

OPEN ISSUES AND ISSUES AS THEY OPEN

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An ‘open issue’ is different from a ‘special’ or ‘themed’ issue. Whereas the latter generates work in response to a specific call, an open issue is made up of papers that have been sent to the journal by scholars working on their own independent (or group) projects. As such, an open issue offers an insight into the kind of work that is taking place in a field at a given time, rather than focusing on work produced in response to a specific call, topic or theme. Of course, an open issue is only a snapshot – indeed, only a snapshot of work that falls within the remit of the journal and that has passed peer review and been completed within a given time frame.

This issue of *Martial Arts Studies* is an open issue in this sense. It contains an article by Swen Körner and Mario S. Staller with Benjamin N. Judkins, an article by Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn, articles by Maya Maor, Veronika Partikova, and Tim Trausch, as well as book reviews by Spencer Bennington, Qays Stetkevych and a conference report by Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istas, and Martin Meyer.

The first thing one might notice here is a high incidence of German and/or Germany-based scholarship. Körner and Staller (based in Germany), along with Judkins, have produced an in-depth and expansive study in ‘The Creation of Wing Tsun – A German Case Study’. Similarly, Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn offer a study of the ‘Key Factors in Career Development and Transitions in German Elite Combat Sport Athletes’. Tim Trausch is also a German scholar, although his contribution is not focused on Germany or German matters per se, but is rather a discussion of ‘Martial Arts and Media Culture in the Information Era: Glocalization, Heterotopia, Hyperculture’. (Interestingly, the author of one of the books under review, Udo Moenig, is also German, although he has long been located in South Korea and the focus of his book reflects the Korea-centric character of the early history of taekwondo.)

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Also prominent in the contents of this issue are studies of identity in relation to martial arts. Maya Maor offers a study of gender relations, hierarchies and fluidity in the article, 'Fighting Gender Stereotypes: Women's Participation in the Martial Arts, Physical Feminism and Social Change'. Meanwhile, Veronika Partikova explores individualism and collectivism in 'Psychological Collectivism in Traditional Martial Arts'.

The collection closes with reviews: Spencer Bennington's review of Udo Moenig's important 2016 monograph, *Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport*; Qays Stetkevych's review of the 2018 edited collection, *The Martial Arts Studies Reader*; and a review of the 8th Conference of the German Society of Sport Science's Committee for Martial Arts Studies, 'Experiencing, Training and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and Martial Sports', which took place in November 2018 at Ghent University by Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istas, and Martin Meyer.

Although this 'snapshot' or 'cross-section' of work taking place in the field inevitably says as much (perhaps more) about the remit and scope of this journal as it does about scholarship taking place independent of our involvement, we are confident that this collection does provide an important window onto the current areas and boundaries of exploration being elaborated and articulated within this still-young field.

Significant here may be regional matters. While discussions of the globalization of the traditional Asian martial arts have been occurring for decades, most have focused on events in North America. Less attention has been given to how the globalization and localization of these practices has unfolded in other areas of the world. Even their adoption in Europe remains understudied in the English language literature. This somewhat myopic focus has limited our understanding of the ways in which the martial arts function, and the sorts of social work that they can be called on to perform in the current era.

Moreover, there is also a need to turn inward and enrich our understanding of the personal effects of practice. Along with a geographic broadening of scope, papers in this collection offer detailed explorations of various ways in which martial arts practice impacts the identities that practitioners create and perform. The intense training environments favored by these practices not only grant students a set of technical skills. They can also create a new understanding of the self. These more psychological mechanisms are explored within the context of both the modern combat sports and the traditional martial arts.

As mentioned, Körner, Staller and Judkins open the issue with 'The Creation of Wing Tsun – A German Case Study'. This paper begins with a seemingly simple question. How can we explain the immense popularity of wing chun (also *ving tsun* or *wing tsun*) in Germany from the 1970s onward? It is all too easy to point to the popularity of Bruce Lee's films and the resulting 'kung fu fever', a phenomenon which was seen across Western Europe. Yet the explosion of wing chun practice in Germany was not matched by the art's development in other European countries. This anomaly guides the authors into a detailed exploration of Germany's post-war social and economic history in an attempt to understand the unique development of German wing chun culture. Their article draws on the theoretical framework advanced by Judkins

and Nielson's 2015 study, *The Creation of Wing Chun*, as well as systems theory and local historical sources, to illustrate which constellations of values, social structures and semantic strategies proved decisive in the creation of German wing chun.

The issue's second research paper continues the exploration of the German martial arts, but focuses instead on the complicated and multi-layered careers of high level competitors. Kristin Behr and Peter Kuhn draw on over a dozen interviews to understand 'Key Factors in Career Development and Transitions in German Elite Combat Sport Athletes'. After explaining variations in the career pathways of various competitors, the authors offer a number of policy recommendations to improve the development of martial talent in the German sport system.

The issue's third article, by Maya Maor, shifts our focus to questions of gender identity and performance within the martial arts. In 'Fighting Gender Stereotypes: Women's Participation in the Martial Arts, Physical Feminism and Social Change', Maor draws on both auto-ethnography and interviews to explore the many ways in which full contact martial arts training provides an environment that lends itself to specific types of transformative gender construction. More specifically, she hypothesizes that the structure and training environments seen in these practices encourage the formation of certain queer identities as well as the promotion of 'male embodied nurturance'. Both of these outcomes rely on a type of appropriation of gendered performance facilitated by specific structures found within modern martial arts training.

Veronika Partikova then provides an exploration of identity and psychological transformation in her article 'Psychological Collectivism in Traditional Martial Arts'. Returning to the realm of traditional practice, she seeks to provide readers with a new framework for thinking about the psychological effects of practice. More specifically, she investigates the ways in which individuals who cross cultural boundaries experience the development of 'psychological collectivism' within their martial arts training.

Psychological collectivism describes an individual's ability to accept the norms of an in-group, understand its hierarchy and experience a sense of interdependence. Partikova explores the limits of the existing literature through her own fieldwork with various traditional Chinese martial arts groups. She concludes that traditional martial arts training creates environments strong enough to activate collectivistic attributes of the self within individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Yet these values are not universally applied or completely transformative. She finds that a practitioners' mind-sets may be one thing within a training context and something else outside of it. This kind of collectivistic interaction may suggest ways in which the traditional martial arts can work in psychosocial therapies.

Tim Trausch brings together these two streams – the geographic and the deeply personal – in his treatment of mediatized representations of the Chinese martial arts. More specifically, he introduces readers to a paradox. While the popularity of the martial arts has been driven by media structures that stress the constant reassemblage of symbols over any one fixed moment of creation, thus undercutting the meaning and legitimacy of traditional state borders and claims of national ownership,

these same patterns also allow for the creation of new spaces and trends in which regional identities and resurgent ethno-national boundaries seem to matter more than ever.

These themes are explored in his essay, 'Martial Arts and Media Culture in the Information Era: Glocalization, Heterotopia, Hyperculture'. Readers should note that this article also exists as the Editor's Introduction to Trausch's edited volume, *Chinese Martial Arts and Media Culture, Global Perspectives*, which was recently published by Rowman & Littlefield International in late 2018. That collection as a whole seeks to problematize both the myths of a linear media development, in which new technological representations of the Chinese martial arts inevitably replace the old, and to illustrate how even the most globally connected communities are not immune from the resurgence of older, often discounted (cultural) borders.

Andreas Niehaus, Leo Istas, and Martin Meyer continue the focus on European martial culture and scholarship with a detailed discussion of the 8th Conference of the German Society of Sport Science's Committee for Martial Arts Studies, whose theme was 'Experiencing, Training and Thinking the Body in Martial Arts and Martial Sports'. This was the first conference in the series to be held outside of Germany. It was hosted at Ghent University on November 15-17, 2018, and its success underscores the increasingly transnational and interdisciplinary nature of martial arts studies, as well as illustrating the ongoing development of martial arts studies in and around Germany and German scholarship.

Finally, the issue concludes with two reviews. Spencer Bennington appraises Udo Moenig's highly influential monograph, *Taekwondo: From a Martial Art to a Martial Sport*, which was published by Routledge in 2016. Qays Stetkevych then offers a candid and detailed discussion of *The Martial Arts Studies Reader*, published by Rowman & Littlefield International in September 2018. His review will help readers to navigate some of the dominant themes and threads running through that collection. Taken together these papers and reviews expand our understanding of what martial arts studies has accomplished in 2018, and suggest the exciting developments that the immediate future is likely to bring.

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