

EDITORIAL

Benjamin N. Judkins and Paul Bowman

What is the meaning of ‘forms’ practice within the traditional Asian martial arts? Were Bruce Lee’s movies actually ‘kung fu’ films? Was the famous Ali vs. Inoki fight a step on the pathway to MMA or a paradoxical failure to communicate? What pitfalls await the unwary as we rush to define key terms in a newly emerging, but still undertheorized, discipline? The rich and varied articles offered in Issue 3 of *Martial Arts Studies* pose these questions and many more. Taken as a set, they reflect the growing scholarly engagement between our field and a variety of theoretical and methodological traditions.

Many monographs, academic articles, book chapters, conference papers and proceedings that have appeared over the last year have been forced to address the question that Paul Bowman raised in the very first issue of this journal in 2015: Is martial arts studies an academic field?

Looking back on the rich achievements of the last year, the answer must certainly be ‘yes’. Yet, as Bowman reminds us in his contribution to the present issue [Bowman 2017], fields of study do not simply appear. They are not spontaneously called forth by the essential characteristics or importance of their subject matter. Rather, they are achievements of cooperative creativity and vision. Fields of study, like the martial arts themselves, are social constructions.

Over the next year, we hope, in a variety of settings, to stimulate even more systematic and engaged thinking about the various ways that one might approach the scholarly study of the martial arts. Given the diversity of our backgrounds and areas of focus, how can we best advance our efforts? What sort of work do we expect martial arts studies, as an interdisciplinary field, to do?

In this issue’s first article, Bowman turns his attention to the unfolding debate about the definition of martial arts [Channon and Jennings 2014; Wetzler 2015; Judkins 2016; Channon 2016]. This discussion is prefaced with a brief exploration of some of the failed precursors to martial arts studies, including hopology. Bowman concludes that efforts to theorize the orientation of martial arts studies as a field are likely to put us on a better pathway for sustained development than arguments for or against any particular definition of the martial arts themselves. While Bowman does not suggest that any single methodological approach should dominate the emerging field, he offers a strong critique of ‘scientism’ in all its forms.

Alex Channon and Catherine Phipps, in an article titled ‘Pink Gloves Still Give Black Eyes’, ask what martial arts studies can tell us about the construction and performance of gender roles in modern society [Channon and Phipps 2017]. Their ethnographic study focuses on the ways that certain symbols and behaviors, when paired with achievements in the realm of fighting ability, are used to challenge and rewrite an orthodox understanding of gender. This leads the authors

to conclude that future scholars interested in the subversion of gender should carefully consider the possibility that appropriation and re-signification may be critical mechanisms in their own areas of study as well.

Daniel Mroz and Timothy Nulty draw heavily on their overlapping backgrounds in Chen style taijiquan with a pair of separate yet complimentary articles [Mroz 2017; Nulty 2017]. Both of these contributions ask us to consider how various theoretical approaches, drawn from a variety of fields, can help us to pragmatically understand basic elements of the embodied practice of the martial arts.

Mroz begins his article with a brief discussion of the practical, narrative, theatrical and religious explanations of prearranged movement patterns (*taolu*) within the Chinese martial arts. Noting the shortcomings of such interpretive efforts he employs the twin concepts of 'decipherability' and 'credibility', drawn from the Great Reform movement of 20th century theater training. He advances a framework that points out certain shortcomings in the ways that we typically think about the practice of *taolu*, and goes on to suggest a new perspective from which their practice might more fruitfully be understood.

Following this, Nulty draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'embodied intentionality' to elucidate the distinction between *gong* (skill) and *fa* (technique) in martial arts training. After demonstrating the ways in which this approach facilitates the understanding of other concepts critical to taijiquan, Nulty argues that the *gong/fa* distinction outlined in his article is in fact widely applicable to the study of a variety of martial arts.

The articles that follow go on to examine the representation of the martial arts in various types of media, and their semiotic or discursive status. Jared Miracle draws on the realms of applied linguistics and performance theory in an attempt to reevaluate the famous, but ill-fated, 1976 bout which pitted the American boxer Muhammad Ali against the Japanese professional wrestler Antonio Inoki [Miracle 2017]. After reviewing a range of sources, including newspaper reports, eyewitness interviews and personal correspondence, Miracle concludes that the event should be understood as an example of robust, but failed, communication.

Wayne Wong turns his attention to new trends in Hong Kong martial arts cinema. After setting out a discussion of the action aesthetics developed in the films of such legendary performers as Kwan Tak-hing and Bruce Lee, Wong turns his attention to Donnie Yen's immensely successful *Ip Man* franchise. In discussing the innovative fight choreography in these films, Wong notes a new set of possibilities for the positive portrayal of *wu* (martial) Chinese culture on screen. Wong argues that the innovative recombination of images and approaches in Yen's films present students of martial arts studies with a new, and more comprehensive, understanding of the nature of the southern Chinese martial arts.

Lastly, in 'News of the Duels – Restoration Dueling Culture and the Early Modern Press', Alexander Hay attempts to bridge the gap between

popular representations of violence and our historical understanding of martial culture [Hay 2017]. Specifically, he asks what reports in the press both reveal and conceal about the changing nature of violence in British society during the 1660s and 1670s, particularly with regards to duels. Despite pervasive censorship, a review of historical newspapers suggests insights into how these deadly encounters evolved as individual swordsmen gave way to both firearms and groups on horseback. The social upheaval that gripped British society during this period was reflected in parallel transformations both in how violence was carried out and in how it was publicly discussed.

The issue concludes with reviews of recently published books. The first is Michael Molasky's assessment of Jared Miracle's *Now with Kung Fu Grip! – How Bodybuilders, Soldiers and a Hairdresser Reinvented Martial Arts for America* [Miracle 2016]. Following this is Colin P. McGuire's review of *The Fighting Art of Pencak Silat and Its Music: From Southeast Asian Village to Global Movement*, edited by Uwe U. Paetzold and Paul H. Mason [Paetzold and Mason 2016]. Then Anu Vaittinen discusses Raúl Sánchez García and Dale C. Spencer's edited volume, *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports* [García and Spencer 2014]. And, to close this issue, Alex Channon offers his review of Lionel Loh Han Loong's *The Body and Senses in Martial Culture* [Loong 2016].

Taken together, we believe that these articles and interventions illustrate how a wide spectrum of theoretical and methodological approaches make substantive contributions to our understanding of the martial arts. But, of course, the range of approaches present here is not in any way comprehensive. A considerable variety of tools and lenses remain to be explored and applied in martial arts studies. Yet, collectively, it is clear that these authors are advancing a compelling vision of the type of field that martial arts studies is in the process of becoming.

Our thanks go to all of our contributors, as well as to our editorial assistant Kyle Barrowman, our designer Hugh Griffiths, and all at Cardiff University Press, especially Alice Percival and Sonja Haerkoenen.

- Bowman, Paul. 2015. 'Asking the Question: Is Martial Arts Studies an Academic Field?', *Martial Arts Studies* 1, 3-19.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2015.10015>
- Bowman, Paul. 2017. 'The Definition of Martial Arts Studies', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 6-23.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10092>
- Channon, Alex. 2016. 'How (not) to Categorise Martial Arts: A Discussion and Example from Gender Studies', *Kung Fu Tea*, available at: <https://goo.gl/zdElcY>
- Channon, Alex, and George Jennings. 2014. 'Exploring Embodiment through Martial Arts and Combat Sports: A Review of Empirical Research', *Sport in Society* 17.6, 773-789.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.882906>.
- Channon, Alex and Catherine Phipps. 2017. "Pink Gloves Still Give Black Eyes": Exploring "Alternative" Femininity in Women's Combat Sports', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 24-37.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10093>
- García, Raúl Sánchez and Dale C. Spencer [eds]. 2014. *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports*. London: Anthem Press.
- Hay, Alexander. 2017. 'News of the Duels – Restoration Duelling Culture and the Early Modern Press', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 90-102.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10097>
- Judkins, Benjamin N. 2016. 'The Seven Forms of Lightsaber Combat: Hyper-Reality and the Invention of the Martial Arts', *Martial Arts Studies* 2, 6-22.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10067>
- Loong, Lionel Loh Han. 2016. *The Body and Senses in Martial Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Miracle, Jared. 2016. *Now with Kung Fu Grip! – How Bodybuilders, Soldiers and a Hairdresser Reinvented Martial Arts for America*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Miracle, Jared. 2017. 'Applied Linguistics, Performance Theory, and Muhammad Ali's Japanese Failure', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 65-71.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10095>
- Mroz, Daniel. 2017. 'Taolu: Credibility and Decipherability in the Practice of Chinese Martial Movement', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 38-50.
<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10094>

Nulty, Timothy J. 2017. 'Gong and Fa in Chinese Martial Arts', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 51-64.

<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10098>

Paetzold, Uwe U. and Paul H. Mason. 2016. *The Fighting Art of Pencak Silat and Its Music: From Southeast Asian Village to Global Movement*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Wetzler, Sixt. 2015. 'Martial Arts Studies as Kulturwissenschaft: A Possible Theoretical Framework', *Martial Arts Studies* 1, 20-33.

<https://doi:10.18573/j.2015.10016>

Wong, Wayne. 2017. 'Synthesizing *Zhenshi* (Authenticity) and *Shizhan* (Combativity): Reinventing Chinese Kung Fu in Donnie Yen's *Ip Man* series (2008-2015)', *Martial Arts Studies* 3, 72-89.

<https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10096>

MARTIALARTSSTUDIES.ORG

TWITTER.COM/MASTUDIES

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

EDITORS

Paul Bowman
Benjamin N. Judkins

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Kyle Barrowman

To discuss publication or to submit
a paper please contact:

martial.arts.studies@gmail.com

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch *University of York*
Stephen Chan *SOAS*
Greg Downey *Macquarie University*
D.S. Farrer *University of Guam*
Adam Frank *University of Central Arkansas*
Thomas A. Green *Texas A&M University*
T. J. Hinrichs *Cornell University*
Leon Hunt *Brunel University London*
Felipe P. Jocano Jr *University of the Philippines*
Gina Marchetti *Hong Kong University*
Meaghan Morris *The University of Sydney*
Daniel Mroz *University of Ottawa*
Meir Shahaar *Tel Aviv University*
Dale Spencer *Carleton University*
Douglas Wile *Alverno College*
Phillip Zarrilli *Exeter University, Emeritus*

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Martial Arts Studies is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.



The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Cardiff University Press
Gwasg Prifysgol Caerdydd

Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org

Journal DOI

10.18573/ISSN.2057-5696

Issue DOI

10.18573/n.2017.10091

Martial Arts Studies

Journal design and production by Hugh Griffiths