

Chinese Martial Arts Confront the 21st Century

面对二十一世纪的中国武术

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摘 要：中国武术是中国五千年文化史中一个重要组成部分。柔道和跆拳道都是吸收了中国武术中一些成分而形成了国际搏斗运动成为奥运会正式比赛的项目。这两个搏斗运动项目各自包含了中国武术技巧的一部分；柔道着重摔拿，跆拳道着重踢打。想要保留传统中国武术，须要年青一代爱护它和使它国际化，那就需要追溯踢打摔拿的全面内容和竞技方法，这可分为两部分（1）传统中国摔跤为必要核心，（2）任何中国传统武术门派配合。竞技方法要接近混合武术散打类似的形式，规则，和护身装备。

From the historical evidence it appears that China has the oldest continuous, evolving martial arts culture in the world, so it was undoubtedly a big letdown to receive word from the Olympic Committee in October 2006 that Chinese martial arts (Wushu) were not accepted as an official Olympic entry in 2008. It is especially disappointing when one realizes that the origins of the two East Asian Olympic martial sports, Judo and Taekwondo, can both be traced, to at least some degree or another, to traditional Chinese martial arts.

Martial arts were an important element in Chinese culture as far back as earliest recorded history. Many of the characteristics that have been manifested in the martial arts and their role in society have accompanied them to one degree or another all the way into the 21st century; however, until very recently, serious in depth scholarship in this field has been minimal in China, not to mention elsewhere, and perceptions have been colored by highly publicized images from late 19th century popular novels, Secret Society myths and heterodox religious group practices.

Now, already approaching a decade into the 21st century, the Chinese martial arts continue to be practiced in various venues throughout China: officially sponsored, performance oriented Wushu routine competition; health oriented exercise programs such as Taijiquan; self-defense oriented traditional style martial arts training, general education in a martial arts environment (attendees likely harbor hopes of breaking into the entertainment industry, possible jobs as security personnel/bodyguards, and so forth). There are individual martial arts teachers and schools in almost every city in China. According to one report in August 2006, Dengfeng City, in the vicinity of Shaolin Monastery, boasted 83 martial arts schools with more than 50,000 domestic and foreign disciples.

But, despite all this activity, the fact is that Japan and Korea have already beaten China to the punch for a place in the Olympics. It is interesting that the Japanese chose to enter Judo into the Olympics as their national sport rather than Karate. The likely reason was that Judo had seniority over Karate. Judo was developed

from jujutsu practices that can be traced roughly to the late 17th-early 18th century, and at least one early jujutsu school, Kitoryu, openly admitted that their school was influenced by the Chinese expatriot, Chen Yuanyun, although the final product of judo was unquestionably "made in Japan". Karate can only be traced to its introduction from Okinawa in the 1920's and the Okinawans openly admit that they learned Karate through contact with China (1760's), thus they call it "Tode", or Tang Hands(Dynasty referring to China). As for Taekwondo, while it is undoubtedly deeply indebted to Japanese Karate, credit is due the Koreans for their ability to "Koreanize" and market Taekwondo during a period of strong nationalism following WWII. Also, the Japanese entry of Judo left the door open for the Koreans to enter Taekwondo.

As for China, which has the oldest continuous, evolving martial arts culture in the world, to which Karate, Judo, and Taekwondo all owe varying degrees of gratitude, one can only say, "he who hesitates is lost". What happened in China? It appears that the major contributing factor to the survival of the Chinese martial arts over the centuries has also been at the root of the difficulty in entering them into the Olympics -- China's conservative, inward focused sociopolitical system during much of its long history, and from which China only really began to emerge beginning in the 1980's under Deng Xiaoping's "Opening" policy. As a result, China was several decades behind South Korea in adjusting to global society and, while it has made amazing strides overall since then, Chinese have only very recently awakened to the implications of their lost opportunity with the martial arts. Of course, failure to make the Olympics does not mean the end of Chinese martial arts, but it was a big disappointment and, whether or not they will ever make the Olympics remains an open question.

So, where do the Chinese martial arts go from here to survive in modern China and find a niche in global culture, two interrelated aspects in modern society? As a minimum, the direction taken must satisfy the desire of youth, both inside and outside China, to compete and be recognized. Within China, it must also appeal to the widest portion of the martial arts community, which means that practitioners of all styles must be able to compete. To insure this happens it will be necessary to design a training program that fully applies traditional Chinese martial arts theory and skills (kicks, punches, siezing/grappling, throwing), and to determine rules and protective gear suited for competition.

I envision an amateur level program that is similar to Mixed Martial Arts. All participants would be required to have a standardized, basic foundation in Chinese wrestling (Shuaijiao). Shuaijiao training would provide necessary freestyle full contact experience in use of seizing/grappling, throwing, and falling techniques. With this foundation certified, individuals would be eligible to compete regardless of any other martial arts styles they practiced, which would supplement Shuaijiao skills and add kicks and punches. To facilitate freedom of movement, minimum protective gear would be worn, such as MMA style, not regular style, boxing gloves. This would be an advanced form of Sanda, similar to MMA.

Only after developing a wide enough international following will Chinese martial arts stand a chance to become an accepted Olympic sport. This will require several years, but stands a good chance if the Chinese martial arts community displays a unified effort to ensure its success. Optimistically speaking, even though Chinese martial arts were not accepted as an official sport with Chinese characteristics for the 2008 Olympics, the door is still open to enter Chinese martial arts in the future. In fact, Chinese martial arts have an opportunity to regain their place as the main source for East Asian barehanded martial sports by developing a program such as that described above, which goes beyond both Judo and Taekwondo, and returns to full traditional content, by combining all four basic techniques of kicking, punching, throwing and seizing.