

REVIEWS

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Martial Arts and Combat Sports. Towards the General Theory of Fighting Arts: book review

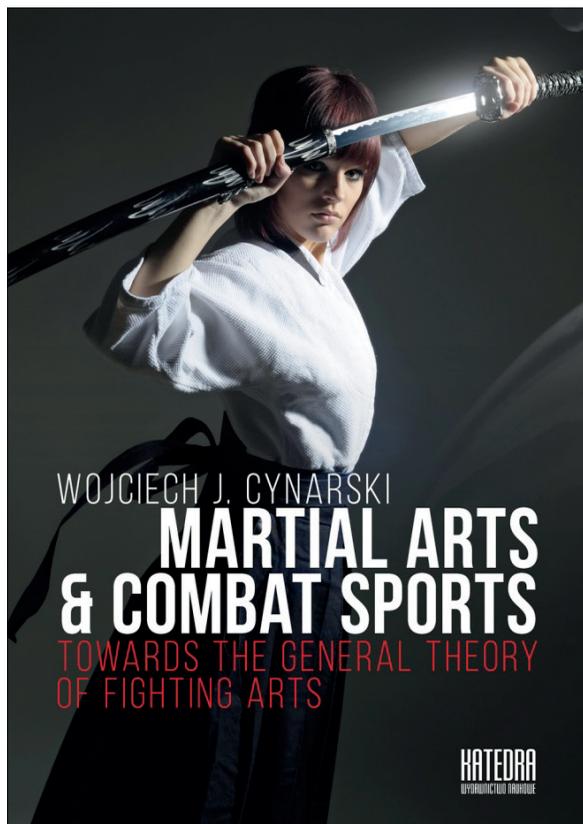
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Key words: combat sports, martial arts, book, theories

Abstract

This is a review of the book “Martial Arts and Combat Sports. Towards the General Theory of fighting arts” by Wojciech J. Cynarski, released in 2019.

The contents of the book consist of thirteen chapters (excluding the introduction and summary). They concern the following issues: a review of the most important theoretical approaches; state of knowledge on martial arts; self-defence against martial arts theory; expressive martial arts and their evolution; participation of martial arts in the policy of promoting national culture; the role of training; the role of women in martial arts fighting; relationship between the different Asian martial arts in social structure; the presence of Christianity in martial arts; and short studies on the elements of combat in rugby, *kenjutsu*, *ido* and *yoga*. The whole study is supplemented with an extensive bibliography.



Introduction

Martial arts and sports are the subject of research originating from various scientific disciplines. These studies, located in diversified areas of science, provide results emphasizing, among others, health benefits of martial arts and sports, their role in traditional cultures and mass culture, position in social and media discourse, as well as their potential and real impact on the social attitudes of children and young people from various cultural areas. Practising such forms of physical activity can also become the main element of private and professional life of masters and students [Cynarski, Pawelec, Yu, Vit, Słopecki, Bielec, Kubala 2018; Cynarski, Pawelec, Yu, Słopecki, Bielec, Kubala 2018].

Multifaceted research on martial arts and sports allows for the specialization of research areas taking into account, among others, 1) historical issues (e.g. fencing, warrior culture), 2) issues of using martial arts in the military dimension, 3) theories of physical education, 4) cultural contexts, 5) education, 6) religion, 7) philosophy, and 8) media content with regard to the indicated subject matter. This promotes the treatment of martial arts and combat sports also in an interdisciplinary perspective, to varying degrees referring to almost every field of science [Cynarski 2006]. All scientific publica-

tions in which theories refer to the above elements are potentially interesting sources of topics sought by many researchers. These researchers often combine theoretical knowledge and practical skills attested by master or student degrees [Cynarski 2002; Maroteaux 2012].

One of such studies is the book “Martial Arts and Combat Sports. Towards the General Theory of fighting arts”, written by Wojciech J. Cynarski, Professor of Physical Education at the University of Rzeszow. He is an author of many books and scientific and popular science articles in martial arts and combat sports. He is also a recognized practitioner with master degrees of 10 dan in *judo-do/ido*, 9 dan *jujutsu*, 9 dan *idokan karate/zen-do karate tai-te-tao*, 7 dan *aikijutsu/aiki-jujutsu*, 6 dan *iaido*, 6 dan *kobudo*, 4th dan *judo* and 4th dan *kick-boxing* and president of the International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society and the Idokan Poland Association.

The Book

The contents of the book consist of thirteen chapters (excluding introduction and summary). They concern the following issues: 1) review of the most important theoretical approaches; 2) the status of current knowledge on martial arts; 3) placing self-defence against martial arts theory; 4) expressive dimension of martial arts and their evolution; 5) participation of martial arts in national culture promotion policy; 6) the role of training; 7) the role of women in martial arts fighting; 8) relationship between the different Asian martial arts in social structure, 9) the presence of Christianity in martial arts and 10) short studies on the elements of fighting in rugby, 11) *kenjutsu*, 12) *ido* and 13) *yoga*. The whole study is supplemented with an extensive bibliography.

The introduction to the cited study contains, among others, the author’s comments on the forms of transferring martial arts traditions (e.g. within the family, in schools, in temples). It is supposed to come from both the personal experience of the masters and the schemes developed by many generations of experts. Psychophysical skills should be supplemented with thorough theoretical knowledge conducive to gaining experience and life wisdom. Thanks to this, the “warrior’s path” has with time become one of the cultural phenomena, and the division of martial arts made by Daniel Boleli into 1) demonstrative, 2) internal, 3) with weapons and 4) self-defence [2008] is treated by the author in a too simplified way.

In the second chapter, W. J. Cynarski presents two theories related to martial arts: the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts, the Anthropology of Martial Arts and the General Theory of Fighting Arts. This topic, presented as one of the lectures of the Fifth World Scientific Congress of Martial Arts and Combat Sports in Rio Maior

(Portugal, October 6-8, 2016), included a distinctive language of concepts (such as “physical culture”, “martial arts”, “the path of martial arts – *budo*”, “combat sports” and “hand-to-hand combat systems”), as well as discussing the scientific framework from an anthropological perspective (with “man” in the centre of attention) and justification for the study of martial arts tourism. The General Theory of Fighting Arts is a development and complement to the previously developed two theories, including the introduction of specialized training (which was developed in chapter eight) and a range of new content (e.g. characteristics of aspects and dimensions of the “fighting arts” phenomenon). This concept was introduced by the author intentionally, as the broadest scope.

The next chapter contains new versions of the content presented during the lectures given by the author to the Faculty of Sport Sciences at the Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic) in 2014. Their topics included a broader description of the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts and Anthropology of Martial Arts combined with the General Theory of Fighting Arts. This chapter also includes knowledge related to culture (studied on the example of theatre, dance and film), religion, symbolism and psychological, cultural-sociological and educational aspects.

The subject of the fourth chapter is focused, among others, on the opinions of experts in the field of martial arts and combat sports on the subject of self-defence. A canon covering the techniques and tactics used and expert opinions on the role of specialist training is presented. The advantage of these trainings would be the development in the field of versatility, selection of effective techniques and psychological knowledge transmitted through appropriate teaching methods.

In the fifth chapter W. J. Cynarski develops the subject of mythical and archetypal roots common to both martial arts and the theatre. The author emphasizes the role of aesthetic and metaesthetic relations, for example on the basis of knowledge encoded in the movement expressed in accordance with the classical forms developed for centuries. At the same time, the author admits, for example, that performing combat movement (Japanese *Kata*) allows to treat the warrior almost like an actor.

The sixth chapter contains valuable information on the incomplete transfer of practical knowledge on *jujutsu* and *karate* from Japan to Europe and on other continents, which consequently influenced the development, change and institutionalization of martial arts. In addition, new eclectic “creations” referring to Japanese martial arts are far removed from their prototypes. Such activities have also been used in political relations both within a given country and on the international arena, sometimes serving to advertise totalitarian systems of many countries (which is the subject of the seventh chapter).

Containing elements of one of the author’s previous publications (2018), the eighth chapter addresses

the training process in its three aspects: 1) “Ideological conditioning of martial arts training”; 2) “Training in chosen traditional martial arts”; and 3) “Complementary training”. The author provides a review of selected European martial arts organizations for this purpose in terms of implementation of processes referring to the mentioned elements.

In the ninth chapter, which concerns the proposal of four archetypes of women present in the world of martial arts and martial arts, W. J. Cynarski distinguishes: 1) *a warrior*; 2) *a princess*; 3) *a dancer*; and 4) *a witch*. He also raises the problem of showing the processes of emancipation of women practising these forms of physical activity.

The tenth chapter – devoted to intercultural dialogues conducted through martial arts and combat sports – presents an outline of the elements of social structures of selected schools and organizations acting for the dissemination of the widely understood “warrior’s path” in various kinds of associations. As appropriate examples, the author uses the characteristics of the *dojo*, groups of practitioners and organizations working actively worldwide.

A comparison of the Christian religion and the “spirit” of martial arts (already done in another article by the author: Cynarski 2016), shown in chapter eleventh, is an attempt to answer questions about universal values for warriors from the East and West. The issue of the opposite to “warrior’s path”: “anti-path”, becomes more and more important.

The twelfth chapter contains (with selected examples) the advantages of using theoretical and practical knowledge about hand-to-hand combat in team sports. One of the best examples of this according to W.J. Cynarski is rugby, which combines team action (group aspect) of players along with hand-to-hand combat with a specific opponent (individual aspect).

The book discussed here also presents martial arts using a particular weapon. Related content (included in chapter thirteenth) includes a short description of the traditional fencing of the old Japanese *kenjutsu* (also containing *iaido*). The author presents selected schools and their greatest masters, as well as selected forms of *kenjutsu* and *kobudo* using illustrative materials.

Far Eastern martial arts are also associated with Old Japanese medicine (called *bujutsu ido*), which in many cases is an effective alternative to European medicine. Wojciech J. Cynarski in this place (chapter fourteen) focuses however, on its social perception among the Westerners. In addition, Cynarski briefly characterizes yoga (chapter fifteenth), both in terms of its links with martial arts and its presence outside the Far East.

Conclusions

The featured book by Cynarski has significant cognitive value, because it refers to a wide range of topics focused on martial arts and combat sports (as well as combat

systems). This is confirmed by the thematic spread of this reading, ranging from the history and evolution of martial arts through to its related medicine, and ending with the subject of the presence of women among contemporary warriors, which corresponds in the real world of “co-existence” among others cultural issues, and takes a philosophical approach, as well as considering bio-medical issues. The author himself also notes that chapters 4-15 contain “discussion of the individual dimensions and aspects of the broadly understood martial arts – from the utilitarian (self-defence, self-healing), through teaching and training methodology, to philosophical and sociological issues. In some cases, these are texts that are a continuation of research and work previously published, while others are completely new” (p. 9). Their explanation is facilitated by the “Theories of cultural dialogue”, “Radical Humanism” and “New-paradigmatic human and social sciences” as promoted by the author in this book.

Any reservations, among others might include the too narrow treatment of the subject matter of martial arts in mass media. The omission of even a brief description of media profiled to match the interests of readers seems to be a missed opportunity.

It is worth noting that the author is a long-time practitioner of martial arts (the holder of several top master degrees), as well as a university lecturer holding the title “professor”. The use of this book will therefore allow readers to deepen their current knowledge in the discussed topic.

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Martial Arts and Combat Sports Towards the General Theory of Fighting Arts: artykuł recenzyjny

Słowa kluczowe: sporty walki, sztuki walki, książka, teorie

Streszczenie:

Niniejsza recenzja dotyczy książki *Martial Arts and Combat Sports. Towards the General Theory of fighting arts* autorstwa Wojciecha Cynarskiego, która została wydana w 2019 roku. Na zawartość książki składa się trzynaście rozdziałów (oprócz wstępu i zakończenia). Dotyczą one następujących zagadnień: przeglądu najważniejszych podejść teoretycznych, stanu dotychczasowej wiedzy na temat sportów walki, sytuowania samoobrony na tle teorii sztuk walki, ekspresyjnego wymiaru sztuk walki i ich ewolucji, udziału sztuk walki w polityce promowania kultury narodowej, roli treningu, roli kobiet w sztukach walki, relacji azjatyckich sztuk walki w strukturze społecznej, obecności chrześcijaństwa w sztukach walki oraz krótkich studiów na temat elementów walki w rugby, *kenjutsu*, *ido* i jogi. Całość uzupełniona jest obszerną bibliografią.