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Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

Chinese wushu martial arts as a manifestation of China's cultural diplomacy

Subject

The doctoral dissertation examines Chinese martial arts the context of their use in China's cultural diplomacy. The martial arts, usually referred to as either *gongfu (kungfu)* or *wushu*, represent an excellent example of military traditions typical of East Asian States. They are defined as a historical category of perfect hand-to-hand combat and weapon use systems, linked to ethical codes and metaphysical elements. At the same time they are a form of physical culture, which, drawing on the traditions of ancient warrior cultures, leads - through long-term training of combat techniques - to psychophysical improvement and self-realization. Traditional Chinese martial arts, referred as the "traditional *wushu*" (*chuantong wushu*, 传统武术) or "folk *wushu*" (*minjian wushu*, 民间武术), have a long documented history and are deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition. They developed under a strong influence from the traditions of ancient philosophical and religious schools, i.e. *ru* (confucianism), taoism and buddhism, as well as from old cults and rites. The eclecticism specific to Chinese culture imbued the native martial arts with a unique character. Therefore they can be regarded now as a major transmitter of cultural values shaped over centuries.

Different traditional styles lay the groundwork for the form of *wushu* that we know today – the "modern *wushu*" (*xiandai wushu*, 现代武术) and „sport *wushu*" (*jingsai wushu*, 竞赛武术). The 20th century witnessed a transformation, conversion to sport and the development of an institutional framework for this type of physical activity. At the same time, the ideas of promoting it in the country and abroad were voiced for the first time. In the 1980s *wushu* as a separate discipline became a unified system of contests with specific components and a developed competition programme. The vigorous activity of Chinese and international bodies supported by the authorities in Beijing popularized the Chinese martial arts in the form of both sport and traditional *wushu* worldwide. Including *wushu* in the Olympic Games programme became the key goal for those organizations. The authorities in Beijing began to treat Chinese martial arts instrumentally as a unique form of physical culture developed on the basis of a native tradition that could be successfully adapted on a larger global scale. The Chinese authorities also see them as an important tool that can be used, on the one hand, in the process of social integration and the

shaping of national identity, and, on the other hand, for the practical improvement of citizens's physical condition.

Scope and objective

The primary objective of the dissertation is to present how China uses martial arts as a tool in its cultural diplomacy. The activity of the central government in Beijing is analysed as well as the activity of public institutions promoting martial arts in China and abroad. This analysis was linked with an attempt to locate the activities related to the promotion of martial arts in a broader context of the goals of China's cultural diplomacy.

The following research questions were posed in the work: What are the main objectives, tools and means of China's public and cultural diplomacy? What is the place of Chinese martial arts in the promotion of China's culture outside? What traditional values are cultivated and propagated by Chinese martial arts? How did the 20th century processes of establishing an institutional framework, transformation, and conversion to sport impact Chinese martial arts in the 21st century? To what degree has the classification of traditional styles influenced the definition of the contemporary rules and regulations of *wushu* sports contests? What strategy for promoting Chinese martial arts is applied by Chinese and international actors backed by the Beijing government?

The research questions framed in this manner made it possible to formulate three hypotheses. Firstly, in its pursuit of cultural diplomacy, China makes an instrumental use of its unique civilization achievements to bolster its image and increase its attractiveness in the world. In this regard martial arts, as an immanent part of native culture, are treated as a means of securing national cultural interests as well as a "communication bridge" in contacts with other countries. Secondly, Chinese entities promoting *wushu* in China and worldwide have always tried to combine Chinese martial arts with traditional values deeply rooted in Chinese culture. The authorities in Beijing seek to emphasise this element in their cultural diplomacy, striving to include *wushu* as a separate discipline in the Olympic Games programme. Thirdly, the classification of traditional styles influenced the definition of the contemporary rules and regulations of *wushu* sports contests. The identification with the native styles of traditional *wushu* is intended to preserve their identity despite the pressure to adapt to the requirements of sports rivalry. Sports *wushu* contests, representing a unified system of selected categories with specific components, grew out of traditional native styles. The development of sports *wushu* (Chinese martial arts as a sports discipline) today reflects the tendency of Beijing authorities to seek new ways of promoting a national form of physical activity that can be adapted not only on a local scale but also globally.

In the analysis of various theoretical approaches and numerous definitions of the concepts of public diplomacy, focusing on its selected concretisation, i.e. cultural diplomacy, three research perspectives were adopted in the work. The first analyses the objectives of the undertaken diplomatic activities. In this context, cultural diplomacy is treated as a pillar of foreign policy, representing a tool to achieve the goals of state policy. The key idea behind its activities is to familiarise foreign recipients with the country, its inhabitants, culture, language, while building a positive image through culture.

The second perspective relates to cultural diplomacy and puts emphasis on the role of culture in attaining political goals. Here cultural diplomacy favours the promotion of the native culture's heritage and attractiveness. Cultural diplomacy is an activity closely related to culture that inspires and attracts people from all over the world despite the existence of boundaries and political differences. Reaching agreements between nations wherein states make use of promotional activities based on culture, i.e. ideas, history, art, value system and tradition, is one of the key objectives of cultural diplomacy. In publications by Chinese-speaking researchers, cultural diplomacy is understood as a means to maximise participation in international cultural competition and securing China's national cultural interests as well as serving as a "bridge of communication" with other countries. It boosts a country's "international standing" and its "international influence", while contributing to the development of "cultural diversity" in the global context. The very concept of China's public diplomacy is deeply rooted in its culture, defining its fundamental goal as reducing or even eliminating the hostile attitudes of public opinion abroad and gaining sympathy for the Chinese government and people. Such an understanding of cultural diplomacy shows that authorities in Beijing use the unique achievements of their civilization in an instrumental way in order to promoting the state in the outside world.

The third perspective on cultural diplomacy is complementary and relates to sports diplomacy, given the twofold approach to Chinese martial arts, seen not only as a carrier of the centuries-old Chinese tradition but also as a sports discipline or, more broadly, as a national form of physical activity. The sporting dimension is propagated through the activities of entities that promote Chinese martial arts on a global scale.

Research methods and techniques

This doctoral dissertation is drafted in the framework of cultural and religious studies but many of its elements are interdisciplinary, referring to solutions typical of disciplines such as history, physical culture, political and administrative studies.

One of the research methods applied in the dissertation was content analysis. It involved the study of textual communication (i.e. statutory documents, regulations, messages from major international organisations promoting Chinese martial arts). The research focused mainly on the analysis of documents from organisations such as: International Wushu Federation (IWuF), Chinese Wushu Association (CWA), Wushu Federation of Asia (WFA), European Wushu and Kungfu Federation (EWuF), European Wushu Federation (EUWUF), World Kuo Shu Federation (TWKSF), International Chinese Kuoshu Federation (ICKF). These organisations were selected owing to their global influence, their recognisability, achievements and experience.

A historical-comparative analysis, in turn, made it possible to present the development of Chinese martial arts in the 20th and 21st centuries in terms of cause and effect, based on library queries. The emphasis was placed on the establishment of institutional framework, the transformation of martial arts, their local and international development and the changing strategies of their promotion in China and abroad.

Expert interviews conducted by the author with representatives of various styles made an important contribution to the dissertation. The interviewees included Shi Yanti of the 34th generation of Shaolin fighting monks and at the same time a direct disciple of the abbot Shi Yongxin. Interviews were also conducted with the present heir of the traditional style *Choy Lee Fut (Cailifoquan)* – Chen Yong Fa, the leader of the International Chan Family Choy Lee Fut Wing Sing Tong and the Shaolin Lohan Therapeutic Qigong Centre. Polish experts were also interviewed, including: Dariusz Piwowarski – president of the Polish Wushu Association, long-time activist and practitioner of Chinese martial arts specializing in *sanda/sanshou*, and Stanisław Ścieszka - Shi Yan Long, 34th generation of Shaolin fighting monks, disciple of Master Shi Su Gan - at the moment the oldest generation of Shaolin fighting monks alive.

Participant observation was also applied, with the author directly involved into the martial arts environment. The author is a long-time practitioner of Chinese martial arts in the *Choy Lee Fut* system, a member of the community of that system's practitioners and sports *wushu* contenders. She took part in numerous promotional activities (including international and domestic contests) organized by the International Wushu Federation, Chinese Wushu Association, European Wushu and Kungfu Federation, World Kuo Shu Federation and Polish Wushu Association. As a member of the Polish Wushu Association's national team she represented Poland at international contests of the highest rank in both traditional and sport *wushu*. This enabled her to conduct participant observation during prestigious sporting events. Observation of this type was also conducted during international *gongfu/wushu/qigong* seminars.

As the author is a practitioner of the traditional style, the research methods applied in the field of martial arts should be supplemented with the “*budō* study” as defined by Wojciech

J. Cynarski. The experience accumulated over many years of practice and participation in sports contests provides the author with a unique perspective, enabling her to gain a special insight into the processes related to sports competition. As the author is a member of this community and an active participant in sports events, she has been able to obtain knowledge, identify relationships forming in this space and understand the processes generated by the examined international organisations. The case study method was applied to Chinese martial arts understood as a tool of China's cultural diplomacy. In this context, many techniques of historical research were employed, supplemented with direct observation of the examined phenomena and interviews with their participants.

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