The Evolution of the Modern Martial Arts Systems: Characteristics and Context

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Abstract

The term "martial arts" is a widely used but is both vaguely defined and/or means different things to different users. It is, in some sense, not a purely objective term based on static criteria. Various factors shape the meaning of the label, and can include personal experience, socio-cultural factors, a generally under-developed body of truly scholarly research on the subject, as well as the ubiquitous effects of commercialization. How best to develop a common understanding of what we are referring to when we discuss "martial arts"? This paper reviews my anthropological approach to analysis, where I have examined a cross-cultural spectrum of approaches to fighting.

Zusammenfassung

Der Begriff "martial arts" ist ein weit verbreiteter Begriff, der jedoch nur unzureichend definiert ist und/oder für verschiedene Benutzer unterschiedliche Bedeutungen hat. Er ist in gewisser Weise kein rein objektiver Begriff, der auf statischen Kriterien beruht. Die Bedeutung des Begriffs hängt von verschiedenen Faktoren ab, z. B. von persönlichen Erfahrungen, sozio-kulturellen Faktoren, einer im Allgemeinen unterentwickelten wissenschaftlichen Forschung zu diesem Thema sowie den allgegenwärtigen Auswirkungen der Kommerzialisierung. Wie lässt sich am besten ein gemeinsames Verständnis dessen entwickeln, worauf wir uns beziehen, wenn wir über "martial arts" sprechen? Dieser Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über meinen anthropologischen Analyseansatz, bei dem ich ein kulturübergreifendes Spektrum von Ansätzen zum Kämpfen untersucht habe.

Introduction

The term "martial arts" is a widely used but is both vaguely defined and/or means different things to different users. It is, in some sense, not a purely objective term based on static criteria. Various factors shape the meaning of the label, and can include personal experience, socio-cultural factors, a generally under-developed body of truly scholarly research on the subject, as well as the ubiquitous effects of commercialization.

How best to develop a common understanding of what we are referring to when we discuss "martial arts"? This paper reviews my anthropological approach to analysis, where I have examined a cross-cultural spectrum of approaches to fighting (see Donohue and Taylor 1994, Donohue 1991). My early research (Donohue, 1991, 1994) attempted to synthesize various secondary sources as well as extensive participant-observation [1] in training halls of the Japanese martial tradition to

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develop a more coherent and comprehensive picture of martial arts. This work formed part of the efforts taking place in the last few decades to create more scholarly approaches to the topic (see, for example, DeMarco 2017, Jones 2002, Zarrilli 2000, Hurst 1998, Friday 1997) [2].

My work has led me to the conclusion that there are patterns of historical development of fighting systems across cultures that lead us to understand these systems as both technological and sociological artifacts that exhibit common cross-cultural characteristics but also serve various non-combat functions. The salient points are these:

- Increased social complexity fuels increased complexity in the technology of fighting.
- Truly martial systems will stress effectiveness and efficiency in achieving their ends.
- What are typically referred to as "martial arts" have connections to combat systems but do not display an alignment between societal complexity and efficiency.
- As a result, we must look for other functions that explain the perpetuation of martial arts in the modern world.

The Development of Martial Systems in Cross Cultural Context

What makes a martial art? There are as many answers as there are practitioners. Ask a few pointed questions, however, and the vagueness of these definition(s) becomes clear. Is a martial art any activity relating to fighting? Are soldiers martial artists? Is a martial art designed to be a practical means of combat, or is it a sport? Do we find martial arts only in Asia? Is it philosophy that defines such an art? The process of codification? The manner of its transmittal?

Understanding structure, purpose and classification means that we must place the martial arts within a broader range of activities related to human conflict. The potential for aggression is a universal characteristic of human beings, and there is a depressing record of the development of organized systems of aggression in the annals of human history. It would seem that fighting (ritualistic, sportive, or lethal) is done among, with, and to other people. It is an eminently social activity.

A comparative discussion of martial systems and the development of a cross-cultural typology has important implications for our specific understanding of the form and purpose of the martial arts in the world today. [3]

There are two principal aspects to consider in a categorization of martial systems: the social and the technological. The evidence in the archaeological and historical record demonstrates that growing sophistication in military arts is based upon a rising level of complexity in social organization and technology. As things grow more complex in human society, so too do martial activities. They become more refined, more systematic, and hence more efficient.

The creation of truly martial systems – formally codified, culturally defined bodies of knowledge oriented around potentially lethal human conflict – is ultimately a phenomenon which can be directly correlated to levels of socio-cultural complexity. In short, we should expect to observe highly formal systems in complex societies, while the approach to martial activity in simpler societies may be

[2] And these examples are not the end – the discussion about defining martial arts is an ongoing one, as – for example – Meyer (2020: 13ff.) showed quite actually: Meyer (2020: 18ff.) identifies three central definition problems – a linguistic one, a cultural one and a semantic one – and his 'starting point' is the martial arts studies research of Paul Bowman, who brought up a literalist position, where certain criteria have to be met, vs. a discursive position, where "a category like 'martial arts' only ever refers to whatever people think and say are 'martial arts' " – and both positions could be criticized. The second problem has to deal with "the role of combat as part of martial arts" and takes cult, i.e. rituals, (war) dance and stage arts into account (see: Meyer 2020: 18, 20ff.). The main question of the third problem is 'Which and how many terms are used?', where Meyer (2020: 24ff.) e.g. makes use of German terminology and writes (critically) about the work of Draeger (we will return to this later down below).

[3] Based on Donohue, John J. and Kimberly Taylor. 1994. The Classification of the Fighting Arts. *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, Vol.3, no.4: 10-37.

relatively informal.
In simple societies – small-scale, egalitarian groups with a low level of technological sophistication or relatively primitive technologies [4] – participation in physical conflict may be perceived as one aspect of gender roles, where most adult males of a certain age range are expected to be able to participate in raids, feuds, etc. In many cases, performing a combat function can be considered both a statement of social solidarity (as with the institution of feud, common in many tribal societies) as well as a means of making a social statement regarding the attainment of socially defined manhood, as was often the case among the indigenous peoples of the North American Plains.

As societies grow more complex and develop distinctions between higher and lower status groups, the picture is somewhat more complex. A cultural emphasis on the male role as warrior may still be generally present, but the function of chief as the coordinator of economic and military activity may place a greater emphasis on military roles as being characteristic of a particular status group. The development of a "warrior class" is symptomatic of growing social and economic elaboration and also contributes toward the process.

For complex societies like states, the functions of combat are part of a more formally distinct status, which in its most extreme development is perceived of as an occupation—that of the soldier. In these cases, the functions performed may well contribute to concepts of social identity and status, but combat activities are more increasingly defined as being in the realm of something approaching a professional occupation. The familiar development of the armored knights in European Feudalism is an example. Admittedly a military role that was characteristic of a distinct social stratum and which was supported by an elaborate ideology, it nonetheless had, by the tenth century A.D., become ". . .a business for wealthy specialists who trained for it from early youth" (Howard 1976: 3). In these complex social entities, particular classes may be obligated to serve or have a monopoly on military power. This obligation may also bring with it associated rewards (the Roman legionary's salarium, the Japanese samurai's stipend). In any event, the social position of those engaging in combat, and the techniques used in such activities, are much more formally defined and are often characteristics of distinctive forms of social identity and specialized function.

The Question of Efficiency

In simple societies with relatively primitive technologies, the implements used as weapons are often "embedded" within the toolkit of the particular culture. The same types of tools that are used to farm, hunt, and slay animals are typically used in combat. There is a type of efficiency in such cases. Since weapons are also tools, individuals require little formal training in their use before they can go to battle. Nor is there great emphasis on training—fighters learned by experience. Tactics are also simple—the salient characteristics of primitive warfare are small-scale, short-term hostilities, poor command and discipline, and an emphasis on surprise (Vayda 1967: 359, Hanson 2001).

There is a notable increase in the incidence of warfare which accompanies the process of social evolution (Fried 1961). Thus, as societies grow more complex, and as the intensity and frequency of conflict grows, it is not uncommon to see the development of formal weapons—tools developed

[4] For clarification: The use of descriptive words like 'simple'/'complex' or even 'primitive'/'advanced' carries absolutely no judgment and refers simply to the ability of harness energy at different levels.

[Editor's note:] The use of words like 'simple'/'complex' or even 'primitive'/'advanced' (societies/cultures?) – especially in the academic discipline or field of anthropology – is a complex and complicated issue: Just think of concepts and views of (complex) societies/cultures, primitive/indigenous people, development with [(anti-) social] evolutionism, relativism and/or/wit/in views on rationality – with, for example, "Primitivity as lack of rationality" as seen in 'primitive mentality' against civilized (Western) one or/and/in a single conception of their/our (Western/European) ideas with regard to (scientific, technological or other) superiority of the West/Europe –; all of this as a first hint (see in: Barnard & Spencer, 2010: 149ff., 168ff., 189ff., 266ff., 377f., 571ff., 590ff., 604ff., 649ff.).

for specific use in combat. One of the significant innovations of the Zulu, for example, was the abandonment of the javelin in combat, and the development of the heavy stabbing spear (assegai), which revolutionized Zulu tactics (see Otterbein 1967: 344-345). [5] In another example, the innovative use of javelins, short swords, and shields, combined with tactical elaboration, was a significant factor in the successes of Rome's legions (Goodenough 1979: 151-153).

In the primitive states of the historical record, the technological sophistication of weaponry could only be developed so far. A significant parallel development which can offset purely technological limitations is the use of larger bodies of combatants, very often utilized en masse. The deadly precision of a Roman legion was not only due to the technological marvels of the weapons themselves, but the way in which these weapons were brought to bear – by thousands of fighters in disciplined ranks who swept over opponents like some sort of fearful machine. This is in stark contrast to the relatively individualistic types of combat recorded for simple societies. Hanson (1994), while focused on the tradition of organized combat that emerged in the West, nonetheless points out the role of discipline, specialized technology and the use of massed infantry focused on decisive shock combat as characteristic of growing societal complexity.

Another aspect of efficiency, and one which must be considered together with levels of technological sophistication, is the amount of time necessary to train combatants in the techniques of conflict. Simple societies, though technologically primitive, have an efficient approach to martial activities. Since martial techniques and skills are embedded in other social activities (the principles of stalking game are not much different from those of ambush), and since men acquire weapons (tool) skills as part and parcel of socialization into adult roles and responsibilities, there is little need for formal training.

Primitive states augment the limits of technological innovation by concentrating on the elaboration of tactics instead. There is thus considerably more time invested in teaching trainees the rudiments of formal combat systems in these societies. This is necessary due to dual utilization of specialized weaponry and specialized tactics, and often offers substantive political advantages.

Unlike simpler groups, then, combat efficiency in complex societies rests on the combination of technological innovation in weaponry, tactical precision, and extensive training periods. Vegetius records the extensive training of Roman recruits in the use of sword and shield, forced marches, etc. (Grant 1974: xxvi), and Josephus remarks that the extensive maneuvers and training of the Roman legions, not luck or bravery alone, were responsible for Rome's history of successful conquest (Grant 1974: xvii). Only a complex, stable society can sustain the associated costs of long training periods, since armies are notoriously expensive to maintain.

Growing technological sophistication in the modern era has made combat more efficient (which is to say, more deadly). The destructive power of an infantry platoon armed with automatic and semi-automatic weapons is a result, not of greater valor or personal skill, nor even of tactical innovations (officer candidates still study the lessons of Cannae as well as Sun-Tzu's A*rt of War*) but of the growing investment of technology in the specialized tools of combat. This emphasis on weapons technology as a way to boost efficiency and simultaneously reduce expense and training time has long been present in the evolution of armies in Europe. The widespread use of gunpowder-based small arms beginning in the seventeenth century was the result not only of their destructive power, but also due to the fact that they were cheaper to manufacture than crossbows and required less

[5] 1) Gluckman (1940) provides an overview about "The Kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa" and the book in which it appeared – *African Political Systems*, edited by M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard in 1940 – was and is inspirational and partly controversial contribution to anthropology as an anthology of essays by a kind of Oxford clique for British social anthropology and is revisited until recent years (see: Bošković and Schlee 2022). 2) Also, the Zulu not only had these sharp combat weapons but had a tradition of stick fighting found there as in other African groups (see in: Green, 2001: 1ff., esp. 2, 4f., 562; Green & Svinth, 2010: 18ff.).

training to use than long bows (Howard 1976: 31-32). A heavy reliance on technology, not skill, has, if anything, permitted modern technological armies to impart a relatively high level of efficiency in a short period of time. Continued technological innovation in the modern era perpetuates the Roman emphasis on training as a means of imparting a mind-set more than a way of creating a highly skilled fighter. The most efficient martial systems in complex societies cycle recruits through training at a very rapid rate. Thus, modern American soldiers are given "basic training" in a mere eight weeks. This is possible because it is the system, not the soldier, that is of utmost importance in complex warfare. [6]

Modern warfare between nation states has accentuated this trend. War in these societies emphasizes the utilization of massive armies in a continuous struggle that destroys soldiers at an alarming rate. This introduces a new element into the equation of efficiency, since a rapid replacement cycle becomes part and parcel of the approach to organized aggression. Unlike heroic societies, soldiers, not warriors are valued. Thus, we find a long-standing resistance to the creation of military elites within modern armies. Despite a public fascination with small groups of highly trained, elite fighters, professionals have long felt that such groups are grossly *inefficient* in light of the modern environment of war. Military elites, it has been argued, take the best and brightest conscripts, train them for long periods of time, and then place them in situations where mortality rates are even higher than those for normal troops. This "selection destruction cycle" underscores the fact that a type of efficiency in modern warfare is predicated on technological adaptation replacing the need to create highly skilled individual fighters (Beaumont 1974).

A Typology

There are thus a number of different types of systems concerned with combat. In simple societies, these activities, which I will label "combat forms," are embedded in the skills and activities of other spheres of life. The technology and skills used are not specialized, there is an emphasis on individual and/or small group action, and there is a close fit between the technology used and the level of socio-technological development.

In more complex societies, there is increasing specialization in terms of the tools and tactics used. Limited capacities for technological elaboration in societies of the past created an emphasis on the use of larger units, and more formal training periods. These were labor-intensive systems. Combat activities are often part and parcel of status positions. These "combat systems" are typically found in societies making the transition from simple levels to more complex social forms like early states.

In fully-developed state-level societies we find truly "martial systems" – highly articulated, formal systems with elaborate tactical and technological developments. Combat activities become part of a specialized role – the class-bound roles of ancient Greek small landowners, feudal knights or Japanese *samurai* – or occupation. There is still a strong emphasis on large unit tactics (even feudal European armies were dependent on massed infantry), but the increased technological sophistication of weaponry means that the training time needed to create soldiers is vastly reduced. These are technology-intensive systems in which the importance of the human capacity for bravery or the individual's personal skill with a weapon is considerably reduced.

The wide variety of martial systems should demonstrate that they are meaningful types of human activity in a number of socio-cultural contexts and on a number of levels. Efficacy is always a prime consideration – martial activity is actual or threatened physical violence to accomplish an end. We can see that as societies develop more complex technologies, they are able to field larger and larger groups of fighters with specialized weapons, training, and tactics.

[6] I'll note that the valor of individual fighters can and does make a difference to some situations, but the fact remains that this impact is felt on a tactical and not a strategic level in most cases.

A martial system is a means to an end. Like all human activity, however, it is more complex as well. Participation in these systems can contribute toward a sense of personal and social identity, since behavior associated with specific gender roles and social or occupational statuses are often associated with martial activity. Statements of group affiliation and allegiance can also be expressed through participation in martial activities, and so there is an additional political dimension here. Economic considerations can also be found in such activity: ultimately most intergroup conflicts center around questions of resource allocation. Finally, there is an ideological component to many of these systems: the activity of combat is often surrounded by a densely woven tapestry of symbols which explicitly and implicitly transmit messages concerning the worth, status and place of the fighter in society. [7] Indeed, we may speculate that, given the danger and pain inherent in the practice of these systems, psychic reward may often loom large as a motivating factor, at least for voluntary participants.

A Typology of Martial Systems

	Combat Form	Combat System	Martial Systems	Martially Inspired Arts
Characteristic	Embedded	Transitional	Formal	Stylized
Social Level	Egalitarian or Ranked	Ranked or Stratified	State	State
Aspect of	Role	Status	Occupation	Avocation
Units	Individual/Small Group	Small/Medium Groups	Large Groups	Individuals
Training time	Low, informal	Medium, formal	Low, formal	High, formal
Efficiency	High	High	High	Low

THE ASIAN MARTIAL ARTS

What are popularly labelled the "martial arts" of the Far East [8] (and now other areas) fall into a fourth and entirely separate category. I don't base this contention on the popular ideas about the martial arts: beliefs concerning their effectiveness, elegance, or philosophical dimensions. These beliefs spring more from wish fulfillment and the romantic idea of the Exotic East [9] than they do an accurate understanding of martial activity. Unlike systems in the first three categories in the typology, martial arts do not demonstrate the systemic fit between social complexity, technology, and efficiency that is characteristic of truly martial systems. Modern martial arts are complex art forms to be sure. They involve some aspect of physical activity at least partially connected to human conflict. But they are not true martial systems.

Based on the criteria outlined above, the martial arts, in strictly military terms and despite their reputed lethal nature, are grossly *inefficient*. I am sure that individual cases can be mustered to demonstrate that the martial arts can be effectively utilized as mechanisms of self-defense. Such instances, however, depend on unique situations which bring highly skilled individuals into situations where highly constrictive conditions limit the skill of an opponent, possible range of aggressive action and the utilization of weapons technology. These exceptions ultimately prove the rule: the martial arts cannot seriously be considered as having a primarily combat-oriented function based upon the criteria outlined above. Martial artists are always bringing a knife (or an empty hand) to a gun fight.

These arts flourish in complex societies but utilize extremely primitive weaponry, often limiting

[7] I owe a debt of gratitude here to Dr. David Jones, whose research on the development of military elites in Aztec Mexico, Feudal Europe and Japan has clarified my thinking on this matter.

[8] "The Far East, as an expression, suggests a great distance from the West, but it may as well evoke a total disconnection with the familiar. China, Japan, and North and South Korea are the dominant nation-states in what is also called, less ethnocentrically, East Asia" (in: Barnard & Spencer 2010: 69).

[9] The topic of the romantic idea of the Far East – or romantic ideas of (Far) easts, maybe differentiating between Far East Asia, South(East) Asia, Central e.g. is also a complicated issue: Looking at these regions and ideas anthropologically brings us to topics like colonialism, essentialism, Orientalism (see in: Barnard & Spencer 2010: 67f., 69ff., 71ff., 74ff., 138ff., 234ff., 518f.).

themselves to archaic devices such as swords, spears, bows, or even reducing their arsenals to the various parts of the human body. They also emphasize extremely long training periods – the time needed to gain basic proficiency in many systems is reckoned in years, not weeks – and also emphasize individual skill and tactics. Fighting is also conceived of as taking place in a civilian or sportive environment. Thus, they may be more properly identified as "martially inspired arts" but by no stretch of the imagination can they be considered to be concerned with real combat. [10]

This suggests that we should look at the sociological function of martially inspired arts since they do not share the instrumental orientation of true martial or combat systems. The distinction made by the Japanese, for example, between "martial techniques" (*bujutsu*) and what they term "martial ways" (*budo*), which are considered vehicles for moral development and spiritual enlightenment (Draeger 1974) is a real and very vital one. It is, in fact, a critical point for our understanding of the martial arts today. [11]

Many martial arts systems transplanted from Japan, for instance, were developed there during the nineteenth century. These *gendai budo*, were understood to be different from the *koryu* that they were based on. An awareness that these modern martial arts forms were not combat systems was well developed in 19th century Japan, where warriors schooled in traditional methods of combat scorned the new systems as "flowery fighting." These arts were designed consciously to be non-lethal (and even safe) in everyday practice and considered to be open to trainees at any and all levels of competence. The groundbreaking work of the educator and *jujutsu* expert Kano Jigoro set the pattern that most modern martial arts form would take in Japan and across the globe (s.a. in: Green 2001: 210ff.; Green & Svinth 2010: 127ff., 385f.). Kano viewed his "gentle way" of judo as a form of physical and ethical training. He modified techniques to ensure training safety, established a formal curriculum and grading system, and permitted sport competition (see Kano et. al. 1986; s.a. Hall 2012: 236f., 268ff.). This has been widely adopted as the pattern for successful modern martial arts forms, and even his practice of wearing a training uniform called *gi* with colored belts to indicate a practitioner's rank in the *kyu/dan* system is widespread in most modern martial arts forms. [12]

As they evolved in Japan, one aspect of the function of modern martial arts is concerned with the creation and perpetuation of identity. These are stylized, ritualized systems which perpetuate a worldview associated with a particular culture and/or a particular group of people. The renaissance of martially inspired art forms in Japan can be understood as a reaction to the social transformation effected during the Meiji era (1868-1912). During the late nineteenth century, Japan opened its doors to the West, abolished its traditional social system, transformed its economy, and experienced the cultural disruptions that inevitably follow such change. The martial arts can then be viewed as a vehicle to preserve traditional aspects of culture and create a sense of continuity. Thus, the martial arts are essentially mechanisms for the perpetuation of ethnic identity in poly-ethnic environments

[10] While I believe the term "martially-inspired-art" to be a more accurate one in terms of descriptive classification, the popularity of the phrase "martial arts" suggests that it would be difficult to dislodge from common usage. I therefore continue to use the popular label with the understanding that this is the popular way of identifying what I have called martially inspired-arts.

[11] Talking about Draeger's work in general and about this distinction – which is sometimes expanded to *budo/bugei/bujutsu* – in particular is also a complicated issue (see e.g. Draeger 1974; Donohue & Taylor 1994: 13, 22f., 29ff.; Green 2001: 56ff., 484f.; Green & Svinth 2010: 369f., 390f.; Hall 2012: 52f., 56): Criticism exists as you can see also in Meyer (2020: 27ff.), who, at the end of this multi-pages main paragraph, where he also links Draeger with the definitional work of Green & Svinth (2010: Intro), comes to the above mentioned paper of Donohue and Taylor (1994): "Speaking of *budo* and *bujutsu*, Donohue and Taylor (1994, 14) sharply criticize that spiritual connotations of East Asian fight systems are often exaggerated, 'All fighting is dirty, destructive, and practical. Complex social, historical and economic reasons account for the disparate development of fighting systems between East and West, not the intrinsic moral superiority of Asian culture.' " (Meyer 2020: 30; orig. *italic* imprints).

[12] I'll note that an art like *kendo* does not use colored belts for rank, but shares virtually all of the *judo* paradigm, including the *kyu/dan* ranking system. See also in: Green (2001: 213ff., 253f., 445ff.); Green & Svinth (2010: 125, 127ff.); Hall (2012: 76f., 213, 256f., 297).

and for the creation of personal identity through affiliation with voluntary associations (see Cohen 1974). Asian martial arts institutions are highly effective in this regard due to their complex symbolic nature, in which action is ritualized and given impacted meaning through an elaborate and stylized tradition of thought and movement.

Although the dearth of research regarding other martially inspired arts in other cultures makes it problematical to generalize, we may well expect that they too share a similarity of function. The mushrooming of a variety of "martial arts" associated with groups as diverse as Thai, Filipino, Polynesian, and Native American cultures may speak, then, not necessarily of the presence of highly articulated martial systems among these groups in the past, but of the re-creation of selected cultural elements in an effort to perpetuate identity in a changing world. This is consistent with observed patterns in other aspects of culture, particularly those with a highly symbolic content, where structure remains relatively static through time, but where social function changes (Spicer 1971). The characteristics of the fourth type of martial systems, that of martially inspired arts, indicates that they flourish, not necessarily because they are efficient combat techniques in the here and now, but because they are institutions which attempt to give people a sense of identity in the present by creating a link with the past and also offer a sense of transcendent purpose.

But this isn't the only function of these systems. In ethnically diverse environments like that of the contemporary United States, for example, it is possible that some martial artists are drawn to training as a way of strengthening ties with traditional cultures associated with these arts. But the fact remains that, while Americans of Asian descent may be strongly represented in some of the less widespread martial arts systems (such as *kendo*) the vast majority of martial artists in this country have no links of descent or heritage with the cultures of East Asia. So, if the martial arts are involved in the formation of identity, it must be a phenomenon that springs from something other than an ethnic affinity for the cultures that bore these arts. Something about the martial arts must attract people, and this something must be linked to ideas and feelings that are formed in an explicitly Western setting. On the surface, part of the allure of the martial arts may seem to be their exotic origins and obscure symbolism. On another level, however, we must wonder whether their appeal also springs from the fact that there are aspects of the martial arts that answer needs in contemporary society.

The martial arts may be understood in part as a ritualistic activities [13]. They are formalized and stereotyped in terms of the structure and progression of activities. They are often extremely rule-bound with charters that underlie the specific physical actions. Practitioners of martial arts are enmeshed in a highly symbolic cultural activity in which color, language, and motion all act to transmit specific messages about the world as interpreted in the *dojo*, or training hall (Donohue 1990). Above all, training shares a characteristic universal to all ritual activity: the channeling of brain functions into paths outside normal experience (Brown 1991: 114).

The experience of participating in martial arts training is ideally one in which the physical and mental aspects of the person become fused. The frequency with which this goal is realized is difficult to establish, however. Nonetheless, training is both a ritual that expresses the aspiration of trainees as well as a vehicle that assists in the realization of these aspirations. We may additionally

[13] "According to most theories, ritual either involves different forms of action from everyday life, or at least different purposes. For example, in Christian ritual, the act of ingesting bread during holy communion is different from eating bread at any other time. The difference relates to the meaning attached to the ritual act, which is suggested by the use of symbols. Paraphrasing Clifford Geertz's definition of **culture**, David Kertzer defines ritual as 'action wrapped in a web of symbolism' (1988: 9). This assumes that ritual has a communicative role. Thus, despite the idea that ritual denies the everyday relationship between an action and its purpose, it is assumed that this denial is not gratuitous. There is assumed to be a purpose, a function and a meaning behind ritual action" – so Jon P. Mitchell at the beginning of his entry on 'ritual' in Barnard & Spencer (2010: 617ff., quote on p. 617, orig. **bold** imprint).

speculate that part of this activity's attraction lies in the fact that, while "enlightenment" may be a frustratingly elusive goal for most trainees, the side effects of intense physical training and mental concentration can act to create physiological states that mimic those traditionally associated with "higher states of consciousness."

The mind-body unity that is the goal and end point of the focus developed through training is not unique to martial arts practice. As described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), this sensation of "flow" is common to a variety of physical and mental activities. Certainly, a central concern of religions and ritual activities associated with them is the creation of a type of "optimal experience" that approximates the flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 76-77). [14]

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[14] For martial arts and flow, especially an East-West comparative analysis on *mushin* and flow, see Krein and Ilundáin (2014). See also Hall (2012: 334).

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