

## PHILOSOPHY

LU AN<sup>1(ADEFG)</sup>, GUOBIN DAI<sup>2(AC)</sup>, RENHUI FENG<sup>3(BCF)</sup>

1 ORCID: 0000-0002-6591-2970

School of Physical Education, Huaibei Normal University, Huaibei, Anhui (China)

2 ORCID: 0000-0002-5105-3511

School of Chinese Martial Arts, Shanghai University of Sports, Shanghai (China)

3 ORCID: 0000-0003-1379-3874

School of Physical Education, Huaibei Normal University, Huaibei, Anhui (China)

Corresponding Author: Renhui Feng, School of Physical Education, Huaibei Normal University, no. 100, Dongshan Road, Huaibei City, Anhui Province, China

e-mail: feng20171000@163.com, phone: +8619356100416

# How dare you: the formation of courage in Chinese martial arts

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### Abstract

**Background.** All over the world forms of martial arts emphasize the importance of courage. However, the understanding of courage varies from culture to culture.

**Problem and aim.** The main goal of this study is to discuss the concept and formation of martial courage in Chinese martial arts.

**Material and methods.** This paper analyses the influence and contributions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, which constitute the pillars of traditional Chinese thought.

**Results and Conclusions.** The core of Confucian courage is benevolence, justice, propriety, and wisdom. Its main function is to govern the country by establishing an ideology to normalize people's martial activities, namely people's choice to fight or not. The core of Taoist courage is non-action, non-contention, and being like water. Its main function is to govern the body by highlighting the philosophy that the unity of human and heaven is what the Chinese people have long been yearning for. The core of Buddhist courage is compassion. Its function is mainly to govern the mind by using either lowered eyebrows or angry eyes. Chinese martial arts absorb the essence of the three thoughts on courage and construct its own martial courage system, which facilitates the formation of martial arts techniques, and also acclimatizes Chinese martial arts practitioners' behaviour to the construction of the Chinese national spirit.

### 1 Introduction

Skill, courage, and morality, which have been called the core qualities of martial arts, are the three driving forces that seek to ensure the healthy development of Chinese martial arts (Wushu in the Chinese language). While there are numerous studies on skills

and morality within the literature on Chinese martial arts [Li 2015; Yang 2021; Liu 2021], few studies have focused on courage (胆 dan in the Chinese language). However, in practice, whether it relates to a traditional martial art form or modern combat, courage is crucial. As the traditional boxing proverb says, the most important element is dan (胆 courage), followed by

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li (力 strength), and *kung fu* (功夫 skill). Chinese martial arts practitioners prioritize courage.

In order to reveal and explore the connotations and denotations of courage and effectively convey the essence of Chinese martial arts, this paper analyses martial courage (武勇 Wu Yong in Chinese) from the perspective of Chinese culture. To some extent, the martial courage in Chinese martial arts represents the general courage of the Chinese people from all walks of life, including politicians, diplomats, workers, farmers, soldiers, and so on, because Chinese martial arts is, to borrow Carl Jung's terminology, a complex of all Chinese. Regardless of whether they are adults, children, men, or women, everyone has a hero dream hidden in their hearts – that is, the dream of becoming a kung fu master. Therefore, the study of martial courage is an important perspective in understanding Chinese culture and people.

What is courage in the Chinese context? It is useful to turn to etymology to understand this, because Chinese characters reflect Chinese people's perception of something. The character Yong ('courage' in the English language) was first seen in the oracle bone inscriptions from the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC – 771 BC) [Li 2013]. It means bravery, courageousness, and aggression. It can also be extended to refer to a brave person. With time, the shape of the character gained three variants, which XU [1963] explained in *Shuowenjiezi* (*The Interpretation of Chinese Characters*) as follows:

𠂔 follows Qi, because the right part of this character represents strength; 𠂔 follows GE, because the right part represents weapon; 𠂔 follows heart, because the bottom part represents psychology [Xu 1963].

What is the relationship among these three variants? Duan Yucai, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), said in *Notes on The Interpretation of Chinese Characters*:

Qi is also Yunqi which fills the body of a person. Strength refers sinew. Why Yong is defined as Qi? The reason is that where the breath comes, where the strength reaches; where the mind comes, where the Qi reaches [Duan 1988].

The etymologies of Wu ('martial' in English language) and Yong have had a natural connection since their inception. The earliest character of Wu 𠂔 was found in an oracle bone inscription from the Shang Dynasty (1600 BC-1046BC) [Li 2013]. One interpretation contends that the icon of Wu comprises GE (a kind of weapon) and ZHI ('toes' in the English language). It means the act of carrying a weapon in order to fight bravely, which implies an abstract moral concept about war in ancient times [Yang 1981]. Another interpretation takes ZHI to mean 'stop' (homophone of toes in the Chinese pronunciation), so the Chinese character Wu

means 'to put away weapons and stop fighting', which is a quote from Chu Zhuangwang (?-591BC) [Li 2013], who truly intended to say that 'the purpose of war is not to show off, but to stop fighting'. Chu Zhuangwang took advantage of the topic to express the idea of using force in order not to fight. Dai and Lu [2019] discussed the etymology and reviewed the conceptual history of Chinese martial arts, and redefined it by asserting that it is a culture of rivals. The etymological analysis shows that the link between Wu and Yong is GE, where Wu is action, meaning 'to use GE' and Yong is like an engine, meaning 'daring to use GE'.

World over, ancient scholars like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in the West and Confucius, Mencius, and Zhuangzi in the East have discussed courage. Given that Chinese martial arts is classified as a sport in China, and that modern sport has become a specialized discipline, scholars have conducted detailed studies on the courage of sports [Corlett 1996; Scott Kretchmar 1982; Konter, Ng 2012]. Chinese modern scholars have also explored courage significantly, but have mainly focused on the interpretation of Confucian literature [Tu 2017; Lin 2007; Zhao 2020]. Some researchers have attempted to microscopically explore the methods to cultivate the martial courage of Chinese martial arts, for instance, training a martial art practitioner to be brave and aggressive [Du 2008; Shu 2006; Jin, Li 2005], but few have tried to macroscopically explain how such courage comes into being.

Martial arts 'did not develop in a cultural and philosophical vacuum, but were affected by the cultural milieu and philosophical traditions in which they developed' [Lewis 2016: 252]. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism constitute the cornerstone of Chinese culture, which comprehensively and profoundly affects all aspects of Chinese behaviour, certainly including those of Chinese martial arts practitioners. This paper focuses on the Chinese milieu and explores the influence of these streams of thought on the formation of martial courage in Chinese martial arts. It is necessary to point out that the purpose of Wushu in the age of cold weapons (traditional Wushu) is quite different from that of Wushu sport today (modern Wushu). It was not just about competition and winning. It was a matter of life or death. Therefore, for Wushu practitioners in ancient times, courage meant something different from what athletes need today. What we discuss here specifically refers to the traditional Wushu.

## 2 The influence of Confucianism on martial courage in Chinese martial arts

The frequent wars in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (770 BC-221BC) gave birth to the concept of martial courage, which prevailed in society at the time and

surpassed the virtue of moral courage. Confucius realized that the concept of martial courage that prevailed with the occurrence of wars would have a bad social impact if it was unrestricted. Therefore, Confucius managed to reinterpret the connotation of moral courage by integrating the concept of martial courage into his ideological system. Confucius was a brave man. According to Historical Records, ‘Confucius is nine feet six inches tall, and people call him a superior man, and feel strange about his height’ [Sima 1959]. However, Confucius expanded the connotation of courage, so that the concept was not only applicable to wars, politics, and diplomacy, but also became an important part of personal moral cultivation. Confucius drew out different meanings and values of courage. In inheriting the concept from his predecessors, he brought courage into his ideological system with benevolence as the core and propriety as the norm, in order to ensure that righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and benevolence would restrict courage. He identified four key precepts as part of this.

First, courage must work with righteousness. Confucius asserted that courage must match righteousness, and he intended to rule with righteousness. If a gentleman had only courage but no righteousness, he would make trouble and revolt, and if a villain had only courage and no righteousness, his villainous ways would only worsen. Confucius believed that courage should meet the standards and value requirements of righteousness, and action taken in furtherance of courage should be based on the values and guidance of righteousness. He said ‘to see what is right not to do it is want of courage’ [Confucius 2011:6, translated by James Legge]. Then ‘doing what should be done’ or ‘daring to do what is right’ is a very important feature of Confucius’ idea of courage. Things tend to be done righteously, and not politically, right. The influence of righteous courage is so big that today’s national anthem of the People’s Republic of China is titled ‘March of the Righteous Courage Army’.

Second, courage must work with etiquette. In the opinion of Confucius, etiquette is a symbol of a well-functioning social order and represents a social norm that is used to tell the hierarchical difference between upper and lower levels, and that functions as a political discipline for the governance of society. Etiquette had to be observed: people were expected to be aware of their social status and act accordingly. Confucius once said, ‘if you don’t learn etiquette, you have no place to make a living’ [*The Analects of Confucius*, Book XVI Jishi, translated by the authors]. Confucius tied etiquette to courage, to let people know the social order, so that the society would be full of courage but no chaotic. Courage working with etiquette can play an essential role in the education of ordinary people by civilizing the vulgar.

Third, courage must work with knowledge. Zhi (knowing) in *The Analects of Confucius* is interpreted as intelligence, which means wisdom and learning. Con-

fucius believed that learning can make a person smart and wise, and help them become a person of great righteousness. Confucius was a great educator with 3000 disciples. He created his own teaching methods, such as: ‘I do not open up the truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help out any one who is not anxious to explain himself’ [Confucius 2011:21, translated by James Legge]. Confucius’ intention was to let students think positively first, and then inspire them. He said ‘learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous’ [Confucius 2011:6, translated by James Legge]. Zhi in *The Analects of Confucius* also meant to distinguish right from wrong, and make wise judgments and choices before being brave. What Confucius emphasized here is the courage of wisdom. He did not advocate reckless courage. He said, ‘I would not have him to act with me, who will unarmed attack a tiger, or cross a river without a boat, dying without any regret. My associate must be the man who proceeds to action full of solicitude, who is fond of adjusting his plans, and then carries them into execution’ [Confucius 2011: 22, translated by James Legge]. Confucius did not approve of the brave action of fighting a tiger without fear and with boldness. He believed that courage should be accompanied by resourcefulness. Besides, Zhi is also interpreted as having a sense of shame. Confucius often said: ‘To be fond of learning is to be near to knowledge. To practice with vigor is to be near to magnanimity. To possess the feeling of shame is to be near to energy.’ [Zi Si 2010: 38, translated by James Legge].

Fourth, courage must work with benevolence. Benevolence is the commander of Confucius’ ideology. All moral norms established by Confucius aim at benevolence, which governs various ethical principles. Benevolence is a way of doing things, which is reflected in interpersonal communication, such as blaming oneself and forgiving others. In Confucius’ opinion, courage must take benevolence as the highest pursuit. To be brave is to practice benevolence. The spirit of a benevolent person who is not afraid of making a sacrifice for the pursuit of truth is the embodiment of a benevolent person’s great courage. Confucius once said, ‘There is no lofty one who will seek to live at the expense of injuring benevolence, but only one who sacrifices his own life to fulfil benevolence’ [*The Analects of Confucius*, Book XV Wei Ling Kung, translated by the authors]. This spirit of martyrdom is the embodiment of great courage, which is the external manifestation of benevolence and the foundation of fulfilling it.

Mencius (372BC-289BC) and Xunzi (313BC-238BC) inherited and developed Confucius’ concept of courage and gave it new characteristics. According to Mencius, courage is closely related to Qi. Mencius’ courage is a moral one based on Qi and righteousness, which takes ‘nursing courage’ as an important means to achieve the realm of unmoving ideal personality, and the cultiva-

tion of magnificent spirit as concrete content. Mencius named the magnificent spirit 'HAO RAN ZHI QI' and described it as follows:

This Qi is extremely vast and powerful. If you cultivate it with a magnanimous mind without injuring it, it will be full of heaven and earth. However, this kind of Qi must be matched with benevolence, righteousness and morality, otherwise it will lack strength. Moreover, it can only be generated through regular moral cultivation of benevolence and righteousness, rather than relying on incidental acts of justice. Once you have a guilty conscience, it will lack strength. [The Works of Mencius, Book III, Gongsun Chou, Part I, translated by the authors]

Mencius believed that the cultivation of great courage should focus on inner moral introspection, which involves asking oneself whether it is right in the way of self-examination. If justice is on one's side, they will have courage in their heart and remember that 'I will go forward against thousands and tens of thousands' [Mencius 2010: 51, translated by James Legge].

Xunzi followed Confucius and Mencius' guidance on courage, and added the reference standard of 'benefit' on treating righteousness and injustice. He said:

There are the courage of dogs and pigs, the courage of businessmen and thieves, the courage of villains, and the courage of gentlemen. The courage of dogs and pigs is characterized by fighting for food and drink, no shame, unable to tell right from wrong, regardless of death and injury, not afraid of the strength of anyone, greedy merely for eating and drinking. The courage of businessmen and thieves is characterized by doing things for profit, fighting for property, with no declining, acting decisively, bold and exhilarating, ferocious, violent, greedy merely for wealth. It is the courage of a villain to act tyrannically regardless of death. With no succumbing to power as long as righteousness exists, with no changing his point of view even he is offered the whole country, sticking to justice and perseverance though he values life, this is the courage of a gentleman [Xunzi 1988, translated by the authors].

Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi made an incomplete but profound exposition on courage, which established the basic structure of Confucian theory of courage and had a significant influence on martial arts practitioners. Following the Confucius' notion of courage, Chinese martial arts elites have established its own domain in courage. For example, Confucius highlights etiquette courage, Chinese martial arts practitioners call for 'learn etiquette before you learn martial arts' and warn 'if you do not stick to martial etiquette, you are a martial thug'. In order to meet the Confucius' righteous courage, Chinese martial arts learners are encouraged to 'Go and do boldly what is righteous' and a real Chinese martial arts

practitioner must 'dare to do and dare to be'. As for the Confucius' shame courage, Chinese martial arts masters believe 'prefer death to humiliation' and 'it is never too late to avenge'. In addition, Chinese martial arts learners are taught with benevolence courage by infilling 'never hurt others while engaging in the martial arts' and 'it is no better than defeating the army without fighting'.

Whereas Confucianism handles issues between people, Taoism handles issues between people and nature, and Buddhism between people and nirvana. Some Chinese scholars call Confucianism 'stepping-into-society thought', Taoism 'retiring-from-society thought' and Buddhism "stepping-out-of-society thought" [Yang 2017]. We can also say that the courage of Confucianism is 'stepping-into-society courage'. Confucianism promotes the practical spirit of 'actively entering the world', advocates the individual personality of 'to be above the power of riches and honours to make dissipated, of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend' [Mencius 2010: 108, translated by James Legge ], and puts forth the highest moral standard of 'sacrificing life for righteousness'. From the pre-Qin era to date, Confucianism has armed the Chinese nation with the 'stepping-into-society thought', which links each individual to their family, country, and world. In order to carry forward the spirit of Chinese martial arts, contemporary Chinese scholars have put forward slogans such as 'great martial arts, major national events' and 'the greatness of chivalrous being is for the country and its people' from the perspective of historical archaeology, and at the same time, have tried their best to excavate and construct the martial virtue of China [Wang 1998]. All these are a products of the times influenced by the positive thoughts of Confucianism's entry into the world.

### 3 The influence of Taoism on martial courage in Chinese martial arts

Taoism is represented by the thought of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu among the hundred schools of the Pre-Qin Dynasty (Palaeolithic period - 221 BC). The completion of the book *Tao Te Ching* marked the point of culmination of Taoism. As the founder of the Taoist school, Lao Tzu put forward the value system with TAO as the core. In Lao Tzu's view, all things are formed by the cooperation of TAO with some certain matters, and TAO dominates the growth and development of all things. Lao Tzu advocated the realization of an ideal society with TAO and called for people to carry out the politics of Wuwei.

Interpreting Wuwei is key to understanding courage in Taoism. Needham Joseph [1956], a famous British scholar, pointed out in his book, *Science and Civilization in China, Volume 2: History of Scientific Thought* that the English words 'non-action' and 'inactivity' cannot reflect

the profound meaning of 'Wuwei'. 'Wuwei' does not mean non-action or doing nothing, but means not acting recklessly. The implied meaning is that whatever one does must be in accordance with a given situation and the law of nature. Lao Tzu said, 'Follow Wuwei, and nothing cannot be done' [chapter 37, *Tao Te Ching*, translated by the authors], and 'Follow Wuwei, and nothing cannot be governed' [chapter 3, *Tao Te Ching*, translated by the authors]. Lao Tzu's intention was to persuade people to shape a Wuwei attitude, with which they could deal with social affairs and/or individual troubles. Wuwei is not passively waiting or doing nothing, but more of a subjective initiative. Subjective initiative is a philosophical concept, also known as 'conscious initiative'. It refers to the dynamic effect of people's subjective consciousness and practical activities on the objective world and has two meanings: one, people can actively understand the objective world; and two, it can transform the objective world actively under the guidance of cognition. Wuwei meets these conditions and unifies the two basis on practice. However, it is disguised as inaction. This is also why many people misunderstand Wuwei to mean inaction or Bishi (hide in the world or taking flight). The well-known quote 'I am the master of my fate' from *Lao Tzu Xi Sheng Jing*<sup>1</sup> proves the real intention behind Wuwei. Lao Tzu proposed two methods to achieve Wuwei: 'non-contention' and 'being like water'.

Statistics show that the word 'non-contention' appears 8 times in *Tao Te Ching* and Lao Tzu explained what it means and why one should adopt it. In Lao Tzu's view, non-contention is the way of the sage. He said:

Truthful words do not sound beautiful; beautiful words are not truthful. Kind people are not butter-tongued; butter-tongued people are not kind. He who knows has no wide learning; he who has wide learning does not know. The sage does not hoard. Having bestowed all he has on others, he has yet more; having given all he has to others, he is richer still. The way of heaven is to provide benefits and does no harm; the way of the sage is to be generous and does no contend. [Chapter 81, *Tao Te Ching*, =translated by the authors]

Does non-contention mean giving up contending? It does not. What, then, is the purpose of non-contention? Lao Tzu repeated the answer at more than six places across *Tao Te Ching*. The following is one statement:

The reason why rivers and seas can become the place where all valleys converge, is that they excel in taking the lower position. Hence they are able to be king of all

valleys. Therefore, to lead the people, one must humble oneself verbally before them, and to lead the people, he must put his own interests behind them. Therefore, although the sage of the TAO is above the people, the people do not feel heavy burden; Ahead of the people, the people do not feel victimized. The people of the world are willing to accept it without getting tired of it. He does not contend with the people, so no one under the heaven can find a chance to contend with him. [Chapter 66, *Tao Te Ching*, translated by the authors]

That he was afraid of confrontation was the reason for cowardice; in reality, this is a courageous man's strategy. We can also see this in Chapter 68.

He who excels as a warrior does not appear formidable; he who excels in fighting is never roused in anger; he who excels in defeating his enemy does not join issue; he who excels in employing others humbles himself before them. This is known as the virtue of non-contention; this is known as making use of the efforts of others; this is known as matching the sublimity of heaven [Chapter 68, *Tao Te Ching*, translated by the authors].

In order to win any contention with non-contention, Lao Tzu and his followers suggested being like water. Water excels in benefiting myriads of creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to, so it comes close to the TAO. Taoism believes that the highest good is like water. Water is shapeless. When it flows into a round container, it becomes round; when it flows into a square container, it becomes square. Water is the softest thing and can also penetrate the hardest thing.

Thus, Wuwei is an attitude to do or be, non-contention is a strategy, and being like water is a method. Either non-action or non-contention is what Rollo May described in *The Courage To Create*, when he said, "The most prevalent form of cowardice in our day hides behind the statement "I did not want to get involved"" [May 1994]. Neither non-action nor non-contention means passive acceptance. After Taoism came into being, martial arts were incorporated in the programme of Taoist cultivation, and its function of cultivating Taoism was revealed. Conversely, Chinese martial arts became a tool to prove Taoism.

Taoism has been applied in fighting techniques in Chinese martial arts, such as in forming the strategic idea of using the static to control the dynamic, of subduing hardness with softness, and of striking after being attacked. In facing the opponent, Chinese martial arts fighters do not take the initiative to attack but watch the changing situation closely. In the beginning, they tend to act weak, as though they have no other choice but to move along with the opponent, in order to induce the opponent into fake supposition. Once the opponent moves first and exposes a loophole, the Chinese martial arts fighter loses no time in borrowing the strength of others and strikes

1 The Main Content of Lao Tsu Xi Sheng Jing is to elucidate the essence of Daodejing and inherit Lao Tsu's thought of governing through inaction. The author is unknown. The date of the work is also uncertain. It is mentioned in *The Legend of Immortals* by Ge Hong (Taoist theorist of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, famous alchemist and pharmacist) in Jin Dynasty, so it is speculated that the book was written between the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-420).

before being struck. As described in *Zhuangzi · Shuo Jian* (*Chuang Tzu's Talk on Sword*)<sup>2</sup>, while fighting with a sword, you need expose your emptiness to your opponent first and then let him suffer your sharpness, thus making sure that you are not the initial attacker but your opponent is the initial sufferer. Taijiquan (shadow boxing) is a typical example of the application of Taoism. It emphasizes on having a 'soft body' and on using the 'mind rather than force'. Toughness is hidden in soft movements, like a needle in a cotton ball. It is widely recognized among Taijiquan practitioners. As often quoted in combat strategy: 'if you do not move, I do not move; If you take any slight move, I move first'.

Bruce Lee elevated the folk tradition to new philosophical heights with his well-known interpretation of Kung Fu as water:

A good martial artist is like water. Why? Because water is insubstantial. By that, you can't grab it, you can't punch and hurt it, so be soft like water and flexible. Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless like water. You put water in a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You put water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can flow or crash. Be water, my friends!

[Bruce Lee was interviewed by US host Pierre Burton in Hong Kong 1971.]

Aside from influencing the philosophy of Chinese martial arts and fighting techniques, Taoism influences the outlook of Chinese martial artists. The state and temperament of a real martial artist is lofty: he is strong in heart and gentle in appearance. While encountering major trouble, Chinese martial arts practitioners should be unyielding, but not arrogant. IP Man (1893-1972), Bruce Lee's teacher, looked quiet, peaceful, and kind. Wang Xiangzhai (1885-1963), the founder of Yiquan (Mind Boxing), Wan Laisheng (1903-1992), a master of the Natural Boxing School and many other contemporary martial artists all look peaceful. For them, inner strength is the cause of true outer peace. Therefore, the first thing to do while fighting is to remove fear and be strong enough in the heart.

#### 4 The influence of Buddhism on martial courage in Chinese martial arts

'Buddhism originated in India and was introduced to China later. It evolved over a long period of time and integrated with Chinese Confucianism and Taoism. Eventually a Buddhist culture with Chinese characteristics was formed. Buddhism has had a profound impact on the

philosophy, literature and art, and customs of the Chinese people'. This is the insightful and profound exposition on the Sinicization of Buddhism from the speech delivered by Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at UNESCO headquarter in Paris on March 27, 2014<sup>3</sup>.

Confucianism was strongly advocated by the Han dynasty (202 BC-220). After the Han dynasty, Taoist metaphysical thought prevailed. However, Buddhism was considered a foreign thought at the time and was rejected rather seriously. According to Taoism, Buddhism is an uncivilized thing that opposed the Chinese indigenous TAO. However, Buddhism did not exclude Confucianism and Taoism, but rather skilfully and conveniently catered to Chinese cultural thoughts and actively resolved the contradictions between both by relying on the astrology and metaphysics of the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-420), thus forming the 'six schools and seven sects'<sup>4</sup> of Buddhist Prajna. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), people faced frequent wars, political corruption, and poverty, so they could not help but think about the meaning of life and death, and hope to find a new spiritual home in which to take refuge. Buddhism's wisdom and spirit of universal salvation met the spiritual needs of the people at the time, and the public began to accept and absorb it widely. During the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581-907), China's feudal society was unprecedentedly powerful and prosperous, with the political unification of the north and south, the prosperity of the national economy, and the integration of Chinese and western cultures. Sinicized Buddhism began to embark on a road of relatively independent development, presenting a prosperous trend. After the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Sinicized Buddhism imperceptibly penetrated nearly all aspects of Chinese life, and became an important part of the traditional ideologies and cultures.

Simplicity became the basic characteristic of Chinese Buddhism. This involved two elements. The first was objective simplification, that is, to think that 'everyone can become a Buddha', 'Buddha is a person who is enlightened', and 'Buddha is a person who is free from worldly troubles', to name a few. The Buddha-nature is human nature, and everyone is born with Buddha wisdom, so they can realize their nature and become Buddha. All sentient beings do not become Buddhas because of confusion. Once delusion is removed and obsession is broken, true wisdom is revealed, and then the heart 'sees' nature, which results in internal and

3 Available at [www.beijingreview.com.cn/zt/txt/2014-03/28/content\\_610259.htm](http://www.beijingreview.com.cn/zt/txt/2014-03/28/content_610259.htm) (accessed 10 July 2022)

4 Six Schools and Seven Sects refer to the different schools of Prajna study in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The cause of these academic differences is the result of Buddhist scholars' understanding and interpretation of Buddhist sutras with Confucianism and Taoism.

2 Zhuang Tsu (ca. 369 BC- 286 BC) was a thinker, philosopher, and representative of the Taoist school in the middle of the Warring States Period.

external enlightenment. The being becomes Buddha. This school is represented by Huineng<sup>5</sup>, who turned the Buddha outside the heart into the Buddha inside the heart and created room for an ordinary person to become Buddha. The second is process simplification: Chinese Buddhism holds that Buddhahood can be achieved through enlightenment in an instant. This is often demonstrated and stereotyped in Chinese novels and movies that project chivalry, where a monk tends to say to a prostrated mob, 'Amitabha, put down your butcher's knife and become a Buddha immediately!'

Although Buddhism is compatible with some thoughts in Confucianism and Taoism, courage in Sinicized Buddhism has distinct characteristics. Buddhism emphasizes compassion, and its courage is courage under the premise of compassion. It also emphasizes persuasion and opposes 'tough against tough' confrontation. Buddha is very compassionate to all living beings and is willing to accept them, and help them solve any difficulties caused by their obsessions. However, Buddha does not promise to renounce the use of force, believing that it is also compassionate to use force to stop violent crimes when there is no other option.

In Chinese Buddhism, there is a saying that 'Bodhisattva has low eyebrows and Vajra has angry eyes.' This has something to do with a story from the Sui Dynasty (581–618).

One day, Xue Daoheng, the minister of history, visited the Kaishan Temple in Zhongshan. The temple was large and peaceful, and every monk in the temple did his best to do his part, each in his proper place, some walking under the shade of the forest, some meditating in the Zen hall, and some diligent in performing his duties. All of them behaved peacefully and looked comfortable. Xue Daoheng carefully observed the scene, as if in the pure land on earth. Just then a little monk walked from the hall to the courtyard. Xue Daoheng suddenly came up with an idea to test the little monk, and then asked him: why Vajras glare? Why bodhisattvas lower their eyebrows? The little monk answered without thinking: Vajras glare so as to prostrate the four demons; Bodhisattvas lower eyebrows, so as to show compassion. Hearing this, Xue Daoheng was stunned at the little monk's quick wit. Since then, 'Bodhisattva has low eyebrows and Vajra has angry eyes' has become a popular phrase [Li 2020, translated by the authors].

The 'Angry Vajra' is the transmission of power to bring down the wicked; The 'Low Eyebrow Bodhisattva'

conveys kindness to protect others with love. In this world, everyone has different qualities, and Buddha has to play different roles accordingly. In order to develop the being's awareness, Buddha sometimes stares with angry eyes, and sometimes with kind eyes. Based on this, the story of the 13 monks saving the Emperor of the Tang Dynasty has always been told to shape the chivalrous image of Shaolin Kongfu. This story was coined based on three epitaphs on the steles at the Shaolin Temple, by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a modern Chinese thinker, in the early years of the Republic of China. These three inscriptions are: 'Tang Taizong granted Shaolin Temple Doctrine Books', 'Shaolin Temple Missive', and 'Huangtang Songyue Shaolin Temple Stele'. In the inscriptions of the three steles, there are no words such as 'Emperor of the Tang Dynasty', 'staff monks', or 'martial monks'. Why did Liang invent the story? In the early years of the Republic of China, Ma Liang initiated the promotion of 'new Chinese martial arts'.

Liang Qichao, as the author of 'Bushido in China' during the Reign of Emperor Guangxu, took Ma Liang as his confidant and praised the new Chinese martial arts. He wrote a preface to Ma's book, saying:

At the end of the great cause of the Sui Dynasty, the world was in chaos. Tens of thousands of thieves are approaching the Shaolin Temple, and the temple monks will disperse. There is an old man holding a stove poker to defend the front of thieves, and all thieves dared not enter the temple and flee. One hundred young monks were selected and taught how to use a stick as weapon. When Tang Taizong mounted a military expedition against Wang Shichong, the monks joined and helped Tang to win the combat with sticks. The monks were awarded the first merit and 13 of them were rewarded. Using sticks to resist the enemy is a fact [Liang 2018, translated by the authors].

Liang Qichao, as a famous scholar, naturally must know the legend of Kimnara and be clear that what he wrote was purely deductive. He insisted on writing this way despite others' doubts, and naturally had his reasons. The creation of new martial arts is a hasty reaction of the Chinese people in the face of a strong foreign culture. Liang Qichao connected the 13 staff monks with the Emperor of the Tang Dynasty to awaken the martial spirit of the people. The legend of the 13 staff monks saving the Emperor of the Tang Dynasty is a confluence of the ideological essence of Chinese traditional cultures (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism), and is endowed with a social sense and national mission.

Shaolin Kongfu is different from other martial arts schools. Its cultural connotations involve the integration of Zen and boxing, advocating enlightenment to achieve the highest level of Chinese martial arts. It emphasizes the application of 'heart' in Chinese martial arts training, and understands it as the cultivation of a Zen mind

5 Huineng (638–713), an eminent monk in the Tang Dynasty, the founder of Southern Zen Buddhism, is known as Ancestor VI of Zen Buddhism in the history of Buddhism. Huineng advocated epiphany. He did not think that only meditation can be considered Zen. In all dynamic movements, he can also experience the realm of Zen.

rather than a pure fist and foot, in order to improve their psychological quality and develop their sports wisdom. As Shaolin monks have long lived under the constraints of Buddhist precepts and are bound by the '10 Shaolin martial arts precepts', Shaolin Kungfu is mainly defensive and involves self-defence in terms of technical movement style, such as Golden Bell Armour (Jinzhong zhao) and Iron Cloth Shirt (Tiebu shan)<sup>6</sup>. While fighting, it is necessary to be still inside and fierce outside, namely 'to defend like a fair maiden, to offend like a ferocious tiger.'

## 5 Sageness and kingness of martial courage

If we stand on the height of philosophy and overlook Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, we can find that the common direction of the three is the pursuit of the inner sageness and the outer kingness. As for what is the specific sageness and kingness, the three schools have different interpretations because of their respective beliefs. Deeply influenced by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, the theory and practice of Chinese martial arts have gradually formed a culture of courage based on adversaries, which is related to the body and the mind as well. In *Wushu: A Culture of Adversaries* Dai and Lu [2019] analyzed in detail the adversaries including visible symbolic adversaries, visible factitious adversaries and invisible imaginary adversaries, and non-human adversaries. In short, as long as you are practicing a martial art, even if it is an individual routine (tao lu), there must be adversaries in your mind. Otherwise, what you practice cannot be called martial arts. A necessary attribute of a martial art is the exercise of attack and defense around the adversary. Then the purpose of martial arts training is to knock out the adversary? Not necessarily. Especially in today's civilized world, thousands and thousands of practitioners have spent their lives to do martial arts, but they have never fight for even once. So why do they practice martial arts?

Actually, people who are obsessed with martial arts enjoy the process of perceiving and striving towards the ideal of inner sageness and outer kingness. The result

of this process is to face any possible adversary without panic or fear.

Chinese martial artists believe that the way to achieve inner sageness and outer kingness is to cultivate both body and mind, inside to practice essence, energy and spirit, outside to practice sinews, bones and skin. All Chinese martial arts classics emphasize the relevance between strength and courage. For example, the *Real Intention of Internal Boxing* says 'courage is the beginning of strength' [Ren 2010: 155]. Mo-tsu Self-cultivation also says 'Although the gentleman has the strength to fight, but the courage is the most fundamental thing' (translated by the authors). No one who lacks the strength to truss up a chicken has the right to talk about bravery. It is not strange that some people, merely in pursuit of the kingness, cultivate a certain part of their bodies so hard that the body part is deformed, and they are proud of the deformation, for instance, the hands with deformed palms. Some people merely enjoy the efficacy of meditation in order to pursue inner sageness. The practice of wushu culture proves that it is not advisable to isolate the two.

The inner sageness is mainly based on the understanding of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and its daily cultivation is manifested as the outer adjustment of mind and breath. The outer kingness mainly relies on the mastery of martial skills, and its daily cultivation is manifested as thousands of drills with internal pseudo-anger. Just take a close look at the facial expressions of the practitioners in Wushu competition venues, you will see they almost wear angry expressions. This is because in the practice of traditional Chinese martial arts culture, the practitioners are trained to overcome the fear through the expression of anger, so as to cultivate the courage. When a person gets angry, he usually clenches his fists, which is human instinct. Qi Jiguang (1528-1588), a well-known Chinese militarist and martial artist, specially made 'being angry' a compulsory part of the military training program, requiring 'everybody took courage and became angry while drilling or combating' [Qi 2001]. Gan Fengchi, a well-known martial artist of Qing Dynasty (1616-1912) emphasized in his *General Teachings on Hua Quan* that 'anger arises from the mind, anger leads to the intention of fighting, and the intention of fighting leads to boldness -----'. Cai Longyun (1928-2015), a well-known modern martial artist told his students that 'whenever you are practising martial arts, you need to set yourself in a combative situation full of furious billows, demonstrating fearless courage, and every offensive move should be enriched with the verve that is as powerful as a thunderbolt or a raging tide' (Cai 2007: 64-65). Every outward action is a reflection of the inner cultivation. The moves of the Chinese martial arts routines (tao lu) are either offensive-defensive or cat-and-mouse playing. The arrangement of these movements is the

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6 Golden Bell Armour is a kind of hard Qigong. Iron Cloth Shirt is also a kind of hard Qigong. These two terms are like rhetoric devices. Once a person gains either of these kung fu, he become very strong, looks like an armed man with bullet-proof armour or shirt. Chinese martial arts highlights the function of Qi. Qi is soft, but if you accumulate enough Qi in your body by manipulating breathing, your body can be very strong, just like a tyre. Qi is movable. A Qigong master can make accumulate Qi into his palm, so that his palm becomes very hard. The same to his head, his foot, his belly (...). The practice and use of Golden Bell Armour and Iron Cloth Shirt are usually accompanied by rituals through which practitioners accumulate strength and courage.

concentrated embodiment of Chinese unique courage, combat strategy and dialectical thinking.

## 6 Conclusions

In terms of its basic theoretical content, Chinese traditional philosophy comprises Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. In contemporary times, Confucianism, as a conceptual subject of Chinese culture, is undergoing changes and renewal in terms of its theoretical connotations. Although Buddhism is a foreign culture, it is constantly endowed with Chinese and modern interpretations, and continues to fill the important space of belief in people's spiritual lives. As the source of Chinese traditional philosophy, Taoism has opened up a new theoretical direction in Chinese traditional thought, and has been constructing relatively extensive philosophical and life realms.

Chinese martial arts are fighting sports that are deeply influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and demonstrate Chinese people's thoughts comprehensively. Therefore, traditional Chinese Chinese martial art is also called Zhe Quan (philosophical fists). Chinese martial art is a culture of adversaries [Dai, Lu 2019]. External training aims at strengthening the muscles, bones, and skin, and internal training at commanding the inner force. The ultimate goal is to train courage, specifically, to face others and oneself bravely. The guiding ideology of a Chinese warrior's brave idea and behaviour comes from the internalization and integration of the three core thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Confucianism contributes benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, whereas Taoism contributes harmony, specifically, acting with non-action, contending with non-contention, and being like water. Buddhism contributes compassion, which is reflected in Vajra's angry eyes and Bodhisattva's low eyebrows. The threefold philosophy facilitates the formation of martial arts techniques and acclimatizes Chinese martial arts practitioners' behaviours implicitly and explicitly.

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## Jak śmiesz?: kształtowanie odwagi w chińskich sztukach walki

**Słowa kluczowe:** odwaga wojenna, chińskie sztuki walki, konfucjanizm, buddyzm, taoizm

### Streszczenie

Tłó. Wszystkie formy sztuk walki na całym świecie podkreślają znaczenie odwagi. Jednak rozumienie odwagi różni się w zależności od kultury.

Problem i cel. Głównym celem niniejszego opracowania jest omówienie koncepcji i kształtowania odwagi w chińskich sztukach walki.

Materiał i metody. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje wpływ i wkład konfucjanizmu, buddyzmu i taoizmu, które stanowią filary tradycyjnej myśli chińskiej.

Wyniki i wnioski. Rdzeniem konfucjańskiej odwagi jest życzliwość, sprawiedliwość, przyzwoitość i mądrość. Jego główną funkcją jest rządzenie krajem poprzez ustanowienie ideologii normalizującej działania wojenne ludzi, a mianowicie wybór ludzi, czy walczyć, czy nie. Rdzeniem taoistycznej odwagi jest brak działania, brak koncentracji i bycie jak woda. Jej główną funkcją jest kierowanie ciałem poprzez podkreślanie filozofii, że jedność człowieka i nieba jest tym, za czym od dawna tęsknią Chińczycy. Rdzeniem buddyjskiej odwagi jest współczucie. Jej funkcją jest głównie kierowanie umysłem za pomocą opuszczonych brwi lub gniewnych oczu. Chińskie sztuki walki wchłaniają esencję trzech myśli na temat odwagi i konstruują własny system odwagi, który ułatwia tworzenie technik sztuk walki, a także aklimatyzuje zachowanie chińskich praktyków sztuk walki do budowy chińskiego ducha narodowego.