

# Values of martial arts in the light of the anthropology of martial arts

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## Summary

From the perspective of the philosophical anthropology of martial arts and of martial arts humanistic theory the author presents values of today's pathways of warriors from eastern Asia. He also refers to other theoretical concepts of martial arts philosophy, and especially their normative ethics.

The pedagogical implications of the use of a variety of axiological traditional martial arts have been proven in many countries, but to the greatest extent in the countries of eastern and south-eastern Asia. The pathways of martial arts (such as Japanese Budo) constitute a huge potential and universal cultural heritage from which today's physical education pedagogy should draw.

## Theoretical perspective and general assumptions

The author has formulated a theoretical concept to identify the general principles of a humanistic theory of martial arts for which he has adopted a (Central) European perspective – as in the title of the main thesis: *The theory and practice of martial arts from a European perspective* [1]. He has done this to consider the puzzle within the bigger picture and in an attempt to interpret the issues of ever growing conceptual ranges [2].

Cynarski's anthropology of martial arts comes from the general anthropology of mental and physical progress. It is an extended version of a previously formulated humanistic theory of martial arts. The final shape of *Anthropology of martial arts* [3] was influenced by a reviewer S. Tokarski, as mentioned above. Thanks to this, the concept takes the achievements of many Polish and foreign authors into greater account. It is still a rather European perspective, because of its mentality, the availability of materials and research results [1,4], rather than a fully objective one. The latter is indeed quite impossible to achieve.

Among the main theses formulated in martial arts anthropology the three most important, used for specifying the object of scientific inquiry, are:

1. Reducing martial arts and the warrior's pathways only to sport is a serious mistake of reductionism, pigeon-holing and inadequate definition of terms [5,6,7,8,9]. First of all, in martial arts the axiology is different from that of sport. In sport, the main goal is to score, to win the competition. In the pathways of martial arts we find the aims positioned higher in the hierarchy, such as the improvement of the psychophysical personality and becoming a better person.

2. It is important to conduct multi-dimensional and many-faceted analyses, taking into particular account the axiological dimension, especially in terms of education. The concept of holistic education is especially noteworthy here [10,11]. No less important are the socio-cultural [12,7], and spiritual dimensions [13].

3. There is no one common axiology of martial arts (in the sense of a common canon), but rather there are many according to the variety of martial arts, individual masters, teachers and schools. There is a philosophy of the warrior's pathway known as *kyokushin* (the ultimate truth) [14] operating in the school and organisation of the master Masutatsu Oyama. There is also a philosophy of *idō* (perpetual motion), initiated by Dr Wally Strauss [15] and adopted by a group of today's warriors of the pathway.

Thus there are different „philosophies” for each type of martial arts, but an academic reflection on this topic may be described as research into the philosophy of martial arts, a new emerging discipline of philosophy, which is also a meta-theory for the science of martial arts.

## What are values?

Gichin Funakoshi pointed to such human qualities of a karate practitioner as courage, kindness, honesty, humility and self-control [16]. Overall, „The Warrior's Pathway” is pushing one's own limits, a kind of transgression through continuous effort of self-development, it is a moral way – improving the character and personality of the fighter by their own weakness. Not so much a distant goal, as the way itself is the main sense of self-improvement and value in the psychophysical systems of the East. It is the most important and the most difficult

of combats. If it is consistent with the "Pathway of Heaven" and leads to knowledge of the Absolute, we can also speak of its transcendental dimension. This term does not have to concern only the areas of East Asian martial arts as they are associated with a more universal ethos of knights and soldiers. In addition, it is not self-acceptance, but just the awareness of one's own weakness which enables improvement on the way. Thanks to this a person also becomes socially more valuable. Interestingly, a lot of people practising martial arts internalize these values [4,17]. Experts in East Asian martial arts mention a number of educational [18], normative and ethical, health, cultural, esthetical [19,20] and utilitarian values of the individual disciplines. Practising Asian or Brazilian martial arts in Europe, or a more general kind of martial arts originating from a different culture, contributes to the attitude of tolerance of foreign cultures. The abilities obtained provide a sense of security and higher self-esteem. Martial arts teach respect for others, for tradition and authority, improve emotional self-control, teach concentration, perseverance, character and strong-will. Moreover, they are of course a great way of developing (and then maintaining) a high level of mental and physical fitness and positive health potential.

Practising technical forms of exercise, whether using traditional cold steel or without weapons, is an excellent way to improve physical memory, spatial orientation, visual-motor concentration, motor coordination abilities, arm strength, etc. [21]. It is one of the basic methods of teaching traditional martial arts, but not the only one. Martial arts in total, as education systems, offer a rich set of educational, pro-health, and of course, utilitarian values.

The philosophy of martial arts is sometimes called the Oriental philosophy of sport and is described under this name [22]. The humanistic theory of martial arts, including in it the concept of the philosophy of martial arts mainly refers to the trend of this philosophy associated with the ethos of the warrior culture. Other streams of the Oriental philosophy of sport relate to – according to Kowalczyk [23] – environmentalism and Taoism or Zen philosophy.

## Authors conception

I am trying to develop this humanistic theory of martial arts on the one hand into the anthropology of martial arts, on the other – into a general theory of martial arts. The mentioned anthropology is the anthropology of the warrior's pathway, the philosophical and cultural anthropology of martial arts [3,24,25]. It is based on the concept of the human psyche and physical progress [26]. The step towards the creation of a general theory of martial arts is the work entitled *Martial Arts Phenomenon – Research and Multidisciplinary Interpretation* [27], which is a result of international research by the Idokan Poland Association.

In my work I described both a general canon, developed from the principles of *Bushido* and *Budo Charter*, as well as from various philosophies or ideologies, schools and different martial arts organizations (*aikido*, *ido*, *jujitsu yoshin-ryu*, *shoto-*

*kan karatedo*, *kyokushinkai*, *taekwondo*, *karate zendo*). I do not see that there is any comparison between martial arts and combat sports because of the different aims of practitioners. So there are different philosophies, and different varieties of martial arts, but academic reflection on this research can be called the philosophy of martial arts. This philosophy can be compared in some respects to the ancient Stoic philosophy [27].

How to determine one's own approach towards this philosophy in a nutshell? I would generally describe the epistemology of martial arts as a psycho-physical path of practice, introversion and intuitive knowledge, and at the same time self-discovery by the individual in training. The proper explanation of this phenomenon with no experience at the appropriate level (the issue of a long-standing practice) is difficult or completely impossible.

Ontology explains some of the basic common entities and concepts that exist here. From an anthropological perspective the human being, personal, physical and psychological is interesting. The body here is not undervalued but bodily practice is related to the path of spiritual development. The pursuit of perfection affects both the skills of hand-to-hand fighting and of wielding weapons, as well as the morality and the pursuit of full humanity.

The axiology of other cases is sometimes different. For example the *idōkan yōshin-ryū* system is similar (in terms of ethics) to radical humanism and the Christian personalism of Fromm. In other martial arts schools, the focus is sometimes more on utilitarian, health or environmental issues.

The convergence of the biographies and views of eminent people in martial arts is also interesting. These people have devoted their lives to their life-long passion, and have passed on their knowledge, attained after years of confirmed mastery and with authority by teaching and publishing [25]. The philosophical anthropology of martial arts describes a man on his way to psychophysical progress.

The humanistic theory of martial arts refers to a holistic pedagogy – a new teaching concept, developed by *Prof. zw. dr hab. Andrzej Szyszko-Bohusz* [10,11]. It results in a number of practical applications, for example in the field of physical education [28]. And what does it look like from other theoretical perspectives?

## Practical implications

Matthias von Saldern (teacher and karate practitioner, 5<sup>th</sup> dan) proves that the ideals of *Budo* are still valid, even in Western countries [29]. Angelika Förster (philosopher and *aikidōka*) suggests applying the philosophy of martial arts to sport and, as an alternative, „the culture of the inner way” [30]. However to what extent, is their message clear, among philosophers, representatives of the science of physical culture or sports authorities? Or at least is the scientific community willing to accept the philosophy of martial arts?

As in the case of understanding the meaning of martial arts, we can distinguish opposing forms: a) the Eurocentric

approach to the philosophy of the martial arts pathway, and b) – let's call it the traditionalist approach, where the philosophy is derived from the cultural context of the creation of martial arts. In the latter case, authors are trying to reach back to the sources, or add weight to their statements by providing supporting quotes from the „wisdom of the East“. For example Masutatsu Oyama, did this when describing his own „philosophy of *Budo*„, created and developed to a large extent for the use of the Oyama International Kyokushinkai Organisation (IKO).

If we assumed that Oyama's philosophy [14] was absorbed by even a small percentage of students worldwide training in the *kyokushin* style (now in various forms), it is already quite a large body of people who practise this very popular style of karate. So it is not a theoretical figment of some philosopher's imagination, but something which exists objectively and which influences human behaviour. A similar value, although on a much smaller scale, has the „philosophy of *idō*„ at work in the *Idōkan* organization (Idokan Poland Association, IPA) [15]. This is partially a description, partially, a project – especially to clarify the axiology. The „*Ido* Philosophy“ has been developed in Europe and for reference it can be categorised as „A“ i.e. the Eurocentric approach. In addition to the strictly European humanistic, values, and references to the tradition of chivalry and Christianity (ideal of *homo creator nobilis*), there are strong links with the concepts typical of *Bushido* in its humanised version.

Hikaru Matsunaga and co-authors [31] write about the philosophy of *Budo* – Japanese martial arts ways – that these ways and their philosophy are derived from the traditions of *Bushidō*, the pathway of the warrior. *Budo* is a respected form of physical culture. The aim of studying of martial arts is to achieve the unity of mind, technique and body, improving the character of a practitioner, cultivating moral principles and the pursuit of self-perfection. In this way, it enables the personal development of people studying martial arts and contributes to the harmonious functioning of society. Similarly, many of the martial arts were pointed to by *sensei* Taketo Sasaki<sup>1</sup>, 7 dan judo, who includes Japanese martial arts among the components of high culture (the cultural heritage) of this country [7]. *Budo* is the educational system originating from samurai culture. It contains a number of components.

And many other authors refer to the idea of *butoku* – the virtues of chivalry and *Bushido*, especially the humanised version of this code. *Bu* means martial, but here it refers to *bushi* – knights, warriors of a samurai class. These virtues are: honour, courage, justice, loyalty, honesty, willingness to fight, respect, sacrifice, straightforwardness, devotion and kindness. In fighting it is supposed to be stability (psychophysical balance), smoothness (of movement), spontaneity, flexibility, agility and dexterity and precision (activity), speed, strength and intuition. Wisdom and gentle disposition are to be helpful in the face of death [32].

*Budo* is all about stopping different forms of aggression and achieving a state of harmony and inner balance, while the *Budo* ethic comes down to a virtuous life lead with impeccable manners [32]. Honour is a sign of moral dignity and proper respect for others, acting in a disinterested way, and as an expression of self-confidence [32]. The author of these words is a Knight of the *Homo Creator Nobilis* Order awarded by the European Union and holder of degree 9 dan in *aiki-jūjutsu* awarded by the respected Japanese Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (DNBK) organization. We can sense here an echo of the ethos of European knights, which is consistent with comparative studies by Takeshi Takagi [33]. Referring to the same canon of interpretation (the European reception of the *Bushidō* tradition) there is a description and design of the ethos of the warrior's pathway by Juliusz Piwowarski [34]. This religious studies scholar and philosopher who is also a coach and the holder of the degree of 8 dan in *karatedō*, mainly analyses the *Bushidō* code of the *dojo* oath and historical contexts. He also describes the personal patterns of the martial arts masters Morihei Ueshiba and Masutatsu Oyama, who are fully devoted to *Budo*. And he does so in relation to the humanistic theory of martial arts. Patrick McCarthy, while explaining and working on *Bubishi*, the classic textbook of hand-to-hand combat, devotes just a few paragraphs to the philosophy of Chinese martial arts [35]. He explains that in *quanfa* the sense of *wu* (in Japanese *bu*) is not a victory or defeat, but rather patience, sincerity, honesty and kindness. The secret is to build up vital energy *qi* (*ki*) through acting in accordance with the laws of nature. In addition, the Chinese art of the fist requires compliance with rules of courtesy for the practical goal which is social respect and a happy, peaceful co-existence. It is therefore a set of simple rules for a wise life.

## Summation

Within the philosophical anthropology of martial arts and the humanistic theory of martial arts a selection of the values of today's warriors of the Eastern Asia pathway has been set out. The pedagogical implications of the use of a variety of axiological traditional martial arts have been proven in many countries, but to the greatest extent in most East and South East Asian countries (China, Japan, Korea and Thailand). The pathways of martial arts (such as Japanese *Budo*) constitute a huge potential and universal cultural heritage from which today's pedagogy of physical culture can and should draw.

The philosophy of martial arts is both the practice of selected axio-normative systems, determining lifestyles and a description of the internalization of certain values. There is also an emerging philosophical sub-discipline resulting from the anthropology of the warriors' pathways. Finally, it is a superior theory for the area of knowledge and scientific disciplines described as *martial arts sciences*. In particular, it gives the possibility of practical application through various methods of teaching martial arts.

<sup>1</sup> Dr T. Sasaki is professor emeritus at the University of Fukushima, an active member of the Committee of Scientific Research and Dan IPA Committee and former technical director of the Japanese Academy of Budo.

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