Coach or sensei? His group relations in the context of tradition

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

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ABSTRACT

In the perspective of the General Theory of Fighting Arts, an analysis of socio-cultural factors that determine the opposition of the role of a teacher of martial arts (Jap. sensei) to the role of a sports trainers was undertaken. The structural cultural context, cultural patterns, and social institutions resulting from divergent goals were taken into account. The roles of teachers and trainers result from these conditions. The existence of the separate roles of the master-teacher in martial arts and the sports trainer was established. These roles manifest themselves in different relations with students or players. Democratic and egalitarian interactions in sports teams include player and coach relations. In traditional martial arts, the dominance of the teacher is more accepted. However, there is also a social position combining the features of the sensei and the trainer that is typical for combat sports that are also martial arts (participating in sports competitions). As there are relationships of subordination in the hierarchical societies of Japan and Korea, there is no problem with recognizing the primary role of the sensei in these cultures. The position of the master-teacher is also sanctified by tradition. Reducing educational systems, which are the paths of martial arts, to oriental varieties of sports would be a serious factual mistake.

KEYWORDS

Martial arts, combat sports, coach, teacher, position in the group

Introduction

The general theory of martial arts has been developed systematically since 2000 in works such as *Ido Movement for Culture*.

"The identity of each of the sciences is particularly determined by problems and specialized language: names, categories, concepts, hypotheses, theories. Only mature sciences have a specific, original detailed methodology (...) in the case of the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts, there is already a specialist scientific journal (indicated above – the author's note). (...) developing a separate research methodology does not have to be constitutive for martial arts science,"

as Kazimierz Obodyński (2003, p. 11) once wrote. Here, the adjective "humanistic" results mainly from the emphasis on a man who is placed in the center of scientific, interdisciplinary reflection. Therefore, the next step in the development of theoretical reflection at the Rzeszów Scientific School was broadly understood as "martial arts anthropology," with the development of philosophical, sociological, anthropological, and cultural aspects (Cynarski, 2012, 2018).

Martial arts are most often studied in the field of physical culture sciences.

“As Cynarski showed in his many works, Far Eastern self-fulfillment systems (including martial arts in particular) deserve, due to their specificity, equal treatment with other basic fields of physical culture, such as sport, physical recreation, physical education, active tourism or rehabilitation (...) Wojciech Cynarski proposes to include martial arts in a broadly understood systemic perspective. This perspective is to take into account the problems of spirituality and morality, cultural ethos and interrelationships between various aspects of these issues” (Obodyński, 2003, p. 13).

Gradually, martial arts theory was expanded to include issues in the fields of culture sciences, philosophical anthropology, hopology (science of military cultures), pedagogy, and the systemic concept of health (cf. Zaborniak, 2005; Cieszkowski & Sieber, 2006; Obodyński, 2009; Cieszkowski, 2010; Kernspecht & Brizin, 2012; Cynarski, 2017; Pawelec, 2020).

In addition to the concepts developed at the Rzeszów School centered around the *Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology* quarterly, today's *General Theory of Fighting Arts* has also influenced the concepts of other authors: in particular, the typological suggestions by Bolelli (2008); the aesthetic, anthropological, and cultural concepts of Jones' team (2002); the concepts of von Clausewitz's war strategy (Cynarski & Sieber, 2012); and the pedagogical analysis of Wolters (2002, 2005) and Szyszko-Bohusz (2011, 2013). It is hard to overestimate the scientific discussions at IMACSSS (International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society) conferences among specialists such as Fuminori Nakiri, Abel Figueiredo, Thomas Green, Carlos Gutierrez-Garcia, and Sergio Raimondo. The philosophy of martial arts developed in this way, understood here as their general theory, offers a scientific framework for considering the status positions of the sports trainer and the *sensei*, i.e. a teacher of martial arts.

According to Shizuya Sato, the *sensei* title applies to venerable teachers with high grades (5-10 dan) or academic professors. The masters, however, are those with the title or function *hanshi* or *shihan* (Sato, 1998). There is one leader in each school – the master. The rest are instructors and students of different ranks (older and younger, i.e. *senpai* and *kohai*). Professor Sato was himself a respected *sensei* with the highest master degree of 10 dan in *jujutsu*. He held the highest titles of *meijin* and *hanshi* and acted as the unquestioned leader of the IMAF, the International Martial Arts Federation based in Tokyo. He was also a strong opponent of participating in sports competitions. He only allowed competitions in technical forms, called *kata* in Japanese.

What socio-cultural conditions result in the martial arts environment often contrasting the role of the teacher (*sensei*) with the role of a sports trainer?

Institutional justification for the differences

Sport is a product of Western civilization. In its present form, it is connected with the Olympic ethos, the *fair play* canon, and most of all the functioning of a democratic, egalitarian society. This European tradition of equality causes the trainer in combat sports to become a hired instructor to perform a specific – and often quite explicit – task. Only the Olympic or national team coach enjoys greater esteem. In the era of extreme commercialization, the number one goal of an athlete and sports trainer is success in competitions, which usually translates into commercial success. In competitive sports, the trainer must focus on success in competition (cf. Kajtna & Doupona Topic, 2017).

The relationship between coaching skills and sports performance is well known (Czajkowski, 1994; Moen & Federici, 2013; Żukowski, 2013). This applies not only to the competences of a given trainer or coach, but also to his personality and style of team management (Dobrzeńiecki, 1974; Czajkowski, 2008; Occhino et al., 2014). In martial arts, teacher-masters are often self-taught in the field of pedagogical and methodical knowledge, coming to some methods themselves through many years of experience and imitating their teachers. On the

other hand, high-class sports trainers are usually well-trained in teaching methodologies, effective sports training, and rules of conduct in interpersonal relations (cf. Kurzawski, 1994; Werthner & Trudel, 2006; Moen & Federici, 2011, 2013; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

Zbigniew Czajkowski (2008) distinguished five styles of managing a sports team in the trainer's work, namely: "imperious (dictatorial, authoritarian), superior, formal, cooperative (democratic) and friendly." He also clearly indicated (based on his long-term observation of the participating sports environment, especially fencing) that: "The best and effective management styles are cooperative and friendly" (Czajkowski, 2008, p. 73). In the case of sports trainers, the cooperative, democratic style seems to be the most effective. This is especially true since, as noted by Bogdan Berdel, the young athlete is often irritated by subordination to the coach. In martial arts, however, relationships have a slightly different character. Seniority and, on the other hand, the pursuit of non-aggression and harmony are more emphasized and respected (Berdel & Kawalec, 2003; cf. Cynarski & Berdel, 2000).

In sport, the authoritarian style appears relatively rarely, perhaps more often in sports that come directly from martial arts, such as *judo*. In some cases, the authoritarian style can lead to sporting success. But there is also the risk that a crisis could occur between the coach and a talented player, with negative emotions preventing effective cooperation. Feliks Stamm was a trainer of great authority who achieved a high status in his environment as well as social recognition and deserved fame not only because of the results of his mentees. He was both a teacher and a kind of father for the boxers he trained. So he was able to achieve a status akin to that of the great martial arts teachers. In this way, it is easier to apply the rules of teaching, enforce discipline, resolve possible conflicts, and achieve sports success (cf. Czajkowski, 2008; Arziutov et al., 2016).

As plenty of relationships of subordination exist in the hierarchical societies of Japan and Korea, these cultures have no problem recognizing the primary role of the *sensei* (Cynarski, 2016). The position of master-teacher is also sanctified there by tradition. *Shihan* is a "guide on the right path." Although various martial arts from East Asia have established institutions of social functioning in different ways, the teacher is usually like a father in a patriarchal family. In the case of *kung fu* schools, the term teacher-teacher (*sifu* or *shifu*) refers directly to the father in the family, which results from the social ethics of Confucianism that shaped Chinese society over the century. But the *sensei* is also a bit like a *guru* and guide; perhaps *guru* to a lesser extent as few of today's martial arts masters try to influence the spiritual development of their students (unless the martial arts teacher is also a clergyman, e.g. a Buddhist monk or Catholic priest). On the other hand, the role of a guide on the difficult road to the championship is probably an apt description of what students or their families expect from their *sensei*; that is his professional role, and in relation to the students, it is also his social role.

The trainer's personal formula is important for achievements in both sports (combat sports) and martial arts or martial ways (cf. Zuchora, 1971; Wolters, 2002; Szyszko-Bohusz, 2011; Cynarski, 2012; Johnson, 2017). However, in the traditionally understood ways of martial arts, its importance seems definitely more important. This is due to the social role of the martial arts master, i.e. a set of social expectations related to his position in the martial arts environment. It is a culturally determined difference. The master is therefore to be an educator and as such has relatively large pedagogical influence (Fredersdorf, 1986; Berdel & Kawalec, 2003; Cynarski & Lee-Barron, 2014).

Mastery in the traditionally understood way of martial arts does not require confirmation with the results of a sports competition. Thus, the goals are different than in combat sports. In addition, the responsibility is perhaps greater. The adept acquire combat tools, which are technical and tactical combat skills supported by a high level of physical fitness. The educational and training process is spread out over years. Gradually, self-defense skills are achieved in real combat situations, as are mental resilience, self-discipline, and self-control. The ways of martial arts are the art of humanity, and thus the main goal is to shape a good, socially valuable man. The teacher should just be an educator, showing the moral way and setting an example of its implementation (Cynarski, 2012; Martinkova, Parry, & Wagner, 2019).

In the case of martial arts that have entered the path of sporting competition, the sharp contrast between the roles of the trainer and *sensei* is blurred. This applies, for example, to sports *jujutsu* and *karate* (in various forms and organizations), as well as sports *wushu*, *judo*, and *taekwondo*. The trainer here is both a trainer and a tutor. Also important is the fact that many martial arts organizations grant coaching licenses, meaning there is institutionalization in this area. Nevertheless, the master-teacher of a given martial art emphasizes that the sports aspect is only a small part of what he does. An example would be *shihan* Lesław Samitowski, 7 dan in *Kyokushin karate*, who takes on the role of trainer. However, he strongly emphasizes his role as a karate martial arts teacher, which is associated with martial arts medicine (Japanese *bujutsu ido*) and a special philosophy of life. The “Karate athlete” is not the same as the *karateka*, or “karate man” (Popko, 2019).

On the example of Samitowski, we can speak about the specific *karate* culture that originates from Okinawa and the former Kingdom of Ryukyu and is now assimilated in the processes of inculturation and internalization in enthusiastic environments on a global scale (cf. Piepiora et al., 2016). The culture of Old Japanese fencing and use of the Japanese saber, also known as the samurai sword, is disseminated similarly (cf. Sugino & Ito, 2010; Bennett, 2015; Mor-Stabilini, 2016). This applies to Chinese martial arts varieties that are studied and described in the context of entire cultural systems and socio-cultural functioning (cf. Lin, 2016; Guo, 2019). The group’s relationship to the *sensei* is a relationship of subordination. The interaction is based on mutual trust and respect with the advantage of the master-teacher as the one who “knows better.” On his part, this is the attitude of a demanding father who does not always tolerate the whims and fancies of children. In turn, he should lead his students to mastery, also broadly understood (i.e. not only in the realm of technicalities and sports).

In Japan and Korea, unlike in Western sport, physical performance is not a central value. It is similar with the meaning of competitions: in the West, sports competitions are a confirmation of effectiveness and often constitute a motive for exercise, while in *budō* they are rejected or transcendent – they become a medium of spiritual and bodily education (development) and do not constitute an autotelic value (Fredersdorf, 1986, pp. 123-239; cf. Johnson, 2017). The teacher’s role is also different. The trainer feels responsible for the physical education of students, trains for success in competitions, and is involved in group dynamic processes between athletes, especially towards “sports champions.” On the other hand, the martial arts master feels physically and morally responsible for each individual student; he presents the students with the goals of the “path” and the possibilities of full self-integration. The *sensei* builds stable human relationships with his students, teaches and educates, and fulfills the function of paternity – admittedly with the autonomous authority of professionalism and spiritual power, but necessarily with the ambivalent attitude of a leader. According to Fredersdorf, by practicing *jūjutsu* (Japanese martial art) we gain openness in interpersonal contacts and tolerance for foreign patterns, willpower, courage, and an attitude of responsibility and honor. Practicing *budō* as a competitive sport is, according to him, a perversion.

Discussion

Generally, the development of interpersonal relations between the coach and player is the result of long-term and continuous communication based on cooperation, trust, and devotion. This allows for a favorable atmosphere and affects sports performance. For example, in swimming, coaches with more experience provide better support for athletes, are more dedicated, develop more positive personal relationships, and place fewer requirements on their athletes. In addition, as Liposek and Doupona Topic (2014) conclude, many young people quickly end their professional careers due to the high demands of a coach and the pressure placed on them to win, while other qualities of sports (maintaining good form, conquering fear, experiencing the joy of achieving a goal) should be more important.

Fredersdorf pointed out the contradiction of *budō* (Jap. martial arts path) with the spirit of the “rational society of the result (German: *Leistungsgesellschaft*)” (Fredersdorf, 1986, pp. 123-148; Dürckheim, 1975, p. 20). *Budō* for the Japanese is a cultural value involving cultivating traditions, ritual-religious practice, an escape from the

brutal world of capitalism, and a way to develop fortitude. In the societies of Japan and Korea, and especially in the martial arts of these countries, there is a hierarchical system that determines the specificity of these martial arts. Seniority is based on internship in a given practice and the possession of a specific rank (degree, title). Above all, Frederic Fredersdorf drew attention to various theories of values, norms, consciousness, and goals that differentiated East Asian martial arts from Western sport (Fredersdorf, 1986, p. 126), which causes different motivations, expectations, and effects. In his opinion, among the central values of practicing martial arts are the pursuit of self-fulfillment and enlightenment, the practice of an art, and the practice of continuous exercise to achieve physical and spiritual unity. On the other hand, according to this German sociologist, the goals of sport in a broad sense are maintaining health, raising bodily possibilities, reducing mental tension, spending free time, improving bodily aesthetics, engaging in a relationship with nature, and entertainment and recreation, i.e. movement as a source of pleasure, etc.

Sterkowicz (2003), examining interpersonal relations in a group practicing *hapkido* (Korean martial art), showed a strong relationship between the status hierarchy and the level of special fitness – the best in this martial art were the most respected and well-liked. A similar relationship applies to masters-teachers who can impress with their masterly skill level. Older masters are more often impressed with knowledge and have great authority as living legends of martial arts. Significantly, in sports *judo* the coaches of this discipline from Japan have turned out to be largely Americanized, while the trainers from other countries have remained as if more under the spell of traditional Japanese culture (Matsumoto et al., 2001). The results of the indicated international comparative studies are evidence of cultural dialogues and exchanges, as well as the explosion and implosion of cultural patterns in the era of cultural globalization and localization. These patterns undergo some modifications, but a certain “hard core” determination of originality remains constant (cf. Cynarski, 2013).

There are also studies whose results cast doubt on the thesis about the clear difference between the roles of the trainer in combat sports and the master in martial arts. For example, a comparison was made of the hierarchy of the trainer’s 20 professional activities in three martial arts (*capoeira*, *karate*, and *taekwon-do* ITF) and mixed martial arts (MMA). The results indicated that the differences between the weighted average of the professional activities of martial arts trainers ($n = 182$) and MMA trainers ($n = 68$) were not statistically significant (Bujak, Muntean, & Gierczuk, 2014, p. 35). After all, some features of an exemplary trainer are common to both martial arts and combat sports (Piórko, 2004; cf. Szyszko-Bohusz, 2011).

Conclusions

Reducing educational systems, which are the paths of martial arts, to oriental varieties of sports would be a serious factual mistake. Traditional sports are different, as are various forms of folk wrestling and similar ludic figures of physical culture. However, martial arts in the traditional understanding are fragments of the national cultural heritage of various countries and nations. Their teaching requires knowledge of the entire cultural systems from which they have originated. Therefore, a martial arts teacher should have a much broader competence than an instructor – a specialist in teaching methodology and sports training. Added to this is the spiritual dimension of the “warrior’s path,” which is constitutive of the definition of martial arts. This requires knowledge of the moral code, the tradition of the school, and the role of the tutor-guide through someone functioning as the *sensei*. The difference between the role of a sports trainer/coach and the role of a master in a given martial art is culturally determined. The master is to be a teacher and educator. This is due to the influence of the hierarchical culture and the ethos of the warrior preserved in martial arts.

Ethics approval and informed consent

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