

The meaning of *taijiquan* from the Chen family in physical activity of Poles

Authors' Contribution:

- A** Study Design
- B** Data Collection
- C** Statistical Analysis
- D** Manuscript Preparation
- E** Funds Collection

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Abstract

Background & Study Aim: The wushu martial arts have a long history, and the effect of this long tradition is a number of new schools and styles. The main aim of the paper is to extend the knowledge on the meaning of *taijiquan* from the Chen family, for the people in Poland who prefer this kind of physical activity.

Material & methods: The study was conducted on 110 persons aged 20-90 (the average age amounted to 45.2 years), including 72 males and 38 females who practise *taijiquan* in various centres in Poland. The authors used their own straw poll, composed of 12 questions (6 open-ended questions and 6 closed-ended ones), and the specification.

Results: The main motive of taking up *taijiquan* by Poles is health improvement and fitness, as well as the interest in Oriental martial arts. For most practitioners it is, first of all, "internal martial art", a form of Far Eastern meditation, the philosophy of life in today's urbanized civilization. It is a form of physical activity available in Poland regardless of the age and occupation, becoming an integral part of their lifestyle and the only preferred form of physical activity.

Conclusions: The findings lead to the conclusion that *taijiquan* is such an attractive martial art in terms of health benefits that its further popularization may become the only or one of the main "life sports" not only for Poles.

Key words: health promotion • life sports • martial arts • motives • positive health

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Health promotion – the process of modelling the habit of caring about one's and other people's health, as well as the ability of creating healthy environment during the entire life.

Motives – stimuli to action, the reason behind human activity, both conscious and unconscious. The motives ensue from the needs and shape the goals of actions.

Positive health – a concept of health related to the quality of life and the capability possessed by an individual. This term relates more to the development than to the simple coping skills. In the physiological context it may be perceived as a state which is characterized by: a) the absence of the disease; b) low level of the severity of risk factors and the civilization-related diseases; c) an adequate capacity of adaptive mechanisms responsible for the control of the external environment, the physical effort in particular [36,37].

Taijiquan in the Chen family – is a traditional martial art created by Chen Wangtingtan, a military commander, based on special combat techniques (halberd techniques), and due to the halberd weight, they required special low-body positions and bodywork, in particular the low part of the abdomen. Nowadays the techniques of master Chen are called the modern form of *taijiquan*, from the Chen family, as a unique compilation of the Qigong energetic exercises (Chan Si Gong version), and combat forms, including the dynamic Fa Jing hits.

INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of 19th and 20th centuries when judo was popularized by Professor Jigoro Kano [1], all over the world the interest in Oriental martial arts has been growing. The next turn of the centuries drew attention to the martial arts of the Chinese origin, especially to their health values [2-10]. Regardless of the interesting historical context of each martial art, the original terminology and ceremonial (these are the factors that attract the youth's attention), in many countries numerous schools were founded, teaching various martial arts (e.g. the Brazilian capoeira and jujitsu, the Russian sambo, the Israeli kravmaga, or the UNIFIGHT – created by the Olympic judo champion Sergiey Novikov). There is also the third tendency – less visible on the global scale – distancing oneself from any forms limited by the name, ceremonial, terminology, the division into art and sport etc. In Poland the combined combat sports and martial arts, in the context of health and utilitarian benefits (underscoring all positive health dimensions i.e. the somatic, mental and social aspect), are propagated by Roman M. Kalina [11-13], attracting more and more advocates of the idea [14].

The Chinese martial arts – wushu, feature long history, and the effect of this long tradition is the growing number of schools. *Taijiquan* from the Chen family, is a traditional martial art, created on the basis of the philosophy included in the “Book of Transformation”, creating a unique form of physical activity.

The motive to study the *taijiquan* martial arts was the participation of one of the authors in the Chen *Taijiquan* Academy in Ireland in 2005, which were conducted by Naill O'Flain, and meeting master Wang Hai Jun. Before the knowledge on the subject was drawn from numerous publications e.g. [15-26]. An important source of knowledge for Polish readers, especially those who practise the martial art, are the translations of the interviews and official statements of the masters from the Chen family.

The main aim of the paper is to expand the knowledge on *taijiquan* from the Chen family, for the people who prefer this type of physical activity in Poland. The detailed aim is to solve the three issues, i.e.:

What is the perception of the term *taijiquan*, among those who practise this martial art?

Which motives have made the people take up *taijiquan*, and the extent to which their environment accepts their choice?

Are there any premises to forecast further popularization of this martial art in Poland?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

110 people, aged 20-90 (average age – 45.2) have been studied, including 72 males and 38 females. The people were practising *taijiquan* in various centres in Poland i.e. Adam Wypart's Dao Academy in Katowice, Marek Balinski's Chen Taijiquan Academy in Warsaw, Piotr Zięba's TAICHI SCHOOL in Poznań, and Jarek Jodzis's Chen Academy in Jelenia Góra.

The largest group (32.7%) were people aged 40 and over, the subsequent – those who are not 30 yet (30%), whereas people aged 50 and over constitute 20% of the studied group, and finally the remaining ones (17.3%) are those aged 30-40. Nearly three fourths (70%) of the studied have a degree. The people with secondary education constituted 17%, and 13% of the studied had vocational education. The vast majority (85.5%) of the respondents were professionally active and the remaining part (14.5%) were retired or unemployed. From the whole group one can shortlist the people who have sedentary jobs (60%) and the remaining 40% are specialists in management, doctors, lecturers, PhD students, teachers, and those in the construction sector (Figure 1).

As the research tool the authors have applied their own technique i.e. straw poll, composed of 12 questions (6 open-ended and 6 closed-ended ones) and the specification (the authors received the consent of the bioethical committee).

RESULTS

The perception of *taijiquan*

The studied people perceive the term *taijiquan* in different ways. The largest group (42.7%) state that it as an “internal martial art”. Slightly more than one fourth (26.4%) perceive *taijiquan* as a form of Oriental mediation, and every fifth person (20.9%) has accepted *taijiquan* as their way and philosophy of life, which means constant physical, mental and spiritual development. A little group of the respondents (10%) considers *taijiquan* to be one of the currently available forms of physical activity, which builds up one's self-esteem and fitness (Figure 2).

The motives of taking up *taijiquan*

Nearly a half (46.4%) of the respondents took up *taijiquan*, in order to improve their health and fitness.

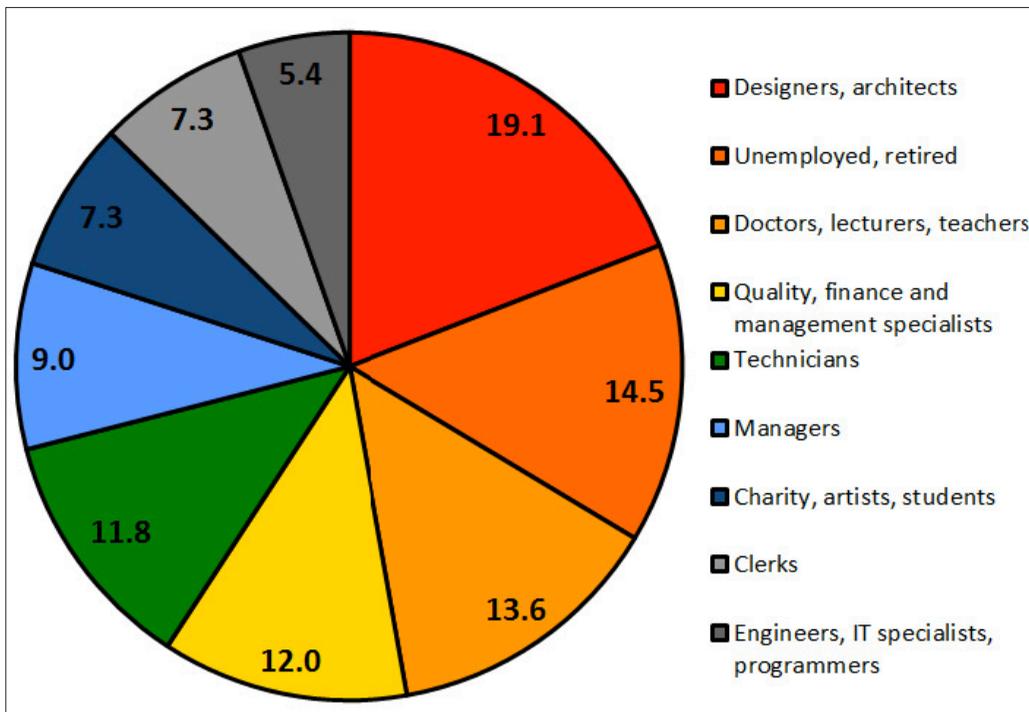


Figure 1. The jobs of the people practising taijiquan in Poland

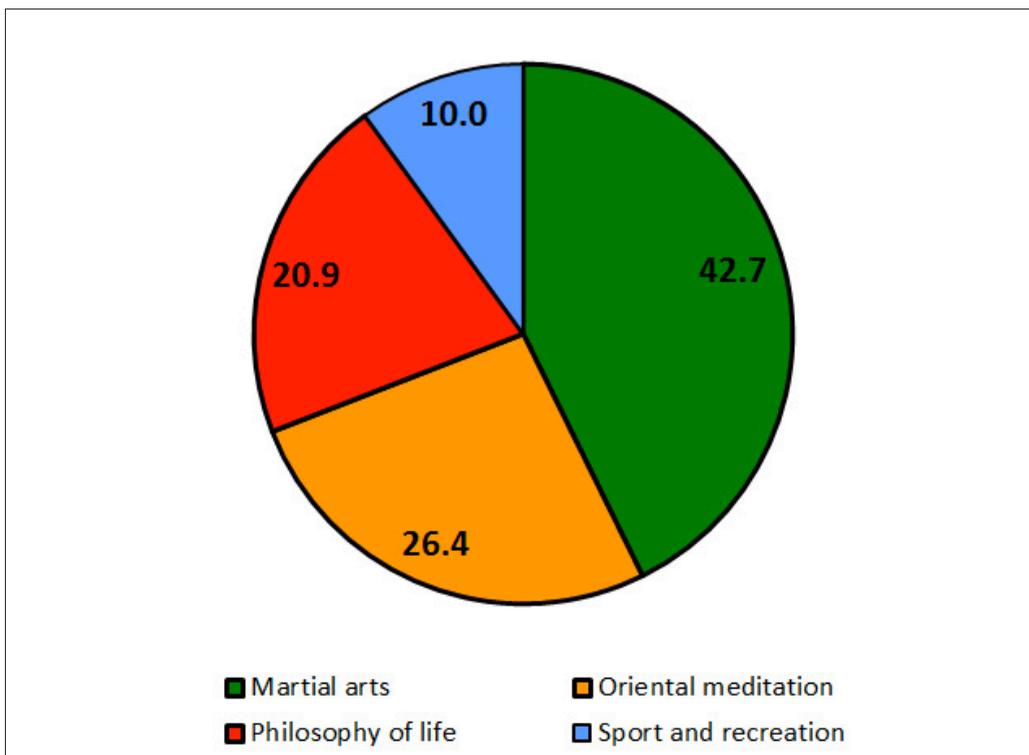


Figure 2. The perception of taijiquan by the practitioners

The interest in the Oriental martial arts was the reason to start the training (31.8%), and only 13.6 % of the respondents did it out of curiosity (the effect of television, press, the Internet, and third parties) (Figure 3).

The preference of other forms of physical activity

The majority of the studied does not do any forms of physical activity, but taijiquan (60.9%). (Figure 4). The remaining respondents, apart from practising taijiquan as their main physical activity, engage in other

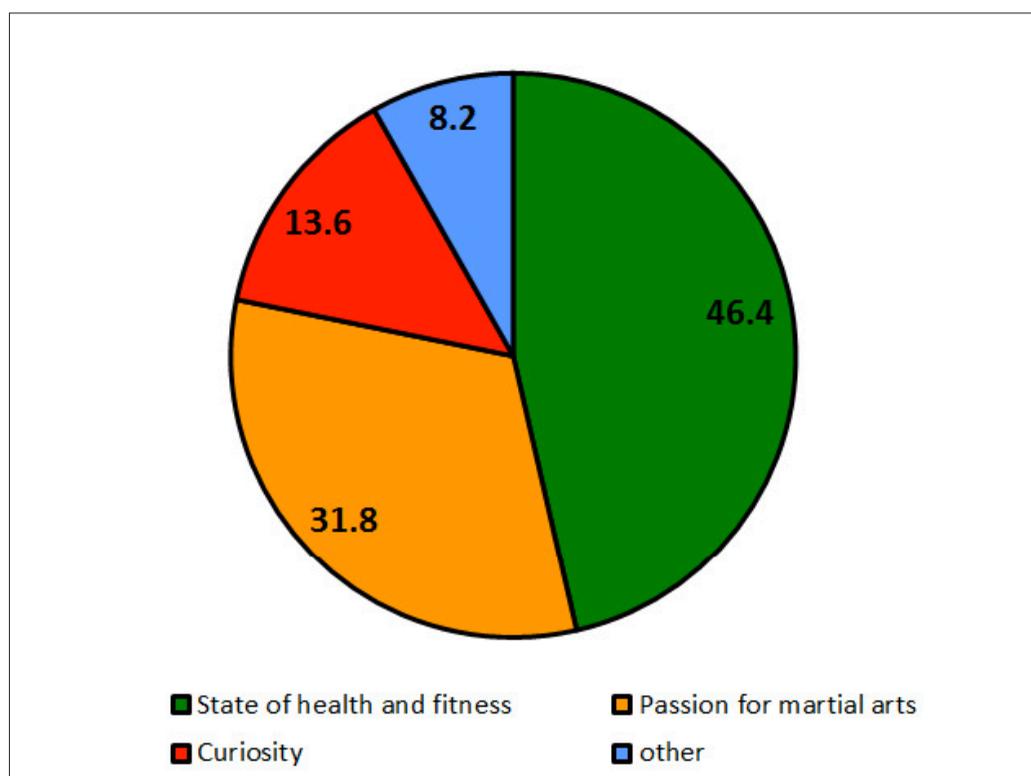


Figure 3. The motives of taking up *taijiquan* by Poles

exercise. Most often the respondents declared the practice of other martial arts i.e. wushu, karate, taekwondo, systema, kravmaga, capoeira, aikido, kendo, and various forms of meditation and breathing exercises, e.g. yoga (18.2%), individual and outdoor sports (19.1%), and team games (1.8%) (Figure 4).

The opinion of the environment about the people who practise *taijiquan*.

The respondents stated that most people (59.1%) from the closest environment accept their training, and the remaining ones (32.6%) are indifferent about it.

DISCUSSION

The following synthesis of the findings is justified: the main motive to take up *taijiquan* by Poles is health improvement and fitness, and the interest in Oriental martial arts; for most practitioners it is first of all, “internal martial art”, a form of Oriental meditation, a peculiar philosophy of life in this urbanized civilization, a form of activity available in Poland regardless of the age and the job of a person, becoming for many an integral part of their lifestyle and the only preferred form of physical activity.

Many plots derived from the findings and the conclusions drawn from them, coincide with the diagnosis made by Kruszewski, ten years ago, entitled: “The main reasons arousing and limiting interest in combat sports and martial arts in Poland” [27]. Both in his and our study, it has been concluded that taking up martial arts was the desire to improve fitness. However, in the case of our study, the consequent motive was the fascination about Oriental martial arts, whereas in his study it was the desire to acquire fighting skills. In turn Cynarski et al. [28] concluded that the key factor in the growing interest of Oriental martial arts was the internalization of values and norm of behaviour i.e. ensuring the harmonious psychophysical, motor, health, moral development of a person and their self-perfection. The authors show that these universal values are taken from the ancient warrior codes, in the course of training, contribute to bodily, health, moral harmony, therefore in a way broader than in the case of our study.

The most recent findings point at a therapeutic impact of martial arts and combat sports on the various aspects of health. Litwiniuk et al [29] have proved that the training of combat sports and martial arts is conducive to shaping the personality traits desired in sport and everyday life, it also lowers the level of aggressiveness

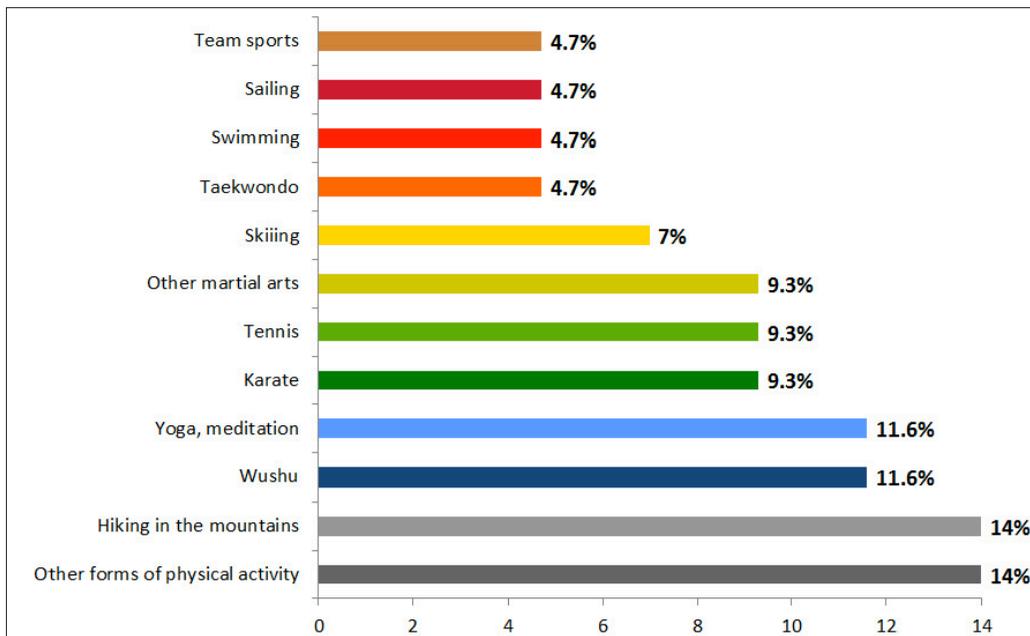


Figure 4. Other forms of physical activity that people practising *taijiquan* engage in.

and neuroticism, and negative features in interpersonal behaviour. In turn Lim and O'Sullivan [30] have pointed at positive educational effects, inter alia the improvement in behaviour and interpersonal communication with the section members, which was the effect of taekwondo training. In turn Boguszewski et al [31] have presented the findings that show a positive impact of judo classes as an additional and alternative therapy of the retarded children.

Therefore we can conclude that the peculiar physical activity, namely martial arts, has lost its strictly military value, and it may contribute to the improvement of health of a certain part of the society of each country, the part that is different in terms of age and education. As Bergier et al [32], Bergier [33] Biernat and Tomaszewski [34] prove, one should analyse, with

the available research tools, various forms of physical activity, taken up systematically by the societies in the aspect of health, which is confirmed with the EU documents [35].

CONCLUSION

The findings justify the conclusion that *taijiquan* is an attractive martial art in terms of health, to the extent that its further popularization may become for many people (not only Poles) the main or one of equally important "life sports".

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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