



# INYO

THE JOURNAL OF  
ALTERNATIVE  
PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
MARTIAL ARTS AND  
SCIENCES  
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## SUMMER 2011

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 1

OUR MISSION: PROVIDING A FORUM FOR ALTERNATIVE  
WAYS OF READING, VIEWING, ANALYZING, INTERPRETING,  
AND PRACTICING MARTIAL ARTS

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# EDITORIAL: SUMMER 2011

Joseph Svinth

In Japanese, the words transliterated into English as “*in-yō*” (陰陽) refer to the cosmological concepts of yin (darkness) and yang (light). Methods for identifying and then balancing these oppositional principles are taught in East Asian martial arts such as taijiquan, and as a result, the name *InYo* seems appropriate for an e-journal dedicated to taking an alternative look at the world’s martial arts and sciences.

Meanwhile, in North American English, the phrase carries the connotation of “in yo’ face!” According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary, the expression “in your face” is “characterized by or expressive of bold and often defiant” language, especially in a context of basketball and other sports (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Although this is almost certainly how the expression entered European American usage during the 1970s (In your face, 2011)(Ballinger, 1981), the phrase had been part of African American usage for decades before that (Hurston, 2006, pp. 20, 30, 32). In any case, there is once again a context of sports, a subtext of violence, and a swirl of black and white.

This is mentioned because both meanings, yin-yang and in your face, were intended back in late 1999 when we decided to name this particular e-journal *InYo: The Journal of Alternative Perspectives on the Martial Arts and Sciences*. I wish it had been me that came up with the name, but as I recall, it was actually Kim Taylor.

Now fast-forward a dozen years. In May 2011, I was attending the 2011 Scientific Congress on Martial Arts and Combat Sports in Viseu, Portugal, and a theme of the conversation was that there were not many places where someone could publish academically acceptable articles on the martial arts and combat sports. Wait a minute, I thought. What’s wrong with EJMAS? It is a legitimate e-journal, complete with International Standard Serial Numbers (ISSN). Indeed, it is among the earliest e-journals of its kind, as we got our numbers in early 2000. Our publications are indexed in the National Library of Canada. Our articles do just fine in Google Scholar page placement, and several of our articles have provided the basis for articles subsequently published in *Neurology* and *New York Times*. What’s wrong with us?

The answer is that we haven’t taken the steps necessary to get listed in academic indexes. Back in 1999, we assumed that readers might –gasp – actually read our articles. Way back in the Dark Ages of Web 1.0, the assumption was that content drove traffic to your Internet site. You know what happens when you assume. As Eugene Garfield (1925- ), the man who invented the idea of indexing academic journals by impact factor puts it, “people do not have or care to take the time to read the articles” (Garfield, 2005, p. 20). In other words, people use the digital indexes to find keywords, and then simply scan the abstracts.

Okay, I said, but can we try keeping the content yet still make the EJMAS journals (or at least some of them) more palatable to online scanners and indexers? What if we tweak the format? What if we throw in abstracts and keywords, establish a more regular publishing schedule, and insert all the boilerplate said to thrill the high priests of Journal Impact Factors? It's only kata, after all.

With such thoughts in mind, *InYo* has adopted a new look. We have added new editorial and production staff, made boilerplate easier to find, and committed to publishing on a regular schedule – biannually, in the case of *InYo*, summer and winter. In other words, we're making kata part of the program.

At the same time, we hope to maintain the same old in your face attitude.

Let us know how we're doing.

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# CALL FOR PAPERS

Our plan is to focus individual issues of *InYo* around a single common theme. For instance, the theme of this issue is alternative perspectives. How do we interpret and analyze what we have been told or read?

Themes that have been suggested for future issues include

- Lords of Disorder: The role of martial arts and combative sports in traditional festivals
- The commodification of leisure and the invention of modern martial arts and combative sports
- Martial tourism
- Muscular theater: Circus and vaudeville acts
- Political uses of martial arts and combative sports
- Steampunk martial arts

Obviously, we need more themes and lots of articles to maintain a regular publication schedule. If you have an article in the drawer or in mind, drop the editor a line at [jsvinth@ejmas.com](mailto:jsvinth@ejmas.com). Alternatively, join the EJMAS discussion list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ejmas/join>. Our article submission guidelines are published at the back.



Reviews  
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Emerson Franchini



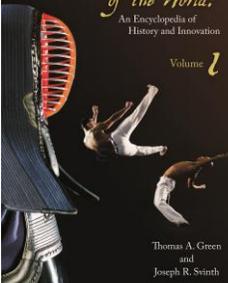
# JUDÔ

Desempenho competitivo

2ª EDIÇÃO

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An Encyclopedia of  
History and Innovation

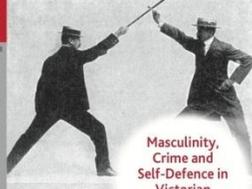
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Thomas A. Green  
and  
Joseph R. Smith

Cambridge  
University Press

Masculinity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature



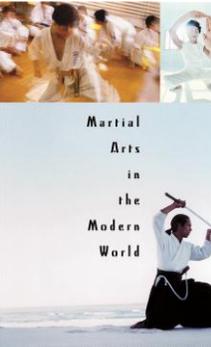
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Emelyne Godfrey

For more on the author, please see the back flap.

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Martial Arts in the Modern World

EDITED BY THOMAS A. GREEN AND JOSEPH R. SMITH

Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals  
A HISTORICAL SURVEY



Brian Kennedy  
and Elizabeth Guo

# WHAT ARE MARTIAL ARTS?

Joseph Svinth

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, martial art describes “any of several arts of combat and self defense (as karate and judo) that are widely practiced as sport” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Although this may be how many (perhaps most) native speakers of early twenty-first century American English define or understand the phrase “martial art,” it is not a very good definition. Not all martial arts are for combat or self-defense. Not all martial arts are of Asian origin (which is implied in the examples given). Not all martial arts are widely practiced as sport. And so on.

Thus, in this instance, Wikipedia gives a far better definition than does Merriam-Webster

Martial arts (literally meaning arts of war but usually referred as fighting arts) are extensive systems of codified practices and traditions of combat. Martial arts all have similar objectives: to physically defeat other persons or defend oneself or others from physical threat (Wikipedia, 2011).

As for a recent academic definition, Thomas Green proposes the following.

Martial arts can be defined as systematic bodies of knowledge, belief, and practice that are associated with methods of attack and defense against human adversaries and their extrahuman allies (Green & Svinth, Belief Systems, 2010, p. 331).

Note that in this last definition, martial arts are not solely directed against external adversaries. “Extrahuman allies” refers to amulets, charms, prayers, blessed weapons, and invocations of cultural deities, and thus there is recognition that in some martial arts, there is as much emphasis placed on controlling one’s inner demons as there is on controlling the physical actions of other people.

Although I like this third definition, I suspect that most English-speaking people use one of the first two definitions. Therefore, to avoid

**Abstract:** When comparing and contrasting martial practices, it is useful to remember that everyday definitions may not be accurate and idiosyncratic explanations may be misunderstood. Therefore, we need to be careful about defining our terms. At a minimum, thinking about our definitions and terminology should increase our understanding of our own practice and reduce, avoid, or mitigate misunderstandings of our teachers’ instructions and others’ practices.

**Keywords:** Defining terms, martial arts

Financial support for research presented in this essay was received from King County Landmarks and Heritage Commission (now 4Culture), Japanese American National Museum, Associazione Italiana Sport Educazione, and SportAccord.

misunderstanding, it is perhaps best during general discourse if we try to define our terms as we intend to use them – and with that thought in mind, perhaps avoid using phrase “martial art” whenever possible. As I have written elsewhere

Although “martial art” is the usual English translation of the Japanese *bujutsu* and the Chinese *wushu*, and has been since the 1910s, it is a translation that sends a mixed message. For example, if the emphasis is on the martial, then the term surely includes military strategy. Both Sun Tzu and Machiavelli did, after all, write texts called *The Art of War*. On the other hand, if the emphasis is on the artistic, then the term just as surely includes Dürer’s knights and Sousa’s marches. Yet neither of these does justice to the flying sidekicks and seven-year old black belts that most people think of when you say “Martial Art.” Additionally, the word “martial” refers to the cowardly Roman god of war, which in turn presents an altogether different mental image than does the Japanese character *bu*, which shows a hand reaching up to stop a spear. Finally, while translating *bujutsu* as “conflict resolution techniques” is possible, such New Age gloss is anachronistic when applied to the militaristic nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, for precision I prefer more narrowly defined terms such as “combative sports” and “muscular (or martial) theater (Getting a Grip, 2003, p. 271).<sup>1</sup>

## TOWARD IMPROVING OUR DEFINITIONS

Even if one likes the phrase “martial art,” or simply finds it convenient, I think we can all agree that clarifying our definitions as we mean them, and then presenting those definitions to others in advance of our using them reduces the risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding. In that case, the next step involves figuring out better ways of defining the concepts that underlie the phrase “martial art.”

One possible method involves classifying martial arts by how they are done (Green & Svinth, *Martial Arts and SportAccord*, 2011). For example, there can be

- Wrestling while wearing jackets
- Wrestling while not wearing jackets
- Striking with upper limbs only
- Striking with all limbs and the head but using limited wrestling

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<sup>1</sup>In the same book, I defined combative sports as: “Physically aggressive athletic games. Individual combative sports such as boxing, wrestling, and fencing essentially mimic dueling while team combative sports such as football, ice hockey, and lacrosse essentially mimic small unit warfare” (p. 268). I also defined muscular (or martial) theater: “A popular entertainment whose chief feature is visually exciting mayhem. Plots are simplistic, characters are stereotyped, and complete enjoyment requires audiences to suspend disbelief. Examples include adventure films and professional wrestling matches” (p. 271).

- Striking with all limbs and the head plus wrestling, but without using weapons
- Striking with all limbs and the head plus wrestling, and also using weapons
- Spear, sword, and stick-fighting without striking with limbs or head, or doing much wrestling
- Shooting sports using archery tackle
- Shooting sports using firearms
- Musical accompaniment

The problem is that defining via outward attributes does not explain how or why judo, for example, is different from Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Danzan Ryu jujutsu, or sambo.

Another method of classification involves arranging arts by geography (Africa, East Asia), cultural zone (former Ottoman Empire, Hollywood), or country of origin (China, Japan). Unfortunately, globalization and nationalism render each of these arrangements problematic. For instance, if you classify by geography, then how does one classify old-style Japanese martial arts practiced in New Jersey by people of Chinese ancestry? If by region, then are the martial arts shown in the James Bond movies best understood as coming from the British cultural zone, the Hong Kong cultural zone, or the Hollywood cultural zone? And if by country, then does this mean we will someday get to study the heretofore secret martial arts of Luxembourg?

A third method for classifying martial arts involves identifying the role that the art plays in the lives and society of the participants involved in the study. I like this method of classification, so will discuss it in some detail.

## CATEGORIZING MARTIAL ARTS BY SOCIETAL ROLE

**T**wenty-first century martial arts generally fit into one of the following categories

- Televised elite professional sport
- Televised elite amateur sport
- Non-televised elite amateur sport
- Workplace activities
- Regulated recreational activities
- Empowerment activities
- Vernacular systems

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

—Matthew 7:5,  
Revised Standard  
Version

**Elite sport** is self-explanatory. It is what we see on television or in the stadium.

**Workplace activities** include the methods taught and practiced by soldiers, police, and people who work in mental health facilities, the activities of people who teach martial arts for a living, and the methods and practices of actors and professional wrestlers.

**Regulated recreational activities** are what most of who read and write English and also practice or teach martial arts do. We do not do them to get into the Olympics or because we must. Instead, we do them because we want to do them. Thus, our practice is recreational (and sometimes, re-creational). Nonetheless, our practice is regulated by local associations and state or regional federations, and if such associations do not exist, then we create them.

**Empowerment activities** include most so-called “self-defense” training. Such activities are often taught via seminars and short courses rather than years of sweaty practice.

Finally, “**vernacular system**,” as used here, refers to a definition developed by Thomas Green. Says Green, “The term ‘vernacular’ as used in linguistics denotes a local language, dialect, or non-standard version of a language and art criticism as creations of people who are detached from the movements and friends of fine art. Applied to the martial, ‘vernacular’ denotes local traditions that meet the needs of those groups in which they are preserved rather than being subject to an outside sanctioning body” (Vernacular Martial Arts, 2011, p. 50).

Each of these social roles serves multiple functions within both the society at large and the subculture that practices the art. Some of these functions cross categories to the point that they are almost universal, whereas other functions are fundamentally opposed to motivations in other categories. The following three tables show what I mean.

**Table 1: Typical Motivations for Premodern Martial Arts**

|                             |
|-----------------------------|
| Building character in youth |
| Cultural nationalism        |
| Dueling                     |
| Group cohesion              |
| Group defense               |
| Personal defense            |
| Prayer or divination        |
| Professional activities     |
| Prowess/social recognition  |
| Rights of passage           |
| Ritual drama                |

**Table 2: Typical Motivations for Modern Martial Arts**

|                              |
|------------------------------|
| Building character in youth  |
| Commodified leisure          |
| Cultural nationalism         |
| Group cohesion               |
| Group defense                |
| Personal defense             |
| Physical and moral education |
| Professional activities      |
| Prowess/social recognition   |
| Public entertainment         |
| Rights of passage            |
| Sporting purposes            |

**Table 3: Motivations for Elite Combat Sports**

|                         |
|-------------------------|
| Commodified leisure     |
| Nationalism             |
| Professional activities |
| Social recognition      |
| Sporting purposes       |

Obviously there are more categories than just the ones listed here, and reviewing them in detail would take some time (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2006); (Green & Svinth, Martial Arts and SportAccord, 2011); (Green, Vernacular Martial Arts, 2011); (Svinth, Some Motivations, 1999); (Svinth, 2010) (Svinth, Education and Sport, 2010); (Svinth, Creating a Typological Framework, 2011). Nonetheless, the listed examples are sufficient to show that motivations are not necessarily the same in every system, and to suggest that meanings attributed to an art or system may be changed, refocused, or even eliminated after that art or system is transplanted to another country or culture, or appropriated for alternative purposes.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Svinth is editor of *InYo*. His books include *Getting a Grip: Judo in the Nikkei Communities of the Pacific Northwest 1900-1950* (2003) and, as co-editor with Thomas A. Green, *Martial Arts in the Modern World* (2003) and *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation* (2010).

# UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT MARTIAL ARTS: POOH AND HERMENEUTICS

Kendall Giles

**B**roadly stated, hermeneutics is a research method that focuses on the study of reading meaning into human behavior. Its origins derive from the process of interpreting ancient religious texts and it has evolved into “interpreting the unfamiliar and alien” (Lee, 1999). Some might say that martial arts deal with human behavior and that the various techniques, rituals, and movements that the various martial arts profess appear unfamiliar and alien to outsiders or beginners. (“Understatement,” muttered Pooh.) Therefore understanding hermeneutics could help outsiders and beginners better understand the art being studied.

**S**cholars dedicated to resurrecting techniques and movements sometimes find interpreting and comprehending ancient texts to provide a formidable challenge. For example, in some Japanese martial arts, techniques were brushed on scrolls by leaders of the particular schools and subsequently passed down to those who took over the schools. Present-day owners of these scrolls (presumably present-day leaders of those schools) interpret the techniques based on their own inclinations, experience, and their master’s teachings. While these interpretations may be different from what the original author intended, in theory the old understanding is still known. On the other hand, while Western martial arts practitioners have compendiums of

A version of this essay appeared in *InYO* in December 2000.

**Abstract:** Hermeneutics is a research method. Hermeneutic martial arts researchers seek to uncover and understand not only the mechanics of particular techniques, but also: 1. What those techniques meant at the time they were first described. 2. Why those particular techniques were written down instead of others. 3. What variations of the techniques are acceptable and which are faithful to the intent of the original martial arts’ author. 4. When and why changes were introduced.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, martial arts, Winnie the Pooh

“But how does one know a hermeneutic if one were to meet one in the dark?” asked Pooh, a little concerned at this point.

techniques presented as bound manuals, such as Fiore dei Liberi's *Flos Duellatorum* (Flower of Battle, ca. 1410) or Hans Talhoffer's *Alte Armatur und Ringkunst* (Old Armament and Art of Fight, 1459), neither the ancient *maîtres* nor their students are around to give us insight. Therefore uncovering the meanings and interpretations is difficult for modern day martial artists.

My thesis is that hermeneutics provides a useful method for trying to fathom the musings and sage advice of masters of eons past, and in this article Pooh and I hope to introduce the concept of hermeneutics as applied to the martial arts. It is not a complete workshop, but a springboard of sorts for you in your journeys into uncovering the martial way, in whatever flavor of martial arts you may pursue.

**T**he basic premise of hermeneutics is that the original author knew what he or she wrote about, and that it is the reader or researcher who must seek, from within, the understanding needed to explain a passage or behavior that does not make sense. The reader tries out alternative readings until the reader comes to see “how a sensible person would have written them” (Kuhn, 1977). It is at this point that the reader has reached a point of equal or greater understanding than even perhaps the original author of the document under study. It is also at this point when previous passages or behaviors take on new meanings, in which case the document must be re-read to discover even more meaning and understanding.

Like a Zen koan, the above simple description of hermeneutics masks great depth, and there are five basic characteristics of hermeneutics.

1. The first is the concept of **pre-understanding**. Pre-understanding deals with the set of preformed ideas and concepts we bring to the object of study, be it a passage or person, as a result of living in a “cultural world” (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Any interpretation we make is influenced by the preformed ideas we have unique to us, resulting from our individual backgrounds and experiences. In other words, this pre-understanding is a starting point for making our interpretations.
2. The second concept, **appropriation**, is the process of the reader digesting or internalizing the reading (Lee, 1999). This means that the reader has assimilated the reading and the text has become activated for the reader. It is no longer foreign and no longer the original author's — it is now the reader's.
3. The third concept, **social construction**, recognizes that, in addition to the meaning a reader gives to a text, there is an additional meaning independent of the reader or the author. This meaning derives from the fact that the text is a social construction. The text is a fiction — it “does not exist in the physical world of nature” (Lee, 1999). But even

though the text does not exist physically, it exists — people may come and go but the text continues. The meaning of the text is also a social construction — it encompasses the norms and traditions of the society in which it exists. As such, its meaning is larger than that presented in the actual text. For the reader to assimilate the text, the reader becomes “an agent of the socially constructed world” of the text (Lee, 1999). A step beyond appropriation, reader-agents are then able to conduct true discourse concerning the text, possibly extending the theory or changing the text’s world in the process.

4. A fourth characteristic of hermeneutics is the **autonomy of the text**. After the text is written, the text “assumes a life of its own” (Arnold & Fischer, 1994) that is quite independent of the author or the author’s wishes. The text is subsumed by the culture and can lead to understandings in addition to or different from those intended by the author.
5. The fifth characteristic, the **Hermeneutic Circle**, is perhaps the most important, and refers to the way we read and understand text. The individual words have their own meanings, some more than one. When placed together, the words can take on different meanings depending on their placement in the text. The text takes on a particular meaning depending on the placement of the words. There is an iterative process of understanding the words and the whole of the text and the words again until we reach closure for understanding the entire passage. When we reach this closure, there is no remaining contradiction left to cloud or confuse our understanding. The circle is this linked system of deriving meaning from repeated personal exposures to the parts and to the whole until the circle is complete and there is closure in understanding.
6. There are many methods to use in our research. But as with most problems in life, there is no silver bullet, no single research method that can solve all problems with sufficient facility. But hermeneutics, while regarded more

Pooh ambled over to my library and thoughtfully pulled a few books from the shelves. “I think I understand what hermeneutics is,” he said, rubbing his chin, “but I now have to ask why hermeneutics?”

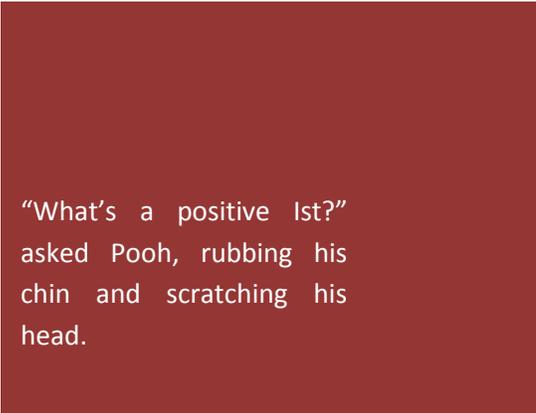
as a “perspective” than a full methodology – “there exist no detailed and explicit guidelines for *the* hermeneutic method” (Arnold & Fischer, 1994, emphasis in original) — is known as an interpretive research method. Furthermore, it presents several benefits compared with positivist research methods, as well as with other interpretive methods, which are worth noting.

**P**ermit me to stray on a brief tangent and detail a little about the different types of research methodologies. Basically, humans love to classify things, as evidenced by our taxonomy of fellow animals in biology, the constellations of planets and stars in astronomy, and even the ways we organize our books in libraries. From perhaps a fundamental level this need to classify helps us make sense of the chaos around us, for to group or classify something is to know it, and to know it is to be no longer afraid of it. This never-ending, ever-endearing, inquisitive trait, this need to know, surely has been with the species since its inception.

Humans extend this process of grouping and classifying not only to the “things” — animals, stars, and books — but also to the various ways we seek to know in the first place. In other words, not only are the *things* themselves classified, but also the *ways* in which things are classified or known are classified. This meta-level grouping with respect to how things are known has itself been grouped in the realm of the philosophy of science.

Two major groups or divisions within the philosophy of science, or two major ways in which humans endeavor to know, are the arms of research called **Positivism** and **Interpretivism**. Because the processes by which humans conduct their research influence the very character, quantity, and quality of what we know and what we will know, before we can ourselves begin on this noble quest of knowledge we must first understand the socially acceptable ways in which we can research. That is, we must understand the characteristics and compatibility of Positivist and Interpretive research. First we need to gain a better understanding of what research itself means, then see how the philosophies of Positivism and Interpretivism have influenced research, and finally see how these two research methodologies can and cannot work together.

Although definitions abound, for the purposes of this article **research** is defined as the use of formal procedures to propose or validate knowledge. It does not matter whether we are researching various interpretations of strikes to the head with a long sword or



“What’s a positive Ist?”  
asked Pooh, rubbing his  
chin and scratching his  
head.

theories of whether or not certain attacks were meant to be used against opponents wearing armor. The formal procedures are the socially accepted methods we may use to conduct our research, which involve distinct steps and often iteration. This set of steps, or the way in which we conduct research, i.e. the research process, has been succinctly summarized (Meredith, Raturi, Amoako-Gyampah, & Kaplan, 1989) as an iterative cycle of description, explanation, and testing.

1. The first step, **describing and conceptualizing events or actions**, provides a background for generating or testing concepts about the situation at hand. These concepts can be developed to form a framework around the situation to provide a straw universe within which further studies can be conducted to investigate the situation.
2. This straw universe is used in the second stage to **generate or propose an explanation** (or explanations) of the situation.
3. The third stage in the cycle is that **of testing the previously generated explanations** to determine which are true and which are false.

As an aside, notice for a moment that we can only determine whether the explanations are true or false, as opposed to True or False. These explanations can be found to be true within our constructed universe or framework in the second stage of the research process, but a truth in that universe may not hold true in another. For example, a common truism spoken and believed by many is that “the sun sets in the west.” Many of us however know that Galileo proved that it is actually the earth that revolves around the sun and that our spoken truism is actually false. We nevertheless speak our truism out of social custom. Yet even fewer of us know that Einstein showed us, through Relativity, that a coordinate system affixed to a given body is actually just as valid as any other body as a reference point. Thus Galileo affixed the coordinate system that we have held as true for centuries to that of the sun. Yet Einstein showed us that a coordinate system affixed to the earth (or even ourselves) is equally valid. Our spoken truism is actually no longer true or false, but somewhere in between. Thus Truth is hard to know. Please forgive me for being redundantly redundant but while we may not be able to achieve Truth, we should strive in our research for truth in as universally universal a framework as possible.

**B**ack to the point. Our process of research is cyclic because at any stage (but most often at the testing stage), we may gain through our work a greater or more refined understanding of our original theories, frameworks, or explanations. This allows for restating our initial research goals and more passes through the cycle. New theories can also be generated, spawning research cycles of their own. But, basically

1. **Positivist research follows the accepted rules of the “natural-science model.”** The natural sciences such as physics, biology, and chemistry follow the rules of formal

logic to prove conclusions through experiment and deduction (Lee, 1999). The main assumption is that “the phenomenon under study can be isolated from the context in which it occurs and that facts or observations are independent of the laws and theories used to explain them” (Meredith, Raturi, Amoako-Gyampah, & Kaplan, 1989). With Positivist research there is a belief that all knowledge is derivable from basic laws or truths; conclusions can be shown to be true with the use of logic in an environment independent of the context in which the situation occurs.

2. **Interpretive research includes the context of the phenomenon as a part of the object of study.** In Interpretive research, the focus is on placing the person or action studied into a context in which the actions make sense; the observed facts are not independent of the observer or the theory. Interpretive research also “gives explicit recognition to the ‘Life World’” (Lee, 1999), meaning that since humans create the universes in which we live (that is, we live in socially created worlds), these universes cannot be separated from the ways in which people make and derive their truths. Furthermore, the researcher is a critical element in research conclusions; at a minimum, what he or she chooses to research is itself a choice that influences the findings. Finally, interpretation is by definition subjective. Therefore the greater understanding gained by one researcher influences the interpretation of subsequent researchers and as a result, their frameworks and conclusions. This in turn allows for new interpretations in which deeper or alternative meanings are reached.

On a scale of Rationalism versus Existentialism, these two research paradigms appear to be polar opposites (Meredith, Raturi, Amoako-Gyampah, & Kaplan, 1989).

Positivist research is characterized by

- **Objective experiments** conducted in a context devoid of the previously mentioned Life-World — *i.e.*, in the context of electrons and molecules rather than the social context in which humans live their lives.
- **A deduced conclusion from first principles** describes a formal methodology developed over centuries of use, and its validity is based on the unprecedented and unsurpassed advances made in the natural sciences.

Interpretive research typifies everything that Positivist research is not. Interpretive research is characterized by

- **Conclusions reached through the use of induction** (which is logically unstable) (Lee, 1999).

- **An informal (ad hoc) methodology using subjective observations and models** about people and behaviors used to support situations based on historical, social, non-repeating events (Meredith, Raturi, Amoako-Gyampah, & Kaplan, 1989) (Schutz, 1962-1966).

These perceived differences have divided researchers for many years. Some Positivist researchers did not take seriously the results of the Interpretive researchers due to the perceived lack of rigor, precision, and inherent subjectivity in the Interpretive methods and goals. Some Interpretive researchers felt that because of the nature of their problem domain, a domain involving the social context of humans, the methods of the Positivist researchers were too limiting to handle the richness and complexity of their human subjects.

These differences probably are not as great or automatically divisive as first thought. For example, Positivist research may be good for developing knowledge and conclusions for classes of problems whereas Interpretive research may be better used to describe singular, non-repeating events.

Either way, Positivist and Interpretive paradigms fit our definition of research. That is, both

- Allow researchers to use procedures of iteration and logic to derive their conclusions for the purposes of elucidating knowledge. The logic used by the Interpretive researchers may not be the logic of mathematicians, but the steps used to reach the conclusions are logical and follow socially accepted reason.
- Offer initial description or explanation.
- Build frameworks around the situation to provide problem-space richness.
- Perform tests to reach justifiable (logical) conclusions.

However natural “laws” are deduced, they are the products of a political, social process. As a result, they are not actually laws but fictions (Lee, 1999). Even the supposed objectivity of the natural science methods is not exempt from the social context in which we live. For these reasons the many methods historically used by Interpretive researchers are available for use and should be acknowledged by the Positivist researchers. Likewise, as noted by Schutz (1962-1966), “a set of rules for scientific procedure is equally valid for all empirical sciences whether they deal with objects of nature or with human affairs.”

The point is that both Positivist and Interpretive researchers have developed methods and tools, and it is neither the subject matter nor the researcher that determines which methods to use. Just because I am studying physics does not automatically preclude me from the method set and tools historically used by the Interpretive researchers. Likewise, just because I am a social scientist or historian does not preclude me from conducting carefully controlled and repeatable deductive experiments. Furthermore, since both Positivism and Interpretivism are humanly created, each is equally subject to error. Nonetheless, both their methods are available to everyone, and with openness and creativity researchers can take advantage of the strengths of each, thereby providing greater insight into their subjects' problem areas and better validating their conclusions. To return our discussion, unlike the traditional Positivist experiment that requires independent and dependent variables and rigorous mathematical formulations, hermeneutics "gives explicit interpretation to the LifeWorld" (Lee, 1999). In other words, while electrons and atoms apparently have no meaning to one another, humans do mean something to each other. As a result, it is important for social scientists, historians, and martial arts scholars to collect subjective meanings as well as objective behaviors

(Lee, 1999). In the specific context of the martial arts, we must understand not only the mechanics of the punch or strike, but also the culture in which the original author was living: we need to understand the author, his personality, his experiences, and even his likes and dislikes. The strict scientific or positivist view of cause and action, independent and dependent variable, leaves no room for this subjective understanding, and thus can fail martial arts researchers striving to uncover meaning in ancient texts.

"How's that, Pooh?" I said.

"Kind of like eating honey," replied Pooh, thinking hard about his favorite subject.

"I can use my left hand or my right hand," he said, making motions in the air.

"Or I can use both hands at once." He grinned, obviously proud of his new research conclusion.

**B**ecause hermeneutics is based on the study of language, the domain where hermeneutics excels is that of text and language. In this domain having a hermeneutic perspective may give structure and process for the researcher, and so provide insight not available from other interpretive methods. Grounded Theory, for example, is often used to generate theory that is grounded in the data. A hermeneutic perspective would enrich the data-grounded theory by giving focus to interpreting behavior, meaning, and language. Meanwhile, ethnographers often use techniques such as “social structure,” “culture,” and “world view” to distance themselves from the subject and to remove bias. Hermeneutics on the other hand explicitly acknowledges bias on the part of the researcher. By recognizing this, as in the case of positivist research, hermeneutics can serve to support and enhance theory.

“Oh, bother,” said Pooh, rubbing his head. “This is too much for one little bear to comprehend, I think.”

He continued to watch me type, his eyelids growing ever more droopy. Despite being a little confused about the subject matter, he seemed contented, as if my explanations set things right once again in the universe. But before falling completely asleep he whispered one last thing that made me think that perhaps he understood what I had said after all:

“This must be the beginning of the article, or the ending, depending on your point of view,” said Pooh.

**T**o summarize, hermeneutic martial arts researchers must seek to uncover and understand not only the mechanics of particular techniques, but also

- What those techniques meant at the time they were first described.
- Why those particular techniques were written down instead of others.
- What variations of the techniques are acceptable and faithful to the original intent of the creator of the martial art.
- When (and why) changes were introduced.

## REVISITING THIS ESSAY TEN YEARS LATER

First published over ten years ago, “Understanding Ancient Martial Arts: Pooh and Hermeneutics” introduced hermeneutics, with the help of Winnie the Pooh, as a way of understanding and reconstructing martial arts techniques and principles described in ancient texts. At the time, groups all across the world, especially those interested in historical Western martial arts, were analyzing and debating ancient martial arts treatises. Why is the attacker’s leg extended in this figure? How does one get from the beginning position to the ending position in that figure? There were many questions and mysteries contained within those treatises, but through careful interpretation of the source material, proposition of a hypothesized technique, and testing of the technique in *la salle d’armes*, we know much more now than we knew then.

So why is this article still relevant? Because there is still much more to learn. Indeed, this quest to better understand historical martial arts is in many ways just getting started, and interest has never been stronger. For example, this year (2011) will see the 10th Western Martial Arts Workshop, an annual event dedicated to the instruction and promotion of historical European and American martial arts techniques (Chicago Swordplay Guild, 2011). Meanwhile, interest in the techniques and methods of “the martial art of Sherlock Holmes,” called Bartitsu, has led to the creation of Bartitsu chapters and study groups across several countries (Bartitsu Society, 2011). These are people interested in martial arts but who want more than just what the McDojos have to offer. Although she was speaking of reenactment in general, Dr. Vanessa Agnew captures many of the motivations fueling the interest in historical martial arts: “Perhaps because of this winning combination of imaginative play, self-improvement, intellectual enrichment, and sociality, reenactment is booming” (Agnew, 2004).

All these people interested in learning historical martial arts, but it is only through the careful reconstruction of techniques, methods, and fighting philosophies that we can be sure we are doing it right. In fact, what may be of interest going forward is the creation of a formal hermeneutic process for the interpretation of ancient martial arts texts—a martial arts reconstruction recipe or framework that groups can use to help make sure they are accurately interpreting and practicing the techniques. This is not a trivial task, but would help address common questions, such as

Pooh climbed up onto my desk, rested his chin on his paw, and began to think. After a long time, he said, “All I do is open the jar and then eat the honey. That’s really as hard as it gets, if you’re a bear.”

- How to prioritize or rank the various martial arts texts?
- How do we handle the inclusion or fusion of modern methods and fighting philosophies into historical techniques as reconstruct them?
- What is canon and what is neo?

Establishing a formal hermeneutic process would likely increase the spread of interest in historical martial arts, and would certainly give practitioners tools to help them tackle the sometimes formidable repository of ancient lore.

In short, establishing methods for the careful reconstruction of historical martial arts remain relevant today, perhaps even more than they were a decade ago.

Special thanks to Steve Hick — and Pooh.

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Photo: James Kielland

# CHINESE BOXING CLASSICS IN TRANSLATION: PROBLEMS AND PERIL

Brian Kennedy

The Russian proverb in the sidebar to the right encapsulates the core problem facing any translator. When attempting to translate Chinese boxing classics or training manuals (*quan pu*) from their original Chinese into English, that core problem is exacerbated by a number of other factors. Those factors are the topic of this article. Even if one never intends to do any translations, these factors are worth understanding. That way, as one reads English language translations of Chinese boxing classics or training manuals, one has a better understanding of why the translation may seem odd or disjointed, or was not quite what the reader expected.

## GOOD CHINESE ESSAY = BAD ENGLISH ESSAY

A good Chinese essay often makes a bad English essay. The reason is that the aesthetic and literary criteria (word choice, sentence structure, coherent paragraphs, overall structure, thesis, and so forth) are very different in the two languages. This is particularly true in the case of classical Chinese ("classical" in the sense of a style, not an era of writing).

Here is an example. This is a paragraph taken from Sun Lu Tang's preface to his book *The Study of Form-Mind Boxing*. The translation is by Albert Liu. It reads

I have been unceasing in my literary study and interest in martial arts, since my childhood. I don't want to be bold with powerful

Translation is like a woman. If she is faithful, she is not beautiful. If she is beautiful, she is not faithful.

—Russian proverb

**Abstract:** The qualities that make a good essay in one language, culture, or time may not be the same qualities that make an equally good essay in another language, culture, or time. The reason is that the cultural aesthetic and literary criteria can change. This essay provides an introduction to this issue.

**Keywords:** Martial arts, martial arts texts, translations

A version of this essay appeared in *InYo* in February 2002, and a version also appeared in Brian Kennedy and Elizabeth Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals: A Historical Survey* (2005).

force, but hope to have the proper way to health. The real courage is not based on bold force, but on the interrelationship of hardness and softness without boldness. There is a common saying that the principle of martial arts training is the same as that of literary learning. Both have the same value and importance. Literates do not like martial arts seeing that common martial arts are too bold and lack elegance (Liu, 2001).

As an English essay, this gets an “F”. It is incoherent. It lacks a thesis. It contains hyperbole. And it rambles in no apparent direction and toward no apparent purpose. It is, however, an excellent piece of Chinese writing and the translation is very well done. Sun Lu Tang (1860-1933) wrote very well and Albert Liu is a skilled translator. The problem is that the piece simply does not translate well. It does not translate well because it is good classical Chinese and the aesthetics and rhetorical standards are different from English.

A number of specific factors contribute to the classical Chinese-modern English impasse. Among them:

Classical Chinese does not have the same concept of paragraphing that modern English does. A well-written English paragraph, as we all learned in school, contains one major idea, a thesis sentence, and then supporting sentences. Classical Chinese does not really even have the idea of paragraphs. The divisions used were sentences and then what might be termed “sections.” It is up to the translator to decide how the translation should be paragraphed.

Classical Chinese sentences are almost always what English teachers would term “run-on sentences.” That is, they go on and on. In contemporary English, such sentences would be divided into separate sentences. This situation is worsened by the fact that many early Chinese martial arts texts contain little or no punctuation.

Classical Chinese tends to be very indirect. (This correlates to the concept of run-on sentences.) Thus the point (whatever the point is) is rarely made directly. Instead there will be a hint of the point, then an aside, then kind of back to the point, then a further aside.

Classical Chinese gives the impression of being disorganized. Actually, it is not really “an impression”— classical Chinese writing *is* disorganized. Under classical Chinese literary aesthetics, coming right to the point is considered boorish, crude, and a sure sign of literary incompetence.

Master Sun’s paragraph mentioned above is a perfect example of these translation problems. It contains three topics that are only vaguely related. In them, we learn that

- Master Sun was interested in martial arts and literature his whole life.
- There are two types of courage.
- Martial arts and literary studies have something in common although practitioners of the two arts do not seem to like each other.

Unless one intends to completely rewrite the essay, there is not much that a translator can do about the disorganization. My partner and I often translate modern Chinese essays for the local Taiwanese newspapers and this lack of organization is the bane of such translations.

Another challenge facing the translator is word choice. Classical Chinese is often filled with hyperbole, and literal translation can make the Chinese author sound like a used car salesman. Careful word choice by the translator can go a long way toward making the work sound more intelligent. The question here is one of “translator ethics” or perhaps “translator philosophy.” How far should the translator substitute words that s/he thinks are “appropriate” with what the author literally said?

In Master Sun’s example above, the translation of the second sentence reads, “I don’t want to be bold with powerful force, but hope to have the proper way to health.” The phrase “bold with powerful force” is 100% literally correct. I would paraphrase that to: “I don’t practice martial arts in order to be seen as aggressive or belligerent, but rather hope to improve and protect my health.” I think that makes a better English sentence, but it is not what Master Sun wrote. Instead, it is what I think he meant. How far a translator should go in re-writing or paraphrasing an author is a subject that has been much discussed in translation circles. However, its resolution lies outside the scope of this article.

Differing literary aesthetics is more of a problem with earlier works, earlier being defined as pre-1950s. For example, Chinese boxing training manuals written during the Republican period (1911-1949) by authors such as Sun Lu Tang, Hwang Bo Nien (1870-1954) (Rovere, *The Xingyi Quan of the Chinese Army: Huang Bo Nien's Xingyi Fist and Weapon Instruction*, 2008), and Jiang Rong Qiao (1891-1974) are written in a classical Chinese style that does not translate very well into modern English. More recent works often have a more modern style of Chinese writing that translates with greater ease into English. This is especially true for texts written by Mainland Chinese authors, due to the fact that under Communism, classical literary styles were (to put it mildly) “disfavored.” Taiwanese authors have to a greater extent maintained the older literary style, although that varies from author to author.

In other words, if you read a translation of a Chinese boxing classic or training manual and the phrasing seems awkward, do not automatically think that the translator lacked skill. Instead, it may be that the text simply does not lend itself to elegant translation.

## THE PERFECT TEAM

That is not to say that the translator is never to blame. Translators need a wide set of skills to translate Chinese boxing texts, and as a practical matter the translation usually requires a team of at least two people. Furthermore, the team will have to bring to the project knowledge of

classical Chinese, and such knowledge is not necessarily common among modern Chinese speakers.

Admittedly, one sometimes reads in popular articles about the Chinese language that “the written language of China is the same all over the country, and that it has remained unchanged over thousands of years. Thus any modern speaker of Chinese is able to read Chinese classics going all the way back to Confucius.” That statement is wrong on both counts. First, there are regional differences in writing style. For example, most Taiwanese can quickly spot something that was written in Hong Kong, and vice-versa. Although the characters are the same, the vernacular is noticeably different. As a result, on several occasions my partner has been hired to “translate” documents from “Hong Kong Chinese” into “Taiwanese Chinese.” Such translations are not the result of simplified versus traditional characters (Hong Kong still uses the traditional characters), but rather due to the differences in vernacular. As to the idea that a modern native speaker of Chinese can read any Chinese document stretching all the way back to Kung Tzu (552-497 BCE), that is an equally inaccurate statement. By way of rough analogy, a modern native speaker of Chinese has about the same degree of comprehension of a Ming Dynasty text (1368-1644 CE) as a modern native speaker of English has with Shakespeare (1564-1616). For a modern Chinese reader to go back to Laozi (Lao Tzu, sixth century BCE) or Sunzi (Sun Wu; also Sun Tzu, after fifth century BCE) is about the same as a native speaker of English trying to read Chaucer (ca. 1343-1400 CE) or Beowulf (before twelfth century CE) in the original. In other words, without special training, lots of annotations, and a copy of the Chinese equivalent of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, full comprehension simply is not possible.

One member of the translation team needs a journeyman level of skill in writing English. That statement may seem foolishly obvious, but I see it routinely violated. Just look at a microwave or car instruction manual if you disbelieve me. While it is true that a good publishing house editor can do wonders improving a rough manuscript, the house editor is not in a position to rewrite the translation. The translator (or at least one member of the translating team) must have reasonably good English writing skills.

A member of the team also must be familiar with the specific martial art being discussed. One reason is that one must already have a good idea what the work is going to say, especially if the book is discussing how to do techniques. If one does not, then the chances of getting things mixed up rises astronomically. Another reason is that each of the Chinese martial arts has its own cant and jargon. Unless one is familiar with the jargon, the translation can go far astray. Much of the jargon is *not* self-explanatory even to an educated native speaker of Chinese, and non-standard usages are not included in standard dictionaries. Consequently, a member of the translation team needs to already know the martial art being discussed or a closely related one.

In sum, the translator (or team) needs to

- Know how to read both modern and classical Chinese.
- Be able to write reasonable English.
- Have reasonable knowledge of the martial art being described in the text.

Because there are few individuals who are skilled in all three areas, you can see why teams produce the best translations. A good example is the team that put together the book *Xing Yi Nei Gong* (Miller & Cartmell, 1999). The team consisted of Tim Cartmell, Dan Miller, Wang Jin Yu, and Zhang Bao Yang. The team members brought together extensive knowledge of xingyiquan and classical Chinese, plus considerable English language writing and publishing experience. The result was an outstanding book on xingyiquan.

## TOO GREAT OF EXPECTATIONS

**W**hen preparing to read a Chinese boxing classic or training manual, especially if it is a classic written by (or at least attributed to) authors such as Sun Lu Tang or Li Cun Yi (1847-1921), the reader arrives with high expectations. Many times modern practitioners (and especially practitioners who are just getting started in Chinese martial arts) have an exaggerated sense of what Chinese boxing classics or training manuals will contain. The basic thinking (or hope) often is this: “Oh, once I read Master Whomever’s book on Chinese boxing, my understanding of Chinese boxing will greatly improve.”

Maybe not. Most historical classics are interesting from a historical or philosophical perspective, but they do not usually provide much practical information that the average practitioner can use to improve his or her martial arts. Chinese boxing classics are long on poetry and philosophy, and short on practical advice. By practical advice, I mean detailed information that the average practitioner could use right here and now to improve the quality of his or her practice. Oftentimes too, the practical advice that is given is “bad advice,” at least when measured against modern standards. A prime example is the exhortation not to drink fluids before or during practice. This bit of advice routinely turns up in Chinese boxing classics or training manuals. In Taiwan, a very hot and humid country, I see it followed by practitioners who cite the classics as their reference. In Taiwan, I also see practitioners faint from dehydration after following this advice of the classics.

## MODERN AUTHORS MAY HAVE MORE TO SAY

I will now risk excommunication and utter a “Chinese boxing heresy”: many modern authors have more to say of practical value than do the masters and classics of old. For example, I practice xingyiquan. If I had to choose, strictly for the purposes of improving my practice, between owning Sun Lu Tang’s book or any of a number of modern books on xingyiquan, I would take the modern books. There have been a number

of xingyiquan books released on both the Mainland and on Taiwan in the last thirty years that are very fine, very detailed books. They far surpass the classics in their practical discussions of how to improve one's practice.

There are a number of reasons for this. As mentioned earlier, most of the Chinese boxing classics and training manuals are long on philosophy but short on practical advice. For example, large sections of Sun Lu Tang's book are devoted to showing how the practice of xingyiquan ties in with Taoist cosmology. While interesting from a historical or philosophical standpoint, the discussion does little to improve one's xingyiquan.

Another reason that modern Chinese boxing texts are more useful is that oftentimes the classics devote large amounts of text to vague discussions of intrinsic energy, or *qi* (Kennedy, Chi, the "X" Factor., 2001). However intellectually interesting, as a practical matter such discussions do little to improve one's daily practice.

A third reason is that the classics often do not provide complete information about the actual mechanics. By mechanics I mean does the hand or foot move first, or at the same time? That sort of "timing information" is critical, but often overlooked in old texts.

In short, old does not automatically equal better or best.

## CLASSICAL BLUES

It has not been my intent to disparage either the Chinese boxing classics or the translators who bring them to the English-speaking public. Instead my intent has been to point out two basic things. First, translating such text is quite demanding. Second, old texts, however classic, may not have as much to say as the eager martial arts student hopes they would say. Thus, my single recommendation in this article is that in future, translators of Chinese boxing classics and training manuals should turn their translation skills to more modern texts that would be of more immediate value to English-speaking martial arts students.

## REVISITING THIS ESSAY NEARLY TEN YEARS LATER

Revisiting this essay nearly ten years later, it occurred to me that I should have discussed the economic aspect of translation. Good translations are time-consuming and the best professional translators are, by definition, paid to translate. The kung fu craze has come and gone, and the lack of an economic incentive to produce high-quality translations means that after one or two published translations, most publishers and translators abandon the martial arts translation genre and move to more lucrative areas of translation work.

To inject some hard numbers into the previous statement, most translations of Chinese martial arts classics published by commercial publishing houses in the United States net their author-translators only a couple thousands of dollars, and that over a two or three year period.

Given the amount of time that goes into any full translation, it becomes obvious that the translation team would have made more money flipping burgers.

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# ON THEORY AND MARTIAL ARTS

LeRon James Harrison

In her 2007 essay “Yet More Towards a Theory of Martial Arts as Performing Art,” Deborah Klens-Bigman wrote

[A]ny overarching theory will of necessity generalize or simplify. Any number of scholars will then gleefully point out exceptions, perhaps to the point of making any “general theory” all but useless. Given the enormous scope of martial arts practice, both on the human scale and beyond, I am not surprised that we have not seen some general theory, and I am even skeptical that such a theory can be discerned (Klens-Bigman, 2007, p. 4)

This statement, a response to my criticism of her work (Harrison, 2007), is perplexing. Is she rejecting every form of theory but her own?

In my critique, I provided no contrary theory. Instead, I was searching for a starting point to develop a theory.

My understanding of theory is different from Klens-Bigman’s. To me, theory is best understood in the words of Joseph Natoli

Theory is not a search for a preeminent ground upon which to ‘govern interpretation of a particular text’—govern practice—but rather a discourse interpenetrating other discourses. This interpenetration... questions the isolation, integrity, telos, [and] origin of established practices (Natoli, 1987, p. 10).

Using Natoli’s explanation, a theory of martial arts should

- Identify the connections between martial arts *and*
- Interrogate the separation imposed by martial artists on their own art and other arts.



Novell Bell (L) and Liang Peng practicing baguazhang in China. Photo Novell G. Bell.

**Abstract:** What is “theory” and how can it provide a different view of martial arts? In this essay, I argue that theory attempts to identify connections and differences, concepts that have yet to be discussed with regards to martial arts. I also lay out the beginning ideas of my own theory of martial arts by using the term “practice,” as discussed by philosophers Theodore Schatzki and Todd May.

**Keywords:** Defining martial arts, martial arts, “practice” as a theory; theories of martial arts

To my knowledge, this has yet to be done. As such, the absence of theory in my critique was a reflection on the state of theory in martial arts at that time as well as the absence of a starting point to create such a theory.

The “overarching theory” of martial arts is not a theory; it is better described, using the language of Martin Heidegger, as a projection of the interpreter’s fore-structures. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger posits that interpretations are projections grounded in what are now commonly called the “fore-structures of understanding”

- **Fore-having.** That is, the involvements in the world we have in advance of interpretation.
- **Fore-sight.** That is, the point of view we have in advance of interpretation.
- **Fore-conception.** That is, the concepts we grasp in advance of interpretation (Heidegger, 2008).

If we leave interpretation to our fore-structures, the fore-structures project themselves onto whatever we (the interpreters) are trying to interpret — in this case martial arts. This projection, which I shall call “interpretive projection,” is an imposition of the interpreter’s concepts unto the martial art. The interpreter’s concepts often are not ones that practitioners of the martial art would ascribe to. Meanwhile, “a search for a preeminent ground,” as Natoli describes, is a prevalent approach to practitioners looking at martial arts. This in turn leads to disagreements and arguments among practitioners. As such I believe it is something martial artists (and theorists) should try to avoid.

Heidegger presents a way to avoid interpretive projection. He explains that the

first, last, and constant task [of interpretation] is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves (Heidegger, 2008, p. 195)

In other words, rather than merely projecting our social involvements, points of view, and preconceptions unto martial arts, we should instead work out what fore-structures are inherent within other martial arts, and then analyze how these relate to the fore-structures of the martial art the interpreter practices.

Interpretation as describing the fore-structures of other martial arts as well as our own particular martial art falls in line with theory as described by Natoli. In describing theory, interpretive projection, and interpretation in the above way I must now restate the matters I presented in 2007.

**M**y critique, in light of what I have discussed thus far, was abstract in nature. To me, the ideas Klens-Bigman presented in her essays did not seem complex enough to deal with issues in martial arts other than old-style Japanese martial arts (*koryū*) or to be considered a theory. However, at the time of writing my critique, I did not have the terms and language to make this explicitly clear; now I can restate the critique's central argument more concretely. Deborah Klens-Bigman, despite entitling two articles "Towards a Theory of Martial Arts," is not developing a theory of martial arts. Among other things, she does not attempt to question the isolation among martial arts or try to examine and present the connections among them. Instead, what she is advancing in her articles is interpretive projection.

In her first article (1999), Klens-Bigman presents the elements contained within the public exhibitions of *koryū* as a fore-structure, and then uses these elements to identify similar elements in other martial arts. This is projecting the fore-structure of *koryū* onto other martial arts and is not trying to examine the fore-structures within other martial arts and relate those fore-structures to those of *koryū*.

In her 2007 essay, the interpretive projection is more particular and less comprehensive. That is, it centers on specific issues. One such issue is the term *jo-ha-kyū* (defined below) and Klens-Bigman's assertion that "the earliest references to *jo-ha-kyū* came from the writings of Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443)" (Klens-Bigman, 2007, p. 2). In stating this, Klens-Bigman is presenting information on *jo-ha-kyū* that is different from what other ethnomusicologists and scholars on Noh performance say: *jo-ha-kyū* originates in *gagaku* (雅楽), imperial court music rather than Noh. For example, Konparu Kunio, a Noh actor whose book lays out the basic principles of the art and devotes great attention to the art's aesthetic principles, describes the origins of *jo-ha-kyū* in line with the scholars and not with Klens-Bigman.

"Perhaps the most important aesthetic concept in Noh is *jo-ha-kyū*. *Jo* means beginning or preparation; *ha* means breaking and *kyū* means rapid or urgent. The term originally came from *Gagaku*, ancient court music imported to Japan from China, and generally it was used to indicate a three-part piece played at a gradually increasing tempo: *jo* – noisy non-beat entrance of dancer(s), opening part (introduction); *ha* – fine overall beat, gentle dance, middle part (development); *kyū* – rapid beat, rapid dance, final part (conclusion)" (Komparu, 2005, pp. 24-25).

In the face of a Noh actor describing his own art, Klens-Bigman is carrying out an interpretive projection. By ignoring other interpretations, Klens-Bigman advances the *jo-ha-kyū* used within *koryū* discourse and associated with Noh's usage during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), when it was used as form of infrastructural control. By this I am referring to the tactic of the Tokugawa Shogunate having the daimyō (feudal lords) build Noh theaters (*nōgakudō*) in their domains and stage Noh plays as a means of depleting wealth from their coffers,

thus preventing them from rebelling. This fore-conception of *koryū* practitioners is different from the understanding that scholars and Noh actors have of the term. Whereas theory would have one try to understand the differences between *jo-ha-kyū* as scholars and Noh actors understand it and as *koryū* practitioners understand it as well as how the differences arise (or arose), interpretive projection simply presents *jo-ha-kyū* as *koryū* practitioners use the term and never mentions the alternate significance.

I choose to work toward a more universal theory of martial arts.

**T**o begin preliminary work on the theory, I posed the following question: Is there a concept or term that martial artists use that can help describe the interconnected nature of martial arts? The answer is yes; the term “practice” can do this but only by incorporating insight from philosophical discussions of the term.

When martial artists use the term “practice,” they are normally describing the time spent learning, mastering, and refining the techniques of a particular martial art. However, philosophers such as Todd May and Theodore Schatzki describe another aspect of “practice.”

According to Schatzki (1996), people define both themselves and the social order by carrying out practices. But the “practices” Schatzki is talking about are not merely the learning and refining of technique that is so frequently associated with martial arts. May defines practice in the following way: “A regularity (or regularities) of behavior, usually goal-directed, that is socially normatively governed” (May, 2001, p. 8). What May is asserting with this definition is that central to practice is a knowledge best understood via the phrase *savoir-faire*. The literal meaning of this French phrase is “to know how to do,” and this meaning can be used to explain the first two aspects of May’s definition.

Practice, according to May, involves knowing how to do a particular activity. This know-how is the regularities of behaviors that open the definition. Acquiring this knowledge has an aim in mind (*i.e.* it is goal-directed), even if the aim is as simple as improving one’s capacity to carry out the action. This know-how also explains how the philosophical notion of practice relates to the practice normally used by martial arts. As May explains: “[K]now-how is the mastery of something that requires practice (in the sense of study and repetition) in order to be good at a particular practice” (May, 2001, p. 66).

In other words, by practicing, by devoting time and effort to mastering the know-how, one improves at the practice of the particular activity.

The conventional meaning of *savoir-faire* includes the ability to respond appropriately in social situations. This meaning captures the remaining two aspects of May’s definition. *Savoir-faire* indicates that an individual has an understanding of the right and wrong ways to interact with people in a given situation. In a similar way, May is describing practices as involving other people (*i.e.* being socially-governed) and having right and wrong ways of being carried out (*i.e.* being normatively

governed). The sense of practice that emerges from May's definition is normally used to discuss professions such as medicine and law; what May and Schatzki do through their discussions of practice is to provide a way to discuss other forms of knowledge as practices. In doing so, this notion of practice advocates seeing martial arts not in the standard isolated way but instead to recognize there is some connection among martial arts.

The notion of martial arts as *savoir-faire* (and by extension practices) helps explain how we can see martial arts as interconnected and why we are just as likely to see them as disparate.

Jacques Barzun presents the idea of knowledge as having two aspects, know-how and cultivation, writing

[K]nowledge may be put two uses: it may serve an immediate and tangible purpose by guiding technical action; and it may serve more permanent, less visible ends by guiding thought and conduct at large.... One is know-how, the other is cultivation (Barzun, 2003, p. 428).

Martial arts as *savoir-faire* in the literal meaning of "knowing how to do" speaks to Barzun's idea of knowledge as guiding technical action; it also suggests the idea that martial arts should not be seen in terms of superior or inferior.

Fundamentally speaking, there is no sense of superiority or inferiority among technical actions. Knowing how to ride a bike, for example, is neither superior nor inferior to knowing how to ride a motorcycle or drive a car; it is simply different from the other two. Similarly, the techniques that constitute the Chinese martial art of wushu are neither superior nor inferior to the techniques of other martial arts such as aikido, taekwondo, pencak silat, or capoeira; they are merely different. But this difference of techniques is something true of all styles. That is, the techniques comprising one style of martial arts are different from all other martial arts that are in existence. This co-presence of similarity and difference means, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, that

comparison is only possible from system to system... [and] what is commonly called distinction, that is, a certain quality of bearing and manners... is... in short, a relational property existing only in and through its relation with other properties (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 6).

In other words, notions of superiority and inferiority within martial arts emerge from the fact that martial arts are in relation to each other and interconnected. This relationship is often overlooked as martial artists privilege martial arts as *savoir-faire* in the social sense and the sense of the distinction that accompanies that *savoir-faire*.

Failing to see the relationships explains why there has yet to be a comprehensive theory of martial arts. A comprehensive theory asks us to interrogate and undo the current understanding of martial arts, and requires us to recognize martial arts as having both forms of *savoir-faire* – knowing both how to do and how to act -- and at the same time not privileging either knowledge or action. This represents an uncomfortable position, and as a result a comprehensive theory has gone ignored and undeveloped.

The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi (fourth century BCE), in a famous passage of the “Discussion on Making All Things Equal,” proposes that saying a person is one with the myriad things in existence and actually being one with the myriad things are two different things (Watson, 1996). Zhuangzi’s statement captures the problem that plagues martial arts research to date. To actually move toward a comprehensive theory of martial arts, you must first interrogate martial arts and examine the concepts that are projected onto them. Without this interrogation or examination, you will never succeed in producing a theory of martial arts.

## CONCLUSION

What I have done in this essay is lay out some of the tasks required to produce a theory of martial arts. Carrying out these tasks requires a deeper analysis of martial arts using philosophical insights from Todd May, Theodore Schatzki, and other thinkers; as such I cannot present a theory here in its entirety. But what I have presented suggests that to some degree the discourse on martial arts has become reified and repetitive. It is this lack of diversity of thought that has driven me to turn to philosophy. By drawing on philosophy and philosophical discussions of practice, I hope to bring new perspective and start a new discourse on the martial arts. Theory, therefore, is to me a means to reinvigorate discourse on martial arts and free it from its reifying tendencies.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LeRon James Harrison received his PhD from and is currently a lecturer at the University of California, Irvine. His research focuses on premodern Japanese literature, specifically Japanese court poetry and its interactions with Chinese poetics.

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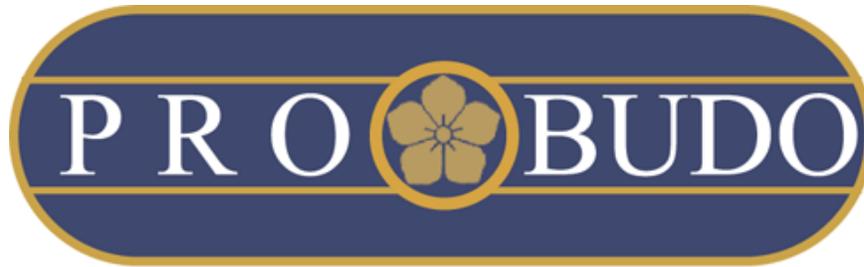
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## PARTING THOUGHT

All the laws of war boil down to these three fundamentals. One. If it needs to be killed, kill it. Two. If it doesn't need to be killed, don't kill it. Three. If you see somebody killing something that doesn't need to be killed, try to stop them. Any questions?

—Thomas D. Dicken III, in letter to Editor of *Marine Corps Gazette*, May 1995