t seem to get motivated to start work on anything that would take more than one session to complete; and things that I would normally finish in an hour are taking me all day, or longer. I’m putting things off, staring blankly at word documents, not able to engage with anything properly.

Even exercise, even martial arts. When I took the decision to pause BJJ shortly before the lockdown became official, I decided to work on some BJJ-specific kinds of stretching, movement and strength drills and routines, in order to come back stronger. Three weeks later, I start them now, if at all, and have to fight against the relentless question, ‘why bother?’

And yet, I am exercising more now than I possibly could before. I’m probably over-training. I’m aching most of the time. And it gets harder to get anywhere with my exercise sessions. I find myself frustrated and disappointed that my aging body needs rest days to recover when I have all this time on my hands – or, not so much ‘time on my hands’ as ‘time that I can’t fill with anything else because I can’t concentrate’. I walk down the garden, set up the punchbag, sweep leaves off the decking, put on the gloves, throw a few lacklustre jab-cross combinations and then just give up. I wander around, look in the fridge at my dwindling stocks of beer (the only thing I can’t even begin to approximate to BJJ. It was not even equivalent to decaffeinated coffee or alcohol-free beer, as it did not even have the taste, smell, feel or look of BJJ. It was merely aerobics and stretching. At many clubs, groups of four could form ‘social bubbles’, that could train together as normal. Should I join one? To get to any of these clubs would involve complex journeys and public transport. And members of my family are ‘high risk’. Could I take the risk?

Moreover, soon autumn and winter would be here. Colds and flus are themselves coronaviruses, and they are so contagious through autumn and winter that this is said to be their season. I began to predict that a return to normal training – or anything like it – would be unlikely before the end of winter. All I could do (to continue to ‘be’, or ‘feel like’ a martial artist) was hope, and make speculative plans. Plan A and Plan B; best-case and worst-case scenarios. I wagered that privately owned clubs one might find contact training. At many clubs, groups of four could form ‘social bubbles’, that could train together as normal. Should I join one? To get to any of these clubs would involve complex journeys and public transport. And members of my family are ‘high risk’. Could I take the risk?

The ‘stages of grief’ model presumes a process of working through, working out and coming to terms with a new reality. As weeks turned to months, I knew that I was trying to work out what the reality was for me as a ‘martial artist’. If you are not training, if you are not teaching, or learning – if you can barely bring yourself to practice at all – are you still a martial artist? For several months, my mind seemed to wrestle with an enforced transformation in my allowed identity statement: from the preferred ‘I am a lifelong martial artist and I am currently learning BJJ’; to the crushing ‘I used to be a martial artist, but I am no longer training’. To ward off the past tense from becoming the present reality (‘I used to be…’), my coping mechanism took the form of making plans.

Bargaining

As spring became summer, I decided that even if classes resumed, I would not be able to return to training until after a planned summer visit with elderly relatives. Safety first. The belief that I was making an active decision felt good. Summer bloomed; my club’s classes appeared online. I still did not participate. My BJJ instructor had once said to me, ‘I’m not letting anyone else’s ideas about fitness interfere with my training’. And yet, now, here he was, offering what were essentially online fitness classes. Even when, in late July, physical classes did start up again, there could be no partner-work – at least, not at my main club, which had to adhere to the rules of the community sports centre. Training had to be solo. There could be no contact. To me, this could not even begin to approximate to BJJ. It was not even equivalent to decaffeinated coffee or alcohol-free beer, as it did not even have the taste, smell, feel or look of BJJ. It was merely aerobics and stretching. At primarily owned clubs one might find contact training. At many clubs, groups of four could form ‘social bubbles’, that could train together as normal. Should I join one? To get to any of these clubs would involve complex journeys and public transport. And members of my family are ‘high risk’. Could I take the risk?

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Even before the ‘second wave’ arrived in autumn 2020 I had already accepted that it would all have to be deferred until next year, and next year felt like a very long way away. Even then, a voice in my head told me that I was still being naively over-optimistic. Would BJJ really be able to return to ‘normal’ anytime soon? Or, in the absence of a vaccine, ever?

BJJ is, after all, perhaps the most physically intimate, most sweat-sharing and breath-exchanging of all the martial arts, and hence a hotbed for the spread of infection. And, even if classes did reopen ‘properly’, could I really risk going, with a clear conscience? Members of my family have respiratory and other health problems. Could I risk infecting them? And what about me? Sure, I may irrationally want to believe that I am immortal and invincible, and maybe I might only get a mild or asymptomatic dose. But ‘what if…? And what about ‘long-COVID’ – in which recovery is interminable, with enduring aftereffects of respiratory problems and fatigue? Do I really want to risk that?

Acceptance, or Ossification?

Recap. In 2019 a domestic crisis had transformed my practice of martial arts. Martial arts had long provided me with ever-unfolding sources of enrichment, pleasure, exercise, stress relief, identity construction, and so much more. But, through no fault of their own (thanks, rather, to the effects of a reactive attachment disorder within my family), they had been turned into sources of extra stress, creating day-to-day difficulty, and putting pressure on my parental obligations.

In the face of so many obstacles, I had taken time out, to pause and reflect on why I was training martial arts at all. I reflected at length and asked myself what I was getting from my current training – indeed, from training per se – and whether that was what I wanted, or needed, at this stage in my life. I came to the conclusion that my martial arts practices had become commitments, obligations and responsibilities that were now in a sense holding me back from developing in different directions, and that were causing more problems than they were solving. At the same time, I felt strongly that (1) I wanted to learn something entirely new, and (2) that I needed to train on my terms and at times that suited me, not someone else. This realisation and the choice I made to begin BJJ had proved exciting and energising. At the time it even felt emancipating. I found entire new reserves of energy, enthusiasm and excitement, both physically and intellectually.

Then, in mid-March 2020, I had to come to terms with having what felt like the love of my life taken away in the very first blush of the honeymoon period. And I constantly agonised about what would happen, what would remain after this second, globally shared, legally enforced period of abstinence and reflection. At first, I tried to carry on. I tried to train BJJ techniques with my dummies and with my teenage daughters – who were, unfortunately, neither keen, nor large or strong enough, nor skilled in any way. Moreover, what I needed was to be taught. And to have a training partner. So that fizzled out.

Of course, I had other options. I had decades of pugilistic experience to draw upon. I could practice and perfect the skills I already had. But kicking, punching and weapons training were the very things I had decided to move away from only months before. They no longer excited me. Punching a punchbag or swinging sticks around in this context was no substitute for what I wanted to do. In fact, such activities only served to remind me starkly of what I was currently not able to do. So, my martial arts training ground to a halt. Even taiji – which I have practiced consistently since the day I submitted my PhD in March 2001 – held no appeal. Was I ‘accepting’ that this was all over and done? It did not feel like ‘acceptance’, or ‘coming to terms’. At least, not at first.

Therapy

If there is such a thing as comfort eating, there is also comfort exercising, comfort training. As a child I was surrounded by my father’s free-weights. I kept them in my bedroom from an early age, and had first tried to use them when I was at primary school. In fact, my love of weightlifting has repeatedly derailed my martial arts training – especially during my teens and twenties. Far too often, I have chosen weight training over martial arts training. During lockdown I reverted to form. I even reverted to archaic and pre-scientific approaches to weight-training, finding comfort in doing the ‘three sets of ten’ of my youth.

At first, I told myself that I was weight-training for strength and joint mobility in preparation for a return to BJJ. I told myself I would supplement this with yoga for flexibility – again, for BJJ. But after a while, these initial justifications began to fade. Soon, I was merely weightlifting, if not ‘for its own sake’, then at least for health, strength and fitness reasons that no longer made reference to ‘martial arts’. I did return to regular taiji practice, but principally for flexibility. I get bored of yoga and any other kind of stretching routine very quickly. Taiji keeps me as flexible as I need to be. It also helps recovery from other kinds of exercise, and (crucially) taiji always gives me a sense of (what we too easily label) ‘wellbeing’.
There are many ways to describe and account for the sense of wellbeing produced by taiji. There are many explanatory vocabularies. However, in broadly conventional medical terms, physiologically it can be said to relate, at least in part, to the ways that taiji’s relaxed, controlled and measured breathing and coordinated movement stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (the ‘rest and digest’ system). As well as taiji, other practices, such as gentle pranayama, meditation, qigong, yoga, and even things like sunbathing or taking warm showers all generate a sense of wellbeing via the stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system in similar ways [Tai et al. 2018; Figueroa, Demeersman, and Manning 2012; Lu, Hui-Chan, and Tsang 2016; Gerritsen and Band 2018; Chin and Kales 2019].

Higher-impact practices are said to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, by exposing the body to stress. In martial arts training, the most obvious source of such stress/stimulation is sparring (although ‘drilling’ with weapons can also be highly stressful in this way). However, in my experience, there is something quite unique about BJJ ‘rolling’ (sparring) in this regard. This is because rolling is not driven by the aim of point-scoring or even gaining a knockout. It is often described as an activity which ends in the ‘submission’ of an opponent (exemplified by one person ‘tapping out’ to signal their submission). But, as far as the human brain is concerned, rolling is experienced quite directly as a fight for life. This is not least because a primary target in BJJ is your partner’s ability to breathe. Even when not actively pursuing a choke or stranglehold, partners will often try to crush the breath out of the other person (using bodyweight, knees, feet or hands to press down onto chest, abdomen or neck, etc), even if only to distract or debilitate an opponent so as to achieve another outcome, such as an arm or leg lock, for instance. It is this fight for breath that most acutely stimulates the sympathetic (fight or flight) nervous system.

Since every challenging BJJ roll produces the feeling of a fight for life, the end of a session is like the aftermath of a near-death experience, with all of the attendant exhaustion, elation, and camaraderie that goes along with surviving such encounters. A BJJ saying goes, ‘if you don’t roll, you don’t know’. This has a range of possible meanings, but prime among them is that those who have never trained BJJ cannot begin to grasp its appeal, its feel, and its profound psychological and emotional effects. In a very real sense, BJJ can easily be regarded as a kind of therapy. The question is one of who it is that needs BJJ as therapy, and why.3

The contemporary condition (whether figured as modern or postmodern) has often been characterised as one permeated by sedentary media consumption, work-stress, insecurity, work/life imbalance, information overload, consumerism and indoor living [Žižek 2001; Bowman 2007]. The so-called ‘developed’, ‘Western’ world of consumer societies, neoliberal policies and deregulated economies, are acknowledged to be the cradle of ‘diseases of affluence’. Part of the background noise of this environment is generalised anxiety. One biological feature of chronic anxiety has been said to involve the constant low-level ‘running’ or ‘leaking’ of aspects of the sympathetic nervous system – manifesting in the anxiety-sufferer’s inability to ‘switch off’ feelings of stress and anxiety [Nestor 2020]. Activities that directly stress the mind and body – such as intense exercise and extreme experiences – have been connected with ‘correcting’ this constant ‘leak’. The argument is that they may do so by, in a sense, giving the body a dose of ‘real’ (physical and/or psychological) stress, which thereby ‘reminds’ the body what stress actually looks and feels like. This thereby allows the organism to ‘recalibrate’ and switch off anxiety-producing chemicals in the absence of ‘real’ physical stressors [McKeown 2015; Nestor 2020]. Short-term, low-level doses of the kinds of stimulation that would cause lasting damage or even death in prolonged exposure is called hormesis, or hormeric stress [Hof 2020].

3 DS Farrer’s recent article ‘Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is Therapy’ does not deal directly with this almost literal therapeutic dimension [Farrer 2019]. Farrer either ignores this dimension or treats it as an unstated starting point – something so obvious that it need not be engaged directly, preferring as he does a more theoretically diverse approach. However, my sense is that all studies could benefit from engaging with the biological, chemical, neurological and psychological dimensions in play here.

4 Far be it from me to indulge in biological essentialism, or to regard ‘nature’ or ‘biology’ as trumping ‘culture’. I have regularly critiqued this impulse. Rather, as Sloterdijk has put it, ‘From the start, nature and culture are linked by a broad middle ground of embodied practices’ [Sloterdijk 2013: 11]. In the same text, with reference to nature-vs-nurture debates, Sloterdijk observes: ‘It has been stated often enough in endless discussions on the difference between natural and cultural phenomena – and the methods of their scientific investigation – that there are no direct routes from the one sphere to the other’ [10]. However, he argues: ‘In truth, the crossing from nature to culture and vice versa has always stood wide open. It leads across an easily accessible bridge: the practising life. People have committed themselves to its construction since they came into existence – or rather, people only came into existence by applying themselves to the building of said bridge’ [11].
Motivation seems key. Motivations seem *prima facie* fundamental to people’s decisions as to whether or not to practice martial arts. But, the issue of declared or professed motivations opens out onto many obstacles, contradictions, and undecidables - for both researchers and ‘motivated’ practitioners alike. Indeed, the topic of motivations is a pragmatic, philosophical and theoretical minefield. On the one hand, simply asking people about their motivations seems like an obvious thing to do vis-à-vis finding out why they do what they do. But, on the other hand, there may be reasons to conclude that perhaps people are constitutively incapable of knowing their own motivations, or why they do what they do.

**Motivational Deficit**

Studies of martial arts uptake and practice are often formulated in terms of motivations [Meyer and Bittmann 2018]. Methodologically, such studies approach the matter via people’s own sense and statements of their conscious decisions about why they choose to do something. However, the problem here is that any consciously expressed motive, motivation or stated intention is at best merely one of several possible stories we might tell ourselves, or others, about ourselves. Sometimes such tales are told in all sincerity; sometimes they are tendentiously selected and edited collections of half-truths, packaged and repackaged, retooled and redeployed differently, to suit different contexts.

Motivations are narratives, and narratives are composed, not confessed. The statement of a motivation is a construct, not a datum. The methodological implication here is that too great a focus on conscious statements of motivation may be limited and limiting for researchers. Such declarations can easily involve elements of delusory or ego-gratifying self-construction, romantic or cynical self-promotion, *ex post facto* rationalisation, and so on.

There is more than one way to problematise the validity or viability of motivations as the way to try to learn about the reasons for people’s actions and activities. For instance, much has been made of Sigmund Freud’s discussion of the hypnotised subject who is told under hypnosis that, when they wake, they must walk around the edges of a room, and not directly across it. After hypnosis, the subject is instructed to walk directly across the room but conforms to the instruction given while they were under hypnosis – and walks around the edge. Upon being quizzed about why they did not just walk straight across the room, such subjects give all kinds of rationalisation for their unusual behaviour. All of these are grounded in claims about their own ‘conscious’ decisions, motivations and intentions: ‘I wanted to…’, ‘I needed to…’, ‘I thought I would just…’, etc. The Freudian point is that the ego thinks it is in control, but it is not necessarily even aware of what motivates actions.
Given the role played by factors of which we remain unconscious, our declared intentions, motives and motivations cannot be trusted.

The poststructuralist deconstruction of intentionality, led by Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, took things even further. The ultimate implications of poststructuralist arguments about motivations and intentions are not only are we not in control of the ultimate meanings of our actions, but also that we may not even necessarily be animated by the intention of having meanings in the first place [Husserl and Derrida 1962; Derrida 1981; Barthes 1977]. By the time we get to later poststructuralist work, the erstwhile human world often looks not only very ‘machinic,’ but also entirely lacking a mechanic [Protevi 2001].

Louis Althusser had already summed up much of this with his formulation: ‘History is a process without a Subject or a Goal’ [Althusser 1976: 99]. As Althusser explains: History ‘does not have a Subject, in the philosophical sense of the term, but a motor’. Some may disagree with his contention that the given circumstances in which ‘men’ act as subjects under the determination of social relations are the product of class struggles, and that class struggle is the ‘motor’ of all activity [99]. But once we acknowledge that there are complex social forces and relations acting on the contexts of our lives, many of which we may have no conscious awareness of and certainly no control over, the net result is the same. The analytical status of ‘motivation’ and ‘intention’ becomes opaque. Certainly, motivations and intentions exist, yet perhaps they must be treated not like the hand of God, but – to use Barthes’ image – like ‘a figure in the carpet’ – i.e., a part of the rich tapestry of the context, but not a uniquely determining factor.

Maybe what we tell ourselves and others about ourselves may at most reflect the current condition of our narcissism. Certainly, there are methodological problems involved in confirming whether anyone’s spoken representation of themselves matches their inner model, and whether either this representation or that self-model are adequate to any other ‘reality’ as verified by any other means. Put differently: if we base interpretations only on testimonial or interviews, we might never know with certainty whether we are hearing the truth, nor whether that declared or felt truth is actually correct, valid or reliable by any other measure. This is perhaps especially so when we get into the murky waters of accounts of why we do something.

From this perspective, the methodological primacy of asking practitioners about their motivations recedes. The issue may be resolved not by what we tell ourselves about our motivations. It may relate more to the question of what need a practice meets – a need that may exist outside of consciousness, or one that may defy clear or accurate verbal expression. Our rationalisations for our activities may well be alibis and pretexts whose real motors operate entirely outside of our consciousness.

### Post-Therapeutic Stress Disorder

This is not to suggest that we are all automata. It is, in the end, merely to suggest that the question of why people think they do something may not only be less verifiable but possibly even less pertinent than the question of what they get from it. The distance between the perceived/declared motivation and what is actually derived could account for why people’s declared motivations change over time (‘I initially started because X, but now I do it because Y’). Obviously, before beginning, people don’t necessarily know in any meaningful sense either what they are after or what they will get. You never know until you experience something what it will be like for you. But perhaps more significantly, it seems important to pose the possibility that people may never really ‘know’ what they are ‘getting’, even when they are in the process of getting it.

My intention in proposing this is not to disparage studies of intention and motivation (which have many valid aspects and make a range of contributions); but rather to try to capture a dimension to the question of what is ‘got’ from practice that exceeds the ‘motivations’ paradigm. Ultimately, while I want to enquire into similar issues, I believe we need to start from a different position or set of premises. Specifically, I want to propose that the conscious discourse of agents, and their conscious ways of conceptualising and articulating what a practice ‘gives’ does not necessarily capture a host of dimensions. Simply put, the discourse of conscious intentions does not capture the complete character of the transactions taking place.

Although practitioners may make reference to motivations ranging from self-defence to losing weight to gaining a black belt and so on, perhaps such rationalisations often fail to see, grasp, capture or communicate the ‘real’ reasons, which perhaps need to be formulated in different vocabularies (from the sociological to the philosophical to the psychological to the biological), rather than with reference to unitary or coherent models of motivations. At the very least, if we want to continue to work with a motivation/intention paradigm, it is important to incorporate awareness of the fact that there will be multiple incomplete, incompatible and contradictory levels of ‘motivation’ active at the same time, including some that are not present to conscious thought or able to find expression in words. Ritual, habit, community, identity, fantasy, as well as chemical, sociological, cultural,
economic, traditional, and other factors can all be less than conscious or inexpressible and should all be borne in mind when studying ‘intentions’.

Given the functional complexity, multiplicity and possibly even the inexpressibility of what practices like martial arts ‘give’ to their practitioners, it is likely that losing martial arts practice during the pandemic will, at the very least, cause ‘problems’ for the practitioner. Stages of grief will be experienced. Substitute practices will be sought.

Switching to different sorts of practice may induce more than temporary changes. Changes may go beyond practical aspects of day-to-day routines, and morph into different values, enjoyments, investments, identifications, apperceptions and senses of identity. Indeed, in the face of the replacement of ‘full’ martial arts practice by collections of substitute practices – stretching, running, meditating, and so on – it may well only be personal reference to a residual sense of identity and motivation (‘I am a martial artist, I do martial arts’) that will keep martial arts ‘alive’. Phrased the other way around: in the absence of full, formal group classes, and in the presence of substitute and alternative activities that feed different dimensions of the needs formerly satisfied by martial arts training, it may well be the very identity of ‘martial arts’ that is in jeopardy – or, at least, in metamorphosis.

The ultimate question is how durable this identificatory/motivational dimension is, and how well ‘being a martial artist’ and ‘doing martial arts’ will continue to measure up in comparison to more widely available alternative or substitute activities in a transformed environment. So, the pragmatic question is, what happens when the very possibility of being able to ‘do’ martial arts, or to ‘be’ a martial artist, are blocked for an indefinite amount of time?

In my case, in coming to terms with the absence of BJJ, I experimented with many possible replacement activities. Eventually, I constructed a combination of activities that in some senses seem to compensate for the absence of BJJ. It has already crossed my mind more than once that the pleasures and rewards of my new regimen may even come to jeopardise my planned return to BJJ in the future. So successful have my new-found practices and routines become in meeting my physical and psychological needs that henceforth I may question the need to leave the house to go to a formal taught martial arts class at all. And I may not be alone in thinking and feeling like this. This is a potential shared solution or whether it has wider significance, it seems important to reflect on what it is that made BJJ into one of the most popular and fastest growing martial arts in the world (pre-COVID-19), and to think through what it seems to give to its practitioners, in terms other than facile ‘health and fitness’ or easy ‘self-defence’ or ‘sport’ formulations.

**Proxy Religions**

BJJ is (or was, pre-COVID-19) the world’s fastest growing martial art. Understanding the reasons for its popularity and the implications of the spread of BJJ around the world as it penetrated and colonised the most intimate areas of the hearts and minds, identities and subjectivities, and daily lives of every one of its practitioners remains an important task for scholars of martial arts, physical culture and society. Its most well-known origin narrative gives it a mythic status, established by the monumental success of its practitioners in the first UFC events, and the revolution it precipitated in the world of martial arts in terms of revealing the need for martial artists and fighters to ‘learn groundfighting’. However, this is only a small part of the explanation for BJJ’s global appeal. Most practitioners are not competitive martial artists. Most turn to BJJ for reasons other than sport – and they stick with it for reasons other than those that led them to it in the first place. In short, BJJ is not merely popular because it is an essential component of MMA – which is today the world’s most lucrative combat sport. Rather, with or without MMA, BJJ attains a very different status for its practitioners.

Words often used by practitioners include ‘spiritual’, ‘life-changing’, ‘lifestyle’, and ‘way of life’. Public discourse on BJJ, in the form of the published and broadcast words of celebrity practitioners, news stories and non-specialist commentary on the practice, suggests that BJJ’s unique appeal relates to a number of interlocking features of its physical practice. Firstly, it gives access to forms of intimate intersubjective encounter that are impossible elsewhere in life. These encounters stage life-and-death scenarios in controlled environments that teach the management of fear and aggression, transform one’s relationship to pain and discomfort, and even to the limitations and capacities of one’s own body, while also producing myriad forms of satisfaction and fostering almost immediate companionship with erstwhile strangers [Spencer 2011]. At the same time, BJJ offers a superlative iteration of an embodied philosophy of non-violence (or ‘the lesser violence’), one that is not dissimilar to other martial arts such as taiji or aikido, but that supersedes these older forms in offering practitioners experiences and ‘results’ that align with contemporary health, fitness, beauty, strength and mobility ideals, neoliberal ideologies of self-investment, and the inexpressibility of what practices like martial arts ‘give’ to their practitioners, it is likely that losing martial arts practice during the pandemic will, at the very least, cause ‘problems’ for the practitioner. Stages of grief will be experienced. Substitute practices will be sought.

To make sense of the arrangement I came to, and to reflect on whether this is merely my individual solution or whether it has wider significance, it seems important to reflect on what it is that made BJJ into one of the most popular and fastest growing martial arts in the world (pre-COVID-19), and to think through what it seems to give to its practitioners, in terms other than facile ‘health and fitness’ or easy ‘self-defence’ or ‘sport’ formulations.
self-management, self-reliance, and so on, as well as alignment with appealing philosophical worldviews as diverse as Stoicism and Taoism.

This quick sketch indicates something of the range of attractions and rewards involved in BJJ practice. Of course, there is a chance that this account may be too generalising. After all, can BJJ really be the ‘same thing’ – the same experience, with the same implications – for all practitioners, across all contexts? It is a poststructuralist cliche to assert that nothing means exactly the same thing twice [Derrida 1981; 1987]. Nonetheless, it is possible to agree with the idea that it will be at least slightly different for everyone, and yet to discern patterns of regularities in reiterated meanings and recurring values [Laclau and Mouffe 1985]. For, although a practice or a thing may not necessarily mean the same things across all contexts, or serve the same social functions everywhere, what it ‘is’ or ‘does’ is likely to relate to a familiar position within a predictable constellation of possibilities.

It is reasonable to affirm that there are regularly recurring key coordinates related to what BJJ may mean/represent, be, and do for its practitioners (which, of course, suggests some of the ways that ‘motivation-focused’ studies are indeed valuable). For instance, both the media discourse about it and my own (‘autoethnographic’) experience suggest that something specific to the practice induces a kind of ‘spontaneous philosophy’ [Macherey 2009] or ‘organic ideology’ [Zizek 2001; Bowman 2007]. The philosophies and ideologies of BJJ may vary or modulate across cultures, societies, classes, times and spaces [Farrer 2019], but there are some remarkably regular recurring features. These features relate to the explicit evocation of self-knowledge and community bonding, the values of embracing humility and hierarchy, as well as embodied subjective wellbeing and a kind of proto-‘spirituality’.

The recurrence of such nodal points structuring the discourse in similar ways across multiple contexts is revealing – not just of BJJ as a globally popular practice – whose logic of spread is arguably similar in many ways to yoga [Singleton 2010] – but also of the ways that physical practices can morph into (proto-)religious practices [Spatz 2015]. Of course, we should hesitate before representing martial arts such as BJJ as being either ‘spiritual’ practices, ‘cults’, or neo-, quasi- or crypto-religions. Yet the rules, principles and rationales inherent to, or associated with, the practice of ‘pure’ BJJ (as opposed to its incorporation into MMA) do seem to involve ingredients and factors that induce a kind of evangelical worldview. Perhaps a study of BJJ, approached neither as an invented tradition nor as an example of orientalist misrepresentation, but rather as a modern, secular, sporting, health and self-defence practice, could cast new light on how, why and what it means to say that martial arts can become spiritual or religious practices.

None of this has been my focus, or could now be within the remit of this article. But, this quick evocation of the rewards and gratifications of BJJ – ranging from friendship to intimacy to improved physicality to changes in psychological dispositions potentially aligned with ‘spirituality’ – serves merely to give some context to the discussion of what kinds of practice might appear as potential ‘replacements’ when BJJ is no longer an option.

Desire

Peter Sloterdijk has proposed that ‘spiritual’ and even ‘religious’ practices are at root physical practices whose meanings and understandings have been wrenched in a certain direction. More precisely (and problematically), he argues that ‘religion does not exist’ and that there are only ‘variously misinterpreted anthropotechnic practice systems’ [Sloterdijk 2013: 84]. Translated into the context of martial arts practices, one might therefore say that there is no necessary connection between martial arts practices, spirituality and/or religion, but that it remains eminently possible that such connections might be made. The meditativeness of qigong and the mindfulness of taiji movements are both conduits to states of consciousness, perception, proprioception and interoception that might easily fall into the category ‘spiritual’ even for the most secular of modern students. The shared physicality, intimate sociality and institutionally managed messages of community generate a sense of shared identity, ideology and community in practices like BJJ which might easily be aligned with cults or religions.

This does not mean that in the absence of BJJ, practitioners will flock to gurus or swell church congregations. But it does indicate the kinds of structures of feeling that they may crave [Williams and Orrom 1954; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Birchall and Hall 2006]. In the purely physical exercise realm, with the closure of BJJ schools, my social media feeds overwhelmingly suggest that many practitioners seem to have turned to yoga (and yoga-like practices) as a replacement activity. Given the requirement for flexibility, many BJJ practitioners already incorporated yoga and yoga-like routines into their weekly schedules. So, the route from BJJ to yoga was already established and well-travelled. However, this is not a simple two-way street. BJJ practitioners may often turn to yoga as a supplement to their practice. Conversely, there are no necessary reasons why yoga practitioners would turn to BJJ as a supplement to theirs. This is not to say that there are no yoga practitioners who take up BJJ. It is rather to say that while there is a prima facie obviousness to the supplementing of BJJ with yoga(like) practices, there would have to be a very specific ‘martial arts motivation’ for a yoga practitioner to take up BJJ.
This perhaps says something about the status of yoga in the contemporary landscape or ecosystem of physical practices [Singleton 2010; Spatz 2015] – at least, under conditions of lockdown or situations in which solitary activities in smaller private spaces dominate our lives. Yet the risk for the practice of martial arts like BJJ is not merely that it may take many years for the world to become safe enough for unfettered practice to resume. It is also that, in the absence of regular classes or safe-training, and in the presence of a smorgasbord of alternative practices of physical culture, it is not merely the opportunity but also the very desire that might be lost – or transformed.

Perhaps the ultimate question is the constitution and maintenance of desire. What makes people desire martial arts? What avenues will remain visible or viable to move practically into the orbit of that desire now and in the future?

Identification

I have argued many times that martial arts is a discursive entity produced principally by media [Bowman 2010; 2011; 2014]. Nor am I alone in this [Brown 1997; Hunt 2003; Goto-Jones 2016; Trausch 2018]. Film and television generated the figure of ‘the martial artist’ and put this identity out there as an option to be desired and worked towards. Without the media invention of martial arts and its incarnation in the various figures of martial artists, entire generations would not have identified as martial artists and would not have chosen one or another martial art as a path or practice.

The good news for martial arts is that it seems unlikely that the mediatization of martial arts will end simply because the pandemic has paused and problematised many kinds of training. Films will still need fight scenes [Kendrick 2019]. Fight games continue to be core staples of computer gaming [Goto-Jones 2016; Trausch 2018]. In the West, MMA, boxing and wrestling continue to be too big a set of businesses to expect investors and entrepreneurs to walk away without a fight (so to speak). Moreover, in countries like China and South Korea, it must be remembered, practices like wushu and taekwondo remain major and heavily supported strings to their diplomatic bows; integral to performances of national identity, and stitched into numerous social institutions – cultural, commercial and educational, from museums to schools to cultural industries to martial arts faculties within sports universities, and more. So, images of martial arts will continue to proliferate. Because of all of this, martial arts will continue to be available as sources of fantasy, identification, ambition and identity construction, internationally.

But there will be mutations. Maybe the growth of BJJ will slow. Maybe it will atrophy. By the same token, maybe we will enter a new boom time for more distanced practices – weapons-based practices such as HEMA, heavily solo styles, such as taiji, or solo-kata aspects of karate, well-covered styles such as kendo, Ludosport, maybe even archery, and so on. We will see reinventions, reorientations: maybe a reduced focus on sport here, an amplified awareness of ‘mindfulness’, ‘breath-cultivation’, maybe even ‘qi’ there [Palmer 2007], and so on.

In the face of the globalisation of a potentially fatal respiratory infection, the growth of interest in matters such as breathing, as well as cardiac, respiratory and circulatory health, must surely be regarded as overdetermined, or as symptomatic of wider contextual factors and forces. Can it be considered mere random chance that in July 2020, a national British newspaper published a feature article on a new book called Breath [Nestor 2020], a book that I immediately felt compelled to buy? Or that this book introduced me to what is called the Wim Hof Method – a health-focused practice based on breathing exercises combined with cold exposure (cold showers and/or ice baths, etc.), all of which, individually or combined, generate feelings ranging from intoxication and euphoria to sharpened perception and physical control, and which seem able to reduce feelings of anxiety [Hof, Rosales, and Robinson 2012; Hof, Jong, and Brown 2017; Hof 2020]? Certainly not. The international spread of breath-focused health practices during the COVID-19 pandemic is perfectly understandable.

When I began to practice the Wim Hof Method, I would refer to it as ‘my Wim Hof Methadone’. This is because if I were addicted to BJJ, now ‘illegal’, this provided a kind of ‘legal’ substitute for something I had been getting from BJJ. The practice involved in the Wim Hof Method is quick and simple: one short session of breathing and breath holding sequences per day, plus a period of cold exposure (such as a cold shower or ice bath) per day, along with some basic yoga-style exercises as optional extras [Hof, Rosales, and Robinson 2012; Hof, Jong, and Brown 2017; Hof 2020].

Maybe the breathing and full and empty breath retentions have the same physiological effect as fighting against a chokehold. Maybe cold exposure is experienced on some deep level of the body as essentially equivalent to fighting for one’s life against an opponent. Either way, on reading about the Wim Hof Method in Nestor’s book, Breath [Nestor 2020], I initially tried it on a whim. I was immediately pleased with the ‘natural high’ effect of the breath exercises. This new sensory hit in a period of lockdown and isolation gave me enough reason to continue. One morning, I followed the breath-practice with taiji. This was quite a profound experience: my sense of perception seemed altered, slightly psychedelic yet precise; the world seemed dreamlike and yet my...
movements and focus were crystal clear; I knew I was moving much slower than normal, but simultaneously felt entirely unclear about speed (in fact, I was unsure about the concept of speed *tout court*); and my movement and perception seemed uncommonly fluid: I felt more in control than ever, without needing or trying to be in control at all. I was hooked.

In those early days, I also became keenly aware that something had switched off my anxiety. I had read that Wim Hof Method could do that, but hadn’t realised how enabling – how emancipating – it would be. I felt it intensely on a daytrip to a beauty spot with the family. I noticed I wasn’t worried – about what time it was, about where we were, what the plan was, about our group dynamic, about what would happen if this or that were to happen, and so on. This was new for me.

Not constantly worrying, I found I could start doing. My desire to train taiji and to resume ‘martial arts’ (albeit solo) returned full force. I invested in a new punchbag and a new floor-ceiling-bag (AKA top-and-bottom ball), and loved the practice. I now accepted solo training – ‘for as long as’ – in the age of COVID-19. I was once again able to make my preferred identity affirmations about myself to myself: ‘I am still a martial artist – I am still who I wanted to be’. Even though everything had changed – perhaps even the form, content, and meaning of ‘martial arts’ and ‘martial artist’.

However, by the same token, it is no longer clear whether I now ‘need’ to return to a formal class of any kind – something that would signal the demise of my BJJ practice, if not my taiji or my percussive/pugilistic forms of training, in which I have enough years of training to feel able to train productively by myself, to some degree.

**Being Singular Plural**

Clearly, the reasons for people’s interest, attention, desire and investment (or ‘motivations’) must all be approached in terms of the backdrop of broader cultural movements and complex moments. Today’s cultural conjuncture is perhaps as strongly informed by media messages as it is by COVID-19 restrictions. For instance, since the nostalgic teen karate series *Cobra Kai* migrated to the mainstream in 2020 (moving from YouTube’s less popular paid service to the near ubiquitous Netflix), I have had people contact me to ask if I could teach karate to their teenage children. The fact that I have not done karate since I was 14 suggests much about people’s general literacy around martial arts. But more importantly it suggests that the (entirely non-referential and often counter-factual) ‘karate’ of *Cobra Kai* has been capable of capturing and redirecting (or constituting and organising) the desires of a new generation of potential martial artists. We may yet even see the emergence of ‘actual’ Cobra Kai classes and Miyagi-Do dojos around the world in the not too distant future.

Pointing out the power and place of different media in stimulating, generating and organising desires in and around bodily practices, belief systems and aesthetic and ideological lifeworlds such as martial arts, has been a key part of my intellectual project in the field of martial arts studies, since day one of my involvement in the academic discourse on martial arts. It gives me hope that today, when it is easy to feel as if we are standing on a precipice, peering over the brink, expecting to see the void, all alone and all on our own, we still see the UFC, Netflix ninjas and teenage karate kids. These images, which so many ‘serious’ martial arts practitioners regard as an embarrassment, are actually key to understanding a great deal about the constitution and continuation of our practice.

We began with two epigraphs: one from Ovid, the other from Kafka; and the observation that while, on the one hand, Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* depicts changes taking place for clear reasons that can be easily allegorized; in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* change is essentially obscure, impenetrable, uncanny and irreducibly disturbing. In our own present moment, it may feel like we are living through the latter: We might feel like we have become alien(ated) objects, locked indoors, prisoners, inscrutable to self and others. But I feel confident that we will ultimately – inevitably – turn our metamorphosis into the former.

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Legacies of the Drunken Master: Politics of the Body in Hong Kong Kung Fu Comedy Films
Luke White
University of Hawai'i Press, 2020
240 pages
$68.00 (hardback)

INTRODUCTION

Early in his magisterial work of ordinary language philosophy, The Claim of Reason, Stanley Cavell postulated that ‘a measure of the quality of a new text is the quality of the texts it arouses’ [Cavell 1979: 5]. This can be understood in two ways, or directions. On the one hand, in the sense of ‘arouse’ as ‘to awaken’, this can be understood in the direction of the past, as the historical texts that a new text brings renewed attention to or reconsiders/reconfigures. On the other hand, in the sense of ‘arouse’ as ‘to stir to action’, this can be understood in the direction of the future, as the subsequent texts that a new text can in time be said to have inspired. However and in whatever direction(s) one understands Cavell’s postulation, it is readily apparent that Luke White’s new text Legacies of the Drunken Master: Politics of the Body in Hong Kong Kung Fu Comedy Films is of a very high quality, for it both insightfully reconsiders and reconfigures countless historical texts, from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin in the broad sphere of cultural theory to the work of David Bordwell and Leon Hunt in the narrow sphere of martial arts cinema studies, while also providing nuanced, insightful, and inspiring original arguments relating to cultural theory and film history that will certainly invigorate scholars working in the areas of cultural studies, film studies, and martial arts studies.

White begins his text by staking out his scholarly territory. With a nod to Bakhtin’s observation that ‘laughter and its forms represent […] the least scrutinized sphere of the people’s creation’ [Bakhtin 1965/1984: 4, quoted in White 2020: 1], White laments the fact that, despite the growing presence of martial arts cinema in recent scholarship in and between cultural studies, film studies, and martial arts studies, no book-length academic explorations of kung fu comedy exist in the English language. This in spite of the fact that kung fu comedy is:

a historically significant phenomenon […] the significance of [which] is only amplified when we remember that the genre’s lovable everyman and global megastar, Jackie Chan, for many years regularly topped box offices not only in Hong Kong but across Asia before making the jump in the 1990s to a level of Hollywood superstardom not even achieved by Bruce Lee. [White 2020: 3]

To be clear, White’s purpose in Legacies of the Drunken Master is not to investigate the reasons for the scholarly neglect of kung fu comedies. Rather, White’s purpose is ‘to redress the critical neglect of the kung fu comedy’ by ‘offering a detailed exploration of its aesthetic properties and pleasures’ on the one hand and ‘contextualizing it and making sense of its social and political significance’ on the other. It is his ‘fundamental gambit […] to take the kung fu comedy seriously’ [White 2020: 5].
Having thus staked out his investigative terrain, White next clarifies his methodological orientation. White states in no uncertain terms that his text ‘is unashamedly “theoretical”’, by which he means to distinguish his overtly theoretical approach to kung fu comedy from the ‘Post-Theory’ orientation of pioneering martial arts cinema scholar David Bordwell, who, along with Noel Carroll, was instrumental in moving film studies away from what they referred to alternatively (and pejoratively) as ‘Grand Theory’, ‘Screen Theory’, or, as Bordwell himself preferred, ‘SLAB Theory’ [cf. Bordwell and Carroll 1996; see also Bordwell 1989]. For their part, Bordwell and Carroll encouraged scholars to eschew the (politically-minded) dogmatism of earlier eras of film studies, in which capital-T ‘Theory’ reigned supreme, and push the discipline in the direction of more modest and diverse investigations of cinematic phenomena (like the kung fu comedy) [cf. Barrowman 2014a]. In this way, White’s investigation is actually of a piece with the Post-Theory initiative. However, at the end of the day, White is a cultural studies scholar, and so his work is indebted to the dominant disciplinary strain of postmodern (neo-)Marxism [cf. Barrowman 2019a]. To his credit, though, this methodological orientation did not hinder White in his investigation. On the contrary, White managed to produce an assiduously researched, commendably nuanced, and extraordinarily rich investigation of martial arts cinema history generally and the kung fu comedy specifically.

Structurally, White’s layout in this text is rather idiosyncratic. As opposed to dividing up his chapters chronologically, or organizing them according to specific stars or directors, White’s investigation proceeds with reference to a handful of organizing concepts: Carnival, Utopia, Violence, Hysteria, Masculinity, and Legacies. In deference to the structure of White’s text, this review will also be organized according to these concepts.

**CARNIVAL**

After his introduction, White moves immediately to the notion of the ‘carnival’ as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin. Having acknowledged the seemingly inappropriate desire to apply ‘an essentially European canon […] to cultural production from a postcolonial, East Asian context’, White works in this initial chapter to demonstrate the relevance of Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival, and specifically of the ‘grotesque body’, to the kung fu comedy in a way that ensure[s] that the Hong Kong context does not get “emptied out” […] and that “theory” does not get hypostatized or universalized’ [White 2020: 19]. And it must be stated that he executes this theoretical two-step superbly. Not only is White’s articulation of the Bakhtinian notions of the carnival and the grotesque body fascinating in and of itself, he brings it provocatively to bear on a discussion of the differences between the ‘perfected’ body of Bruce Lee, which is on display in such iconic ‘heroic’ kung fu films as *Fist of Fury* (1972), and the ‘imperfect’ bodies of the kung fu comedy’s parade of ‘cripples, drunks, and geriatrics’ [White 2020: 49]. In so doing, he foregrounds the extent to which the kung fu comedy is ‘antiauthoritarian’ and to which it ‘resists […] traditional roles and norms’ from typical aesthetic representations of masculinity to ‘the conventionality of “Confucian” culture’ [White 2020: 51]. Right off the bat, White demonstrates the ease with which he can move from cataloguing the generic constituents of kung fu comedy to theorizing the carnival, the grotesque, and the antiauthoritarian in philosophical and political terms. That is, in this chapter White demonstrates the harmonious balance that he managed to strike between cinephile and theorist, fan and scholar.

On the whole, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the archetype of the Drunken Master in the specific cinematic context of late 1970s Hong Kong cinema. *The Drunken Master*, for White, ‘most clearly epitomizes’ the historical shift in Hong Kong martial arts film production toward comedy [White 2020: 40]. But White does not merely want to historically situate the Drunken Master. This is merely a prelude to an insightful theoretical articulation of what the Drunken Master stands for, or, more accurately, stands against.
While the *tiyu* (physical culture) movement of the twentieth century sought to use martial arts to promote youthfulness, fitness, health, and hygiene as the path to an empowered Chinese modernity, the ‘Drunken Master’ – even in his very name – seems to transgress such an equation. Aged, alcoholic, and slovenly, as a wandering beggar the iconic figure of the drunken master lives outside both the respectable Confucian family and the world of work, defying both the productivity of the modern body and its reproductive powers. Unwashed and dressed in filthy, stinking rags, he refuses [modern] disciplinary forces [...] [while] the films seem to refuse the processes of political subjectification that ‘kung fu’ might thus have offered. [White 2020: 40]

This is where White executes his impressive argumentative turn. Though kung fu comedies *seem* to be ‘merely’ comedic, silly, trivial, etc., it is White’s contention that the fact that films like *Snake in the Eagle’s Shadow* (1978) and *Drunken Master* (1978) are different in tone and orientation than, say, *The Assassin* (1967) or *Fist of Fury* is (importantly) *not* to say that the former films are apolitical or irrelevant to questions of politics. White’s gambit, then, is not merely to take kung fu comedies *seriously*, but to take them *politically*. And his arguments to this effect, including in this chapter in which he argues for understanding kung fu comedies as promulgating a politics of ‘indisicipline’ [cf. White 2020: 41-58], are intelligently and persuasively formulated.

However, there are a few claims in this chapter that are a bit eyebrow-raising. For instance, I wonder if White does not go too far down the theory rabbit hole in discussing Robert Stam’s notion of the grotesque body as resisting the alleged ‘body fascism’ that such ‘idealized physiques’ as Bruce Lee’s ‘might entail’ [White 2020: 49]. For one thing, anything ‘might entail’ anything else. Why should we, if we should, repudiate or distance ourselves from Lee’s emphasis on physical fitness, or, in White’s own terms, ‘normalizable corporeal perfection’ [White 2020: 49]? For another thing, the term ‘fascism’ is thrown around much too frequently and casually these days, and White never makes clear to what extent anything even remotely connected to Lee could be said to be in support of anything even remotely fascistic, especially considering the frequency with which Lee’s persona and films have been discussed in contexts of disenfranchisement, resistance, protest, etc., as opposed to totalitarianism, superiority, subjection, etc. [cf. White 2020: 49].

I also wonder if White does not protest too much with respect to the alleged distance that separates Bruce Lee as a ‘heroic’ kung fu star and Jackie Chan as a ‘comedic’ kung fu star. It seems to me that it is less a question of either heroic or comedic and more a question of the ratio of heroism to comedy in a given film or characterization. At one point, White draws attention to the alleged ‘humorlessness’ of *Fist of Fury* to mark out a contrast between the heroic kung fu films of the early 1970s and the comedic kung fu films of the late 1970s [White 2020: 34]. But can one really describe as ‘humorless’ a film in which Lee pays tribute to Jerry Lewis and does a comedic turn as a goofy telephone repairman? In point of fact, every single one of Lee’s films from *The Big Boss* (1971) through *Enter the Dragon* (1973) has at least one or two scenes, or one or two characters, meant to be comedic and which/who provide comedic relief. In *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) in particular, in the famed double nunchaku fight scene in the restaurant back alley, Lee integrates intense combat and silly comedy seamlessly in a manner that anticipates the likes of Chan and Sammo Hung. Is there perhaps even more benefit – historically and theoretically – to exploring the extent to which Lee and Chan are *similar* rather than positioning them at opposite poles? This is, of course, an open question – to White and to any other scholars interested in this topic – and one which serves to indicate the potential texts that White’s text could arouse in future scholarly efforts.
Having established the historical and theoretical ‘place’ of the Drunken Master, and having initiated his political argument vis-à-vis the claim that kungfu comedies are not apolitical but merely politically orient themselves differently than their martial arts cinema predecessors, in the second chapter White moves on to a consideration of the ‘utopian’ potential of the genre. This is where White introduces the work of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin, of course, famously wrote about silent Hollywood slapstick comedy as well as Disney cartoons. For White, this material provides an inroad to a theoretical discussion of the utopian potential of kungfu comedy insofar as the latter can be conceived as inheriting the legacies of the former. In the course of a stirring reading of Snake in the Eagle’s Shadow as offering in Jackie Chan’s youthful protagonist a Mickey Mouse figure who ‘subverts the “hierarchy” of beings, plunging into the inanimate and mechanical (in [the] alliance with and imitation of machinery), into the animal (in becoming snake, cat, monkey, or the like), and also into the super or post-human in [his] assumption of new powers (in becoming dragon – or even drunken god)’ [White 2020: 69], White persuasively illuminates the degree to which Chan duplicates the comedic efforts of Charlie Chaplin in Modern Times (1936) to ‘tarry with the modern’, as it were.

This opens out onto White’s broader interest in a specifically Benjaminian notion of utopia. If, in White’s sagacious elucidation of Benjamin’s work, Mickey Mouse ‘emphasizes the utopian powers […] of transformation [e.g. becoming snake]’ and the ‘rejection of the “prison-world” of everyday experience’ [White 2020: 70], then Jackie Chan – and, beyond Chan as an individual star, the protagonists of kungfu comedies – can be similarly conceived. Indeed, it is on this point that White manages to connect his previous exploration of the carnivalesque and the grotesque to his current exploration of utopia.

The kungfu comedy becomes legible [by virtue of White’s Bakhtinian and Benjaminian understanding of it] as an insubordinate reaction to experiences of the alienation of the body […] and as offering a redemptive image in which the new powers of the [modern] world are incorporated (or in Benjamin’s terminology, ‘innervated’) into the body itself […] These powers, within the cinematic imagination at its most emancipatory, open up a critical vision that refuses to accept the world as it is […] envisioning the possibility of transformation not only of the body and the self, but also of the whole world of things within which we live. Such a cinematic dream-world (opposed to the ‘prison-house’ of the everyday) begins to resemble the utopia of carnival in which all things are involved in constant transformation. [White 2020: 73]

Beginning with a reading of Snake in the Eagle’s Shadow, White concludes this chapter with another brilliant reading of a film, this time of Chan’s Project A (1983). In the course of his analysis, White notes the slapstick-inspired manner in which Chan ‘builds [his] humor out of the transformation of objects from their mundane uses to new and surprising ends, based not on convention, but on the morphology of the object itself’ [White 2020: 75; see also Barrowman 2019b], ultimately concluding that in Project A, even though it ‘certainly doesn’t offer the kind of open anticolonial and ethnonationalist revolt’ as seen in something like Lee’s Fist of Fury, ‘Chan as Dragon Ma nonetheless introduces an element of anarchy into colonial spaces through his physical traversal of them and his refashioning of their logic’ [White 2020: 77]. In the end, White argues that Project A enacts ‘a kind of “kungfu revenge” upon “space[s] of class and colonial privilege’ [White 2020: 80].

Of course, the very notion of utopia has quite a bit of historical and theoretical baggage, none of which White picks through at any point in this chapter. Though his film-specific analyses are rich and insightful, the larger questions of the theoretical and practical validity of utopianism – whether in a specifically Marxist context.
or in any other political context – were left unexamined. This leaves quite a large hole in White’s discussion, as he frequently invokes Marxist ideas and arguments as if self-evidently true, on the one hand, and as if oblivious to the fact that Marx himself was opposed to utopianism, on the other [cf. Sciabarra 1995, 2000; see also Sciabarra, Bissell, and Younkins 2019]. But this is more a question of politics than of cinema, and it is to White’s credit that very rarely does he push political ideas or arguments over or at the expense of articulating the discernible content of the films under consideration.

VIOLENCE

Avid readers of Benjamin will not be surprised to see that, after introducing Benjamin and spending time in the second chapter exploring his thoughts on Mickey Mouse, White moves on to a consideration of violence in the context of Benjamin’s dialogues with cultural critics Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. This makes for a particularly difficult chapter for White, seeing as he is tasked with exploring ‘a multifaceted phenomenon’, one which is ‘inherently an ambiguous, overdetermined phenomenon […] with a range of very different historical manifestations both on screen and off, each with very different meanings or ramifications’ [White 2020: 83]. Martial arts studies scholars will certainly find this chapter fascinating, as people like Sixt Wetzler [2018] and Benjamin Judkins [2018, 2019] have been encouraging more detailed considerations of violence and of the violent practices of martial arts, while others like Janet O’Shea [2018] and Alex Channon [2020; see also Barrowman and Channon 2018 and Bowman 2020: 214-239] have sought to move away from or challenge conventional understandings of martial arts as violent. Though I personally reject White’s bald assertion that ‘violence is, after all, always a matter of the irrational’ [White 2020: 83], and though I also reject his characterization of capitalism as ‘exploitation’ and especially as ‘violent exploitation’ [White 2020: 84], I nevertheless find his consideration of cinematic violence in kung fu comedies interesting and astute.

One of White’s contentions is that the violent comedy of kung fu comedies, much like the violent comedy of Hollywood slapstick, is capable of ‘inculcating a capacity for feeling that is at once corporeal and also emotional’ [White 2020: 85; see also Clayton 2007]. That is to say, the violence in kung fu comedies is not (necessarily or inherently) detrimental or deleterious; rather, it is (or can potentially be) beneficial, at least to the extent that kung fu comedies are capable of channeling destructive urges into the realm of representation [and thereby] ameliorating their expression in life’ [White 2020: 88]. While this is a familiar argument regarding media violence (be it film violence, or TV violence, or video game violence, etc.), White adds color to this theoretical picture by considering the importance in kung fu comedies, and especially to the star persona of Jackie Chan, not of violence administered but violence suffered.

With reference to Chan’s celebrated practice not only of executing incredibly daring stunts but of showcasing the physical pain endured in order to execute those stunts, White considers the significance of these visual displays of violence suffered by kung fu comedy protagonists. White acknowledges the possibility of reading this aspect of kung fu comedies as capitulation to capitalism. Leaving aside the implicit premises that capitalism is bad and therefore capitulation to it is bad, which are by no means self-evidently true, such a reading would contend that the fetishization of suffering in the Chan star persona works to (a) pacify viewers in a manner analogous to Adorno and Horkheimer’s assessment of Donald Duck (‘Donald Duck in the cartoons […] get[s] [his] thrashing so that the audience can learn to take their own beating’ [Adorno and Horkheimer 1947/2002: 110]) and even to (b) valorize this ability to take a beating in a manner analogous to Mark Neocleous’ critique of the neoliberal notion of resilience (inasmuch as it presents, in his estimation, a false sense of virtue which masks the fact that the ‘traumas’ of capitalism are being naturalized [Neocleous...].
In contrast to such a reading, White encourages a perspectival shift whereby resilience is transformed from being a kind of neoliberal gaslighting to being a (specifically Chinese) virtue vis-à-vis the martial notion of ‘eating bitter’. After all, as White soberly avers, resilience is a prerequisite to resistance or revolt [White 2020: 94].

For the purpose of this argument, White usefully takes his accompanying film analysis, specifically of Chan's physical bravery and corporeal suffering, beyond Leon Hunt's well-known discussion of 'corporeal authenticity' [cf. Hunt 2003: 39-41]. However, in going beyond Hunt's coordinates vis-à-vis realism and representation, White creates problems of his own. For instance, White postulates that 'the kung fu comedy seemed to reverse the trend to increased “realism” and return to the deliberately theatrical elements of opera that the films of the early 1970s had eschewed' [White 2020: 97]. The problem here is that White does not make clear at the outset his sense of realism in the cinema, let alone realism in martial arts cinema. So, when he goes on to imply that notions of theater, dance, and music – to say nothing of the notion of the comedic – are by definition antithetical to realism, I am left wondering why and according to what definition(s). As I see it, kung fu comedies are capable of being just as realistic as, if not more realistic than, heroic kung fu films. Not only is it possible to ‘translate’ something dramatic into a comedic register without compromising or losing (any of the) realism – as in, for example, the way that, in his castle confrontation with Benny ‘The Jet’ Urquidez in Wheels on Meals (1984), Jackie Chan ‘translates’ the Jeet Kune Do ‘lesson’ of adaptability that Bruce Lee ‘teaches’ in his Colosseum confrontation with Chuck Norris in The Way of the Dragon [cf. Bowman 2010: 76-77 and Barrowman 2012] – it is also possible to understand manifestly comedic content, such as the frequency with which Chan exhibits through facial expressions or verbal cries his pain at falling down or getting punched or kicked, precisely as markers of realism [cf. Barrowman 2014b; see also Bowman 2010: 73-84 and Wong 2017]. Of course, this is less a critique of White's argument vis-à-vis violence and more a demonstration of threads left dangling vis-à-vis film theory and criticism. But, in the spirit of texts arousing past and future texts, a more thorough consideration of realism generally and realism in kung fu comedies specifically would be most welcome, whether by White himself and/or by other scholars interested in these implications vis-à-vis martial arts practice and aesthetic representation.

HYSTERIA

Indicating yet again the consistency and coherence of his investigation, White moves seamlessly from his consideration of violence, specifically in its comedic and hysterical modes, to a more elaborate consideration of the notion of hysteria itself. Situated within the psychoanalytic contexts of the writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, White moves from broad conceptions of kung fu comedies as hysterical in the sense that they provoke hysterical laughter and in the sense that the stars use their bodies in hysterical ways, to a technical conception of hysteria as naming the way that kung fu comedy characters relate to 'the conditions of bourgeois patriarchy' [White 2020: 110]. That is, if, as White contends, 'the social conformism of Hong Kong in the late 1970s seems to offer us something much more like the seemingly docile, silenced young women of the Victorian era than anything akin to Rey Chow’s “protestant ethnic”, then ‘if there is ‘resistance’ here of some sort […] it is likely to be on something of the same grounds as that of the hysterical rather than the radical activist’ [White 2020: 112]. Continuing to develop his larger argument vis-à-vis kung fu comedies and politics, White offers another instance of the kung fu comedy not being apolitical but merely reorienting its political content. Here lacking overt displays of resistance analogous to Bruce Lee kicking the 'No Dogs and Chinese Allowed' sign in Fist of Fury, kung fu comedies embrace a more stereotypically ‘feminine’ mode of resistance understandable with reference to the notion of hysteria.
What defines hysteria most fundamentally is its corporeal dimension – what Freud termed the ‘bodily conversion’ of the symptom, where, with the silencing of the voice, it is left to the body to speak and to take on the burden of communicating the subject’s trauma [...] The ‘exacerbated staging of the subject’ and ‘theatrical and operatic conversion’ of [hysteric] in fact describe well the exaggerated, formalized, and dance-like qualities of the martial arts performances of the kung fu comedy [...] Indeed, although hysteria is more often associated in the popular imagination with ‘feminine’ weakness, fainting, or tears, what is striking in examining [Jean-Martin] Charcot’s attempts to create a photographic iconography of his patients’ enacted symptoms is the intense athleticism evident in many of his plates (of both men and women hysterics) and the resultant echoes between these images and those of the comedic martial arts body.

[White 2020: 114]

From here, White proceeds to demonstrate the veracity of his contention that kung fu comedy protagonists, ‘in their very parallel to the “clownism” of Charcot’s patients, become legible as displaced symptoms of a blocked political subjectivity’ [White 2020: 118], by virtue of a second pass over Project A. Initially, White adduced Project A in the context of a utopian analysis. Now, he adduces Project A in the context of a hysterical analysis. Personally, I find his hysterical analysis less convincing, if only because it is predicated on what I judge to be a misinterpretation of Chan’s star persona in one crucial respect. Assessing Chan’s career trajectory, White claims that Chan is synonymous with the role of ‘the dutiful cop – a faithful civil servant and upholder of (colonial) law and order’ [White 2020: 119], and he cites both the two Project A films and the Police Story films as examples of Chan playing this role.

With regard to the former films, White himself points out that ‘if, in Project A, I have argued, [Chan’s character] and his rather ramshackle cohort of coastguards accept and uphold the colonial order, it is only simultaneously to subvert it’ [White 2020: 119], while, with regard to the latter films, the same could be said, certainly of Police Story (1985), Police Story 2 (1988), and Supercop (1992). Worse still, White goes on to claim that Chan not only continues this trend of playing the ‘dutiful’ and ‘obedient’ Asian character in his crossover Hollywood films but that this is evidence of his being subjected to or indulging in (White does not clarify which) ‘racial stereotypes’ [White 2020: 122]. I say ‘worse still’ because Chan is arguably at his least obedient and most subversive in Rush Hour (1998), in which he, an Asian character from Hong Kong coming to America, and American Detective James Carter (Chris Tucker), a black character who works for the Los Angeles Police Department but who is never given credence by his white superiors, spend nearly the entire film disregarding orders and protocol and subverting standard police procedure. To the extent that hysterics are hysterical because they do not have an outlet for their rebellious energies, I am not sure that White’s argument holds up inasmuch as I am not sure that Chan can really be considered a hysterical subject/character so defined.¹

¹ Not to harp on White too much, but, at the risk of being pedantic, I found this chapter to be the most questionable with respect to his film analyses and his film-historical claims. Going beyond the vicissitudes of Chan’s star persona, White also extends his consideration of Chan’s American films at one point to a discussion of the differences between Chan’s persona and the personas of American heroes’ who ‘command the action by being the still point around which it turns, often filling the frame of a shot to emphasize their dominance over their world’. White adduces Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis as examples of such American heroes and he contrasts them to Chan, who ‘more, again, like Buster Keaton or Mickey Mouse [...] is the acted-on and always out of control object of the forces around him, often framed as a small figure within a chaotic and dangerous environment’ [White 2020: 122]. To put it bluntly, I cannot imagine that anyone who has ever seen Die Hard (1988) would characterize Willis’ iconic performance as John McClane, one of the quintessential ‘wrong place, wrong time’ protagonists in contemporary cinema from one of the quintessential action-comedies in contemporary cinema, in a manner that even slightly differs from White’s characterization of Chan as the ‘acted-on’ and ‘out-of-control object of the forces around him’. Indeed, Willis is the closest to Chan of all the American action stars of the 1980s and 1990s in that his star persona is very much that of a comedic hero, as evidenced not only by Die Hard but also subsequent action-comedies such as The Last Boy Scout (1991) and The Fifth Element (1997).
Masculinity

Nevertheless, White’s discussion of hysteria ultimately serves as a springboard to a more focused discussion of gender. On this front, White’s arguments are far more convincing and productive. Moving through an elaborate discussion of father figures in kung fu comedies, White builds in this chapter to a consideration of ‘masculine anxiety and feminine excess’ in Drunken Master, in the course of which he offers a series of insightful observations regarding the ostensibly ‘masculine’ ‘essence’ of martial arts practice versus their ostensibly ‘feminine’ ability to allow the weak to overcome the strong [cf. White 2020: 135] and the degree to which such ‘excessive’ representations of gender challenge conventional Western notions of masculinity and femininity.

But what is unique in White’s analysis is that he goes beyond the familiar terrain of, for example, Bruce Lee’s ‘performance’ of his ‘extreme’ masculinity in The Way of the Dragon to the uncharted territory of the kung fu comedy, wherein female characters frequently appear, such as Chan’s character’s aunt in Drunken Master, who are ‘superior [fighters] to the male protagonist, throwing his virility into question’; indeed, White finds that in Drunken Master ‘embracing femininity turns out to be an essential source of power’ [White 2020: 137]. Aside from providing a profound reading of Drunken Master and Chan’s character arc therein, White’s insights regarding gender in Hong Kong kung fu comedies also resonate in considerations of the evolution of Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Hollywood career from the ‘hard’ action star of such 1980s action classics as Commando (1985) and Predator (1987) to the ‘soft’ action star of such family-friendly 1990s films as Kindergarten Cop (1990) and Jingle All the Way (1996), to say nothing of the ability to extend White’s consideration of female fighters in Hong Kong kung fu films (both dramatic and comedic) to considerations of contemporary female action stars between and beyond Hong Kong and Hollywood.

Legacies

Fittingly enough, to speak of further resonances of the elements identified by White to be constitutive of the Hong Kong kung fu comedies of the 1970s and 1980s is to hint at the various legacies of the kung fu comedy. It is to this concept of legacy that White turns in the final chapter of his text. All throughout, of course, the concept of legacy subtends his many different discussions. But it is in this chapter that White foregrounds the concept and explores, beyond the specific coordinates of the 1970s and 1980s, the lasting impact that these kung fu comedies have had on Hong Kong film production. Not surprisingly, White begins with a consideration of the films of Stephen Chow, the Hong Kong film figure ‘who most clearly and successfully carries the flag of Hong Kong martial-arts-themed comedy into the present’ [White 2020: 152]. As White argues, Chow’s films ‘share much of the grotesquely corporeal carnival laughter’ of the early kung fu comedies, ‘as well as the absurdism that pervades so much Hong Kong humor – a continuation, perhaps, of a hysterical attack on the cultural and linguistic logic of a (post-)colonial order’ [White 2020: 152-153]. Nevertheless, they involve ‘something fundamentally different’ [White 2020: 152], namely, a postmodern form of reference and citation whereby ‘anything drawn from’ the kung fu comedy tradition ‘arrive[s] self-consciously in quotation marks’, which, for White, makes it ‘hard to know whether to situate Chow’s films “within” the tradition of kung fu comedy or merely to locate the devices that he draws from them as witty – even perhaps satirical – intertextual evocations’ [White 2020: 153].

Far more intriguing to White vis-à-vis the legacies of the Drunken Master are the films from the 1990s that ‘returned to the motif of “drunken boxing” and to revising or imagining anew the myths’ of the Drunken Master [White 2020: 158]. White closes his investigation proper with illuminating analyses of King of Beggars
(1992), Heroes Among Heroes (1993), and Drunken Master II (1994). What White finds so intriguing about these films is that, while they of course mark ‘a continuation of the themes and motifs of the “drunken master” comedies of the late 1970s, and were made with many of the genre’s instigators still at the creative helm’, they more significantly mark an attempt to reinvent kung fu comedy ‘for a new historical moment, both in terms of their incorporation of the newly dominant cinematic aesthetic of the period and also in terms of their response to historical circumstances’ [White 2020: 158-159]. White’s readings of these films against the cinematic backdrop of Tsui Hark’s ascendency and the eventual status of his Once Upon a Time in China (1991) on the one hand and against the cultural backdrop of the 1997 handover on the other are exemplary of his skill, on display chapter after chapter, page after page, in moving between large-scale historical, cultural, and theoretical discussions and small-scale, detailed film analyses.

CONCLUSION

In the end, the takeaway having read Legacies of the Drunken Master is that it will surely be a go-to text for scholars interested in martial arts cinema. But more than that, the most impressive thing about White’s text is the intellectual diversity of his material. In what is ostensibly a book about a specific sub-genre of martial arts cinema, readers will find refreshing and provocative considerations of martial arts practice and aesthetic representation, gender and representation, mixed martial arts and questions of martial and national histories and traditions, and cultural criticism and political theory. Not only is White up on all of the literature in and between cultural studies, film studies, and martial arts studies, he is able to – and does throughout his text – intelligently and productively engage with this literature, elaborating on and/or reformulating it for the purposes of his original contributions to these fields. It is one thing to produce a new standard text. That is hard enough, and I believe that White has succeeded in creating a new standard text for scholars interested in martial arts cinema. It is another thing to produce a new text that raises the scholarly bar. This is even harder to do, yet I believe that White has succeeded in doing this, too.

Speaking of legacies, White continues a tradition of martial arts cinema scholarship exemplified by the groundbreaking work of scholars like David Bordwell [2000/2011], Leon Hunt [2003], and Stephen Teo [2009/2015], while also continuing a tradition of culturally-informed martial arts and media study exemplified by the work of Meaghan Morris [2001, 2004, 2012] and Paul Bowman [2010, 2013, 2019, 2020]. For White’s part, having inherited these legacies of scholarship, Legacies of the Drunken Master showcases a level of intellectual rigor, argumentative nuance, historical knowledge, and sheer enjoyment of subject matter that is much too rare in contemporary scholarship. For our parts now as readers – that is, as inheritors – of Legacies of the Drunken Master, we may pay tribute to White and continue the scholarly traditions to which he has provided such an important contribution by attempting in our own scholarship to rise to his level. This may be easier said than done, but then so is learning drunken boxing. The key, as we can learn from studying the kung fu comedies that White so intelligently and lovingly analyzes, is for us to always meet such challenges with a welcoming smile so that we may then overcome them with a triumphant laugh.
REFERENCES


When one loses a good friend, who is also a renowned and accomplished researcher, scholar, director, writer, teacher and actor trainer, it’s difficult to know on which of his many stellar qualities to focus the reader’s attention. In the case of Phillip Zarrilli, the man and his work are so closely and completely interwoven it becomes doubly hard. I’m not the right person to address all the aspects of his remarkable and acclaimed career. Moreover, his books and essays stand on their own as testaments to the clarity, rigour and precision of his intercultural scholarship. So, I will write only of the one facet that I know best from experience: of the influence he has had on the practice, teaching and understanding of kalarippayattu.

Kalarippayattu has some name recognition now as a martial art form in many parts of the world, but thirty years ago, when Phillip Zarrilli and I met, it wasn’t very well known outside its communities of practice even in its home state of Kerala. As we sat on the grass outside a conference venue in Brisbane and talked about the trials and tribulations of practice in a mud floor kalari, it was as if we’d exchanged a secret handshake. I had just begun my practice, he was already a renowned practitioner, scholar and teacher of the form, so that chance meeting was very lucky for me. The friendship and collaboration sparked that day shaped my understanding of not only kalarippayattu, but what it means to be a performer and the possibilities for transformation within embodied practice.

Phillip began his training in 1976 under Gurukkal Govindankutty Nayar, at a time when he was (usually) the only white person in the kalari, and continued to train intensively on extended visits to India. In 1988 he was awarded the pitham, or seat of knowledge, by his guru to mark his mastery of the form. He taught kalarippayattu in the context of theatre and actor training at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and then at the University of Exeter as well as in non-institutional settings, especially at the annual summer ‘intensives’ held at his own Tyn-y-parc Kalari in Wales.

In taking an art form out of one culture and allowing it to inhabit bodies within an entirely different context, with a different understanding and assumptions about even what a body is, Phillip was careful, meticulous even, in giving and demanding respect for the unique qualities of kalarippayattu. He even made a heated dirt floor in his kalari, with great difficulty and expense. But neither did he fetishize the practice by making or defending claims of authenticity, antiquity, superiority. Having gained the respect of gurus in Kerala, he was quick to call out bad practices in teaching and performing, especially the chauvinistic and communal uses to which Muslim, Hindu and Christian kalaris could lend themselves.
At around the same time I was studying, and then performing, bharata natyam. I had somehow, in the superstitious way that many practitioners of physical disciplines may recognize, internalized the idea that one could only do one or the other well: dance, or write about dance. That had been my experience – bad dancers wrote about dance, and good dancers danced and were silent on the subject. Phillip demonstrated by his own example that needn’t be the case. He was both; an excellent and skilled practitioner of kalarippayattu, and equally able to observe, research and write intelligently and with useful insights about the practice.

His study of kalarippayattu, When the Body Becomes All Eyes: paradigms and practices of power in kalarippayattu published by Oxford University Press [1998/2000] remains the authoritative text in English on the subject to this day. In that book, he wrote ‘Because practices are not things, but an active, embodied doing, they are intersections where personal, social and cosmological experiences and realities are negotiated’, and reading those words, I began to look at my practice of both kalarippayattu and bharata natyam through the theoretical lens he made available.

By the time I took my first summer intensive at Tyn-y-parc, in the kalari he’d built in Wales, I’d advanced to wooden weapons, but I knew that I was missing something essential in my practice in Kerala, even though I was coming closer and closer to meeting the demands of the outer form; kicking higher, lunging lower, responding faster to attacks from my master. Phillip had had experience with that paradox. In his book Psychophysical Acting, he narrates his feelings when his teacher shouted at him to use his whole body: ‘I thought I was using my entire body. How could I not be when on the outside a river of sweat was pouring from my body onto the earth floor and on the inside I was making such an effort?’

I was stuck in the stage that Phillip describes here, of mistaking effort and intention for masterful embodied doing. He insisted that I start from the beginning again with him, and so I did, learning to do the leg practice and the basic movements of the first attack-defense sequence, or meipayattu all over again. As he made me go through that most basic of kalari positions, Phillip’s way of entering into the forms took me beyond any outward manifestation, into a state of attentive open engagement with the practice itself, my awareness ‘so fully open that one is totally focused within a specific action’.

This is not to say that my kalarippayattu master in Kerala didn’t have access to this knowledge; of course he did. But it was not articulated, it was something the student was left to discover through a daily early morning physical practice that started at the age of six. For someone like me, who came to kalarippayattu in my thirties, it was unlikely that I would ever attain the kind of transformative bodily knowing that I observed in my master, pervading his movements and never needing to be brought to conscious attention.

The gurus of kalarippayattu are often considered to possess secret techniques, locks, holds, points on the body that can be pressed, which are given as a precious gift to only the most advanced, devoted and sincere students. What Phillip did was open the door to a whole treasure house on the first day. Once he allowed access to that attentional space, I could enter into any practice through it. Other students benefitted in similar ways. Dancer and choreographer Brandy Leary applies his insights to her own training and performance: ’It’s not magic, it’s practice, every time doing the same movement, with the same attention – expansive attention, keeping the connection between the internal world of the body and the external shape the body holds in space. The way of working I learned from Phillip changed my understanding of time, and of the performer’s relationship to the audience’.

While Phillip used the kalarippayattu forms as a means for performers to access and utilize ‘in-depth bodymind awareness’ he avoided grandiose claims about the form itself: this was the strategy he’d come to, and there were many other possible strategies as well. He also remained a consummate teacher of kalarippayattu at the highest level. His students who practice kalarippayattu not as performer-training, but as a martial art, like P. S. Gowtham and Hans Wolfgamm, found practice of weapons with him to be enriching even when his age and health made him less agile; he could, for example, accurately pinpoint loss of integration of the weapon with the body. Whenever he returned to the CVN Kalari in Trivandum where he began his training, he taught advanced students, who touched his feet, a gesture of respect to the guru that he never asked for but accepted with grace and understanding. When P. S. Gowtham went to meet him and document his training in Lithuania, on the other hand, Phillip hugged him like an old friend.

Qualities of rigour and precision, careful thought and profound insights that mark his scholarly writing, equally entered into casual conversations over coffee and while washing dishes after dinner. Hans Wolfgamm speaks of his influence as extending beyond the formal training sessions: ‘Under his guidance kalarippayat transformed from a series of movements into a way of inhabiting those movements that reaches out towards all parts of life. At any impasse I sense through the soles of my feet and open my awareness to the space behind me and the situation improves, even if slightly, even if just through acceptance.’
Since Phillip wrote about kalarippayattu that ‘ideally, the practitioner’s “self” is reconstituted through long-term practice to achieve agency, power and a type of behavior which can be deployed personally, socially, even cosmologically’, it is not surprising that his practice had made him wise and wonderful in myriad ways.

Phillip died on 28th April 2020. Playwright Kaite O’Reilly, his life partner and collaborator on many creative projects, wrote of his death that ‘He rode out on a breath – like so many times in his teaching he spoke of riding the breath to that moment of completion at the end of exhalation – the space in-between at the end of one cycle before the impulse of the next inhalation begins. This time came no inhalation’.

The word ‘guru’ conveys something more than ‘teacher’. But the stories from the mythology about gurus read like cautionary tales: Drona demanded, and got, the thumb of his student the great archer Ekalavya, so that his other student Arjuna would have no rival. Phillip embodied another kind of relationship between student and teacher, making no unreasonable demands, holding back no secrets, and always generous with his time, knowledge and insights.

In a tradition where one traces one’s training lineage, Phillip has created a lineage of kalarippayattu practitioners all over the world who remember him in the most important way, through the body-in-practice.

Phillip Zarrilli was the first Westerner to seriously study kalarippayattu. In addition to his primary long-term training under Gurukkal Govindankutty Nayar starting in 1976, Zarrilli also studied under C. Mohammed Sherif (Kerala Kalarippayattu Academy, Kannur) and Raju Asan (adi-murai).

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In 2000, he started the Lanarth Group, based at the Tyn-y-parc Kalari/Studio in Wales and under his direction. It brought together a variety of international artists to collaborate on particular production projects. The work was always informed by the application of a psychophysical approach through Asian martial/meditation arts as the basis for developing a common language and process of performance. Phillip Zarrilli’s production work includes: Almond and the Seahorse; The Beckett Project; Speaking Stones; The Maids; The Waterstation; Told by the Wind; Orestes; Walking Naked; The Flowering Tree; The Dance of The Drunken Monk; And Suddenly I Disappear; The Beauty Parade.

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Remembering Phillip Zarrilli
Gitanjali Kolanad

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