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The Noble Warrior: East meets West

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Cynarski W.J. [ed.] (2011), *Selected Areas of Intercultural Dialogue in Martial Arts*, Wydawnictwo UR, Rzeszów, pp. 172.

There is quite a touching moment at the end of Will Smith's recent, somewhat underrated, remake of the American classic film, "The Karate Kid". Smith's son Jaden plays Dre Parker whose mother is forced to move from Detroit to China in order to keep her job. Quickly smitten by a young Chinese girl named Mei Ying, he soon encounters the class bully, Cheng, who uses the traditional techniques of Kung Fu to inflict some real pain and humiliate the diminutive Dre. Desperate and frustrated, somewhat by fate rather than chance, Dre finds his way to Han, a maintenance man played by Jackie Chan, who is a true master of the martial arts. Han, himself, has a bit of personal history in the town having been unfairly disgraced by Master Li, the mentor of many of the boys in a high-profile martial arts academy. Master Li's students always win a prestigious yearly tournament and the best young men are once again preparing for this year's meet. Their methods, however, are sometimes questionable. Li has applied many western values and attitudes to his methodology. In contrast, Han transforms young Dre with a correct understanding of the martial arts technique and tradition – "Eastern" values that are about "calm and maturity and a harmony with life and self", not about the superficial values Master Li has been developing and promoting, "Western values" in one very real sense of that word. In the well-staged finale, Dre uses the techniques of Kung Fu correctly and, with honor, defeating his bully nemesis with appropriate dignity. In a striking conclusion, the young men from the academy walk away from Li and return to the true mentor, Han, the master who carries the traditions with true nobility.

This dramatic moment comes to mind as we reflect on "Selected Areas of Intercultural Dialogue in Martial Arts" - a series of essays edited by Dr. Wojciech Cynarski that comes from a group of European scholars who have been committed to the martial arts for over thirty years. This "monograph" has been embraced by the IPA (Idokan Poland Association) as the 14th volume in a series sponsored by the Lykeion Library and was produced at the University of Rzeszow in Poland. There is a very helpful picture of the group meeting in conference on page 73, which assists the reader in identifying and appreciating the evolution of the collegium's work over these years. To the American mind, the title of the book is a bit of a misnomer. The authors address the patterns, trends and dynamics that are important when the values of the East, incarnated in the martial arts tradition, meet western cultures. Some parts might prove useful in an American college or university setting. Dr. Cynarski writes a "Preface" to the series of essays which is quite clear and helpful in processing the content.

The essays by Dr. Cynarski and colleagues (Dr. Kazimierz Obodynski and Agnieszka Huzarska) and Professor Stanislaw Tokarski provide some insightful analysis of the evolution of modern Europe, and the popularity of martial arts within differing contexts. These essays would be very helpful to "seminar style instruction" in college and university settings, and could serve as an excellent stimulus leading graduate students to deeper and necessary understandings of the disciplines they will be embracing. A very thoughtful reflection by Dr. Miroslaw Mylik called, "The Duel", fits within this context, though it is placed at the end of the text as a companion to a short graphic piece about fencing which does seem out of place. We then find three essays on specific martial arts, all of which would be useful to coaches, and others who need to work

daily on developing precise technique. There are two essays that broach the topic of “cultural interactions” in modern Europe, and finally we have two essays that serve as resource summaries for scholars.

There are six essays that might provoke fruitful seminar discussion. Pre-eminent among the content-based essays are three where Dr. Cynarski serves as the primary author. In *“Humanism of the Today’s Way of the Warrior”*, Dr. Cynarski presents many keynote themes that serve as a foundation for the essays that follow. He traces the “ethos” of the true warrior, reminding us that his purpose is always about “strength of spirit, leadership and a true nobility, not violence and dominance”. After a brief reference to these practices within the Greek and Egyptian histories, he reflects that these ideals were embraced by the Christian cultures that then built the modern civilizations of Europe. Paradoxically, the ethos of Asian martial arts was then described best by language we associate with a “divine” ethos, a way of bringing God’s will into the world, a Christian perspective that makes the reader think about “just wars”. Dr. Cynarski then explains how these values spread throughout the academies of Europe, meshing to some degree with modern secular humanistic thinking: “The way of martial arts is not reserved for the representatives of particular beliefs, as the missionaries of Zen Buddhism try to present it. It is the method of achieving a higher level of health, inner harmony, morality, the ascetical form of education... The whole rest concerns the heart, mind, or soul of the practitioner and overcoming one’s own weaknesses or making moral choices” (p. 31). This sounds like a bit like the mantra that Jackie Chan’s character Han repeats over and over again to Dre in the recent movie.

In a second essay about *“...Psychophysical Self-Realization Systems,”*

Dr. Cynarski and Dr. Kazimierz Obodynski pass along the results of some contemporary research concerning the popularity of martial arts in many European cultures in recent years. We learn, simply, that many practitioners are involved to advance their own perceived well being, but others have a true sense of altruism and believe that they can better improve society through a deep commitment on both the physical and spiritual level. Some come to fulfillment through behaviors that improve themselves in external ways; others do so through behaviors that strengthen their spirit and advance society. The purpose of this article seems to be to summarize the efforts made recently to document the impact that the martial arts have on societies, whatever motivation might be in play. Dr. Cynarski and Dr. Obodynski summarize:

“However, sociology of psycho-physical practices or psychophysical systems of self-realization remains the only trustworthy conception...” (p. 42) meaning, we conclude, that our best window into these matters is through opportunities that we are able to observe in cultures that are rich in martial arts institutions.

Dr. Wojciech Cynarski and Agnieszka Huzarska contribute an important piece to the monograph called *“Activity of Martial Arts Institutions for Cultural Dialogues”*. In a sense, this essay helps us understand Dr. Cynarski’s title. We understand the dynamic and interactions that result when a good martial arts program is instituted and integrated into a culture. The authors remind us that European history was based in the ideal of the chivalrous warrior, he whose behavior must always present the best side of his lord. Sport, we are told, is “a social subsystem ... interrelated by mutual relationships with other subsystems and the system of civilization” (p. 57). Thus, the ethos reflected in sport may well then be or reflect the ethos of our societies. This process requires the foundations of a legal frame of reference, the possible internalization of what many might call “far eastern values” and a graduated system of organization and development. This essay serves as an argument to: “... appoint commissions of scientific research working by sports associations and federations of martial arts which would facilitate bringing closer sciences of physical culture, interdisciplinary theory of martial arts and training dojo practice” (p. 62). In short, all cultures would benefit a great deal if the martial arts were institutionalized and integrated into their cultural systems. There might be a bit more “nobility” in our behavior.

Dr. Stanislaw Tokarski, a former Judo champion in Europe, contributes two essays that define the ongoing interchange between the values of East and West. In the first of these two, *“The Dimensions, Conditionings, and Values for a Dialogue of Cultures,”* Dr. Tokarski, whose English syntax and style seem to translate better than most of his colleagues, establishes the thesis that the clash of cultural values often creates more moderate tensions than explosive events. We readily accept his premise that cross cultural dialogues are essential in the new “global environment”. The thinking of Mircea Eliade, an American anthropologist, then serves as the basis for much of his reflection, and helps us understand the nature of the bridges to the eastern traditions, on which he is an acknowledged expert: “One day the West will have to know and understand the existential situations and the cultural universes of the non-Western peoples – moreover, the West will come to value them as integral with

the history of the human spirit and will no longer regard them as immature episodes or as aberrations from an exemplary history of man. Western man is no longer a master of the world..." (p. 17). Dr. Tokarski then shows a breadth of understanding of this concept as it crosses academic disciplines, even using the thinking of Carl Gustav Jung and other contemporary thinkers to explain the nature of the ongoing and necessary integration of the meeting of East and West. This essay might be the first a professor would use with graduate students.

In "*Where West meets East in Martial Arts*", Dr. Tokarski uses the personal narrative form to tell us a bit of his own history as a Judo champion in Poland, and the fruit of his encounters over the years with Eastern masters. We learn that beginners in the West are not comfortable with the techniques of "dojo": the special skills associated with the release of natural energy should not "be given to anyone who is cruel". Be careful of the Master Li clones, which are always with us. Dr. Tokarski bemoans the "westernization of sports attitudes and training" and concludes that a loss of the true Eastern traditions can even have a profound effect on the Japanese economy and their national spirit, a country he has come to know well. We hear again the keynote theme that the "ethos of sport can become the ethos of the civilization".

An essay well suited for classroom discussion is Dr. Mirosław Mylik's "*The Duel*". There is a subtext in this essay, something unspoken and that exists in segments of society as he knows it, the author is aware that dueling, "even unto death" is held in high regard, even in the contemporary arena. This may seem like a strange premise to us, but Dr. Mylik develops an argument, very moral in tone, that any justification for these behaviors is "a means that can never justify the end". The author proclaims that his purpose is to "try to get to the bottom of the philosophical essence of the duel". In European history, the duel has served as a way of saving one's public honor, and Dr. Mylik wonders how this traditional approach fits with contemporary values and thought. It certainly might in many situations that come to mind. He comments that most moderns see the ritual as a relic, and reminds us that these attempts to save face were unknown in the Greek and Roman civilizations. The Catholic Church excommunicated participants in duels when they first appeared, and would refuse to bury anyone in sacred ground who had been involved in this ritual. Indeed, Dr. Mylik points out that the person involved in this challenge affirms his own death, and was accused by Church authorities of accepting a strange method of suicide. The essay has a strong moralistic tone and Dr. Mylik seems to be pointing

out that a contemporary mentality that affirms and supports the ritual can never be validated within this perverse way of defining "nobility".

The contributors have also provided three "How-To" essays that could prove valuable to coaches and teachers. The best of these is Dr. Chuchchai Gomaratut's "*Muay-Thai: The Art and Science of Thai Traditional Self Defense*". This essay has an excellent structure, a format that is well designed for the western mind. Its illustration is sharp and clear, and it succeeds in making techniques that might seem complex, simple and sequential. The strength and clarity of the images make the analysis useful to coaches and teachers working at all levels. Dr. Keith R. Kernspecht's "*The Complete Concept of Wing Tsun*" emphasizes the philosophy that generates the technique, and we might conclude Kernspecht's approach is quite comprehensive. The author begins with a very simple differentiation - the distinction between the operations of "proactivity and interactivity". This simple point/counterpoint serves very well to integrate the sequence of ideas that follow, both philosophical and technical in nature. A coach might use this essay, but would need to be a bit creative when demonstrations become appropriate. Lothar Sieber's "*Zen-Do Karate Tai-Te-Tao*" is quite comprehensive. Sieber demonstrates that he is certainly a "Karate master" and is very careful to show that the techniques, which he describes in a precise and clear way, can never really be separated from the philosophy of nobility that serves as their basis. Sieber connects some of what we know about Zen Buddhism to the practices of this form of "Karate".

Finally, there are four articles whose purpose is to assist scholars in various research endeavors materials that play to quite a limited audience. Dr. Cynarski and five of his colleagues (Dr. Obodynski, Dr. Gutierrez-Garcia, Sieber, Dr. Slopecki. and Dr. Litwiniuk) report on their ongoing work in the Czech Republic in "*A Report on the International Research Project No. 1 by the Idokan Poland Association (2003-2010)*". This is a comprehensive summary of their nicely illustrated and organized work. Dr. Michal Vit and Dr. Zdenko Reguli provide a well-designed article that reviews the literature about martial arts in the same Czech Republic. The piece is entitled "*Systemized Review of Czech Literature on Combatives and Self-Defence*". Jitka Cihounkova and Dr. Zdenko Reguli submit a piece entitled "*A Search of Literature on Karate Published in the Czech Republic*" which is quite a clear and well-illustrated summary of some of the same material. Mikel Perez-Gutierrez and Dr. Carlos Gutierrez-Garcia contribute a piece that summarizes much of the important literature

about martial arts within the traditions of Spain. Entitled “*Description of the Methodology used for the Preparation of an Annotated Bibliography about Asian Martial Arts Monographs*”, this piece, like the others has a professional polish, and meets its objectives quite well.

An American editor might have moved these well-done monographs to the back of the text, opening the presentation with the reflective, content-based pieces and following them with the very practical pieces about three of the martial arts. Another editor of this Lykeion Library series might even have chosen to lead with the monographs. The existing sequence of the pieces, however, proves adequate if not ideal. Bruce Lee adorns the beautifully designed cover of this well-produced book, but maybe future generations, needing a more recognizable icon, will take the image of Jackie Chan’s Han persona from the 2010 movie, and integrate it into the design in some way. There are many ways to catch the “spirit of true nobility” that we hope to preserve.

Szlachetny wojownik: Wschód spotyka Zachód

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, dialog, wartości

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest recenzją książki pod redakcją W. J. Cynarskiego “*Selected Areas of Intercultural Dialogue in Martial Arts*” (*Wybrane obszary dialogu międzykulturowego w sztukach walki*). W recenzji autor w skrócie przybliża zagadnienia zawarte w poszczególnych częściach książki i ocenia je, zwracając szczególną uwagę na przydatność publikacji w amerykańskim świecie akademickim. Według autora eseje Cynarskiego, K. Obodyńskiego i A. Huzarskiej oraz S. Tokarskiego przedstawiają wnikliwą analizę ewolucji nowoczesnej Europy, aktualne trendy i wzory ważne, gdy wartości Wschodu obecne w sztukach walki napotykały kultury zachodnie.

Wymienione eseje mogą być użyteczne dla studentów pragnących zgłębić wiedzę na temat sztuk walki, kolejne teksty dotyczące konkretnych sztuk walki mogą być przydatne dla trenerów, zaś pozostałe dla badaczy sztuk walki. Według autora wiele tekstów może posłużyć jako materiał do dyskusji w czasie seminariów lub konferencji np. „Pojedynek” M. Mylika.

Autor recenzji wspomina tekst Cynarskiego i Huzarskiej dotyczący działalności różnych stowarzyszeń sztuk walki dla dialogu kulturowego, który pomaga w wyjaśnieniu tytułu, który autorowi wydaje się nieco niezrozumiały w kontekście amerykańskim. Podkreśla on także lingwistyczne aspekty tekstów prof. S. Tokarskiego.

Końcowe chwalebne uwagi autora dotyczą kolejności publikowanych tekstów, która różni się nieco od amerykańskich standardów.