

The British Construction of Chinese Martial Arts in the Writings of John Dudgeon, Herbert Giles and Joseph Needham.

In the 16th century, China and its civilization was not anymore an image of a fantastic country travelling through merchants as in the case of Marco Polo's account, but a reality brought by the people from his same country that travelled with different purposes bringing the Chinese culture to Europe.

The valuable presence of educated men in China served as an authoritative stimulus to discuss, that knowledge. Sacred texts, followed by some translation from Chinese into Latin, became the first-hand presence of a millenarian culture based on assumptions so different.

The appealing aspect of that different civilization did not lie simply on different conceptions; rather in its primary tool of communication. The Chinese language appeared, and perhaps still today does, very similar to the already known Egyptian hieroglyphs. This similarity suggested to the people of that time the hypothesis of an ancient common language. This was probably not the only one common thing people were looking for. Later on it seems that scientists searched for a common scientific knowledge and, in addition to this, physicians were only beginning to explore new ways to cure diseases.

This was probably the scope of those people with medical training who approached for the first time certain Chinese religious practices with clear effect on physical and spiritual health. These Chinese practices were brought back to Europe under the name of *kung-fu*, or also *cong-fu*.

Right here starts the spreading of knowledge and the misconception regarding Chinese boxing as health method both in Britain first and other European countries later.

Aim

This essay aims at showing the earliest stages of the knowledge, perception and transformation of Chinese boxing in British literature. This essay will use both primary texts and critical literature: The works written by the Surgeon John Dudgeon will be discussed in the first chapter; the scholar, Prof. Herbert A. Giles will be considered in the second and the subsequent work by Joseph Needham, although in minor measure for reasons of space, in the third chapter.

It will be relevant to note how clearly different backgrounds and cultural purposes produced a different image of the subject. Yet the three primary images built by Dudgeon; Giles and Needham show an underlining cultural conception rooted in the Greek assumption of the complete human being.

Moreover, it will be useful to look at some secondary literature of historical and anthropological approach to see how the first wave of critiques approached the same subject by highlighting the cultural tendencies and difficulties.

The first approach: John Dudgeon

Introduction

By the end of the 16th century, missionaries were the first people from Europe who went to China in order to evangelize the country. Some missionaries, however, were not only men of faith, they were also men of science; some were physicians who went to China to observe the local level of medical knowledge and produced relevant works which affected subsequent accounts.

In this chapter will take in consideration the work of the Surgeon John Dudgeon (1837-1901). Dudgeon was a Scot who attended first the University of Edinburgh and later received his medical degree in Master of Surgery at the University of Glasgow, in 1862. He worked in China for the British Legation for about 40 years performing medical duties and translations into Chinese¹ and in 1864 worked at the Peking² Hospital in connection with the London Missionary Society.

In those years he produced a series of accounts; some on general information, such as the “The Population of China”; together with some other works more focused: “A Modern Chinese Anatomist”; “A Chapter in Chinese Surgery” and the work titled “Kung-fu³ or Medical Gymnastic”. It is rather disappointing that this last work in particular is not mentioned in the page of the British Medical Journal, a rare source about his life, where the above information about his life has been found.

Dudgeon’s relevant record of Chinese medical gymnastic, titled “Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic”, was the second in chronological order and the first in Britain to show evidence that martial arts (*wushu* 武术), or more precisely *kung-fu* (功夫), roots had to be found in the daoist practice of *qigong* and, therefore, to construct the idea that *kung-fu* is originally an alternative therapeutic method.

The Frenchman Pierre Martial Cibot (1727-1780), a missionary man, had written an article titled “Notice du Cong-fou, des Bonzes Tao-sée” in 1779 where he recorded the practice of certain postures associated to healings and related to Daoist alchemy. Almost a century later, John Dudgeon was asked to work on this subject, to expand further and answer specific questions, as shown later on, on what had been left unclear by P. M. Cibot:

“Detailed information on the positions and breathing movements”⁴

¹ For more bibliographical information see the “Obituary”, *The British Medical Journal* March 16 (1901), p. 679.

² This was the transliteration used in those days.

³ Here it has been kept the transcribed as appeared on the text; however hereafter the Chinese word will be followed by the *pinyin* system of transcription in footnote. So, in this case we have *gongfu*.

⁴ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’, *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 357-359.

Moreover, his work could have also been considered as a mark commencing a certain aesthetic trend toward Chinese things, better known as *chinoiserie*.

The cultural trend before him and the role of qi (氣 human energies)

In the works of Linda Barnes⁵ and to a limited extent of Jonathan Spence⁶ we can learn about the cultural differences between European and Chinese physicians in treating diseases and also the curiosity that emerged among them when they saw the Chinese therapy at the end of 17th century.

“Chinese and Western practitioners learned radically different and even incommensurate ways of reading the body, the disparities rooted in different cosmologies”⁷

In particular, Barnes stresses the attention that some Europeans paid to the Chinese reading of the pulse⁸ to work a diagnosis; the conceptions of *qi* and the respective levels of sophistication: *Jing* (精 seminal essence) and *shen* (神 spirit)⁹. *Qi* was the first cultural issue to deal with if they wanted to comprehend and present the Chinese approach to a European audience.

“Still, some writers attempted to explain core Chinese concepts to European audiences. Ten Rhijne translated *qi* as ‘Spirits,’ equating it with Galen’s ‘animal spirits.’ Yet while both terms involved vital force and blood — making the connection natural — it was still wrong”¹⁰

The understanding of *qi* went, indeed, through diverse translations: *Qi* was taken as a “spiritual substance”; “animal spirit”; as a combination of circulating “blood and humours” and as a coupling element together with the spirits. These differences shown the beginning mark of the difficulties Europeans had in rendering such a complex concept into the western intellectual world¹¹. Physicians were still observing the human body as “structure [...] allowing to recognize changes [...] and corresponding problems in the mechanism’s capacity to function”¹².

It is important here to show the problems Europeans had when dealing with *qi* because John Dudgeon never actually mentions in his work “Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic” the word *qi*, and its graph, but used directly western words. Dudgeon seemed have preferred to avoid confusing the reader, although educated, with distracting discourses. This is clever in order to continue keeping the attention of the reader. However it does not respond to one of the cultural demands of the Western societies since then, that is the clarification of one the keys of Chinese culture; the *qi*.

⁵ Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004). In particular Chapter 3, pp. 72-125 and Chapter 4, pp. 126-211.

⁶ Jonathan Spence, “The dialogue of Chinese science”. In Spence, Jonathan, *Chinese Roundabout*. (New York, 1992), pp. 141-154.

⁷ Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004), p. 85.

⁸ Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 92-104.

⁹ Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 87-92.

¹⁰ Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004), p. 87.

¹¹ For a fuller discussion with names of European physicians see Barnes, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. 87-89.

¹² Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004), p.85.

As for any philosophical explanation of the *qi*, Dudgeon dedicates a brief explanation of the *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳) principles¹³; and even when he refers to them he means animal forces: *Yin*, a vegetative force, has to be combined with *yang*, the muscular force, in the production of an equilibrium of physical forces, the *T'ai-chi* (太极)¹⁴. Only at the end of this introductory part, Dudgeon gives the impression of building a religious universal image of *kung-fu*, in creating a physical and spiritual harmony, that he also found in the Indian and Greek conceptions:

“Such are the principle upon which reposes the theory of Kung-fu of the Chinese, like that of their chemical and pharmaceutical medicine, and also that of their religious, social, and philosophic doctrines; for the Chinese [...], carry always their considerations into all the elements of his nature and his constitution. [...]. Indeed, this will be a curious history to write [...] that of these old priests of Tao, — these remains still living of the first Brahmans of India [...]. Depositories of the tradition, these founders of nations carried the doctrine of King-fu from the common cradle into all the countries where they established themselves”¹⁵

Kung-fu was hardly a fighting method

The importance of this work toward the British construction of Chinese martial arts as a therapeutic system rather than a pure fighting art starts with a general introduction about the conception of the importance of physical motion to preserve health and strengthen the body¹⁶ and only a tangential reference to *kung-fu* utilised in aggressive competitions.

Dudgeon rarely argues about the other violent and combative implication of *kung-fu* as it is known today through the popular culture; conversely, he states that contests were held in ancient Greek and Roman times to pursue reinforcing of the body. A similar assumption is found in other ancient societies such as the Hindu and Chinese. These latter two produced a body of literature where the preservation of health goes along with the change of seasons; the climate; food and the way to arrange the house¹⁷.

Although Dudgeon was probably not introduced the martial meaning of *kung-fu*, he nevertheless came rather close to it when argues that in the Chinese national curriculum, *kung-fu* included the practice of archery and horsemanship.

Moreover Dudgeon put forward the Greek assumption of a “sound mind in a sound body”¹⁸, as the ideal of physicians and philosophers and argued that any kind of dynamic activity provides a benefit including “walking, dry-rubbing or friction, wrestling, etc.”¹⁹

¹³ Dudgeon, John, “Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic” *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 370-372.

¹⁴ The pinyin is *Taijiquan*.

¹⁵ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 371-373.

¹⁶ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 341-375.

¹⁷ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 343-344.

¹⁸ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), p. 342.

¹⁹ Dudgeon, John, *ibidem*.

In addition to this, Dudgeon adds the Greek word *athlos*, hence *athletae* can be associated to the benefits that the practice of *kung-fu* delivers, thus arguing for a similarity in meaning²⁰ within the two civilizations. Iccus of Tarentum and Herodicus of Selymbra, continues Dudgeon, were two Greek gymnasts who cured diseases through movements; in particular, Herodicus used gymnastic and fighting for medical purpose: “Hippocrates, who was one of his pupils and superintended the exercises in his *palaestra*, tells us that Herodicus cured fevers by walking and wrestling, and that many found the dry fomentations did them harm.”²¹

Lastly Dudgeon seems willing to compare the Chinese and the Greek in his first part. Dudgeon went further into the exploration of the culture of physical movements in China and found that what is called in the West gymnastic was not completely alien in China.

Since the time of the Great Yǔ (大禹), the Chinese have created a system of movements to preserve health. These movements took the shape, later, of some military exercises, although Dudgeon does not mention martial arts, and again they became dances with shields and banners called Tà Wǔ (大舞)²² at Imperial court to entertain or as a form of court ritual. These dances showed a circular trajectory aimed at preventing endemic and epidemic maladies²³.

It is a shame that Dudgeon could not continue his investigation into the culture of China and its aspects due to the pressure to publish the material, as he also wrote:

“The result of my attention having been called to this treatment is the following article of Kung-fu, which was submitted to Dr. Roth, and by him recommended for publication. I was unwilling at the time to present to the medical profession or to the general public a subject so meagrely handled, and during all these years have waited for the convenient time to devote to it more study and research, with the view of supplying at least sufficient details to render any one, ignorant of Chinese and medicine, able to grasp the subject and determine its usefulness or otherwise as prophylactic and curative agent. Unfortunately the press of work, necessitated by the care of a large hospital and other duties, has prevented me from pursuing further this study.”²⁴

This is because it seems that he had the chance and the material to explore *kung-fu* topic hardly touched by other scholars, physicians or missionary men. He had built an original picture where the ancient Chinese culture of gymnastic meets the equally ancient Greek culture of *palaestra*. This was also the result of the Eurocentric cultural view that emerged since the 18th century when observers built a frame of knowledge that applied one intellectual structure to the world, China included²⁵.

The impact of his use of the term “Kung-fu”

²⁰ Dudgeon, John, *ibidem*.

²¹ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), p. 343.

²² The pinyin is *Dawu*.

²³ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 345-346.

²⁴ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), p. 358

²⁵ Barnes, Linda, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. (Cambridge, 2004), p. 126.

Part of this essay starts because of the use Dudgeon made of the Chinese words pronounced *kung-fu* 功夫 and 工夫. Perhaps some readers of Chinese culture today may associate the word *kung-fu* with the Chinese figure of Li Zhengfan, better known into West as Bruce Lee; who first introduced this word in the Western countries through his movies at the end of the 1960s.

Dudgeon provides a brief explanation of the meanings of *kung-fu*: Firstly he mentions the ability to perform an art. Secondly the application of bodily exercises in the “prevention or treatment of disease”²⁶. Thirdly he associates this concept of physical or artistic work to the way certain “Taoists”²⁷ hold their postures²⁸, by also stating that, in this last sense, Taoists have practiced *kung-fu* for long time in the search for the *elixir vitae*. In his last part of his semantic research of the word *kung-fu*, Dudgeon quotes a certain Lady Manners, who in the *Nineteenth Century* stated that the Chinese have learned gymnastic from the Indians and relate this to the “Science of Living.”²⁹

Kung-fu had and still has more than one meaning: In the Mathews Dictionary of classical Chinese we find “ability”; “work” and “service”³⁰. These three meanings have broad applications, certainly beyond the sphere of physical culture. The modern Oxford Chinese dictionary provides something different: “time”; “effort” and “workmanship”³¹; moreover, the three go under a variation of the original graph 工夫. Yet, they still show a broad application in meanings. However, none of them mention the combative meaning; this is, in fact, indicated by the Oxford English Dictionary which, under the word “kung fu” also shows: “a Chinese martial art resembling karate.”³² Therefore, one may be left with doubt wondering where the combative meaning comes from.

Dudgeon's sources

Although sources regarding Daoism were not spread among the missionary men by the end of the 19th century; Dudgeon managed to see some Chinese texts. If the reader pays attention to his chapter titled “Books on Kung-fu”³³ they can realise how many of those texts were hardly known to the people and, it goes without saying, also to a wider western audience. Interestingly enough to the reader of Chinese religion and martial arts a good portion of the chapter “Books on Kung-fu” is dedicated to the figure of the Indian monk Ta-mo (达摩)³⁴ and two texts attributed to him: the *Washing Sinew Book* (*Hsi-sui-ching* 髓洗经)³⁵ and the *Transforming Meadow Book* (*I-chin-ching* 易筋经)³⁶, which, Dudgeon states, is Indian language. The figure of

²⁶ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895) p. 347.

²⁷ This was the transliteration used at that time for Daoism.

²⁸ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895) p. 347.

²⁹ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895) p. 349.

³⁰ Mathews, p. 541

³¹ *Oxford Chinese Dictionary*. (Oxford, 2003),

³² Soanes, Catherine, *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Oxford, 2002) p. 465.

³³ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 500-509.

³⁴ This is the short for Bodhidharma.

³⁵ The Pinyin is *Xisuijing* and in this texts the words are in the wrong order; the correct is 洗髓经.

³⁶ The pinyin is *Yijinjing*.

Bodhidharma and the two texts are related to the Shao-lin-sze (少林寺)³⁷ and the practice of *kung-fu*. Just as several modern publications show as a proof of his impact and of a certain trend and legitimating process still alive.

A good part of the work of Dudgeon is the technical description of the postures included in the text Eight Ornamental Sections (*Ba-duan-ching* 八段经)³⁸: “The eyes must first be shut, and the heart dark [...], the fists must be tightly closed, and the heart at rest, and both hands placed behind the vertex (of the head); then 9 respirations [...]”³⁹

The technical aspect of Dudgeon “Kung-fu”

The description of the movements deserves a quick look, since this was one of the main editorial tasks. The large diagrams are preceded by a couple of lines to briefly teach the reader how to perform it. The main point here is that the majority of those movements are given with animal names: The animal is referred for the mimic and also to describe the part of the body that will benefit from the therapeutic performance:

“*The Tiger*. Close the breath, bend the head, close the fists tightly, and assume the severe form of a tiger. The two hands are slowly to lift a supposed weight of 1000 catties; the breath is to be retained till the body is upright, then swallowed and carried down into the abdomen. [...]. By this sort of movement, the air and pulses of the body will be harmonized, and the hundred (all) diseases prevented from being produced”⁴⁰

Conclusion

Dudgeon translation and account of *kung-fu* had little to do with the original conception of Chinese martial arts that emerged, for instance, in the account about Chinese boxing written by Herbert A. Giles considered in the second chapter and published not much later.

However the conception of Dudgeon showed, first of all, that the Chinese had and still have, a conception of gymnastic not just as entertainment but for the higher scope of treating the sick people and also the noble idea of a “sound mind in a sound body” that he saw in practice can be found in a country far away from our own civilization. Therefore it deserved more attention and respect.

In addition to this the ideas of Dudgeon have had a significant impact on the late 20th and beginning of 21st century commercial publications, where the association of Chinese martial arts with Daoist practices of *qigong* (氣功 work on *qi*) seems well spread and taken for granted. This is apparently far from the academic discourse; it actually shows as potentially more important within the popular culture.

The academic approach: Herbert Allen Giles (1845-1935)

³⁷ The pinyin is *Shaolinsi*.

³⁸ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 375-385.

³⁹ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), p. 377.

⁴⁰ Dudgeon, John, ‘Kung-fu or Medical Gymnastic’ *The Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3.4 (1895), pp. 386-387.

Introduction

Giles approaches the study of Chinese civilisation as a scholar and in particular as an academic sinologist⁴¹ at the earliest stage of its academic definition as discipline in the Western world. The approach of Giles is wide in covering different topics and translates texts from the original source language.

Moreover, seen through the lenses of his studies on the Chinese martial arts, it is uniform with that of the others sinologists of his time. That is to observe China and present its culture within the Occidental cultural frame, rather than being on the field and create a local strategy of analysis.

Nevertheless, in his picture of the art of boxing in China, Giles builds an interesting image. His work is original because he puts the image of China under a new light and against the main cultural stream⁴². This was that of a very civilised and peaceful country that has always condemned war and violence. By contrast in his first article Giles presents Chinese boxing as the art of fighting at an already sophisticated level, because based on 'gentle' movements.

Giles adopted the same cultural method, he saw the Greek ideal in Chinese sports although approaching Chinese culture from a different educational specialisation: Dudgeon was a surgeon interested in finding a therapy to treat diseases and found a cultural similarity with the Greeks; whereas Giles was a scholar interested in explaining the civilisation of China through some particular topics, such as the art of boxing, and presented the Chinese as a culture similar to that of the Greeks.

The works of Giles cover various fields; they range from the Buddhist studies to the literary and linguistic up to the translation of specific forensic text. He was a distinguished scholar for his style and known for his criticism toward other works. His distinguished character also caused him to be removed from a diplomatic position in China because "did not suffer fools gladly"⁴³.

Among his publications, he wrote in 1906 a piece on Chinese martial art titled "The Home of Jiu Jitsu" included in the project *Adversaria Sinica* and few years later, in 1911, a very small book titled *The Civilisation of China* in which we can find a very brief mention about Chinese boxing in the third chapter covering the "Philosophy and Sport" topic.

This is a rather unusual interest in this aspect of the culture of China, because the number of scholars who dedicated time to explore the physical activities of the Chinese were rare; in particular those who analysed the martial arts were unique.

⁴¹ The definition of this word, sinology, has puzzled for decades scholars of the so-called Chinese studies field. Probably the definition given by Kuijper is more coherent to the specialization when states that translation is the main skill and the contextualization work functions as a cultural frame; for a fuller discussion see 'Is Sinology a Science?' *China Report* 36.3 (2000), p. 349. Although we do have to recognize that everyone can actually be a sinologist if approach the Chinese texts and translates it, despite not had been acquainted with Chinese language before; see the same article mentioned before pp. 333-354. In our case we have evidence of the training in Chinese language of Giles, but we do not have it for Dudgeon, despite the fact that he translated few names from Chinese into English.

⁴² For a full discussion about this controversy see Morton Fried 'Military Status in Chinese Society', *The American Journal of Sociology* 57.4 (1952), pp. 347-357.

⁴³ Charles, Aylmer, *East Asian History* 13.14 (1997), pp. 1-7.

Giles was initially concerned with the generic Chinese sports. He also wrote another article, which will not be covered here for reasons of space and time, titled "Football and Polo in China"⁴⁴.

The focus here will be on the specific topic of Chinese boxing and its derivatives; later it will be clarified the reasons why Giles spent some time on it; lastly it will be shown the extent of his impact on later literature.

It is a real shame that neither in the biographical work by Charles Aylmer⁴⁵ there is not sufficient information about his work on Chinese boxing; this is, nevertheless, the reason of this work, to fill a gap in the British construction of the Chinese martial arts.

A unique interest in fighting arts

Giles two works on Chinese *wushu* are both original in their scopes. The *Adversaria Sinica* project started in 1905 as a series of notes on various topics. He was interested in writing articles about the dances of the Chinese and on Jiu Jitsu⁴⁶, and the picture he built is that of the practice of self-defence that became a sport and later transformed into the science of boxing.

The title and introduction deserve a comment. Giles states the Chinese martial arts are the origin of the Japanese art of Jiu Jitsu. The academic information about the introduction of *Jiu Jitsu* in Britain are scarce⁴⁷; apparently the Japanese art was introduced earlier in Britain by some Japanese clerks in the late 19th century; it is, therefore, possible that Giles saw some performance of this art or heard about it. Having probably seeing that performance and probably also a demonstration in China, Giles must have come to the conclusion that there is a technical and cultural link between the two arts. Giles questioned about the origins of the two and specifically regarding the Chinese achievements: "So much has been lately said and written about *jiu Jitsu*, the Japanese form of self-defence, that it may be of interest to see what China, with her vastly longer national life, has achieved in the same direction"⁴⁸.

Sources and resulting image

Giles article on Chinese boxing represents a breakthrough in the field, because nobody had ever attempted to trace the origins of this art by looking at the existing classical literature; moreover, he explored the new territory of the specialised literature⁴⁹ and translated it.

Giles brought to the attention of the British reader a wide variety of textual sources never utilised before for that purpose, such as the Tang Official Records (*Tang Shi* 唐时), and texts new to the audience of Chinese studies, such as the chronicles from

⁴⁴ Giles, Herbert A., 'Football and Polo in China' *The Nineteenth Century and After* 59 (April 1906), p. 508.

⁴⁵ Charles, Aylmer, *East Asian History* 13-14 (1997).

⁴⁶ A Japanese art of self-defence.

⁴⁷ It can be found something using internet at the page <http://www.redroseju-jitsu.org.uk/ju-jitsuuk.html>, accessed on February 15, 2009.

⁴⁸ Giles, Herbert A., 'The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*', *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), p. 132

⁴⁹ Stanley E. Henning, 'The Martial Arts in Chinese Physical Culture, 1865-1965' in Green, Thomas A. and Svinth, Joseph R., (eds.), *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, Westport Conn., (London, 2003), p. 26.

Ninpo (宁波); the story of the Shao-lin monastery and finally the military treatise New Book of Effective Discipline (*Jixiao xinshu* 纪效新书)⁵⁰.

However after the emerging of an academic interest in the subject that allowed its exploration, it can be noticed that Giles introduced the works with some omissions regarding authors and facts beyond some of the conceptions mentioned. He does not, for instance, clarify who wrote the Canon of Boxing (*Ch'üan ching* 拳经)⁵¹ and neither when he argues about a distinction to be made between “exoteric” (*waijia* 外家) and “esoteric” (*neijia* 内家) self-defence arts⁵².

It is no wonder that the reader is left with so many questions unanswered; consequently those conceptions have been living in the imagination of those few people interested, perhaps fascinated by it, and contributed to a somehow mystic construction of martial arts still alive in the 20th and 21st century publications.

In my opinion what stroke the attention of Giles when describing Chinese boxing is the concept of gentleness of certain movements; he stresses the concept of gentle in the Japanese art of *Jiu Jitsu* (柔术) and also in the movements described in the Chinese military treatise that first he quotes at length:

“Boxing seems to be an accomplishment of no real value in serious warfare. At the same time, inasmuch, as a study of this art in its elementary stages involves flexibility of the arms and legs, together with activity of the body, [...] holding the adversary face upwards lies its gentleness”⁵³

and then he comment: “The use here of the word *jou* ‘gentleness’ is peculiar noticeable, the Japanese term *jiu jitsu* being the equivalent of the Chinese *jou shu* ‘gentle art’”⁵⁴.

The reader may come to the partial conclusion that the interest Giles showed toward the art of boxing in China was part of his original approach to that civilisation and it is unlikely to be shared by his colleagues in Britain and the rest of Europe at that time.

As for his wording; Giles in this article “The Home of Jiu Jitsu” find difficult to keep the consistency of the word boxing. This emerged because of the same problem shown by the Chinese texts were words vary: from *jiaodi* (角抵 Horns down) to *ch'uanpo* (拳搏 fight) to *ch'uan* (拳 box)⁵⁵. Moreover, Giles alternates the use of self-defence with that of boxing or science and only once used the French *savate*⁵⁶.

Chinese authors have usually used the word *quan* 拳, in combination with other words, to express the idea of fighting that includes bare-handed fighting and also with weapons. Furthermore, in modern western works, there is an inaccurate use of the

⁵⁰ Giles, Herbert A., ‘The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*’, *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), pp. 135-137.

⁵¹ Giles, Herbert A., ‘The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*’, *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), p. 134.

⁵² Giles, Herbert A., ‘The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*’, *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), p. 135.

⁵³ Giles, Herbert A., ‘The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*’, *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), p. 137.

⁵⁴ Giles, Herbert A., ‘The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*’, *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), pp. 137-138.

⁵⁵ According to the current method of transcription pinyin is *quan*.

⁵⁶ Giles, Herbert A., ‘The Home of *Jiu Jitsu*’, *Adversaria Sinica* 1.5 (1906), p. 135

words 'martial art' or the Chinese original 'wushu' or 'kung-fu' because they all generally refer to the same meaning.

This was acceptable at Giles time when few people were interested in such an historical effort, but this can confuse the reader. Unfortunately, the two authors presented so far did not contribute to clarity: Dudgeon, as already shown, used *kung-fu* for therapeutic purposes whereas Giles used a number of words for boxing.

The Anglo-Eurocentric construction

Giles drew another interesting image of martial arts in his later publication in 1911, *The Civilisation of China*. Here, his argument on martial art is certainly shorter but it is perhaps more close to the general cultural trend that included China in the European scheme of analysis of the world that emerged by the end of 16th century.

At an first reading, the reader may wonder why Giles argues, in the chapter "Philosophy and sport", about thinkers in ancient China, followed by a very brief mention on the art of boxing, certainly taken from his previous article, arguing that fighting had been created as a sport now "passed out of the national life, and existing only in the record of books"⁵⁷. While Chinese boxing flourished in a Buddhist monastery and gave life, later on, in Japan to the art of self-defence *jiu-jitsu*, again repeating the term "gentle art" (柔术).

Moreover this concept is also supported by the same quotation showed in the article already discussed about the gentle art⁵⁸. This is a short passage within the presentation of sports in general in ancient China. Furthermore it is followed by a whole chapter titled "Recreation"⁵⁹ including the activities of skating; acting; gambling and so forth.

Brownell locates his vision of the subject in the broad cultural context of a western view of China, where the equivalent Greek conception of sound mind in sound body is highlighted⁶⁰.

This is unlikely to be just a case, because this work together with the article, not in exam here, "Football and Polo in China" is the evidence that Giles had an interest in showing not merely the civilisation of China but some particular aspects of ordinary life making them appearing conceptually similar to the Greek ideal.

Conclusion

In my view Giles contributed to the British image of Chinese martial arts with a remarkable work of research that can certainly be regarded as being ahead of his time. Perhaps it is due to this reason that his academic effort has been overlooked by the generations of scholars and has not reached the general audience leaving martial arts in an unclear state: Are they simply gymnastic; a dance; a science or boxing?

Giles attempt to view the civilisation of China and martial arts as comparable to the Greek ideal of a "sound mind in a sound body" as in the case of Dudgeon is striking;

⁵⁷ Giles, Herbert A., *The Civilisation of China*, (London, 1911), p. 151.

⁵⁸ Giles, Herbert A., *The Civilisation of China*, (London, 1911), p. 151-152.

⁵⁹ Giles, Herbert A., *The Civilisation of China*, (London, 1911), pp. 159-178.

⁶⁰ Brownell, Susan, *Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China*. (Lanham, 2008), p. 29.

although today scholars are rather trying to build an image of Chinese martial arts using Chinese criteria.

In the third and last chapter of this essay will be taken into brief consideration the work of Joseph Needham about Chinese martial arts. It will be relevant to see how Needham put the two conceptions together: that of Dudgeon of *kung-fu* as a daoist therapeutic method and that of Giles of an ancient Chinese sport.

Needham's vision of Chinese martial arts

Introduction

Much has already been written on the valuable academic achievement of Joseph Needham; therefore, for this reason and also due to the limited space available on the subject, the work *Science and Civilisation in China* and *Celestial lancets* will be taken into consideration briefly where Needham and Lu Gwei-djian have drawn a picture of martial arts, including that of Japan, together with specific skills.

His vision of boxing

The vision of Needham can be seen as the cultural transition between ideal of knight errant (*youxia* 游侠)⁶¹, the popular imagine of a hero and that more "scientific" of a Chinese therapeutic method. The semi scientific factor, as he also wrote, is because of the daoist base.

A further and wider vision emerges along the line; this is the perpetuation of the Greek conception applied to the rest of the world. Needham occasionally uses the word 'art' as in the Chinese *shù* 术 and in the majority of the cases he uses the western word 'gymnastic' possibly associated with 'massage' or 'exercise'. In these words there still is the conception of a body in motion or to be treated. Needham argues also about Chinese boxing as 'gymnastic technique' within the daoist context; he approached daoist because a "system of mysticism"⁶² is not anti-scientific therefore useful to be looked at if one reader wants to complete the picture of sciences in China.

Sources available

It is relevant to note that in the references, Needham relies on the works of Dudgeon and Giles. This is to confirm the impact of the two previous authors presented here. Needham makes the two images of Chinese boxing by Dudgeon and Giles converge into one of ritual dance and development through physical exercise. This is because of the absence of other academic works.

Perception

The reader at this point of the narration of the work of Needham may wonder if he had ever seen a performance of *wushu* because it seems that his work is not based on personal experience. This occurs once, when Needham writes "Chinese boxing (*chuan po*) as an art with rules different from that of the West and embodying a certain element of ritual dance (see Giles) probably originated as a department of Taoist physical exercises"⁶³. The reader cannot recognise which method or style he

⁶¹ Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol.5, Part 6, (Cambridge, [1956] 1972), p. 87.

⁶² Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge, [1956] 1972), p. 33

⁶³ Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge, [1956] 1972), pp. 145-146.

refers to. Probably the interpretation of Needham of *wushu* as gymnastic is the result of all the parts of the body used when in combat.

Chinese boxing and Traditional Chinese Medicine

In the study of Traditional Chinese Medicine (hereafter T.C.M.), Needham approaches the topic of vital spots and its tradition and puts martial arts under a different light. In my view it is not surprising that Needham, apart from the scientific interest, was also personally curious of exploring this new and mysterious area of knowledge. Needham shows *wushu* under a new light, because it is an art “in the service of man’ aggression”⁶⁴. The image is decidedly less philosophic and certainly not physiotherapy. Moreover Needham starts to show Chinese boxing names together with their Japanese version; thus presenting the idea that what is true for *wushu* can also be true for *bujutsu*⁶⁵(武术).

In *Celestial Lancets*, Needham provides more technical descriptions regarding movements classification; different arts originating from one source in China; the tradition concerning the division exoteric (*waijia* 外家) and esoteric (*neijia* 内家); that of Shao-lin monastery and the traditional figure of Bodhidharma.

Until this point the image Needham has constructed was clear, for those who have a classical education that included the study of the Greek civilisation and ideals. However from this point onward the image becomes more complex and based on local Chinese traditions rather than on an academic work. This has been the first improved academic effort and it is surprising that a sinologist of his profile had developed such an interest, although presented as a “digression”, however so brief and un-experienced.

Conclusion

To draw a conclusion of the three authors presented, their works can be generally located in the intellectual trend established by the end of the 16th century that built a Eurocentric approach toward the “new”, Asian and East Asian world; China was one of the countries to be included.

John Dudgeon who built an image where Chinese *kungfu* appears as a possible counterpart of the Greek ideal and the Chinese answer to the medical European quest of how to treat the illness without dissecting the body.

Herbert Giles was inspired by the same Greek ideal and also by the personal interest in ritual dances in ancient China. He made an interesting effort to explore briefly some relevant texts previously mentioned.

Joseph Needham continued the construction of Chinese martial arts using the Greek ideal, improving it by arguing a possible origin in the Daoist conception of the personal attainment of immortality and the topic of vital spot.

Therefore these three images can be part of the same intellectual image built to conceptualise China within a precise theoretical framework. Their idea of martial arts

⁶⁴ Needham, Joseph and Lu, Gwei-djian, *Celestial Lancets*, (Cambridge, 1980), p. 302

⁶⁵ This is the same Chinese words *wushu* simply written according to the Japanese transcription method.

as beneficial because they are considered as a therapeutic practice is still alive in the Britain. In modern British popular literature, such as *Qi Magazine* and, the English written magazine, *Kungfu taichi* we can still read article, for example, about the discussion of how to define *qi*⁶⁶. This together with the popularity of courses taught in gyms where the people can learn the ‘gentle’ movements of *Taichi chuan* and the practice of *qigong*. By consequence in the people’s mind the word Chinese *wushu* means also an “other” way of well being.

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⁶⁶ *Qi Magazine: Health and Internal Training*, Issue 84, Jul/Aug/Sept 2007.

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