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Budo in transition – the challenge of combat sports in the third millennium

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Summary

The author discusses circumstances of the emergence of the idea of Congress and the preceding activities, as well as the concepts and opinions which integrated researchers in the area of martial arts. The evolution of research directions, presented at the Congress in Rzeszów, was reviewed starting with the Judo Congress in Spała, the proceedings of which was considered a milestone in the development of martial arts; their transformations were discussed from two points of view – 50 years of their development and meeting of two cultures. This resulted in implanting some Eastern elements into the physical culture of the West, e.g. an increasing popularity of Asian concepts of self-defence self-defence, self-realisation and self-expression which greatly enriches the contemporary sport; on the other hand, combat sports undergo scientific evaluation which transformed the activities in that area of researchers with Western background. That encounter of research in combat sports (scientific approach to training, teaching, winning skills and recruitment) with the philosophical reflection of the East (code values, spiritualising the body, *bushido* code), has created the worth studying, unique present of combat sports. Those, who contributed most to the development of research on martial arts, were mentioned together with the list of prime tasks of the just established Centre for Combat Sports and Martial Arts. In conclusion, the author makes the readers aware of pathologies which infiltrate every element of the contemporary sport and which have to be overpowered for the sake of *budo* values and of the research achievements and applications made so far.

Key words: **Martial arts • Combat sports • Sport trends • Sport development**

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In the beginning of 1989, several scholars launched the idea of organising in Poland an International Congress on Judo Sciences [6]. That important event turned out to be a truly integrative platform combining divergent research areas on the transition of this combat sport, the evolution of its values, techniques, methods of training, its changing rules, and the whole appearance of the discipline. This event has been planned as an encounter of theory and practice suitable for the Western and Eastern specialists. To make the perspective of debates comprehensive and holistic, the organisers invited the researchers, some former champions, the journalists and coaches of judo. I had the honour to open the scientific part of the debates. The conference was followed by a collective work published in the same year by the Institute of Sport (Warsaw) which sponsored that event.

Then, two decades later, I had the chance to begin the debates of another important event, the Congress on Budo Science. There is some consistence and continuity of the quest for the meaning of martial arts seen in these two important events. The most outstanding contributors to the first Congress attended also the second one. For example, it ought to be reminded that the former deputy director of Institute of Sport and the most enthusiastic adherent of the idea of the Spała Congress, Professor Sikorski, had been among us and took part in the preparations for the Congress of Budo Sciences.

Between these two Congresses many things had happened. The Polish scholars attended several important meetings dealing with martial arts and combat sports. A comprehensive evaluation of the transition of the ways of Budo in the modern world became the main topic of many scientific debates for a quarter of the last century. The martial arts have also been lively present in some other gatherings dealing with the physical culture as a whole, e.g. in Rzeszów and Łańcut (2004), or several conferences dealing with combat sport organised by Professor Kalina in Wrocław, Płock, and Warsaw.

The hundred years of modern history of Budo is prompting to write a collective, international, holistic and comprehensive Encyclopaedia of Budo, Martial Arts and Combat Sports [9]. To fulfill this aim, we have to find the right place and time. Maybe the papers presented at the 1st Congress of Combat Sports and Martial Arts in Rzeszów will be the first step towards it. The generation of the main actors of Budo appearance in the modern world is still alive. The tradition and transmission of ancient values, techniques of chivalry cherished in combat sports can be described directly by the first pupils of Budo found-

ers. They have been getting old with modern Budo sports. It seems that we have been witnessing, to some extent, the end of the cycle of the transformation of martial arts into the contemporary combat sports. The road of Budo to the West has come to the end. This important process of change, being the constitutive factor of transition in the global civilisation, should be described and evaluated by qualified and gifted historians, sport scholars and researchers, situating the process in a very comprehensive, holistic perspective. In the meantime, we can celebrate the centennial anniversary of Budo thought and practice.

Paradoxically, Budo is young and old. The history of modern martial arts and combat sports has begun about a hundred years ago. Born with the emergence of judo, modern Budo has grown up with the expansion of Eastern knowledge of self-perfection in self-defence into the West. Its presence in the Olympic Games gave some Asian systems of fighting the status of popular sports practiced in many countries. After a hundred years of wanderings, the Budo is highly valued in the world, just as the old man who became the legend because of his deeds. At the same time, seen in Asian perspective, Budo is a young product of Eastern background. It has been born from the encounters of very ancient Asiatic combat practices with the ideas of Western physical culture and sport.

Like many other products of ancient Asia, the martial arts had to face the challenge of modern times [1]. Situated in the global perspective, they succeeded to reappear in many modern contexts. In a way, we witness a kind of their renaissance, the transformation of old combat traditions into the leading sports of Asia.

Hitting the road to the West, martial arts created new cultural fashions which could be dealt with in the perspective of a cross-cultural dialogue. Seen in some wider perspective, the phenomenon of international expansion of Budo constitutes a part of the process of the important multicultural encounters. It has also been a great interest for the scholars dealing with the problems of physical culture and sport. On the other hand, it created the field of new studies particularly interested to the scholars specialised in human sciences. The Western world had to face it as a challenge: the multidimensional impact of combat sports and martial arts has changed the modern civilisation.

In the way to enter the world of Budo practices, values and ideas, the Western scholars had to transcend the narrow and old-fashioned European conscience to develop new approaches. The area of philosophy and ethics of combat sports became the area of



confrontation and dialogue. The new situation has been described in a wider perspective by the famous historian of religions, Professor Mircea Eliade: “*Our historical moment – he wrote in 1969 (preface to *The Quest*, Chicago) - forces us into the confrontation that could not even have been imagined fifty years ago. The peoples of Asia have recently re-entered the history. They are seeking to become its active subjects instead of its passive objects. But if the peoples of the West are no longer the only ones to make history, their spiritual and cultural values are no longer to enjoy the privileged place, to say nothing about the unquestioned authority that they have enjoyed some generations ago. These values are analysed, compared, and judged by non-Westerners*” [2].

For the world of martial arts, this new situation meant a great debate on the shape and sense of widely understood notions of self-defence and the launching of a battle against aggression in sport in the name of non-violence. It also dramatically changed the ideas of self-expression in sport, creating a new aesthetics of sport spectacles; that of martial arts has been particularity explored by media. And what is the most important, in the vehicle of Budo ideas came to the West the spectacularly preached ideas of self-realisation, with great consequences for spiritualising the area of physical culture as a whole [8]. For the time being, this area in the general Western reception has been reduced to a material and mechanical dimension.

Asian martial arts brought a revolution in that respect. “*Budo has sought to develop martial arts systems – wrote in 2005 Hidetaka Nishiyama – that do not depend on strength but rather on psychological and physical techniques which maximise one’s energy and power, budo practice enhances a person’s mental strength, scale and class in a manner that potentially enables to control an opponent without physical confrontation*” (the opening speech at the meeting of the Japan Budo Council of the USA, Los Angeles, 11th December 2005).

That meant the new status and new prestige of the human body, forgotten for long in the modern world. We may say that it launched the crusade for a revival of axiology, not only within the framework of combat sports but in the area of physical culture as a whole. The meaning of this direction of the evolution of martial arts, especially that present in its Asian perspective, cannot be underestimated. As an example to follow, the collective work *Toward an Understanding of Budo Thought* edited by Shigeoshi Matsumae [4] should be recalled. The debate evoked there showed the clash of values of great consequences, not only

important for the martial arts in transition but also for the vast area of modern sports, their image in media, and for the physical culture as a whole.

The civilisation of every nation has to face the challenges of multicultural encounters. Sport and physical culture came across this phenomenon from the very beginning of the modern ages. These trends have been developed considerably within the framework of the modern Olympic Games [5]. The barriers in that area were to be overcome first, long before the political and economic obstacles. Today we witness big migrations of sports, sportsmen and sport fashions. East and West meet in individual and social consciousness.

Martial arts are the best example of these new encounters. At the beginning of the 20th century the values, ideas, and techniques of combat sports became the place of exchanging the ideas and practices. There, the highly appreciated patterns of Budo disciplines emerged together with some by-products threatening the homogeneity of the Budo spirit. From these confrontations some brand new combat sports were born, with Western framework of competition and Asian techniques, but not with Eastern values deeply rooted in the Codex of Bujutsu warriors. Although they were themselves also traditions in transition, their international expansion has been followed by questioning the strategies, notions and systems of values, described in the modern European physical culture as *fair play*. In order to struggle with these pathologies (no rules, no values, only pragmatic effectiveness), we have to look with special attention and care into the ethos of some pathological forms of the recent combat spectacles.

On this ground, the philosophy of modern Budo has been reborn. The Japanese brought into this area new notions of self-realisation, self-expression and a very comprehensive idea of self-defence. Other ancient disciplines of combat with non-Japanese background followed this example to form the family of Budo in well-received, attractive and fashionable forms in global dimension. But the comprehensive reconstruction of Budo is still a challenge for modern world. Its philosophical and moral backgrounds have not been studied satisfactorily nor have they been entirely known to many practitioners. We also have to study the social dimension of the transition of Budo, the transformation of its practices, theories and values. The process of its transformation constitutes from the very beginning a part of global change.

The most striking confrontation took place in the scientific area. The encounter of the theory and

practice of Budo had other unavoidable and very important consequences. The cross-cultural dialogue in this area meant for many traditions of Asian fighting a confrontation with Western science. The Eastern spirit of fight has been measured, tested, reworked. For the martial arts it meant penetration of Western ideas into the area traditionally formed on Asian ground. In the age of scientific knowledge, man is making rapid progress in all dimensions of his life. It is true for the areas of sports and games; scientific knowledge has revolutionised the standards of human performance in all sports, sport scientists have designed scientific methods for talent identification and for training sport heroes from childhood to the Olympic Games, constructed systems of most efficient training aimed at highest level performance. New scientific methods have become omnipresent parts of Budo practice in Asia and in Europe. They guaranteed an effective progress and better performance in combat sports, are used by coaches all over the world, and created the training infrastructure for modern champions [3].

This aspect of change is not only the consequence of Budo's road to the West, it is also valid in Asia. The paradox of Westernising the Asian martial arts and, at the same time, Easternising the area of Western physical culture, is obvious after a hundred years of Budo expansion. Throughout those years, Budo has brought to the described area a new consciousness of body, and radically changed the design of modern physical culture. It also changed the appearance of combat sports, its techniques and values. At the same time, it has changed itself. We cannot underestimate the importance of martial arts and combat sports in the perspective of the clash of civilisations, the contact of East and West in this field is creative for Asian and Western cultural conscience. Seen in this respect, Budo is a new trend of modern culture.

Culture has a variety of meanings. The most important understanding of culture comes from cultivation soil or a plant. To cultivate meant to plant, to prepare the ground, to promote the growth of crops, to care for harvest. Planned and ordered, in a general sense, cultivation meant education and training. That was true within the area of physical culture, though this term combined with expression "the culture of the body" sounds in modern civilisation like a paradox. The global appearance of Budo brought about a new dialogue and re-definition of physical culture.

In Western tradition of rationality, the body is a part of nature, and culture is what is not nature. Nature is wild, culture is man-made. Although language, myths, traditions and religious beliefs widely announce the

gospel of domestication of the body, modernity does not take it for granted. Budo spiritualises the body. It sanctifies it, makes it the cult and the vehicle of self-perfection. At the same time, it provides a perfect tool for education of the youngsters, unique to built the courage, chivalry and self-esteem. Confronted with the notions of fair play, it created a new entity in the area of Western physical culture. Applied to sports, it clashed with the ideas of high performance and effectiveness. For this purpose, it happened to be subject of change. We have to reflect on the consequences of the constant evolution of Budo.

If the Count Jigoro Kano or any other founder of modern Budo came back to life, he would be greatly astonished. Where are the great teachers surrounded with small groups of devoted pupils? Old fashioned *dojo* in an ancient temple has been changed into a modern training area, the traditional designs disappeared. The modern spectacle, the omnipresent advertisements and omnipotent media follow every step of the new champion of martial arts. Everything has been changed.

The studies on Budo in transition have begun recently all over the world and the Polish part of it is noteworthy. The beginnings of Polish Budo practices combined with the first import of Budo philosophy have been constructed within the framework of judo training organised at the Warsaw Academy of Physical Education in mid-fifties. Two Polish students born in France, Adam Nidzgórski and Henryk Gielec, met in a small *dojo* with a group of their followers. Backed up by some professors of that Academy they were well received by Polish authorities. The idea of the first booklets about Asian self-defence came from that circle. They created the first club and the first licensing courses for coaches and referees. Much later, the first comprehensive book dealing with the rich cultural background of Budo has been written by W. Sikorski and St. Tokarski [7].

The research on martial arts has been pursued in Poland in many ways; a pragmatic approach to training, the roads to sport success and the efficacy of methodology have been combined with a humane and intercultural approach. The idea of the first international gathering on this subject has been launched by the Institute of Sport. The Congress of Judo Sciences had been opened in Spała in 1989, Professor Sikorski being one of its promoters. A cycle of conferences followed that event: the debate on the pragmatic and moral aspects of martial arts at the Wrocław Military Academy (1994), on social communication and self-defence education (Wrocław, 1995), on communication in a struggle (Wrocław, 1996),



on the military experience of martial arts (Kalisz, 1997), on the training of psychophysical equilibrium for defence formations (Biała Podlaska, 1998), on the role of martial arts in prison (Zakopane, 1999), on optimising the methods of training martial arts (Academy of Physical Education, Krakow, 2000), about pragmatic and ethical aspects of martial sports (Warsaw, 2000), on the role of martial arts for children and youths (Płock, 2001), on humane theories of martial arts (Rzeszów), martial arts for soldiers (Warsaw, 2003), or martial arts against aggression (Płock, 1996). These events, presented in collective works or in the periodicals of the Academy of Physical Education, in the Scientific Quarterly of the Society of Physical Culture and in occasional military publications, created the framework of a common perspective of joint research.

The positive consequences of such scientific gatherings and conferences have been obvious; they provided time and space to integrate and inspire comprehensive approaches to detailed studies. They also led to the brilliant idea of creating a Centre of Martial Arts and Combat Sports, combining many dispersed international efforts, to study the practical and theoretical aspects of martial arts and combat sports. Such a structural creation would not only lead to a better understanding of techniques, strategies and methods of sport training on one hand, but to a better understanding of Budo axiology, its durability and dynamics of changes on the other. In order to grasp its social dimension in the truly holistic perspective, in order to create the comprehensive understanding of its broader meaning for the cultural progress of the modern world, its impact for cross-cultural dialogue, we have to establish a sound co-operation. This aims have been our inspiration to organise the Congress on Budo Sciences and Combat Sports.

Outlining very briefly the past and present ways of Budo abroad and in Poland, we cannot forget about the task of Budo scholars in the nearest future. The

Congress is the best place to reflect on it. First of all, we have to think about the construction of a holistic and comprehensive perspective of studies on martial arts and combat sports. There should be a full account on scientific progress in these fields accessible not only to the scholar world but also to practical experts. The results of research should be published or announced first of all in highly specialised periodicals, and further research should be inspired and co-ordinated.

The debate on the pathologies of the image of Budo in media, movies and commercial deformations of Budo should be widely discussed. The right image of Budo should be cherished and its values safeguarded with self-confidence, chivalry and non-violence as the leading terms. For these reasons, the gospel of non-violence of Budo should be integrated with the evaluation of practical patterns of the self-defence formula which could be accepted by the modern culture, taste, morality, and law. Its recent aberrations should be widely discussed.

The evolution of Budo disciplines should be followed and described by scholars with special attention and care. The educational dimension of martial arts and combat sports should be the field of particular interest, seen in the dimension of comprehensive studies as well as in practical applications. The wealth of Budo world and its new orientations should be fully acknowledged and properly evaluated. For this reason, truly comprehensive international projects and programmes of research should be backed up and launched.

The civilisational gospel of Budo as the unique tool and an attractive vehicle for the cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding of different cultures should be emphasised in its all dimensions, in scientific publications and in media. Its non-violent message and the struggle against the escalation of modern forms of aggression should be the core of the message.

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