

SOCIOLOGY

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The prestige of martial arts and combat sports from a sociological perspective

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Abstract

Background. Prestige is one of the most valued social resources. The ongoing transformation of martial arts into combat sports inspires scientific analysis of these changes, and above all, a search for the sources of prestige for both martial arts and combat sports. **Problem and aim.** The aim of the research is to consider martial arts and combat sports through the prism of social prestige, but also to indicate its different sources.

Results. Both martial arts and combat sports enjoy recognition and social prestige, but the genesis of this prestige is completely different. Martial arts prestige derives from the tradition, customs and culture of Asian societies. On the other hand, the prestige of combat sports arises from the logic of (post)modern societies, which is focused on success, fame and money. It is also a consequence of such processes as globalization, mediatization, commercialization, professionalization and spectacularization of combat sports and martial arts.

Conclusions. Martial arts prestige is based on fully humanistic and personalistic premises, while the prestige of combat sports is based on the logic of pragmatism, material benefits and success, often at any price.

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Introduction

Prestige in the social sciences, and sociology in particular, is considered an extremely important and highly desirable social resource. However, not all members of the community have access to it. Most often, such access is available to a small, privileged group that has certain features, qualities and social values. They cause other members of the community to show them recognition, respect and reverence. Those enjoying social prestige occupy high positions in the social structure,

while those deprived of it are located on the lower rungs of the prestigious ladder. This different positioning may be the consequence of custom, formal regulation, cultural patterns, or religious principles.

In pre-modern societies, differences in prestige were clear, unambiguous, understandable and perfectly defined. Usually, prestige was inherited and was based on caste, class, or occupation. Social mobility on the ladder of prestige was absent or very limited. In the (post) modern society, the sphere of prestige has undergone numerous changes, which were greatly influenced by both

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the market economy and the egalitarianism of individuals in relation to the law. The role of prestige associated with noble birth has decreased, while the importance of individual achievements, successes, merits, which are most often the result of hard work, investing in one's development and good professional preparation, has increased. These changes contributed to the increase in social mobility, as a result of which individuals from the so-called social disadvantages, thanks to talent, diligence, consistency in the pursuit of goals, gained access to this valued social resource, which is social prestige.

Prestige, as a result of social perception and evaluation, was present in the sports culture of the ancient Greeks. On the one hand, most sports games of that time was attended only by the well-born and respected by the social environment, as we would say today, representatives of the aristocracy and the upper social classes, while slaves, barbarians and criminals were forbidden to participate. On the other hand, victory in the games ensured social elevation to the position of a demi-god and the immortalization of the Olympionist in the gallery of glory (by erecting a monument) and honor in this and subsequent generations [Andrews 2006; Taylor 2008; Liponski, 2012: 81-84].

The analysis of the literature on martial arts shows that martial arts, martial arts practitioners, but above all master-teachers (*sensei*), from the very beginning in Asian cultures (Chinese, Korean, Thai or Japanese) enjoyed great prestige. It resulted from the high positioning of this art, philosophy or development path in the social structure, which was not limited to physical growth or learning to effectively fight the enemy, but primarily included the improvement of spiritual, moral, social, personal and community values. The carriers of social prestige were the most initiated masters, whose authority flowed not only directly to the students, but also to the school, of which they were most often the founders and, at the same time, highly respected teachers [Cynarski 2018: 214-222; Sieber, Cynarski 2004: 293-297].

The aim of the work is an attempt to show martial arts and combat sports in the perspective of social prestige and the factors generating these changes. We will try to answer the question about the sources of prestige of martial arts and combat sports, but also present martial arts and combat sports as a source of prestige. The analysis will use dominant scientific theories such as structure structural-functional, social interactionism, prestige, as well as the humanistic theory of martial arts.

The concept of social prestige

Prestige, next to wealth and power, is one of the most important dimensions of social inequality and is most often understood as esteem, honor, respect, recognition, but also honor, dignity, pride, and respect [Wejland 1983:

80]. Henryk Domanski defines prestige as a vast sphere of other people's assessments based on their intelligence, knowledge, positions and social roles they play, looks and life successes [Domanski 1999: 9-10]. Piotr Sztompka treats it as an independent social power, next to power, wealth and education. It is revealed by expressions of respect and social appreciation shown to an individual or group. His highest figure is fame. Social prestige can be understood as showing privilege, symbolically demonstrating and taking away prestige, or the right to expect and receive it [Sztompka 2002: 331-336].

In theoretical analyzes of prestige, two approaches are distinguished: structural and functional [Reszke 2000: 201-204]. In the structural approach, prestige in the stratification system is analyzed as a privilege of higher-located communities due to the possession of valued social resources. An example of such an approach may be Stanislaw Ossowski's theory, according to which prestige is a privilege resulting from the social role of an individual [Ossowski 1968: 24-26]. In functional terms, prestige coordinates the actions of individuals in the community and thus ensures the effectiveness of the social system. Thanks to the community of norms and values, it is possible to assess which positions and roles deserve higher prestige [Parsons 1972; Domanski, Sawinski 1991: 224]. This approach is well exemplified by the theory of social stratification by Kingsley Davis and Willbert Moore, in the light of which prestige is a reward for expenditures related to obtaining education and various competences, and is an inspirational factor for developing potency and talents [Davis, Moore 1975: 464].

Most researchers agree that in (post)modern society the most important factor in shaping prestige is the profession. The prestige of the profession gained independence and thus new foundations for the formation of prestige were formed [Wesolowski, Domanski 2000: 197-198; Słomczynski, Domanski 1998: 125-142].

Max Weber [1975: 415-416] recognized wealth, power and knowledge as the basic sources of prestige. Access to these resources, in his opinion, generate the social power of an individual or group, which is expressed in social prestige. The regularities discovered by Weber also occur in the field of sport, where prestige is determined by wealth and money, which are shared by individual and collective sports participants. At the bottom and middle rungs of the social affluence ladder [Warner 1952] there is the largest group of sports participants who do not have the prestige resulting from obtaining significant monetary benefits. At the highest levels there is a small group that has prestige due to drawing significant financial benefits from sport. This applies to both professional athletes, coaches training the most outstanding sports units and teams, club owners, presidents of these clubs, federations, unions and sports organizations, but also owners of companies and enterprises operating for and in connection with sport

(owners and directors of television stations, presidents of companies producing goods and services, sponsors and donors).

The second prestige-creating factor is power [Hamilton, Hirszowicz 1995: 40-44], which can be analyzed both in the macro- and micro-sociological perspective. In the macro scale, it occurs when we deal with such formal organizations as the International Olympic Committee, the International Football Federation (FIFA), the International Athletics Federation (IAAF), while in the micro scale it manifests itself in the most elementary and everyday interactions, as the authority of the national federation sport over athletes, employees and volunteers operating in a specific sport discipline, the owner or president of a club over its members and employees, a coach over players, etc. Prestige and personal respect most often result from individual interactions or taking place in small communities. Researchers of the issue point out that each behavior shows the order of power and prestige, and the lack of symmetry in this behavior reveals the hierarchy of power and the distribution of prestige in the group [Szmatka, Wagner, Wysienska 2002: 202; Ridgeway, Walker 1995: 281-310].

The third prestige-creating factor is knowledge [Ziolkowski 2002: 308-314]. This factor plays an extremely important role at all levels of sport organization. Knowledge will be understood here in a broader sense, namely as knowledge in the strict sense, but also as skills and competences related to functioning in sport, acquired and acquired in the process of socialization for sport and in sport. Access to this resource is varied, some have competences at the elementary level, while others achieve the highest, called perfectionism or mastery. The former have limited access to the prestigious resource, while the latter, it would seem in some cases, very large and almost unlimited. They are usually the world's best footballers, tennis players, Formula 1 drivers, golfers, boxers, basketball players, baseball players, owners of the largest clubs, or coaches of the best teams. Their names are present in the social discourse, in mass culture, and their names as patrons are on the signs of streets, schools, sports centers, stadiums, halls and swimming pools.

Martial arts prestige

Martial arts originated in hierarchical Asian societies and cultures where various religious systems played a dominant role. One can even say that their creation resulted from certain socio-religious determinations that determined the directions and ways of human development. These were not exogenous systems, derived or transplanted from others, but fully homogeneous, growing on the fertile subsoil of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Indian religions and societies. Therefore, we

can say that martial arts were, in a way, a natural product of these societies, a product that was the accumulation of all the basic elements of culture in the form of values, principles, norms, patterns, rules, but also tradition and custom, respect for wise people, people with experience and less or more formal, responsible social roles [Obodynski, Cynarski 2003: 197-200].

Growing on the religious and cultural subsoil, martial arts were primarily aimed at human personal development in all spheres and planes, from ideological, spiritual, moral, intellectual and psychological, to physical, fitness, health and social interaction. They were to help in the formation of a man internally integrated and harmonized with the natural and social environment, a good, honest, noble man, peaceful, just and sensitive to others, but also aware of his value, proud, respecting his own and others' dignity and not using his advantages and values in order to enslave, humiliate, degrade, and humiliate others [Cynarski, Obodynski 2006: 263-268; Schrenk 2014: 101-116].

In martial arts, ethics, respect for rules and spiritual development played a key role, while agon or competition with others were almost completely marginalized. Even today, martial arts are practiced without competing with an opponent. This applies, for example, to various varieties of *hapkido* or *capoeira*, *aikidō* and *iaidō*, *karate* and *kobudō* [Sieber, Grzywacz 2015: 13-25]. To improve health, relaxation, recreation and well-being, *qi-gong* (*chi kung*) and *yang taijiquan* (*taichi chuan*) and the so-called complete systems [Wlodyka, Cynarski 2000: 146-186; Skrzeta *et al.* 2021: 67-78].

Martial arts, having an autotelic character, being a paradigm of everything that is beautiful, good and noble, enjoy the recognition and prestige of those members of the global society who value noble values and ideas more than interests, material benefits and profits [Sterkiewicz, Madejski 1999]. The group of people oriented towards humanities is quite numerous in the declarative and verbal sphere, but in social practice it is significantly reduced. A similar mechanism works here as in the case of the Olympic Games and Olympism [Mangan 2012], which are based on a set of fully humanistic values with truth, goodness, nobility, friendship, peace, selfless respect for rules, respect for other people, equal opportunities in resignation from the practical benefits of victory, minimizing the opponent's suffering at the forefront, while in practice what counts is success, defeating the opponent, medal, record, effectiveness regardless of the circumstances, the amount of prizes, social recognition and prestige, sports promotion, the attractiveness of the spectacle, its drama and victory at all costs. Almost everyone accepts the principle of *fair play*, while in practice the majority is guided by the principle of efficiency and effectiveness in action, the application of which will allow to show an advantage over others and ensure access to valued social goods, such as wealth, fame, recognition,

championship, and power [Miller 2006; Lipiec 1999].

Martial arts, based on bravery, honour, *fair play* and the principles of knightly ethics, socially related to the aristocratic class, enjoy respect, recognition and prestige founded by the archetype of martial arts, a certain pattern underlying them and associated with tradition, custom, society and above all, its culture, in which traditional values, patterns of behavior, norms as instrumental values, as well as rules and principles retain their certain meaning [Cynarski, Sieber, Litwiniuk 2007: 53-57]. A detailed example may be the high position of a master, a martial arts teacher, which results from the high position of seniority in Far Eastern societies. A master of martial arts in Chinese, Japanese or Korean societies is surrounded by an aura of respect and recognition, because he leads his students to the highest values, which are truth, harmonious and creative life, nobility and respect for others [Cynarski 2016: 54-59].

People not only strive to satisfy their autotelic needs, those that are a value in themselves and are associated with selflessness, joy of life, relaxation, enrichment of one's own personality through the creation and self-creation of spiritual, ethical, intellectual, aesthetic, hedonistic, and existential needs. values. For autotelic reasons, martial arts are practiced, the basic goals of which are aimed at the implementation of values related to one's own spiritual, moral, physical and social development, enjoying order and harmony within oneself, but also with the external world, the surrounding nature, civilization and society. A significant part of activities and activities is undertaken by people for reasons other than autotelic values, such as social prestige, advancement of individuals and groups, earning money, gaining and consolidating power, building a political position, gaining fame and popularity [Krawczyk 1997: 61-81].

The prestige of combat sports

Under the influence of the changes taking place in the world, in which the phenomena and processes referred to as globalization, commercialization, professionalization, mediatization, rationalization and utilitarianization occupy an important place, this part of social life and the element of culture, which is sport, including martial arts, is also changing. They cease to have only an autotelic meaning, but, in accordance with the logic of the ongoing changes, they take on an increasingly instrumental form. They cease to be a value in themselves and become a tool or an instrument that allows the implementation of values considered higher. It is about using martial arts to gain money, gain prestige, become famous and popular, gain and consolidate power, advance in the social structure, provide an attractive spectacle and strong emotional experiences. Martial arts understood in this way ceased to be only a way of noble and harmonious

human development and demonstrating the effects of work on oneself during non-confrontational shows, but became a lucrative activity providing access to desirable and valued social resources, including such a resource as social prestige [Dziubinski 2022: 397-421; Allen 2015].

Are the discussed changes in martial arts, consisting of transforming them into combat sports, combat systems and utility combat techniques, something special and unique and worthy of stigmatization? Answering this question, it should be unequivocally stated that the ongoing transformation of martial arts is a consequence of specific tendencies in the global society and its culture, but also in sport, in which all phenomena, processes and mechanisms characteristic of society and culture occur. The direction of these changes consists in the transformation of a disinterested or aristocratic sport into an activity that is increasingly mediated, commercialized, professionalized and focused on the implementation of mercantile and media interests. This is the direction of changes in modern sports, including martial arts, in which noble and fully humanistic ideas and values give way to self-interest, profit, success and popularity. In this way, martial arts become combat sports, sports disciplines in which competition is conducted during numerous competitions for cups and other prizes, continental championships, world championships or the Olympic Games. They are primarily about media and business success, both of the players themselves, event organizers, as well as television stations and other means of mass communication. Martial arts often transform into combat systems or defense systems that are used by various military or paramilitary formations to carry out combat tasks, security, restoring order, and social order, fighting terrorist groups and acting to the detriment of society and its institutions. Martial arts may take the form of certain sets of combat techniques taken from their various varieties and used for self-defense, but also for educational, health, fitness, recreational or show-related purposes, but also for gaining social recognition [Dziubinski 2020: 47-54; Cynarski 2023].

The cited transformations of martial arts take place under the influence of socio-cultural changes and changes taking place in the sport itself. These changes are related to the instrumentalization of martial arts and their use as a means to achieve individual and group goals. They go in two directions, namely, on the one hand, martial arts become a lucrative occupation or profession that creates opportunities to gain access to valued social resources (wealth, power, prestige, fame, security, and high social position), on the other hand, they are used to aesthetic and hedonistic goals, the importance of which in (post)modern societies is systematically growing [Bielec *et al.* 2021].

The process of transforming martial arts into combat sports occurred almost from the very beginning of their creation, because in parallel with their development,

attempts were made to use their advantages in the widest possible way to achieve other important individual and group goals. Polish warriors have their share in the history of the development of combat sports. It is worth mentioning Wladyslaw Pytlasinski, called the "father of Polish wrestling", who won the gold belt in Paris in 1898. He was also the founder of a wrestling school in Lodz (Łódź) and Warsaw, a trainer and promoter of wrestling, and a co-founder of the Polish Athletic Society. His famous student was Stanislaw Cyganiewicz, who drew in a fight with Gama, a famous representative of Indian wrestling, with whom he performed in circuses throughout the country [Godlewski 1994; Cynarski 2020: 43-48].

An exemplification of the changes in martial arts can be *judo* created by Jigorō Kanō, which, according to the creator's intention, was to cultivate the values of martial arts inscribed in the cultural tradition of Japan, the ethos of the noble way and hand-to-hand combat techniques. As a result of the impact of the (post)modern world and the entry of judo into the program of the Olympic Games, according to Villamon and others, its regression occurred, consisting in reducing its values to physical, strength and direct sports combat, subordinated to sports regulations and regulations [Villamon *et al.* 2004: 139-156]. At the next stages of the changes, they focused on creating brutal, gladiatorial performances as a response to the atavistic needs and expectations of the audience eager for a show of strength, ruthlessness, aggression, blood and complete human exhaustion.

Another direction of changes in martial arts and combat sports were attempts to mix techniques and styles characteristic of various, often very different, martial arts and sports. At the beginning, kick-boxing was created in Japan and the United States, which consists in the confrontation of punching and kicking techniques. Fans and competitors, however, were increasingly concerned with the question of which combat sport is the most effective and effective, namely whether, for example, a boxer will win against a wrestler, and a wrestler against a judoka? The next step in the process of change was the abolition of almost all fighting rules and allowing the use of all techniques from punching and kicking to grabbing. In this way, open tournaments, ultimate fighting tournaments and the mixed martial arts (MMA) formula, gaining more and more supporters, became the most popular [Cynarski, Ziemiński 2010: 31-35].

Mixed martial arts (MMA) by many researchers, due to the deprivation of dignity of the participants of the competition and the degradation of humanity, as well as clinical brutality, referring to gladiator fights during the Roman Empire, are sharply criticized from the humanistic and personalistic perspective [Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2006: 1-10]. However, what is criticized by humanistically oriented martial arts researchers becomes an asset and a desirable good in (post)modern societies. Brutality, blood, cracked skin, bumps and bulges, sub-

cutaneous haemorrhages, drama of the show, surprising twists and turns, warriors staggering from exhaustion and falling to the mat, massacred faces, and in the background federation belts and significant money, make the stands crowded with huge crowds fans, and a significant part of the global community by the screens of TV sets, computers and smartphones.

The prestige and popularity of MMA results, among other things, from the fact that access to such a valued social resource as wealth is at stake. Not only the fighters themselves benefit financially, but also their coaches and training staffs, gala organizers and mass culture organizations, especially television stations that buy the rights to broadcast the fights. Participants of galas, thanks to their commercial successes, are surrounded by respect and social recognition. The procedures of acquiring prestige by individuals in MMA are subject to general social regularities [Dobrzycki 2022].

Currently, we will try to establish the prestige of the MMA institution in relation to other sports institutions, treating them somewhat conventionally as types of professional specialties (football player, basketball player, swimmer, ski jumper, speedway rider, tennis player, etc.), similarly to medicine (internist, ophthalmologist, surgeon, cardiologist, diabetologist etc.). When we evaluate the prestige of mixed martial arts in relation to other sports, such as basketball, tennis, golf, football, Formula 1, American football, we conclude that they belong to the group of the most prestigious disciplines, due to the money involved, but also due to the media demand, which is a response to the needs and expectations of a wide range of fans. The presence of MMA in mass culture can be considered a measure of popularity, but also proves the admiration and recognition of the audience [Dobrzycki 2022].

The process of creating the prestige of sports disciplines is similar to the process of creating the prestige of professions (doctor, lawyer, worker, teacher, etc.) and results from the function in the sports system. Occupying a specific professional position is a consequence of a specific educational career and acquired competences. The more complicated the work performed within a given profession is and requires above-average and specialized preparation, the smaller the supply of specific professional qualifications on the market, the more esteem is given to the given profession, and the people performing it occupy high positions in the professional hierarchy and are highly rewarded, and, as a result, they are socially recognized and respected [Domanski 1981]. The same is true in sports in relation to individual disciplines. If the production of a product in the form of an attractive sports spectacle requires the highest professional competences, which are confirmed each time by the high participation of society in direct and indirect consumption, then the discipline, a specific player or team receive the highest financial rewards and receive

recognition for all the investments made related to with the development of a sports career and their objective effects. The produced high-quality spectacle product is followed by further benefits in the form of sponsorship agreements and agreements with TV stations defining broadcasting rights. Such a situation means that certain sports competitions, for which there is a social demand, enjoy prestige. When we talk about prestigious sports disciplines and social demand for sports events, we obviously mean events in which the best and most successful athletes and teams compete for prestigious trophies. Certainly, mixed martial arts are among those disciplines that attract the attention of a large number of fans, and this makes the mass media, with television at the forefront, as well as large sponsors and business people, and often politicians, interested in participating in the performances [Lenartowicz 2019: 321-347].

Summary

Prestige is one of the most valued social resources, and access to it is not evenly distributed. In every society there are those who have significant access to it, while at the other extreme, there are those who do not. The situation is similar in sport, where there are outstanding players who enjoy prestige, but there are also those who are at the lowest levels on the hierarchical ladder of prestige. Individual sports disciplines also have prestige, which can be divided into those that have this prestige and those that are deprived of it. At the top of the prestigious ladder are football, basketball, tennis, golf, Formula 1 and boxing.

The most prestigious disciplines in Asian societies certainly include martial arts and combat sports, which, on the basis of diffusion and homogenization of cultures, have gained popularity in most parts of the civilized world, especially in the United States and European societies. Recognition and social respect are given not only to martial arts and combat sports, but also to warriors or competitors who present the highest level of development and have the highest degrees of initiation in the form of 8-10 dan (martial arts) and winners of competitions and galas, as well as winners of belts with the most federation.

The prestige of martial arts has a different genesis than the prestige of combat sports. The prestige of martial arts results from the cultural context of Asian societies, in which the system of values, patterns of behavior, norms, principles, rules, traditions, and customs are somehow integrated into the philosophy and practice of martial arts. Martial arts are autotelic, which means that they are practiced for one's spiritual, social and physical development, for satisfaction, contentment, personal expression and growth of one's own comprehensive and harmonious personality.

The sources of prestige in combat sports are different. First of all, practicing combat sports is instrumental, which means that its practice and competition are subordinated to the implementation of values and goals other than autotelic, such as a medal, belt, championship, award, money, media coverage, fame, but also often power. In this way, martial arts turned into combat sports as a result of the overlapping processes of globalization, mediatization, professionalization and commercialization of martial arts. In combat sports understood in this way, ideas and values play a lesser role, and their place has been taken by business, profit, prize, record, money, popularity and spectacle. It is not traditional values and patterns that are the source of prestige in combat sports, but a global audience that shows interest, especially in the case of mixed martial arts, in spectacles full of blood, smashed faces, dramatic twists, chokes, submissions and paralyzing kicks and punches. The audience is followed by mass culture, especially television, which shows gladiator fights in the most attractive airtime, which in turn attracts large sponsors who spend significant financial resources to promote their goods and brands.

Therefore, we can conclude that the prestige of martial arts results from tradition and custom, the culture of Asian societies, while the prestige of combat sports results from the logic of development of (post)modern societies and the postmodern cultures of these societies, focused on success, fame, victory, media coverage, and above all money.

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Prestiz sztuki i sportów walki z perspektywy socjologicznej

Słowa kluczowe: prestiz społeczny, sport, sztuki walki, sporty walki

Streszczenie

Tło. Prestiz należy do najbardziej cenionych zasobów społecznych. Dokonujące się przeobrażenia sztuk walki w sporty walki inspirują do naukowego analizowania tych zmian, a przede wszystkim dociekania źródeł prestiżu zarówno sztuk walki jak i sportów walki.

Problem i cel. Celem badań jest ukazanie sztuk walki i sportów walki przez pryzmat prestiżu społecznego, ale także wskazanie na odmienne jego źródła.

Wyniki. Zarówno sztuki walki jak i sporty walki cieszą się uznaniem i prestiżem społecznym, jednak geneza tego prestiżu jest całkowicie inna. Prestiz sztuk walki wynika z tradycji, obyczaju i kultury społeczeństw azjatyckich. Natomiast prestiz sportów walki wynika z logiki społeczeństw (po)nowoczesnych, ukierunkowanych na sukces, sławę i pieniądze. Jest także konsekwencją takich procesów jak globalizacja, mediatyzacja, komercjalizacja, profesjonalizacja i spektakularyzacja sportu i sztuk walki.

Wnioski. Sztuki walki posiadają prestiz, u podstaw którego tkwią w pełni humanistyczne i personalistyczne przesłanki, natomiast sporty walki posiadają prestiz, u podstaw którego tkwi logika pragmatyzmu, korzyści materialnych i sukcesu, nierzadko za wszelką cenę.