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## Spheres of fight in martial arts

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**Authors' contributions:**

- A** Study design
- B** Data collection
- C** Statistical analysis
- D** Data interpretation
- E** Literature search
- F** Manuscript preparation
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### Summary

**Study aim:**

On the ground of holistic anthropology of martial arts the authors analyze the spheres of fight – from the physical dimension of a duel to transcendent and moral dimensions placed in the fighter’s conscience. The aim of the work is an attempt to explain the phenomenon of martial arts.

**Material/methods:**

The qualitative methods of empirical social studies have been used – the expert’s judgement (*meijin* Sieber 10 dan and opinions given by other specialists in martial arts and combat sports), long-term participating observation of the authors and heuristics from the humanist perspective of the theory of martial arts.

**Results:**

One may distinguish the following categories of fight – its **spheres**: physical (perception, pain stimuli, movement and techniques of fight), emotional, referring to the will, intellectual, ethical, symbolic and not connected directly with psychophysical practice – the spiritual sphere (of individual moral choices on the way of life). Moreover, the following **dimensions** of practicing fight have been distinguished: health (exemplified by *qigong*); ritual (e.g. *sumō*); utilitarian (for the purpose of self-defense or real fight); sport (for rivalry of recreation); self-realizational (for personal transgression and inner spiritual development); symbolic (for cultural values, respect for tradition etc.).

**Conclusions:**

Fight is practiced in physical time and space in technical conventional arrangements or limited by rules in various formulas of “free fight”. In the sphere of the practitioner’s mind it may concern his imagination (mental training) or moral choices made. The axiological connection between the transcendent aspect of the way of martial arts with the ethical way of Christian personalism has been noted.

**Key words:**

**Fighting • martial arts • combat sports • self-defence • anthropology**

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**BACKGROUND**


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The problem of martial arts has been discussed by the researchers in martial arts and combat sports in many ways. Among others Kernspecht [20] and Kalina [19] deal with the issue of a duel – a direct confrontation of two subjects – from the perspective of the theory of sport. Kalina approaches this problem in praxeological categories as a problem of negative confrontation. Kernspecht [21] distinguishes the following spheres: motion, emotional and intellectual one of doing *kung-fu*. In turn Tokitsu [25] analyzes the problem of a training “free fight” where negative emotions, fear and pain occur. He indicated the existential sense of fight and the phenomenon of showing the true nature of the fighters.

Is that the only fight undertaken by the adept of martial arts? What is the deeper sense of martial arts and their other dimensions? The authors shall attempt to answer these questions from the perspective of the humanist theory of martial arts and anthropology of martial arts.

**Integral anthropology and anthropology of martial arts**

The phenomenon of martial arts requires scientific penetration from the point of view of such branches as philosophy, sociology, psychology, theology and the study of religions, cultural sciences, history, pedagogy, medical sciences and sciences of physical culture (theory of training, theory of sporting combat and others). However, above all, due to the fact that martial arts were created and are done by a human being and for a human being the common ground for the studies should be widely (systematically) understood **anthropological theory**.

Anthropology should be integral as a superior branch for the sciences of human being with its characteristic meta-theory and also as a new epistemological and methodological synthesis rejecting only reductionistic schematism. A new general theory on man, human progress and culture must take into account the whole bio-psycho-social dimension of a human being. The holistic aspect of such an approach concerns 1) health, physical culture, ecology and harmonious development; 2) the psychic, soul, basic religious needs – God and holiness; 3) problems of morality, social life and culture. Thus integral anthropology appears as a science on man as functioning in a system of psychophysical culture. Here such notions as “personality”, “health” and “harmonious development” refer to all dimensions of human existence.

The human world is not limited to three-dimensional material space. The human mind (also spirituality, consciousness, emotions) require interpretation exceeding the convention of traditional rational logic. Progress in science – especially in the sciences – we owe to developed creative intuition of great scientists. A new paradigm of science and culture is developed by mystics and theologians (P. Teilhard de Chardin, John Paul II) and the practitioners of meditation (Fromm, Eliade, Szyszko-Bohusz, Capra, Maliszewski) who are able to go beyond the limitations of linear thinking and over the reductionistic schematism.

For sociologists following the present in anthropology and being under its influence change of the perspective of studies and theory has not been an expression of self-perfection but a necessity due to the progress in sciences of culture in the world. This anthropological – culturological discourse is undertaken by sociologists referring to the classics of humanist and social sciences. However the most frequent here is the situation which is lacking the perspective of transcendence – theological and religious one. Widening the horizon of perceiving culture through anthropological definitions and concepts revived tendencies to introduce new topics, new research procedures and methodological approaches, new theoretical points of view into sociology. On the background of theoretical confrontations and methodological experiences of anthropology and sociology of culture the lacks of reductionist methodology and comparative procedure are especially apparent. In particular it refers to schematic receipts of neo-positivist model of science. Among counter-positivist views one may distinguish the following, neo-psychoanalytical, semiological, ethno-methodological, phenomenological, hermeneutical current and a new synthetic systematic approach.

Among sociological subfields a particularly interesting perspective is offered by the sociology of physical culture analyzing the bio-psycho-social man (in his attitudes and aspirations, physical activity and environmental relations). In this way it favors his holistic, social and psycho-physical identification. The integral anthropological theory should take into consideration new-paradigmatic indications in epistemology and methodology as well as all dimensions of humanity. It is necessary to get sociology, anthropology sciences of culture and “sciences of spiritual sphere” (psychology, studies of religions, theology) closer together and it happens – on the example of anthropology of far eastern martial arts [9].

Postulated accounting for the physical dimension in anthropological and social studies may be fully realized in the humanist theory of martial arts. Here

in sociological and anthropological reflection on psychophysical practices of the East the indications of the philosophy (anthropology) of personal dialogue are also realized, postulated by Martin Buber. The man of martial arts functions not only on the borderline of historical and cultural contexts but also in relations with a pupil, with a teacher of the spiritual way and with the divine Absolute. **The dimension of transgression and transcendence** is imposed here – regardless the fact of relating to the personal God or differently understood Final Truth – the “divine element” of anthropology of this sphere of culture and requires taking it into account. The dimension of transcendence requires personalistic (or related to it) and holistic perspective.

Generally in Capra’s words “A new paradigm (of science) may be called a holistic one and thus putting greater emphasis on the whole than on particular parts, or an ecological one” [3, p. 101]. Systematic, “spiritual-physical” anthropology does not contrast reality with nature and culture but treats the psychophysical man in a holistic way. It is suitable for the research needs of the complicated and multidimensional phenomenon of martial arts. Not contrasting physicality with spirituality in anthropologies (philosophies) of far eastern systems causes that also eastern Asiatic culture can hardly be divided into the physical and spiritual part.

Far eastern martial arts are more than a sport or an oriental form of physical culture. They are at the same time – as axionormative systems – methods of education, ways of self-realization (self-perfection), arts of psychophysical expression, forms of cultivating military traditions and ways of self-defense. Among numerous dimensions and values of Asian martial arts the moral dimension is more essential than the utilitarian one. The ways of martial arts is the way of shaping personality which is undoubtedly the master-teacher’s responsibility. The work of art is here the master himself and this master is being followed or even copied – especially on the *kyū* level – by his pupils.

May a contemporary woman be a warrior too? – This noble and creative one, obeying the rules of the knightly code? Yes, but the condition is that she is able to oppose the fashion for feminist ideology and magic or also the one-sidedness of evaluation (depreciation or the cult of the body). One of the ways of self-realization of this kind is, of course, the way of studying psychophysical systems of martial arts which is more and more often and willingly followed by modern women – especially those full of dynamism, “with character” and living temper [9].

**Responsibility** for the partner in training concerns all practitioners. In particular it concerns those who have higher degrees or in other words the older ones (*senpai*) and, of course, the teacher who, for instance, demonstrates self-defense techniques on a chosen *uke*. The teacher is especially responsible for the process shaping attitudes, accepting patterns of behavior and values by his students. The students, for whom the teacher (*sensei*) is a great authority, internalize contents passed by him. Thus it depends on the teacher whether the students will understand the way of martial arts as a way for acquiring the skills of fight, whether they will not become mindless “beating machines” as it happens in certain combat sports, and whether they will not become more aggressive. Therefore it is justified to demand from the martial arts teacher to be at high moral level. Also an “animal-fit” student should become – under the watchful eye of the teacher – more perfect spiritually developing towards universal values of the good, truth, love and wisdom. Responsibility means here not only assuring safety in the exercise room, injury prevention, teaching self-defense techniques which are really efficient (NB many instructors teach suicidal techniques in a real self-defense situations). It is also a serious responsibility for the spiritual development of a young person who trusted his master completely. The teacher should speak about ethical principles, respect, the hierarchy of authorities, discipline and higher, universal, timeless values.

Martial arts exceed the spaces between tradition and innovation, self-defense and sport, fight and self-realization, aggression and humanitarianism. The ideas of *aikidō* or *idō* refer to freedom, brotherhood and peace. In contemporary *aikijutsu* of the *takeda-ryū* school (the methods of fight of the Takeda clan originate from early Middle Ages) it is less about military education more about health and positive personal development. The ideal is: vigilant spirit, fit body, tolerant thinking and kind conduct.

“The way of budō” requires knowledge of a possibly complete system – a set of methods of martial arts and traditions of Japanese *ryū* (schools). A *karate* master, for example, is not a *budō* master if He does not know many other *jūhō* (soft) and *gōhō* (hard) methods, techniques of weapon and classical forms, energy exercises and massage, the rules of martial arts medicine, mental training; if he does not possess knowledge on cultural tradition and philosophy of martial arts. The normative of versatility which also concerns versatile development beyond the martial arts brings the practitioner of “the way of a warrior” to the ideal of *homo universalis*. This practice – as



a cognitive process of experiencing and realizing values – completes knowledge influencing the following spheres: intellectual, emotional one, the will, developing the sense of intuitional perception of reality.

In its “western” adaptation (in the form relatively humanized and simplified) as well as in the original version (in the transmission of few-hundred-year-old schools) the ideology of martial arts confirms the connections between military roots and contemporary humanistically-oriented physical culture. The cultural heritage of warriors both in the spiritual and physical (of physical culture) sense justifies *budō* of “the New times” best. In the premises of the *budō* system the sense of any practice, the ascetic (exercising the body), utilitarian (Learning techniques and tactics of fight) ones, mental training (meditations etc.) is perfectionism in the moral sphere and spiritual development of the adept. Contemporary *budō* becomes more an axionormative system of psychophysical practice, a pedagogical method and practicing Asian cultural tradition than just a set of fighting techniques. On the other hand there are tendencies to make martial arts more “sporty”, their commercialization and parting from the ethical cannons.

Political economical reasons or ambitions of preserving and popularizing old traditions of martial arts caused that sporting competition has become part of many varieties of far eastern martial arts. Systems of psychophysical self-realization changed in many cases into combat sports – most frequently of direct duel. The pace of life in contemporary civilization and haste in reaching spectacular successes, the need for a fast result and impatience on the way to mastery create the climate for greater interest in sport and creating short-term champions. Commercialization causes that at present it is difficult to find an authentic master and a hero in martial arts who would confirm the axiology of *budō* with all his life.

### Real fight, sport or way?

Similarly to a myth the **kata** forms are a record of achievements of a master-hero, the creator of a school or military experiences of a few generations of masters. They are a motion record of bloody and deadly settlements when the fighting skills decided about life and death [10]. The forms are a way of teaching, they have a symbolic or ritual meaning as it is in case of *sumō* – the ritual of *shintō* religion. The symbolic character of practiced forms may also have a philosophical sense as e.g. an illustration for the principles of Taoism in *taiji quan*. It may be connected with health exercises as in *qigong* [24, 28].

On the other hand **free fight** is a test for technique, psychic and physical preparation; it is also a way of learning. In this aspect Harasymowicz presented karate as a non-aggressive way in the following manner, “In fight various sides of human nature appear – fear, aggression, pride, vanity, skills, physical predispositions, knowledge and interdependencies between these features. (...) it shapes the attitude of a vigilant observer and the ability to act in accordance with the laws of nature, brings out weaknesses and the necessity to cooperate with others in overcoming the weaknesses. Training develops predispositions of a human, allows him to overcome fear and complexes which are a source of aggression against others. Thus, it is – despite false appearances – a non-aggressive way” [17].

A martial art is not only fight and controlling aggression. The ideals of martial arts stretch in the space between pure sport and religion and practical philosophy of widely understood perfectionism (self-realization). A quite wide margin for martial arts is, however, the “philosophy” of hard fist and efficiency, best style, force and superiority. Often exquisite contestants and technicians subscribing to this cult of force remain at the stage of *homo pugnans* (a fighting man) in the cultural evolution and perhaps they will never understand that in martial arts not everything comes to fight. The **cult of violence**, fight and victory is an expression of primitive understanding martial arts or a result of orientation to sporting result. Generally the range of techniques taught is limited to the group of acceptable techniques which may come in handy in sporting fight, which applies to various martial arts becoming combat sports.

In case of *aikidō* a similar limitation is imposed by convention – conventional (irrational and unreal) attacks. However, the show sports impose training of technical arrangements due to their show-quality and according to strict cannons. Particular varieties of martial arts and combat sports teach many valuable abilities but the also have weak point and they limit. Bruce Lee who aspired for the ideal of a free creative artist of martial arts broke these limitations (schematism of thinking, fossilization of traditional forms) by studying various Chinese kung-fu styles, Japanese and Korean systems, also boxing, fencing and wrestling as well as experimenting with various methods of training [22]. **Versatility** of training and education should be supported. Similarly Morihei Ueshiba revolutionized Japanese *budō* – not by modifying old techniques but by changing the sense of the martial arts training [26].

**Self-defense** is usually an eclectic mixture of “what is useful” – techniques coming from *jujitsu*, karate or

related and derived systems. Its sense and justification is teaching techniques efficient in a real situation of an attack. Concerning the fact that muggers are usually in bigger number or there is one mugger but much stronger or armed the self-defense techniques should be always efficient and work fast. Matusiak states after K. Matuszczak that “self-defense consists in solving the situation with the use of the first technique and if the opponent manages to counteract it we go into a fight”. Self-defense is a conflict situation in which fight does not yet happen if we understand *fight* as “exchange of techniques”. According to Matusiak many contemporary martial arts teach rather self-defense or remain a set of ritual techniques [23]. Teaching fight requires versatility both in the knowledge of techniques of fight in various distances, positions and situations as well as the ability to use them. Modern *jujitsu* must be effective in confrontation with all kinds of attacks and thus, apt to confront any opponent, also a representative of other martial arts and combat sports. It must respond not to a conventional but real attack and consist the techniques of advancing and taking over initiative. Otherwise teaching self-defense or even to a greater degree fight does not make sense. An example of contemporary versatile *jujitsu* style is *idōkan yōshin-ryū* [4].

The skills of self-defense and fight should include techniques possible mild and more brutal [12]. The first ones may be used in situations requiring passive defense (control of distance, dodge, blocking, freeing from a grip etc.) and the latter – when our or another person’s life or health is directly threatened (in the situation of an armed attack, strangling etc.). Defense adequate to the degree of danger allows to use techniques dangerous for the attacker. A man has a right to defend himself. However, if a relative being intoxicated in any way wants to test our “bravery” (term described by R.M. Kalina<sup>1</sup>) we may and must treat him as lightly as possible neutralizing his attack with e.g. a *jūdō* technique (carefully with throws!). The *jūdō* technique has been adjusted to a certain convention of a sporting combat by eliminating dangerous techniques from *jūjutsu* (*atemi* is practiced sporadically in the kata forms for exams for higher *dan* degrees). Thus, using *jūdō* technique in a real fight may appear to be a suicide.

In relation to real situations of attack and threat to life when the attacker does not obey any rules and if the goal of self-defense or defense combat is saving life of the attacked person, our defensive reaction (technique of used defense) should be even more brutal than attack and behavior of the aggressor. It is

one of the *idōkan yōshin-ryū* school of *jujitsu*. Another rule is to practice response to real attack during a self-defense training. Differently, i.e. when the attack is conventional (hitting with stopped fist, attack with a wide spar etc.) the technique practiced in this way will not work outside *dōjō* – the exercise room.

Some schools treating on self-defense and teaching artificial conventions should teach running simultaneously so that they may be honest towards their students. Also typical combat sports as limited by the sporting formula (technique and methods of training adjusted to safe rivalry according to the rules of a given discipline) are not suitable for training real self-defense. Short ‘self-defense courses’ are a fiction, especially for women, which do not ensure rising the level of motor fitness and let us not talk about the basics of fighting technique. It results in the fact that only a long period of systematic training of martial arts gives chances for real effects in both self-defensive skills and personal progress. A beneficial element here is, at a certain stage, including sporting rivalry as a method for intensifying the practice and teaching fight. The best is the formula of sporting *jūjutsu* which requires great versatility and at the same time it is safe for the contestants.

On the pole opposite to the cult of violence there is the ongoing process of humanization of the ways of martial arts which applies to styles being more schools of self-perfection, life and humanity than of fight and violence. It is not about winning over the opponent anymore; the opponent becomes more a partner of exercise and the technique must be totally controlled (dynamic but stopped) which allows for the attitude of self-control and responsibility. Leaving from contact combat allows practicing this form of martial art through the whole life. Leaving from sport and changing the sense of fight and the aim of exercises causes, of course, changing methods of training. Instead of fear, hostility and aggression one may find here friendly atmosphere, which should not, however, lead to lessening discipline and training loads. Above all, such schools (like *zendō karate tai-te-tao*) are intellectually superior over the contact varieties and they are, as it seems, the future of non-competing forms of martial arts practiced for self-realization [5, 6, 7].

A mile stone on the way of *budō* evolution is the **idea of idō** developed by Idokan masters on the ground of the *jūdō-dō* concept. The *idō* philosophy reaches for the ethos of gentlemanly sport and knightly traditions of Europe and it refers to the whole humanistically

<sup>1</sup> He also writes about relations “martial arts – combat sports – self-defense” [18, pp. 108-110].



perceived *budō*. *Budō* is not directed against anyone anymore but it is a way of recreation of personality through the attitude of internalized morality, friendship and international solidarity. In the physical sphere it is a practice of fluent doing the techniques and counter-techniques (combinations, counters), continuity of action or reaction. *Idō* according to Hans Schöllauf is developing spirituals Power and “perpetual” spiritual movement. And movement is an essence of life [9].

Exercises and fight consist a spiritual component, somewhat a sacral one, which essentially distinguishes martial arts from primeval ‘fight in order to beat the opponent’, In more mature varieties of martial arts the opponent changes into an exercise partner and rivalry is substituted with positive cooperation. The enemy is not longer another human being but objective evil, one’s own weakness which should be overcome.

### Fight – direct dimension

Fight requires the sense of distance, timing, rhythm, consequence or flexibility in realizing tactics. In free fight the adept of a given martial art has a possibility to test himself as far as his technical and tactical skills, motor and endurance-efficiency preparation, his own psychological resistance and the ability to recognize the states of opponent’s psychic (emotions, ways of reacting, intentions) are concerned [2]. The fighter usually tries to hide his true intentions, tries to deceive the opponent. A lot can be seen in the eyes and in the face but the fighter uses these means of expression along with other false gestures (so-called feints) to make the opponent read his intentions mistakenly. In this psychophysical game of two personalities various factors are important, such as self-confidence and the state of aroused awareness – Korean *kihap* [2]. Knowledge and experience result in the ability to recognize the psychological profile of the opponent. In fight a man shows his true character and temper as also connected with them style of fight. If an adept is able to connect efficiently the sphere of intellect and knowledge with the physical sphere (trained body and technical skills) as well as with the psychological sphere (awareness, will, self-control) fight becomes a union of perfection of movement, mature personality and wisdom. As such it is worth being called an art.

An artist of martial arts must control aggression, negative emotions, accept pain. Tokitsu [25] recommends practicing free fight<sup>2</sup> in a contact way but the debutants should do it with protectors. He thinks that only in this way they will practice correct habits of effective counteracting the blows of the attacker.

In classical martial arts created in times when a warrior had to take sudden death into consideration we find methods of preparing for this extremely difficult situation – fight for life and death [11]. Also today some schools try to teach similar abilities to their students useful in self-defense in the situation of defending life or in the war need of special forces. Undoubtedly a contemporary commando needs utilitarian values of martial arts more – specific skills of fighting hand-to hand or with weapon – than the knowledge of classical almost ritual forms of symbolic beating opponents. However, training of concentration or so-called meditation – clear the mind and deepening consciousness – also in this case seems to be advisable.

However, should fight be separated from its ethical context on the way of martial arts? We know what dehumanization of sport leads to. It becomes a show and business at the cost of participating in it subjects. Brutalization of many fields of sport progresses which become more forceful and aggressive [compare: 8, 16]. Research indicates that the varieties requiring greater self-control and so contactless have a more beneficial influence on the personalities of the practitioners [14].

### Aspects of transgression and transcendence

In the light of the humanist theory of martial arts and anthropology of martial arts the sense or the central notion of the way of martial arts is not fight but the ascetic way of self-realization and spiritual progress. Also fight serves here **transgression** in particular – reaching higher levels of psychophysical and moral development [15, 9]. A warrior of the way perfects himself and develops with help of co-practitioners overcoming own weaknesses and lacks in abilities together. It is done in the atmosphere of mutual respect and without orientation towards rivalry – it is not about beating an opponent but overcoming weakness or aggression itself [1]. In real fight aggression and the opponent’s attack should strike into vacuum. An adept of martial arts tries not to hurt the attacker because the opponent is not another person but a certain form of evil, lack of knowledge or stupidity. Violence for low purposes is rejected. Fight is supposed to develop and educate serving not destruction but creation. Perfectionism refers here to obeying moral principles and ethical everyday life, constant work on one’s own personality. Combination of hard work, persistence and self-discipline with the ethics of honest life allows to form socially valuable personalities successful in professional work and life.

<sup>2</sup> „Those who seek efficiency in a specific form in fight, practice free fight” [25].

The dimension of **transcendence** refers to going beyond the physical spheres of fight. It concerns fight in the area of one's own moral choices. The warrior of the Truth (like the Pope John Paul II) opposes moral evil of this world supporting the civilization of love. A modern noble man is at the same time a creator sculpturing his own and his students' personalities as well as a defender of authentic values in pop-cultural flow of apparent values. Fight if the fight in the name of the good and the battlefield – individual conscience. This approach is in accordance with the paradigm of holistic approaches and harmonizes with the moral philosophy of Christian personalism [27, 13]. The values of truth and good, honor and dignity, patriotism and respect for authorities, protection of life and non-aggression are here similarly emphasized.

## CONCLUSIONS

One may distinguish the following categories of fight – its **spheres**: physical (perception, pain stimuli,

movement and techniques of fight), emotional, referring to the will, intellectual, ethical, symbolic and not connected directly with psychophysical practice – the spiritual sphere (of individual moral choices on the way of life). Moreover, the following **dimensions** of practicing fight have been distinguished: health (exemplified by *qigong*); ritual (e.g. *sumō*); utilitarian (for the purpose of self-defense or real fight); sport (for rivalry of recreation); self-realizational (for personal transgression and inner spiritual development); symbolic (for cultural values, respect for tradition etc.).

Fight is practiced in physical time and space in technical conventional arrangements or limited by rules in various formulas of 'free fight'. In the sphere of the practitioner's mind it may concern his imagination (mental training) or moral choices made. The axiological connection between the transcendent aspect of the way of martial arts with the ethical way of Christian personalism has been noted.

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