ON OPEN ISSUES AND ISSUES AS THEY OPEN
BENJAMIN N. JUDKINS & PAUL BOWMAN

THE CREATION OF WING TSUN:
A GERMAN CASE STUDY
SWEN KÖRNER, MARIO S.STALLER & BENJAMIN N. JUDKINS

KEY FACTORS IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITIONS
IN GERMAN ELITE COMBAT SPORTS ATHLETES
KRISTIN BEHR & PETER KUHN

FIGHTING GENDER STEREOTYPES:
WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE MARTIAL ARTS
MAYA MAOR

PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM IN TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS
VERONIKA PARTIKOVA

MARTIAL ARTS AND MEDIA CULTURE IN THE INFORMATION ERA:
GLOCALIZATION, HETEROTOPIA, HYPERCULTURE
TIM TRAUSCH
ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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Martial Arts Studies
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors/Editors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Paul Bowman and Benjamin N. Judkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Creation of Wing Tsun:</td>
<td>Swen Körner, Mario S. Staller &amp; Benjamin N. Judkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Key Factors in Career Development and Transitions in German Elite</td>
<td>Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combat Sport Athletes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Fighting Gender Stereotypes</td>
<td>Maya Maor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Psychological Collectivism in Traditional Martial Arts</td>
<td>Veronika Partikova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Martial Arts and Media Culture in the Information Era:</td>
<td>Tim Trausch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glocalization, Heterotopia, Hyperculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Experiencing, Training and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and</td>
<td>Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istas, and Martin Meyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martial Sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport</td>
<td>Udo Moenig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>review by Spencer Bennington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>The Martial Arts Studies Reader</td>
<td>Paul Bowman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>review by Qays Stetkevych</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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An ‘open issue’ is different from a ‘special’ or ‘themed’ issue. Whereas the latter generates work in response to a specific call, an open issue is made up of papers that have been sent to the journal by scholars working on their own independent (or group) projects. As such, an open issue offers an insight into the kind of work that is taking place in a field at a given time, rather than focusing on work produced in response to a specific call, topic or theme. Of course, an open issue is only a snapshot – indeed, only a snapshot of work that falls within the remit of the journal and that has passed peer review and been completed within a given time frame.

This issue of Martial Arts Studies is an open issue in this sense. It contains an article by Swen Körner and Mario S. Staller with Benjamin N. Judkins, an article by Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn, articles by Maya Maor, Veronika Partikova, and Tim Trausch, as well as book reviews by Spencer Bennington, Qays Stetkevych and a conference report by Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istaras, and Martin Meyer.

The first thing one might notice here is a high incidence of German and/or Germany-based scholarship. Körner and Staller (based in Germany), along with Judkins, have produced an in-depth and expansive study in ‘The Creation of Wing Tsun – A German Case Study’. Similarly, Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn offer a study of the ‘Key Factors in Career Development and Transitions in German Elite Combat Sport Athletes’. Tim Trausch is also a German scholar, although his contribution is not focused on Germany or German matters per se, but is rather a discussion of ‘Martial Arts and Media Culture in the Information Era: Glocalization, Heterotopia, Hyperculture’. (Interestingly, the author of one of the books under review, Udo Moenig, is also German, although he has long been located in South Korea and the focus of his book reflects the Korea-centric character of the early history of taekwondo.)
Also prominent in the contents of this issue are studies of identity in relation to martial arts. Maya Maor offers a study of gender relations, hierarchies and fluidity in the article, ‘Fighting Gender Stereotypes: Women’s Participation in the Martial Arts, Physical Feminism and Social Change’. Meanwhile, Veronika Partikova explores individualism and collectivism in ‘Psychological Collectivism in Traditional Martial Arts’.

The collection closes with reviews: Spencer Bennington’s review of Udo Moenig’s important 2016 monograph, Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport; Qays Stetkevych’s review of the 2018 edited collection, The Martial Arts Studies Reader; and a review of the 8th Conference of the German Society of Sport Science’s Committee for Martial Arts Studies, ‘Experiencing, Training and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and Martial Sports’, which took place in November 2018 at Ghent University by Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istas, and Martin Meyer.

Although this ‘snapshot’ or ‘cross-section’ of work taking place in the field inevitably says as much (perhaps more) about the remit and scope of this journal as it does about scholarship taking place independent of our involvement, we are confident that this collection does provide an important window onto the current areas and boundaries of exploration being elaborated and articulated within this still-young field.

Significant here may be regional matters. While discussions of the globalization of the traditional Asian martial arts have been occurring for decades, most have focused on events in North America. Less attention has been given to how the globalization and localization of these practices has unfolded in other areas of the world. Even their adoption in Europe remains understudied in the English language literature. This somewhat myopic focus has limited our understanding of the ways in which the martial arts function, and the sorts of social work that they can be called on to perform in the current era.

Moreover, there is also a need to turn inward and enrich our understanding of the personal effects of practice. Along with a geographic broadening of scope, papers in this collection offer detailed explorations of various ways in which martial arts practice impacts the identities that practitioners create and perform. The intense training environments favored by these practices not only grant students a set of technical skills. They can also create a new understanding of the self. These more psychological mechanisms are explored within the context of both the modern combat sports and the traditional martial arts.

As mentioned, Körner, Staller and Judkins open the issue with ‘The Creation of Wing Tsun – A German Case Study’. This paper begins with a seemingly simple question. How can we explain the immense popularity of wing chun (also ving tsun or wing tsun) in Germany from the 1970s onward? It is all too easy to point to the popularity of Bruce Lee’s films and the resulting ‘kung fu fever’, a phenomenon which was seen across Western Europe. Yet the explosion of wing chun practice in Germany was not matched by the art’s development in other European countries. This anomaly guides the authors into a detailed exploration of Germany’s post-war social and economic history in an attempt to understand the unique development of German wing chun culture. Their article draws on the theoretical framework advanced by Judkins
and Nielson’s 2015 study, *The Creation of Wing Chun*, as well as systems theory and local historical sources, to illustrate which constellations of values, social structures and semantic strategies proved decisive in the creation of German wing chun.

The issue’s second research paper continues the exploration of the German martial arts, but focuses instead on the complicated and multi-layered careers of high level competitors. Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn draw on over a dozen interviews to understand ‘Key Factors in Career Development and Transitions in German Elite Combat Sport Athletes’. After explaining variations in the career pathways of various competitors, the authors offer a number of policy recommendations to improve the development of martial talent in the German sport system.

The issue’s third article, by Maya Maor, shifts our focus to questions of gender identity and performance within the martial arts. In ‘Fighting Gender Stereotypes: Women’s Participation in the Martial Arts, Physical Feminism and Social Change’, Maor draws on both auto-ethnography and interviews to explore the many ways in which full contact martial arts training provides an environment that lends itself to specific types of transformative gender construction. More specifically, she hypothesizes that the structure and training environments seen in these practices encourage the formation of certain queer identities as well as the promotion of ‘male embodied nurturance’. Both of these outcomes rely on a type of appropriation of gendered performance facilitated by specific structures found within modern martial arts training.

Veronika Partikova then provides an exploration of identity and psychological transformation in her article ‘Psychological Collectivism in Traditional Martial Arts’. Returning to the realm of traditional practice, she seeks to provide readers with a new framework for thinking about the psychological effects of practice. More specifically, she investigates the ways in which individuals who cross cultural boundaries experience the development of ‘psychological collectivism’ within their martial arts training.

Psychological collectivism describes an individual’s ability to accept the norms of an in-group, understand its hierarchy and experience a sense of interdependence. Partikova explores the limits of the existing literature through her own fieldwork with various traditional Chinese martial arts groups. She concludes that traditional martial arts training creates environments strong enough to activate collectivistic attributes of the self within individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Yet these values are not universally applied or completely transformative. She finds that a practitioners’ mind-sets may be one thing within a training context and something else outside of it. This kind of collectivistic interaction may suggest ways in which the traditional martial arts can work in psychosocial therapies.

Tim Trausch brings together these two streams – the geographic and the deeply personal – in his treatment of mediatized representations of the Chinese martial arts. More specifically, he introduces readers to a paradox. While the popularity of the martial arts has been driven by media structures that stress the constant reassemblage of symbols over any one fixed moment of creation, thus undercutting the meaning and legitimacy of traditional state borders and claims of national ownership,
these same patterns also allow for the creation of new spaces and trends in which regional identities and resurgent ethno-national boundaries seem to matter more than ever.

These themes are explored in his essay, 'Martial Arts and Media Culture in the Information Era: Glocalization, Heterotopia, Hyperculture'. Readers should note that this article also exists as the Editor’s Introduction to Trausch’s edited volume, Chinese Martial Arts and Media Culture, Global Perspectives, which was recently published by Rowman & Littlefield International in late 2018. That collection as a whole seeks to problematize both the myths of a linear media development, in which new technological representations of the Chinese martial arts inevitably replace the old, and to illustrate how even the most globally connected communities are not immune from the resurgence of older, often discounted (cultural) borders.

Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istas, and Martin Meyer continue the focus on European martial culture and scholarship with a detailed discussion of the 8th Conference of the German Society of Sport Science’s Committee for Martial Arts Studies, whose theme was ‘Experiencing, Training and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and Martial Sports’. This was the first conference in the series to be held outside of Germany. It was hosted at Ghent University on November 15-17, 2018, and its success underscores the increasingly transnational and interdisciplinary nature of martial arts studies, as well as illustrating the ongoing development of martial arts studies in and around Germany and German scholarship.

Finally, the issue concludes with two reviews. Spencer Bennington appraises Udo Moenig’s highly influential monograph, Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport, which was published by Routledge in 2016. Qays Stetkevych then offers a candid and detailed discussion of The Martial Arts Studies Reader, published by Rowman & Littlefield International in September 2018. His review will help readers to navigate some of the dominant themes and threads running through that collection. Taken together these papers and reviews expand our understanding of what martial arts studies has accomplished in 2018, and suggest the exciting developments that the immediate future is likely to bring.
THE CREATION OF WING TSUN:
A GERMAN CASE STUDY

SWEN KÖRNER, MARIO S. STALLER & BENJAMIN N. JUDKINS

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Wing Chun, Wing Tsun, self defense systems Germany, EWTO, system theory

ABSTRACT
Ip Man’s immigration to Hong Kong in 1949, followed by Bruce Lee’s sudden fame as a martial arts superstar after 1971, ensured that wing chun kung fu, a previously obscure hand combat style from Guangdong Province, would become one of the most globally popular Chinese martial arts. Yet this success has not been evenly distributed. Despite its cultural and geographic distance from Hong Kong, Germany now boasts a number of wing chun practitioners that is second only to China. The following article draws on the prior work of Judkins and Nielson [2015], as well as on systems theory, to understand possible reasons for why this is the case. Drawing on both local historical sources and various theoretical approaches, we outline which constellations, structures, and semantic strategies proved decisive.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Benjamin N. Judkins is co-editor of the journal Martial Arts Studies and a Visiting Scholar at the Cornell University East Asia Program. With Jon Nielson, he is co-author of The Creation of Wing Chun: A Social History of the Southern Chinese Martial Arts (SUNY, 2015). He is also the author of the long-running martial arts studies blog, Kung Fu Tea: Martial Arts History, Wing Chun and Chinese Martial Studies (www.chinesemartialstudies.com).

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INTRODUCTION

Wing chun is one of only a few well-known Chinese martial arts to succeed within the global marketplace. Bruce Lee’s rise to superstardom in the early 1970s, and the commercial success of the more recent Ip Man films (beginning with Wilson Ip’s 2008 biopic) have done much to promote this once obscure southern Chinese fighting style. Unfortunately, our scholarly understanding of this phenomenon has not kept pace with its rapid popular expansions. As with other Chinese martial arts, it often seems that the popular folklore associated with these practices is taken at face value, even within more serious discussions. This results in fundamental misunderstandings about the nature and significance of these arts.

Judkins and Nielson’s 2015 study, The Creation of Wing Chun: A Social History of the Southern Chinese Martial Arts, was the first scholarly monograph to explore the development and global spread of these practices, as well as their evolving place in both regional and national identity. This work posited that the success of this fighting system is best understood as a result of complex social transformations which were set in motion by Southern China’s sudden (and sometimes violent) exposure to the global economy starting in the early 19th century. The authors then argued that, during the later 20th century, wing chun once again connected with new audiences by advancing streams of communication that spoke directly to the social and cultural dislocations of globalization (Judkins & Nielson 2015: 270ff).

According to Judkins and Nielson, Ip Man is perhaps the most famous wing chun ‘grandmaster’ and pioneer, and they postulate that close study of his work will yield insights for students of martial arts studies regarding how a parochial fighting system could be consciously repositioned within a global context. Forced to flee to British-controlled Hong Kong by the Communist advance in 1949, Ip Man had to reevaluate what his art had to offer, as well as the cultural and commercial strategies necessary to succeed within a modern, cosmopolitan, marketplace. His customers, mainly young men, needed practical tools to compete in the contemporary world of rooftop fights. Yet, student retention proved to be a persistent challenge, as Hong Kong’s economy and cityscape offered many distractions and little stability. Confronting the realities of this new environment, Ip Man changed both the ways that he taught and described his art. His sons, who were familiar with the more traditional teaching methods of Guangdong, reported being surprised by these innovations after they themselves managed to escape the mainland and join their father in Hong Kong in the mid-1960s.

Indeed, modes of communication dominate Judkins and Nielson’s arguments about wing chun’s success in the global marketplace [277ff]. Building on Peter Beyer’s discussions of the changing place of religious institutions within a globalized world [Beyer 2000], we propose that two distinct modes of communication can be detected within the modern wing chun movement. The first of these can be termed transcendent communication, which allows for the exploration of issues like tradition, origin, and collective identity. In contrast, what might be called immanent strategies of communication emphasize wing chun’s ability to address the more concrete secondary problems that emerge in periods of rapid economic or social change. These might include the perceived need for self-defense, a community that allows students to engage in social networking, or a type of exercise that staves off increased instances of ‘lifestyle diseases’. Immanence thus stands for wing chun’s material and individual benefits. On the other hand, transcendent approaches to the martial arts tend to be favored by individuals who are primarily motivated by a need to establish or defend more fundamental notions of individual or group identity. They emphasize the creation of fundamental social meanings.

In their epilogue, Judkins and Nielson remind readers that both modes of communication are available to modern martial artists and can be seen to varying degrees in any and every community. Indeed, this rhetorical flexibility has been key to the success of such supposedly ‘traditional’ institutions in the modern world. Judkins and Nielson further note that both the overall success of the wing chun movement, as well as the emergence of debates that sometimes threaten to fracture the community, can largely be explained through the adoption (or rejection) of strategies based on these ‘immanent / transcendent’ modes of social communication.

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1 A note on the spelling of a key term is necessary. ‘Wing chun’ (Cantonese) or ‘Yong Chun’ (Mandarin) is a Southern Chinese hand combat tradition (comprised of multiple lineages) which emerged in the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong during the late 19th century [Judkins and Nielson 2015]. ‘Wing Tsun’ refers to a specific style of wing chun successfully promoted by the EWTO in Germany from the late 1970s. This article provides readers with a historical discussion of Wing Tsun (a specific school) in an effort to explain the current popularity of wing chun (a more diverse style) in Germany today.

2 While wing chun previously appeared in a number of kung fu films (Invincible Shaolin and Warriors Two, both released in 1978) and Chinese television programs (Wing Chun [1998]), these more recent, widely distributed, films have done much to shape the style’s popular image in the West. Herman Yau’s Ip Man: The Final Fight (2013) and Wong Kar Wai’s The Grandmaster (2013) are especially noteworthy in that they won critical acclaim while expanding the reach of wing chun within global markets.

3 Note, for instance, the trenchant criticisms made by Stanley Henning in his classic article ‘On the Politically Correct Treatment of Myths in the Chinese Martial Arts’ (1995).
While most of their research focused on events in either China, Hong Kong, or the United States of America, their theory suggests that this same dialectical competition within the wing chun community will manifest itself in other places as well. It should help to explain the unique characteristics that wing chun takes on as it becomes localized in different national markets. It may even describe the situation in Germany, which might be thought of as a critical test of their theory. After all, the largest wing chun enclave in the world outside of Hong Kong and mainland China was established there during the 1970s and 1980s under the brand name of Wing Tsun.

While wing chun has proved to be popular everywhere, Germany seems to constitute a special case. How did this Southern Chinese practice become so well established so quickly? After all, Bruce Lee’s films were not more popular there than they were in other Western European nations. And many of these states had longstanding colonial and economic relationships with parts of Asia, as well as preexisting martial arts communities. The present article outlines a number of relevant factors which may help to solve this puzzle. Drawing on both local historical sources and theoretical approaches, we explore which constellations, structures, and semantic strategies proved decisive.

**OUR THEORY**

To explore these issues, we turn first to social systems theory. It suggests that the success of wing chun in Germany may be the result of difference-based communication strategies. Following Luhmann, we formally define communication as a transmission of information that finds a social connection [Luhmann 1984; Körner 2008]. In our model, this takes place on two levels. On the first level, we refer to wing chun as a mode of physical communication established through the concrete and practical interaction of fighting bodies. The second level is analytically- and textually-oriented. This level includes the entire body of published works and media representations that surround the community. More specifically, it comprises any type of communication that situates wing chun within the scope of discursive practices. Because these two levels are mutually constitutive, they must be analyzed together [Bowman 2014, 2015].

We relate the communication of both levels to their potential for unfolding social dynamics, but we replace the differentiation between transcendent and immanent strategies as outlined by Judkins and Nielsen with a more general distinction of ‘internal’ and ‘external’. This dichotomy is less weighted with religious connotations and thus seems a better fit for the German case. Whilst an emphasis on internal communication allows for the creation of a more closed and ‘inward looking’ wing chun network (one that will likely focus on what might be termed ‘identity work’), the external mode of communication opens wing chun up to contemporary social needs. In this later case, meaning is established through identifying and addressing the sorts of practical and material problems that modernity and economic globalization have created. In that sense, the fundamental structure of our argument remains similar to the one outlined by Peter Beyer [2000].

The body of our analysis focuses on events and publications that date to the founding decade of the German wing chun community. As in other states, the practice began to take root in the mid-1970s. Our analysis is therefore deliberately selective and incomplete. We will return to reflect on these limitations at the end of the article.

According to the underlying premises of social system theory, wing chun is best understood as a practice of communication. As such, it must reckon with the usual improbability thresholds that go along with communication in general [Luhmann 1984]. That is, in order to succeed on any level, the transmitted information has (1) to arrive (the problem of accessibility), (2) be understood (the problem of understanding), (3) evoke approval (the problem of acceptance), and (4) be kept (the problem of commitment). Luhmann’s improbability thresholds of communication provide the formal structure for the following analysis.

**ACCESSIBILITY AND UNDERSTANDING**

In order to become globally accessible, wing chun, originally based in the Pearl River Delta region of the Southern Chinese Province of Guangdong, needed to find a channel of communication. Thus, the first barrier was the political geography of travel and trade in the post-war years of the mid 20th century. Simply put, the modes of social communication that were derived from most Chinese folk practices did not spread into the global marketplace, as they enjoyed no (or very limited) access to this system of commercial and cultural exchange during the early years of Communist rule on the mainland.

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4 This is not to say that wing chun is never experienced in spiritual terms or seen as a replacement for more conventional religious modes of association by its Western students. Other scholars have already addressed this trend within English-speaking countries. See Jennings, Brown and Sparkes [2010]. Such discussions are even more common in the Daoist-focused sections of the taijiquan community [Phillips 2016].
Ip Man’s move in 1949 from the relatively small city of Foshan to British-controlled Hong Kong (a major shipping nexus within the global trade system) fundamentally changed the fate of this martial art. Still, wing chun’s eventual success in Germany was far from an inevitability. Quoting Ip Man’s younger son, Ip Ching, Judkins and Nielson note that while wing chun enjoyed more than its fair share of students from middle class families it was really the underdevelopment of Hong Kong’s higher education sector that set the stage for the art’s subsequent spread through the global system [Judkins and Nielson 2015: 272-273].

Several of Ip Man’s students and grand-students (Moy Yat, William Cheung, Duncan Leung, Hawkins Cheung, Augustine Fong, Kenneth Chung, Ben Der, etc.) began to emigrate to the West in the 1950s and 1960s to attend universities and/or to seek employment. Of course, the best-known member of this wave of students was Bruce Lee, who brought his own approach to wing chun to the West Coast of the United States. Unsurprisingly, much of the discussion of wing chun’s global success focuses on both Lee’s cultural legacies and the American case.

Yet, it was a single individual of non-Chinese descent who established Germany’s contact with Hong Kong-based wing chun in 1975, and who was responsible for much of the subsequent growth of this community. Although it was Lee Sing who first brought wing chun to London, and thus to Europe, in 1956 [Kernspecht 2013a: 91], wing chun’s establishment in Germany is closely linked to the name of Keith R. Kernspecht [1945–present]. In the mid-1970s, Kernspecht became the first European student of Master Leung Ting, a wing chun practitioner from Hong Kong. While Leung Ting has been the focus of some controversy over the years [cf. Chiu 2010], he is often accepted as being one of the last students to study directly with Ip Man [Kernspecht 2013a: 85; Leung 2003: 163-187].

In 1976, Kernspecht founded the European Wing Tsun Organization (EWTO) as a division of the Wing Tsun GmbH, an independent limited company in Kiel. Thus, from the start, German commercial law structured the creation of a corporate entity focused primarily on the provision of commercial services related to martial arts and self-defense training. As in the case of Ip Man’s earlier reforms in Hong Kong, the Wing Tsun of the EWTO reached the public through the social structures of market based economic communication: services and a specific training schedule were transmitted in exchange for monetary payments. The person behind the development of this specific pedagogical structure was the then-31-year-old Keith Kernspecht. In addition to solving the basic problem of accessibility, he also provided the specific framework that would make Wing Tsun communication understandable (and deeply attractive) to German martial artists.

Aspirations, however, would not be enough. Dedicated channels of domestic communication were necessary to realize Kernspecht’s larger goals. An essential step towards the dissemination and popularization of Wing Tsun in Germany was taken with the creation of an EWTO-owned publishing house in 1976. In the same year, the Wushu Verlag Westdeutschland (Wushu West-Germany Publishing House) published the first book about wing chun in German.1 The author of this volume (Wing Tsun Kung Fu) was Leung Ting, Kernspecht, his student and the EWTO Founder, provided the translation.

Once the press was established, several other publications arrived in quick succession, effectively monopolizing the small domestic market for wing chun texts. In 1977, Kernspecht released Kung Fu – Praktische chinesische Selbstverteidigung (Kung Fu – Practical Chinese Self-Defense), followed by translations of Ting’s basic work Wing Tsun Kuen in 1981 and 1982. Perhaps most significantly, Kernspecht’s iconic Vom Zweikampf (About Fighting) was published in 1987. This volume is now in its 17th edition and has been translated into four languages [Wing Tsun Welt, no. 24 2000: 3]. Few other publications on the subject have achieved this same level of popularity.

This corporately-owned publishing house also provided a range of German translations of Chinese language sources on the practice of wing chun. At the same time, it served as the central marketing and distribution hub of the EWTO brand. Thus, the EWTO made the message of Wing Tsun more generally available to German consumers. More than other fighting systems in Germany at this time, the EWTO created a unique communication channel for establishing contact with martial artists who may have been interested in this Chinese style (wing chun) and its products, then sought to convert them into committed students and members of the organization.

The EWTO’s sophisticated communication strategies went beyond publishing books for the general public. The magazine Wing Tsun Welt (Wing Tsun World) released its first issue in 1982 (it now appears...
annually). Despite their external dissemination efforts, however, the EWTO seemed to operate with an eye towards ‘internal closure’: accessible only to those readers who were already members (‘Over 60 Local Groups or Schools’ [WT Welt No. 1 1982: 25]), the magazine focused on the cultivation and dissemination of descriptions of an idealized EWTO community within the EWTO itself.

This inward-looking rhetoric notwithstanding, Wing Tsun Welt continued to regularly deliver the types of information necessary for the organization’s membership to accomplish their goals. The stated occasion for the creation of Wing Tsun Welt was the ‘ten-year anniversary of our martial arts in Germany’ [WT Welt 1 1982]. At first, this assertion appears to be mistaken. Apparently, the jubilee was calculated through a generous rounding of the years 1970-1975 when Kernspecht learned from Joseph Cheng in London (Cheng was a student of the previously mentioned European wing chun pioneer Lee Sing). All of this occurred before Kernspecht became a disciple of Leung Ting [Kernspecht 2013a: 91].

Hence our preliminary conclusion: The massive growth of wing chun in Germany should be understood as a direct consequence of the founding of the EWTO in 1976. If one were to model the EWTO as sitting at the intersection of converging streams of communication, two levels can be distinguished. On the first level, wing chun appears as an embodied system of communication between a group of fighting persons whose bodies and movements recursively refer to each other – until the end of a training sequence, fight, or educational curriculum has been reached. Socially, this level of embodied communication is marked by internal closure. It perpetuates and seeks to reproduce the air of secrecy seen in certain traditional Chinese practices and which is often taken to denote ‘authenticity’ and legitimacy in Western market contexts. While the EWTO always maintains a public presence, in some sense the door to the training room remains firmly closed. It can only be opened to those who actually expose themselves to physical practice and hence interaction.

The EWTO simultaneously adopts a second discursive strategy. On this second level, wing chun is the subject of textual- and media-based modes of communication. Through its own publishing house, the EWTO publishes books and magazines. The organization bears the costs of production and distribution and oversees both quality control and the selection of content. In that way, it has played an important role in controlling the spread of German language information relating to wing chun and determining the general accessibility of different sources.

As we have already seen, WT Welt is available only to those who are already members. And even the EWTO’s other communication strategies, which are open to ‘outsiders’, are characterized by a high degree of self-reference. This rhetorical strategy, when paired with the newness of the practice, allowed a relatively young organization, located outside of China and founded by a European, to quickly establish a high degree of legitimacy by creating a field of communication in which it would sit perpetually at the center. Indeed, this textual strategy displaced other traditional centers of authenticity that one would have found in martial arts communities in Hong Kong or South East Asia. In an early European environment where individuals worried about the authenticity of their practice, this constant signaling of the organization’s legitimacy would have provided a solid anchor.

Since its inception in 1976, the EWTO has been operating in the double sense of the genitive: communication over wing tsun vs. wing tsun as communication. (It hegemonized both the practice of wing chun, the sorts of embodied messages that one could express, as well as what it was possible to say, and even imagine, about wing chun in a more public or mediatized framework.) This strategy has proven very effective. It instills a notable degree of unity within the understanding and actions of its members as they come to share a common set of goals, it allows the organization to influence the production of external self-images (what others think and say about the group and their practice), and it connects the organization with solvent and teachable customers. However, that potential students can be reached and images of Wing Tsun can be crafted through a variety of media outlets is not enough to explain the organization’s success or the subsequent growth of their art. There must be some precise reason why students during the 1970s and 1980s found the specific communications of EWTO Wing Tsun desirable and wished to pay for extensive training. To be a successful organization, the EWTO needed a membership. That can only be gained by expansion through outward focused strategies. This leads us to the third and fourth improbability thresholds of communication [Luhmann 1984], the issues of acceptance and commitment.

**ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT**

One cannot analyze the growth of the EWTO without considering the unique constellation of internal and external conditions that explain the communicative success of wing chun in Germany. From the middle of the 1970s and early 1980s, the EWTO proactively framed the practice of wing chun in ways that provided answers to the pressing social questions of the era. Much of this was accomplished through a strategy of ‘product differentiation’ in which the EWTO stressed the unique aspects of wing chun in comparison to existing martial arts and sports. Our analysis proceeds as an examination of the organization’s inner semantics and rhetorical strategies, which contained models designed to
promote acceptance of, and commitment to, the new practice. We then relate these orientations to the larger socio-structural developments of this period of German history.

**Practical Orientation**

Within the realm of practical discussion, the EWTO immediately set to work establishing a phenomenal, programmatic, and organizational distance between itself and what was commonly available in Germany in the 1960s and early 1970s. At that point, the German athletic landscape was dominated by Japanese (judo) and Korean (taekwondo) martial arts, as well as Western boxing, wrestling, and fencing. Each of these better-established communities had adopted a similar organizational approach and were constituted as non-profit sports with constitutionally anchored autonomy vis-à-vis the state. The EWTO, on the other hand, eschewed any relationship with the traditional non-profit sports sector. It was founded purely as a business enterprise.

*Phenomenally,* wing chun was introduced as a close-contact-fighting system, containing special ‘ingenious and effective’ [Kernspecht 1982: 9] training exercises such as the rolling or sticking hands (chi sau), which emphasized the importance of tactile sensitivity in fighting [Ting 1989: 390; Kernspecht 1994: 126]. The ‘chain punch’ (a sequence of quickly delivered straight punches) also gained fame as a core technique of the system. This was explained as an operationalization of the (para-)military principle of attacking opponents by a fast course of repetitive actions [Kernspecht 1994: 9ff]. *Programmatically,* the EWTO was able to draw a clear line separating wing chun as a ‘self-defense art’ and the other ‘combat sports’ like judo or boxing that dominated the German landscape. The EWTO’s communicative strategy framed wing chun as a martial art through the extension of claims that it was primarily an ‘effective’ form of self-defense [WT Welt 1982: 9].

From the start, the EWTO defined wing chun’s identity by emphasizing what it is not. In addition to the distinction of ‘true’ wing chun / ‘not true’ wing chun (a rhetorical strategy seen in the popular discussion of several Chinese martial arts), the EWTO has drawn a sharp line within the diversity of existing wing chun styles and lineages [Hirnese & Pertl 1988]. For example, the first edition of the magazine WT Welt exposed a Spanish master who had claimed to possess the ‘10th master degree’ as ‘not genuine’ [WT Welt No.1, 1982: 16].” If true, the Spanish master might have been perceived by potential students as better-qualified than the founder of the EWTO. Early authors within the popular German language literature also sought to emphasize the distinctions between wing chun and the other Asian martial arts. Of course, these styles were the EWTO’s main commercial rivals. The differences between wing chun and karate, for instance, were a central subject of the first wing chun book published in 1976, as well as articles in the first issue of WT Welt [1982].

The creation and repeated emphasis of these distinctions encouraged German readers to imagine the art in simple binary terms. One must practice either wing chun or karate. One’s lineage of wing chun is either authentic (descendent from Ip Man through Leung Ting) or inauthentic (and possibly fraudulent). In each case, the EWTO rhetorically positioned itself on the normatively positive side of the distinction [Spang 2001: 16]. The fact that the EWTO introduced wing chun to Germany under the brand name of Wing Tsun was a deliberate demarcation strategy expressing its reformative approach in opposition to traditional ‘Ving Tsun or wing chun’ [Kernspecht 2013a: 111].

The pattern of normative self-placement is also illustrated in the first issue of the organization’s magazine, in which great emphasis is placed on new students discontinuing the study and/or practice of any other fighting system(s) on the grounds of the absolute superiority of EWTO’s Wing Tsun. Under the heading ‘On the Incompatibility of Wing Tsun and Karate Lessons’ [WT Welt No. 1, 1982: 25], it is stated: ‘Karate, Taekwondo, Ju-Jutsu etc. athletes enjoy[ing] the logical and practical Wing Tsun (WT) method’ is encouraged, but these words of encouragement are followed by a warning that ‘the retrainee [should] no longer practice his old style of fighting’ and should instead ‘concentrate exclusively on Wing Tsun (WT)’. This same article attempts to ameliorate the socially isolating effects of such language by going on to brag about the successful retraining of ‘several thousand former Budoka’ [ibid.].

Nor were the students of Japanese arts in Germany the only ones slated for reeducation. In another piece, a student’s journey ‘From Taekwondoka to wing chun’ was explored. Articles such as these appear to have self-consciously modeled a standardized narrative of disillusionment and conversion to be shared among new wing chun students. The subjects universally regretted their previous training after realizing that ‘the techniques I have practiced confidently for years have been ineffective against Wing Tsun’ [ibid.: 12].

While highly self-referential, and in many ways circular, these articles helped to establish a common discourse within the new body of German wing chun students. Indeed, the success of the EWTO in creating a closed and hegemonic narrative around Wing Tsun is an important factor in understanding why the early history of wing chun
progressed differently in Germany than in other areas of the world.

For instance, in the United States there were many teachers who had studied either with Ip Man himself or with one of his senior students. Each of these individuals was free to establish their own interpretation of the art. Further, the anti-authoritarian views and radical pedagogy advocated by Bruce Lee, perhaps the most famous early practitioner of the art in the USA, would have complicated a campaign like that employed by the EWTO [Lee 1971, 1975]. This is not to say that certain North American teachers did not agree with them on many of these points. In the larger and more competitive North American marketplace, though, it was impossible for any one school or philosophy to totally dominate the public discussion and practice of the style.

Of course, Bruce Lee was also an important force in German popular culture. In 1974, Der Mann mit der Todeskralle (Enter the Dragon) was the 11th highest grossing film in the country (beaten only by such blockbusters as Der Exorzist [The Exorcist, 1973], Emanuelle [1974], and Ein Mann sieht rot [Death Wish, 1974]), selling 1.7 million tickets. As with audiences elsewhere, German viewers marveled at Lee's charisma, his stunning physical development, and the seeming efficiency of his fighting techniques. This last trait was cinematically staged through careful fight choreography and the logic of action film storytelling. Yet, to audiences at the time, it felt 'real' [Bowman 2010].

One wonders, though, whether Lee's films were understood by German audiences as emphasizing the differences between his own brand of kung fu and the other Asian martial arts which were more commonly taught. Lee's character in Enter the Dragon clearly put more emphasis on individual attainment rather than following the strictures of style. That lesson seems to dominate the later part of his career. This was masterfully illustrated on screen when he teaches a lesson to a boorish individual who taunted him with the pointed question 'What's your style?' It seems more likely, however, that many moviegoers were more captivated with the grand spectacle of Han's secret martial arts tournament pitting schools and styles against each other.

The potential of the Chinese martial arts for facilitating social resistance or encouraging individual triumph was the central theme in all of Lee's films. This message resonated with German audiences and Lee's films all ended up in the top 20 for the year of their respective releases (1973 Todeskräfte aus Shanghai [Fist of Fury] with 1.2 million viewers and 16th place, 1975 Die Todeskralle schlägt wieder zu [Way of the Dragon] with 1.5 million / 12th place). The worldwide kung fu craze, triggered by Lee [Bowman 2010, 2013], captivated the Republic immediately after the 'fat' years of the German economic boom. While the limits of economic growth and the culmination of the 1970s social problems loomed on the horizon, the scope of Germany's 'leisure culture' continued to expand. 60% of gross household income was spent on food in the early 1960s, by the mid-1970s things felt very different for the average family. Within a decade, incomes doubled and food bills slipped to only 40% of household expenditures [BpB 2002]. This increase in income triggered growth across the leisure sector of the economy. According to data from Emnid, average household leisure spending increased by 25% between 1969 and 1982 [ibid.].

This was a tide that lifted all ships. Everything connected with sports and athletics benefited from these economic trends. Between 1970 and 1987, the number of members in the German Sports Federation doubled, expanding from 10 to 20 million individuals [BpB 2002]. German consumers not only had the disposable income to watch Bruce Lee in the cinema, they had enough money left over to look for instruction in Chinese kung fu.

Lee's cultural importance can be seen in a number of ways. References to Lee were omnipresent during the founding years of the EWTO, including in the very first German language publication, Leung Ting's Wing Tsun Kung Fu [1976; see also later, Kernspecht 2013a: 282]. Of course, this is not unique to Germany or even to the 1970s. Lee has always been a critical, if sometimes polarizing, figure within the global wing chun community. Nonetheless, early German language publications made a point of emphasizing the triangular relationship between Ip Man, Bruce Lee, and wing chun [Ting 1976; WT Welt 1982: 6], and there is no doubt that this helped the EWTO's advertising efforts, as Lee's association with wing chun was something that no other Chinese art could claim.

Other, more domestic, social trends must also be considered. The 1970s were characterized by a rapid acceptance of feminism within German society. It is not implausible that Bruce Lee was adopted as a role model by adolescent males at least in part because models of masculinity were in flux. Lee thus served as a subcultural protagonist of male identity development. By extension, the wing chun system could be seen as speaking directly to transcendent aspects of personal and group identity which were coming under threat.

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This aspect of the wing chun discourse had other important resonances as well. Defined as self-defense, wing chun explicitly addresses the phenomenon of interpersonal violence. That too touched on the larger social ills which were just appearing on the horizon at the moment of the EWTO's creation. Social violence was an omnipresent subject in Germany in the 1970s. The public increasingly feared both terror from the outside (e.g. the 1972 terrorist attacks) and the growth of domestic threats such as the Red Army Faction (also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group). And there were more mundane threats to consider as well. Period crime statistics reveal a notable increase in all types of civil offenses [Birkel & Thome 2004: 110].

In summary, the EWTO's early discourses offered individuals multiple strategies to understand both their personal challenges and fundamental identity in a moment of rapid social change. It claimed to provide very practical solutions for the era's crisis of repressed masculinity and the widespread perception of increasing violence. All of this would fall within in the realm of 'immanent communication' according to the framework laid out by Judkins and Nielson.

On the other hand, Wing Tsun as crafted by EWTO created two additional dyads of potential conflict. The first was designed to differentiate it from other wing chun styles, schools, or lineages. But, above all else, the EWTO sought to rhetorically stand above other martial arts and combat sports. Gang, fandom, and party researchers [Fuhse 2003] demonstrate that these sorts of manufactured conflicts are an essential mechanism of collective identity formation. The basis of this exercise is the creation of plausible difference. The cognitive and normative orientations in EWTO Wing Tsun sought, at every turn, to announce and accentuate such differences.

**Cognitive and Normative Orientations**

The EWTO employed other communication strategies to encourage commitment to the newly created Wing Tsun clan. It consciously cultivated the image of being both a highly traditional and 'orthodox' kung fu school as well as a modern fighting art. In a broader sense, it sought to appropriate for itself the great philosophical and ethical traditions of Chinese culture. The EWTO claims to have turned to Confucianism for the blueprint of its social structure. Like other Chinese martial arts associations, it emphasizes the idea of the family throughout its internal organization [Kernspecht 1982; 1994: 266]. The relationship between sifu and todai (i.e. fatherly teacher and pupil), and all other kinship roles, fit surprisingly well within the organizational structure of a modern corporate enterprise. Both are hierarchic and marked by asymmetric systems of responsibility within the organization. Functionally, this kinship model served to hierarchically structure the legitimacy of all communication within Germany's early wing chun community. It also naturally leads to the asymmetrical distribution of positions of authority: one person leads, all others follow.

While some very traditional martial arts lineages within China still restrict discipleship to immediate family members, instructional or business relationships within the EWTO Wing Tsun clan are rarely based on blood. Nevertheless, they are often explained and understood using quasi-biological concepts. As with a family, once a member, there is no real means of exit. Membership in the formal organization is terminable, but the underlying bond of social responsibility does not end with leaving a union, and not even with death [Kernspecht 2013b]. A father always remains a father. This worldview is also evidenced in other highly traditional Chinese martial arts communities and other types of secret societies. It creates not just a sense of belonging, but also a subtle mechanism for continually strengthening one's commitment to the group. After all, almost everyone has only one father.

This quasi-patriarchal social structure has important implications for the distribution and control of the Wing Tsun curriculum. A letter to the editor of the EWTO's in-house magazine put the question like this: 'What happens if one of your students begins to teach without your blessing and transmits WT techniques?' The EWTO founder replied: 'Apart from the legal consequences … a brother cannot become the father of his siblings. All his future so-called students are according to general kung-fu intuition my Todai. I am their sifu even if I never meet them … Irrespective of that, of course, I do not claim the member's monthly school fee' [WT Welt 1982: 22]. The business enterprise EWTO adapts a family semantics in which crypto-biology supercodes the legal conditions of modern societies. Those who are learning WT enter a world in which other laws prevail, different from the outside' [Kernspecht 1994: 281]. Through its largely invented connections to 'Chinese tradition', the EWTO sought to create its own self-contained society. Its very structure seemed to promise an escape from the mores of mundane European culture through the adoption of a more legitimate and meaningful set of relationships.

As emphasized in both early and recent publications, wing chun is not simply a collection of techniques [Kernspecht 2013a: 171ff]. Rather, it is typically seen as a conceptually driven system of hand combat. Among other sources, the EWTO selectively draws certain principles from Daoism. This practice reflects the common misconception (challenged

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10 For a comparative discussion of how a similar conflict regarding authority and the right to economically profit from the sharing of 'secrets' manifests itself within the global taijiquan community; see Frank [2014].
by Henning, Lorge, Wile, and others) that the Chinese fighting arts are fundamentally a product of esoteric Daoist and Buddhist practice. While recent scholarship has greatly clarified these questions, such orientalist views were widely accepted throughout Western popular culture during the EWTO’s formative years in the 1970s and 1980s.

For instance, it is popularly asserted that the slogan ‘Loy Lau, Hoy Sung’ (‘Welcome what comes, follow what departs’) frequently encountered in discussions of hand-to-hand exchange is originally of Daoist origin [Kernspecht 1987: 263ff; 2013a: 126, 155ff, 193ff]. The same applies to the duality of Yin and Yang as mapped onto ‘hard’ and ‘masculine’ techniques versus ‘feminine’ and ‘soft’ techniques. The inclusion of a concept of the feminine within the realm of fighting widens the horizon of possible theory and policy. In the EWTO’s rhetoric, the hard can (and often should) work to become soft. Thus, female students are explicitly welcomed within the organization. Within the group’s self-understanding, it is the focus on core concepts such as this which differentiated the Wing Tsun of the EWTO from the other lineages and schools which are increasingly popular in Germany today. They too tend to differentiate themselves in conceptual and technical terms. Yet, the EWTO continues to claim a degree of superiority as they supposedly practice their principles more ‘strictly and consistently than the others’ [Kernspecht 2013a: 52].

The cultivation of a tradition also played other roles in the organization of the EWTO’s Wing Tsun. Kernspecht has claimed that in switching to Leung Ting (after previously studying with Joseph Cheng from 1970-1975) he was able to learn from Ip Man’s most talented student [Kernspecht 2013a: 85]. Leung claims that his background is unique because he was initiated as a personal disciple by Ip Man, thus giving him access to ‘the highest theories and techniques’ of the art which were purposefully withheld from the other students [ibid; Leung 2003]. Through its connection to Leung Ting, the EWTO has inherited these exclusive claims to ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’, along with the vicious intra-community debates that come along with them. The family-based model of the EWTO (and much of the rest of the wing chun community) reinforces questions of legitimate inheritance and genealogical authority. All of these issues remain central topics of communication within the EWTO Wing Tsun community today.

Ironically, the law of ‘non-interchangeability of the father’ does not seem to apply to Kernspecht himself. After all, the EWTO founder moved his loyalties from sifu Cheng to sifu Leung. Doing so even contradicted the example of Confucian rectitude set by Ip Man himself. While Ip Man would later go on to study with Leung Bik (son of the famous master Leung Jan), he always made a point of honoring and acknowledging Chan Wah Shun as his personal sifu in accordance with Chinese social etiquette. While Confucianism is often invoked in the modern Western wing chun community, the actual substance of its principles is poorly understood.

If one accepts a more utilitarian model of authority, the logic behind this shift is clear. By aligning himself with Leung Ting, Kernspecht (and by extension his German students) could claim to move up a generation in the wing chun family tree. They placed themselves in closer proximity to the teachings of Ip Man and even the mythological creators of the style such as the Shaolin nun Ng Mui. As Judkins and Nielson would suggest, this genealogical leap provides a permanent occasion for the production of transcendent communication about identity and legitimacy mediated by the supposed purity of one’s transmission.12 Traditionally and mythically, the Wing Tsun of the EWTO advanced social norms that sought to orient the thoughts and actions of its members: family, descent, hierarchy, leadership, and a conceptually specific approach to the art.

Still, the EWTO’s internal structure is perhaps best understood as a reflection of the social situation in Germany at the time of its creation. One could easily juxtapose the strong emphasis on the production of family values within the organization with the more acute erosion of traditional family values and the institution of marriage which was taking place in the 1970s. Feminism had become a political and legal force throughout German society. Divorce rates were on the rise, as were non-marital partnerships and single households [BpB 2002]. These disruptions, linked to the advent of a postindustrial society, allowed the EWTO to explicitly position itself as a counterbalancing force. In an era when basic social institutions seemed threatened, they argued ‘We are family’ [Martin 2012: 17].

As we found in our own survey of motivational issues, ‘family’ was identified as a core priority of wing chun practitioners in Germany [Heil, Staller, and Körner 2017]. The art was being discursively tied to these values at the same time that other pillars of civic life seemed to be losing their relevance. The number of regular churchgoers dropped by one-third in Germany between 1968 and 1973 [BpB 2002]. At the same time, these values were explicitly welcomed within the organization. Within the group’s rhetoric and relationships is one of the standard means by which challenges can be launched and innovations legitimated.

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11 For one of the best discussions of this general pattern of behavior and contestation within the traditional Chinese martial arts, see Jeff Tacaks [2003]. When discussing communities in Taiwan, Tacaks notes that the creative manipulation of lineage rhetoric and relationships is one of the standard means by which challenges can be launched and innovations legitimated.

12 For a trenchant theoretical critique of this sort of lineage-based understanding of the problem of transmission, see Bowman [2017: 93-94].
same time that German Catholic church membership plunged, the EWTO wing chun program succeeded in expanding and reinforcing its membership. Many of its communication strategies focused on the re-contextualization of values that, while still held by larger segments of civil society, were losing importance in other sectors and contexts.

Perhaps the EWTO succeeded where better established organizations failed because, as a relatively new group, it was well-positioned to incorporate certain progressive trends within what remained a basically traditional social discourse. This semantic flexibility allowed the organization to better communicate its values within a modern media environment. Again, women were a frequent target of EWTO communication [Kernspecht 1994: 212], and the timing of these messages could not have been better. When seeking to reach this audience, the group promoted and leveraged wing chun’s creation legend, according to which the origin of the art is attributed to a Shaolin nun (Ng Moy/Ng Mui) and her teenage female student (Yim Wing Chun). While a few other Chinese martial arts refer to important early female figures, wing chun is unique in the degree of emphasis that it places on female figures. All of this would have resonated in a period when feminist values were gaining an ever more prominent place in German public discourse, as illustrated by the 1977 launch of the magazine Emma. Yet, these progressive images and ideas remained embedded within a larger set of communications on social issues that were fundamentally conservative and hierarchic in nature.

The organization’s ‘family structure’ also led to the differentiation of other roles in ways which were compatible with German society of this time. Students need teachers, and the more students there are, the more teachers are needed. The rapid growth of EWTO Wing Tsun forced the group to pioneer an innovative model of professional education. This was the first time (within the German martial arts sector) that a commercial program undertook the complete training of a large number of novice students destined to become professional martial arts instructors and franchisees.13

The process was organized and monetized through an extensive system of grades. Even a single rank might be subdivided into sub-levels. Limited area instructional licenses, restricted to certain post-codes, were distributed to members under franchise contracts. This allowed for a rapid expansion of EWTO schools which was essential as the organization sought to capture the demand created by Bruce Lee and initial popularity of the Chinese martial arts. Needless to say, this highly disciplined and centralized organizational structure is a modern construct of the EWTO built on German corporate law and bearing little resemblance to the way that wing chun schools replicated and spread in China and Hong Kong during Ip Man’s time.

The EWTO’s approach to instruction and franchising may also have been boosted by contemporary economic trends. The first issue to consider is structural changes in the Federal Republic of Germany’s labor market. Structural changes within the national educational system, along with growing youth unemployment, characterized the shift from an industrial to a service economy in the volatile mid-1970s [BpB 2002].

The same decade was also perceived by social observers as an era marked by increased hedonism. Youth cultural movements such as punk, or the entry of the personal computers and game systems into private households, indicated both an individualization and pluralization of the lifestyle challenges facing traditional German values. Achievement and discipline seemed to take a back seat to personal freedom and self-development [BpB 2002]. Indeed, Ronald Inglehart has explicitly theorized about how sustained periods of economic growth has led to the development of ‘post-material’ values in advanced Western societies [see Inglehart 1990, 1997; see also Judkins 2018]. Given the structural changes within the labor market, and the growing social emphasis placed on the process of individualization, training to become a professional EWTO-certified Wing Tsun instructor began to seem like an economically attractive option in ways that likely would not have been the case a generation or two before.

All of its orientalist and traditional rhetoric notwithstanding, the actual mechanisms that underlay the transmission of Wing Tsun within the EWTO illustrate that the movement was strongly rooted within Western modernity. In many early publications, this was even embraced and celebrated as a core value of the art itself. The organization’s first textbook, published in 1976, presents wing chun as the ‘most scientific and practical’ martial art [Ting 1976]. In a sense, this approach to the art more accurately reflected Ip Man’s actual views on the subject than an over-emphasis on Confucian and Daoist philosophies does. In his interview with R. Clausnitzer, an early Western student of the style, Ip Man explicitly characterized his practices as ‘a modern form of Kung Fu’ [Clausnitzer 1969: 10]. Indeed, Clausnitzer prophetically predicted that, of all the Southern Chinese fighting systems, wing chun would be the first to gain a widespread following in the West precisely because of its modern approach to hand combat and progressive (often English speaking) student base.

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13 A similar model of commercial instructor training had been pioneered by the Pure Martial (Jingwu) Association in urban China during the 1910t and the early 1920t. That was also an era that saw the rapid expansion of the martial arts in response to modernization and social change [Judkins and Nielson 2015].
The EWTO expanded upon these preexisting tendencies, touting the supremacy of wing chun by repeatedly emphasizing the 'scientific nature' of the logic, geometry, physics, and physiology that characterized Ip Man’s art [WT Welt 1982: 9]. For instance, the EWTO publication About Fighting went so far as to discuss the mathematical calculations behind the timing of a defense against a conventional punch [15ff]. Their model included the speed with which the human nervous system could perceive and carry out a movement, as well as all of the relevant environmental factors including distance, position, and line of attack. This analysis was carried out to the thousandth of a second. The argument attempted to demonstrate that ‘traditional self-defense methods cannot work’ through the construction of a mathematical and scientific rhetorical framework [ibid.: 14]. Unsurprisingly, this same discursive strategy revealed that wing chun methods were far superior to boxing, wrestling, or even karate [see also Kernspecht 2013a: 12].

While promoting traditional social values, such arguments sought to demonstrate that the wing chun of the EWTO could withstand the rigors of scientific testing. Indeed, these early articles argued that its 'hypotheses' had already been confirmed. While other martial arts were a mere matter of faith, EWTO Wing Tsun was unique, for it embodied both scientific principles and proper social relationships. ‘COGITO ERGO EWTO (∴ think, therefore I am with the EWTO)’ [cover slogan 1987].

Of course, there have been many pathways to modernity. The EWTO’s vision of the Wing Tsun system seems to express a uniquely Western vision of modernity, perhaps different from what Ip Man sought to teach his students in the 1950s and 1960s. The organization’s preferred modes of communication suggest that in some ways it has attempted to transcend pure scientism, or some of the other problems with modern Western thought. By emphasizing their connection to the Daoist duality of yin and yang, the EWTO seems to imply that the seeds of the modern lay within traditional wisdom and that modern experimentation will bear out the wisdom of traditional practices. Thus, their model of wing chun seeks to transcend, in some way, the duality of Western thought, or at least the labels ‘East’ and ‘West’. According to the theorem of contradiction, something cannot be itself and its opposite at the same time. Within the EWTO’s carefully constructed map of communication strategies, this might be possible. Still, one must note that the academically inspired marketing slogan ‘COGITO ERGO EWTO’ undercuts this essential claim in a subtle way. It was René Descartes who established the modern dualism of body and soul with his pronouncement cogito ergo sum. Rather than truly transcending the limitations of the West in a fundamental way, the EWTO has merely established strategies of communication which accept and seek to remedy the social contradictions of rapid modernization, much as Peter Beyer would have predicted [2000].

**SUMMARY**

Processes were set in motion in Germany during the 1970s which would result in the creation of the largest wing chun community outside of China. We conclude that the success of the EWTO is best understood in organizational terms. Founded in 1976, the organization (which claims to have more than 50,000 members at present [see Kernspecht 2013a: 148]) employed two fundamental modes of communication. First, the practice of EWTO-trademarked Wing Tsun was treated as a conversation between fighting bodies. Secondly, the organization sought to impose its own frame of reference for all regional communication about wing chun in Germany.

On the practical and semantic levels of cognitive and normative function, the Wing Tsun of the EWTO is organized as a system of binary opposites. It sought to position itself as synthesizing tradition and progress, myth and logos, Western science and Eastern philosophy, employee and entrepreneur, domestic self-reliance and foreign exoticism. By employing modes of communication based on a strategy of transcendence [Beyer 2000], the EWTO created an inward looking and largely closed community which addressed fundamental questions about what it meant to be German in a time of social and economic upheaval. These strategies are further illustrated by a strong emphasis on membership, group loyalty, clothing codes, symbolically shared values, and homogeneous body choreographies. Like many other Asian martial arts, it attempted to reorient the individual’s relationship with modern society through the construction of shared physical experiences and identities [Gainty 2013]. This was an ‘imagined community’ that one could feel [Anderson 1991].

The semantic and organizational structures of the EWTO demonstrated a great deal of flexibility in their ability to adapt to a changing environment. Its approach to Wing Tsun has been varied. It proved suitable both for the compensatory alleviation of socially produced effects (change of values) and at the same time has forged connections to post-modern currents (individualization, pluralization).

Our analysis has focused on the EWTO’s first decade in Germany. This paper has neither addressed other wing chun lineages found in Germany [Hirneise & Pertl: 1988] nor later periods in the EWTO’s development. Nevertheless, our theoretical approach to the problems
of communication and identity formation provide starting points for further analyses of the spread of wing chun in Germany and the rest of Europe. We conclude by quickly reviewing some of the EWTO’s later history and noting instances that may suggest fruitful avenues for future research.

The EWTO’s ability to adapt in response to both external and internal developments has been repeatedly proven through the decades. The organization proved to be well-positioned to handle the political upheaval which emerged after 1989. Thanks to its teaching model and franchise system, the EWTO’s vision of Wing Tsun could quickly expand within the marketplaces of the new federal states after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The WT Welt Special No. 1, published in 1993, on the occasion of the ‘100th birthday of Grandmaster Ip Man’, featured an advertisement for the group’s training and education center in Langenzell Castle in Heidelberg (‘Training like in a monastery’ [11]). Such an allusion was designed to excite the imagination with images of the legendary Shaolin temple, while tempting the rational mind with the promise of exciting franchise opportunities in the new federal territories. After all, leaders of Wing Tsun schools all over Europe (and other continents) had received their training in the ‘WT-Castle’. So, why not those seeking to establish the tradition in the German ‘East’?

This ability to quickly expand into new areas through a system of corporate franchise licenses has become something of a double-edged sword. In some ways, the EWTO may even have become the victim of its own success. Once the value of these rhetorical strategies and organizational structures had been proved, there was nothing to stop individual students from attempting to replicate the group’s incredible success on their own. Indeed, the 1990s saw a proliferation of splinter groups, each trained and socialized in the EWTO’s methods. Most relied on the larger group’s tried and true business strategy, and simply rebranded the product. The EWTO has released a new ‘Blitz Defense’ program. At the same time growth of krav maga within the German market in recent years), the EWTO has shifted to the ‘big seven’ [Kernspecht 2013a: 157].14 According to the EWTO’s literature, this signals ‘nothing less than a new paradigm’ [Kernspecht 2013a: 24]. In the face of new pressure from practices like MMA and krav maga, the EWTO is struggling ‘to put Wing Tsun back on its feet’ [Kernspecht 2013a: 102].

Ironically, this ‘back to basics’ strategy seems to be leading to a greater degree of product differentiation within the German wing chun community. Sensing the need to take seriously the growing demand for adult self-defense (a need that has been signaled by the explosive growth of krav maga within the German market in recent years), the EWTO has released a new ‘Blitz Defense’ program. At the same time special programs seeking to popularize Wing Tsun among children are seen as necessary to expand the EWTO’s customer base by providing an entirely different range of services. Likewise, after a long period of exclusion [Kernspecht 1987], the EWTO has started to embrace the importance of ground fighting.

That such drastic shifts in strategy can even be undertaken illustrates the inherent flexibility in wing chun’s engagement with modernity.

14 The ‘big seven’ are introduced as a set of unspecific skills containing ‘Achtsamkeit’ (attentiveness), ‘Gewandheit’ (dexterity), ‘Körpereinheit’ (body unity), ‘Gleichgewicht’ (balance), ‘Training der Sinne’ (training of senses), ‘Timing’ (timing), and ‘Kampfgeist und Resilienz’ (fighting spirit and resilience) [Kernspecht 2013a: 311ff].
As outlined by Judkins and Nielsen [2015], the EWTO achieved tremendous growth in the 1970s and 1980s by establishing a community focused on essential questions of identity in the face of globalization and social dislocation. Yet, in recent years, the organization has increasingly turned outward, establishing a strategy that seeks to identify problems in the lives of students and offer concrete solutions.

As Peter Bayer might have predicted, this change in approach necessitates a move towards the acceptance of increased specialization and professionalization. In 2008, the EWTO even sought to manage the risk from both external and internal shocks by bringing additional shareholders into the management of Wing Tsun GmbH and Co. KG. While many proponents of wing chun continue to rhetorically emphasize the ‘ancient’ and unchanging nature of their practice, the case of the EWTO reminds us that these are fundamentally modern practices adapted to Western market conditions. Their future success will be the result of further organizational innovation and an ability to localize what have become global products to meet the needs of regional and national markets.


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The Creation of Wing Tsun: A German Case Study
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KEY FACTORS IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT & TRANSITIONS IN GERMAN ELITE COMBAT SPORT ATHLETES

KRISTIN BEHR & PETER KUHN

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to systematically identify key factors that facilitate and constrain career development and career transitions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted and analysed using both deductive and inductive analysis. The sample was purposefully composed of 14 active (n=7) and retired (n=7) male (n=8) and female (n=6) international level athletes, including Olympic gold medallists and World and European champions with 120 medals won between them. Findings relate to difficulties and critical events in athletes' attitudes toward their career development. Six key factors were identified: second pillar, higher-level competition experience at a young age, coach, federation, setbacks, and way of coping with career termination, out of which three factors (second pillar, higher-level competition experience at young age, way of coping with career termination) were theory-based and the other three factors (coach, federation, setbacks) were collected from the transcript material. We concluded that an athletic career is a highly complex, multi-layered, and individual process. Significant differences were found between statements of student-athletes and sports soldiers concerning the second pillar and financial support. Participation at senior competitions at an early age is required for a smooth transition to a world-class level. Other aspects, such as improved communication in federations and career assistance programmes, adaption of foreign coaches to the German sport system, and supporting activities of universities have to be investigated in further research.

CONTRIBUTORS


KEYWORDS

A fighter’s life, athletes’ careers, key factors, combat sports, elite sport, interview

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1. CONTEXT

Development, progression, and transitions of athletic careers have fascinated researchers in sports psychology since the 1960s and have increasingly been the focus of research since the 1980s [Stambulova et al. 2009]. Looking at the investigations of the last fifty years, the horizon of the object under investigation has developed over time. At the beginning of research on athletes’ careers, the transition from active competition to retirement was the main subject, which was presented as a purely negative and traumatic experience [Sinclair and Orlick 1993; Alfermann 2000]. In a first shift, career retirement was no longer examined as the only change in an athletic career. Consequently, the twists and turns during the career are considered named as a ‘whole career’ approach [Stambulova et al. 2009: 386]. The second shift was that not only the transitions in athletes’ athletic careers, but also their lives besides sport was examined. It was important to understand the athlete as a ‘big whole’ to be able to draw conclusions about their careers [Wylleman and Lavallee 2004].

Finally, the context of the research has been widened. While – in previous studies – only coaches, parents and friends have been considered to be external factors [Côté 1999; Wylleman et al. 2000], macro-social factors, such as sport systems and culture, get more attention now [Stambulova, Stephan, and Jäphag 2007].

This led to the development of descriptive and explanatory models. Athletic career development is understood as proceeding through different stages, sections and transitions of a career [Stambulova et al. 2009]. While descriptive models focus on the stages – such as initiation/ sampling, development/ specialization, perfection/ mastery/ investment, final/ maintenance, and discontinuation stage [ibid.] – explanatory models also emphasize transitions.

Athletic Career Explanatory Models

Schlossberg defined career transition as an ‘event or non-event [which] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships’ [1981: 5]. The understanding of a transition changed in 1999, when Wylleman et al. [2004] viewed the transition as an ongoing process instead of a single event or non-event. According to Alfermann and Stambulova [2007: 713], ‘transitions come with a set of specific demands related to practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle that athletes have to cope with to continue successfully in sport or to adjust to the post-sport career’. They differentiate career transitions into normative and non-normative turning points/ phases in the course of a sporting career. Three drastic transitions have been identified and investigated: junior-to-senior transition, transition of student-athletes, and career termination [Vanden Auweele 2004; Vanden Auweele et al. 2004; Barker et al. 2014; Tokuyama 2015; Pehrson, Stambulova and Olsson 2017; Stambulova, Pehrson and Olsson 2017; Li et al. 2018].

Looking at an athlete’s entire career, the transition from junior to senior level is an unavoidable and often critical phase of athletes’ careers. In this phase athletes are divided into two groups. One part makes the leap to the top of the world and ally to the international senior level, and the other and larger part, fail and either drop out completely or pursue their sports only as an extracurricular activity. Recent studies give evidence that most athletes confirm that they have failed at this point in their careers [Stambulova et al. 2009]. Consequently, the transition from junior to senior level is associated with considerable demands on young athletes. Additionally, athletes perceived this transition as a big step related to a much higher training intensity and performance [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. According to Stambulova et al. [2009: 405] there are five overarching demands for a successful transition: ‘(1) to balance sport goals with other life goals and to reorganize lifestyle, (2) to search for one’s individual path in sport, (3) to cope with pressure of selections, (4) to win prestige among peers, judges, etc., and (5) to cope with possible relationship problems’.

Wylleman and Lavallee [2004] found that the transition in sport coincides with transitions in other life situations, such as the transition from school to university, and makes it more difficult to cope with both transition situations. According to them, the following skills are necessary to successfully master the transition to the elite level: ‘(1) interest in sport science knowledge, (2) summarizing and drawing upon their own sport experience, (3) implementation of psychological strategies in competitions, (4) learning from mistakes of others, and (5) family and federation support’ [Stambulova et al. 2009: 405].

Research also confirmed that successful coping with junior-to-senior transition is associated with a high athletic identity and personal maturation [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. Athletes’ ambitions to cope with this transition successfully and to meet the expectations of others together with the uncertain outcome of the coping process, result in high stress and increased sensitivity to social influences [ibid.]. Therefore, support from outside, in terms of coaches e.g. plays a vital role during the transition process. Bennie and O’Connor [2004] point out that a supportive environment regarding the psychological, social, and economic situation is essential for a successful transition process. Such adjustments are particularly difficult for young talents who received early social recognition for their achievements. In addition, they grow up with an exclusive focus on sport, which makes the transition to senior level even more difficult.
Athletes practicing their competitive sports while studying at the same time are another research topic. Especially in fringe sports it is usually unthinkable for athletes to concentrate solely on sports if they want to be vocationally successful in life after their sport careers [Debois et al. 2012]. Student-athletes try hard on combining professional sport and studying at university. However, the combination of top-class sport and professional education, especially at university level, represents a particular challenge and puts a set of demands [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. Students are confronted with new academic requirements, face the challenge of living away from home, create new relationships and manage their time and resources. Especially in Europe, the ‘Dual Career’ approach is widespread meaning that the career has two major foci: sport and university or work. Many benefits, such as balanced lifestyle, reduced stress, good conditions for developing life skills and higher employability after sports are reported by this approach, but it is also accompanied by several problems and demands, especially when new levels in sport or education are to be achieved [Elbe and Beckmann 2006; Stambulova and Ryba 2013]. Studies show that students perceive difficulties not only in sport but also in their student life [Stambulova et al. 2012]. They reveal that they can adopt much better to changes in sport than in the educational life as their athletic identity is much greater than their student identity. However, due to the double load of professional sport and university, student-athletes are more likely for chronic fatigue or even burnout [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. To avoid such consequences special arrangements between sport and educational systems have been established, that should assist talented athletes to manage both athletic and academic-vocational development successfully, and, in addition, assure their readiness for the post-sport career. Therefore, current literature recommends developing strategies to help athletes to complete areas, such as career management in and outside sport, development and use of transferable skills or preparation for post-sport careers [Carr and Bauman 2002].

The transition of athletes into post-sport career and their athletic retirement is the most studied research topic of career transitions worldwide [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. Alfermann and Stambulova [2007] found that the support of any organization decreases abruptly as athletes approach the end of their careers and thus no longer perform. In contrast, support of family and friends is felt to be particularly strong at this time. Topics of interest are the reasons for career termination, retirement demands, barriers and resources, coping strategies, and quality of adaption. All those factors are weighted in the athletes’ decisions to terminate and are not necessarily related to sport (e.g. stagnation, injuries, lack of financial support) but also to future life opportunities (e.g. job offer, wish to start a family). Career termination has several causes and is often the result of a long decision process [Fernandez, Stephan, and Fouquereau 2006]. It is the clearest example of a normative and inevitable transition, and sport-related as well as non-sport-related contexts influence the process of decision-making [Alfermann and Stambulova 2007]. Four main causes of career termination have been identified by Taylor and Ogilvie [2001]: age, deselection, injury, and free choice. The main difference between these causes is, that the first three are forced and unplanned whereas the forth cause is free of choice and – more or less – planned. Studies show that the more athletes terminate due to future plan reasons the easier athletes adapt to the new situation. Additionally, the athlete’s impression of controllability of career termination is a decisive factor [Alfermann and Stambulova 2007]. Several authors [Lavallee and Wylleman 2000; Taylor and Ogilvie 2001; Alfermann and Stambulova 2007] identified five different demands facilitating the adaption to the post-sport career and smoothens the transition: (a) starting a new professional career in or outside sports; (b) solving an “identity problem” (i.e. reducing their athletic identity and developing new identities relevant to their new careers); (c) reorganizing their lifestyle (with sport/exercise included only for recreational purposes); (d) renewing their social network (i.e. finding friends outside sport); (e) dealing with family issues (e.g. own family, parenthood, house-holding duties) [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014: 613].

Research of career termination is abounding, although in terms of absolute numbers only 20% perceive their athletic retirement as crisis. Reasons for this crisis can be a high athletic identity causing an ‘identity crisis’ as well as the missing support from coaches, sport peers, and sport organizations. Especially the lack of support from sport organizations have been reported by retired athletes [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. The other 80% of successfully transitioned athletes need between 8 and 18 months for the adaption [ibid.]. Authors agree that necessary resources for an unproblematically transition are: (a) ‘retirement planning in advance …; (b) voluntary termination; (c) multiple personal identity and positive experiences in roles other than the athlete role; (d) effective social support from family, coach, peers, and sport organizations’ [613].

If athletes have these factors at their disposal, they tend towards the right coping strategies and thus towards a successful transition to their post-sport careers. Studies show that more positive and less negative emotional reactions lead to more active (i.e. problem solving) and less defensive (i.e. emotion-focused) coping strategies [Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]. Summing up, quality of adaption to post-sport career depends on the causes of career termination, its circumstances, and the individual athlete’s personal and social resources [Alfermann and Stambulova 2007].
Career transition explanatory models focus on reasons and demands, coping processes, factors influencing coping, outcomes, and later consequences of a transition. The central and decisive element of those models is the coping process. To develop successful coping strategies, the requirements and demands of the situation must match the athlete’s ability to deal with the situation including his/her existing experience and motivation to manage the transition, as well as financial and social support. Three different explanatory models are prevalent in existing literature: the human adaption to transition model [Schlossberg 1981], the athletic career termination model [Taylor and Ogilvie 1994], and the athletic career transition model [Stambulova 2003]. Compared to the previous models, Stambulova’s athletic career transition model focuses not only on normative but also on all other transitions that can happen during an athlete’s career [Fig. 1]. It explains career transition as a process of coping with a set of specific demands [Battochio, Stambulova, and Schinke 2016]. In this process coping strategies (planning, practicing more than opponent, searching for professional support, etc.) are key elements to handle the new situation. The success depends on the dynamic balance between transition resources and barriers [Alfermann and Stambulova 2007]. Resources include all internal and external factors facilitating the coping process (e.g. athlete’s knowledge, skills, personality traits, motivation and availability of social and financial support), while barriers refer to all internal and external factors interfering with successful coping (e.g. lack of necessary knowledge or skills, low self-efficacy, lack of financial or social support, difficulties in combining sport and education, etc.) [Stambulova 2003]. Summarizing, athletes have to deal with certain demands and with factors (resources and barriers) influencing these demands to reach either a successful or a crisis-transition outcome. If the transition is successful coping was effective and the athlete was able to apply coping resources and strategies. Crisis transition is the outcome of an athlete’s inability to cope with the new situation due to low resources, high barriers and/or ineffective coping strategies. Reasons for ineffective coping can be an athlete’s low awareness of transition demands, lack of resources or barriers, and inability to analyse the transitional situation and to make a decision [Alfermann and Stambulova 2007]. If athletes are not able to cope with the situation on their own, outside interventions are needed resulting in either a successful delayed transition or in negative consequences due to ineffective or no interventions [Stambulova 2003].
Why Specifically Investigate Athletes in Combat Sports?

Combat sports is an umbrella term for many different types of single combat including boxing, wrestling, fencing, karate, judo, taekwondo, which are Olympic types of combat sports. Combat sports’ athletes are an interesting subject of research in the field of career development and transitions for two specific circumstances.

First, there is an uncounted and highly diversified number of martial arts that are more or less competitive. A group of scientists in the German Society of Sport Science states that this field consists of domestic and foreign cultural, organized and non-organized, commercial and non-commercial, amateur and professional as well as Olympic and non-Olympic forms, styles, and sports, and, thus, represents – similar to dancing – a specific thematic context of movement, which can be distinguished from the other sport as a whole [Bayreuther Autorengruppe 2011]. Within this field athletes can both change between styles or types of martial arts and combat sports and decide to stay amateurs or become professionals in the same sport, e.g. boxing or wrestling, or in a different sport, e.g. from judo to mixed martial arts.1

Second, it is the role combat sports play within national sports systems in which Olympic sports rival with other sports for financial support from the governments. In Germany e.g. for every Olympic Games a medal goal is formulated, which was just touched in Rio de Janeiro and resulted in heated discussions and new reforms in the sports system (such as the performance sports reform of the German Olympic Committee). Due to their diversity in terms of various individual sports and their different characteristics (weight class, discipline, etc.), combat sports have a great influence on the medals to be achieved. While many studies about career development and transitions have been conducted with sport-specific groups (ice-hockey, football, handball, etc.), no overarching investigations about combat sports athletes exist down to the present day.

Third, we have just episodic research and almost no specific knowledge about how careers and fighters’ lives in martial arts and combat sports develop, proceed, end, and what comes afterwards. The research programme ‘A Fighter’s Life’2 which frames this study aims at identifying aspects that are crucial or at least important for the performance development of an athlete and to analyse interaction processes between the people involved in the athletic career in order to derive, implement and evaluate interventions for quality improvement on this basis.

Comparable Studies

Stronach and Adair [2010] focused on the socio-economic circumstances of Australia’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous boxers. Therefore, retirement experiences of fourteen elite athletes have been collected by interviews to understand their decision-making process.

Debois et al. interviewed an elite female fencer with Olympic goals to explore how she dealt with key events and transitions in her sports career as well as with other domains of her life. The study shows ‘an illustration of the ups and downs that elite athletes may face in their pursuit of excellence and invites questions about the conditions which would best contribute to the effectiveness of psychological intervention for enhancing both performance and personal growth’ [2012: 660].

Battochio et al. [2016] investigated the demands of 23 retired Canadian National Hockey League (NHL) players and identified stages in their careers by interviews. Based on their results they proposed an empirical career model.

In the qualitative study of Stambulova et al. [2017] a conceptual four-phase (preparation, orientation, adaption and stabilization) junior-to-senior transition framework was established. Based on this information an interview guide was constructed. Seven Swedish ice hockey players were interviewed concerning their experience during junior-to-senior transition and asked for their feedback on the established framework. In their discussion, the authors transformed their framework with respect to their new data collected.

Coakley [2006] interviewed seven former National Football League athletes regarding their well-being during sport-career transition experiences.

2. AIM, QUESTION, AND METHODS

Within this context, our study aimed at investigating elite combat sports athletes concerning their career development, proceeding and transitions, and, on this way identifying crucial influencing elements. Our research question was: ‘Which key factors are crucial in terms of influencing combat sport athletes’ career development and transitions?’

As the aim of the study was to explore what’s new in a known field, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate, and, thus, data were collected via semi-structured in-depth expert interviews [Niermann 2014]. The interview guide was constructed based on guides of Gläser

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1 As Ronda Rousey, Max Schirnhofer, and Yoshihiro Akiyama did.

2 See https://www.researchgate.net/project/A-Fighters-Life
Six categories were identified as crucial factors: second pillar, higher-level competition experience at young age, coach, federation, setbacks, and way of coping with career termination. The subcategories are presented in subsections.

Second Pillar

In Germany elite athletes are offered support by the German Olympic Sports Confederation (‘Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund’, DOSB), which is the non-governmental umbrella organization of German sport, in order to combine sport and vocational education. This so called ‘Dual Career’ refers to competitive athletes who are pursuing studies or apprenticeships in parallel to their top-class sport and try to combine both in the best possible way.

While the DOSB describes the Dual Career as a success story, the attempt to master a Dual Career was positively evaluated only by a few athletes while the difficulty of combining sport and education was shown by problems as follows.

- The choice of studies is limited to universities in the surrounding area of the training environment.
- Attendance and exam phases force athletes to lower their training extent.
- The combination of elite sport and studying is becoming increasingly difficult in higher semesters, and it is not possible to pursue both, sport and study, at a high level.
- The combination of elite sport and studying is perceived as extremely strenuous due to the frequent commute.
- The studies could not be completed in standard period of study time.

Four athletes dropped out of their studies because they wanted to fully concentrate on their sport. Another four athletes stated that they would always choose their studies when they were faced the decision between sports and studies. Our findings show that a Dual Career can only be realized through specially initiated organizational measures, such as personal agreements with professors and lecturers regarding leave of absence.

See https://www.duale-karriere.de/home/.
As the time required for training increases with advancing age, the demands placed on students in their studies also increase. Due to outstanding achievements, professional athletes are often out on competitions around the world and therefore rely on athlete-friendly universities or training companies. The interviews revealed that competitive sport is acknowledged differently as a social commitment from university to university. At some universities – often due to the initiative of the nearby Olympic Centre – professional sports representatives are available who try to support the athletes in organizing and combining top-class sport and studies/training. In addition, personal/private contacts with professors and lecturers played a decisive role. At other universities, some athletes were completely on their own, organizing their studies and trying to coordinate things in the best possible way. These athletes described their universities as uncooperative and mostly had to solve problems themselves. The compatibility of elite combat sport and studies also depends on the subject of study. The combination works better if the university has few compulsory courses or offers material via e-learning and the athlete is not tied to a specific location. Especially in the natural sciences such as medicine or dentistry, this was a considerable obstacle due to laboratory times and practical courses. Considering training companies, all – with one exception – supported the Dual Career of the athletes during their apprenticeship. But as soon as the athletes became trained professionals, the companies no longer felt sympathetic to absences. Resulting, the double burden of a Dual Career left little or no room for further activities.

Those athletes, who do not study or pursue a Dual Career, are usually for several years in the sports promotion section of the German Armed Forces – so called sports soldiers.\textsuperscript{4} Seven athletes of the sample did so. Five of these athletes in joined the sports promotion section immediately after school. This step marked a noticeable turning point in their careers. All athletes perceived the support positively, as they could fully concentrate on their training and considered a change to the student or training status as negative. The sports promotion sections of the German Armed Forces therefore represent the only possibility for the athletes to pursue their sport to 100% and to earn money at the same time.

Three of the seven athletes left the army at some point to study. However, they confirmed the previous assumption that the training frequency suffered as a consequence. Only one athlete described that the beginning of the apprenticeship led to a surprisingly increased performance but explained this by the fact that his mind was not only focused on sport and he enjoyed training much more than before.

\textsuperscript{4} Sports soldiers are athletes serving their country as military personnel while being financed by the state mainly for the practice of their sport.

\section*{Higher-Level Competition Experience at Young Age}

As described, it is a critical transition when athletes switch from junior to senior level. Consequently, athletes do not only face opponents who are at the same age within a three years margin but everyone from a certain age upwards. This implies that athletes are confronted with opponents of every age with some of them having much more experience at this level at the time of the switch. Many athletes are struck by the highly different level of the seniors. They report that they needed about two years to adapt to that level. It is even harder as the number of competitions decreases compared to the dense schedule of the juniors.

For some it is mentally hard to cope with the aspect that it is difficult to get in with the senior level as the results are not comparable with the junior level at all. An athlete who struggled at the beginning of the senior level but made it to the national team after a few years explained the effective transition due to her own motivation. This motivation came from rays of hope, e.g. when the athlete could compete in the team and got positive feedback from the outside.

Contrary, some athletes had a quite smooth transition into the senior level and had no difficulties in their adaption process. The athletes justified this with the fact that they have already competed at the senior level when they were still junior or even in the age range below. One athlete was even looking forward to competing against his senior idols and had therefore a highly positive point of view.

\section*{Coach}

Coaches are the daily companions of athletes and thus exert a significant influence on them. Athletes have relations to their club coaches as well as to national head coaches, which implicates the task to adjust themselves to different characters and coaching styles. Since the relations are often close and also coaches have to show results conflicts seem to be inevitable.

Nine athletes described their relationships with their personal/club coaches as very confidential and expressed a strong attachment to their coaches. Five athletes even saw their coach like a father or grandpa figure. This intensive relationship was established by the athletes’ time spent with their coaches and by long competition trips, but also by team-building measures demanded by the coaches themselves.

Another five athletes emphasized an attachment to their coaches but said that they were not reference persons for personal problems, as this was something to talk about with their friends and not their coaches. One athlete justified the impersonal relationship to her coach by the fact...
Federations which are in charge of one specific type of sport each. The DOSB has 101 member organizations including 16 regional sports federations with particular tasks. The term 'federation' refers to these 65 national sport-governing federations which are in charge of one specific type of sport each.

The support provided by the federation was perceived quite differently. Some athletes felt that their federation took care of them and paid for their competition travels, training camps and equipment. The higher the squad status, the more was taken care of by the federation. However, there were also critical comments from a large number of athletes who perceived the support of the federation as poor. Several athletes stated that they felt really deserted and disappointed by the federation. Some athletes criticized the poor communication between federation and athletes, which athletes interpret as disinterest on the part of the federation. No talks about the future of the athlete have been conducted in this way.

In addition, the level of support was classified according to the relationship with the national head coach and the performance.

The category federation includes the financing of competitions, travels and equipment of the athletes. Here, no consistent picture could be drawn either. However, it became evident that the federation finances the squad athletes who are nominated for a European or World Championship and thus belong to the national team. The limitation of funding to selected athletes poses a problem for the remaining athletes, who are members of the national team but do not attend international highlights such as European and World Championships. The lack of transparency of such criteria lead to the fact that athletes are often unable to understand or even influence these criteria.

Furthermore, it became obvious that a (temporary) drop in performance had a direct influence on the financial support of the athlete by the federation, so that the funding of competitions etc. turned out to be problematic. In such cases many athletes would only be able to continue professional sports due to the support of their parents who would bear a large part of the financial burden and high costs.

In addition to the assistance of the parents, some athletes also rely on the support of the Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe, regional foundations and critical. It turned out that the national head coaches trust in their athletes is extremely important. As soon as the national head coach gave their squad members the feeling that the athletes' development of the athlete was important to them, increased motivation and fun were the result. However, this was extremely problematic for athletes who did not train at the Olympic Centre. Consequently, the lack of recognition on the part of the national head coach led to a diminished athletes' motivation.

Some athletes described frequent change of coaches as a negative influence on the relationship between coach and athlete. The majority of the athletes have experienced several coach changes so far. On the one hand these were forced changes, triggered by the passing through of different age groups, club changes or the federation, but on the other hand some were also desired changes. Men perceived the change of coaches as more neutral than women. Female athletes emphasized that it was difficult for them to get involved with a coach again every three years and that adjusting to the new philosophy of the new coach would take a long time and therefore meant a setback.

With regard to the question of conflicts only minor disputes were reported, but these were not considered in the coach's overall assessment. As an example, incomprehensible nominations or minor discussions about the training effort were mentioned. These small setbacks were responded to by harder training on the part of the athlete in order to become even better. Furthermore, some athletes reported that you have to be above such things.

Barely any of the athletes confirmed that they felt pressure from their coach. However, there was a slight tendency among the sexes, as women felt pressured rather than men and reacted anxiously.

The acceptance of the Dual Career by the coaches was perceived very differently. Thus, some coaches were willing to exempt the athlete from training for university measures while others saw no need for it. Especially foreign coaches reacted with low understanding to the requirements of vocational training. The reason was the lack of knowledge of the German sport system and federal structures. In many other countries, the conditions for competitive athletes are not comparable to those in Germany.
and earmarked donations via the Olympic Centre. The Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe was listed by all athletes as an important/existential supporter of their athletic careers. However, the sport is unpleasantly done at the expense of the parents and long competition journeys are partly omitted, since athletes rate them as not worthwhile.

Clearly, financing problems occurred primarily with athletes pursuing a Dual Career, but not with athletes of the German Armed Forces’ sports promotion group. Here in particular, sports soldiers explicitly named the army as a supporter and considered a competitive career without the support of the army to be impossible. This became apparent for athletes who left the army because of their studies and consequently had to finance their entire cost of living.

Thus, if these framework conditions developed unfavourably, this partly led to athletes thinking about retiring.

**Setbacks**

All athletes interviewed emphasized setbacks in their athletic careers but did not describe them specifically as turning points.

Poor performance, i.e. failure to achieve self-imposed goals was a primary concern for some athletes. This e.g. included missing an Olympic medal and the Olympic qualification or even the non-nomination despite having achieved the qualification criteria. Besides that, a perceived stagnation of performance was mentioned as setback.

The atmosphere in relationships with coaches or teammates was often associated with setbacks resulting in demotivation. This field ranged from coach changes and coach dismissals over non-consideration by the national head coach to conflicts with the (national) coach and the squad mates.

Larger injuries were perceived as drastic negative experiences. These included cruciate ligament ruptures and even a stroke. As such injuries take time the feeling of missing out on the competition arises.

The interviews give a fairly coherent picture of how the athletes (especially men) deal with setbacks, whether on an interpersonal, physical or goal-oriented level. All athletes develop a special ambition and an inner incentive to train even harder, better and more thoughtfully in order to avoid something like that happening again. The athletes wanted to show the people around them even more what they are capable of. The majority also has an extremely objective and factual point of view: ‘That’s simply sport’. Only a small number of athletes were looking for the causes and reasons for the setback and were not able to identify them.

Female athletes, by comparison, seem to be much more sensitive to setbacks. Again, they had much more difficulties to find an efficient coping strategy than male athletes. They partially resigned, and no proper coping process occurred. This was particularly evident among female athletes with a Dual Career, as the second pillar compensates for competitive sports.

**Way of Coping with Career Termination**

For some of the retired athletes their retirement was fixed (Group ‘fixed’) as it was a creeping process for others (Group ‘creeping’). The athletes who deliberately set a point in time mentioned age and the feeling that they were no longer able to perform at their best as causes of career termination. In contrast, athletes presenting their exit as a creeping process were in particular students, as their studies and professional goals became more and more important. This intention was reinforced by dissatisfaction with the respective national head coach and federation.

All athletes of Group ‘fixed’ had completed vocational training or studies while pursuing their sporting careers. As a consequence, none of them was afraid of the future. Summing up, a combination of reasons led to a shift in priorities at the expense of sport among top student athletes and thus to the end of their careers. Group ‘creeping’, consisting of athletes who were still participating at a high level, can be divided into students and sports soldiers. None of the sports soldiers thought about a point in time when they would end their career. However, they were rather concerned with the question of what they wanted to do after their sporting career, which they did not know yet. Remarkably, the sports soldiers mentioned that they wanted to continue doing their sport as long as their bodies would allow it. They described the exit from competitive sport as hardly imaginable and expressed fear of the time coming after that.

In contrast, student-athletes had a more concrete idea about their career planning after competitive sports. They thought more in terms of professional and financial reasons about their retirement. Unlike the sports soldiers, they did not stress that they were afraid of the end of their sporting careers due to their studies. Some student-athletes

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**6** The Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe is a non-profit foundation under civil law. The purpose of the foundation is the idealistic and material support of athletes to compensate for their participation in international championships and national representation. The athletes should be financially supported in return for their services to their country’s reputation.
even spoke of joy about the ‘time after’, since they would have many alternatives and would no longer have to make so many commitments.

A common difficulty for both sports soldiers and students is the new rhythm of everyday life.

In general, thoughts about phasing out were mainly caused by a declining performance curve and lack of nominations. Many sports soldiers wanted to remain involved in sport in the form of a coaching profession even after their career was over. Moreover, none of the fourteen athletes interviewed believed that they would receive any support from the federation or the coach during or after the retirement process. They rather hoped that the army, the Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe and sponsors would help them in the transition to the post-sport career.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, the results are interpreted and related to existing results of the authors referred to in the first section of this paper. Based on this, recommendations for the athletes and their consultants are derived. In addition, the value of the study is summarized and its limitations will be outlined.

Second Pillar

Student-athletes perceived their Dual Career as extremely exhausting and most of their statements regarding the combination of professional sports and studies have been negatively associated. This can be explained by the fact that they have to cut back in both studies and sport as well as in their social life. In addition, student-athletes are limited in their choice of university and have to extend their study time. This counteracts to build up social relationships due to a different course plan compared to their fellow students. Furthermore, a Dual Career poses an organizational challenge to the athlete. As there is no uniform regulation for them concerning presence time, exam dates etc., the organization depends often on individual arrangements. Only a few universities have sports representatives trying to facilitate the communication between professors, faculty members and athletes. The results demonstrate that if athletes have no organizational help and the university members do not appreciate individual arrangements, it is barely impossible to master or even successfully complete studies and sports. Consequently, by pursuing a Dual Career the athletes already make a – somehow subconscious – decision of how important sports and vocational education comparatively are to them. In this decision process the role of their parents and their upbringing in childhood are clearly recognizable. If parents themselves have made a career, their children are more likely to pursue a vocational education as well because they learn from childhood on how important a vocational pillar is.

Most of the athletes who are not combining sports and academic training are working as sports soldiers and have a positive attitude towards the army. They perceive the army’s support as inevitable to perform on a professional level in their sports. The main problem is that sports soldiers do not have concrete plans regarding an occupational career when they retire. Therefore, the possibility is high that they will work in the sports area as coach or in areas where they do not need a specific education. As a result, it could be dissatisfying and hard to accept for athletes being ordinary workers in the post-sport career as they were used to perform at a high level.

The identified resources for a well-working Dual Career approach are an athlete-friendly university (members), stress-persistency, wanted subject of study close to the training environment and an understanding coach. Barriers are the tendency of sports soldiers not pursuing anything else next to the athletic career and the opposites of the resources mentioned above.

Summing up, two groups can be identified by investigating the Dual Career approach. Either athletes decide to combine high-level sport with high-level education or they choose the way as 100% professional athlete by becoming sports soldiers in the army. In the first case, athletes must be aware of meeting various obstacles and be mentally and physically strong to break through those barriers. But in the end student-athletes will be rewarded with a university or associate degree and are well-prepared for the post-sport career. The second case is quite the opposite situation. Athletes in the army have no obstacles during their active careers as they are free for practice, training camps and competitions but conflicts arise when they move on to the post-sport career. Usually they pursued no or only a low-level academic training which makes it difficult to establish in the vocational world. This is aggravated by the fact that sports soldiers have no fixed point in time when they want to end their career as it is an easy life pursuing their ‘passion’ and getting paid for it. Resultingly, they are most often way above 30 years when they want to enter the world of work. In addition, they have no occupational experience at all. Based on these facts, it is quite difficult for athletes pursuing a career as an officer and to make it to the top also on an academic level.

Benefits of a Dual Career identified by Elbe and Beckmann [2006] as well as by Stambulova and Ryba [2013] are barely confirmed by the interviewed athletes. Only the aspects of balanced lifestyle and higher employability after sports are visible in two individual cases.
Contrary their studies carved out problems (when new levels in sport or education are achieved) that can be documented by the results of the interviews. Furthermore, the athletic identity is not necessarily greater than the athlete’s student identity concerning every athlete interviewed. However, a higher athletic identity can be recorded for sports soldiers whereas the identities of student-athletes change during their athletic careers.

Regarding career development, transitions, and termination, the theory-based obstacles (Dual Career approach, junior-to-senior transition, career termination) and three new aspects (coach, federation and setbacks) were extracted from the collected data influencing an athletic career. Significant differences were found in the Dual Career approach between student-athletes and sports soldiers. There were considerable problems with student-athletes who tried to pursue a Dual Career. Uniform regulations at all universities are necessary to improve the Dual Career approach and would be a huge step into the right direction. In addition, better support of student-athletes could be achieved through a higher recognition of their efforts in sport by universities’ staff members. The NCAA system for colleges in the USA serves as an orientation, since nearly 80% of the Olympic participants of the USA are college students [McDonald 2016].

The study thus highlights a large discrepancy between sports soldiers and student-athletes in almost all areas. For student-athletes the financial subsistence, the functioning of the Dual Career, the decisions of federations, and the relationship with coaches are influencing their careers. In comparison, the athletic performance appears to be the only crucial factor for careers of sports soldiers.

Further research should investigate more success factors more detailed to give a clear advice for career assistance programs, federations, universities and training companies.

**Higher-Level Competition Experience at Young Age**

Studies showed that only a small percentage of high-level junior athletes make a successful transition to the senior stage and the majority drops out. Most of the combat sport athletes interviewed in this study transitioned successfully from junior to senior level, which is obvious because they are or were highly successful in their sports. One reason for a smooth transition was that those athletes have already competed at the senior level before they accessed this level formally.

This finding can be supported by the statements of those athletes who had difficulties to adapt to the senior level. They felt that the higher level, the experience of the older athletes, and the decreased number of competitions that they had to get used to the new level were the causes of the protracted transition process. Although the athletes met the demands for a successful transition mentioned by Stambulova [1994; 2009], they did not necessarily experience a successful transition. Additionally, the skills for an efficient transition stated by Wylleman and Lavallee [2004] are not specifically essential skills for the junior-to-senior transition and can be applied to all other transitions as well. In this time in particular, the key element is that the athletes need to take part in many competitions of the highest possible level in order to get experience needed for the senior level. Concluding, this way should be already pursued at a young age to enable athletes to develop towards a high-class level.

**Coach**

A huge difference in the relationship with the national head coach is reported by the interviewed athletes. Statements describe the relationship from very confidential to rather aloof. But no matter what kind of relationship with the coach prevailed, the recognition of the national head coach was of major importance for all of the athletes. Above all, the coach’s trust in the athlete’s person despite an experienced defeat is an enormously important factor for the athletes. A crucial problem emerges for athletes who did not train at the same club as the national head coach because athletes from other training bases had the impression that he often had a bias towards his own students in terms of nomination, financing and other supporting services. All athletes who did not perform significantly better than athletes from the national head coach’s base must therefore usually fight for the attention of the national head coach.

Especially with foreign coaches this problem becomes increasingly apparent. If they have a different mentality, difficulties may be the consequence. Besides comprehension problems due to language, foreign coaches reach their limits due to their ignorance of the German social and sports system with its federal elements. As a result, student-athletes, in particular, have enormous difficulties in establishing a relationship of trust with the national head coach due to absences from academic further training and have to fight for the support of the national head coach. In the worst case, this creates a vicious circle in which top athletes turn away from competitive sports. [Figure 2].

This links to the next point ‘change of coaches’ and makes it evident how important a long-term relationship to the coach – be it national head coach or club coach – is. Due to frequent changes of coaches it is difficult for the athletes to build up confidence in the new coach again and again. In addition, the athletes need at least one year to get used to the new philosophy and a different technique of the new trainer as well as to adapt. This in turn means that athletes are initially dissatisfied with their performance and feel set back.
Furthermore – in contrast to the members of the national team – no conversations were held regarding the future of the athletes. As a consequence, the athletes in this group had a very negative image of the federation. So, the question arises: To what extent should the federation invest in good athletes who, however, do not reach international highs due to poorer results in the meantime?

Another problem arises from the non-financing of such athletes. Often the nomination criteria and the associated financing of the federation are not transparent for these athletes, and, consequently, encounter incomprehension and fierce criticism. If these athletes do not benefit from their parents' financial capabilities or regional foundations, the association loses these athletes who, despite their not above-average performance, are talented, motivated and ambitious. If these athletes are pursuing studies or training at the same time, the path to a post-sport career is very short. Furthermore, their potential to act as high-quality training partners is not recognized. As these athletes become frightened away, the national top performers become narrower and are limited to the four athletes of the national team with increasing age. In summary, whether these are nomination or financing problems, the lack of transparency of such decisions and the lack of or no communication about them are decisive factors.

The factor coach is also mentioned by other authors [Stambulova et al. 2009]. However, in addition to other aspects such as high motivation, positive attitude, parents, etc., it mostly represents only a mosaic in the overall picture with little influence. It thus contributes to a certain extent to a positive or negative coping reaction but is not investigated as a decisive element [Wylleman, Lavallee and Alfermann 1999]. Additionally, Debois et al. [2012] identify coaches – beside several other factors – as issue facilitating the development of a high-level performance.

In summary, it can be shown that the confidence of the national head coach in the athlete's person is a key element for athletes' career development, which is particularly difficult to achieve for athletes from other bases. Furthermore, frequent coach changes represent an additional obstacle for an increasing performance curve of the athlete.

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Federation

The athletes interviewed also perceived the support services of the association very differently. While athletes of the national team, who took part in important international highlights such as the Olympic Games, World and European Championships for the federation, spoke of impeccable financing of competitions, travel and training camps, the remaining squad athletes represent a clear contrast. They had to put together their own financing and felt abandoned by the association.

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Although there are existing career assistance programs, athletes confirm that they often feel abandoned. Especially in the fields of
Poor performance, atmospheric interferences in relationships with coaches or teammates, and injuries are the three inductively derived sub-categories from the code setbacks. In general, a gender difference was noticed. Female athletes appeared to have much more difficulties to find effective coping strategies on setbacks comparing to male athletes. No matter what setback they experienced, the attitude ‘That’s sport!’ was omnipresent. Furthermore, they responded to setbacks with harder training which proves a part of the male characteristic. In contrast, the generally rather effeminate image of women was confirmed. They reacted more sensitive when they experienced losses and were rather demotivated. The different handling of setbacks can be explained by the different perception of setbacks. If athletes perceive the new situation after the setback pessimistic, ineffective coping strategies are the result. Contrary, if athletes do not attach great importance to the new situation, they are able to cope better with the new conditions. In summary, the handling of setbacks depends on the athlete’s mental attitude.

Only one paper dealt in specific with injuries as setbacks [Ivarsson, Stambulova, and Johnson 2018]. After the detailed investigation of this study, the authors described the setback injury as a career transition with its long-term consequences in terms of career termination. The authors constructed a four-phase model (pre-injury, first reactions, diagnosis and treatment, rehabilitation and consequences) demonstrating the transition process. In each phase athletes experience specific demands and barriers and respond to them with distinct coping strategies and resources. Comparing to this study, distinct strategies of the interviewed athletes can be identified by the reaction of higher training intensity and volume as well as their mental skills.

Therefore, it is necessary that the athlete continuously works on his mental condition to avoid ineffective coping-strategies in advance. As a consequence, attention should be paid to integrate not only physical skills but also mental abilities into the training plan.

Way of Coping with Career Termination

Although research about athletic career termination is abounding, nothing about the different transitioning of student-athletes and sports soldiers has been investigated. As mentioned in the discussion about the second pillar student-athletes have a much smoother transition than sports soldiers. The findings of the interviews point out that the athletes who had already retired can be divided into two groups [Fig. 3]. One group determined a fix point in time for their career termination whereas it was a creeping process for the other group.

The last-named group has been all student-athletes who gradually dropped out of sport due to dissatisfaction on their performance and the increased importance of their occupational education. Those athletes who determined a concrete date for their career termination mentioned age, decreasing performance, injuries and missing fulfilment as reasons for their decision. Most of those reasons have been already shown by Taylor and Ogilvie [1994; 2001] and, thus, are confirmed by this study.

Athletes who are still participating in high-class sport can be split in two subgroups as well. Group 1 represents student-athletes whereas the group 2 consists of sports soldiers. Differences can be reported in the planning of the post-sport career. Whereas student-athletes have a concrete plan in mind, sports soldiers want to compete on a professional level as long as their bodies would allow it. While student-athletes are excited about the future without any commitments, the sports soldiers are more afraid of the time after competitive sports. This can be explained by the fact that student-athletes always have to decide between two sides which they both want to pursue whereas sports soldiers ‘lose’ their possession/passion and have no suitable alternative.

While Alfermann and Stambulova [2007] assume that adapting to post-sport career is easier when the athletes terminate because of future plans [Alfermann and Stambulova 2007], the student-athletes interviewed rather terminate due to future plans, mainly because they want to join the world of work but also when they want to raise a family. The retirement process of student-athletes is described as a creeping process, but in this creeping process the athletes reported that they compulsively attempt to achieve good results in both sports and studies. Therefore, the student-athletes trudge through the adaption process until they finally decide in favour of their studies. However, the initially described

resources: pro-active retirement planning in advance, voluntary athletic career termination, multiple personal identity and positive experiences, effective social support from family and friends [Taylor and Ogilvie 2001; Alfermann et al. 2004; Fernandez et al. 2006; Alfermann and Stambulova 2007], and

barriers: high athletic identity leading to an identity crisis, missing support of coach, peers and organizations [Taylor and Ogilvie 1994; Alfermann and Stambulova 2007; Stambulova and Wylleman 2014]

can be confirmed by this study.
Limitations

Three limitations relating to the sample, the research design and the author can be found in this study. The first limiting factor is that different athletes from several sports were interviewed. Due to diverse conditions in the respective federations, the results of the present study are limited in their generalizability. In addition, the wide range of the age of the sample is a problem as the German sport system changed over time. Therefore, comparing statements from retired athletes about second pillar, coaches, federations etc. with statements from active athletes these days skews the results.

Second, the retrospective design of the study has its limitations (e.g. recall, bias) [Kerr and Dacyshyn 2000; Stephan et al. 2003]. Reinterpretation and memory selection pervert the truth and lead to different results. For example, retired athletes often do not view past events as badly as they experienced them at time. Further research should consider taking more homogenous samples and a smaller age range to obtain more confident conclusions.

Third, our own experiences in combat sport could bias the results as well. This is a common problem in ethnographic research. On the one hand being a ‘native’ definitely helps to open doors and to deeply understand what athletes experienced and tell about. On the other hand, as Bergold and Thomas state, the high degree of involvement and commitment in the field can also lead to the participating scientists being too strongly influenced by the ways of thinking and concepts of the research field [2010: 338]. According to Bergold and Thomas, researchers have to use distancing instruments which allow them to reflect on their personal interests and blind spots and on their relations with research partners and to establish a critical distance to the research situation. We have been aware of this problem and the requirements associated with it, however, a certain bias cannot be completely ruled out.

Value of the Study

The study is highly valuable as career transitions are a decisive issue in both literature and current topics in society. The sport-specific investigations so far have dealt with athletes from individual or team sports (ice hockey, handball, hockey, football, boxing, etc.). The special value of this study is that, for the first time, high- and top-level athletes in judo, karate, kickboxing, wrestling, boxing, and fencing were interviewed. Summarizing, the study’s question can be answered as follows: The study identified six key factors for career development and transitions – (1) second pillar, (2) higher-level competition experience at a young age, (3) coach, (4) federation, (5) setbacks, and (6) way of coping with career termination – whose characteristics partly confirm the current state of scientific discussion and, above that, reveals a row of new – crucial – findings both for athletes themselves as for their advisors.

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Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.
Key Factors in Career Development and Transitions in German Elite Combat Sport Athletes

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**ABSTRACT**

In the past, some scholars have assumed that women’s empowerment through participation in sports, particularly male-identified sports, would result in a decrease in gender differences and performances of femininity. Recently, however, scholars have suggested that performances of femininity are not necessarily detrimental to gender empowerment, and furthermore that strategic use of them may be subversive. On the basis of my auto-ethnography and interviews with men and women who practice martial arts, I explicate the unique social conditions that make full-contact martial arts a fertile ground for gender subversive appropriation in terms of: 1. close and reciprocal bodily contact between men and women, 2. the need to learn new regimes of embodiment, and 3. the paradoxical effects of male dominance in the field. I then describe two specific mechanisms through which subversive appropriation takes place: formation of queer identities and male embodied nurturance. While the first mechanism relies on women’s appropriation of performances of masculinity, the second relies on men’s appropriation of performances of femininity.
GENDER AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

While women’s involvement in many sports has the potential to challenge normative gender roles, martial arts is especially well-suited for studying how physical activity can change gender hierarchies [Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015; Channon, Quinney, Khomutova, and Matthews 2018]. First, in present-day Western societies, practicing martial arts is still considered a predominantly male activity. While there have always been women who have insisted on participating in the martial arts or in combat sports, their participation, at least in recent Western history, has been restricted [Oppliger 2013; Jennings 2014; Quinney 2015].

For example, while women in the 18th century were occasionally allowed to wrestle at traveling circuses or carnival shows, they were portrayed as a sexualized spectacle or freak show. In the 19th century, Victorian-era women were repeatedly arrested for boxing [Oppliger 2013; Jennings 2014; Quinney 2015]. It was only in 1993 that USA Boxing allowed women to compete in amateur events, and women were not allowed to wrestle or box in the Olympics until very recently (2004 and 2012 respectively) [Quinney 2015]. Furthermore, the media and combat sports organizations like the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) continue to stigmatize women fighters and to frame women fighters in terms of attributes other than their athletic skills, such as their appearance or their sexuality [Quinney 2015; Channon, Quinney, Khomutova, and Matthews 2018].

However, the changes in modes of embodiment involved in participation in martial arts may alter women’s relationships outside such training spaces. Practicing martial arts necessitates performing movements and actions that are strongly associated with masculinity in contemporary Western societies, such as fighting or initiating physical contact [Willey 1992; McNaughton 2012; Velija, Mierzwinski, and Fortune 2012; Channon 2013]. Beyond the need to cope with the psychological implications of practicing martial arts (such as fear of hurting another person or fear of becoming ‘unfeminine’), women practitioners confront the normative gendered regimes of restricting movement and limiting physical potential – as powerfully described by Iris Marion Young [1980] – and incorporate modes of embodiment that deviate, at least to some extent, from these norms [Channon, Quinney, Khomutova, and Matthews 2018].

Despite the myriad ways that women’s participation in the martial arts may have the potential to challenge gender roles and hierarchies, scholars disagree about whether, and, if so, in what ways, women’s participation in the martial arts indeed leads to empowerment and social change [Velija, Mierzwinski, and Fortune 2012; Follo 2012; Channon and Phipps 2016].

Certainly, small and enclosed communities such as martial arts groups or classes reinforce and support members who display loyalty to the group’s values and norms. In order to be able to practice martial arts on a regular basis, and in order to be accepted and promoted in a specific martial arts community, women and members of other marginalized groups (such as persons with disabilities or members of the LGBT community) are encouraged to join by means of ‘simple inclusion’, as ‘male equivalents’, adopting or conforming to practices and values that are strongly linked to violent patriarchal control of women [Lafferty and McKay 2004]. Nonetheless, even under these conditions, women who participate in the martial arts might still engage in forms of practice and representation that reinforce normative gender hierarchies [Hargreaves 1997; Paradis 2012; Channon and Jennings 2013; Weaving 2014].

Indeed, as long as women are a minority in most martial arts groups, it is likely that women practitioners may come to view themselves (and be seen by their male training partners) as exceptional women, or as ‘honorary men’ who are ‘thereby dismissed from troubling symbolic constructions of male superiority’ [Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015; Channon and Phipps 2016]. For example, many professional women judokas in Greece come to identify with the judo etiquette, i.e. viewing themselves as exceptional while identifying with the view that most women are inferior in sports [Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015]. In this scenario, as well as the previous one, gender hierarchies remain intact.

Furthermore, the optimistic views held by proponents of women’s participation in martial arts do not take into consideration girls and women, as well as members of other groups deviating from hegemonic masculinity, who could not conform to the way martial arts are organized today, who have been hurt or injured and have had to leave these spaces, giving up on the possibility of practicing martial arts. By definition, women who could not or would not conform to the atmosphere in martial arts groups cannot be represented in studies that examine women’s participation in the martial arts.

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1 While there are no formal statistics regarding gender disparities in participation in the field, Harwood, Lavidor, and Rassovsky [2017] note that very few studies examined the effects of martial art participation on female youth and that this may be due to the ‘male dominated nature of the sport’ [98].
PHYSICAL FEMINISM AND PERFORMANCES OF FEMININITY

The concept of ‘physical feminism’ is pivotal for understanding the possibilities and conditions under which women’s participation in the martial arts may lead to personal empowerment and wider social change. Broadly speaking, physical feminism refers to empowerment through physical activities [Roth and Basow 2004; Noel 2009; Quinney 2015]. Its rise is connected to the second wave feminism self-defense movement, which viewed self-defense for women as representing ‘a way for women to physically express their independence and [as] part of a larger feminist movement to combat violence and achieve self-determination for women’ [Rouse 2014: 472]. However, what are the social and psychological processes through which empowerment is achieved?

Many scholars who use the term, including those who coined it, seem to use it to articulate a negative relationship between performances of femininity, or gender differences, and empowerment. According to their view, as more women participate in ‘masculine’ sports, gender differences will decrease. This hypothesis rests on two assumptions regarding gender in present-day Western societies: First, that notions of widespread differences between men and women are mostly fictitious ideological representations, and, second, that in patriarchal societies performances of femininity are basically ideological means to subordinate women. Therefore, women’s empowerment, and especially empowerment through participation in a male-identified sport, seems to imply the abandoning of performances of femininity.¹

One of the first authors to use the term illustrates this view. McCaughey [1997] asserts that, ‘as more women become trained, physical differences between men and women will probably become less obvious, and the nature of those differences, if any, will become clearer’ [84]. She also asserts that physical training will make ‘[women’s] aggression, and the femininity that prevents it, conscious’ [McCaughey 1998: 281]. Similarly, Roth and Basow treat gender body differences as a myth: ‘Often women are not weaker than men … yet the myth of women’s weakness often goes unchallenged even by feminists’ [Roth and Basow 2004: 246]. In fact, tensions between performances of or identification with femininity have been a reoccurring theme in many studies of women in the martial arts [e.g. Mennesson 2000; Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009].

However, they do not relate to other social mechanisms that can explain social change and empowerment through the performative approach, such as subversive appropriation. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial considering that empowerment through learning to fight is not self-evident but is contingent on specific circumstances [Channon and Matthews 2015; Channon, Quinnery, Khomutova, and Matthews 2018]. Specifically, Butler [1990] discusses how employing gender performances in unconventional contexts and manners can lead to subversive and socially liberating effects, a process she refers to as ‘subversive appropriation’. Through parody, exaggeration, or in combination with other practices, women’s entry into martial arts can destabilize the meanings of both performances of masculinity and performances of femininity.

The present study addresses this gap. Since in order to participate in martial arts women need to perform actions that are considered

² For a historical discussion of the links between physical training and self-defense for women and social and political empowerment in first wave feminism, see Rouse [2014].

³ Performing ‘femininity’ is often not entirely voluntary, as women pay dear social costs for failing to approximate the feminine ideal in various arenas [Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015].
performances of masculinity, subversive appropriation is a useful mechanism that can explain how the entrance of women into full-contact martial arts may lead to empowerment and social change. I draw on the particularities of my experience as an adult woman who began to practice a full-contact, grappling-based martial art (Brazilian jiu-jitsu) and excerpts from interviews with women participating in full-contact martial arts to explicate the specific structural conditions that make mixed-gender martial art practice a particularly fertile ground for subversive appropriation of gender performances.

At the same time, I argue that subversive gender appropriation is not unidirectional. The entrance of women into a male dominated field changes the gender organization of the field itself and the available gender expressions of the men who train with women. Despite differences in class, race, and sexuality, many adult women who enter the field have experienced socialization differently and have different relationships to and experiences with violence and physical fighting than men. For an optimal training experience to occur between men and women under these circumstances, many men need to adjust and change the way they usually train. In the course of this article, I will explicate the distinct structural conditions and the expression of the changes in men’s practices within mixed-gender training, which I term ‘men’s embodied nurturance’. To clarify, the goals of the present study are twofold:

1. Analyzing the structural conditions that make mixed-gender full-contact martial arts, as practiced in present-day Western societies, a fertile ground for subversive appropriation of gender performances.

2. Analyzing two social mechanisms of subversive appropriation within martial arts settings, where women are the primary agents of the first mechanism and men are the primary agents of the second one:

   a. Formation of queer identities that are not centered on sexuality (women’s appropriation of masculine performances).

   b. Men’s embodied nurturance (men’s appropriation of feminine performances).

METHODOLOGY

The wider research study that I conducted included over 60 in-depth interviews with men and women who practice and teach different martial arts in Israel and in the U.S., an auto-ethnography of my experiences as a woman who practiced several types of martial arts over five years, and a content analysis of discussions on various online platforms of women and men who practice martial arts as well as promotional materials.

The present article is primarily based on my auto-ethnography. I have been interested in becoming physically stronger and being able to protect myself for most of my adult life. After weight training for several years, I became convinced that developing the size and strength of my muscles alone would not significantly enhance my ability to defend myself against a physical attack by someone stronger.

The thought of practicing a full-contact sport in a mostly male group was at first inconceivable to me. As a fat child, gym classes and the presence of others during physical activity became associated with teasing and embarrassment for me. Close physical contact with men seemed intimidating and uncomfortable as well. However, five years of 4-7 training sessions a week in a Brazilian jiu-jitsu class, a grappling-based martial art (that perhaps involves the greatest degree of physical contact between participants of all martial arts) has significantly changed my own experience of gender embodiment.

First, I have learned to feel comfortable with close physical contact with the men in my group. The group is a space for forging physical relationships between men and women that are not based on sexuality or motherhood. Second, practicing martial arts has allowed me to utilize my body (e.g. wide and forceful movements) and express my personality (e.g. competitiveness and assertiveness) in ways that are not compatible with gender norms. Third, I have learned, and am still learning, to accept my body’s limitations, usually through pain and injuries. Pain, I have come to learn, is one of the most difficult experiences for me to write about in ethnography. In the following pages, I elaborate on some of these insights.
RESULTS

The conditions that make martial arts a context for subversive appropriation

Co-ed training of men and women in full-contact martial arts is characterized by three conditions that challenge gender roles: 1. Close bodily contact between men and women that is reciprocal and not based on sexuality or familial relationships. 2. The need to unlearn previous modes of embodiment and channel corporeal knowledge (such as instincts) to new regimes of ‘being in one’s body’. 3. The scarcity of female trainees in general, and especially among senior trainees, instructors, and key persons in the administration and organization of martial art groups, creates a socially acceptable opportunity for novice female trainees to identify with male bodies.

Close bodily contact that is not based on parenthood or sexuality

In present-day Western societies, bodily relationships between men and women are constructed as complimentary and socially viable in one of three major contexts: sexual, parental, and medical/therapeutic. Unlike professional sports, men and women are not segregated and train together in many amateur martial arts groups. Co-ed training between men and women, specifically in full-contact martial arts, can serve as a new and unique social venue for bodily relationships between men and women that differ substantively from and that can potentially challenge the normative gendered assumptions inherent in the three more common contexts for such relationships [Paradis 2012; Channon 2014].

Quinney [2015] argues that, like transgender individuals, female martial artists challenge the alleged immutability of gender norms. The combination of joint physical contact, in a differently gendered social context, has the potential to produce gender identities that do not correspond to a male/female dichotomy.

Relearning embodiment

In her seminal work ‘Throwing Like a Girl’ [1982], philosopher Iris Marion Young provides a phenomenological account of how women learn to shape their movements and limit their physical and bodily potential according to gendered regimes of knowledge. By choosing to practice martial arts, women incorporate modes of embodiment that deviate, at least to some extent, from the normative modes of gender embodiment embedded in these regimes.

Since fighting and the bodily movements entailed therein are strongly associated, culturally and historically, with masculinity [Channon, Quinney, Khomutova, and Matthews 2018], women must expand their embodied repertoire in order to practice martial arts. Beginning to learn a martial art often brings relatively long periods of frustration and an inability to perform some of the most basic and rudimentary motor functions in the system of the specific martial art. In many ways, the gender re-socialization for women in the martial arts is like their original socialization as infants. Feelings of helplessness and the effort to learn to be able to take part anchor the new trainee full force in her body. The need to learn basic forms of movement and actions is especially transformative as an adult. Unlike the relative ‘clean slate’ mode of infancy, the adult mind or consciousness often resists these changes in embodiment and looks at the body that ‘fails to perform’ from the outside, passing painful judgment.

The paradox of men’s dominance: identifying with performances of masculinity

In all of the martial arts groups that I participated in or observed, men made up the majority. Culturally, martial arts are also associated with masculinity. When I first started training, I was either the only woman or sometimes just one of two. The bodies that I aspired to mimic and to learn from were bodies of men. Even in the process of theoretical learning, it is hard to separate the body of the teacher from the pedagogical process [Tirosh 2006]. Just as we assign gender and race to the texts we read [Tirosh 2006], we also assign bodies to activities. In physical training, the body of the teacher/instructor is all the more significant.

First, in sports and fitness fields, investing time and energy in the body becomes a way of gaining credibility and corporeal capital. Fitness instructors often receive the message (e.g. from clients, superiors, etc.) that they are expected to display a fit and toned body that conveys the values associated with military combat training [Fernández-Balboa and González-Calvo 2018]. Likewise, women in semi-combat roles in the Israeli army describe how they learned, through their training, to adopt their (male) superiors’ styles of walking, talking (e.g. lowering tones), and dress codes (e.g. wearing the belt lower on the hips). This is because part of their credibility and authority stems from displaying an embodiment of the values associated with military combat training [Sasson-levy 2003].

I have often encountered this in martial arts settings, where senior ranked trainee women or women instructors lowered their voices on the mats and adopted a somewhat less emotional expression. This reinforces the hypothesis that in male focused social environments, the adoption of male associated embodiment by women is partly encouraged and rewarded.

In this context, to learn martial arts from a teacher means, at least in some respects, to want to embody the teacher’s body. So, paradoxically,
men’s dominance as instructors and in filling out the highest ranks in martial arts makes it a field in which it is legitimate for women to want to embody performances of masculinity.

The need to perform the movements and embodiment style of men (concrete men who are instructors or high rank students) coincides with performing fighting related movements that are considered masculine in contemporary Western societies. When training in contemporary martial arts groups in Western societies, women need to learn to perform the same movements, to execute the same techniques, as men. In pairs training, women need to experience and learn how to do the technique both as the active initiator and the passive recipient. One of the strongest gender dichotomies in the West, equating femininity with passivity and activity with masculinity, is thereby subverted.

Repeating the same physical movements and actions, men and women working together creates a consciousness of ‘undoing gender’ [Butler 1990]. Through martial arts training, I have challenged, with my own movements, some of the principles of normative feminine socialization. While I was practicing martial arts, I was also conveying certain messages:

- There is nothing that you are allowed to do to me because you are a man which I am not allowed to do to you.
- There is no specific manner in which you are allowed to carry yourself which is forbidden to me.
- There is no action that you are allowed to want or to perform as a man which is forbidden to me to want or to perform as a woman.

My growing sense of embodied identification with masculinity was also fraught with envy and feelings of not belonging. I did not experience myself as becoming more like men, but as a woman struggling to expand her embodiment.

This excerpt from my field notes demonstrates the complex negotiation of gender roles and identity within martial arts spaces through a case study of learning how to tie my belt:

I am one of four women in one of my Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) groups. One is a very skilled veteran and another two are novices. The veteran wears the belt low-slung on her hips. The two novices tie the belt high on their waist. In one class, a guy asked one of the novices why she wears the belt high on her waist, saying that it ‘makes her look like a geisha’. The woman replied that it makes her feel feminine. She said that entering the training space, taking off her clothes and putting on the gi (the uniform) makes her feel less feminine as it is. Tying the belt high on her waist was her way to distinguish herself and resist pressures to become ‘man-like’ in the training space.

When I first started practicing BJJ and was one of a small number of women in a mostly male group, I noticed that the men who trained with me tied their belts lower on their hips, while the women tended to tie theirs higher on their waist. I wanted to tie my belt like the men, lower on my hips. The first instructor who introduced me to BJJ and kept encouraging and supporting me when I felt that I could not cope assumed an important role in my life. I wanted to tie my belt like he did. It took me about half a year to learn how to tie my belt. I wanted to do it perfectly, just like my coach tied it, where the two stripes of the belt lie one underneath the other so that they look like one strip, and the knot is diamond-shaped. The diamond knot is supposed to sustain the intensive friction of ground fighting in BJJ.

For more than six months, three to four times a week, I could not manage to tie my belt. I used to approach my instructor, embarrassed, and ask him to tie it for me. Usually, he would tie it on my waist. I once read that tying the belt at the hips makes it harder to control the opponent by gripping the belt.

In the first class that I tied my belt lower on my hips, I did not dare look at myself in the mirror. I felt that I looked just like a man. By the second class, when I dared to look, I was shocked. I looked like a man. For the third class, I went back to tying my belt higher around my waist. However, by the next class, I returned to tying my belt lower on my hips and I continue to do so to this day.

I now feel that I do not look ‘man-like’ with my belt tied down around my hips. My somewhat different body form than the average man trainee is still visible, and I continue to carry my body in ways that reflect my personal interpretations of feminine norms. In the days that preceded my receiving my blue belt, and a few weeks before beginning the basic instructors’ course, I tied my belt low on my hips without thinking, and I often teach novices (men and women) how to tie their belt low on the hips by demonstrating.

My initial decision to tie my belt around my hips was an intentional one. In my view, I was not tying my belt like the men who train with me because I was like them; I wanted to create something different with my body. I saw tying my belt the ‘masculine’ way as a way to resist my feminine socialization. This is an excerpt from my field notes around my first months of training:
Recently, my belt got untied during class. One of the male trainees helped me to tie it again, tying it around my waist. For the rest of the class, I was acutely aware of how the belt shapes my body into the wrong form and I felt uncomfortable.

If I can choose between the feminine way or the masculine way to occupy space, I definitely choose the masculine way. I want to be the active, strong, powerful, self-asserting body. Not the frail, to-be-looked-at body.

First mechanism of gender subversion: Acquiring a queer identity

The more I participate in reciprocal embodied interactions with men who treat me as a training partner and not as a (sexual) object, the more I feel a new sense of confidence in and ownership of my body and space. I expand the contours of my body in space, I expand the limitations I previously imposed on my bodily functions. I am able to overcome my fear of losing my balance. I am able to express my intelligence through my body, to become a transcendent subject with my body for the first time in my life.

These changes are not limited to the gym. I stretch up further when reaching for an object on a high shelf. I feel more comfortable sitting with my legs relatively spread apart in public. Ever since adolescence, men have allowed themselves to comment on my ‘masculine’ or ‘sporty’ walking style, or to say that I stand like a football player. At the same time, I was always told that I have a very traditionally feminine communication style. Martial arts classes were the first place where I felt that my personal combination of feminine and masculine performance was accepted. For example, only after beginning to train did I let myself cut my hair very short. At the same time, I am also very attuned to the well-being of my partner and use my socialization to an ethics of care to be critical of practices in martial arts that I consider to be reflective of unnecessary uses of authority and power. My grappling style is always centered on an ethics of care, and this shapes the techniques I choose during sparring. For example, I never perform ‘air’ chokes (which block/crush the trachea) because I believe that they are unnecessarily painful. Instead, I apply ‘blood’ chokes (which block the carotid arteries) which is not painful. I avoid rapid movement and the use of techniques that necessitate explosive force because I believe that they increase the risk for injury. I prefer ‘giving up’ a submission if I worry my partner will get injured, even if he or she did not tap to signal a secured submission.

One of the most important things for me is to be able to fight while always being attuned to my partner. Hearing my partner say ‘it was fun rolling with you’ fills me with more satisfaction than hearing that I made technical progress.

Sometimes, I wear a top with a low neckline in a no-gi class or even underneath my gi. However, I feel very self-conscious, even though many men feel comfortable training with no shirt at all under the gi. Their body, the male body, is just a human body. It matters what that body does, not what that body arouses in others. Women in Israel wear a high-necked shirt4 under the gi most of the time and long pants under their shorts in no-gi classes. Men rarely wear tights under the gi. Women’s bodies being conceived of as sexual objects always seems to be prevalent, even if in the background.

The words of a Greek judoka elucidate how sometimes merely becoming a fighter is connected to exclusion from the gender binary: ‘Because you have chosen this particular sport, you might acquire specific characteristics. When you are an athlete that fights, you cannot be the ethereal creature that moves like dancing. You might acquire a specific athletic-type posture, and men usually do not like that in a woman’ [quoted in Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015: 94].

Once, after BJJ training, I overheard one of the instructors say to a friend that ‘the women who train with us? Well, they are not really women’. Elinor, a 30-year-old BJJ blue belt told me that she was surprised to learn that her testosterone level is relatively low, as she was sure that somehow her enjoyment of martial arts indicated high testosterone levels.

The queer identities adopted by women when training in the martial arts do not constitute being man-like, but produce something different. Furthermore, sometimes women’s participation in mixed-gender training can even increase their awareness of differences between men and women, especially in ‘hard’, full-contact martial arts. Before I started martial arts training, I did strength training at the gym for a couple of years. Slowly increasing the weights that I could lift, seeing visible changes in the size of my muscles, I felt increasingly confident that gendered bodily differences were commonly exaggerated. However, as I started grappling with men, I realized that the average man could toss me to the other side of the room on brute strength alone. Moreover, he could do it so fast that I would not realize what had happened.

Besides differences in speed and strength, the average man enters martial arts spaces with more experience with/propurities for fighting and has more self-confidence with regards to physical learning with his body. Many of my interviewees recounted how sparring with men increased their awareness of the extent of physical differences between men and women, even after years of training. In the next excerpt, a woman BJJ blue belt describes how constantly sparring with men may give women false negative feedback on their technical skill because of gendered body differences:

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4 During my fieldwork in the U.S., I encountered many women who feel comfortable only wearing a training bra underneath the gi.
I realize that with someone my size... I'm not that bad. [T]his is what I get from the ladies' class, because when... when you learn [with] people who are all so much stronger than you [men], you don't know how good you are. Because a lot of techniques, you think you don't know them well, you think you aren't doing them well just because they [the male opponents] are resisting strongly. When you have someone with your strength, you realize, 'Ha, I know this technique and, on someone my size, it does work', like, I'm doing it well. But when you're with a guy who weighs 20 kilos more than you, and he's stronger... [then it] doesn't work. And it's not because you're doing it wrong, sometimes it's just because... they are using... [their speed/strength advantages]... with males I'm only playing defense... because I know if I get on the bottom... on the bottom of the mount [where the opponent sits on top of you with their hips around your torso], or on side control [when the opponent pins your back to the ground chest-to-chest], I'm not getting out of it. Both because it's harder to do the technique on them, and because I'm claustrophobic, so sometimes I would tap out before I was forced to submit so I could breath. I won't put myself in danger, trying new things [with men]. I won't... so I won't work [i.e. develop my technique] that much. So you know that's the thing... I feel like I'm bad and I don't improve... [Arin, 39, a BJJ blue belt with experience in other martial arts]

Some of the men and women I interviewed discussed how men need to learn how to grapple using mostly technique, thereby moderating their use of strength, in order to provide a safe learning environment for them. This led me to theorize another mechanism through which physical feminism develops. While in the first mechanism, the formation of a queer identity, women take the active role, in the second mechanism it is the men who train with women who take the active role.

**Men's embodied nurturance**

The entry of adult women with no previous experience in the martial arts into full-contact martial arts poses challenges – and opportunities – for mental and physical growth, and for men as well as for women. Adult women usually have less experience (if at all) with physical fighting and are usually slower and weaker than the average man, regardless of the origin of these differences (whether they are purely the result of gender socialization, i.e. of a lack of opportunities to develop, or whether they have a biological component). Women also tend to have a different personal history regarding fighting and violence. Therefore, men have to adjust and provide women who train with them a physically and emotionally safe space to develop and experiment with their fighting skills. Developing the ability to moderate and control their strength, speed, and emotional aggressiveness also benefits men in their own development as martial artists. As Hélio Gracie himself learned nearly a century ago, brute force will not help a man when he is on the mat with a bigger/stronger/faster/younger male partner. In fact, through learning how to fight with female novices, men can perfect their use of technique, the function of which is precisely to compensate for/counteract weight, strength, and speed discrepancies.

A male instructor teaching a female student exemplifies what I refer to as ‘men’s embodied nurturance’, even more than those men who develop skills to optimize sparring/training with women. Similar to the paradoxical effect of men’s dominance in martial arts providing a legitimate context for women to incorporate performances of masculinity, men’s dominance in the field has unintended and surprising potential for social change. In martial arts groups that I participated in and the ones I observed, most teachers, instructors, and senior trainees are men. At the same time, teaching is mostly embodied or bodily in the martial arts. In fact, teaching can be viewed as a form of physical and emotional nurturance. Instructors and senior trainees’ bodies provide a fecundity of knowledge and skills; they also ‘contain’ and transform the students’ (including female students’) bodily fears and frustrations into commonly shared embodied knowledge and skills.

Men’s embodied nurturance, as a mechanism of social change, challenges embodied relationships between men and women in at least two ways. First, it changes the patriarchal concept of women’s bodies as ‘giving’ and men’s bodies as ‘taking’.

In contemporary Western societies, embodied relationships between men and women are still generally not constructed as reciprocal. Women’s bodies are constructed as ‘nurturing’ or as a dwelling place, while men’s bodies are constructed as ‘taking’ from women’s bodies. Women’s bodies and sexuality are constructed as an object to be given to or sold between men. The derogatory term ‘a woman that puts out’ demonstrates this relationship. Furthermore, it is not just in relation to sexuality, but in philosophy [e.g. Irigaray 1985] and medicine, as well, that women’s bodies are thought of merely as a space given to the fetus of the man: for example, the common conception of the vagina enveloping the penis, or the uterus as the first ‘place’ of the male fetus. Women’s bodies are understood not in relation to herself but in relation to another subject which it is supposed to envelop, nourish, and contain [Irigaray 1985; Martin 1991].

Ironically, the dominance of men in martial arts provides the opportunity to challenge this normative gender construction. Most women’s bodies are taking (at least during their first years of training), while the bodies that give and nurture are men’s.
However, martial arts spaces are not immune to the patriarchal concept of a woman who puts out. For example, Linda, a BJJ black belt and instructor recounted an instance early in her career in which she executed a triangle choke (a choke in which the opponent’s head lies somewhat between the legs of his or her partner), at which point she heard some other trainee laughingly comment in the background that it was probably the best moment of her opponent’s life. The trainee positioned her as a woman ‘who puts out’, whose body is there to provide pleasure. Linda immediately stopped sparring and approached him, saying ‘don’t ever talk to me like that again’.

I have heard many similar stories from the women whom I interviewed, and I experienced it myself. During one aikido class in which I participated for a year, I was called ‘the collective tatami’ (tatami is the Japanese word for the training mat; the collective mattress is a misogynist derogatory term in Israeli slang for a woman who serves as a secretary in a mostly male military unit and is presumably promiscuous) and other comments of a sexual nature by senior trainees.

While these attempts to impose the normative interpretation of male-female relationships into the martial arts context are prevalent and common, men’s embodied nurturance, as described earlier, is a newly conceived institutionalized context that is emerging in which men provide embodied nurturance to women on grounds of reciprocity.

Second, the realm of martial arts challenges the nature of men’s embodied nurturance in patriarchal societies. While in patriarchal societies men’s embodied nurturance usually emphasizes differences between women and men, in the martial arts, men’s nurturance decreases the differences.

Men’s embodied nurturance in the field of martial arts is significantly different than the ways we think of men’s nurturance or protection in terms of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ [Kandiyoti 1988]. In the patriarchal bargain, women provide domestic, sexual, and childrearing services while men provide protection from other men of different ethnic groups (war) or of the same group (police). Men’s bodies come into contact with other men’s bodies, and women’s bodies remain protected behind the scenes. In the context of men’s embodied nurturance in the martial arts, men’s bodies encounter women’s bodies as two subjects and the purpose of the contact is to increase similarity between the two bodies rather than emphasize their differences, particularly along the lines of those that need to be protected and those that protect. In fact, some women who choose to train in the martial arts explicitly defy their role in the patriarchal bargain [Lawler 2002].

This comparison stresses the difference between a woman’s body that contains the body of a man or receives protection from a man and a woman’s body that ‘takes’ knowledge from men’s bodies. To receive protection means remaining the passive object of the actions of men. To take skills and knowledge, on the other hand, means to learn to adapt and appropriate behaviors and skills learned from an interaction with another body. When receiving protection, gendered differences are accentuated. In receiving skills, gender differences change their meaning.

This next excerpt from my fieldnotes demonstrates further what I mean by men’s embodied nurturance:

I knew I had to overcome my fear of performing the ‘double leg’ takedown on someone else and of being thrown myself before my blue belt test. In BJJ, most of the time you’re on the ground, and there I feel safe. I have always felt uncomfortable with throws and takedowns, especially high throws or throws where your opponent grabs your legs. Just feeling someone touching my legs knowing that he or she wants to perform the throw gave me chills … I approached one of the instructors after one of the classes and asked him to help me learn how to do the takedown. He told me to put my weight on him, but whenever he started to lift me, I panicked, hardened my body and resisted the lift, trying to regain my upright posture.

The instructor remained patient and tried to figure out how to help me overcome my fear without trying to yell at me, or push me, or ‘break’ me, which I had experienced with other instructors and which had only increased my fear. He asked one of the other instructors that was sitting nearby to help us. He explained that he wanted the other instructor to do the takedown on him very slowly and gently, so that I could watch and see that it was safe. Afterwards, I was a bit calmer.

I explained to the instructor that I feel panicked when I’m being lifted off my feet and my head tilts down towards the ground. He reassured me that even if someone would want to hurt someone else, he would not smash his head into the ground but would throw him and then grapple with him on the ground. He repeatedly told me that I shouldn’t worry about my head smashing into the ground. His genuine interest and patience made me verbally articulate why I was particularly afraid of double leg takedowns [more than other throws] for the first time. Talking about fear is a taboo in many martial arts settings and just being able to talk about it helps. He then

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5 For a discussion of the mediatized sexualization of female athletes, see Channon, Quinney, Khomutova, and Matthews [2018].
told me that if I was still afraid I could hug him when he lifted me up. I did so and he lifted me off my feet and laid me gently on the ground. I felt a new sense of confidence and, after a few more times, and after throwing him too, I felt comfortable enough to perform the throw and be thrown myself for my test.

Specifically, because martial art training is one of the most popular sports activities among adolescents in the West [Gubbel et al. 2016], learning how to teach and guide, through one’s body, developing an ethics of care (in which helping others develop skills is a central goal) can significantly and positively calibrate masculinity. Martial arts can serve as an arena in which certain forms of touch can be interpreted as reassuring, or part of a learning experience, etc., rather than as sexual, or arousing, or homophobic, etc.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on performative understandings of social change and gender, this article contributes to the work of Channon and Phipps [2016] by analyzing the conditions that make mixed-gender martial arts training a fertile ground for the destabilization of gender hierarchies by expanding the theorization of ‘physical feminism’ in two ways. First, Channon and Phipps have pointed out [2016] that, unlike previous interpretations of physical feminism, empowerment and social change does not necessitate abandoning performances of femininity but can include a strategic use of feminine performances. I show how by creatively and strategically combining performances of femininity and masculinity female martial artists can form queer identities that are not based on sexuality. The cultural association of martial arts with masculinity offers women an arena distinct from that of sexuality to experiment with and adopt various performances of masculinity (e.g. wide movement in space, expressing physical aggression, etc.). Thus, the subversive effects of women’s participation in the martial arts may not lie in diminishing (previously learned) performances of femininity but in combining them with newer performances of masculinity, forming new, non-binary queer identities that are not based in sexuality:

They treat you like a different kind of species. You are neither a man, nor a woman. You are something strange for the rest of the people. Sometimes, when you are younger, it makes you wonder: What is it that they find so strange? What makes them see you as something very different? [A professional female judoka interviewed by Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015: 95].

Secondly, studies thus far have addressed the role of women in relation to physical feminism [e.g. Roth and Basow 2004; Noel 2009; Quinney 2015]. The present article explores the role of men in facilitating physical feminism in mixed-gender environments. Previous works studied how men cope with the social taboo of hitting women in the context of mixed-gender martial arts [e.g. Channon and Jennings 2013]. They showed the adjustments men make in order to treat female participants like they treat the male ones. But many women who begin to train as adults are not ‘like men’ in that they enter the field with different sets of physical as well as psychological capabilities, acquired through different processes of socialization and different life experiences as women.

The average woman beginning martial arts training is far more likely than the average man to have experienced some degree of sexual violence inflicted by men. Furthermore, the average woman is far less likely to have experimented with physical fighting involved in play with peers. Therefore, women are not like men – particularly adult women who enter mostly male groups. In order for average, and not necessarily athletic, adult women to be able to train in full-contact martial arts with men, men need to adjust the way they train, specifically by adopting performances of femininity such as an ‘ethics of care’ [Gilligan 1982]. Examples include moderating force and speed to enable women to work on and express themselves through applying techniques in co-ed sparring, mentoring female novices, and helping women feel comfortable in a male-dominated environment.

In a masculine-identified field in which men comprise a numerical majority and are often high-ranked trainees or instructors, participating with women often takes the form of mentoring and nurturing. Therefore, I term men’s positive attitude toward the entrance of women to martial arts ‘men’s embodied nurturance’. In this mode of behavior, men often behave in ways (encouragement, gentle touch, etc.) that are culturally labeled as ‘feminine’. Particularly in a masculine-identified field, these behaviors can be thought of as subversive appropriations of performances of femininity. Like gender performances in general, subversive appropriation is not necessarily conscious, and its effects can be unpredictable [Butler 1990].

At first glance, nurturing in the context of martial arts is an act of giving extended from men to women, as often men occupy the positions of instructors or senior trainees, and men often have to adjust their use of brute strength. However, accommodating the needs of ‘atypical’ trainees such as women expands the repertoire of modes of training and sparring and can benefit the development of men themselves. I have occasionally heard instructors say things like, ‘There will always be someone stronger than you, more athletic than you, more flexible
than you – relying on brute force will not help you then’, in order to encourage more relaxed and technique-oriented training styles.

Theorizing the characteristics and implications of men’s embodied nurturance can also help us to theorize the relationship of gender and sports beyond approaches of ‘equity’ or ‘differences’, in terms of changing gender relationships. The paradoxical effects of women’s marginality in the field and men’s dominance in it gives rise to new and unique gender relationships:

\[\text{[Hargreaves 1990: 294]}\]

The many potentials of gender empowerment and destabilization of old gender hierarchies are not always realized, and martial arts spaces in the West significantly diverge in the degree and the extent to which they are open to the entrance of women and to transforming gender roles. Instances of harassment or of simply being taunted for ‘being a girl in a male sport’ are common and well-documented in the literature [e.g. Kavoura, Ryba, and Chroni 2015]. In many of the martial arts classes that I have participated in or observed (such as aikido, kung fu, and Brazilian jiu-jitsu), I have encountered social environments in which toughness was assigned positive value while verbal communication was devalued, policed, or even prohibited. Emotional detachment – including, for example, avoiding smiling – was encouraged and idealized at the expense of other coping mechanisms [Maor, in press]. Encouragement of such social sentiments associated with traditional masculinity can also lead to unnecessary harmful repercussions specific to martial arts training, such as dehydration due to weight cuts before competitions or blurring the line between mutual engagement and assault [Channon and Matthews 2018].

While an exhaustive discussion of the reasons for this divergence is beyond the scope of the present article, possible factors that influence openness to gender diversity may include: type of martial art, openness to ‘outside’ influences, and numbers of female trainees and instructors. Future studies should explore such factors, as well as interventions that lead to greater social inclusivity among martial art spaces.


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Psychological Collectivism in Traditional Martial Arts

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ABSTRACT
This paper offers a new perspective for viewing traditional martial arts in terms of psychology. It argues that ‘traditional’ martial arts offer physical skills, moral codes, rituals, roles, and hierarchical relationships which, taken together, creates the perfect environment for psychological collectivism. Psychological collectivism focuses on individuals and their abilities to accept the norms of an in-group, understand hierarchy, and feel interdependence or the common faith of the group. First, this paper introduces the theory of psychological collectivism and connects it with traditional martial arts known as wushu or kung fu. It argues that traditional Asian martial arts create situations strong enough to activate collectivistic attributes of self and suggests that practitioners’ mind-sets can be different within and outside of the training environment. This kind of collectivistic interaction may provide one explanation for how non-Asian practitioners function in such training environments and how the traditional Asian martial arts can work as psychosocial therapies.
INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I argue that traditional Asian martial arts create situations strong enough to help even non-Asian practitioners become more collectivistic and bridge the gap between their own cultural backgrounds and the background of the style they practice. The starting point for this hypothesis is rooted in and directed by the theory of psychological collectivism. This is the argument that tradition is constituted as a set of shared values, rituals, and structures. The traditional ‘self-defence’ martial arts of Asia (such as karate, wing chun, or judo) are known not only for their physical benefits, but also for specific kinds of behaviours and outlooks as well as rituals and moral codes. Cultural and psychosocial backgrounds significantly subtend the practice of martial arts itself, or at least influence the ‘philosophies’ of the various styles. In practicing them, practitioners from non-Asian countries often accept and produce behaviours and values that may be very different from those of their own background. Practitioners may indeed develop family-like relationships. Inside such communities, lineages, or schools, foreign students and teachers are well represented; they often adopt the behaviours, rituals, and norms introduced in the context of their training and repeat them in their own training practices. This paper explores one possible approach to this phenomenon. After defining the approach of psychological collectivism, its insights are used to explain some common practices seen in traditional martial arts. For discussion, I use examples drawn from the rich traditions of Chinese wushu (kung fu).

The term ‘psychological collectivism’ is used very differently than the commonplace notion of ‘collectivism’ that is used in reference to whole societies [Hui and Triandis 1986; Hui, Triandis, and Yee 1991; Jackson et al. 2006]. Unlike societal level collectivism, psychological collectivism is focused on the individual. It is characterised by the ability to accept the norms of an ‘in-group’, understand its hierarchy, share its resources, and consider the implications of actions with respect to it [Hui and Triandis 1986]. ‘In-group’ in this case refers to a community with a common faith, where its members are likely to feel some sort of interdependence [Markus and Kitayama 1991].

By contrast, psychological individualism refers to self-realization, prioritizing personal goals and self-interest, and taking charge of one’s decision making with a willingness to bear the responsibilities and the consequences. However, although it may feel reasonable to understand psychological collectivism as the opposite of psychological individualism, they are not mutually exclusive [Triandis 2001]. An individual can demonstrate both tendencies, and because of this we must discuss its manifestation in specific contexts, such as those of traditional martial arts.

Recently, psychological collectivism has been connected with the field of sport research. This is because common sense suggests that there must be some degree of psychological collectivism present in team sports, as it is linked to better functioning in team sports [Dierdorff, Bell, and Belohlav 2011]. However, the concept of psychological collectivism is also important in understanding individual sport performance. Building on the fact that individuals are still surrounded by other people who, to a greater or lesser extent, influence them, Evans, Eys, and Bruner [2012] found that interdependence is an important issue even in individual sports. Moreover, psychological collectivism may not only affect the motivations of an athlete, it may also have a bearing on their performance.

Building on this understanding of psychological collectivism in individual sports, I would like to draw attention to its role in the traditional Asian martial arts. This is because these practices include physical skills, moral codes, rituals, roles, and hierarchical relationships, thus providing an ideal environment for exploration and examination. Moreover, it may come to be significant that the features of traditional martial arts communities may diverge significantly from the cultural background of foreign practitioners – divergence which may prove fruitful for future cultural and psychological research.

To understand what it would mean to discover psychological collectivism in traditional martial arts, it is critical to look beyond the technical practice of a martial art itself. There are many warrants for doing so. For instance, consider the fact that traditional martial arts are among the practices often used in social work and social therapies – practices which are less about the literal or objective characteristics of the technical practices themselves and much more about something else, something more. My argument is that this ‘something else’ or ‘something more’ is intimately bound up with the matter of psychological collectivism.

Consequently, in this paper I present a theory of psychological collectivism within the context of the Asian traditional martial arts, using what I shall refer to for convenience as Chinese traditional wushu (although other names could equally be used) as my case study. The philosophical and social background of traditional wushu is explored...
to explain how it provides a unique research environment. The presence of psychological collectivism in individual sports has already been established among researchers in the field; this paper presents a theoretical conceptualization of its presence in the Asian traditional martial arts.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

As mentioned, this paper focuses on ‘traditional’ Chinese styles, whether referred to as kung fu or wushu. ‘Traditional’ in this case refers to the connection between their history and their practical applications and goals. Tradition in this sense manifests in several ways. For instance, unlike modern wushu, whose practice is divided into taolu (form) and sanda (fighting), traditional wushu does not distinguish between these two specializations. In addition, my key claim is that the term ‘traditional’ is often strongly associated with additional values, such as character development, psychosocial benefits, and a strict moral code. This concerns the nature of practice, which differs from the largely sporting orientation of modern wushu, which emphasizes cooperation rather than competition [Vlachos 2015] and links it with lineage and community [Frank 2006; 2014].

In Zhang’s approach, wushu is an umbrella term for martial arts in China (and connected with modern wushu). Kung fu refers to mastering a skill, in this case a ‘profound notion referring to moral edification obtained through long-standing wushu training’ [Zhang 2014: 156], which is nowadays used as a synonym for traditional wushu. However, Judkins [2014] has pointed out that ‘kung fu’ on the contrary holds an important meaning in terms of its regional historical and cultural uses, and sometimes traditional kung fu is strongly connected with ideas of its richness and opacity.

Meanwhile, Wetzler [2015] has proposed five dimensions which typically organize the meaning and characteristics of martial arts and combat sports. These five rather fluid qualities may be all included in a single style, or the style can be focused on only some of them. When exploring the complexity of traditional Chinese martial arts in historical, psychological, or sociological research, it is useful to remember that people may practice these fighting systems for reasons that traverse ‘preparation for violent conflict’ (such as self-defence), ‘physical enjoyment and competition’, ‘performance’, ‘health care’, and ‘transcendent goals’ (such as ethics or character building).

Traditional martial arts are not simply defined by the name of their styles or by the fact that they have long histories. Bowman [2016] has even argued that the so-called long histories of traditional styles are often fractured and actually quite short. Yet, Bowman avers, belief in a long history is an important characteristic for many practitioners:

So if we go down to our local dojo or dojang or kwoon, or join the taiji group in the park, part of what we are searching for is the feeling of what it is like to become a part of an ancient culture – to fantasize an involvement in that culture, in its ancientness – and to feel its embodied knowledge, techniques, movement systems, and ‘wisdom’, in our limbs, in our movements, and on our pulse. [Bowman 2016: 924]

From the position of the researcher, it is not the practical dimensions of traditional martial arts that make them good ground for psychological collectivism, but precisely participants’ feelings of being part of something special, exotic, culturally rich, profound, etc. What bonds practitioners together are the sharing of mythologies, body experiences, and interpretations of the art they practice. Fuller [1988] proposed that cultural values within martial arts are what generate the positive psychological development of the practitioners. This view was challenged by Columbus and Rice [1991], who argued that it is not about any inherent values (which they claimed were impossible for non-Asians to understand in the same way as their Asian counterparts, unless they shared the same relevant cultural or religious education), but rather it is a matter of how practitioners interpret them. In this argument, ‘Asian’ values and wisdom are produced by shared mythologies. But they still constitute one of the positive impacts of martial arts.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM IN INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

From the perspective of sports science, collectivism is a decidedly fresh topic. It is no surprise that most of the existing literature is concerned with team sports. For example, if the members of a team score high on collectivism, it is likely that they will function more effectively as a team [Dierdorff, Bell, and Belohlaw 2011]. From this standpoint, collectivist relationships are expected to arise in a team environment and not so much in the individual sport realm.

There is evidence, however, that our understandings of individual sport must be reconfigured. Evans, Eys, and Wolf found that ‘elite individual sport athletes indicate that teammates are a primary source of motivation, social facilitation, social comparison, and teamwork’ [2013]. Indeed, it is actually very difficult to find a purely individual sport, without any connection to other people. Athletes are always interacting with colleagues, coaches, rivals, doctors, and so on.
According to Evans, Eys, and Bruner, this interdependence divides sport into much richer categories than merely ‘individual’ versus ‘team’ sports [2012]. For their categories, they proposed it is more productive to focus on the type of task involved and on questions of whether group or individual outcomes predominate. In their terms, there are integrated, segregated, collective, cooperative, contrient, independent, and solitary sports – and the solitary category is the only one with minimal interaction.

Of course, since this typology is based on competitive sport, it may be problematic to apply it to the realms of traditional martial arts. However, it provides us with a good base from which to work. Traditional martial arts might fit into different definitions based on a given practitioner’s understanding of a given art. Whether the task is interdependent or not is based on the need for interaction during a competitive task. Sparring could be understood as being interdependent. In the course of the interaction, both sparring partners work to develop certain skills, though not necessarily cooperatively, therefore it could alternatively be identified as segregated. Perhaps, then, martial arts belong in the segregated sport category.

However, other elements of practice, such as body conditioning, breathing exercises, or forms practice must also be considered. For some practitioners, this may not involve any social interaction during their individual practice. Whether the martial art is categorized as collective or contrient depends on whether the practitioner seeks purely individual or group progress. Regardless, though, traditional martial arts are never truly solitary given the strong sense of group membership.

The growth of a literature on collectivism in individual sports strongly suggests that it is time to test these same theories within the realms of traditional martial arts. Not only can traditional martial arts provide examples of every category of sport, they might also suggest additional cultural and historical variables, including specific kinds of relationships and contact exercise conditioned by solidarity. These factors make them an exciting subject for the further research.

**IT IS ABOUT THE GROUP**

Singh and Solanki [2013] point out that, compared to cricket players, taekwondo practitioners work alone. These researchers were interested in mental toughness in a sport setting, and they suggested that collectivism may be the reason why cricket players had better results in motivation and in handling pressure. Accordingly, the first association between sport and psychological collectivism would be team sports – especially as it has been demonstrated that if team members score high on collectivism then their team functions more effectively [Dierdorff, Bell, and Belohlav 2011]. In contrast, individual sports are often conceived differently. Such an athlete is aiming for success alone, in a swimming pool or on a track, without any co-players.

But for many martial arts practitioners, this conception is inaccurate. Although martial arts are not team sports, they are certainly not lone or solitary activities. Community is in fact very important. As mentioned, researchers have shown that ‘elite individual sport athletes indicate that teammates are a primary source of motivation, social facilitation, social comparison, and teamwork’ [Evans, Eys, and Wolf 2013]. In traditional martial arts, community plays a very important – and for Western societies even surprising – role for practitioners. Frank [2014] described how a member of a particular taiji community was ostracized because the other members (especially his seniors) did not agree with his ‘exporting’ of some teachings to foreign students abroad. Nonetheless, even when utterly rejected by the community, this teacher still understood himself to be a member and felt responsible for its future.

During his ethnographic fieldwork on taijiquan in China, Frank decided to study from several teachers. However, he noted that, ‘in the end, perhaps it was simply the right choice for the anthropologist but the wrong choice for the student of taijiquan’, which he concluded based on the fact that his decision was seen to be ‘violating a fundamental sense of order’ [Frank 2006: 66]. The student and teacher are tightly bound together in traditional Chinese martial arts communities, sharing both responsibilities and successes. Having more than one teacher introduces tension into such relationships, as it suggests that there is a lack of commitment or faith on the student’s side. One of Frank’s colleagues colourfully described such behaviour as acting like a ‘martial arts whore’ [2006: 66]. Frank decided to deal with the situation by asking for formal permission from each of the teachers to be taught by them all.

**METHODOLOGY**

**THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM**

Previous research has tended to oppose individualism and collectivism, sometimes even regarding the collective at the societal level, as society per se, rather than smaller units or communities within it [Hofstede and Hofstede 2005]. Hsu was one of the first authors who highlighted the role of individual characteristics without denying the importance of society, arguing that, ‘if everyone acts as individualized individuals, no society is possible. If everyone acts in complete conformity with others there will be no differences between human beings and bees’ [Hsu
This approach to psychological collectivism regards it as crucial to the personality of an individual [Hui and Triandis 1986; Hui, Triandis, and Yee 1991; Kim et al. 1994; Jackson et al. 2006]. Still, its manifestation does not necessarily differ from conceptions such as that of Hofstede [2005], who explained collectivism as building upon strongly connected relationships in contexts where, as in a family, the group is valued more than the individual and members define themselves with the help of the groups they belong to as ‘we’. Such membership is usually long-term if not lifelong.

There is also a significant difference between in-groups (where people possess a common faith) and out-groups (where people are much less likely to feel interdependent). Family is a good example of an especially tight-knit in-group wherein parents take care of small children who are expected to return the favour later and take responsibility for caring for their aging parents. Contrariwise, individuals in an individualistic society would be supported by the parents in order to become independent as soon as possible, move away, and ‘stand on their own feet’.

Strong relationships and connections (known in Chinese as guanxi) inside the group are crucial [Hwang 1987]. This reflects the typical style and lineage in the traditional martial arts, where one is recognized based on connections in the community. Enquiring about another practitioner’s lineage is almost identical to the question, ‘Who are you?’ Being a member of a group helps to define oneself amidst the collectivistic society. Defining one’s self in this way provides a clear example for understanding individualism and collectivism.

In the individualistic society, one defines oneself as being unique or outstanding according to one’s accomplishments and skills. By contrast, foreign practitioners may be surprised by how likely they are to receive questions such as: ‘Who is your teacher?’ ‘What is their lineage?’ And they will likely be equally surprised by how infrequently they will be asked such questions as: ‘Who are you?’ ‘What is your name?’ In my experience, I am frequently identified by the members of the Hong Kong kung fu community as my teacher’s student. Knowing my name seems to be optional additional information, and not knowing it is not taken to be an indication that any pertinent information is lacking or an obstacle to interaction. Instead, such individualistic information is secondary. More primary is placing me as a practitioner in the system of my style. What seems to be of more interest than my name is my nationality, because local masters take pride in disseminating their art widely.

This relationship is not only limited to the students and the teacher but is also extended to the family and other members of the kung fu community. The role of the family in the training of martial arts practitioners is significant. The family provides a supportive environment that helps practitioners to develop their skills and progress in their martial arts journey. The family members, especially the parents, take an active role in nurturing the practitioners’ growth. They not only provide financial support but also offer moral support, encouraging their children to pursue their passion without fear of failure.

In the case of collectivist societies, the family serves as a strong social bond that connects the practitioners to their lineage. The lineage in the traditional martial arts is an essential aspect of the practitioner’s identity. It represents the heritage and tradition that the practitioner belongs to. The lineage is not just a collection of names but a network of relationships that connect the practitioners to their ancestors and contemporaries. This lineage helps the practitioners to understand their place in the community and their role within it. The lineage is often passed down through generations, and the practitioners are expected to follow the traditions and customs associated with it.

In traditional martial arts, the teacher-student relationship is unique. The teacher is not just a mentor but also a guide and protector. The student learns not only the techniques but also the philosophy and values associated with the style. This relationship is not one-sided; the student also learns to give back to the community by teaching and helping others. This mutual support helps to strengthen the bond between the teacher and the student, as well as between the members of the community.

The community in traditional martial arts is tightly connected, and the practitioners are always connected to those standing above and beyond. A newcomer first learns how to be taught by the more senior students, which may include accepting the realization that they are not ‘good enough’ to be taught directly by the teacher. Later, they will learn how to teach the junior students themselves. This may involve learning to navigate complicated relationships and expectations on both sides. It is therefore a cooperative cycle, where the whole group is connected throughout. Twemlow and Sacco [1998] noted that this kind of self-regulation is notably related both to the individual and to the community.
In 1986, Trulson ran a famous experiment with three groups of ‘delinquent’ youth: one trained in ‘traditional’ taekwondo (a Korean martial art), one in ‘modern’ taekwondo, and the last was a control group. ‘Tradition’ in this case refers to the way that the training was organized: the members were encouraged to cooperate with each other, were taught philosophical concepts, and self-development was emphasized over competition. His work was mostly concerned with aggressiveness; however, for the purpose of this paper, it is important to note that the traditional group saw improvement in their social skills, self-esteem, and their desire to keep practicing even after the conclusion of the experiment. (This research was further supported by Najafi [2003].) Richman and Rehberg [1986] even believed that it is such psychological impacts of training as these that have helped traditional martial arts survive into the present day.

Layton et al. [1993] noted that competition within the traditional martial arts community is actually often suppressed. Vlachos [2015] explained that, rather than competing, students in schools help each other instead, including the common practice of senior students helping the junior students learn. It is a way of giving back to the community.

Croom [2014] highlights the importance of being a partner and having a partner to train with. In his work, he points to the fact that sparring and exercises involving body-contact teach the partners to sense each other. They also perceive the pain of their partner and learn how to control their power. But their connection may become deeper, extending to the level of emotions or mood. Croom argues that such unique training situations make the relations between the group’s members strong and reliable. Green [2011] even argues that these kinds of friendships are similar to that of an army or brotherhood. This is partially due to the presence of body-contact when perceiving each other and, at the same time, going through hard training together. Such shared experiences are likely to be restricted only to members of the community.

It is obvious that a school of traditional martial arts is likely to produce positive relationships among its members. As noted above, cooperation is preferred to competition. But Sato [2011] noted that this is true not only among students but also among rivals from other schools. His phenomenological research on kendo practitioners revealed a feeling of ‘something special, like a stronger connection or strong (spirit) or something inside’. It was once again noted how having a sparring partner and being taught by older students or helping teach younger students created a community. Respect plays a crucial role; therefore, rivals are not really considered rivals, but colleagues on the same journey. The community monitors one’s behaviour and supports its members.

The very feeling of belonging to such a social group can be highly significant [Lantz 2002]. Lantz, who was concerned with children, noted that belonging to a training group may make a big difference for many of them. Moreover, belonging to a traditional martial arts group encompasses everything that I have discussed in the preceding; Movahedi et al. [2013] even reported improved social skills when researching the effects of training on children with autism spectrum disorders. As such, martial arts training can be implemented as a therapy for certain groups. Based on his work, Lantz [2002: 573] proposed that such activities could have applicability and value in the field of family therapies. He revealed that respect and friendship are among the final topics of the research: ‘It is like we have a big karate family’, said a mother of a young practitioner. She valued the relationships that the children had with each other, but also the bond that was created among and across the families as a whole.

**DISCUSSION**

**THE CASE OF KUNG FU**

When analysing how traditional Chinese martial arts communities work, we see that lineage is in a sense crucial (even if it contains fictional or mythological elements). Rules, rituals, and habits are passed from teachers to students. Each practitioner may be developing his or her own skills, but they are still intimately connected with the other people in the community. A student is taught by a teacher and other seniors, eventually becoming a teacher and passing the art to the next generation. This is how the art survives [Kennedy and Guo 2005].

Triandis defined psychological collectivism as the tendency to accept and understand in-group norms, value membership of such groups, and prefer consensus over getting ahead of others. Looking at the traditional Chinese martial arts community, its hierarchical structure is evident from day one. A student enters a martial arts school and is usually taught by the older, experienced students. Understanding the hierarchy of the group is a key characteristic of collectivism, and necessary in-group solidarity [Triandis 2001].

This hierarchy exists not only in schools, but also among the wider community of martial artists, and it is particularly visible within the style as a whole. Being someone’s student automatically creates a
position inside such a network. Frank [2014] stated that the status of disciples is important in traditional taijiquan; people from outside are not able to access information inside the family and style. Belonging to a specific teacher strongly reflects one's status in the community and serves to open certain doors. These doors may contain a possibility to practice with senior practitioners, or access to specific knowledge. One's level of skill is also responsible for creating a position in a community; it is earned by long-term practice.

This may be no surprise, because the investment of time and the nature of one's commitment is highly important in kung fu. But I argue that possible degrees of psychological collectivism depend greatly on the level of acceptance in the in-group – i.e. how important this group is and how successful one has been in being accepted as a legitimate member of it. Griffith [2016] studied the Brazilian martial art capoeira and its community and found that having closer bonds with the local students and teachers fostered better learning opportunities. She described foreign students as succeeding in gaining senior members' interest when they showed high levels of dedication. She argued further that there is more than one kind of dedication: personal dedication, or cultivating one's skills, and community dedication, which enriches the whole group in addition to contributing to the practitioner's legitimacy among locals.

Triandis [1995] noted that people may be enacting different degrees of individualism or collectivism depending on their location in a social hierarchy. This may be especially important as traditional Chinese martial arts contain a type of kinship structure derived from their Confucian background. Simply being part of this hierarchical martial arts community may activate collective attributes of the self, even in foreigners.

To explain this coexistence of individualism and collectivism, Triandis [1995] used the analogy of cutting a birthday cake, which can be understood as a strongly collectivistic task: no one is expected to get a smaller or a bigger slice despite potential individualistic tendencies. Given these factors, the context found within traditional martial arts training might be significant. Foreigners, who usually come from very different cultural backgrounds, may be forced to adapt to the social structure of the practicing community and style.

When considering the rather extreme case of a European coming to China to practice a traditional southern style with a local group of practitioners in Foshan (a small city in Guangdong renowned for its martial arts heritage), one suspects that there must be some specific psychological adjustments going on. If the foreigner accepts the new social structure, such as internal acceptance of a discipleship tea ceremony with its privileges and commitments, this does not imply a perfect fungibility where all relationships outside of this martial arts community will be treated with the same feeling and understanding. For example, these same norms might not be applied to simply having a beer with their employer.

**EMBODIED EXPERIENCE AND SOLIDARITY**

Repeated bodily contact is the daily bread of many martial artists. Sparring (of all kinds) is one of the elements that makes traditional martial arts unique. The presence of body contact requires practitioners to sense each other and be sensitive to each other's pain and emotions [Croom 2014]. Moreover, Green [2011] argued that the common experience of hard training, suffering pain, and overcoming obstacles creates a unique bond. Participants in Sato's research [2011] reflected on the stronger connections between the school members, but also expressed positive emotions concerning their rivals. In their minds, they are all in some sense connected.

During my field work over four years in Hong Kong, I observed this myself in my own experience and in the responses of my interviewees, who often described themselves as 'sons' of their teachers and referred to the training group as their kung fu family. Their persistent practice and presence slowly bridged the communication gap – something that was also observed in a study by Jennings, Brown, and Sparkes [2010].

A long-term practitioner from Europe described to me how he was tricked into a bai si – a tea ceremony wherein one promises lifelong loyalty to the teacher – without understanding what was actually happening. This provides an example of how communities police their borders and try to bring new members under their control (including unwitting foreigners), as it 'officially' prevents students from learning at other schools simultaneously and obliges an explicit level of commitment to the group.

As mentioned, because of their (ideally) friendly solidary and communal interaction, traditional martial arts have been proposed as valuable resources for family and marital therapies [Lantz 2002]. However, this may not always be straightforwardly possible. During a discussion with a respected elderly kung fu master, who has an insight into criminality of kung fu communities during the last century, he said: 'I would never allow my kid to learn kung fu from a local master. But if it is a foreigner, then yes’. I was shocked by this: he is Chinese, the art is Chinese, yet he did not want his child to learn that Chinese art from a Chinese teacher. As he explained:
Many of the masters are connected to some underground brotherhood or even criminality. If my kid bai si to the master, he will pull him into the brotherhood. But you as a foreigner, you cannot see it, you cannot understand it. You only see the kung fu, so it is safe.

As he pointed out, it is difficult to judge the quality of the school and its teachers from outside, since there is no formal way of proving their education or credibility, such as certification. And since this paper builds mainly on the relationships inside the training community, it is important also to understand that an extreme type of such a community may be the fanaticism of an undesirable and destructive type of brotherhood. On the other hand, my previous work [Partikova 2014] found that strong connections between individuals across the kung fu community may constitute a larger influence than may be preferred, but these connections can also serve as a kind of safety net. The wider community observes or even controls what the schools are doing and how they treat their students. Therefore, we can say that these bonds are double-edged.

In theoretical terms, the bond between masters and students assists in creating strong situations that require the growth of collectivistic attributes by bridging the understanding of the individual, their interpretation of the situation, and the environment. Payne [1981] noted that Western martial artists like to use Asian terms and theories distant to Western styles of thinking. As such, specific details of meaning may well be lost in translation. But the practitioner’s interpretation opens the door for accepting the new kung fu reality (group, practice, roles) if not some pure or identical understanding of Buddhism or Confucianism itself.

Frank wrote in his notes about a Chinese taiji teacher how his foreign students saw him through the lens of their own interpretation: ‘While I am not arguing that Teacher Zhang sees himself as a “knight-errant”, his foreign students may reproduce the image in their Orientalist gaze’ [Frank 2014: 6]. This is not too different from the ‘Western Buddhism’ of Žižek [2001], which facilitates primarily Westerners’ need for an escape from the pressures of capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Columbus and Rice [1991] argued that it is difficult for foreigners to truly understand the context of Asian martial arts and that what they develop is an interpretation based on their own cultural experiences. Nonetheless, traditional martial arts communities disseminate, transfer, and translate aspects of Chinese culture wherever they exist. Traditional martial arts create their own micro-cultures within whatever spaces they occupy. Inside ‘kung fu culture’, there are different conditions than there are inside other cultural contexts – such as, for example, an office work environment. This culture is created partially by the type of people it attracts, common interest, the aforementioned images of Chinese culture and philosophies applied to the new frameworks for reality, and a family hierarchy.

Triandis [1994] argues that culture is a strong factor in orienting oneself. Similarly, Columbus and Rice [1991] argue that, in the case of traditional karate, training halls in the West ‘appear to provide a meaningful activity that gives recess from “outside”, personal, social, and work life’. The dojo ‘stands for its members as a place where some aspect of their many-sided selves can become rooted’ [Columbus and Rice 1991: 133].

Places where the martial arts are practiced can be for some their place of safety and harmony. They can be special spaces in which the larger world is left outside. In this specific environment, as Columbus and Rice [1991] noted, wealth and titles from outside are meaningless: one must forge a new identity and achieve new status through hard work and facing challenges and fears. It is then a protected place where one can strengthen, or rediscover, or recreate one’s self. This idea of a ‘protected island’ suggests a possibility: one’s orientation and structuring relationships inside and outside the training community may differ. That may mean that even if, for instance, one has a very problematic attitude towards authority, this may change completely when relating to the sifu, sensei, or senior student.

Using the theory of psychological collectivism may offer valuable insights into what takes place during traditional martial arts training. Such practices create contexts strong enough to contain collectivistic attributes of the self, which may be exactly that island of human interaction and comfort that people crave, even need. It may be one of the reasons why traditional martial arts are helpful in certain types of therapies. They provide an atypical connection and create a special zone within the life of a practitioner.

Having established the value of this theoretical framework, the next questions become not those of whether psychological collectivism is present in traditional (Chinese) martial arts, but rather what kind is manifest and to what degree. This paper has argued that psychological collectivism is likely to be found as one element of such practices and institutions. However, the long-term and wider transformative potentials here remain unclear. Consequently, the next step in research in this area would be deeper and more diverse forms of empirical study wherein more dimensions of psychological collectivism in traditional martial arts may be tested and new insights attained.
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This chapter is derived from the Editor’s Introduction to the edited collection *Chinese Martial Arts and Media Culture: Global Perspectives* [Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018]. The collection explores how narratives and aesthetics of the martial arts genre(s) are shaped and imbued with meaning in changing social, cultural, and media arrangements. Drawing from a range of recent media texts, this introductory chapter discusses the global circulation of signs and images of (Chinese) martial arts and their engagement with alleged national, cultural, textual, generic, and media borders. It argues that these texts reflect and (re)produce three paradigms of martial arts and media culture in the information age: glocalization, heterotopia, and hyperculture. What connects these three notions is that, rather than erase difference or establish it as something substantial and dividing, they engage with difference and otherness in inclusive and transformative ways.
In Square Enix and United Front’s 2012 video game Sleeping Dogs, players can choose from a variety of costumes for their character, an undercover cop working the streets of a triad-ridden Hong Kong. Ranging from the iconic black and yellow Bruce Lee jumpsuit to the ‘Bon Gak’, a set of Muay Thai-themed clothing as worn by Tony Jaa in Ong Bak (2003), to downloadable ‘Monkey King’ and ‘Movie Master’ packs, the game assembles key visuals of martial arts in its costume selection. In addition to iconic outfits associated with martial arts cinema heavyweights such as Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan, Sleeping Dogs features at least one costume designed as a reference to the 2004 Stephen Chow comedy Kung Fu Hustle (Gong fu). The costume, named ‘Hog Pen Row’ in an allusion to ‘Pig Sty Alley’ (one of the main locations in Kung Fu Hustle), condenses the film’s plot in its tagline ‘Discover your natural born genius’ and is in turn easily connected to an outfit worn by Bruce Lee in Enter the Dragon (1973). The fact that this Canadian game is not only filled with references to the cornerstone of kung fu cinema and martial arts culture, but quotes from a film that is itself intended as an homage to, a parody, and a collection of references to the cinematic martial arts genre, is emblematic of a media culture that stresses the constant reassembly of signs and images over the idea of singular original creation. This playful updating process, which always creates something new in its own right, exemplifies the cultural dynamics of the information era’s glocalizing media world, in which alleged national, textual, generic, and media borders are increasingly renegotiated, transcended, and dissolved.

The appropriation of the symbols of Chinese martial arts in the polysemic media culture(s) of global information and network societies cannot be regarded in sharp separation from their multiple derivations and their respective transformations and mutual inscriptions. Neither the product of evolution nor of revolution, the martial arts nexus is shaped by its traces being perpetuated, transformed, and given new meaning under changing techno-economic and sociocultural dispositions. This collection brings together scholars from various disciplines in order to explore the guiding question of how the narratives and aesthetics of the martial arts genre have been shaped and imbued with meaning under the influence of these changing arrangements. It traces the symbolic communication of Chinese martial arts from local cinematic production in 1920s Shanghai to the transnational and transmedia circulation in today’s global entertainment industries.

At the same time, this volume challenges the narrative of an apparently linear development via at least two additional dimensions. First, instead of proposing a linear, sequential pattern of new media replacing old linear development via at least two additional dimensions. First, instead of proposing a linear, sequential pattern of new media replacing old media, this volume focuses on the complex repercussions and synergies that accompany any and all media upheavals. Second, it acknowledges that 20th century cinematic martial arts culture was already translocally and transmedially connected, and that its 21st century post-cinematic imagination is not immune to a resurgence of (cultural) borders, as becomes apparent in the case of Chinese online wuxia role-playing games whose distinct, often literary-inspired virtual worlds and language de facto limit accessibility to certain communities. Especially since the significance of the nation-state as a model of order has in decline, cultural production has become equally more engaged with the local and the global, an entanglement and process captured with the notion of glocalization. In turn, the new telecommunication and computer technologies that have decisively shaped cultural production since the end of the 20th century helped facilitate the decline of the nation-state in the first place. As martial arts and media culture exist in a glocalized world, the essays in this collection equally embrace the global(izing) flows of culture and their local origins, manifestations, effects, and transformations.

Research on Chinese martial arts and wuxia culture has been flourishing since the turn of the century, especially with regard to literature and cinema. What this collection contributes to the existing body of literature is a combination of diachronic, transregional, and transmedia perspectives on different generic formations of martial arts. In addition, it embraces post-cinematic screen media and their repercussions with respect to previously established forms of representation, which decisively shape martial arts and media culture today but have not to this point been significantly studied in this context (notable exceptions include Leon Hunt’s chapter on ‘Martial Arts in the Age of Digital Reproduction’ [Hunt 2003: 184-200]; the EnterText special issue Wuxia Fictions: Chinese Martial Arts in Film, Literature and Beyond [2006], which was edited by Hunt; and Chris Goto-Jones’ The Virtual Ninja Manifesto: Fighting Games, Martial Arts, and Gamic Orientalism [2016]). The present study aims to add a media-conscious and cross-media perspective to East Asian Studies as much as it intends to add a specific cultural and regional perspective (especially where borders matter again in a seemingly borderless media world, as is the case with many a Chinese-language wuxia online role-playing game remaining largely inaccessible to users and researchers not trained in Chinese) to ongoing debates on intermediality and ‘New Media’ in an era of an increasing dynamic of the local and the global, in which these media themselves participate extensively.

The burgeoning field (or non-field) of martial arts studies [Bowman 2015; see also Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011] has recently set out to connect hitherto disconnected scholarly engagements with the martial arts in all its different dimensions. If we regard martial arts studies as a network encompassing multiple aspects of martial arts (treated as institutions [cf. Bowman 2015]), including its myths, discourses, symbols, etc., the links to this collection become quite obvious; our point of departure, however, is a very specific link. For the purpose of this collection, we are less concerned with martial arts as embodied knowledge or practice and more concerned with narrative and aesthetic formations in which martial arts appear as a generic trope, a fabric, a topic, a sign, etc. Rather than saying there are no connections between these broad realms (instead, we can assume there to be numerous intricate links as well as clusters so inseparably interwoven that it would appear oversimplified to even speak of ‘links’), this choice of focus is testimony to how the meanings of martial arts have come to be dominantly signified through semiotic webs of media texts. It is thus not the aim of this volume to separate representation from reality but to stress the role of the media as constitutive of culture and the fabric called reality. Instead of claiming authority over the definition of ‘martial arts’, this perspective is intended to highlight that the term carries different meanings and is multiply coded. Exactly because of this, it is important to keep an open dialogue, and keep testing different approaches to and notions of martial arts. Thus, this collection closes with an afterword by Paul Bowman, one of the driving forces of the (non-)field of martial arts studies. Rather than an actual closing, however, we intend this addition to be an extension, a point of transfer to yet another set of meanings, ideas, and questions.

The title of this volume is thus not to be primarily understood as representations of the martial arts in the media, but as the web(s) of significance [Geertz 1973] spun and transformed by an inseparable complex of martial arts culture and media culture. 'The tendency for academic work to subordinate or exclude the media supplement in studies of martial arts' [Bowman 2015: 2] has rightfully been pointed out, and an effort is being made to tackle it within martial arts studies. It is, in fact, against the proposition that the media is ‘supplementary’ that the present volume takes its approach. The question motivating this book is not so much how martial arts are represented, extended, or supplemented in the media, but how different human and non-human actors participate in the construction of martial arts as a network of narratives, signs, and images in shifting media arrangements and their symbolic regimes. In a similar vein, while embracing perspectives on body aesthetics as a central aspect of martial arts and media culture, we do not limit ourselves to observing martial arts as a body genre. As the essays in this collection remind us, martial arts can very well be signified by images of a teahouse or a black and yellow jumpsuit. Even the ‘Bruce Lee’ edition of the Nike Zoom Kobe 5, a basketball shoe combining the color scheme of the jumpsuit from Game of Death (1978) with three parallel red lines in an allusion to the bloody scratches on Bruce Lee’s face in Enter the Dragon, has to do with martial arts in this understanding. It is not only noticeable that a few lines and a certain color scheme act as signifiers for Bruce Lee and/or ‘martial arts’, or that a shoe combines signs from two Bruce Lee films, plus a third in its advertisement, which had Kobe Bryant posing as Lee with a pair of the shoes instead of nunchakus in an aesthetic reproduction of a poster for Way of the Dragon (1972). It is equally significant that these signs and images (while fans will not have a hard time naming their particular ‘sources’) have become key visuals [Kramer 2008] insofar as they circulate through various texts and media platforms relatively decoupled from their respective origins (and, often, from their ‘original’ meaning).

With the global rise of information and network societies in the late 20th century [Castells 1996], the martial arts have entered an age of hyperculture. In these newly emerging technical, economical, and cultural arrangements, the signs and images of martial arts increasingly participate in processes of perpetual de- and reterritorialization. They can no longer be regarded as the exotic Asian ‘other’ against which the ‘self’ is constructed, for they have already become part of the self in a global media culture which is constantly updating itself beyond fixed lines (on conceptualizations of self and other, see Baecker [2000], Kramer [2004], and Petrilli [2013]). In hyperculture, semiotic structures transcend alleged boundaries, are reassembled, and stand equally next to each other [Han 2005]. The new cultural and media arrangements are thus about both differentiation and connection.

Sleeping Dogs combines signs and images from multiple sources, rearranges and attaches new meanings to them, and makes generic tropes visible as such. While the collective symbolism of martial arts cinema forms one of the main points of reference in the game, it equally draws on other images of social memory. The symbolic realm of the martial arts thus stands as one among many. Instead of a closed text, Sleeping Dogs becomes a hyperspace of culture(s) in its multiply coded references and its subsequent add-ons (and their respective references). Whereas hegemonic European and Northern American conceptions of the ‘East’ have for the longest time been marked by either utopian or dystopian visions (in which the martial arts have very well played their part) according to the respective needs of their own communities [see, for example, Zhang 1988], this product of the information age and globalized network societies presents a step towards a cultural heterotopia.

The 2015 film Kung Fury from Swedish filmmaker David Sandberg superbly captures the new aesthetic order of 21st century media culture.
and its hypercultural appropriation of the martial arts. Like the costume selection in Sleeping Dogs, the red bandana worn by the title character (played by the writer and director himself) is no less a marker of martial arts than, for example, a high kick. The 30-minute film that came about as a crowdfunding project and was distributed online beyond the channels of cinema or even DVD/Blu-ray, can be regarded as programmatic for post-cinematic media culture on the levels of production, distribution, and reception, as well as in its narrative and aesthetic design. Even more so than the comparably coherent world of Sleeping Dogs, Kung Fury’s narrative and aesthetic is a wide and wild collection of tropes from cinema, television, anime, and video games. In this short film that currently has over 20 million views on YouTube, VHS aesthetics and hyperreal digital interpretations of 1980s film and television stand side-by-side with anime sequences and reproductions of side-scrolling fighting games like Double Dragon (1987) or Streets of Rage (1991) – both of which also feature bandana-wearing avatars – as do samurai- and ninja-adjacent ‘kung fu masters’, Nazi soldiers, a martial arts version of Hitler (the ‘Kung Führer’), Vikings, fighting arcade machines, dinosaur cops, and laser raptors. These apparently disparate symbols come together to be ‘simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ in a cultural heterotopia [Foucault (1984) 2002: 231].

While the film is clearly marked as an homage to the 1980s, it is very much an exaggerated update and mash-up of various ‘80s tropes that looks and feels less like Miami Vice (1984-1990) or Knight Rider (1982-1986) and more like other recent productions capitalizing on similar aesthetics, such as Ubisoft’s Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon (2013). Like Foucault’s ‘other spaces’, these cultural products ‘are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about’ ([1984] 2002: 231). Paying tribute to the 1980s, Kung Fury is at least equally informed by the culture and cultural arrangements of the 21st century. This underlines what is also reflected by the essays in this collection: that there are hardly any simple and linear flows from A to B – whether from past to present, West to East, or from old to new. Sleeping Dogs and Kung Fury, produced in Canada and Sweden respectively, further rival the idea of hegemonic flows of martial arts culture being restricted to Asia and the US, and at the same time can be considered prime examples of how production, distribution, and reception of martial arts-related texts have moved across the globe and beyond national lines. What we are dealing with instead are complex multidirectional flows, parallelisms, repercussions, updates, and spirals of culture. Tellingly, a side-scrolling beat ‘em up version of Kung Fury was subsequently released for PC, adding yet another layer to its multiple and complex reference and media structure. The structure of the network [Castells 1996] and the notion of convergence [Jenkins 2006] have emerged as key characteristics of media cultures in the information age, in which cultural production and meaning-making are increasingly spread across multiple texts and platforms. Like Sleeping Dogs, Kung Fury is about links and connections. Both embrace the hypertextual structures characteristic of (martial arts) culture in the information era. Watching Kung Fury on YouTube highlights the interconnectedness of the network as cultural paradigm and the network as technical arrangement, as the film is automatically and immediately followed by its official music video as well as other more or less related clips.

Hypertexts like Sleeping Dogs or Kung Fury recollect signs and images of martial arts from various contexts and co-texts. As tropes of martial arts do not stay restricted to what is discursively constructed as one medium, one region, or one (sub)genre, neither do the essays in this collection. The martial arts, which have increasingly set foot beyond Asia both as embodied practice and pop culture text, are a perfect argument against the myth of a unidirectional flow of knowledge, ideas, and symbols from West to East. It is, however, not the aim of this collection to simply reverse this order, which would mean remaining in the very same dispositions of thinking about cultural processes. Instead, we trace constant updating processes beyond notions of cultural purity, processes which include multiple heterogeneous actors with different interests acting in transforming environments.

From the numerous elements playing into early wuxia film – described as a ‘hypergenre’ by Zhang Zhen [2000: 204-205] – to Kung Fu Killer’s (Yi ge ren de wulin, 2013) combination of serial killer and profiler motives, urban kung fu action, swordplay, and notions of wulin and jianghu as realms in which martial artists seek out and challenge each other based on their famed skills, martial arts have hardly constituted a fixed, homogenous genre. Topped off by glimpses of kung fu and wuxia film posters, images of Jackie Chan in Drunken Master (Zui quan, 1978) and Tsui Hark’s Seven Swords (Qi jian, 2005) on television screens, and cameos by former Shaw Brothers star David Chiang and others, a film like Kung Fu Killer is not situated within an exclusive generic notion such as kung fu or wuxia, while its specific references to these very categories and simultaneous allusions to generic tropes beyond the martial arts even stretches the boundaries of the wuda pian (‘martial action film’). ‘New Media’ like computer games further complicate and question notions of genre with their penchant for combining settings and other elements not restricted to either kung fu or wuxia. The fact that ‘martial arts’ appears problematic as a genre- and culture-specific

2 Chinese-language martial arts cinema is generally discussed with a focus on either wuxia [e.g. Hong Kong Urban Council 1981; Teo 2009] or kung fu [e.g. Hong Kong Urban Council 1980; Hunt 2003].

3 Literally ‘martial forest’; this idea of a realm of martial artists is prominently featured in the film’s Chinese title Yi ge ren de wulin, and also reflected in its alternative English title Kung Fu Jungle.
The image from one of the very same posters featured in Kung Fu Killer, that of Zhang Che’s seminal 1967 One-Armed Swordsman (Du bi dao), also appears during the opening credit sequence of Rob Minkoff’s Forbidden Kingdom (2008). This animated sequence primarily drawing on imagery from Shaw Brothers and Bruce Lee movie posters that decorate the room of the young martial arts aficionado at the center of the story already captures and essentializes what marks the entire film, and what has emerged as a paradigm in the production of martial arts-related texts: a collage of the signs and images of kung fu and wuxia culture. It was also this Hollywood blockbuster, produced in collaboration with China Film Co-Production Corporation and Huayi Brothers Media, that for the first time paired Jet Li with Jackie Chan, arguably the most prominent martial arts stars alive and two of the most popular ‘Asian’ stars – both of whom have also made appearances in computer games and have to be regarded as key signifiers of the martial arts genre(s).

Seldom has the fantasy of martial arts been more explicit, both on diegetic (a bullied American teenager and dedicated martial arts film fan embarks on a fantastic journey across a mythical China, where he and a group of martial arts masters fight to rescue the imprisoned Monkey King) and non-diegetic (Jet Li and Jackie Chan teaming up as the realization of a fanboy’s dream) levels. In fact, it is so explicit that one could argue that it is as much an orientalist spectacle and othered fantasy as it is a self-aware testimony to the merging and interdependence of self and other. It presents us with a space where utopia and dystopia meet with (and in) heterotopia. For Foucault, the ‘joint experience’ of utopia and heterotopia is exemplified by the ‘joint experience’ of utopia and heterotopia. For Foucault, the ‘joint experience’ of utopia and heterotopia is exemplified by the ‘joint experience’ of utopia and heterotopia. For Foucault, the ‘joint experience’ of utopia and heterotopia is exemplified by the ‘joint experience’ of utopia and heterotopia.

Finding a definition for martial arts has proven to be problematic in the past, to say the least. As described by Stephen Chan [2000: 69] and picked up by Paul Bowman [2010: 45–46] in his questioning of definitions and disciplinary boundaries, plans for a UNESCO project on the martial arts were cancelled after no consensus could be reached on the definition of its subject. For this reason, martial arts is utilized here as an umbrella term under which different but connected approaches and understandings may find a place. With a focus on Chinese connections in the world, use of the term martial arts has to be viewed critically. Obviously not a Chinese term, and not necessarily one that would be utilized with regard to any of the texts discussed in this collection in their respective spheres of production, it is still useful for drawing connections between heterogeneous (yet related) phenomena. Referring to the apparently more specific terms wuxia and kung fu, it is pertinent to keep in mind that the former entered China via Japan in the 20th century, while the Cantonese ‘kung fu’ and its translocal imaginary took on meanings that cover only parts of the term gong fu. Even if we break down the term wuxia and trace the long-standing

The nation-state, only to then overcome its imagined borders, which is precisely why the above-mentioned visual and media cultures that share images like those of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li cannot simply be demarcated along fixed national lines.
One of the reasons to start this introduction with Sleeping Dogs is because the game not only captures the transregional and transmedia flows of martial arts in media culture, it also gives us a good idea of what could be meant by martial arts in the first place. What allows Sleeping Dogs to be associated with martial arts is not just the game's fighting system, but rather its iconography, its utilization of signs that have largely come to be a direct signifier of martial arts, operating relatively decoupled from their alleged points of origin. As such, Sleeping Dogs exemplifies how the martial arts have come to operate in and with media culture even beyond (representations of) fighting. Still, the combat animation, the way the characters move when they punch, kick, and throw, plays a decisive role in the experience of the game. This play of forms, carefully designed by the producers through motion capture and the support of martial arts practitioners, interacts with memory images acquired by the players (whom, it is safe to assume, we cannot reduce to their role as players) in their socialization processes, and thereby triggers its very own association with the martial arts. At the same time, players develop a certain muscle memory as they embody the knowledge and practice of the game's control and fighting system. It is telling, however, that the earliest reference point in designing the game's fighting style, again, came from (post-)cinematic martial arts culture. Yet it was not Hong Kong cinema, the realm that is predominantly evoked in the game's allusions to martial arts culture, that acted as the first piece of reference, but the 2005 Tony Jaa film Revenge of the Warrior. Where Chinese martial arts culture and Hong Kong cinema were extensively used as a pool of signifiers, the first impulse for combat came from Thai cinema, which, in turn, has largely been hailed as carrying the torch of a Hong Kong style of martial arts in the 21st century. Even within the fighting dimension of martial arts (and we could identify many more such dimensions), there remains a basic element of transtextuality. The movements of shapes on the screen trigger and interact with the user's memory and a discursive knowledge of what the martial arts are. For the purpose of this collection, we can thus make sense of (the tropes of) martial arts in media culture as being predominantly signified through two interrelated dimensions: a collective symbolism and a (re)presentation of certain body techniques. Tracing both these dimensions, we examine the continuities and fragmentations that occurred in the shifting meanings attached to 'martial arts' in media culture.

The apparatus-based technical media of industrial modernity fundamentally changed arrangements of communication and created a global mass audience of martial arts culture, just before the new telecommunication and computer technologies were about to emerge and pave the way for a postindustrial information era. With the rise of the information age, its digital media, and the World Wide Web, the same information and knowledge became available for most societies and individuals at the same (and any) time. People across the world now have instant access to cultural goods that are themselves products of transnational flows of knowledge, symbols, and capital, leading not to homogenization but to a diversification and fragmentation of audiences and identities. As Sleeping Dogs, Forbidden Kingdom, Kung Fury, Kung Fu Killer, as well as examples discussed in the following chapters, such as Kung Fu Panda (2008), Lethal Ninja (1992), or Jade Empire (2005), attest, cultural production has changed (as have the arrangements and media of communication) and is increasingly arranged around the nexus of the local and the global. These (hyper)texts cannot be reduced to or meaningfully described along the lines of alleged entities such as 'Canada', 'Sweden', 'China', 'South Africa', or the 'United States', but show a convergence of the local and the global, of self and other. At the same time, as the papers in this volume carve out, these films and games can significantly change the meaning of the narrative and visual tropes they draw from by disconnecting them from their specific historical and sociopolitical context. To varying degrees and to different effects, they engage with, reflect, and (re)produce three paradigms of martial arts and media culture in the information age: glocalization, heterotopia, and hyperculturalism. What connects these three notions is that, rather than erase difference or establish it as something substantial and dividing, they engage with difference and otherness in inclusive and transformative ways. They unite what is apparently different, and they differentiate what appears to be a unit.

Media upheavals – and this becomes especially evident with regard to the developments in time-based visual media since the late 19th century – not only generate aesthetic shifts, they also change the basic patterns of social and media-related constructions of meaning. The roots of a literary wuxia culture can be traced back at least as far...
as the Han dynasty, yet it was the early 20th century that marked the beginning of a significant increase in both density of martial arts-related texts and heterogeneity of their forms of representation. Since then, the martial arts phenomenon has informed and has in turn been informed by various media in China and beyond. While new media have generally, within the prerequisites of their specific dispositions, aimed at reproducing previously established forms of representation, they are themselves equally shaped by repercussions of subsequent media developments. Under the influence of Hollywood genre cinema, Chinese filmmakers, drawing from wuxia fiction and the acrobatic fighting style of military plays, used imported technology to translate local (symbolic) traditions into reproducible images of kinaesthetic sensations that would eventually extend to global audiences and entertainment industries, in turn being adapted by subsequent media of representation, such as television series or computer games. In terms of sheer production numbers, the tally of 100 Chinese wuxia games released each year [Zheng 2011: 19] even surpasses the estimated tally of 250 wuxia films produced by Shanghai film studios between 1928 and 1931 [Cheng, Li, and Xing 2005: 133; Zhang 2011: 199] and hint at the popularity as well as the social impact and significance of the computer game in martial arts culture. In 2014, 377.16 million Chinese Internet users – which is 58.1% of the country's netizens – were counted as online gamers. Among the most popular online games in China, wuxia-themed role-playing games like Westward Journey Online (Da hua xi you online, 2001), Fantasy Westward Journey (Meng huan xi you, 2003), or Dragon Oath (Tian long ba bu, 2007) still ranked high despite their age [CNNIC 2015]. The three of them are also examples of how games remediate literary sources that already have a long history of being adapted into multiple forms of representation. Since images flow across different language communities more easily than written words, the global production contexts of martial arts-related games are generally less literary-informed and show a closer relationship to the representation and perception of the collective symbolism of martial arts culture. As exemplified by Sleeping Dogs or Jade Empire as much as by fighting games like Tekken, post-cinematic screen media like the computer and video game engage in reproducing cinematic and genre characteristics, but also significantly shape the aesthetic design of film as well as its patterns of production, distribution, and reception. In addition, film's growing detachment from the dependence on the cinematic dispositif through the expansion of its marketing chain further adds to the multitude of channels through which the recurring signs and images of martial arts culture circulate, as do the image and video cultures of the World Wide Web.

Over the course of these dynamic processes, a set of tropes and a collective symbolism including iconic figures, characters, and images has been shaped and inscribed into social memory through constant repetition and remediation. At the same time, especially since the dawn of the information age, these tropes and symbols are constantly being reshaped and reassembled in new fashions. The signs and images produced by the martial arts genre have thus become part of a global semiotic web that transcends text, genre, and media boundaries. Against this backdrop, we pose the following questions:

- What kinds of shifts has the construction of Chinese martial arts culture in different media arrangements witnessed in connection with changing sociocultural and technological environments since the early 20th century?
- How and under what circumstances are the recurring signs and images associated with this martial arts culture shaped, updated, and/or reassembled?
- How have they been transformed within, between, and beyond genre, media, and regional boundaries? What is the role of the local and the global?
- Which continuities and fragmentations accompany these processes?
- Which (human and non-human, technological, social, and institutional) actors participate in these processes? How do different actors attach meaning to these signs and images at different times, and how are they made sense of?

The essays in this collection observe how film, computer games, theatre, and literature, as well as analog and digital storage media, video clips, the Internet, and the World Wide Web participate in the representation and perception of the collective symbolism of martial arts. While the focus rests on technical media as the key area of constructing and communicating martial arts culture since the 20th century (and particularly cinema as the main vehicle of its global popularization and a continuing point of reference for post-cinematic martial arts culture), perspectives on other forms of representation have been included to see how they have affected and been affected by the dominant technical media of industrial modernity and the postindustrial information era. What links the individual contributions together beyond the mere label of 'martial arts' is a keen interest in the manifold narrative and aesthetic shifts that occurred within the mediated construction of martial arts culture across time and space on the one hand and across multiple media platforms on the other. None of the chapters in this volume approach their objects of study without asking after their surroundings and connections or their derivation and contextualization.
The first two entries in this collection reach back the furthest in time and explore shifts in basic concepts of wuxia culture. Clemens von Haselberg follows the figure of the xia and its (alleged) reiminations across different periods and changing sociocultural arrangements, concluding that the wuxia film’s crisis mode gave way to postmodernism and a reaffirmation of political order in today’s more globalized and stabilized production environments. Helena W’u engages the notion of jianghu, arguing for a constant transformation of this central concept of wuxia culture as she traces its reconfigurations from literary to visual culture, and from 1960s martial arts cinema to the global blockbusters of the 21st century. Carlos Rojas explores how Jia Zhangke’s 2013 A Touch of Sin (Tian zhuding) self-referentially remodels representational modes associated with the wuxia genre and combines them with narratives from media reports to comment on contemporary China’s political unconscious and its affiliated logic of representation. Elaborating on an argument from his own previous research on 1960s and 70s Hong Kong martial arts cinema, Man-Fung Yip argues that Hong Kong’s transformation from a modern industrial to a postindustrial network society is reflected in martial arts cinema’s shift from a sensory realism associated with the solid and concrete to one characterized by lightness, fluidity, and effortlessness. Ivo Ritzer’s article discusses the transnational flows of martial arts imagery with a focus on the Global South and South Africa in particular, making a case for the deterritorialization, hybridization, and transformation of generic conventions between global circulation and local appropriation. John Christopher Hamm, taking the popular animated Hollywood character Kung Fu Panda as a starting point for his journey across some of the martial arts genre’s central tropes in cinematic accounts of two of its seminal heroes, explores representations of Chinese martial arts through signifiers of Chineseness, borderline chauvinism and xenophobia, and commodity in a global entertainment industry. In my own essay, I explore an alternative to the binary opposition of ‘the real Bruce Lee’ and ‘Bruceploitation’ through the notion of zhenji (‘genuine trace’), in which the original becomes a process of ongoing creation and transformation. Kin-Yan Szeto examines how David Henry Hwang’s 2014 stage production Kung Fu, combining martial arts, Chinese opera, and dance, negotiates the visual economy and cultural memory of Bruce Lee and problematizes racial Otherness in a global media context. The next two essays explore how the computer game – the programmatic medium of the post-cinematic era – has interacted with martial arts culture and previously established media of representation. Andreas Rauscher develops a typology of the mutual transmedia exchange between martial arts films and computer games, from the ‘mise-en-game’ of generic tropes and the feedback of game culture into film to virtual wuxia worldbuilding. Lastly, Zheng Baochun and W’ang Mingwei present us with a very different and nowadays rather atypical type of computer game in their examination of early 1990s text-based multi-user dungeons (MUD), in which wuxia literature met with the technological arrangements of an interactive digital age. The book concludes with an afterword by Paul Bowman on martial arts and media supplements, opening up important perspectives and questions for future research.

This collection of essays ranges from the proposed end of the wuxia film to the beginning of a new chapter of martial arts culture in computer games – a ‘new chapter’ shaped by ‘old media’ to the same degree that it remediates and updates them, underlining once again that there is no clear-cut beginning or end. Some of the chapters approach familiar material with new ideas and concepts, others address recent phenomena or issues that have so far received little attention, but all of them acknowledge the traces left in/by the old and the new. From the whole of these contributions emerges a picture of the mediation, remediation, and circulation of the martial arts through time that will help us better understand not only the development and transformations of the Chinese martial arts genre but also the role the media have played and continue to play in the constant process of drawing, dissolving, and redrawing boundaries as well as their close and complex entanglement in creating and (re)negotiating the local and the global. The conclusions the individual authors arrive at may match or contradict each other. This polyphony is kept alive, rather than being streamlined into homogeneity. In this way, our collection hopefully keeps the dialogue going, inspiring more critical work in the area of martial arts and media culture and glocal and transmedia cultural processes in general.
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CONFERECE REPORT

EXPERIENCING, TRAINING & THINKING THE BODY IN MARTIAL ARTS & MARTIAL SPORTS

8th Conference of the German Society of Sport Science’s Committee for Martial Arts Studies

Ghent University
15-17 November 2018

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the German Society of Sport Science formed a Committee for Martial Arts Studies, which has subsequently sponsored annual conferences in alternating universities throughout Germany. This was the first year that the committee held one of its conferences outside of Germany, at the University Ghent in Belgium. Professor Andreas Niehaus from the Department of Languages and Cultures hosted the event and chose the title 'Experiencing, Training, and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and Martial Sports' for this year’s conference. As keynotes, he invited Professor Yasuhiro Sakaue from Hitotsubashi University in Japan, who spoke on 'The Nationalization of the Body in Martial Arts', and Professor Mario Staller from the University of Applied Sciences for Public Administration and Management of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany, who gave a keynote titled 'The Journey is the Destination: An Expertise-Oriented Perspective on Thinking, Experiencing, and Practicing Martial Arts, Combat Sports, and Self-Defence'.

KEYNOTES

The two keynote lecturers highlighted different aspects of this year’s topic. The first keynote by Professor Sakaue focused on martial arts in the context of nationalisation. Following the modern history of martial arts and especially kendo, Sakaue showed how the training of (and thinking about) martial arts depends on political and social change. Accordingly, he analysed the conditions that led (and continue to lead) to the nationalisation of Japanese martial arts. He closed his lecture with reflections on the future of traditional martial arts in Japanese society given the declining number of adolescent practitioners.

The second keynote, presented by Mario Staller, concentrated on aspects of the process of becoming an expert in the context of martial arts, combat sports, and self-defence. While considering ‘expertise’ as complex, dynamic, non-linear, and contingent upon contextual influences, he argued for an expertise-oriented developmental framework of the concept.

PANELS

Panel I: Martial Arts in Perspective

During the first panel, three speakers addressed topics related to Asian martial arts. The first presentation analysed the idea of wisdom in martial arts from the angle of modernity and invented tradition. The second paper then turned towards a rather understudied topic by elaborating on the connection of medical and martial education in South India. The third lecture discussed the practical relevance of martial arts philosophy, interpreting well-known texts from Musashi Miyamoto and Soho Takuan.
Panel 2: Biographies and Motivations of Fighters

Professor Peter Kuhn opened this panel by introducing his research project entitled ‘A Fighter’s Life’, which brings together researchers from different countries to discuss issues regarding the biographies and the motivations of fighters. This presentation was followed by two other papers. The first speaker presented the results of a research project conducted in Kanazawa, Japan. The researcher had interviewed Japanese karateka and judoka about their motivations and compared the findings with the results from an earlier study in Germany. Based on interviews, and previously unknown primary sources, the second speaker revealed the life of the West German boxer and entrepreneur Peter Paffen, who founded a leading company for martial arts equipment.

Panel 3: Professionalisierungsdiskurse innerhalb der Polizei

The third panel addressed discourses of professionalisation within the police and involved seven contributions. This made it the largest panel of the conference. The contributions covered various law enforcement related topics ranging from the perception of reality in police training to the dynamics of violence encountered by paramedics. Most striking was the fact that all of the research was either conducted or supported by Swen Körner and Mario Staller – which is perhaps unsurprising as Staller at this moment appears to be the number one researcher in Germany (and probably Europe) regarding police training.

Panel 4: Gender and Emancipation in Martial Arts

The four papers in this panel discussed issues related to gender and emancipation in martial arts. Two presentations focused on gender issues in MMA. The first looked at mixed gender training in MMA and the social relevance of the body and gender. The following speaker turned from the training experience towards the mediated representation of female MMA fighters in German media. A third lecture analysed the current ‘ring girl’ discussion in German (Olympic) boxing. The speaker presented a qualitative case study of a renowned German boxing trophy and analysed a Facebook questionnaire by the organizers of the tournament. The closing lecture then zoomed in on questions related to gender sensitive self-defence courses, drawing on qualitative research data from interviews with experts.

Panel 5: Training the Martial Body

‘Training the Martial Body’ presented various perspectives on topics related to martial arts training. While one presentation addressed issues of training boxing coaches, another questioned the adequacy of levels of complexity in self-defence instruction. Apart from these very martial arts-centred contributions, two further presentations focused on outlying perspectives. One presented findings on the subjective perception of boxing training among adolescent goal keepers, while the other elaborated on the representation of martial arts training in superhero movies and comics.

Panel 6: Social Behaviour and Social Interaction in Martial Arts

This panel concentrated on social behaviour and social interaction in martial arts. The presentations ranged from fighting in video and computer games to the behaviours of spectators of martial arts and martial sports. A qualitative study looked into the effects of periods of reflection during and after judo training. The final presentation in this panel discussed the importance of rhythm in boxing from a sociological point of view. While suggesting an underlying biomechanical grammar of social interaction, this lecture also elaborated on aspects like antagonistic cooperation and empathy.
Panel 7: Selling Martial Bodies: Economies of Martial Arts

’Selling Martial Bodies: Economies of Martial Arts’ addressed economic perspectives in and on martial arts. With three contributions it was a small but nonetheless interesting panel. The first presentation covered the much-debated fight between Floyd Mayweather and Conor McGregor in 2017 and discussed whether it portended the takeover of boxing by MMA. The second presentation focused on martial arts as a service market segment in Bavaria. And the last presentation emphasised instances of economisation and effects of invented tradition in regard of the popularisation of krav maga in Germany.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Lastly, adding to the 30 contributions mentioned above were three poster presentations. The first poster presented the findings of a Japanese-German visuomotor adaption study, comparing results for martial arts and running experts, which could identify effects of increased ambidextrousness among martial arts experts. The second poster examined paradoxes in the concept of qi in Asian cultures. And the third poster addressed the limited academic coverage of the early history of boxing in Germany and promoted the launch of a national boxing archive.

CONCLUSION

Ghent is a remarkably beautiful city and the university and organiser proved to be superb hosts. The academic quality of contributions was high without significant exceptions. Still, the number of participants (approximately 30 persons) was rather low. While this is not uncommon for conferences of the German committee, the remoteness of Ghent might have been a deterrent for some potential German participants (except for the West German participants from North Rhine-Westphalia, who certainly dominated the conference). On the other hand, not only keynote speaker Yasuhiro Sakaue from Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, but also Professor Ricardo Mak from Baptist University in Hong Kong, made their way to Belgium and engaged in important and mutually stimulating academic exchanges with the European martial arts studies community.

Also, the meeting of the members’ committee generated some notable news. Swen Körner stepped down from his office as speaker of the committee and Mario Staller was elected as his successor. The next conference will be hosted by Martin Meyer and Mario Staller at the University of Vechta in Lower Saxony, Germany, and the title will be ‘Teaching is Learning: Methods, Contents and Role Models in the Didactics of Martial Arts’ (3-5 October 2019). Furthermore, the newly founded Journal of Martial Arts Research (JOMAR), an online open access journal closely associated to the committee and hosted at the University of Bayreuth, has published its first volume (www.j-o-mar.com). Apart from the conference homepage (http://www.dvs-kampfkunst-kampfsport.ugent.be), all abstracts – as well as most of the papers – will be published in JOMAR.

Finally, the committee intends to send a delegation to next year’s Martial Arts Studies conference at Chapman University, Orange, California, in the United States (23-24 May 2019) to talk about some of the cultural and political issues involved in establishing a committee such as has been developed in Germany, and is looking forward to literally pushing the boundaries of the international martial arts discourse.
Until quite recently, the nearly eight million practitioners of modern taekwondo across the globe were being sold fabricated and stereotypical mythologies as the definitive history of their art. What’s worse, this misinformation wasn’t simply transmitted by word-of-mouth or by well-meaning instructors: this fiction was propagated by decades of taekwondo training manuals and corroborated by the Kukkiwon, the headquarters for the World Taekwondo Federation [2013]. It was a romantic legend, a sort of slave narrative of an ancient Korean fighting system nearly snuffed out during the brutal period of Japanese colonial rule prior to World War Two. It was a story of traditional taekwondo covertly practiced in secret rituals, folk games, or ancient ceremonial performances in order to survive attempted cultural erasure, the spread of communism, and the devastation of the Korean War. But, despite the appealing plot line, this long-standing myth was nothing more than an invented tradition, nationalist propaganda rife with all the usual baggage this kind of rhetoric incurs.

Thankfully, this deceit has started to become thoroughly challenged. Udo Moenig’s monograph *Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport* [2016] is a work that shines a light on the problem of entrusting a state-sponsored agency like the Kukkiwon as the custodian of taekwondo’s history and philosophy. Moenig, a lecturer in the taekwondo department of Youngsan University, is the first foreigner to teach taekwondo at University level in Korea. A native German, Moenig remarks in the introduction to his work that since ‘critical studies regarding taekwondo’s history are rare … [and not particularly] welcomed as research topics in Korean universities … an outsider’s perspective is necessary to kindle some degree of critical discussion and debate’ [9]. Moenig’s background as a German National taekwondo team competitor, his formal education in Asian Studies and Physical Education, and his thorough enculturation in Korean society solidify his credibility as this necessary ‘outsider’ voice.

The compelling absence of a critical conversation surrounding taekwondo’s history, development, and potential futures lends further credence to the idea that the community needs a fresh perspective. Moenig only identifies eight distinct scholars who have published in this area from 1986–2008, and nearly half of these texts are only available in Korean. One of the greatest strengths of Moenig’s work is its ability to put this literature into conversation with a variety of primary texts written in Chinese, Japanese, German, and Korean for English-speaking audiences. Of the available literature, Moenig is most influenced by the work of Steven D. Capener [1995, 2005], the first non-Korean to investigate the inconsistencies inherent in taekwondo’s history and philosophy as well as, later, its Olympic debut. There have been significant changes to the sport of taekwondo in the last two decades, however, and Moenig’s work offers an updated consideration of taekwondo’s potential future as a combat sport.
In addition to this invaluable synthesis of the available literature regarding taekwondo’s history, Moenig provides new quantitative data in terms of the technical development of the Korean art. As a result, the book can be said to be structured by two fundamental research questions: (1) ‘Where did taekwondo come from?’ and (2) ‘Where is it going?’ Ultimately, the major theme of the book is a disciplinary one, a justified concern given taekwondo’s relative adolescence as an officially recognized Korean martial art and Olympic sport. Because of this, Moenig sees modern taekwondo as perfectly positioned for an intervention, one that could reconcile the sport’s aims and goals with student training regimens and curricula. The argument that Moenig puts forward is that taekwondo has undergone an ‘incomplete transformation’ from martial art to combat sport in the last fifty years [186]. In order to complete this transformation and secure a future for taekwondo, practitioners, master instructors, and accrediting agencies need to come to terms with the incommensurability Moenig so artfully outlines in his juxtaposition of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ training methodologies and philosophies.

To prepare his readers to understand just how incompatible these conflicting ideologies can be, Moenig devotes the first three chapters to debunking some of the commonly held myths regarding taekwondo’s origin story in order to shift towards arguing for its potential future. For example, Chapter One begins with a discussion of t’aekkyon, a Korean folk game involving sweeping leg techniques and wide-arcing kicking motions. Various taekwondo manuals describe t’aekkyon as the ancient martial art from which modern taekwondo is derived and blame Japanese annexation for its near-extinction. Moenig systematically illustrates how commonly employed ‘evidence’ supporting these claims has been misinterpreted, sometimes quite intentionally [20]. Moenig confirms the accounts of historians like Gillis [2008] who describe how officials under the Park Chung-Hee dictatorship (1963-1979) took advantage of the lack of public knowledge regarding t’aekkyon and began establishing a falsified link from the supposedly ancient Korean fighting system and the newly named taekwondo. Moenig describes this effort to ratify taekwondo as historically and culturally Korean as an ‘invention of tradition’, a technique that is often used to provide some sort of cultural foundation or ‘social cohesion’ to the state [25]. This claim is presented rather sympathetically, despite Hobsbawm and Ranger’s [1983] term often being associated with authoritarian rule like that of Nazi Germany. Moenig explains how taekwondo was certainly used as a propaganda tool similar to the earlier implementation of karate in Japanese public education, but that it was used at a time when the newly established South Korea was one of the poorest and most war-ravaged countries on the earth, a time when its citizens needed something to help them re-establish their identity as proudly Korean [47]. But taekwondo isn’t an evolution of a native Korean martial arts culture – in fact, it began, quite simply, in Okinawa.

Moenig provides explicit detail in Chapter Two regarding the leaders of the five major kwans (schools or styles), all of whom trained in shotokan karate and most of whom trained in Japan directly under the legendary Funakoshi Gichin. Moenig builds on Madis’s [2003] work by demonstrating through a timeline of taekwondo manuals how the early Korean publications were, in many cases, identical to Japanese karate handbooks. Founding fathers like General Choi Hong Hi, for example, were accused of blatant plagiarism when reprinting karate katas (forms or patterns) in their own publications.

Despite the attempt to rename and rebrand (beginning in 1955), taekwondo for all intents and purposes was Korean karate until the late 1960s. This meant that almost all technical instruction and training regimens were borrowed from the Okinawan art and slowly adapted, modernized, or Koreanized in the act of nation building. Moenig labels the practices and philosophies of this early period as ‘traditional taekwondo’ and discusses how it is primarily marked by the activity of p’umsae, or forms practice, something he discusses at great length in Chapter Three.
Even when instructors like Choi and later the Korean Taekwondo Association developed forms that were distinctly different from their Japanese predecessors, taekwondo was still a martial art defined by Funakoshi's pedagogy of self-cultivation through repetition and physical meditation. Perhaps a better answer to the question of taekwondo's origin lies in what Moenig describes as Korea's true contribution to the evolution of East Asian martial arts: mainstream, full-contact sparring.

The second half of the book describes the development of what Moenig delineates as 'modern taekwondo', the Olympic combat sport defined by competitive sparring. Chapter Four describes the origins of full-contact sparring by detailing its roots in competitive kendo or experimental Renbukken karate tournaments. Chapter Five goes into more detail about how competition rules and equipment changed over time, and why this had such an impact on the technical development of taekwondo. Finally, Chapter Six demonstrates how, through free-sparring, taekwondo evolved rapidly from its traditional stances, kicks, and strikes to a more dynamic and fluid combat sport for modern competition, one with its own distinct techniques and maneuvers.

These three chapters together represent Moenig's fresh contribution to martial arts studies scholarship in that they provide data supporting the claim that there is a clear schism and crisis of identity in the contemporary discipline of taekwondo. Because of the evidence so cleanly presented in these chapters, Moenig is able to support his argument that traditional forms training as adopted from shotokan karate in the formative years of taekwondo are actually at odds with the contemporary practice of Olympic style sparring. Furthermore, if this issue is not addressed by a reevaluation of taekwondo curriculum design, the sport risks further fracturing into irreconcilable splinter groups, a future that could endanger the Olympic position that the South Korean government worked so hard to procure.

Moenig hints at some implications for this research, namely that the practice of p’umsae training be updated to better accommodate the needs of taekwondo practitioners. This has been done before in the early 1970s when the WTA released the palgwe and taegeuk forms, but the motive for this action had more to do with distancing taekwondo from karate than it did with preparing students for free-sparring. Still, Moenig argues that training in this antiquated way is actually a hurdle for students to overcome should they choose to pursue full-contact sparring. In short, the educational model (taekwondo curriculum) does not connect to or support desired learning outcomes (sparring competency) and, therefore, one or the other needs to be changed.

This research opens the door for a variety of other taekwondo scholars to contribute to the conversation of the style's history, its present state of affairs, and its possible future roles. For example, while Moenig does a fantastic job of debunking certain popular myths (like taekwondo's origin in t'aekkyon) and establishing a historical lineage to Okinawan karate, there is still historical work to be done investigating connections between Chinese cosmology and taekwondo p’umsae (a connection Moenig only partially addresses in Chapter Seven). This dismissal of the modern palgwe and taegeuk p’umsae systems and their potential embodiment of Daoist philosophy reveals the only weakness of Moenig’s argument: his predisposition towards modern taekwondo’s Olympic sport position implicitly relegates some contemporary taekwondo practices (like forms competitions, demonstration festivals, and aerobic exercise) to allegedly insignificant extracurricular activities that could/should be eliminated. In addition, while Moenig thoroughly outlines a theory of how taekwondo techniques developed through sparring practice over time, further quantitative data could help validate these claims and provide insight into how best to rectify the issue of current pedagogy not matching practitioner learning outcomes.
That said, *Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport* is the most authoritative and useful text for any scholar interested in the history of taekwondo's transformation from shotokan karate to a truly Korean intangible cultural heritage. Not only does this work compile and organize a body of literature that has hitherto remained fairly scattered, it adds to the scholarly understanding of how taekwondo sparring evolved over time through new data and evidence. Finally, this work addresses a clear disciplinary problem in the current state of taekwondo, and in doing so invites further research to address this issue for the future of the sport.

While the first generation of taekwondo pioneers were responsible for importing karate to Korea, and while the second generation helped to rebrand this practice into a distinctly Korean sport garnering significant international praise and recognition, it is the duty of the third generation to move beyond the invention of tradition for national pride. Instead, with the help of work like Moenig’s, taekwondo scholars must work to concretize shared goals, educational philosophy, and a unified technical curriculum for the purpose of securing a future for the art as well as the sport.

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The Martial Arts Studies Reader
Paul Bowman (ed.)
Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019
244 pages
£29.95 (paperback)

In order to review something of the scope of and breadth of this multidisciplinary collection of essays, it may be practical to address The Martial Arts Studies Reader first on the macro-level, and then on the micro. With that in mind, this collection does a good job of covering the field in terms of topic matter and approaches to all things martial arts. As a result of the varying backgrounds, interests, and arguments put forth by the contributors to this collection, the question of ‘what is martial arts (studies)?’ is answered (both directly and indirectly) from an array of angles. Thanks to the clever and intentional ordering of the essays, what may have come across as a disjointed collection of vaguely martial-arts-related essays instead reads in a somewhat linear fashion, with several topic-specific threads weaving between and interconnecting otherwise disparate articles. The Martial Arts Studies Reader succeeds in its goal of trying to ‘capture and convey something of the emerging constellation of martial arts studies’. With few exceptions, this collection poses an array of interesting and thought-provoking questions and central issues about the budding field of martial arts studies, and does so in a way that is generally accessible to martial artist, scholar, and layman alike. I will now go on to review the Reader on the micro-level, briefly moving through the essays in the order in which they are presented, as a way to structure this review.

Though in many ways reflecting my previous thoughts on the collection as a whole, the introductory chapter ‘What, Where, and Why is Martial Arts Studies?’, written by Paul Bowman (the editor of this collection), gives an ordered and general overview of the essays that are to follow, and how they fall in-line with the greater overarching aims of the Reader. Intentionally posing more questions than answers, this introduction serves to outline the objectives of the collection; namely, to showcase the potential range of scope of the field, as well as to ‘ground, orientate, acclimatize and stimulate’ ongoing and new research on martial arts studies.

Chapter 2, Peter Lorge’s ‘Early Chinese Works on Martial Arts’ starts the collection off by giving the reader a brief history of 16th century (and earlier) China’s rich tradition of martial arts: concentrating in particular on China’s recorded and extant collection of martial arts histories. Through the surveying of imperial book collections, Lorge takes us from the earliest-known Chinese texts on martial arts from the Han Dynasty through to the imperial collections of the Ming Dynasty. Through this survey we can see the long-term popularity that martial arts manuals and studies shared in China, though it is of interest that the extant works are virtually exclusively about archery, almost to the exclusion of all other martial arts. I found of interest the section on The Wrestling Record, listed in The Song Dynasty History under the ‘Essays and Minor Works’ category of works – a seeming outlier in contrast to the dominance of archery. I also found of particular interest Lorge’s postulation that the archery-centric nature of these collections stemmed from their being ‘an appropriate topic’ for properly

Qays Stetkevych is a doctoral student whose current research examines unarmed combat and grappling in the Norse Sagas.

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‘Confucianized intellectuals’. Despite being far-removed from my area of expertise, I found this chapter to be quite consumable. A final, and clear, takeaway from this essay is also that earlier Chinese writers clearly had a different interest in martial arts than modern martial artists and scholars, and that this difference is reflected in what was written and collected, and by whom.

Douglas Wile’s ‘The Battlefield and the Bedroom: Chinese Martial Arts and Art of the Bedchamber’ takes two activities that are clearly linked, yet rarely compared, and analyses and contrasts them at depth. This chapter draws numerous parallels between martial acts on the battlefield and carnal acts in the bedroom, the majority of which are quite compelling, if not immediately apparent. This chapter also touches on a cultural facet that I found interesting, comparing both ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ martial and sexual ideologies. In this regard I found the article to be quite fascinating, as, for example, the bedchamber concept of ‘essence theft’ can come off as quite foreign to Westerners, and yet when compared to more universal concepts on the battlefield, ‘essence theft’ becomes a more relatable concept. Wile’s section on ‘Martial Arts Fantasy Fiction: Essence Dueling and Sadomasochism’ was also quite fascinating, as was his astute analysis of the political, social, and historical reasonings for the genre’s re-emergence. Fascination aside, my objections to this chapter is twofold: First, many of the ‘traditional’ techniques and concepts come off as dripping with misogyny (and indeed, they are). This is not to in any way say that this is a reflection of the author’s personal views, but rather that I am of the mind that the modern academic scene should aim to clarify and ‘straighten out’ such ‘backward’ ideologies when we see them, rather than to ‘let them slide’ under the guise of ‘culture’. Secondly, although I did indeed find the comments interesting, some of the quotes (particularly a blogger called Sugar Britches musing about the sexual prowess of fellow aikidoka) came off as simply in poor taste. Again, anecdotal musings about training partners’ level of sexual prowess are just that: anecdotal. I do not see the inherent academic merit in such musings (however intriguing they may be) and would prefer a more factually-grounded means of approaching the nonetheless interesting question.

Daniel Jaquet does a great job addressing the current academic state of affairs regarding European primary sources (‘fight books) in his chapter ‘Martial Arts by the Book: Late Medieval and Early Modern European Martial Arts’. In contrast to the Chinese imperial collections in Lorge’s previous chapter, the ‘fight books’ referred to in this chapter were often pointedly created for the purpose of passing on specific techniques and fighting styles. As this is an area I am quite familiar with (as well as much of Jaquet’s other work), I found little that was novel on the personal level, but thoroughly enjoyed what to me was a ‘refresher course’. Perhaps the most profound concept to take away from this chapter is Jaquet’s mantra ‘inscription, description, codification’: where inscription refers to the documenting of practice without didactic intent; description refers to the documenting of practice with evidence of didactic intent; and codification refers to the documenting of practice with encryption (where a technique is described in detail, yet in such a way as only those who can ‘decipher’ the terminology/are already ‘in the know’ are able to understand it). Furthermore, of particular note, Jaquet does a very good job in presenting this topic, and his approach to it, in a very ‘user-friendly’ manner: although the topic matter is very much specialist, it is intentionally described and explained in a manner that allows outsiders and the uninitiated to fully understand the rationale and concepts. This level of discourse is precisely what I feel martial arts studies needs to be aiming for.

Michael Molasky’s ‘The Phone Book Project: Tracing the Diffusion of Asian Martial Arts in America Through the Yellow Pages’ is a straightforward project executed masterfully. Clear in intent and parameter, as well as realistic in its objectives, this piece was both interesting and entertaining. As the title would suggest, this chapter goes to great lengths in its dissection and analysis of the spread of Asian martial arts as evidenced through the Yellow Pages (US phone books) over time. Although not an immediately exhilarating title, the insights that Molasky glean from this project are both revealing and convincing. He traces the roots
and dissemination of Asiatic martial arts in the US starting from the mid-1940s until 2000, complete with numerous ads for reference, and leaves little room for doubt in his conclusions. While following the general change in ads from 'Gymnasium' and 'Martial Arts Instruction' to 'karate', 'judo' and 'Kungfu' adverts, Molasky also takes into account cultural, geographical, and demographic information. Watching the once 'Asian' adverts (complete with 'chopstick writing') become more and more 'Americanized' ('Christian owned and operated'), through the sole use of phone directories, was an interesting experience, and serves as positive affirmation that the realm of martial arts studies can be approached from many versatile angles.

Chapter 6, Esther Berg-Chan's 'Martial Arts, Media, and (Material) Religion' left me scratching my head a bit – not in a 'lost in contemplation' sort of way, but rather in a 'who is the intended audience for this?' sort of way. That is not to say that the case studies and arguments within this chapter are without merit. Much could be said about them in a martial arts context (and indeed Berg-Chan approaches them in some interesting ways). Rather, the issue I take with this article is in its writing and argument style. The twelve pages of this chapter are so injected with elitist post-structuralist terminologies and phrases (with little in the way of explanation/definition) that I imagine them to be extremely difficult for the non-post-structuralist to grasp. After reading the article twice myself, I also find that, after a laborious amount of deciphering, I still cannot 'connect the dots' as to how certain parts of the argument relate to other parts, leaving me with the sense that some key points of logic/reason lie either hidden beneath layers of esoteric language or are simply missing altogether. On another, though not totally unrelated, note, I find the concept of conflating (to any degree) religion and martial arts problematic. Although Berg-Chan gives an ample clarification as to her intentions and the intended scope of the paper, I feel that as an academic field we should not dismiss the importance and veracity of 'truth claims'. Doing so, in conjunction with melding religion and martial arts, seems to at very least buttress the notion that one, and therefore the other, are beyond reproach. There are certainly plentiful interrelations (particularly in the cultural and social realms) between martial arts and religion, but discussing these relations in a setting that intentionally ignores their potential veracity goes against the very precepts of academic rigour. I don't say this to be dismissive or harsh towards the author, as this chapter would fit very well into other fields and contexts; but if the aim of this collection is to 'ground, orientate, acclimatize and stimulate' both ongoing and new research on martial arts in culture and society, then I feel that the inclusion of this arcane essay misses the mark.

For those of you already familiar with Benjamin Judkins or his work, 'Liminoid Longings and Liminal Belonging: Hyper-reality, History and the Search for Meaning in the Modern Martial Arts', comes as 'par for the course'. This chapter delivers high-level and thought-provoking insight on topics ranging from martial arts studies and contemporary social structures to ethnographic accounts of rites of passage in modern Western society: all under the guise of studying lightsabre combat. What really makes this chapter stand out, however, is the apparent ease in which Judkins explains, expands upon, and critiques a topic, before seamlessly connecting it to his next profound (yet often mundane) topic. This, in conjunction with his clear and layman-oriented way of writing, results in a refreshing and highly interesting, yet highly accessible, chapter. In answering the apparently simple questions of 'what sort of martial art is lightsabre combat?' and 'why would someone choose to practice it, given the many other, better established, combat systems that already exist?', Judkins takes the reader on an exploration of the complexities between liminoid and liminal martial arts practices, and examines all the baggage that unpacking these two through such a lens reveals. Lastly, in response to Judkins' pondering about why his instructor keeps reiterating that 'remember, this is all just for fun', I would posit that this kind of 'fun' is very akin to the kind of 'fun' one has in a haunted house, on a rollercoaster, or, in my own case, a grappling tournament or MMA sparring session. This sort of 'thrill-seeking' fun is, by its very nature, very much not fun for the vast majority of the population, yet the select few enjoy it immensely.
Janet O’Shea’s “He’s an Animal”: Naturalizing the Hyper-real in Modern Combat Sport is a fun and pleasant read from beginning to end, especially if you are a mixed martial arts fan. Spring-boarding off a discussion of MMA ‘cage names’ (nicknames) and their revealing nature about both the fighters’ and fans’ psyches, O’Shea moves on to the core of her argument, equating combat sports to ‘high risk-play’ as opposed to simply an extension of violence: a proposal that I wholeheartedly agree with. Although I enjoyed this chapter, there were some areas and claims that I felt could use some more explanation, or were convenient ‘low hanging fruit’ and not fully fleshed-out. For example, the statement ‘Cage names that associate men with nature and women with technology or irony suggest that combat play is natural for men and constructed for women’ refers in part to one of the most dominant female mixed martial artists in history, Cristiane Justino Venâncio, known better by her cage name, Cris Cyborg. The claim that this (type of) nickname implies that combat play is ‘constructed in women’ is unsubstantiated not only in that it (as with several other similar claims made in this essay) is based upon conjecture, but more conclusively so because it is relatively common knowledge that ‘Cris Cyborg’ got her nickname from her long-time husband, and also professional mixed martial artist, Evangelista ‘Cyborg’ Santos. This shows that not only did such a cage name not come from a sense that combat must be ‘constructed in woman’, but also sabotages the idea that this kind of technological name applies primarily to women. Regardless of such instances, I found many of the discussion points brought up in this essay to be quite (potentially) fruitful, especially towards the end. In particular, I found the argument that (high-risk) play allows its players to experience mastery as well as to negotiate failure to be particularly compelling, as well as the notion that a wide range of biological evidence suggests a predilection in nature ‘not towards the competitive, lone, aggressive organism enacting dominance but towards a biological advantage conferred by sociality and shared labour’. I can easily foresee subjects such as these leading to important future discourse in martial arts studies.

Sixt Wetzler begins his chapter by briefly mapping (through the use of two German newspaper articles featuring kickboxers) society’s general change in attitude to combat sport over the last three decades. Interestingly, he uses these examples to then show how polysystem theory can be used as a lens through which to view martial arts. The example here is that whereas kickboxing once held the position of scapegoat in the public’s equation of martial arts to violence, MMA has now taken over that same position within the polysystem. Stemming from such examples, Wetzler goes on rather convincingly to argue how one of martial arts’ primary purposes is in fact to function as a psychological coping strategy. This strategy, Wetzler argues, could prove more practical in one’s everyday life than the actual physical knowledge of how to perform ‘X’ technique, as he goes on to question the possibility of whether or not someone can ever ‘really’ be prepared for the intense physical and psychological trauma that is violence. Once again, this chapter highlights several potential approaches to martial arts studies that could have resounding effects in future scholarship.

DS Farrer’s chapter, ‘Performance Ethnography’, sets out to define its title, as well as several other interrelated key terms in his research, such as ‘performance’ and ‘participant observation’. More than anything else, however, this chapter serves as a ‘mini-handbook’ for the aspiring ethnographer. Through detailed personal accounts, Farrer both cautions the reader about potential pitfalls in the ever-changing world of ethnography, and also gives some refreshing tips and tricks regarding ‘best practice’ advice on topics ranging from informed consent to how best to avoid ethical biases – and all delivered in his signature, relaxed tone. The chapter is rife with interesting advice, and gives a compelling argument as to why fields such as martial arts studies have until now been relegated ‘to a sideline’, and why they shouldn’t be.

Alex Channon’s chapter, ‘Martial Arts Studies and the Sociology of Gender: Theory, Research and Pedagogical Application’, aims to outline the various interrelations between martial arts studies and gender studies. He goes on to argue that gender studies could learn much by paying close attention to martial arts and combat...
sports (MACS), primarily because of MACS’ inherent embodiment, its symbolic proximity to matters of violence, and its frequent attempts to de-emphasize gender difference. Conversely, he also argues that martial arts studies would do well to not lose sight of the importance of gender in analyses. Although I agree with Cannon on virtually all such points as made in this chapter, I found some of the evidence used (the three examples on pages 161-2) to be problematic, in that it was both anecdotal and perhaps not reflective of prevalent issues within martial arts training. A participant’s ‘feeling’ that a punch was ‘fuelled with sexism and misogyny’ has no bearing on the intent behind the punch, nor any business being used as an academic example to support the claim that it relates to. Furthermore, the recommendations (not by Channon but by cited authors) on page 164 seem counterproductive in their insistence upon gender-specific training techniques within the martial arts. For some reason, these completely omit any mention of age-and-weight classes in training and competition: two almost universally-used ‘equalizing’ strategies. It seems somewhat schizophrenic to praise MACS’ ability to ‘de-gender’ on the one hand, while simultaneously appearing to fixate on very gender-specific ways to implement training with MACS. Still, I strongly agree with Cannon on his closing statement that the use of such knowledge in applied interventions deserves to become a key focus as martial arts studies (and gender studies) research moves forward.

Dale C. Spencer’s chapter, ‘Masculinities, Bodies, and Martial Arts’, draws extensively on the concept of corporeal realism in order to examine potential correctives to certain contemporary approaches to martial arts studies, and the understanding of men, masculinities and martial arts. Unfortunately, this chapter once again suffers from muddling esoteric language, and indeed, as a result the very definition of corporeal realism, and its potential impact upon martial arts studies, is lost upon the reader. Again, that is not to say that this article is without merit, or that the author did not achieve his desired result, but that in its current form it is mostly indecipherable to those not deeply initiated within post-structuralism. Although there are several interesting and engaging points, such as friendship’s seemingly paradoxical role in martial arts training, the greater context and intertextuality of these points is made opaque by postmodern-esque word play. It seems an unrealistic ideal to suppose that language such as this will ever increase the allure or accessibility of martial arts studies moving forward.

In the chapter ‘Martial Arts as Embodied, Discursive and Aesthetic Practice’, Tim Trausch does an admirable job in analysing the divide between practice and discourse within martial arts studies through the lens of martial arts video games and media. In doing so he touches upon the paradox of using media as a departure point in discussing martial arts studies, asserting that at the crux of the issue may be the idea of ‘representation’ and its implied divide from, yet subordination to, ‘the actual thing’. His at first seemingly far-fetched argument that martial arts video games (MAVs), and their mastery, is akin on many levels to actual martial arts and their respective mastery only gets more convincing as the chapter goes on. Indeed, he goes on to competently argue, through the support of examples from the neurosciences, that watching or playing martial arts-related media activates one’s motor system in much the same way as physically performing the action would. To conclude his argument, Trausch states that, through martial arts media such as film and video games, we are presented with a ‘dynamic network of associations’ that move across and assemble references to martial arts as embodied, aesthetic, and discursive practice. This article seemingly leaves open a portal of near-endless possibilities for future multi-media research directions within the budding field of martial arts studies.

Luke White addresses the cultural and social underpinnings to the success of the kung fu comedies of the mid-to-late 1970’s in his article, ‘Carnival of the Drunken Master: The Politics of the Kung Fu Comedic Body’. In doing so, White maps the socio-political happenings in Hong Kong in conjunction with the rise and fall of Bruce Lee’s box-office supremacy (in Hong Kong). Intersecting with these occurrences, White further outlines the cultural backdrop that he argues led to the success of the carnivalesque kung fu comedies at the
box-office at the expense of the more nationalist, anti-colonial Bruce Lee films. My only contention with White’s argument is that the movie-going experience of watching the carnivalesque kung fu comedies, to my mind, does not empower the audience and reinforce their identity, but rather further engrains them in the subordinate position of ‘consumer’ within the capitalist machine. Rather refreshingly, White discusses this very objection within the essay, further lending it a well-rounded and thought-out appeal. Over all, White has done an excellent job in using the comparison of two Hong Kong movie genres to highlight the contemporary post-colonial aesthetics, one that sheds a light on a conducive way forward for martial arts studies to interact with popular culture and media.

Lastly, The Martial Arts Studies Reader wraps-up with a conversation between two icons in the field: the editor of the collection, Paul Bowman, and Meaghan Morris, in a chapter entitled ‘Learning from Martial Arts’. In this interesting back-and-forth conversation, ranging from topics as disparate as Derrida and Pilates to the general appeal of martial arts, both scholars expand upon what got them interested in martial arts in the first place, and what direction they think (or wish) martial arts studies is heading. I found particularly interesting the conversation that revolved around the aspect of stretching and practice, and how these otherwise mundane techniques, when executed under different conditions can become sublime in an almost religious sense. Overall, it is both a pleasant read and experience to get a little ‘behind-the-scenes’ look into the minds of two such scholars in the field, and this chapter serves as a nice ‘capping-off’ of the otherwise academically intense reading preceding it.