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COLLECTING MARTIAL ART KNOWLEDGE ON PAPER IN EARLY MODERN GERMANY AND CHINA THE EXAMPLES OF PAULUS HECTOR MAIR AND QI JIGUANG AND THEIR READING IN THE 21ST CENTURY DANIEL JAQUET

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ABSTRACT

European fight books form a large corpus of printed and manuscript material from the fourteenth century onwards, and they provide a detailed view of martial arts practices. Equivalent primary sources in Asia are less numerous for the early modern period. Both scholars and martial arts practitioners have shown interest in the rediscovery of European martial arts in the globalized world of the twenty first century. The recent developments about and around European martial arts studies sweep away the notion of Asia as the exclusive cradle of globalized martial culture, as was already challenged by a growing number of scholarly investigations about their myths and origins. This article reviews the interest in European Martial Arts in Asia. It focuses on the fight book of Paulus Hector Mair (1552–56) and on an Asian counterpart, the military treatise of Qi Jiguang. The German fight book proved to be of interest to a Japanese scholar and groups of martial arts practitioners. As such, it echoes recent interest in comparative studies about fight books stemming from Asia, Europe and the Americas, but also points out potential bias.

Within the field of martial arts studies, concepts such as ‘tradition’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘history’ have been revised and discussed [Bowman 2016a, 2016b, forthcoming], notably regarding collective memory and the connection between modern day martial arts practice and ‘a’ past [An and Hong 2019]. Building on these insights, the present case study reviews how Asian scholars and martial arts practitioners are receiving, or are dealing with, research about historical European martial arts. It focuses on the writings of Paulus Hector Mair of mid-sixteenth century Germany and the modern reading and practice of his works, and the work of a contemporary counterpart in China, namely the treatise of Qi Jiguang. This discussion highlights the value of comparative studies of historical European and Asian martial arts writings, both in their conception and reception, while also addressing the limits of such an endeavour.

According to the current state of research, the primary source material to work with is unbalanced. In sixteenth century Europe, close to one hundred primary sources are known, with a corpus rooted in the fourteenth century [Jaquet forthcoming]. In Asia, specifically China, only half a dozen books about Chinese martial arts are known [Wetzler 2016: 57]. Earlier texts are referred to in other sources as far back as the first century, but none of the original material has survived [Lorge 2018: 14]. The first Asian fight book matching the definition of European fight books were produced in the sixteenth century, in a different context.

SHOOTING, FENCING AND TOURNAMENTS IN LATE MEDIEVAL EUROPE

A large corpus of sources known as ‘fight books’ document the martial arts practices of late medieval and early modern Europe from the fourteenth century onwards [Jaquet, Verelst and Dawson 2016]. This specific literature focuses on the recording of personal fighting techniques through words and often images. It deals with various disciplines usually demarcated as: unarmed, civil (without armour), and armoured fighting techniques on foot or on horseback. Unfortunately, text is an imperfect medium for the transmission of an embodied practice such as fighting.

The fighting techniques dealt with are mostly associated with ritualized forms of combat within the realm of leisure (public competition, public display of skills) or more serious matters (duels of honour, judicial combat, self-defence), but not directly with military contexts [Jaquet 2018]. Other sources address those matters, such as military treatises, or

specialized publications such as tournament books or archery treatises.¹ None of the latter actually address personal fighting techniques (martial arts practice) as the fight books do.

Late medieval and early modern forms of combat are also documented in non-technical sources produced around public displays of martial skills [McClelland 2007]. Far from the battlegrounds, shooting competitions, tournaments on horseback and fencing competitions on foot were part of both courtly and urban life. Within the urban context, these events were organized by associations of citizens and supported by town authorities, not the aristocracy or military elites [Tlusty 2016a; Tlusty 2016b]. As an example, Paulus Hector Mair provides us with several types of administrative documents regarding the organization and the conduct of events like shooting competition, tournaments and ‘fencing schools’ (i.e., competition) in mid-sixteenth century Augsburg. These are augmented with additional narratives in chronicles [Roth 1917: iv-xlvi] and technical information about martial arts in his fight book.

COLLECTING MARTIAL ARTS KNOWLEDGE ON PAPER: PAULUS HECTOR MAIR AND QI JIGUANG

Paulus Hector Mair (1517–1579) came from a privileged middle-class family of Augsburg, a centre for the production of weapons and military technology for the Holy Roman Empire. He began his civic career in 1537 and later served as an accounting official for the city, taking care of the martial events for the town. The historian Kazuhiko Kusudo [2010] presents him as a sport chronicler, because of his numerous annotations of accounting books regarding athletes and martial artists. Paulus Hector Mair was also a martial arts practitioner, and a collector of weapons, goods and books [Mauer 2000: 107–32]. As he writes in, *Opus amplissimum de arte athleticam*, 1552–6, ‘I have applied myself to the knightly practice of the sword, and learned combat in various weapons, and been appropriately tested in several prizefights, acquiring such a love for it that I undertook to compose this knightly book of honor’ [trans. Forgeng 2017: 276].

1 For reference, regarding military books, see Leng [2002]. The so-called ‘drill-manual’, dedicated to the training of soldiers, only appeared later on, during the Thirty Years War. For reference see Lawrence [2009]. For references regarding tournament books, see Krause [2017]. Finally, little technical literature on archery is to be found in Europe. For references see Gunn [2010].



Fig. 1:
Wrestling with the longsword. Paulus Hector Mair,
De Arte Athletica, 1552-6. Munich, Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek, cod. icon. 393 (1), fol. 31v.
Reproduced with permission of the BSB.

At the end of the preface of his voluminous anthology of martial arts, the author states that he invested a great deal of money in his project. He purchased old manuscripts² and selected every technique himself out of them. He hired two skilled fencers to perform them one by one.³ In this process of experimenting and interpreting old fighting techniques, he also let the artists take notes for the drafting of the illustrations. These images are attributed to the workshop of Jörg Breu the Younger [Hils 1985: 199–200].

His works currently survive in three manuscripts, the production of which Forgeng [2017: 274] dates between 1552 and 1556. The most elaborated version (Vienna, ONB, 10825-6) consists of a two volume anthology of five hundred pages of large format (402x 276mm) and richly illustrated (454 figures painted with aquarelle

2 At least eight, listed in Forgeng [2017: 268-9].

3 Vienna, ONB, Cod. 10825, fol. 14v: **Daraus ich allain die allerbesten und der kunst gemessisten nützlichsten, gezogen, und dieselben durch zwen tapffere weidliche fechter, so mit mir lust und liebe zu der ritterlich kunst gehabt, unnd darauff nicht mit geringer belonung erhalten, vorbemelte stuck in allen wheren, wie sie inn disem Buch begriffen, maisterlich aus unnd ein gefochten** (From these I have chosen only the best, the most suitable to the art, and the most useful, and had them masterfully executed by two valiant combatants, who like me loved the knightly art). Transcription Dieter Bachmann and translation Forgeng [2017: 276].

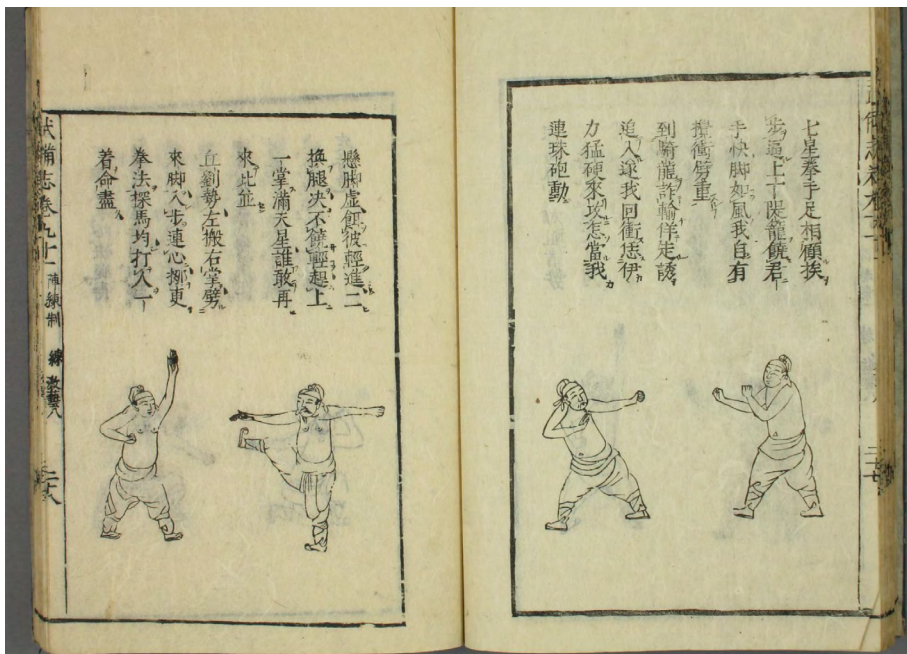


Fig. 2:
Boxing Canon. Qi Jiguang, *Jixiao xinsu*,
1560-1, reproduced in Mao Yuanyi
(茅元儀), *Wubèi Zhì* (武備志), 1621.
Retrieved from the United States
Library of Congress.

and tempera, decorated with gold and silver).⁴ It covers seventeen different martial disciplines from wrestling to armoured combat on horseback, but mostly deals with unarmoured combat on foot with a large variety of weapons, in the context of ritualized combat for leisure. More specifically, he focuses on the activities of fencing schools (competitions) and tournaments, even though the work also contains sections about judicial combat.

In explaining his motives, Mair tells his readers that he felt the urge to record these fighting techniques because the art of combat was neglected and mocked in his time.⁵ His costly project was financed by more than his own coins. The city tried and hanged him for embezzlement in 1579 [Mauer 2000].

Similar urges, but in another context, resulted in the edition of the *New Book on Effective Military Techniques* (*jixiao xinshu*, 纪效新书) in 1561, authored by a Chinese general of the Ming Dynasty. Qi Jiguang (1528–1588) came from a military family and enjoyed a brilliant military career during the Ming Empire's declining years. After having fought the Mongol invaders in the North, he moved to South East China to combat the coastal raids by *wokou* pirates. Assigned to the defence of Zhejiang in 1555, Qi Jiguang applied new theories of military organization, tactics, and equipment [Huang 1981: 159; Ma 2000; Guohua 2008; Ng 2014]. His experience and success in this theatre formed the basis of his book, which he published in 1561 (first edition printed by the author). A second edition came out in 1584, which reduced the initial eighteen chapters to fourteen.⁶

4 Two manuscripts out of three are described in Leng (2010: item n° 8.3 and 8.4). The Munich version (BSB, cod. icon. 393) is sadly not included in the catalogue but is described by Hills (1985: item n° 34).

5 Vienna, ONB, Cod. 10825, fol. 6r: **Dieweil ich aber merck, sihe und briefe, das dise manliche kunst des fechten, wie ander künsten mer, so dem geliebten vatterland, als für nutzliche und eerliche, den menschen durch die gelerten geprisen, und zu lernen furgestalt sein, von denjhenigen, so aus faulkait und hinlessigkait, der gutten tugenden und kunsten nicht achten, auch dieselben zu lernen kain liebe noch naigung, nicht allain nit tragen, sondern dieselben vilmer aus unwissender frechen, faulen leichtvertigkait, mit verachtlichen schmachworten, besudeln, und belegen** (But as I become aware and notice, that this manly art of fencing, as other arts besides, which profit the beloved fatherland as useful and honorable, and by the learned are praised for men to study, are by those who out of idleness and neglect fail to respect the good virtues and arts, and those that do neither love nor feel inclination to learn, not just failing to support, but the same that from an ignorant, impertinent and lazy carelessness use disdainful words of mockery to besmirch them). Transcription and translation Dieter Bachmann.

6 The work is edited in 1922: **Shang wu yin chu guan fa ring** 商务印书馆发行 (Shanghai: Han Fenlou). It is also available as a reprint by Taiwan Commercial Press (Taipei) in 1978, and more recently edited by Zhongyi et al. [2001].

Unlike Paulus Hector Mair, Qi Jiguang's life was dedicated to military service, and his motivation to record martial arts techniques flowed from this more practical perspective. He argued that a soldier in the middle of the battle would use only twenty percent of his skills. A better-prepared soldier, being able to use half of what he learned in training (reinforced by the practice of martial arts through drilled exercises), would be invincible [Huang 1981: 172–3]. Thus, alongside chapters on equipment, military tactics at sea and on the ground, we find content comparable to European fight books, where personal techniques (with or without weapons) are addressed. For instance, thirty-two hand-to-hand combat techniques (or stances) are briefly described and illustrated in the chapter *Quanjing Jieyao Pian* 拳经捷要篇 (Chapter on the Fist Canon and the Essentials of Nimbleness).⁷

Because of two completely different contexts of production, intended readership and use, both these works cannot really be compared with one another. The main intent of their authors, however, is similar: collecting martial arts knowledge on paper. Only the last section of the treatise of Qi Jiguang matches what the European fight books aim to achieve (inscribing, describing or codifying embodied knowledge related to martial arts).

EUROPEAN MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES AND PRACTICE IN ASIA

Kazuhiko Kusudo began publishing on the sport history of late medieval and early modern Europe in 1984, including six articles in German or English [Kusudo 1984, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2004 and 2010], and showed specific interests in Paulus Hector Mair's manuscripts. Although a few references to the rest of the corpus of European fight books appear along the lines, Kusudo did not publish research about other fight books. The description of his actual research project (*Examination of people and society through sports history*, Hiroshima University) states:

The author is the only researcher on the history of German sports in the Middle Ages. Since conventional studies on sports history have not examined sports in the Middle Ages in detail, the author's research has shed light, for the first time, on the fact that sports in the Middle Ages have a rich history.⁸

7 For a discussion about the martial content of the book, see for instance the extensive discussion of Ma [2000], 'Inquiry into and Discussion of Qi Jiguang's "Boxing Classic"'. For a selection of opposing views and different approaches to this source, see Henning [1995: 1–3]; Lorge [2012: 167–9, 175–9, 205–10]; Kennedy and Guo [2008: 176–81]; and Phillips [2019: 46–63].

8 Quoted from the project outline page, Hiroshima University, online < <https://hutdb.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/seeds/view/258/en> >, accessed January 2018.

Kazuhiko Kusudo is a pioneer of European martial arts studies in Asia, and he remains one of the very few Asian scholars publishing in the field today. The situation is reversed in Europe and in the United States, where a substantial number of scholars are researching and publishing on Asian martial arts studies.⁹

The same fact can be observed within the communities of martial arts practitioners. While Asian martial arts are broadly practiced and re-invented in the West, the opposite is true in Asia. The number of Asian groups practicing Historical European Martial Arts is growing but still represents a niche [Jaquet, Tuailon Demésy & Tzouridis 2020].¹⁰ It has increased notably in the last years.

Focusing on their own martial heritage, Chinese scholars have produced new research on Chinese martial arts [Henning 2006], but European fight books have not yet permeated their interest.

CONCLUSION TOWARDS A CULTURAL HISTORY OF MARTIAL ARTS THROUGH THE STUDY OF FIGHT BOOKS

Academic studies of European martial arts form only a small section of the emerging field of martial arts studies. If milestones are currently being reached in Europe and America,¹¹ it is still a curiosity in Asia, both on the scholarly level and for martial arts practitioner communities. It feels like a kind of twenty first century 'Europeanism'

9 Only studies oriented in humanities (history, cultural studies) are of interest for this article. For an overview and discussion of the field, see Paul Bowman [2015]. Several examples and bibliographical references are to be found in the scientific journal **Martial Arts Studies** (ISSN: 2057-5696). Substantial numbers of book reviews in the field and scholarly contributions are to be found on the academic blog Kung Fu Tea, edited by Benjamin N. Judkins (<https://chinesemartialstudies.com>, accessed 02.2019). There are larger numbers of studies regarding Asian martial arts studies in disciplines such as anthropology and sport sciences, not included in this review, lying outside of the scope of the inquiry.

10 For Japan, only a few groups can be found such as Vor & Nach (史實歐洲剣術会) in Taipei, or Castle Tintagel (キャッスル・ティンタジェル) in Tokyo, which is the oldest one (2008), but not only dedicated to the practice of European Martial Arts (communication with Chen Weili, head of the club, January 2018). These groups can be traced only with social networks (Facebook). For China and other Asian countries, a recent survey has been published, see Jaquet, Tuailon Demésy & Tzouridis [2020].

11 No proper reference work or exhaustive overview of the field are yet published. Some elements in English to be found in Anglo [2000]; Jaquet, Dawson and Verelst [2016]; and articles of the scientific journal **Acta Periodica Duellatorum** (ISSN 2064-0404) since 2013.

(as opposed to the Orientalism that characterises some of the interests in Chinese martial arts in Europe and the States).

As outlined in this article, the value of studies of fight books, and of the history of martial arts practice in general, is of particular interest for cultural studies and sport history. Analysing first-hand documentation of martial arts techniques allows relevant insights concerning the cultural shift of martial arts practices between the military context and other ritualized forms of combat in a 'civilian context'. More importantly, it allows us to understand the production of martial knowledge on paper in different societies as well as to circumvent and analyse different discourses about martial arts in its sociocultural context.

Furthermore, as proposed by Wetzler [2016],¹² there is relevant material in these sources allowing for meaningful comparative studies. The cases at hand, Paulus Hector Mair and Qi Jiguang, present different ways of recording embodied martial arts knowledge on paper from the same period but within different cultural spaces, along with choice of media, development of technical lexis and technical illustrations. Also, the authorial project, including the intended audience and intended use, is a critical point of comparison to study the cycle of production, circulation and reception of these documents.

The reading of these sources, however, poses similar issues for both the scholar and the martial arts practitioner. Gaining access to the intended meaning within such texts and images is challenging. Depending on the type and purpose of the inquiry, such endeavours may be considered biased or impossible, or even not scientifically viable [Burkart 2016]. In order to try to reconstruct them persuasively, not unlike dance scholars studying antique dance treatises, historical martial arts scholars are arguably in need of collaboration with practitioners in order to glean insights into the possible practical dimensions of textually recorded fighting techniques. Certainly, without practical interests and experimentation, the study of such technical primary sources remains limited.

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12 This article led to an international conference held at the German Blade Museum, Solingen in November 2017 (**Fight Books in Comparative Perspective**, proceedings forthcoming in the journal **Acta Periodica Duellatorum**).

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