

## CONTRIBUTOR

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# PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM IN TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS VERONIKA PARTIKOVA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a new perspective for viewing traditional martial arts in terms of psychology. It argues that 'traditional' martial arts offer physical skills, moral codes, rituals, roles, and hierarchical relationships which, taken together, creates the perfect environment for *psychological collectivism*. Psychological collectivism focuses on individuals and their abilities to accept the norms of an in-group, understand hierarchy, and feel interdependence or the common faith of the group. First, this paper introduces the theory of psychological collectivism and connects it with traditional martial arts known as wushu or kung fu. It argues that traditional Asian martial arts create situations strong enough to activate collectivistic attributes of self and suggests that practitioners' mind-sets can be different within and outside of the training environment. This kind of collectivistic interaction may provide one explanation for how non-Asian practitioners function in such training environments and how the traditional Asian martial arts can work as psychosocial therapies.

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I argue that traditional Asian martial arts create situations strong enough to help even non-Asian practitioners become more collectivistic and bridge the gap between their own cultural backgrounds and the background of the style they practice. The starting point for this hypothesis is rooted in and directed by the theory of *psychological collectivism*. This is the argument that tradition is constituted as a set of shared values, rituals, and structures. The traditional 'self-defence' martial arts of Asia (such as karate, wing chun, or judo) are known not only for their physical benefits, but also for specific kinds of behaviours and outlooks as well as rituals and moral codes. Cultural and psychosocial backgrounds significantly subtend the practice of martial arts itself, or at least influence the 'philosophies' of the various styles. In practicing them, practitioners from non-Asian countries often accept and produce behaviours and values that may be very different from those of their own background. Practitioners may indeed develop family-like relationships. Inside such communities, lineages, or schools, foreign students and teachers are well represented; they often adopt the behaviours, rituals, and norms introduced in the context of their training and repeat them in their own training practices. This paper explores one possible approach to this phenomenon. After defining the approach of psychological collectivism, its insights are used to explain some common practices seen in traditional martial arts. For discussion, I use examples drawn from the rich traditions of Chinese wushu (kung fu).

The term 'psychological collectivism' is used very differently than the commonplace notion of 'collectivism' that is used in reference to whole societies [Hui and Triandis 1986; Hui, Triandis, and Yee 1991; Jackson et al. 2006]. Unlike societal level collectivism, psychological collectivism is focused on the individual. It is characterised by the ability to accept the norms of an 'in-group', understand its hierarchy, share its resources, and consider the implications of actions with respect to it [Hui and Triandis 1986]. 'In-group' in this case refers to a community with a common faith, where its members are likely to feel some sort of interdependence [Markus and Kitayama 1991].

By contrast, psychological *individualism* refers to self-realization, prioritizing personal goals and self-interest, and taking charge of one's decision making with a willingness to bear the responsibilities and the consequences. However, although it may feel reasonable to understand psychological collectivism as the *opposite* of psychological individualism, they are not mutually exclusive [Triandis 2001]. An individual can demonstrate both tendencies, and because of this we must discuss its manifestation in specific contexts, such as those of traditional martial arts.

Recently, psychological collectivism has been connected with the field of sport research. This is because common sense suggests that there must be some degree of psychological collectivism present in team sports, as it is linked to better functioning in team sports [Dierdorff, Bell, and Belohlav 2011]. However, the concept of psychological collectivism is also important in understanding individual sport performance. Building on the fact that individuals are still surrounded by other people who, to a greater or lesser extent, influence them, Evans, Eys, and Bruner [2012] found that interdependence is an important issue even in individual sports. Moreover, psychological collectivism may not only affect the *motivations* of an athlete, it may also have a bearing on their *performance*.

Building on this understanding of psychological collectivism in individual sports, I would like to draw attention to its role in the traditional Asian martial arts. This is because these practices include physical skills, moral codes, rituals, roles, and hierarchical relationships, thus providing an ideal environment for exploration and examination. Moreover, it may come to be significant that the features of traditional martial arts communities may diverge significantly from the cultural background of foreign practitioners – divergence which may prove fruitful for future cultural and psychological research.<sup>1</sup>

To understand what it would mean to discover psychological collectivism in traditional martial arts, it is critical to look beyond the technical practice of a martial art itself. There are many warrants for doing so. For instance, consider the fact that traditional martial arts are among the practices often used in social work and social therapies – practices which are less about the literal or objective characteristics of the technical practices themselves and much more about something *else*, something *more*. My argument is that this 'something else' or 'something more' is intimately bound up with the matter of psychological collectivism.

Consequently, in this paper I present a theory of psychological collectivism within the context of the Asian traditional martial arts, using what I shall refer to for convenience as Chinese traditional wushu (although other names could equally be used) as my case study. The philosophical and social background of traditional wushu is explored

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1 The issues of psychological and cultural difference are pertinent in the case of foreigners who undertake extensive study of the martial arts and who may even opt to travel to the 'homeland' of their respective style(s). I find it curious that this phenomenon has been overlooked in the current research to date, especially since many research studies of traditional Asian martial arts use foreigners as their subjects [Nosanchuk and MacNeil 1989; Daniels and Thornton 1992; Twemlow and Sacco 1998; Zivin et al. 2001; Lantz 2002; Najafi 2003; Movahedi et al. 2013].

to explain how it provides a unique research environment. The presence of psychological collectivism in individual sports has already been established among researchers in the field; this paper presents a theoretical conceptualization of its presence in the Asian traditional martial arts.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

As mentioned, this paper focuses on 'traditional' Chinese styles, whether referred to as kung fu or wushu. 'Traditional' in this case refers to the connection between their history and their practical applications and goals. Tradition in this sense manifests in several ways. For instance, unlike *modern* wushu, whose practice is divided into *taolu* (form) and *sanda* (fighting), *traditional* wushu does not distinguish between these two specializations. In addition, my key claim is that the term 'traditional' is often strongly associated with additional values, such as character development, psychosocial benefits, and a strict moral code. This concerns the nature of practice, which differs from the largely sporting orientation of modern wushu, which emphasizes cooperation rather than competition [Vlachos 2015] and links it with lineage and community [Frank 2006; 2014].

In Zhang's approach, wushu is an umbrella term for martial arts in China (and connected with modern wushu). Kung fu refers to mastering a skill, in this case a 'profound notion referring to moral edification obtained through long-standing wushu training' [Zhang 2014: 156], which is nowadays used as a synonym for traditional wushu. However, Judkins [2014] has pointed out that 'kung fu' on the contrary holds an important meaning in terms of its regional historical and cultural uses, and sometimes traditional kung fu is strongly connected with ideas of its richness and opacity.

Meanwhile, Wetzler [2015] has proposed five dimensions which typically organize the meaning and characteristics of martial arts and combat sports. These five rather fluid qualities may be all included in a single style, or the style can be focused on only some of them. When exploring the complexity of traditional Chinese martial arts in historical, psychological, or sociological research, it is useful to remember that people may practice these fighting systems for reasons that traverse 'preparation for violent conflict' (such as self-defence), 'physical enjoyment and competition', 'performance', 'health care', and 'transcendent goals' (such as ethics or character building).

Traditional martial arts are not simply defined by the name of their styles or by the fact that they have long histories. Bowman [2016] has

even argued that the so-called long histories of traditional styles are often fractured and actually quite short. Yet, Bowman avers, *belief* in a long history is an important characteristic for many practitioners:

So if we go down to our local dojo or dojang or kwoon, or join the taiji group in the park, part of what we are searching for is the feeling of what it is like to become a part of an ancient culture – to fantasize an involvement in that culture, in its ancientness – and to feel its embodied knowledge, techniques, movement systems, and 'wisdom', in our limbs, in our movements, and on our pulse. [Bowman 2016: 924]

From the position of the researcher, it is not the practical dimensions of traditional martial arts that make them good ground for psychological collectivism, but precisely participants' feelings of being part of something special, exotic, culturally rich, profound, etc. What bonds practitioners together are the sharing of mythologies, body experiences, and interpretations of the art they practice. Fuller [1988] proposed that cultural values within martial arts are what generate the positive psychological development of the practitioners. This view was challenged by Columbus and Rice [1991], who argued that it is not about any *inherent* values (which they claimed were impossible for non-Asians to understand in the same way as their Asian counterparts, unless they shared the same relevant cultural or religious education), but rather it is a matter of how practitioners *interpret* them. In this argument, 'Asian' values and wisdom are produced by shared mythologies. But they still constitute one of the positive impacts of martial arts.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM IN INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

From the perspective of sports science, collectivism is a decidedly fresh topic. It is no surprise that most of the existing literature is concerned with team sports. For example, if the members of a team score high on collectivism, it is likely that they will function more effectively as a team [Dierdorff, Bell, and Belohlav 2011]. From this standpoint, collectivistic relationships are expected to arise in a team environment and not so much in the individual sport realm.

There is evidence, however, that our understandings of individual sport must be reconfigured. Evans, Eys, and Wolf found that 'elite individual sport athletes indicate that teammates are a primary source of motivation, social facilitation, social comparison, and teamwork' [2013]. Indeed, it is actually very difficult to find a purely individual sport, without any connection to other people. Athletes are always interacting with colleagues, coaches, rivals, doctors, and so on.

According to Evans, Eys, and Bruner, this interdependence divides sport into much richer categories than merely 'individual' versus 'team' sports [2012]. For their categories, they proposed it is more productive to focus on the type of task involved and on questions of whether group or individual outcomes predominate. In their terms, there are *integrated*, *segregated*, *collective*, *cooperative*, *concurrent*, *independent*, and *solitary* sports – and the solitary category is the only one with minimal interaction.

Of course, since this typology is based on competitive sport, it may be problematic to apply it to the realms of traditional martial arts. However, it provides us with a good base from which to work. Traditional martial arts might fit into different definitions based on a given practitioner's understanding of a given art. Whether the task is interdependent or not is based on the need for interaction during a competitive task. Sparring could be understood as being interdependent. In the course of the interaction, both sparring partners work to develop certain skills, though not necessarily cooperatively, therefore it could alternatively be identified as segregated. Perhaps, then, martial arts belong in the segregated sport category.

However, other elements of practice, such as body conditioning, breathing exercises, or forms practice must also be considered. For some practitioners, this may not involve any social interaction during their individual practice. Whether the martial art is categorized as collective or concurrent depends on whether the practitioner seeks purely individual or group progress. Regardless, though, traditional martial arts are never truly solitary given the strong sense of group membership.

The growth of a literature on collectivism in individual sports strongly suggests that it is time to test these same theories within the realms of traditional martial arts. Not only can traditional martial arts provide examples of every category of sport, they might also suggest additional cultural and historical variables, including specific kinds of relationships and contact exercise conditioned by solidarity. These factors make them an exciting subject for the further research.

## IT IS ABOUT THE GROUP

Singh and Solanki [2013] point out that, compared to cricket players, taekwondo practitioners work alone. These researchers were interested in mental toughness in a sport setting, and they suggested that collectivism may be the reason why cricket players had better results in motivation and in handling pressure. Accordingly, the first association between sport and psychological collectivism would be team sports –

especially as it has been demonstrated that if team members score high on collectivism then their team functions more effectively [Dierdorff, Bell, and Belohlav 2011]. In contrast, individual sports are often conceived differently. Such an athlete is aiming for success alone, in a swimming pool or on a track, without any co-players.

But for many martial arts practitioners, this conception is inaccurate. Although martial arts are not team sports, they are certainly not lone or solitary activities. Community is in fact very important. As mentioned, researchers have shown that 'elite individual sport athletes indicate that teammates are a primary source of motivation, social facilitation, social comparison, and teamwork' [Evans, Eys, and Wolf 2013]. In traditional martial arts, community plays a very important – and for Western societies even surprising – role for practitioners. Frank [2014] described how a member of a particular taiji community was ostracized because the other members (especially his seniors) did not agree with his 'exporting' of some teachings to foreign students abroad. Nonetheless, even when utterly rejected by the community, this teacher still understood himself to be a member and felt responsible for its future.

During his ethnographic fieldwork on taijiquan in China, Frank decided to study from several teachers. However, he noted that, 'in the end, perhaps it was simply the right choice for the anthropologist but the wrong choice for the student of taijiquan', which he concluded based on the fact that his decision was seen to be 'violating a fundamental sense of order' [Frank 2006: 66]. The student and teacher are tightly bound together in traditional Chinese martial arts communities, sharing both responsibilities and successes. Having more than one teacher introduces tension into such relationships, as it suggests that there is a lack of commitment or faith on the student's side. One of Frank's colleagues colourfully described such behaviour as acting like a 'martial arts whore' [2006: 66]. Frank decided to deal with the situation by asking for formal permission from each of the teachers to be taught by them all.

## METHODOLOGY THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM

Previous research has tended to oppose individualism and collectivism, sometimes even regarding the collective at the societal level, as society per se, rather than smaller units or communities within it [Hofstede and Hofstede 2005]. Hsu was one of the first authors who highlighted the role of individual characteristics without denying the importance of society, arguing that, 'if everyone acts as individualized individuals, no society is possible. If everyone acts in complete conformity with others there will be no differences between human beings and bees' [Hsu

1971: 24]. Hsu built his theory on the concept of personality and placed collectivism at the centre of the idea of the self.

This approach to psychological collectivism regards it as crucial to the personality of an individual [Hui and Triandis 1986; Hui, Triandis, and Yee 1991; Kim et al. 1994; Jackson et al. 2006]. Still, its manifestation does not necessarily differ from conceptions such as that of Hofstede [2005], who explained collectivism as building upon strongly connected relationships in contexts where, as in a family, the group is valued more than the individual and members define themselves with the help of the groups they belong to as 'we'. Such membership is usually long-term if not lifelong.

There is also a significant difference between in-groups (where people possess a common faith) and out-groups (where people are much less likely to feel interdependent). Family is a good example of an especially tight-knit in-group wherein parents take care of small children who are expected to return the favour later and take responsibility for caring for their aging parents. Contrariwise, individuals in an individualistic society would be supported by the parents in order to become independent as soon as possible, move away, and 'stand on their own feet'.

Strong relationships and connections (known in Chinese as *guanxi*) inside the group are crucial [Hwang 1987]. This reflects the typical style and lineage in the traditional martial arts, where one is recognized based on connections in the community. Enquiring about another practitioner's lineage is almost identical to the question, 'Who are you?'. Being a member of a group helps to define oneself amidst the collectivistic society. Defining one's self in this way provides a clear example for understanding individualism and collectivism.

In the individualistic society, one defines oneself as being unique or outstanding according to one's accomplishments and skills. By contrast, foreign practitioners may be surprised by how likely they are to receive questions such as: 'Who is your teacher?' 'What is their lineage?' And they will likely be equally surprised by how infrequently they will be asked such questions as: 'Who are you?' 'What is your name?' In my experience, I am frequently identified by the members of the Hong Kong kung fu community as my teacher's student. Knowing my name seems to be optional additional information, and not knowing it is not taken to be an indication that any pertinent information is lacking or an obstacle to interaction. Instead, such individualistic information is secondary. More primary is placing me as a practitioner in the system of my style. What seems to be of more interest than my name is my nationality, because local masters take pride in disseminating their art widely.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL COLLECTIVISM AND TRADITIONAL MARTIAL ARTS

Recently observed interdependence and psychological collectivism in individual sports leads to the following question: If we compare martial arts to individual sports, or even include martial arts within the category of individual sports, can we expect the same outcome? In my previous research [Partikova 2014], I was interested in what it means to be a traditional martial arts teacher. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, I examined the experiences of three Czech teachers. Four topics emerged: guidance, transformation of self, spirituality, and ego. When researching ego, I noted that teachers consistently spoke about the feeling of being part of something bigger, the 'kung fu family'. Their socially defined roles are bidirectional: they are both teachers and students at one and the same time. This duality firmly connects them to the lineage of the kung fu family.

However, they believed that if they could silence their own egos then the community would be able to work toward a common goal. Ego also serves as an entryway to beginning the process of self-transformation. Foreign students often used terms from Daoism and Chinese culture, feeling that they lacked words in their own language to express themselves. The kung fu family was also described as a rescue network, which takes care of its members and ensures that none of them 'slips away'.

Both the emphasis on membership (which may be of a very long duration) and the 'we' identity is consistent with a collectivist understanding of the self. The relationship between student and teacher and having a firm place in the lineage (which also indicates the individual's status) involves a great deal of interdependence.

## CASE STUDIES DEMONSTRATING COLLECTIVISM IN MARTIAL ARTS

In traditional martial arts, one is never an 'end user'. Even when students become teachers, they are always connected to those standing above and beyond. A newcomer first learns how to be taught by the more senior students, which may include accepting the realization that they are not 'good enough' to be taught directly by the teacher. Later, they will learn how to teach the junior students themselves. This may involve learning to navigate complicated relationships and expectations on both sides. It is therefore a cooperative cycle, where the whole group is connected throughout. Twemlow and Sacco [1998] noted that this kind of self-regulation is notably related both to the individual and to

the whole group and its functioning. By having older students help younger ones, the group learns how to cooperate from both sides – giving and receiving.

In 1986, Trulson ran a famous experiment with three groups of 'delinquent' youth: one trained in 'traditional' taekwondo (a Korean martial art), one in 'modern' taekwondo, and the last was a control group. 'Tradition' in this case refers to the way that the training was organized: the members were encouraged to cooperate with each other, were taught philosophical concepts, and self-development was emphasized over competition. His work was mostly concerned with aggressiveness; however, for the purpose of this paper, it is important to note that the traditional group saw improvement in their social skills, self-esteem, and their desire to keep practicing even after the conclusion of the experiment. (This research was further supported by Najafi [2003].) Richman and Rehberg [1986] even believed that it is such psychological impacts of training as these that have helped traditional martial arts survive into the present day.

Layton et al. [1993] noted that competition within the traditional martial arts community is actually often suppressed. Vlachos [2015] explained that, rather than competing, students in schools help each other instead, including the common practice of senior students helping the junior students learn. It is a way of giving back to the community.

Croom [2014] highlights the importance of being a partner and having a partner to train with. In his work, he points to the fact that sparring and exercises involving body-contact teach the partners to sense each other. They also perceive the pain of their partner and learn how to control their power. But their connection may become deeper, extending to the level of emotions or mood. Croom argues that such unique training situations make the relations between the group's members strong and reliable. Green [2011] even argues that these kinds of friendships are similar to that of an army or brotherhood. This is partially due to the presence of body-contact when perceiving each other and, at the same time, going through hard training together. Such shared experiences are likely to be restricted only to members of the community.

It is obvious that a school of traditional martial arts is likely to produce positive relationships among its members. As noted above, cooperation is preferred to competition. But Sato [2011] noted that this is true not only among students but also among rivals from other schools. His phenomenological research on kendo practitioners revealed a feeling of 'something special, like a stronger connection or strong (spirit) or something inside'. It was once again noted how having a sparring partner and being taught by older students or helping teach younger

students created a community. Respect plays a crucial role; therefore, rivals are not really considered rivals, but colleagues on the same journey. The community monitors one's behaviour and supports its members.

The very feeling of belonging to such a social group can be highly significant [Lantz 2002]. Lantz, who was concerned with children, noted that belonging to a training group may make a big difference for many of them. Moreover, belonging to a traditional martial arts group encompasses everything that I have discussed in the preceding; Movahedi et al. [2013] even reported improved social skills when researching the effects of training on children with autism spectrum disorders. As such, martial arts training can be implemented as a therapy for certain groups. Based on his work, Lantz [2002: 573] proposed that such activities could have applicability and value in the field of family therapies. He revealed that respect and friendship are among the final topics of the research: 'It is like we have a big karate family', said a mother of a young practitioner. She valued the relationships that the children had with each other, but also the bond that was created among and across the families as a whole.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **THE CASE OF KUNG FU**

When analysing how traditional Chinese martial arts communities work, we see that lineage is in a sense crucial (even if it contains fictional or mythological elements). Rules, rituals, and habits are passed from teachers to students. Each practitioner may be developing his or her own skills, but they are still intimately connected with the other people in the community. A student is taught by a teacher and other seniors, eventually becoming a teacher and passing the art to the next generation. This is how the art survives [Kennedy and Guo 2005].

Triandis defined psychological collectivism as the tendency to accept and understand in-group norms, value membership of such groups, and prefer consensus over getting ahead of others. Looking at the traditional Chinese martial arts community, its hierarchical structure is evident from day one. A student enters a martial arts school and is usually taught by the older, experienced students. Understanding the hierarchy of the group is a key characteristic of collectivism, and necessary in-group solidarity [Triandis 2001].

This hierarchy exists not only in schools, but also among the wider community of martial artists, and it is particularly visible within the style as a whole. Being someone's student automatically creates a

position inside such a network. Frank [2014] stated that the status of disciples is important in traditional taijiquan; people from outside are not able to access information inside the family and style. Belonging to a specific teacher strongly reflects one's status in the community and serves to open certain doors. These doors may contain a possibility to practice with senior practitioners, or access to specific knowledge. One's level of skill is also responsible for creating a position in a community; it is earned by long-term practice.

This may be no surprise, because the investment of time and the nature of one's commitment is highly important in kung fu. But I argue that possible degrees of psychological collectivism depend greatly on the level of acceptance in the in-group – i.e. how important this group is and how successful one has been in being accepted as a legitimate member of it. Griffith [2016] studied the Brazilian martial art capoeira and its community and found that having closer bonds with the local students and teachers fostered better learning opportunities. She described foreign students as succeeding in gaining senior members' interest when they showed high levels of dedication. She argued further that there is more than one kind of dedication: personal dedication, or cultivating one's skills, and community dedication, which enriches the whole group in addition to contributing to the practitioner's legitimacy among locals.

Triandis [1995] noted that people may be enacting different degrees of individualism or collectivism depending on their location in a social hierarchy. This may be especially important as traditional Chinese martial arts contain a type of kinship structure derived from their Confucian background. Simply being part of this hierarchical martial arts community may activate collective attributes of the self, even in foreigners.

To explain this coexistence of individualism and collectivism, Triandis [1995] used the analogy of cutting a birthday cake, which can be understood as a strongly collectivistic task: no one is expected to get a smaller or a bigger slice despite potential individualistic tendencies. Given these factors, the context found within traditional martial arts training might be significant. Foreigners, who usually come from very different cultural backgrounds, may be forced to adapt to the social structure of the practicing community and style.

When considering the rather extreme case of a European coming to China to practice a traditional southern style with a local group of practitioners in Foshan (a small city in Guangdong renowned for its martial arts heritage), one suspects that there must be some specific psychological adjustments going on. If the foreigner accepts the new social structure, such as internal acceptance of a discipleship tea

ceremony with its privileges and commitments, this does not imply a perfect fungibility where all relationships outside of this martial arts community will be treated with the same feeling and understanding. For example, these same norms might not be applied to simply having a beer with their employer.

## EMBODIED EXPERIENCE AND SOLIDARITY

Repeated bodily contact is the daily bread of many martial artists. Sparring (of all kinds) is one of the elements that makes traditional martial arts unique. The presence of body contact requires practitioners to sense each other and be sensitive to each other's pain and emotions [Croom 2014]. Moreover, Green [2011] argued that the common experience of hard training, suffering pain, and overcoming obstacles creates a unique bond. Participants in Sato's research [2011] reflected on the stronger connections between the school members, but also expressed positive emotions concerning their rivals. In their minds, they are all in some sense connected.

During my field work over four years in Hong Kong, I observed this myself in my own experience and in the responses of my interviewees, who often described themselves as 'sons' of their teachers and referred to the training group as their kung fu family. Their persistent practice and presence slowly bridged the communication gap – something that was also observed in a study by Jennings, Brown, and Sparkes [2010].

A long-term practitioner from Europe described to me how he was tricked into a *bai si* – a tea ceremony wherein one promises lifelong loyalty to the teacher – without understanding what was actually happening. This provides an example of how communities police their borders and try to bring new members under their control (including unwitting foreigners), as it 'officially' prevents students from learning at other schools simultaneously and obliges an explicit level of commitment to the group.

As mentioned, because of their (ideally) friendly solidary and communal interaction, traditional martial arts have been proposed as valuable resources for family and marital therapies [Lantz 2002]. However, this may not always be straightforwardly possible. During a discussion with a respected elderly kung fu master, who has an insight into criminality of kung fu communities during the last century, he said: 'I would never allow my kid to learn kung fu from a local master. But if it is a foreigner, then yes'. I was shocked by this: he is Chinese, the art is Chinese, yet he did not want his child to learn that Chinese art from a Chinese teacher. As he explained:

Many of the masters are connected to some underground brotherhood or even criminality. If my kid *bai si* to the master, he will pull him into the brotherhood. But you as a foreigner, you cannot see it, you cannot understand it. You only see the kung fu, so it is safe.

As he pointed out, it is difficult to judge the quality of the school and its teachers from outside, since there is no formal way of proving their education or credibility, such as certification. And since this paper builds mainly on the relationships inside the training community, it is important also to understand that an extreme type of such a community may be the fanaticism of an undesirable and destructive type of brotherhood. On the other hand, my previous work [Partikova 2014] found that strong connections between individuals across the kung fu community may constitute a larger influence than may be preferred, but these connections can also serve as a kind of safety net. The wider community observes or even controls what the schools are doing and how they treat their students. Therefore, we can say that these bonds are double-edged.

In theoretical terms, the bond between masters and students assists in creating strong situations that require the growth of collectivistic attributes by bridging the understanding of the individual, their interpretation of the situation, and the environment. Payne [1981] noted that Western martial artists like to use Asian terms and theories distant to Western styles of thinking. As such, specific details of meaning may well be lost in translation. But the practitioner's interpretation opens the door for accepting the new kung fu reality (group, practice, roles) if not some pure or identical understanding of Buddhism or Confucianism 'itself'.

Frank wrote in his notes about a Chinese taiji teacher how his foreign students saw him through the lens of their own interpretation: 'While I am not arguing that Teacher Zhang sees himself as a "knight-errant", his foreign students may reproduce the image in their Orientalist gaze' [Frank 2014: 6]. This is not too different from the 'Western Buddhism' of Žižek [2001], which facilitates primarily Westerners' need for an escape from the pressures of capitalism.

## CONCLUSION

Columbus and Rice [1991] argued that it is difficult for foreigners to truly understand the context of Asian martial arts and that what they develop is an interpretation based on their own cultural experiences. Nonetheless, traditional martial arts communities disseminate, transfer, and translate aspects of Chinese culture wherever they exist. Traditional martial arts create their own micro-cultures within whatever spaces

they occupy. Inside 'kung fu culture', there are different conditions than there are inside other cultural contexts – such as, for example, an office work environment. This culture is created partially by the type of people it attracts, common interest, the aforementioned images of Chinese culture and philosophies applied to the new frameworks for reality, and a family hierarchy.

Triandis [1994] argues that culture is a strong factor in orienting oneself. Similarly, Columbus and Rice [1991] argue that, in the case of traditional karate, training halls in the West 'appear to provide a meaningful activity that gives recess from "outside", personal, social, and work life'. The dojo 'stands for its members as a place where some aspect of their many-sided selves can become rooted' [Columbus and Rice 1991: 133].

Places where the martial arts are practiced can be for some their place of safety and harmony. They can be special spaces in which the larger world is left outside. In this specific environment, as Columbus and Rice [1991] noted, wealth and titles from outside are meaningless: one must forge a new identity and achieve new status through hard work and facing challenges and fears. It is then a protected place where one can strengthen, or rediscover, or recreate one's self. This idea of a 'protected island' suggests a possibility: one's orientation and structuring relationships inside and outside the training community may differ. That may mean that even if, for instance, one has a very problematic attitude towards authority, this may change completely when relating to the sifu, sensei, or senior student.

Using the theory of psychological collectivism may offer valuable insights into what takes place during traditional martial arts training. Such practices create contexts strong enough to contain collectivistic attributes of the self, which may be exactly that island of human interaction and comfort that people crave, even need. It may be one of the reasons why traditional martial arts are helpful in certain types of therapies. They provide an atypical connection and create a special zone within the life of a practitioner.

Having established the value of this theoretical framework, the next questions become not those of whether psychological collectivism is present in traditional (Chinese) martial arts, but rather what kind is manifest and to what degree. This paper has argued that psychological collectivism is likely to be found as one element of such practices and institutions. However, the long-term and wider transformative potentials here remain unclear. Consequently, the next step in research in this area would be deeper and more diverse forms of empirical study wherein more dimensions of psychological collectivism in traditional martial arts may be tested and new insights attained.

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