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## Sociology of Far Eastern martial arts – problems and perspectives

**Authors' contributions:**

**A** Study design  
**B** Data collection  
**C** Statistical analysis  
**D** Data interpretation  
**E** Literature search  
**F** Manuscript preparation  
**G** Funds collection

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### Summary

**Study aim:**

The aim is to outline the present-day state – theoretical output, main directions of social studies and sociological analyses and also an attempt to describe new directions – predicting development of sociology of martial arts.

**Material/methods:**

This work is reviewing and viewing in character on the base of analytical method and theoretical reflection according to the literature on the subject. Special attention has been paid to the output of Polish researchers of those from the Rzeszow school.

**Results:**

The need for inter- and multidisciplinary research has been stressed as well as the significance of sociological reflection for the development of general theory of martial arts.

**Conclusions:**

The need for comparative research on an international scale has been indicated.

**Key words:**

**Martial arts • Social studies • Main directions**

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**BACKGROUND**


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Sociological reflection on the phenomenon of Asian martial arts has been discussed on the ground of sociology of physical culture as well as in the perspective of more general theory of cultural dialogues. The first of mentioned fields of scientific penetration is still little developed [18], which may result from little knowledge possessed by sport sociologists about this part of physical culture constituted by practiced at present all around the world ways of martial arts. The second approach – culturological and systematic seems to be developed better. The area of cultural dialogues concerns various cultural forms which allows to interpret martial arts in their psychophysical, greatly diversified shape.

May one speak about sociology of martial arts? If “the way of martial arts” is something significantly different (in the range of goals and the sense of practicing) from sport and movement recreation, this kind of reflection is justified. Let us call it sociology of this very sphere of culture, another sociological subfield or theory of medium range.

Far Eastern martial arts (FEMA) already have their humanist theory [16, 10], which premises result from the definition of the ways of martial arts as kinds of ascetic systems of psychophysical perfection of the practitioners. Thus, it is not so much about the physical fight but about moral and spiritual development, perfectionism and self-discipline.

Sociological reflection is here a crucial foundation of systematic multidisciplinary theoretical structure. And only this systematic approach to the multidimensional and multi-shape phenomenon of martial arts gives a chance for its full, as far as it is possible, view and explanation [5, 10, 15, 50].

**Directions of studies**

It seems that the oldest approach to the issue of the presence of martial arts in culture is **historical analysis** [23]. Following the classics of cultural studies this approach is used by Borbély [2], Ržany [47], partly also Tokarski [53].

Several valuable pieces of work [29, 53, 26, 55, 19] are devoted to **evolution** of martial arts, their westernization and modifications. Will they preserve their identity at the age of globalization or will they become exchangeable goods on the global market as it happens in case of contemporary sport [50, 3, 41]?

Humanist sociology in which the researcher perceives a human being in an integral way, takes into account

human reception of reality and the world of values is a necessity if we aspire to do science in a form suitable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century [28, 8]. Thus, **reception and understanding** of martial arts in various civilizational circles at present is an incredibly interesting topic [25, 44, 27, 21, 22].

**Cultural studies and axiological analyses**, attempts to describe the philosophy of martial arts and their deeper sense are often made by researchers being at the same time practitioners of FEMA who achieved master's degrees in their practice. They make use of their knowledge coming from participating observation but they also understand subtle issues of self-realization [53, 29, 10]. In this perspective similarly valuable are **biographical studies** [31] – was of lives of masters-teachers, exquisite experts in martial arts. It was Dilthey [34, p. 92] who was fascinated by biographical studies on creative individuals, extraordinary people who influenced society and history and also today they may bring inspiring references, examples of achievements or moral patterns of conduct.

**Theory of cultural dialogues** in reference to the ways of martial arts offers valuable comparative analyses and apt interpretations issues of intercultural transmission of certain traditions, various perceptions, adaptations to local conditions and mentality, creating forgeries etc. [53, 5, 10]. Here appear problems of directions of cultural influence, easternization-westernization, functioning of martial arts In the process of cultural globalization, their presence in the media, relations with local traditions and national identity [4, 13, 54, 41].

Change of social role of women, their emancipation (also in the area of physical culture) and ideology of feminism are also reflected in the discourse in the field of so-called sociology of FEMA. Not only female sociologists write about contemporary **women-warriors** but also their share in elaborating participation of women in martial arts is significant. The Amazons are in accordance with ‘a dynamic postmodern woman’ [10], they play roles predicted for them in the tradition of martial arts [39] or they accept typically male roles competing in e.g. boxing [40].

In the perspective of **sociology of space** specific place of exercise and finding out about the way of martial arts – so-called *dōjō* (*Jap.* the place of the way) is analyzed. Researchers explain symbolism of this place and its connections with anthropology (philosophical and cultural one) of martial arts [24, 11]. The room of *budō* practice – the ways of stopping aggression – is not only a place of strenuous training but also of personal perfection through the hardships of con-



tinuous autocreation in which the master-teacher is helpful. **Interpersonal relations** occurring in schools of martial arts [compare: 51, 10] require further comparative studies.

Attempts have been made to describe how representatives of various martial arts and combat sports obey the ethical canon of *fair play*. **Descriptive ethics studies** [37, 38] confirm that the conduct of representatives of martial arts is in accordance with accepted by them normative ethics related to *fair play*.

Connecting martial arts with **marketing, management and business** [46] is very interesting. This current of studies undertaken by American specialists has not been developed yet in our country, however, research in this direction is being conducted.

### **Sociology of FEMA in the studies of the Rzeszow school**

As the creator of Polish school of sociology of physical culture, Zbigniew Krawczyk stated among a few schools operating in the field of sociology of physical culture at present in Poland there is the Rzeszow school represented by Obodyński and Cynarski [20]. It must be added that a numerous group of researchers from both Poland and abroad is connected with Scientific Year's Issue „Idō–Ruch dla Kultury / Movement for Culture” (IRK-MC) published in Rzeszow.

Apart from research and publications of representatives of the Rzeszow school being in accordance with directions described above, we find here certain new concepts and original works. Partially they are a continuation of theoretical output of Z. Krawczyk.

The patterns of somatic culture shown in *Sociology of physical culture* and confirmed by the research of Krawczyk's group [36, 35] have been completed by the **ascetic pattern of physical culture** as it occurs in the environment of practitioners and fans of martial arts – “the ways of non-aggression” [42].

A contemporary warrior of martial arts often subscribes to ethos similar to the principles of the Samurai code and knightly code of Europe, however, in a much smoother, humanist version. Thus, one may speak about the influence of martial arts values on the **life style** of instructors and students of martial arts [compare: 45, 43].

Apart from research and theoretical justifications [4, 10, 12, 15] the Rzeszow researchers realize projects with great applicational significance. It concerns

the research on **recreational participation** in classes of schools, clubs and sections of martial arts [7], the possibility of **using teaching programs** of martial arts in physical education and academic sport [6] or also **methodological** research for the sake of the needs of development of FEMA sociology and general systematic theory of martial arts [52].

The subject of **institutionalization** and organizational development of martial arts is extremely important and so far it has been elaborated only to a small degree [14]. Also particular **institutions** of martial arts and their social functioning need further reliable description and scientific interpretation [9].

An original issue is “the tourist ways” of the environment of martial arts, in other words “**martial arts tourism**” [17]. From the very same integral anthropology and systematic paradigm as it concerns humanist theory of martial arts a new outlook on the theory of tourism results, within which self-realizational tourism of people studying martial arts inscribes. This problem is discussed in the perspective of anthropology of martial arts, humanist theory of physical culture and systematic theory of tourism.

### **Interesting theoretical concepts and perspectives of studies**

Accepting originating from the Far East martial arts in the western world is an analogical process (in its reversed form) to adapting Olympic sport and the ideology of Neo-Olympism in Japan [48]. Studying **mutual influences of both various patterns of physical culture** and ideas coming from different cultures, their global coexistence and interacting, meetings of various traditions and values are an area of interest for scientists from different countries [25, 5, 32, 49]. However, many issues require description here, further deep analysis and interpretation.

On the ground of sociology of culture the problems of **identity and identification** of FEMA practitioners from different countries have not been studied thoroughly [compare: 33, 34,1]. The question if and in what conditions modification of this identity occurs (?) remains open. The qualitative methods of research appear to be very promising here [52].

**Techniques of controlling the body** – a topic introduced into sociology of sport by Klaus Heinemann [30] require elaboration. In the field of martial arts it applies to obeying traditional etiquette, the rules of politeness, traditional outfits and marks for degrees, conduct in the exercise room and in life.

A chance for progress in social studies on the environment of martial arts is *subject 1.3 Sociology of far eastern martial arts – European comparative research* within the project *Interdisciplinary, multiaspect research on the phenomenon of martial arts* (director of the project: W.J. Cynarski) realized by the Committee of Scientific Research of the Idōkan Poland Association.

## SUMMARY

Apart from sociology of sport and sociology of motion recreation co-creating sociology of physical culture which shape socio-cultural reflection on martial arts, the establishment of sociology of martial arts is influenced by results of research and theses coming from yet other sociological subfields or related fields (cultural anthropology, sociology of culture, sociology of space, sociology of organizations, moral philosophy, social psychology).

The leading directions of socio-cultural studies are: (1) Studies of history and evolution of various FEMA, (2) Cultural studies and axiological analyses (including problems of values, life style and studies of descriptive ethics), (3) Biographical studies, (4) Studies on reception and understanding martial arts, (5) Studies

on institutions and institutionalization of FEMA as well as social participation (of women in particular), (6) Studies in the perspective of the theory of cultural dialogues, (7) Studies in the perspective of sociology of space, (8) Studies on interpersonal relations in the groups of practitioners, (9) Studies on relations between FEMA and marketing and business, (10) Martial arts tourism.

Numerous problems have already been described and explained in detail, others elaborated on an introductory basis or only mentioned. Thus, there are further long term studies in the field of sociology of martial arts – both in the scope outlined in this study and in directions still needing conceptualization.

Significant output of theoreticians and researchers from Rzeszów have been presented, who operate in the European sociological environment and in the international team concentrated around the editorial board of Scientific Year's Issue „Idō–Ruch dla Kultury / Movement for Culture”. Main directions of scientific penetrations have been indicated as well as next interesting areas of research. Greater international comparative studies seem to be necessary in this situation.

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