



Towards a General Theory of Fighting Arts

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Abstract

Introduction: The fighting arts are an interesting area for researchers from many scientific disciplines around the world. Scientific investigations need to choose appropriate theory, language and methods. The first theory that gives us a special language is the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts, HTMA. The second is the Anthropology of Martial Arts, AMA. The problem considered in this study is how we should study the martial arts & combat sports & systems, or 'combatives'; what theoretical framework should we use. It is the author's proposal for a scientific perspective which should be useful; an elaboration the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts (HTMA) and definitions, the General Theory of Fighting Arts (GTFA), and the Anthropology of Martial Arts. **Methodology:** Participant observation, and qualitative content analysis of the literature were used. Methodology of research (in the area of the fighting arts) was also analyzed. **Results and Discussion:** General Theory of Fighting Arts – GTFA. In the GTFA we can study and explain a broad area of fighting arts and the related problems. These are: 1. Cultural areas of martial arts & combat sports & combat systems (according to AMA and HTMA); 2. Teaching concepts (technical and tactical issues), combat strategy (for self-defence and in combat sports), aspects of real fighting – interdisciplinary; 3. Bio-technical issues – from the perspective of sports sciences. The Research methodology for traditional East Asian martial arts requires its own practice and a high level of sophistication – at best, in more than one martial art. It is a qualitative method of participant observation associated with the experience of metaphysical dimensions. This special method is the 'shugyo' (Jap. shūgyō) – psychophysical study and experience from practicing psycho-physical systems. Michael Maliszewski was one of first researchers using this method. **Conclusion:** The GTFA is the sum of HTMA (humanistic, social and cultural issues), AMA (philosophical, cultural and biological approaches), and a part of Sport Sciences, for coaching, bio-technical and bio-medical issues, the methodology of teaching, etc. The GTFA now created should give us the opportunity to research and explain complicated problems of fighting arts, according to this new, holistic paradigm.

Keywords: fighting art, martial art, combat sport, physical culture, anthropology

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INTRODUCTION

Fighting arts is an interesting area for researcher from many scientific disciplines worldwide. Scientific investigations need choosing an appropriate theory, language and method. Such investigations and discourse have been realized since about 2000 – in some scientific institutions. Some scientific conferences were ‘prequels’ for world congresses of IMACSSS – the International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society, active since 2010. For instance, the Humanistic Conference on *Budo – Kakugi – Jindo* in Rzeszow, 2008 [1]. Today, the discussion is realized in cooperation among specialists from East Asia, Europe and both Americas, under umbrella of IMACSSS. The Japanese Academy of Budo (JAB) has undertaken the discussion on Budo and other terms. In the debate leaders and experts JAB and IMACSSS was established that Budo is a designate of the concept of 'martial arts', while *kakugi* are 'combat sports' [2-5]. Budo is associated with high, ethos culture; and of the national heritage of Japan. "Pathways of Warriors" are derived from the culture of chivalry (of Japanese *bushi*) [6-8].

The longitudinal participant observation, and qualitative content analysis of the literature [9] were used in this study.

1. Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts - HTMA

Basic inspirations of the theory were:

- "Theory of Cultural Dialogue" by M. Eliade and S. Tokarski;
- "Radical Humanism" by E. Fromm;
- New-paradigmatic human and social sciences (not only F. Capra).

The Theory of Cultural Dialogue by Eliade was developed by Tokarski. Stanislaw Tokarski, a philosopher, Orientalist (Indologist and scholar of Eliade) and *judo* coach (5 *dan*), explains the meaning of martial arts in accordance with Jigoro Kano's ideas. He identifies martial arts and combat sports, pointing out common elements of the Asian psycho-physical practice forms: self-expression, self-realization and self-defense. Martial arts are described as "forms of activity of the Eastern philosophy expression" [10]. His application for martial arts studies was an inspiration for Cynarski [11-13]. The Cynarski's *Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts* points also the humanistic ethics and anthropology proposed by Fromm [14], personality of teaching by John Paul II, and some other theoretic approaches, like the Holistic Pedagogy by Andrzej Szyszko-Bohusz [15].

How we should understand the new paradigm? Only a *holistic perception of human* and system testing will give us knowledge to meet the requirements of today's challenges. *The new paradigmatic science* suitable for the 21st century will create areas of breaking the nineteenth-century schemes and requiring a broader knowledge of scholars. Contrary to preserved till today the nineteenth-century institutional structure of science, the field of *inter- and multidisciplinary sciences* is what best meets the objectives of the new paradigm of science. The new paradigm must be *humanistic, cultural, systemic and holistic* [16-19].

Language of the Theory

Let's start the study with a definition of basic concepts of the HTMA. "*Physical culture* is a relatively integrated and established system of behaviours in the field of care of physical development, movement fitness, health, bodily beauty, human physical perfection and expression, which take place according to patterns which are obligatory in a given community, as well as results of those behaviours" [20].

We use here and talk about the *physical culture* in the holistic perspective, according the Krawczyk's Polish School of Sociology and Theory of Physical Culture. Martial arts and martial ways are a part of the physical culture, and a part of symbolic culture [20-24].

Matsunaga *et al.* write on the philosophy of *Budō* in this way: “*Budō*, the martial ways of Japan, have their origins in the tradition of *bushidō* – the way of the warrior. *Budō* is a time-honored form of physical culture comprising of *jūdō*, *kendō*, *kyūdō*, *sumō*, *karatedō*, *aikidō*, *shōrinji kenpō*, *naginata* and *jūkendō*. Practitioners study the skills while striving to unify mind, technique and body, develop his or her character; enhance their sense of morality; and to cultivate a respectful and courteous demeanor. Practiced steadfastly, these admirable traits become intrinsic to the character of the practitioner. The *Budō* arts serve as a path to self-perfection. This elevation of the human spirit will contribute to social prosperity and harmony, and ultimately, benefit the people of the world” [6]. Also, they use the term physical culture to define the ‘martial ways’. *Martial arts* are defined as “a historic category of flawless methods of unarmed combat fights and use of weapons combined with a spiritual element” [25]. *Ways of martial arts* include certain forms of physical (psychophysical) culture, which, based on tradition of warrior cultures lead, through training of fighting techniques, to psychophysical improvement and self-realization. At the same time, they are the processes of education and positive ascetics. The positive asceticism combines corporal exercise with conscious self-discipline and is oriented towards moral and spiritual progress [2].

Combat sport is understood as “derivative of the martial arts traditions of the East or the West, whose distinctive feature is sports rivalry. The fight may be direct (but the rules protect the health of players) or in the form of expression of motion (demonstrational forms). Sometimes there are different formulas for competitive sports (as in kick-boxing) or competitions (as in taekwondo ITF)” [25-28].

Combat system is “a simplified technical and tactical training programme of hand-to-hand combat or with the use of weapons in a fight at close range, performed especially in the uniformed services (as well as in a popular /commercialized version as a self-defence course)” [25].

The term “*fighting arts*” combines the skills, forms or fighting behaviour, which are mistakenly called martial arts by cultural anthropologists and hopologists. The term describes also self-defence and other combat sports, training programmes within this scope etc. [2; Fig. 1]. According to the typology by Bolelli [22] there are five varieties of fighting arts (or combative) that can be analyzed: 1) performance arts; 2) internal arts; 3) weapons arts; 4) self-defence arts; 5) combat sports (grappling, striking, and combined). A special glossary has been published in the quarterly “*Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology*” [25, 29].

2. Anthropology of Martial Arts - AMA

The Anthropology of Martial Arts is a development of HTMA, the effect of sociological, anthropological, and philosophical research, and the experience of many years of practice - practical studies of different varieties of martial arts and combat sports [8,13,30]. What were the most important sources of inspiration here?

- Anthropology of psychophysical progress [31];
- Personal approach - *Person and act* by K. Wojtyła (John Paul II) [31];
- Cultural and philosophical anthropology (Anthropology of Warrior’s Way) [8,22,33]; and also
- Philosophical anthropology [21,4];
- *Ido* philosophy [8,35].

From the anthropological perspective the human being, personal, physical and psychological is in the centre of attention. The body here is not undervalued but bodily practice is related to the path of spiritual development. The pursuit of perfection affects both the skills of hand-to-hand fighting and of wielding weapons, as well as the morality and the pursuit of full humanity.

Grand Masters of martial arts schools introduce philosophical elements from various philosophical and religious traditions. Particularly interesting is Wally Strauss’ philosophy of

Ido ('perpetual movement', 'endless road', or 'infinite way') [35], and adopted by a group of today's warriors of the pathway. This philosophy unites new *Budo* with European chivalric ethos, ethics of brotherhood and personal self-realization.

3. General Theory of Fighting Arts - GTFA

In the GTFA we can study and explain a broad area of fighting arts / combatives and related problems (Fig. 1). There are:

1. Cultural areas of martial arts & combat sports & combat systems (according to AMA and HTMA);
2. Conceptions of teaching (technical and tactical issues), strategy of combat (in self-defence and combat sports), aspects of real fighting - interdisciplinary;
3. Bio-technical issues - from perspective of the sport sciences.

In physical, bio-technical aspects fighting arts are similar to other sports. And sport science or sport sciences are appropriate for explaining the issues. Sometimes the specialty is called the "martial arts sciences" or "science of martial arts".

Technical and tactical aspects of real fighting and self-defence has his originality, however is similar to other scientific disciplines (psychology of sport, logic of combat, secure, methodology of teaching). It should be studied according both traditional knowledge and scientific one (inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary) [36-38]. *Ergo*, teaching of Grand Masters are interesting, too.

Hopology is only a part of the *holistic anthropology* (Fig. 1). Combat sports, martial arts and combat systems are elements of *fighting arts*. Big part of the term exists in area of physical culture (Fig. 2). Very useful are also *adaptations* of fighting arts for disabled, like adapted sport/physical education. It can be used for medical therapies, integration and socialisation/resocialisation.

The GTFA contains in one hand the humanistic and social/cultural dimensions and, in the second hand, the dimensions known and studied in sport sciences, for example coaching. Scientific knowledge is in the methodology of coaching a protection against the risk of overloads and injuries.

We can speak about one more element (or subsystem) of the fighting arts phenomenon - the martial arts tourism. People travel to learn or teach martial arts or fighting arts. It is a kind of *non-entertaining excursion, which should be analyzed in the perspective of the systemic-holistic anthropology of tourism* [39, 40].

Figure 2 shows the relationship between concepts: sport - physical culture - martial arts. Martial arts are partially element of physical culture [23]. However, they (martial arts) fall entirely within the concept *psycho-physical culture* [24]. The same, holistic-humanistic-anthropological paradigm helps to explain such complicated phenomenon as fighting arts and its elements - people, institutions and sub-systems.

4. Methodology - qualitative

The new paradigm breaks some old patterns, but does not so much displace the old ideas of reality and science, as supplement them. It is recommended to include group (of) interdisciplinary research and synergistic pursuit for synthesis of knowledge in sciences concerning humans and culture. Systemic recognition of human and culture also requires systemic, nonlinear and holistic thinking, not in terms of structures, but in net processes and relationships.

In anthropological research, holistic approaches and cultural studies are preferred, and their applications [30, 41-47], and *qualitative* methods, like participant observation [33]. It helps us to find human needs, values and social/cultural problems, e.g. barriers.

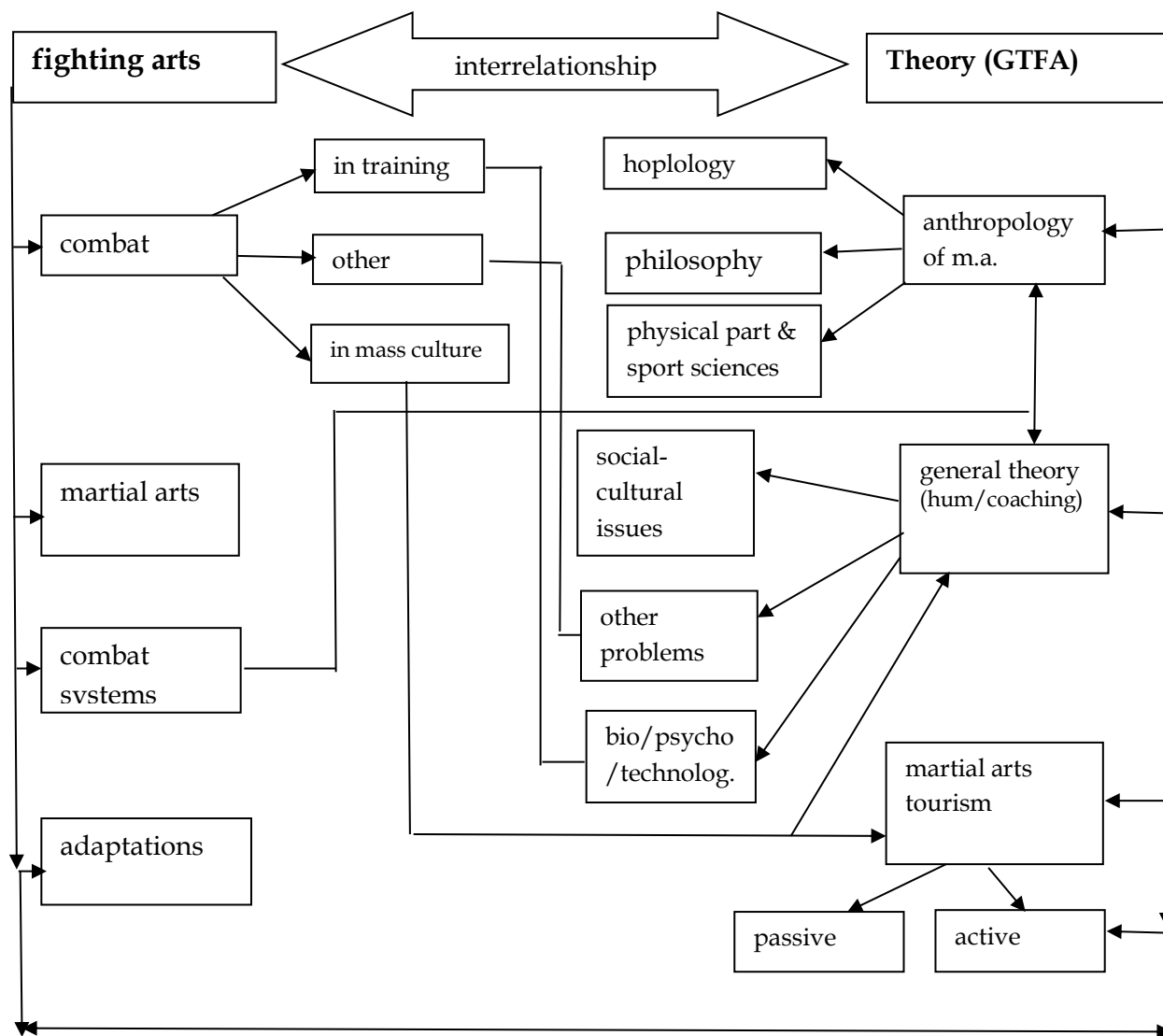


Figure 1. Interrelationship among GTFA and fighting arts and areas of interests (source: own study).

In the HTMA the combined acquisition of knowledge and practical experience through many years of training is parallel called 'Budo studies'. Despite the fact that such terminology is not used, consciously or not, the method itself is currently used by many researchers, such as D.F. Draeger (9 dan *iaido*), K.R. Kernspecht (10th master degree in *Wing Tsun kung fu*), and others. For someone studying martial arts, when this person is also a master-teacher, the group practising in the *dojo* serves as a kind of laboratory. When someone practises several martial arts disciplines, he or she gains a fuller picture of the way of the warrior. A wider practical knowledge gives you greater understanding of their former and present sense. Relationships with the masters-teachers of the highest rank play an important role. A sense of one's own practice and experience also applies to non-Asian martial arts. E.g. descriptions of *capoeira* made by an outside observer would probably have little value. However observation "from the inside" meets the standard of humanistic coefficient [49].

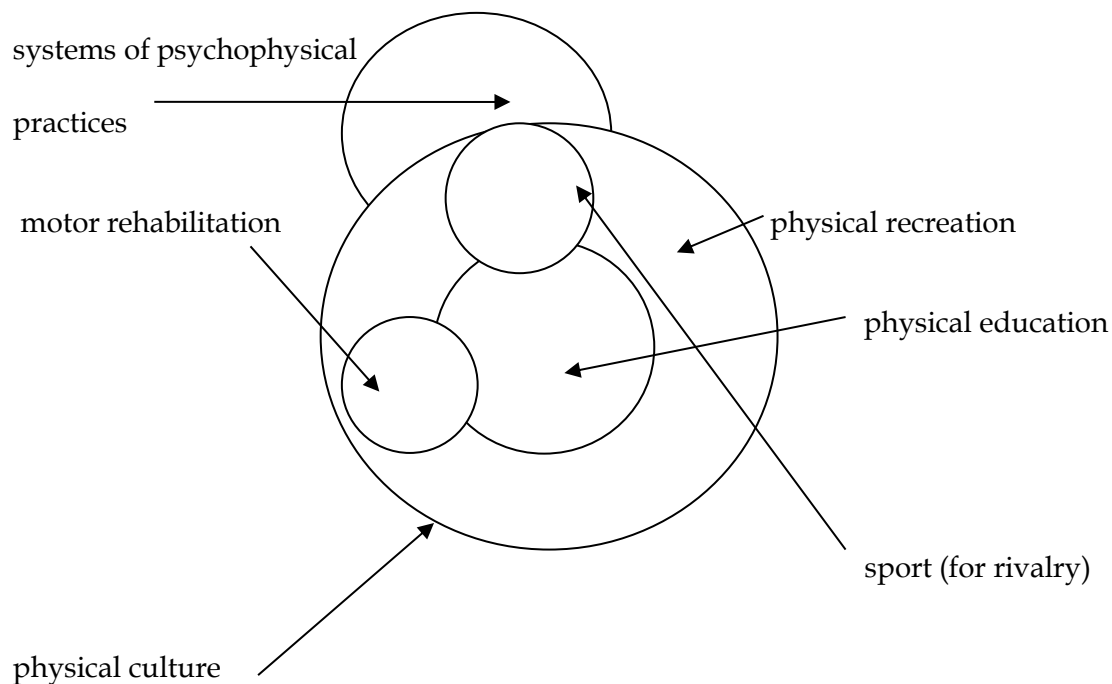


Figure 2. Physical education as a basic component of physical culture (source: 47)

Research methodology for East Asian martial arts requires (to avoid confusion) its own practice and a high level of sophistication – at best, in more than one martial art. It is a qualitative method of participant observation associated with the experience of metaphysical dimensions. This special method is the 'shugyo' (*shūgyō*) – psychophysical study and experience from practicing of *psycho-physical systems*. Michael Maliszewski was one of first researchers using the method [8,48].

CONCLUSIONS

The GTFA is a sum of HTMA (humanistic, social and cultural issues), AMA (philosophical, cultural and biological approaches), and a part of sport sciences, for coaching, bio-technical, bio-medical issues, methodology of teaching, etc.:

$$\text{HTMA} + \text{AMA} + \text{sport sciences (specialty: martial arts science)} = \text{GTFA}$$

The GTFA created now should give us the possibility to research and explain complicated problems of fighting arts, according to the new, holistic paradigm.

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