

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF WUSHU

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Abstract Wushu, the collective phrase for the Chinese martial arts, is one of the most prominent traditional sports in China. Many other Asian martial arts (e.g. judo, karate) have originated from it. Apart from its wide variety of fighting techniques, wushu incorporates ancient Chinese philosophical concepts and religious elements. This paper analyses some of the prominent changes that have occurred in the form, content and functions of wushu throughout Chinese history. Wushu's development has been distinctly influenced by changes that took place in Chinese society at large. During several periods in history, China's rulers have used wushu as a political instrument, thereby attributing specific functions to its practice (e.g. safeguarding public order; maintaining and developing physical abilities and fitness; promoting China's unity and prestige; strengthening the dominant ideology).

Key words • China • martial arts • social development • wushu

China has a long tradition in sport and physical activity. While the earliest signs of Chinese physical culture probably date back some 500,000 years, many of the Chinese sports and pastimes of today appear to have been originated 3000 to 4000 years ago (Gu, 1990). Undoubtedly, one of the most popular traditional sports in China is wushu (Chinese martial arts). Estimates of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions have indicated that three million Chinese workers practise wushu on a daily basis (Wen, 1986). Wushu is also practised on a recreational as well as professional level and is an obligatory part of the physical education curriculum in primary and secondary schools (Krotee and Wang, 1989; Qu, 1990a; Wang, 1987). The major physical education institutes in China have their own separate wushu departments in which student teachers and coaches receive basic and advanced education (Qu, 1990b; Rizak, 1989).

As wushu has a long tradition, it can be expected that its development has been influenced by changes that took place in Chinese society at large. The present review examines how both the organization and content of wushu have been influenced throughout time. In addition to the study on the international literature that has been published on wushu, this review is also based on a number of interviews that have been conducted during a 3-month study visit to the wushu department of the Shanghai Institute of Physical Education in 1991. Since wushu is fairly unknown in the West, a description of its major characteristics will be provided.

Characteristics of Wushu

Many consider wushu to be the basic and most comprehensive form of the Asian martial arts (Draeger and Smith, 1975; Funakoshi, 1973; Guan, 1992; Williams, 1975; Winderbaum, 1977). Numerous other martial arts have originated from wushu (e.g. Japanese judo, karate and aikido; Korean taekwondo; Indonesian pencak silat). Wushu consists of a wide variety of fighting routines, which can be divided into five categories of exercise: (1) barehanded boxing; (2) use of weapons (e.g. sabre, sword, spear, cudgel and whip); (3) pre-arranged fights with two or three persons; (4) group exercises by six or more persons; and (5) offensive and defensive free-fights between two persons (Chinese Wushu Association, 1988). It is estimated that over a thousand variations or 'schools' of wushu exist among the various ethnic groups in China (Wang, 1990). The numerous schools can be classified by: (1) geographical location; (2) place of origin; (3) basic characteristics; and (4) technical forms (Wang, 1990).

Traditionally, wushu has been regarded as more than a merely physical activity, as it incorporates ancient Chinese philosophical concepts and religious elements (Gu, 1990). One of these concepts is natural symbolism. According to early Chinese philosophers, there is a physical resemblance between nature (or universe) and humans (Ch'en, 1986; Liu, 1988). It was said that humans would benefit if they imitated nature, as they would enter into a unity with it. Probably one of the most well-known examples of natural symbolism is the principle of *yin* and *yang*, which represents nature as two opposing forces (Liu, 1988). *Yin* represents characteristics such as female, soft, light, defence, whereas *yang* stands for male, hard, dark, attack traits. Whenever one of these two forces is stronger than the other, there is disharmony that leads to disaster, sickness or other negative situations. The *yin* and *yang* principle also applies to wushu movements and postures (Zheng, 1992). Techniques should be performed in balance and co-ordination. For instance, soft and slow movements should be preceded or followed by hard and fast movements, or low positions should follow or precede high positions. As Brownell notes, wushu was 'not perceived as an arena exclusive to virile young men . . .' (1995: 221). Probably one of the most important reasons for this is related to wushu's central principle, the *yin/yang* dichotomy, which is characterized by the alternation of opposing forces ('there is hardness in softness' and 'there is softness in hardness'). As a result, it is generally believed that if one is a master of technique, one is capable of defeating anyone. Consequently, during China's history several women were highly praised for their wushu skills. For example, Li and Du (1991) referred to Chu Nü, an expert in sword fighting who lived around 465 BC. Some specific wushu styles (e.g. *yongchun quan*) are said to have been created by women (Wu et al., 1992).

As indicated, wushu is also linked to religious practices. Buddhism and Taoism have had particularly strong influences on its development (Back and Kim, 1979, 1984; Draeger and Smith, 1975; Holcombe, 1993; Liu, 1988; Min, 1979; Pieter, 1987). Two of the most renowned wushu schools were located in religious places: the *Shaolin* school, which originated from the Buddhist Shaolin monastery and the *Wudang* school, named after its place of origin, the Wudang Mountains, which are regarded as the cradle of Taoism (Yang, nd). The influence

of these two religions on wushu is evident in the practice of *neigong* or 'inner exercises', which include breathing, mental, standing exercises, and related meditational practices. As will be described later, the significance of these exercises on wushu's development has been highly debated.

A variety of functions have been ascribed to wushu. For example, according to Wu et al. (1992), wushu practice serves the following functions: (1) moral cultivation; (2) self-defence; (c) curative and rehabilitative effects for various chronic diseases; (4) health improvement; (5) artistic effects; and (6) intellectual development. Furthermore, Canic (1986) indicated that the mastery of traditional technical skills in wushu can primarily be regarded as a means of spiritual cultivation. We now turn to how the development of wushu has been influenced by changes within Chinese society.

The Development of Wushu

Military and Civil Wushu

A number of authors maintain that two modes of wushu — military and civil — have co-existed in China (Gu, 1990; Lin, 1988; Wu et al., 1992). Wushu's first appearance probably dates back to the Shang dynasty (1600–1066 BC) (Li and Du, 1991) when it was known either as *wuyong* (military valour) or *wuyi* (military skill), referring to the specific military purpose of the movements and techniques (Gu, 1990). China's turbulent military past has undoubtedly contributed to the 'refinement' of different fighting techniques. Archery, fencing, boxing, wrestling and the use of swords and long weapons were developed to meet the different needs on the battlefield (Gu, 1990). These skills were known as the '18 kinds of military skills'. Wushu skills were highly praised during specific periods of Chinese history. For example, during the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), weapon play was common among the military and scholars, but rare among the people (Lin, 1988). Wearing a sword was an indication of cultural and artistic refinement (Wu et al., 1992). During the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907), military officers were primarily selected according to their wushu skills (Gu, 1990). With the introduction of firearms in battle at the end of the Song dynasty (AD 960–1279), wushu's military importance gradually diminished. However, wushu's popularity within the Chinese military did not disappear and it remained part of the combat training and health regimes of soldiers. Moreover, classical books on traditional warfare (e.g. the 2000-year-old Sun Wu's *The Art of War*) have always been highly regarded by the Chinese army (Needham and Yates, 1994; Pegg, 1993). Also, as Gu (1990) reported, through the importance that was attached to the inclusion of military exercises in physical education programmes, the public school system has also played an important role in the preservation of wushu.

Even though the military form of wushu declined in importance, the civil variant flourished as a means of self-defence, a way to stay fit, and as a form of popular entertainment during folk or theatrical festivals (Holcombe, 1992). In fact, it was from these modes of participation that the name wushu (martial arts)

was introduced, thereby stressing the performing characteristics more than the military aspects. As a result of its grassroots popularity, civil wushu evinced myriad styles and schools. Some wushu forms (e.g. sword play) that had disappeared because of their outdated military value, became popular again as they were practised for health purposes or as a performing art (Wu et al., 1992). In fact, the majority of forms and styles of wushu that are practised today originated during the later Ming and Qing dynasties (AD 1368–1911) (Gu, 1990; Huang, nd). According to Liu (1988), the development and preservation of wushu has been greatly determined by the long-standing links between wushu and other cultural formations in China (e.g. philosophy, literature, art, religion, ethics and folklore). Lin (1988) indicated that changes in people's living conditions, such as the shift to a feudal tenancy system, played a pivotal role in the development of culture and arts, including civil wushu. While before the Song dynasty wushu was primarily practised for sparring and fighting purposes, later on, it was more often practised for health and recreational purposes. This shift occurred at a slower rate in the countryside, where class and ethnic contradictions were sharper and commodity economy was not as brisk as in urban areas. Thus, through its traditional character, which has always been deeply rooted in Chinese culture, wushu has been considered a folk sport and remained an important feature of traditional holidays and celebrations.

Shaolin Wushu

One of wushu's most important influences has been the Shaolin school, which originated in the Buddhist Shaolin temple on Mount Songshan at Dengfeng County in Henan Province (Wu et al., 1992). Although it is often indicated that Shaolin wushu was founded in the sixth century by the Indian monk Bodhidharma, who developed a set of exercises for the monks to practise after their long periods of meditation, according to Li and Du (1991), there is no real evidence that he actually stayed at the monastery. As Buddhism, an Indian religion which was introduced in China in the first century BC, advocates ascetism, non-violence and renunciation of worldly behaviour, it appears curious that such an important link exists with the martial arts. However, this can partly be explained by the fact that the Shaolin monks practised Chan Buddhism, a specific sect that is more tolerant to worldly behaviour (Xing, 1985). According to Xing, the temple's geographical location and specific historical circumstances also contributed to the development of Shaolin wushu:

[The] Shaolin Temple, with its tolerant atmosphere and picturesque surrounding, became an ideal haven for retired generals, malcontents and refugees from the law from all over the country. Before embracing the faith, however, most of these people were recognized wushu experts. As they came together, they had the opportunity to trade special skills, and gradually Shaolin wushu became considerably more mature and refined. (Xing, 1985: 17)

Originally, Buddhism was not well received in China as it did not fit with the prevailing ideology (Zürcher, 1984). For example, monastery life was regarded as 'unproductive' and did not enable the fulfilment of the highly valued family obligations. However, Buddhism gradually gained popularity and by the late Sui

and early Tang dynasty (AD 589–906), it even received official government support, resulting in the donation of land to some monasteries (Zürcher, 1984). The Shaolin temple was also granted property, which according to Xing (1985) was another factor that led to the development of Shaolin wushu in that the monks had to protect their property against bandits:

Such imperial graciousness knocked the bottom out of the basic Buddhist tenet that 'all forms of life are equal', and turned the monks into something of a parasitic class dependent on the leasing of land and housing for a living. Inevitably, Shaolin monks found themselves involved in the whirlpool of political struggle. In order to protect their temple against banditry, monk-soldiers were born. (Xing, 1985: 17)

These monk-soldiers, who devoted much of their time to developing prowess at wushu skills, were asked on several occasions by the government to help them in their struggles against enemies. During the Ming dynasty (AD 1368–1644), almost all Shaolin residents were involved in wushu, comprising a powerful detachment of over 2500 monk-warriors (Xing, 1985). Xing also noted that the appearance of the monk-warriors indicated that wushu had become socially accepted and not just a matter of personal taste and interest. This remark probably refers to the low esteem the Chinese had towards Buddhist monks. Monks were often regarded as miserly and monasteries as meaningless and pernicious places (Zücher, 1984). According to Eastman (1988), it was even believed that excessive social contact with monks could taint a person's reputation as their morals were often suspect.

The extent to which the practice of wushu was socially conventional might also have been a function of the negative influence which Confucianism has had during specific periods of Chinese history on the concept of physical activity and sport. For example, Li Xue, a popular Confucian school of philosophy during the Song and Ming dynasties, respected literary talent and belittled military prowess (Gu, 1990). However, as Needham and Yates (1994) have pointed out, militarism was not always linked with an opposition to Confucianism, as popular Chinese military heroes could be regarded as Confucian gentlemen attempting to restore justice and moral order.

Secret Societies

Although wushu has always been popular with the public, ruling classes have also had a distinct influence on its development. During Qin (221–206 BC), Yuan (AD 1279–1368), and Qing (AD 1644–1911) dynasties, leaders prohibited the practice of martial arts among the people in an attempt to ensure their own position. Needham and Yates (1994) claim that the state also prohibited the mass circulation of military texts with wushu techniques, because they were regarded as 'dangerous' or 'immoral'. It is important to note that official discouragement of wushu practice often had the opposite effect and actually contributed to the popularization of wushu among the people (Lin, 1988; Staples, 1981).

According to Fonteyn (1981), the ruling class actively discouraged participation in wushu by shrouding it in religious mysticism and feudal superstition. This was a result of the fact that several political and revolutionary (secret)

societies had used wushu in struggles with ruling classes (Gu, 1990; Wilson, 1984). For example, political turmoil in the nineteenth century, caused primarily by the settlement of foreign powers, permitted secret societies to use wushu for fighting purposes, although its military value had clearly diminished. Eastman (1988) suggests that secret societies were divided into brotherhoods and folk sects, which differed both in form and function. Brotherhoods differed from folk sects in that the former were more politically oriented. However, as Eastman points out, their political orientation should probably be regarded as a facade for their real intentions, which involved all forms of criminal activity. The most well-known secret brotherhood was the *Triad Society*, which some believed was originally founded by militant Shaolin monks. Folk sects, on the other hand, were predominantly religious organizations which belonged to the *White Lotus* tradition and were based on beliefs derived from Buddhism, Taoism and popular religion. Folk sect members, similar to members from secret brotherhoods, came mostly from lower social classes and were often engaged in wushu and mystical healing practices. Although the folk sects' primary reason for existence was religious, they also rebelled against the government periodically.

One of the most turbulent folk sect uprisings — the 'Boxer Rebellion' — occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. This name was given by foreigners to a sect called *Yihequan* ('Righteous and Harmonious Fists'), known for their wushu skills and their claim to be invulnerable to bullets (Chesneau et al., 1976). Although the Boxers were originally opposed to the Qing rulers, in the 1890s they became prodynastic and antiforeign. Conservatives in the imperial court supported the Boxers in an attempt to strengthen their own position and to fight foreign powers in China (Hsü, 1995). By 1900, the influence of the Boxers had increased to such a level that, according to Hsü, half of the regular government troops had joined their movement. The Empress Dowager Cixi even ordered her court attendants (including the women) to learn wushu skills. However, the Boxers were soon defeated by foreign troops that were far better armed and organized. According to Brownell (1995), the Boxer Rebellion can be regarded as the last occasion on which wushu was used as a means of rebellion.

Wushu and Chinese Nationalism

Despite resisting incursions by foreigners (e.g. the Taiping and Boxer Rebellions), western ideas began to infiltrate China by the end of the nineteenth century (Rodzinski, 1984). Consequently, western sports were introduced and traditional sports declined in popularity (Wang, 1989). Western military training drills and German gymnastics were introduced to the army and schools, thereby replacing wushu and other traditional military sports. Brownell (1995) indicates that at the same time that western sports were being instituted in schools, wushu was undergoing a transformation and revival. On the one hand, western (modern) sports were welcomed by reformers and revolutionaries in their attempt to break with the traditions of China's imperial past. On the other hand, traditionalists perceived wushu as an essentially Chinese cultural form which could help to define national identity. Thus, Brownell (1995: 51–2) suggests that a 'dual pattern in body culture' developed. This duality in body culture was situated in

the more general *New Culture Movement* against traditional culture, in which Confucian ethics and superstition were denounced and acceptance of western science and democracy was advocated.

In 1912, imperial China had become a republic, western influence had decreased and Chinese nationalism flourished. Three years later the Chinese Department of Education ordered schools to add wushu to their physical education classes (Lin, 1992). This regime, which became known as the 'national formal gymnastics', 'Chinese gymnastics' and 'New Wushu', consisted of compulsory exercises adopted from separate wushu movements (Gu, 1990). According to Lin (1992), this variant combined traditional practices with techniques derived from western physical education.

Proponents of the New Culture Movement opposed the new wushu because of its traditional form and content, especially its feudal superstitions (Wang, 1989). The ancient practice of *jingzuo* (i.e. the technique of quiet meditation or 'sitting still') as a means of preserving health was particularly singled out by the Movement, as it allegedly encouraged passivity, which they regarded as one of the corrupt characteristics of feudalism (Brownell, 1995). As alluded to earlier, Chinese concepts of the body were greatly influenced by Confucianist, Buddhist and Taoist doctrines. As a result, morality and contemplation were highly praised, while physical activity was discouraged to the extent that China was referred to as the 'Sick Man of the Far East' (Gu, 1990). Consequently, the practice of *jingzuo* as a means of health preservation could be regarded as an important element of the highly respected quiet, studious, contemplative life. One of the most well-known publications criticizing *jingzuo* was Mao Zedong's early paper 'A study of Physical Culture', which was published in 1917 (Schram, 1972). Mao strongly emphasized the importance of physical training in obtaining a healthy body and, consequently, a healthy nation.

In the 1920s, wushu experienced another revival when the Nationalistic Guomintang movement started to use wushu as a way of promoting 'people's sport', which combined traditional Chinese patriotism with paramilitaristic sports. Wang (1989) claims that the concept of people's sport, which was based on German and Italian models, led to the founding of the first traditional Chinese wushu school for teachers in 1933. In 1928 wushu was renamed in *Guoshu* (or national art), stressing the effort of the Chinese to promote nationalism through the martial arts (Draeger and Smith, 1975). Draeger and Smith (1975) also indicated that well-publicized challenge matches against foreign fighters were organized during the 1920s in order to show China's strength to the world.

Early Wushu Competitions

According to Liu (1993), Chinese nationalism was also responsible for turning wushu into a competitive sport. The fact that western influences threatened the dominant position of wushu 'made the Chinese people realize that wushu must be turned into an international competitive sport if it was to hold its ground and continue to flourish' (Liu, 1993: 5). From about the mid-1920s, regular wushu competitions were organized, primarily by the Central Chinese Boxing Institute which was established in 1927 (Liu, 1993). These first competitions consisted of

routine exhibitions and/or free combat tournaments. The former involved performances of various styles of wushu, which were executed bare-handedly or with traditional weapons. Free combat (or *sanda*) contests consisted of full-contact hand-to-hand fights in which the participants were allowed to use hands and feet. Liu (1993) states that these early competitions were characterized by a lack of unified, clear-cut judging standards and protective equipment for the free combats. According to Brownell (1995: 54–5), the problems that arose by trying to fit wushu into a western sports model demonstrated the fundamental differences between the two modes of sport:

The martial arts developed primarily as an art of using the most efficient means to kill and injure. Western sports, on the other hand, were not oriented toward killing and prohibited the most efficient means. In boxing, for example, the use of the feet and striking vulnerable parts of the body are not allowed. The difference in the two types of sports, as body techniques and as public performances, embodied the world of difference between Chinese and Western cultural traditions.

Wushu in the People's Republic of China

Led by Mao Zedong, the communists won the civil war against the nationalists and founded the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In comparison to the (old) Republic, the 'New China' put much more effort into the development of sport (Ping, 1995). From the 1950s onwards, several key organizations were established, numerous sport facilities were constructed, and the communists gave a distinct ideological interpretation to sport (Ping, 1995; Von der Laage, 1977). Under Maoism, sporting practices were characterized by a disregard for the principle of competition and emphasis on the use of friendly exhibitions. Physical performance and collectively experienced skill improvement were valued more than winning. Competition was even denigrated as 'an antisocial form of individualism' (Hoberman, 1987: 163). This philosophy became better known through the slogan 'Friendship first, competition second'. Communist leaders argued that by practising sports, people would learn the prime lesson of how to serve 'the people'.

Modern Wushu

These interventions affected wushu in a profound way. The communists, who regarded the martial aspects of wushu as useless and outdated (Staples and Chan, 1976), altered wushu's form, content and functions. In fact, a 'new' form that we will call 'modern' wushu emerged. Through the efforts of the government-controlled State Physical Culture and Sports Commission, which was founded in 1952, various forms of wushu were institutionalized. A special committee selected the existing techniques and even added new (often theatrical or acrobatic) ones to augment wushu's role as a performing art. Emphasis was no longer on direct confrontation with an opponent, but on the development of physical skills (Staples and Chan, 1976). Modern wushu was given a distinctive ideological ('educational') meaning. For example, in its 1988 international teaching manual for judges, the Chinese Wushu Association referred to the numerous

'moral maxims' of wushu practice, such as placing public interest above personal interest, practising courtesy and keeping one's word.

Liu (1993) argues that these shifts influenced the organization of competitions. Shortly before the founding of the PRC, free combat competition was abolished and only routine performances were allowed. The first wushu contests that were organized after 1949 only involved exhibitions of various routines, and from 1958 contests contained two categories. The largest division consisted of exhibition events of barehanded and armed individual routines in which points were awarded but no ranking given. The second classification comprised four competitive events which included specific individual routines. Rankings were given in this grouping.

Fonteyn (1981) states that the communists actively fostered wushu, as they believed it would make the people healthier, thereby enabling them to play a far greater role in the construction of the new socialist state. Wilson (1984) asserts that the communist government wanted to use wushu to eliminate fighting among citizens. Unlike the prohibition of wushu among the people by some previous rulers, the communist leaders actively promoted modern wushu in an attempt to end its traditional secret aura. Sutton (1993: 113) is one of the very few authors who have openly criticized modern wushu:

In order to justify the new emphasis and to deprive potential rebels of their traditional identity as members of resistance movements, the historical development of the art has been recast so as to emphasize aspects that fit within the new society's version of history . . . the State is now promoting wushu as a potential Olympic sport, all of which removes the art from its grass roots origin where it combined many aspects of traditional Chinese culture that the State now regards as a potential threat.

Although modern wushu has become very popular in China during the past four decades, traditional forms still flourish (Staples, 1981). Many of the old masters who fled from the communists established traditional wushu in the Republic of China (Taiwan). Traditional wushu is still very popular within expatriate Chinese communities throughout the world. But even in mainland China there are still a lot of old-style masters, who teach privately and often under unfavourable conditions without any official government support. Sutton (1993) contends that a distinct difference exists between modern and traditional (private) wushu classes in China. For example, students of the latter group are expected to be more intrinsically motivated as they are not likely to gain materially through practice. However, the carefully selected wushu students of the official system can obtain better pay and living conditions if they perform well during competitions.

Recent Developments

Since the beginning of the 1980s, several of the 'traditional' characteristics of wushu have regained popularity in communist China. For example, a number of officially sanctioned seminars and festivals have recently been organized, in which the connections between modern wushu and elements of traditional Chinese culture were stressed (Kai, 1993; Tian, 1992; W. Yang, 1990). Also, a

considerable amount of recent state-sponsored scientific research has focused on the use of the internal components of wushu practice (e.g. *qigong* practice) (Wen, 1988; T. Yang, 1990). In 1981, the China Qigong Science Research Society, the first national institute of its kind, was established. Further evidence of an increasing tolerance toward traditional practices such as *qigong* and *jingzuo* is provided by Xu (1992), who stated that the practice of sitting quietly should be regarded as supplementary to physical activity in the context of modern scientific theory. Although the development of wushu has been primarily situated in China, it has also been introduced to other countries.

Globalization of Wushu

Wushu was mainly promoted outside China via: (1) the records of foreign visitors; (2) the migration of Chinese to other countries; (3) wushu action movies; and (4) government-controlled initiatives.

Foreign Visitors

One of the first westerners to write about wushu was Jean Joseph Marie Amiot (1718–93), a French Jesuit priest who lived at the Chinese Imperial court (Crompton, 1975; Hsu, 1983). Amiot referred to wushu as *cong-fou*, which was described as the art of physical exercises used to heal diseases (Demeny, 1909; Estradère, 1884; Leeeflang, 1977). *Cong-fou* clearly refers to *Kungfu*, a term which is widely known in the West. *Kungfu* or *Gongfu* (Mandarin) does not refer literally to the martial arts as it means 'work' or 'skill' (Wong, 1993). However, in the southern parts of China wushu is often referred to as *kungfu*. The association of the term *kungfu* with Chinese martial arts relates to its rigorous training practices. Wushu, on the other hand, literally means 'war art' and is therefore a more exact name. The communists discouraged the use of the term *kungfu* as it was associated too closely with the traditional training methods which they believed involved unhealthy hand and arm conditioning exercises (Staples and Chan, 1976). According to Amiot, *cong-fou* consisted of the knowledge of: various body positions; how to go from one position to another; and the proper breathing techniques associated with executing these movements. Amiot also referred to *cong-fou* when he mentioned the performance of old military exercises which were beneficial to mental and physical conditioning (Crompton, 1975). According to the Frenchman Dally (1857), Amiot's work did not get the attention it deserved from Europeans. Therefore, in his book *Cinésiologie ou science du mouvement* ('Kinesiology or movement science'), he repeated in detail the most important findings of Amiot.

Since Amiot's time, foreigners from all walks of life have spread knowledge about wushu around the world. More recently, the 'revival' of traditional wushu has coincided with the growing interest of the many foreign martial art enthusiasts who visit China, the majority of whom are unfamiliar with modern wushu. With China's opening to the West, many of these enthusiasts come in search of knowledge about the traditions of Chinese martial arts. Authorities have

encouraged these visits by providing special facilities. For example, with support of the State Tourism Administration and the Henan Provincial Tourism Bureau, a new training centre and sport hotel were built to accommodate visitors to the Shaolin temple, one of the most visited wushu sites in the country (Tian, 1992). Another example of this traditional renaissance was the reintroduction of *sanda* (free fighting) competitions in 1990, which had earlier been banned because they were deemed too violent (Bian, 1989; Jin, 1987; Wilson, 1984; Zheng, 1987).

Chinese Migration

According to Wu and Que (1990), the popularization of wushu in Asia can be partially attributed to the work of the famous Jing Wu Sports Association, which was founded in Shanghai in 1910 as a local club and later spread to other cities, as well as to several parts of southeast Asia. Also, more than 200,000 Chinese who migrated from the southern Guangdong province to North America between 1848 and 1900, took wushu with them as part of their 'cultural baggage' (Staples, 1981). A similar pattern occurred in other countries to which Chinese migrated (Hallander, 1986). However, it was not until around the early 1960s that wushu was taught to non-Chinese. According to Gast (1984), martial arts teachers were reluctant at first to share their knowledge with non-Chinese, who embodied the racist treatment that Chinese immigrants had received.

Wushu Action Movies

During the early 1970s, so-called 'Kungfu films' began being distributed on a global basis. Most of these Hong Kong-produced movies were developed from the traditional swordplay films that were popular during the mid-1960s (Glaessner, 1974). Although both types of film featured stories about knighthood and heroism during China's turbulent past, wushu action films focused almost entirely on actual fighting. The first wushu action movie to enjoy popular success in the West was *King Boxer* in 1973. Many other clones soon followed, with martial artist, Li Xiaolong, better known as Bruce Lee, becoming the most popular star of the genre. Lee contributed significantly to increasing the global popularity of wushu and also altered the image of the Chinese for western audiences. Hitherto, Chinese characters were played by western actors. Even Lee, who was a martial arts expert and film star in southeast Asia, was refused the leading role of Kwai Chang Caine in the American television series *Kungfu*, which dealt with the life of an exile from the Shaolin temple. Instead, the role went to an American actor, David Carradine, who had no previous martial arts experience. In his films, Lee played a defender of Chinese culture in the face of foreign prejudice and indifference. In his typical manic and dramatic style of performance, he often fought against western or other Asian martial artists whom he always defeated, thereby stressing the superiority of the Chinese.

In the early 1980s China started producing its own wushu action movies either independently or in cooperation with Hong Kong studios. The most well-known wushu film *The Shaolin Temple* was shot at the actual site and featured China's former national wushu champion Li Lianjie (Xing, 1985). A series of similar films sparked a Shaolin wushu craze both in China and abroad.

Government-controlled Initiatives

The first official appearance of wushu outside China probably took place during the 11th Olympic Games held in Berlin in 1936, when a group of performers accompanied the Chinese delegation and gave a number of demonstrations (Wang, 1989). However, due to Mao's 'closed door' policy, international sporting contacts were rare during the first decades of the PRC (Ping, 1995). It was not until the early 1970s that the Chinese communists started to organize and participate in international sporting contests (Rizak, 1989). Similar to the PRC's overall philosophy on sport, these international contacts were characterized by the 'Friendship first, competition second' slogan.

However, around the early 1980s the PRC began making special efforts to internationalize wushu. In 1990 the International Wushu Federation (IWUF), which embraced 38 countries, was founded. By 1995 this number had increased to 71 (Borkland, 1995). So far, IWUF's major activities have consisted of organizing international competitions and a number of seminars for foreign coaches and referees. Three official world championships have also been organized in Beijing (1991), Kuala Lumpur (1993) and Baltimore (1995). Although considerable progress has been made by a number of Asian countries with regard to the technical skills of their (amateur) athletes, it is expected that the (professional) Chinese teams will continue to dominate international competitions for many years to come (Hyden, 1995).

In their effort to turn wushu into an internationally competitive sport, the Chinese have put a strong emphasis on its traditional Chinese character (Liu, 1993). For instance, references are often made to wushu's long history and its many benefits. In his letter of greeting to the participants of the 1995 Wushu world championships, former IWUF-President Li Menghua (1995: 4) wrote that:

Wushu is steeped in history and is very popular. For centuries, the sport has been practiced and loved by many. . . . It exercised the mind and body to improve one's character and ethics. The benefits also include competition and entertainment as well as enhancing friendships. Overall, Wushu is a sport that has a great value in society. Wushu originated from China, yet it belongs to the world. Wushu will benefit mankind.

Since the 1980s, both the Chinese Wushu Association and the IWUF have lobbied for wushu to be included as an official Olympic sport (Liu, 1993). Following the successes of the Japanese (judo) and Koreans (taekwondo), the Chinese are also seeking Olympic recognition for 'their' brand of martial art. Wushu has been an official event on the Asian Games' programme since 1990 (Hyden, 1995).

Conclusion

We have argued that wushu must be seen as a highly complex and contested cultural form. Even within China, wushu has displayed myriad local variations. The genealogy of wushu has both influenced, and been influenced by, a multiplicity of interrelated political, military, educational, religious, scientific, popular, cinematic, legal, economic, moral and sporting ideologies. Con-

sequently, it has undergone a number of distinctive transformations in form, content and functions. As wushu continues to evolve, future studies could examine features such as its pronounced masculine ambience, social class differences among its practitioners, its uptake in western communities, the political machinations surrounding its status at the Olympics, and how it will be affected by increasing levels of tourism and globalization.

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