

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

Journal of Asian Martial Arts. Volume 1, number 1, January 1992. Michael A. DeMarco, editor. Erie, PA 16502 USA: Via Media Publishing Company, 821 West 24th Street.

This is a pioneering journal in a developing field of study. If the range and content of the first issue is a reliable indicator, then it should be warmly welcomed by students, researchers, and reflective practitioners of Asian martial arts. The variety of martial traditions examined in this first issue is impressive. The *Journal* clearly intends to be interdisciplinary and this is to be applauded. It is a stimulating prospect to be able to read contributions from specialists in sports psychology, physiology, ethnography, history, and the anthropology of martial arts, all within a single journal.

Turning to the specific papers. The first is an extended interview conducted by Dietmar Stubenbaum with Wu Kuang-hsien, an instructor at the Chinese Martial Arts Department of the Chinese Culture University, Taipei. Mr Wu is a noted exponent of Northern Shaolin styles, as well as Yang Taijiquan, Xingyiquan, Shuai Chiao (Chinese wrestling), and several weapons systems. Apart from giving useful insights into his own particular training background, this interview helps to clarify the relationship between the supposedly hard Shaolin and the soft Wu Dang arts. Many martial artists have taken the hard and soft classifications as literal and absolute. Mr Wu makes it clear that this is a mistake. He asserts that if Shaolin systems were all hard they would not be effective, and that every style must have elements of hard and soft. These comments, along with Mr Wu's proficiency in both the Wu Dang and Shaolin systems, should help correct the tendency of some Western practitioners to artificially polarize and absolutize the Shaolin/Wu Dang distinction.

The second paper, by Michael DeMarco, is "The Origin and Evolution of Taijiquan." This useful account rightly acknowledges the importance of the legendary and hagiographical elements in the "myths of origins" of this style, and gives due recognition to the role of the legend of the sage-immortal Chang San-feng. Historically, the author sensibly points to a relatively recent date and identifies the core style as being the "long boxing" of the Chen family in the mid-seventeenth century. This paper is further enhanced by the addition of a number of important lineages of the leading Taijiquan masters.

The next contribution is a brief profile of the Chen-style Taijiquan master Du Yu-tse who died in 1990, written by his student Wang Jia-xiang.

Phillip Zarrilli then provides a detailed and authoritative account of the vital spots (*marmam/varmam*) and their role in the martial and healing traditions of South Indian Kalarippayattu. A researcher, fieldworker, and practitioner of Kalarippayattu for sixteen years, Professor Zarrilli's knowledge and understanding of this system is clearly reflected in this paper. His discussion of the relationship between Kalarippayattu and Ayurvedic medicine and astrology is of particular interest to students of

Asian folklore.

The next paper is an account by David Jones of his *shodan* gradings in *kyūdō* (archery) and *jōdō* (staff) in Japan. He attributes much of his success in the gradings to the fact that he addressed the spiritual and moral dimensions of these *budō* systems in the written papers. Japanese students who treated them purely as physical training in fighting arts were failed.

Willy Pieter and Dennis Taaffe provide an informative summary of their impressive "Oregon Taekwondo Research Project." This project involved the intensive physiological and psychological monitoring of elite competitors. One of the most important contributions of the project was to highlight the dangers of overtraining, particularly in the buildup to major competitions. The results of such overtraining soon become apparent in an increase in injuries and the problems of staleness and burn-out. The project's advice was to emphasize the quality of training and not just the quantity, and stressed the need for athletes to be involved in the planning of their own training programs.

John Donohue's fine paper brings an anthropological perspective to explain the appeal of Japanese martial arts in contemporary American culture. He points out that the modern fascination with these arts is not so much due to their combat effectiveness or physical benefits as to their symbolic dimensions and to their capacity to bring practitioners into a ritualized confrontation with violence and with their own mortality.

He acknowledges that the Zen associations of Japanese martial arts and the notion of *budō* training as entailing spiritual transformation, along with the near magical appeal of concepts of *ki* and intrinsic energy, all exert a powerful appeal. He is also right to emphasise the social and communal dimensions of *budō* training. The group identity created in the *dōjō* (training hall), and reinforced by the language ritual and training protocols, has a particular appeal in an increasingly individualistic society, where the sense of a shared community is often difficult to sustain. He rightly contrasts this with the situation in Japan, where the appeal of *budō* training to adult practitioners lies partly in the quest for individual expression in a highly group-orientated society. This is without doubt a very well-written paper, and should inspire many readers to get hold of Dr. Donohue's recent book (DONOHUE 1991).

As I have made clear, I am more than happy to recommend this new journal. All the articles are well researched, fully referenced, and clearly written. The quality of the printing, presentation, and of the many black-and-white photographs is high. Students on my own course on "Religion and Martial Arts" are already benefiting from the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, and I would suggest that all college and university libraries commence subscribing to this excellent journal.

REFERENCE CITED:

DONOHUE, John J.

- 1991 *The forge of the spirit: Structure, motion and meaning in the Japanese martial tradition*. New York: Garland Publishing.

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