

Martial arts in area of mass culture – chosen examples of presence

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Key words: martial arts, combat sports, MMA, mass culture, media

Summary

Introduction. The theoretical perspective is taken here from the sociology of culture and anthropology of martial arts. The aim of this study is to describe and attempt to explain the manifestations of the phenomenon of martial arts in today's global mass culture.

Material and methods. Three complementary qualitative research methods were used: a long-term participant observation, content literature analysis, and analysis of the content of the mass communication. It was considered together broad thematic discourse of sources and studies.

Results. The results are presented in five parts, corresponding to the areas of occurrence of martial arts in popular culture: 1) film, cinema, and TV; 2) fashion; 3) sports, games and cartoons; 4) magazines; 5) symbolism. It was found the image coarsening of martial arts in the media and fashion of Mixed Martial Arts – MMA.

Conclusions. In the era of extreme commercialization of the most areas of human activity they have become popular martial arts – this form that well „sell” in the media. Hence MMA career – a brutal spectacle that has little to do with martial arts and this is hardly a sport. Moreover, with the dominance patterns of life „lightly, easy and fun,” and the pursuit of success, requiring many years of martial arts training are losing popularity. On the other hand, the pattern of warrior-hero is still popular.

Introduction

Generally, martial arts are the phenomenon from area of physical culture [1]. But, similarly as sport (sports event) they are present in mass culture [2]. They are in fact extremely spectacular form of physical or psycho-physical culture.

The theoretical framework for the research gives here the sociology of culture and anthropology of martial arts [3,4,5]. Aim of the scientific exploration were description and attempt to explain the manifestations of the phenomenon of martial arts in today's global mass culture.

It is interesting to approach the dimensions of showmanship and expression in the martial arts, as pointed out by some cultural anthropologists [6, 7]. In turn, other researchers suggest an association of media and martial arts with myth and archetype [8,p.75-86,9]. What archetype here is the most popular?

The authors have adopted the distinction between mass culture and popular culture, „**mass culture** is content transmitted by technical means of mass media (press, radio and television), which are characterized by, on the one hand, a big centralization of the process for granting and, on the other hand, highly fragmented very numerous and diverse audiences”. And „**popular culture** can be defined as content that – regardless of the medium – are easy to read, often very conventionalized, and contain clear elements entertainment and thus attract a large audience” [3,p.146].

'**Physical culture**' is defined as: „a relatively integrated and rooted system of behaviour in the field of care for the physical development, mobility, health, beauty, physical perfection and the expression of a man running according to accepted patterns within the community, as well as the results of that behaviour” [10,p.28].

In turn, the '**martial arts**' we mean: a historic category of flawless methods of unarmed combat fights and the use of weapon combined with spiritual element (personal development, also in its transcendent sphere) [11].

Material and methods

Three complementary qualitative research methods were used: a long-term participant observation, content analysis literature, and analysis of the content of the mass. Considered together broad thematic discourse of sources and studies [12].

The results are presented in five parts, corresponding to the areas of occurrence of martial arts in popular culture.

Results

Film, cinema, and TV

The martial arts film, as a separate film genre, is developed since the early 1970s [13,14,15,16,17]. In the scientific

discourse on this issue is not lack controversy. For example John Kreng [18,p.23] confuses the martial arts film to sports film (e.g., „Rocky”, 1976), and Marilyn Mintz [13] mixed this genre (martial arts film) with cloak and dagger films (e.g. 'Zorro'), and various others.

'The martial arts film' is characterized by the presence of martial arts training and fight scenes, content dedicated to the culture of warriors (*wu xia, samurai*), their ethos, etc. Once while content is merely cosmetic, and the film we find a few fight scenes using techniques from Eastern Asia, there are already not strict martial arts movies.

Thanks to such persons of cinema, like Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Chuck Norris and Jean-Claude Van Damme, martial arts film won the American market, Europe and the rest of the world. This caused a wave of popularity of martial arts on a global scale. In addition to mass-produced kitsch movies martial arts also appeared in more ambitious pictures of film-making [9]. In the film and cinema is exposed expressive and para-ritual character of many martial arts [7,19].

However, there has been a wave of popularity follower process of commercialization. Martial arts people took the trouble of business – the fight for customers in the martial arts market. As they entered this game rules of marketing and creation of products [20,21,22]. This applies both to teaching, examinations and award degrees, as well as promoting business names and the names of leaders of schools (clubs) organizations.

The media show most good-looking techniques - spectacular high throws, high kicks, fight a few on-one. This is not always real, but it has to sell well. Disciplines more photo- and telegenic are promoted. In addition, more dramatic spectacle sells better.

The brave warrior archetype, a positive hero, is a hallmark of the martial arts film. This is a pattern also popular in China (the film „Hero” with Jet Li) [23, 24]. Legendary masters of *wu xia* were individualists and adhere to a specific ethos.

Fashion in mass- and popular culture

Here as is shown in one of the weeklies opinion slogan 'boxing' – „lemmings run, hipsters box with. But not so ordinary, only in Thai. Thai boxing is as popular as jiu-jitsu. Of course jiu-jitsu also cannot be ordinary, but the Brazilian” [25, p.33]. Well, fashion also applies to martial arts. Fashion are varieties which give promise of faster mastery of dangerous techniques – combat systems, styles combining *karate* with *jujutsu*, and MMA (Mixed Martial Arts). Few are willing to for many years to carve technology of perfect systems and classical forms.

Galas, performances and shows, with the support of television and other media, promote the various martial arts and combat sports [16,26]. The aforementioned commercialization of martial arts phenomenon causes a departure from the ideals of traditional *Budo* and *kung-fu* [20,27,28]. TV promotes mainly the brutal spectacle of MMA. MMA in mass culture is a manifestation of fashion products brought to the low instincts.

Fashion for MMA is represented by numerous 'manuals', whose authors include Griffin Forrest and Erich Krauss [29], Martin Rooney [30], Gerhard Etlil and Fritz Treiber [31], and others. It is connected with fashion for *Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu* (BJJ) [32]. In popular books on this subject we find more pictures (photos), then contents for reading [33,34,35]. Is it really a revolutionary change? Perhaps more heroes of wrestling mats and boxing rings from previous decades were replaced by new heroes.

According to Bolelli, the aforementioned martial arts film and costume cinema of ancient gladiators, contributed to the popularity of today's MMA show [36]. But, is it not due desportisation of combat sports? [37, 38, 39].

The new "sport" needs heroes. They were or are created so subsequent grant masters and super champions. This is the Gracie family and their teacher - Mitsuyo Maeda [35, p. 252-261], Francisco Mansur 9 dan (style *Kioto Jiu-Jitsu System*), Machado brothers, and others.

Popularity of MMA, being a form of 'modern gladiatorship', is a phenomenon from the area of mass culture [40,41]. Gladiator replaced knight.

Sport contests and computer games, manga and anime

For sports fans or gamers these computer games or cheering are substitutes of actively practicing martial arts or combat sports. There is some identification with the characters, who in a symbolic way win for us next opponents, while they are fighting in a fairly literal.

Globalisation of martial arts is carried out mainly by sport competition and pageantry of this rivalry (more drama than aesthetics), in which media are participating [42,26,43]. Financial and organizational development go mainly for the Olympic disciplines, so that it takes the rivalry organizations of various martial arts for the dream of Olympic promotion. Judo and taekwondo have gained worldwide coverage, as Olympic sports, but at the expense of flattening their training goals – reduction of the „warrior's pathway” for sports career.

In current popular culture they are also popular Japanese „cartoon” - *manga* and *anime* - and computer games of martial arts [16]. Based on the manga and games are also created movies like „Street Fighter” with Van Damme, and „Kill Bill” by Q. Tarantino. But, in Japan, *manga* comics and anime themes are more often associated with kendo and the samurai tradition, than with sport. Cartoon „Dragon Ball” has gained great popularity. It was devoted entirely to martial arts. Songo is an invincible warrior who saves humanity. Quite trendy in the world of *manga* is also *ninjutsu* - the art of *ninja* warriors.

The presence of numerous sites on the Internet dedicated to martial arts, martial arts organizations, combat sports events, etc. it is also a sign of the time. Society for the digital age presents here, and promotes, on the other hand - seeks and finds them interesting content. They are available, for example, movies with free access on You Tube, showing the techniques of various martial arts. Photos and videos are also found in social networking sites like facebook.

Professional journals and popular publications

There are still many novels whose heroes are masters of martial arts, for example *wushu kung-fu* [24]. International environment of martial arts enthusiasts are buying colourful magazines – periodicals devoted to popularizing martial arts and combat sports [44,21,45]. Increasingly, they are devoted to fashionable today, MMA, but not only.

Groups of scientists have created a martial arts specialist scientific journals, dedicated for area combat sports and martial arts [46]. Including periodicals are published under auspices of scientific organizations, as Idokan Poland Association (IPA) and International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society (IMACSSS) [47].

The collapse of a series of commercial magazines shows fall of fashion in traditional martial arts. While, the emergence of scientific periodicals on this subject testifies on the advanced processes of inculturation, internalization and institutionalization. Probably the first Asian scientific periodical has been and remains the "Research Journal of Budo", the first European – "Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology" (formerly titled "Ido Movement for Culture"), and American, already not existing - "Journal of Asian Martial Arts" (continued in Spanish "Revista de Arte Marciale Asiatica") [46].

The symbolism in small graphic forms

Not only logos, badges and emblems of individual organizations disseminate the symbolism of martial arts warriors cultures [48]. Cultural traditions of individual nations and countries are supported by individual countries. In promotion of this symbolism are use stamps, coins and banknotes, as well as sports medals. These small graphic forms are the object of interesting studies. Small form forces to show in one of the most common symbol, to which traditions and which values the entity refers to [49,50,51].

Here we find a reference to the history and traditions of the countries of origin of martial arts, martial arts schools, ancestral coats of arms of samurai clans, and also the symbolism of the various cities and countries in which martial arts are now cultivated. Icon showing practicing or fighting judo, karate or taekwondo athletes, etc. are added to this. Visual culture is conducive to this kind of dissemination of contemporary hieroglyphics.

„External” styles, emphasizing the fight and effectiveness show, for example, fist – the symbol of hardness. „Internal” styles rather emphasize the principle of balancing energy, as in *taiji* circle. Sometimes it is emphasized mainly school name or name of the principal master. Classical school perceive its value in ancient tradition, modern – present themselves as the most effective in actual combat.

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Discussion

Mass culture with the cult of physicality, as well as violence [14,52], contributed to the return of the show fighting (MMA), related fighting gladiators in the arenas of the Roman circuses. Is this still a sport where the player's health is not sufficiently protected?

Tokarski [53], indicates that it may be due to the tendency to extremalisation in sport, while easternisation (rather superficial) and westernisation. But westernisation is limited here to establish rules and regulations of the brutal spectacle and of earning on that same spectacle. So departure from the principles of sport [38, 39] towards the extreme commercialization should be evaluated in terms of pathology [42,38].

However, the fact appreciation of martial arts as a means of improving efficiency in the management, today's economists have already noticed not only in Japan. Managers cultivating martial arts are the best [54]. In addition, it is difficult to overestimate the beneficial effect on the character and personality of the young long-term Budo arts training, taekwondo and kung-fu, if the educational process is carried out under the guidance of a true master-teacher [26,1].

Is there a process of easternisation – an import of Asian patterns [55]? What is humanism of martial arts and what is its meaning? Is „Ido” a movement for the promotion of cultures of the Far East? Well, no, it is more about Western civilization lost in the ethos values that can be considered universal [56]. In addition, IPA and IMACSSS promote the values not only of Asian martial arts, but also European (chivalrous) and in particular old Polish [57,58,59].

Brave and noble warrior, a hero of popular culture, is the archetype, ever present in myths and legends. It is also one of the archetypes of the „warrior of pathway” [16,8,p.88-90, 95-96].

Conclusions

In the era of extreme commercialization of the most areas of human activity they have become popular the martial arts form that well „sell” in the media. Hence MMA career – a brutal spectacle that has little to do with martial arts and this is hardly a sport. In addition, the dominance patterns of life „lightly, easy and fun” and the quest for success, requiring many years of martial arts training are losing popularity. On display are the dimensions of pageantry and utilities (fight, as physical violence), bypassing the broader axiology. However, on the other hand, the pattern of warrior-hero is still popular.

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Received: 27.10.2015

Accepted: 25.02.2016

