

The Globalization of Martial Arts

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The term “globalization” is complex and open to a variety of different definitions. (For a discussion, see Scheuerman, 2008.) In this respect, the term is similar to the term “martial arts,” which (despite its familiarity) is equally slippery, complex, and difficult to define. Stephen Chan (2000, 69) illustrates this by pointing out that a study on the martial arts of the world commissioned by UNESCO had to be disbanded before it even began because its authors could not agree on a working definition or organizing concept of “martial art.” “Globalization” can be understood in just as many different (often antithetical) ways, and while many of these perspectives are justified in one way or another, a coherent consensus about what globalization is unlikely to be reached. Nonetheless, some of the salient preconditions for and coordinates of globalization include: 1) the expansion of increasingly instantaneous telecommunication networks; 2) the opening of ever more contexts to market mechanisms owing to the internationalization of finance systems; and 3) the deregulation of those finance systems, the effect of which has been to undermine the traditional power of nation states to control their own economies and societies.

The deregulation of global finance markets since the 1970s had the effect of outflanking any government’s ability to be able to intervene significantly into its own economy – raising taxation or minimum wages beyond a level deemed acceptable (or efficient) to capitalists simply results in capital investment being moved elsewhere. Castells (2000) describes this radical transformation of global power relations through the following analogy. Formerly, nation states were like receptacles containing water. Each had the ability to control the flow of that water through fixed conduits to other receptacles (nation-states). Globalization

turned the tables on nation states, so that now they find themselves emptied of water (capital), and instead of controlling their destinies, they bob about, sinking or swimming, on the ebbs and flows of the seas of finance.

These processes have affected culture and society the world over, and this includes the forms, practices, institutions, orientations and indeed the very definitions of martial arts. In this context, the most relevant aspect or understanding of globalization is in terms of the internationalization of mass media. The development of global media is particularly relevant because, historically, the spread of martial arts could be strongly correlated with *military*, *margins*, and *migration*. The effects of global media have exponentially increased martial arts' dissemination.

Commodification

Historically, martial arts developed around zones and sites of conflict and antagonism, and their spread or dissemination was linked to the cultural and social diasporas that spread out from these historical sites. However, since the 1970s, the easy availability of media and multimedia images, representations, accounts and even manuals has taken control of the ability of martial arts styles to spread and transform. TV, film, print media, and multimedia have increasingly freed knowledge or awareness of martial arts styles from specific cultural contexts. In the process, martial arts have become increasingly deracinated and commodified. Deracination means that ethnic or cultural characteristics are 'uprooted' and sometimes sanitized for external consumption; commodification means that goods or services that were never originally intended to be bought and sold are transformed into things that can be bought and sold. Thus, traditional martial arts have been uprooted from their historical locations, new

hybrid forms have emerged, and in the process, the places, roles, and functions of martial arts have changed considerably.

The development of Tae Bo by Billy Blanks (1955-) is a case in point. First introduced around 1989, Tae Bo took moves from amateur boxing, muay Thai and taekwondo, combined them together with music, and thereby created a new form of aerobics. As such, Tae Bo is hybridized (grafted together), deracinated (severed from roots and traditions), commodified (Tae Bo was from the outset mass marketed through globalized media and finance networks), and reconfigured: the clear lines of demarcation between aerobic exercise and combat training are utterly blurred.

Today, deracination and commodification are arguably the dominant forces acting on martial arts. An example is the Shaolin Temple in China's Hunan Province. The reopening of this temple in the 1980s by the Chinese government was effectively no different from the opening of a theme park or gift shop: a novel or niche demand (a market) was perceived; a supply was provided. An entrepreneurial government capitalized on fantasies about the authenticity and austere, mystical, almost magical "ancient history" of such locations and practices, and exploited it as a marketing opportunity. Financially, this Shaolin temple did so well that in 2009, plans were announced to build a second Shaolin temple in Hong Kong.

Of course, this is only one aspect of the productivity and inventiveness of the connections between mediatization (the increasing role of film and TV representations) and commoditization, both of which are part and parcel of globalization. In the wake of the global success of Bruce Lee's films (1971-1973) and the *Kung Fu* TV series (1972-1975) – shows that effectively introduced "kung fu" to the Western popular culture consciousness – myriad kung fu and karate schools sprang up (Thompson 1993, 19; Miller 2000). These schools often made various kinds of claim to "authenticity," usually defined through some form of

connection to an “authentic” ethnic East Asian lineage. Over time, the perceived necessity of claiming a direct and authentic connection to Asia has diminished in many modern martial arts. But it has certainly not disappeared. (We will return to this below.)

Postmodern Martial Arts

There is arguably a strong difference between (1) martial art development and dissemination in the cultural epochs and contexts of war, colonialism, and imperialism (i.e., the internal and external peripheries or margins of cultures and societies) on the one hand, and (2) those developed in the context of martial arts films, magazines, and businesses in the context of peacetime, on the other. What is often called “Westernization” has always been bound up in both processes, but in rather different ways.

Until recently, the major impetus to developing martial arts has been overwhelmingly related to cultural exigencies and necessities: defense, security, conquest, domination, survival, and so on (Kennedy and Guo 2005; Brown, 1997). As such, martial arts developed on the margins: margins of territory, margins of empire and colony; economic and cultural margins, sites of struggle and antagonism between the disenfranchised and the state, and a whole range of borders, whether political, geographical, or cultural. Thus, there are the martial arts of the powerful and martial arts of the relatively powerless; the martial arts of the military and security apparatus and the martial arts of the antagonists of power, whether by default (the enslaved, the poor, disenfranchised, occupied, or colonized, etc.) or by design (guerrillas, paramilitaries, etc.). There are martial arts that are extremely codified, whose roles and functions are predominantly ceremonial, often nationalistic, dynastic, or even nostalgic. There are martial arts that are entirely pragmatic. And of course, there are martial arts which combine

these and add yet other dimensions, too – such as health, philosophy or spirituality.

In the contemporary globalized world, there has been a proliferation of knowledge, information, and discourses about these myriad martial arts of the world. This has arguably transformed the nature of the “borders” on which martial arts now develop. For, as opposed to martial arts developing on sites and lines of conflict and warfare (as they did in pre-modern and modern times), in the contemporary technology- and information-saturated context, innovation in martial arts – especially hand to hand combat – today takes place knowingly and self-consciously on the borders between styles and approaches. Rather than springing from the urgencies and exigencies of a particular conflict, this kind of development is self-reflexive and deliberately informed by research. Such innovation may take place for sporting purposes (cross-training, for example), for pragmatic reasons (doing something that might reduce the risk of civil suit), or for marketing reasons. In any case, this type of development is technically postmodern.

There are strong reasons for the postmodern proliferation of martial arts. On the one hand, military and paramilitary methods are increasingly technologized, dehumanized, and virtualized. Indeed, for soldiers, the (literal and metaphorical) distances between combatants have expanded to the point that the lines between warfare and computer game-play are increasingly blurred (Hables Gray, 1997). For law enforcement, conflict is more and more premised on digital surveillance and technological action at a distance, and when force is required, it typically involves firearms, chemical sprays, and Tasers rather than wrist locks and batons. For private citizens, handguns and knives are increasingly encountered during violent situations. With knives and firearms entering ever more contexts, the necessity of skill in unarmed combat either increases astronomically or declines altogether. That is, skill in unarmed fighting does not become obsolete, but its field of applicability becomes more circumscribed.

Consequently, wherever martial practice survives, elements other than the “martial” are usually accentuated: health, sport, discipline, self-actualization, cultural artifact, and simple fun become more significant in more contexts.

Martial Arts, Military, Migration, and Media

One of the contexts in which martial arts historically developed was on the margin of empire, meaning places where a colonizing power or government was being resisted. Examples of this include Silat in the Dutch East Indies, kali and eskrima in the Philippines, and capoeira in Brazil. These arts have all been subsequently globalized in various ways, ways that are inextricably linked to the media. But their initial development was linked to military, and their older forms of dissemination and spread were linked to migration. All of these factors and more combine in a very famous example of martial arts, namely Okinawan karate. Although karate, like other arts, was spread communally at first, by practitioners often associated with clan, military, or paramilitary training, it first entered into a global circuit of representation and discourse with “mythologized” media representations. That is, the world (including Japan, where it proliferated first in the 1910s) learned of karate via an assortment of amazing tales, fantastic legends, and entrancing fantasies, popularized first in travel literature and later in film and TV (Krug 2001, 398). These tales often reflected what are called “Orientalist” fantasies (Said 1978), but even some Japanese (notably ethnologist Yanagita Kunio, 1875-1962) saw Okinawa as “a vast, living replica or even a laboratory of seventh-century Japan” (Harootunian, 1998, 155). Such fantasies perhaps spoke more of about the daydreams (and prejudices) of the observers than reality. Nevertheless, ethnological speculations, travel literature, and media representations – no matter how apocryphal – played a large role in promoting interest around the world.

But, why was it that karate gained such global fame? The answer relates to the post-World War II military occupation of Japan by the mid-twentieth century's military and cultural superpower, the United States of America. The fact that the cultural and martial experiences of US military servicemen could come to infect and reorient the imagination of Hollywood, and the fact that this could impact on the cultural literacy of the rest of the world (in terms of “knowing about” karate, judo, ninjas, etc.) indicates the global reach of American film and media.

According to Krug (2001, 399), Asian martial arts first appeared in the Hollywood films of the 1930s, and became common during the 1960s. The reason for this proliferation relates strongly to military and global geopolitical events and processes. The cinematic proliferation marks the advent of martial arts becoming in their own right a new familiar form of knowledge in the West, as more and more American soldiers who had experienced karate and judo in Japan and taekwondo in Korea returned to the USA and opened schools (401). Krug also argues that what took hold in America was by-and-large sport-orientated. This was derived from the revised orientation of karate set in motion by Funakoshi Gichin (1868-1957). Funakoshi had successfully institutionalized Okinawan karate within Japanese culture before the war by getting it accepted and taught in Japanese schools and universities, and then changed its presentation again afterwards (Krug, 2001, 401-402). Indeed, the process of standardization and institutionalization that Funakoshi and his peers initiated vis-à-vis karate-do is a model for the way martial arts have been institutionalized and disseminated more broadly.

This institutionalization chiefly took the form of uniforms, formal lesson structures, fixed syllabi, and the colored belt system. This version of karate had also been sanitized, with lethal moves either removed or redefined as “block” or “punch.” It was this version, developed during and after World War II, which American servicemen encountered: an almost Fordist mass-production-line

approach to martial arts, whose rhythmic, repetitive straight line drills and nuts-and-bolts approach were already akin to military basic training. Thus, what first emerged on a large scale in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and in other Western cultures was substantially different from pre-Funakoshi Okinawan karate. Indeed, the status of karate had already been effectively transformed by its entry first into Japanese social institutions and then into a larger, more Westernized, global circuit. What was originally a local practice that was stitched through the fabric of the culture of Naha and Shuri, Okinawa, became disconnected and rewired very differently into a different set of social and cultural relations. Thus, karate in the west became connected with the discourses of sport, of health, and of various ideas (beliefs and fantasies) about oriental mysticism and spiritualism.

The form of the integration of karate and other martial practices into Anglo-American culture was always going to be conditioned by the environment of its reception. The cultural textures of late nineteenth century Okinawa, early twentieth century Japan, and mid-to-late twentieth century America are all drastically different. As such, the karate of these places and periods is very different. According to Krug, from the 1960s until the present day, martial arts have been increasingly stitched into a relationship not only with sport in general but also with bodybuilding in particular (402). The effects of the influence of discourses of sport and body image on the practices of martial arts are significant and noticeable.

Spectacular film representations of improbable and impossible feats of athleticism (cinematic *wushu*, aka “wire fu”) and ultra-athletic bodies feed these preconceptions and beliefs about martial arts. But, as well as the rapid growth in participation in the most spectacular of styles (such as taekwondo and capoeira) there have also been strong reactions away from spectacular and showy styles. An example is the various versions of ultimate fighter and no-holds-barred Mixed Martial Arts competitions that have appeared on television (normally on pay-per-

view and subscription channels) since the early 1990s. This commoditized and media-driven development has had a pronounced impact on the character of many martial arts practices. Firstly, it has in many ways made problematical the very idea of adhering to a martial art style at all. As Royce Gracie, the winner of many of the early televised Ultimate Fighting Competitions, once put it: “At first it was style versus style, now it’s athlete versus athlete, because everyone cross-trains... And now with time limits built into the fights, not always the best wins, sometimes it’s just the most aggressive” (quoted in Preston, 2007, 64). In other words, this transformation, from martial bouts being style-against-style to athlete-against-athlete, “because everyone cross-trains,” there has developed an irreducible connection to the imposition of (Western) sportive and televisual conventions: rules, time-limits, the banning of potentially lethal techniques, etc. In this way, the media imposes demands and thereby drives the art, which is ironic, inasmuch as the standardized, commoditized media form claims to be “authentic,” “real,” “no holds barred,” and “ultimate.”

Globalization and Lineages, Traditions, Institutions, and Fashions

Martial arts once required the presence of the authentic master, whether “authentically” ethnically East Asian or, more recently, authentically ex-military or ex-tournament champion. However, over time, the internationalization of martial arts has gradually loosened the belief in the importance of an “authentic” master as a guarantee of a style’s legitimacy. Nevertheless, for a long time throughout the twentieth century, authenticity and legitimacy were largely associated with *ethnicity*. Thus, masters were associated with migrant communities, ethnic lineages, and geographical regions. After that, legitimacy came to be associated with military or sporting accomplishments. So, over time, martial practices have been severed from former historical locations and feats.

Authenticity and direct lineage are often discarded as yardsticks of legitimacy in favor of procedures of bureaucratic verification: trophies, titles, examinations, and other measures. Indeed, more recently, entire new martial systems have been devised and/or popularized around movie action choreography, with stuntmen replacing elite military soldiers as innovators and celebrities replacing “authentic natives” as martial arts conduits.

Institutions have increasingly replaced or supplanted local (often patrilineal) structures. As such, standards, examinations, trophies, titles, and similar forms of verification and demonstration have replaced unconditional deference to those who went before. This is not to say that hierarchies and codes of behavior have vanished. It is, rather, to say that martial arts are now ensnared in other networks of circulation. It is certainly still the case that many will wish for (and seek to find) what they believe to be an authentic or ancient martial art, and so will seek to find a traditional master. But the point is that this choice is today a consumption choice, and the status of the notion of being a master is now indelibly associated with branding and marketing, even when those involved do not want this to be the case (Krug, 2001, 403-404).

None of this should be taken to mean that the globalization of martial arts is a process of leveling or homogenization. Indeed, in some respects, perhaps the older notion of internationalization is more useful than globalization. While many things are international, few are truly global. Vast differences in styles remain evident regionally, nationally, and internationally. Indeed, these differences are much more visible today than ever, thanks to such technologies as the internet and websites such as YouTube.

Globalization also does not simply mean that everything is ubiquitous. Instead, globalization refers to the proliferation of communication technologies and networks, particularly within the context of the increasing deregulation of aspects of social and cultural life, with their transformation into commodities

within markets. Proliferation does not bring, or even imply, homogeneity. Instead, it often brings fragmentation – or, as cultural theorist Marc Froment-Meurice calls it, “globalkanization” (2001, 60). And these two forces, homogenization and fragmentation, operate simultaneously, pulling in opposite directions. On the one hand, there is the spread or hegemony (dominance) of certain forms that have become common as a result of their promulgation via sport, film, and TV. On the other hand, there is fragmentation, splintering, and proliferation of diversity.

Certain martial arts styles have become hegemonic and ubiquitous, for various reasons: first, judo and karate, owing to the American occupation of Japan, and the power of American movies and television. Next was “kung fu” (*quanfa*), thanks to the Hong Kong film industry, the cinematic feats of Bruce Lee and the *Kung Fu* television series. After that, it was taekwondo, due partly to its relative similarity to the already-familiar Shotokan karate but supplemented with even more spectacular kicks (something which satisfied an enduring Western fantasy about the spectacular character of martial arts), and partly to significant financial and political support from the South Korean government. Next was capoeira, which is even more visually spectacular and novel than kung fu and taekwondo, and also brought an immediate sub-cultural and countercultural cachet because of its connections with Brazilian slaves and outlaws. Even more recently, perhaps in response to these “spectacular” forms, came mixed martial arts, no-holds-barred martial arts, and so-called “reality-based” martial arts, in all their various manifestations.

Globalkanization occurs in the sense of fragmentation, splitting, and the production of a sense of difference. Development takes the form of combinations and re-combinations, often of unexpected elements borrowed from different societies and cultural traditions. These hybrids do not remain confined within the circumscribable sphere of martial arts: martial arts shade into fantasy as well as sport and self-defense. Novelty in martial arts influences cinematographic

choreography, which feeds back into martial arts fashions and influences. Examples include the Keysi fighting system, which was popularized in *Batman Begins* (Warner Brothers, 2005). Elsewhere, taijiquan has been combined with yoga and Pilates, and sold on exercise videodiscs, while Thai boxing, boxing, and taekwondo have been combined with music and aerobics to create Tae-Bo. And so on.

Of course, all martial styles are arguably hybrid, multi-disciplinary, and multicultural, and invested with elements of invented tradition. Thus, the Japanese characters for karate-do were changed by Funakoshi Gichin from ideograms that meant “China-hand” into ideograms meaning “empty-hand,” for reasons that were essentially nationalistic (Funakoshi 1975). Nonetheless, the intensification and acceleration of the development of martial arts in the contemporary world is overwhelmingly related to the saturation of media and communication networks, and to the marketing of franchises.

An index of this can be seen in the expansion of martial arts into contexts that are not traditional. The baseline for all movie fight and action choreography was utterly transformed by Bruce Lee’s Hollywood success with *Enter the Dragon* (Concord Productions, 1973) – a transformation in film which itself has further effects in other cultural realms, practices, and contexts. It is not just that major recent films such as *Kill Bill* (Miramax, 2003 and 2004) the *Matrix* trilogy (Warner Brothers, 1999-2003), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Columbia TriStar, 2003) and *Unleashed* (Rogue Pictures, 2005) have all been choreographed by Hong Kong-based Yuen Wo-Ping, the man who also choreographed the films that first made Jackie Chan into a star, namely *Drunken Master* (Seasonal Film, 1978) and *Snake in the Eagle’s Shadow* (Seasonal Film, 1978). It is that virtually any movie or TV show with fights in it, from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Lucasfilm, 1981) to *The Lion King* (Walt Disney, 1994) is indebted to martial arts generally, and to Bruce Lee’s trailblazing filmic success specifically (Miller 2000).

The filmic globalization of the sort of spectacular choreography that is – no matter how putatively “realist” – ultimately informed by Hong Kong wire-fu is not merely a contribution to the film industry. It is also a massive contribution to global popular culture. Without the global success of kung fu films, it seems unlikely that China would have opened the Shaolin temple as a tourist destination in the 1980s, and even less likely that China would have planned to construct a second one in Hong Kong during the early 2010s. Indeed, before the *Kung Fu* television show and the Hong Kong martial arts movies of the 1970s, the Shaolin Temple was scarcely known outside China, and then mostly in martial art circles. As Stanley Henning notes (2003, 21) myths about the Shaolin Temple were largely created in two books, a popular novel, *Travels of Lao Can*, written between 1904 and 1907, and the anonymous 1915 *Secrets of Shaolin Temple Boxing*, a spurious training manual that had instantly been debunked by the martial arts historians Tang Hao and Xu Je Dong (Lui, 2005; Kennedy and Guo, 2005, 70-71). True, Robert W. Smith published an English-language book in 1964 called *Secrets of Shaolin Temple Boxing*, but it was never a bestseller. Yet, today, thanks to kung fu films, the Shaolin temple is firmly enthroned in global consciousness. Along with this interest came increased fascination with traditional Chinese culture, history, beliefs, and practices – an interest that arguably transformed global popular culture in the 1970s, in ways that continue to be felt throughout the world. Indeed, as we can see in this example (and many others), the globalization of martial arts has had effects not just on martial arts, but on cultures and economies more widely.

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Martial arts originated as ancient combat techniques. Depending on the form, they involve performing technical and often explosive moves such as kicks, punches, and throws; some types use swords, bow and arrow, or other weapons. Practitioners boost their strength, agility, balance, power, reflexes, flexibility, and cardiovascular endurance. Developed in China and Japan, this martial art is a forerunner of both aikido and judo. All three martial arts rely on grappling, a technique that involves fighting in close proximity to your opponent with lots of body contact; it can involve anything from throws to strangle-type holds to taking your opponent to the ground or floor and fighting there. My top 5 martial arts that are most effective in the streets due to experience first hand and eye witness my self are .. Boxing, Every boxer I met was a well respected fighter and known for their great fighting ability but it a. Continue Reading. Now your skill in these martial arts solely depends on your commitment and will to learn and how serious you practice, the same goes to. The martial arts is as effective as the fighter using it. Develop a strategic mind, always calculate and think before you act, improvise, always looks to find out what you could or can do and most importantly DON'T USE YOUR SKILLS UNLESS A SITUATION YOU HAVE TOO. The author discusses how the martial arts in these countries are developing against the background of globalization and modernization. Although traditional martial arts have transformed to accept some characteristics of modern sports, they still preserved their essential spirit in these countries. For karate, kendo, aikido or judo, Japan is the right country to train in. If you want a serious, intense, and authentic education in these disciplines, you'll encounter Japanese schools that take things very seriously. Aside from getting state-of-the-art training, you'll also learn the basics of res

Global Martial Arts Manga: Rebirth is just a starting point from reaching the peak. Intruding crypt, the rise of martial arts. Rebirth is just a starting point from reaching the peak. Intruding crypt, the rise of martial arts. Academia - The Globalization of Martial Arts. HealthyChildren.org - Healthy Living - Martial Arts. Britannica Websites. Articles from Britannica Encyclopedias for elementary and high school students. Martial arts can be divided into the armed and unarmed arts. The former include archery, spearmanship, and swordsmanship; the latter, which originated in China, emphasize striking with the feet and hands or grappling. In Japan, traditionally a warrior's training emphasized archery, swordsmanship, unarmed combat, and swimming in armour. Members of other classes interested in combat concentrated on arts using the staff, everyday work implements (such as thrashing flails, sickles, and knives), and unarmed combat. The author discusses how the martial arts in these countries are developing against the background of globalization and modernization. Although traditional martial arts have transformed to accept some characteristics of modern sports, they still preserved their essential spirit in these countries. For karate, kendo, aikido or judo, Japan is the right country to train in. If you want a serious, intense, and authentic education in these disciplines, you'll encounter Japanese schools that take things very seriously. Aside from getting state-of-the-art training, you'll also learn the basics of respect towards the discipline's philosophy and the masters who are teaching you the ropes.

4. Brazil. Everyone who's interested in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) aspires to train in Brazil. Martial arts are practiced for a variety of different reasons including self-defense, physical fitness, entertainment and competition. Some even consider martial arts as a way of achieving spiritual growth. If you're interested in finding the right martial arts for you, check out our courses on Martial Arts. I have accumulated a list of the the top 10 martial arts today, not in any particular order.

1. Judo. Martial artists are taught vicious and aggressive moves such as eye gouging, choke holds, biting, grappling, hard striking, and joint locks. Once an attacker is brought to the ground, the first step is to grab a limb and manipulate it at the joint until it breaks. After the attacker is immobilized, the martial artist can unleash an arsenal of fists and elbows to the face.