

REVIEWS

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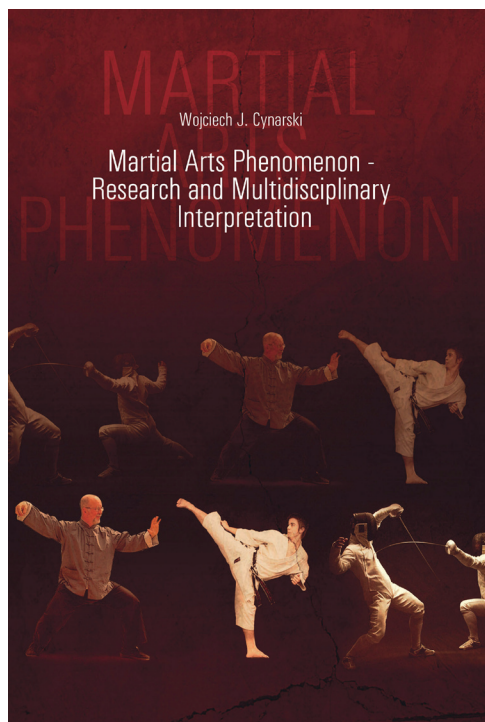
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W.J. Cynarski: “Martial Arts Phenomenon – Research and Multidisciplinary Interpretation”. Review by Prof. Dr Keith R. Kernspecht and Dominique Brizin

Submission: 25.09.2012, acceptance: 29.09.2012

Key words: martial arts, fighting arts, humanistic theory of martial arts, general theory



Wojciech J. Cynarski (2012), *Martial Arts Phenomenon – Research and Multidisciplinary Interpretation*, Rzeszow University Press, Rzeszów, pp. 242. ISBN 978-83-7338-772-0

To underline right from the beginning that martial arts are indeed a relevant scientific topic, especially for academic issues, the author builds a general theory of fighting arts which contains all different kinds of martial arts, combat sports and self-defence, including all martial concepts (historical and modern weapons etc.), relating to

the old “warrior” system of feudal Japan. Thus it also includes theoretical wisdom such as strategies for larger scenarios or tactics for duels and single combat.

The author then builds on this initial definition, explaining teaching and training methods on a holistic basis: methodology of movement activities, methods of training and forms of physical activity organisation which are common to all kinds of fighting arts. He explains that if a teacher wishes to prepare his student e.g. for sporting competition such as the Olympic Games or for a real conflict situation in the street, this is not enough. In a real fight it is important to have an awareness of one’s surroundings: how many attackers are there? Do they have weapons etc.? The author correctly says that this is one of the most important abilities in such a situation, but that there are more, e.g. timing. Different approaches are necessary – depending on which of the aims one wishes to develop – and the research by the author gives scope to further investigations which merge in the field of Combat Logic.

Matching the new overall concept of “fighting arts”, and with reference to the meaning of “warrior”, the author then presents an anthropological view of the martial arts, with the “whole bio-psycho-social dimension of humans”, and underlines the holistic and multidisciplinary aspects of the research. He identifies the most important factor in the “Asian martial arts way of the warrior”: the moral dimension accompanied by self-perfection and responsibility for one’s behaviour, and for the partner or student;

an ascetic search for self-realisation and spiritual progress – to conquer the greatest enemy, our Ego. The cult of violence, combat and victory is identified as a primitive understanding of martial arts or a result of an orientation towards sporting success.

The next topic is relatively unknown in Europe, and more remote from the martial arts per se, but it is therefore all the more important that the author takes a closer look at the subject: the health aspects of martial arts (*bujutsu ido*), an Asian martial arts tradition often firmly established in the training of students and masters-to-be. It is not restricted to special styles such as Tai Chi, where the focus is anyway on health, but seen as an important part of any martial arts training. It is about knowing what to do when e.g. injuries occur, and is connected with acupuncture, its application, TCM and philosophy. Regardless of whether they originate from India, China or Japan, all martial arts have their ways of how to achieve vital, dynamic physical balance, dissolving blockages physically and energetically. In Europe there are e.g. Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf or Alexander, who used similar approaches. At this point Cynarski explores the holistic objective of this book more deeply. The author surprises the reader in this chapter, revealing that he has a wealth of knowledge about health aspects himself, and gives practical advice on what can be done – a small handbook on things deserving attention.

The author once more underlines the importance of the moral background to a martial art, and the necessity to have a closer look at the philosophy. He therefore presents an interesting comparison between the eastern and the western philosophies. Are the eastern philosophies the reason why their martial arts often have another background and demand a different moral behaviour from the western ones – or are there parallels in the western history of philosophy with respect to terms such as “honour”, “duty” or “self-realisation”? This historical excursion starts with battles in ancient Japan, which took place according to firm rules and arrangements: when to fight, who should fight, who should not, where to fight – preferably in more remote areas to avoid injury to civilians – and so on. Indeed, in the 18th century warfare took the same form in central Europe: battles were fought in rural locations away from cities, and with professional soldiers, so there was a particular “code of behaviour” similar to that in the east! In China this kind of war seems to have ended with the period of the warring kingdoms – in Europe it ended with the new war strategy of Napoleon, who conscripted the masses and therefore needed to stir up hatred – with the result that cities were also plunged into warfare.

The author traces the historical evolution from a ruled and orderly way of giving battle to the general escalation of violence in war – but he does not end there: Cynarski brings the great strategists and philosophers SunTsu and LaoTse together to formulate a theory for KungFu, to express humanity and to master one’s life, thus bringing Zen-Buddhism and Taoism together. Here the evolution ends – far away from the violence it involved in the former periods. Now the art of fighting is about the realisation of higher needs – back to the beginning – the way of BUDO.

Philosophy and not political behaviour was finally the reason why martial arts obtained their moral structure in the east. Cynarski also finds an answer to the question whether a similar pathway to the code of the Samurai existed in the western evolution of philosophy, identifying certain structures in Christianity and its philosophical predecessors – the stoics. Stoics, Taoists and practitioners of martial arts all have the same aim: to live in harmony with nature, with virtue and a high moral behaviour. In conclusion we can say that the preconditions were the same in the martial arts, but in Europe they quickly transformed themselves into more of a sporting activity, for example wrestling, boxing or fencing. Moral depth as in the Asian martial arts is not to be found, and the reason is clearly a sociological one.

Cynarski therefore makes an excursion into sociology, and analyses the different approaches relating to the martial arts which already exist. He identifies a major field for possible research, and puts forward various ideas to establish the martial arts as a new sub-discipline of sociology. One important factor is the construction of a “humanistic theory of martial arts”, and the development of adequate teaching methods to transmit the values.

Interestingly, the author calls today’s martial arts into question: can they retain their identity, or are they developing into a sporting commercial factor because of globalisation. Owing to the rules competitions require, many martial art styles have already lost their effectiveness. We in the EWTO have also seen this danger, and therefore decided that WingTsun will never take part in such competitions so as to give the essential self-defence aspect priority.

Cynarski mentions the important factor of today’s professionalisation and commercialisation by the media, industry, show business and propaganda. To make something interesting and marketable it has to look spectacular or dramatic, and in the modern world the martial arts have therefore developed into a symbolic brutality which Cynarski rightly calls pathological. Tradition and honour are

sold for money. However – and I think this is really important – there is also the other side of the coin, e.g. in the concept of self-defence as we view it in the EWTO. The possibilities of professionalisation through marketing and management strategies enable instructors to become successful school owners, turn their hobby into a living and become really professional in what they are doing – because it is a full-time activity and not something they do in their leisure time! So commercialisation is not automatically a bad thing, and does not always involve a loss of honour.

A large part of the book is about the different styles of Japanese sword-fighting, where the impressive knowledge and experience of the author are a great help in obtaining a good insight. There is also interesting information on the development of Japanese martial arts in Europe, with the main focus on Poland. In this part Cynarski describes his own experiences and personal history – so it is partly autobiographical. Cynarski is himself a sensei in kenjutsu (5th dan) and holds many other high grades in the martial arts (8th dan jujutsu, 7th dan karate, ...).

The topics from chapter to chapter differ quite markedly, therefore this review has to be extensive to avoid omitting some important aspects, however there is an overarching theme which combines all the chapters: Cynarski paints a picture of modern knighthood for which the martial arts as a teaching system (especially for young people) is perfectly suited, including knowledge of social behaviour, strategic and philosophical values and health-care. This is indeed something needed in our modern lives, to counter the decline of values in an increasingly uncaring and uncooperative society. Therefore the author's point of view of the martial arts is a mainly sociological one – though of course with many other aspects – and contains a refreshing approach to education which sociologists might do well to adopt in future.

Recenzja książki W.J. Cynarskiego: "Martial Arts Phenomenon – Research and Multidisciplinary Interpretation"

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, sposoby walki, humanistyczna teoria sztuk walki, ogólna teoria

Streszczenie

Recenzja Prof. Dr. Keitha R. Kernspechta oraz Dominique Brizin dotyczy książki Prof. W. J. Cynarskiego „*Martial Arts Phenomenon – Research and Multidisciplinary Interpretation*” („Fenomen sztuk walki - badania i multidyscyplinarna interpretacja”).

We wstępie recenzji można przeczytać, iż profesor W. J. Cynarski buduje ogólną teorię walki, która obejmuje sztuki walki, sporty walki oraz samoobronę odnosząc je do starego systemu „wojowników” w feudalnej Japonii. Dlatego też książka zawiera teoretyczną wiedzę na temat strategii na potrzeby większych scenariuszy lub taktyki pojedynków czy indywidualnej walki. Omówiona zostaje metodyka ćwiczeń ruchowych, treningu i organizacji aktywności fizycznej.

Następnie autorzy recenzji podkreślają, iż tematyka książki jest bardzo zróżnicowana, dlatego omówienie musi być dość obszerne aby nie pominąć ważnych aspektów. Temat przewodni łączy wszystkie rozdziały: W. J. Cynarski maluje obraz współczesnego rycerstwa, dla którego sztuki walki jako system nauki (w szczególności dla młodych ludzi) doskonale się do tego nadają, obejmują bowiem wiedzę o zachowaniach społecznych, strategicznych i filozoficznych wartościach oraz opiece zdrowotnej. Jest to niezwykle ważne we współczesnych czasach by przeciwdziałać upadkowi wartości w coraz to bardziej nieczułym społeczeństwie.

Poprzez połączenie całego pojęcia „sztuk walki” w odniesieniu do znaczenia słowa „wojownik” autor prezentuje antropologiczne spojrzenie na sztuki walki w wymiarze „bio-psycho-społecznym”. Według autorów recenzji - chociaż pogląd Prof. Cynarskiego dotyczący sztuk walki jest głównie socjologiczny, to w połączeniu z wieloma innymi aspektami, zawiera orzeźwiający sposób do edukacji, które socjologowie mogą dobrze przyjąć w przyszłości.