

# AN ANALYSIS OF WUSHU DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE – PART II

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**Abstract:** The following paper analyses the development of Wushu and Qigong in Central and Eastern European countries; it explores the leading countries in Wushu research and the topics of the day. The study is based on a meta-analysis of research papers published in CEE science journals. The results show that Poland is the country most actively engaged in researching Chinese martial arts and health regimen. As for the main topics explored in the papers, those are Taijiquin and Qigong, history, Shaolin etc. The purpose of the study is to explore the scientific landscape in CEE related to Wushu and Qigong and examine their future trends of development.

**Keywords:** Chinese martial arts; Wushu; Qigong; Tai Ji Quan; Central and Eastern Europe

## I. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative is a global project launched by China 2020 whose main goal is to promote international cooperation between its partner countries based on mutual benefits and understanding. Currently, it unites 147 countries around the globe. Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) joined the project through the 16+1 Format. This format, however, underwent various changes in the last three years with some countries leaving it and others joining it. The Format focuses on exchange between China and CEE in the field of economy, trade, culture, education, science, technology, etc.

Wushu is China's national sport and an essential part of its traditional culture; yet, it has long turned into a world phenomenon, a popular sport and a beloved recreational activity as well. This makes it a valuable tool for promoting exchange between China and CEE in the field of sports. Hence, the necessity of a more in-depth analysis of its development in CEE.

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The countries of Central and Eastern Europe share many similarities in language, history and culture; including all of them in this study gives a broader perspective of Wushu scientific research and a better insight into the current trends of its development. Therefore, all 17 countries – past, present and future partners, were included in this study. Furthermore, the first study analyzing Wushu development in CEE was published 2018, when 16 countries took part in the Format (Lecheva 2019: 207 – 213). Its goal was to identify the leading forces in Wushu and the most popular Wushu styles based on medal distribution and participation rate in major World and European Wushu Championships; based on the analysis, Romania and Poland are the leading forces and Taijiquan, Nanquan, Shaolin Quan and Sanda are the most popular sports disciplines. While the first study uses the sports perspective to analyze Wushu development, the present one analyses it from an academic perspective.

## **II. Goals and Methods**

This is a follow-up study, which uses the academic perspective in order to assess the scientific landscape of Wushu in CEE. It is based entirely on scientific publications in CEE journals whose main research question was anything related to Wushu and Qigong. Here Chinese martial arts and Wushu are used as interchangeable terms, so are Qigong and Chinese health regimen. Qigong was added to the research as previous studies have suggested a strong correlation between the martial arts and health regimen originated in China. The research was conducted between March and September 2022.

Data were gathered from online search engines: google scholar; CEE online library; research gate; academia.edu. Key words used for the study include: Chinese martial arts; Qi; Qigong; Wushu; Kung Fu; Taijiquan; Tai Ji; Tai Chi. The study does not include any books, historical or fictional.

## **III. Results**

### **1. Countries, Languages and journals**

The study identified 36 papers published in 19 journals between the years of 2004 and 2022; 19 of them were published in English; in those cases, where no English version was available, the abstract of the paper was used to determine its main subject. Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania have most of the publications, while six countries have no publications; a small percentage of the authors come from non-CEE countries (see Table 1 – 3).

Table 1. Languages

Language	Number
English	19
Polish	6
Bulgarian	3
Hungarian	2
Serbian	2
Czech	1
Estonian	1
French	1
Russian	1
Total	36

Table 2. Countries

Countries	Publications
Poland	13
Bulgaria	8
Romania	5
Serbia	3
Czech Republic	2
Hungary	2
Estonia	1
Latvia	1
North Macedonia	1
Total	36

Table 3. Authors

Authors	Number
CEE	42
Spain	2
Austria	1
China	1
Russia	1
Switzerland	1
USA	1
Total	49

## 2. Topics

The research questions fall into four main categories: Taijiquan and Qigong related; history related; Shaolin related; others. There are 11 papers related to Taijiquan and Qigong; five of them focus on health research, the rest explore performance art, training, Falungong and others. There are 10 papers related to Chinese martial arts history; three of them investigate the ancient history, while seven of them deal with the modern one. There five papers focusing on Shaolin, while the rest of the papers – 10, discuss anything from training, military affairs, philosophy and performance art.

### ***2.1. Taijiquan and Qigong related***

There are two papers authored by the same research team focusing entirely on static Qigong and its health benefits (Arhip, et. al. 2019: 15 – 25; Arhip, et. al. 2019: 17 – 25). The authors point out the lack of differentiation between static and dynamic Qigong in previous studies, hence their decision to concentrate entirely on static Qigong and its effects on health. The first study is a meta-analysis based on 9 research papers dealing with static Qigong. The systematic review shows that there is a positive correlation between its practice and one's heart rate, brain waves cortisol and immunity response. In their second study the authors share the results from an experiment they conducted with 31 breast cancer survivors who had to practice static Qigong mediation once a day for a five-week period. After five weeks of practice there was improvement in cortisol levels and electrodermal reaction, oxygen saturation, increased palm temperature and decrease in anxiety level. Both papers emphasize the unique characteristics of Qigong regimen and its importance as a mind-body therapy which could have a highly positive effect on one's physical, emotional and mental state. There is one paper assessing the impact of Taijiquan and Qigong on emotional state (Skrzeta et. al. 2020: 67 – 78). It is again a meta-analysis of 65 scientific publications dealing with Taijiquan and Qigong effect on people's psycho-emotional state. It shows a positive correlation between their practice and one's relaxation ability and stress-coping mechanism. Furthermore, the paper serves as a bridge between the scientific understanding of the matter and the traditional approach towards their practice. Alongside their ever growing importance in balancing out the negative effect of day-to-day stress, the article emphasizes Taijiquan and Qigong role in disease prevention as the best way to maintain health and achieve wellbeing. "A comparative study of Taijiquan and Qigong" traces the history, philosophy, training methods and health benefits of Taijiquan and Qigong (Lecheva 2018: 283 – 289). The study states that despite differences in origin and history – Taijiquan being developed as a martial art in the late Ming Dynasty, while Dao Yin, the first known Qigong health regime, dates back to 168 BC, both practices share similarities in their training methods, health benefits and philosophical concepts upon which those very methods and benefits are based. "Improving the Service Efficiency in Volleyball Using Tai Chi-Qi Gong Oriental Techniques" deals with the positive effect of Taijiquan and Qigong on Volleyball players (Stirbu 2018: 63 – 68). Those practices were chosen due to their simplicity, availability and positive correlation to health (physical, emotional, mental). A special training program incorporating Taijiquan and Qigong exercises was designed; after 12 months of practice the Volleyball athletes had major improvements in posture, physical balance, motor coordination, mental tone, emotional

state and relaxation ability. “Whose Message Will Win the Souls?” discusses how ancient traditions adapt themselves to today’s world using modern tools such as the Internet (Šindelář 2009: 111 – 124). The author traces the dynamic interactions between the strongly regulated Cyberspace and the religious activities of Falungong practitioners which started at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this case, Falungong is analyzed from a religious point of view, yet, it has been pointed out that its core essence is in fact Qigong individual and group exercises.

### *Based on Abstract*

There are two more papers related to Taijiquan and Qigong and their health benefits (Novotný, Ondruška 2011: 17 – 24; Kostenok 2022: 105 – 112), both of them draw their results from practitioners’ own experience, while one more paper is based on its author’s personal experience during her stay in Taijiquan birth place – the Chen Jia Village (Antonowicz, Dzieciątko 2016: 167 – 178); one paper explores the concept of Qi and how Taijiquan practice can be used in music improvisation (Mazur 2013: 153 – 168); the last paper related to Taijiquan and Qigong deals with the concept of Falungong, its history and development (Košutić 2019: 305 – 327).

## **2.2. History related**

The author of “Process of Institutionalization in Chinese Martial Art: The Case Study of its Ranking System” explores the modern development of Wushu analyzing different aspects of its ranking system (Porchet 2019: 82 – 92). The author uses Bajiquan to exemplify how Wushu ranking system was constructed. It is based on interviews with Bajiquan masters directly involved in this process. The paper compares both traditional and institutional approaches towards martial arts development and how martial arts practitioners perceive and deal with that conflict. The Confucius Institute Headquarters organized a Taiji summer camp for youths of the Belt and Road Initiative Partner countries in 2019. There is an overview of the program which included two weeks of Tai Ji practice, Chinese language learning, sightseeing, and of the background of the practitioners – their martial arts and Chinese language expertise which varied from experts to novice in either of them (Lecheva 2020: 254 – 260). There is one research paper authored by Chinese, Spanish and US scholars (Zhang et. al. 2016). The paper not only tells the story of Meihuaquan origin and history, but it also touches on its current status as a key factor in shaping up the group identity of people in northern China. The article uses field work, interviews and questionnaires to reflect the views of Meihuaquan practitioners – men and women of any age, on the vital role of building and preserving their social life and cultural traditions.

At the same time, it shows the role that Chinese institutions have played in this process, which has led to the revival of this art's tradition in contrast to other Wushu styles. There is one paper tackling the Boxer Rebellion – a highly disputed topic in Chinese history and Chinese martial arts history (Ortner 2019: 50–67). Although the paper focuses on the Austro-Hungarian share in the Rebellion, the study does mention the role martial arts played within the Chinese society of that time pointing out how Chinese military and martial arts practitioners joined forces in fighting against foreign invaders. The paper was included in the present study due to the different perspective it adds to this largely discussed aspect of martial arts history. There is one paper which explores how the Chinese understanding was influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism; it explains aspects of the traditional Chinese culture such as Tao, Qi, Yin and Yang (Grabińska, Piwowarski 2017: 30–54). The paper focuses on Art of War using Morihei Ueshiba as a manifestation of Sun Zi's guiding principle that war is a final decision when all other options are gone.

#### *Based on Abstract*

There are two papers discussing Wushu ancient history (Златев 2018: 280–282; Златев 2019: 185–189), while two others focus on its dissemination in the West through media and movies (Péter 2017: 169–175; Péter 2021: 53–66); the last one explores its history of development throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Witek 2013: 297–306).

### **2.3. Shaolin related**

There are three papers related to the Shaolin monastery, all based on authors' field trips and stay and on interviews with visitors and students from Europe (Cynarski, Swider 2017: 24–33; Skowron-Markowska 2019: 25–31; Skowron-Markowska 2022: 46–56). The studies emphasize the unique function of the place as a cradle of martial arts both in China and globally and as a Buddhist center and a place of worship. At the same time, the Shaolin monastery is a historical monument, part of the UNESCO World heritage and a major tourist attraction. The authors give the insiders' perspective of the activities available to Chinese and foreign visitors and the way those activities are organized – training, prayers, sightseeing, official visits, dining etc., which makes it an example of how old traditions are combined with modern approach. Furthermore, the difference between the Eastern and Western world views towards this legendary place are brought to the table for discussion. The authors clarify that the majority of the foreign visitors seek the authenticity of the place, they are, in their most part, well prepared training wise and very clear about the purpose of their stay.

*Based on Abstract*

The last two papers regarding Shaolin deal with its history and its martial arts styles' characteristics (Brzozowski 2017: 112 – 120) and with the connection between Shaolin martial arts and European dance, respectively (Gagné 2021: 17 – 40).

**2.4. Others**

The author of “Chinese martial Arts and Physical Activities among Bulgarian Students” explores the possibilities of increasing young people’s PA through Wushu practice (Lecheva 2021: 393 – 398). The study identifies young adults as the age group lacking PA the most; At the same time, the paper draws a comparison between the Bulgarian and the Chinese reality related to PA among students. As mentioned in the beginning of the present study “An Analysis of Wushu’s development in CEE” is the first article dealing with this matter. It uses competition data to identify leading forces and popular Wushu style in CEE. “Macedonia’s Army to Benefit from Ancient Chinese Wisdom” deals with the exchange of knowledge between Chinese martial arts experts and the Macedonian soldiers. It is an overview of the mutual benefits those countries shared during the visits. “The Inheritance of the Little Dragon” is a highly analytical paper that dives deep into Bruce Lee’s understanding on martial arts. Based on content analysis of Lee’s own works and those closely related to him (wife and attorney) the author established four main categories of interest: duels; types of duel; terms of confrontation; training (Rodriguez-Sanchez 2018: 22 – 35). The paper itself is a short version of a legacy left to us by a remarkable man with an extremely profound martial arts expertise, both practical and theoretical. “The Grandmaster – Film Sound Analysis” starts with a short analysis of the story and its structure; it later shifts to a detailed analysis of the film’s voices, music and sound effects (Stoian 2015: 27 – 30). According to the author, the movie represents a true masterpiece, a martial arts story beautifully told by a world-class director, whose choice of sound design complements each martial arts style and highlights the drama of the characters.

*Based on Abstract*

Certain papers in this category can be related to training, military affairs, language study, social science and cinema (Иванов 2017: 66 – 83; Brzozowski 2017: 142 – 157; Kowalski 2005: 49 – 68; Läänemets 2012: 87 – 95); one paper was difficult to be analyzed due to the lack abstract (Pušić 2006: 249 – 258).

Poland holds the biggest share in scientific publications; it is the only CEE country where a scientific journal entirely devoted to martial arts has been

published. As for the publications themselves, they fall into four main categories – Taijiquan and Qigong, history, Shaolin and others; the majority of the papers are published in English, the authors with a few exceptions come from CEE countries.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Eight intervening trends of development were identified in the course of the analysis, each of them represents a separate research area: demythologization and demystification; holistic approach towards health; traditions vs. modernity; eastern vs. western worldview; new interpretations of ancient texts; shift in martial arts functions; role of martial arts cinema genre and mass media; women in martial arts.

##### **Demythologization and demystification**

Martial arts and Qigong regimen are a subject to a great deal of myths and legends of all sorts – from stories concerning their origin to such narratives related to certain skills acquired through their practice. Unfortunately, taking those stories at face value does put martial arts development into a different perspective creating a misleading image where one strives to achieve certain powers through martial arts and Qigong practice.

##### **Holistic approach towards health**

There is a great deal of research dealing with the health benefits related to Taijiquan and Qigong, the reason being the huge amount of stress people are exposed to in their day-to-day life, hence the need for coping mechanism to resist and counter this stress. While medical researchers are focusing on finding such a mechanism, practices such as Taijiquan and Qigong come upfront; as the studies emphasize the holistic approach towards health they advocate – body, mind and spirit.

##### **Interaction between traditions and modernity**

Everything happens fast in today's world and the role the Internet and new technologies play in people's lives is growing. Keeping the traditions alive and spreading them further in such a context is a major challenge. Yet, it is exactly the new technologies that facilitate this process to a great extent. In the studies in hand, there are three different examples of interaction between traditions and



modernity. While in the case of Meihuaquan the institutions create conditions for keeping the traditions of the style alive as a way to meet the locals' need for community, in the case with the Duanwei system it is the institutions that shape up the trend of development. In the case of Shaolin there is a complete symbiosis between traditions and modern approach for promoting the art.

### ***Eastern and Western worldviews***

The difference between eastern and western perceptions is most evident in the studies related to Shaolin where western practitioners seek the authenticity of the place and the activities it offers. Although it has been brought up by other studies as well, there is no in-depth study which closely examines such differences.

### ***New interpretations of old texts***

Ancient texts such as Sun Zi's *Art of War*, *Book of Changes*, *Dao De Jing* and other Daoist and Confucian texts are still subject to analysis from historical, philosophical, philological and military perspectives. It is interesting to see how universal principles such as Yin and Yang, Qi and Dao, are interpreted in modern days as something which changes its shape due to the changes in society but which does not change its core essence.

### ***Shift in martial arts functions***

Although developed as a way of protection and as a part of warfare, nowadays martial arts are practiced predominantly for health purposes, the reason being the relatively stable social life and security in certain aspects and the technical innovations in warfare. It should be noted that martial arts are simply an expression of people's evolution; being product of men's desire and need for protection, entertainment and health maintenance. They should be analyzed only in the context of the specific circumstances surrounding their creation and development in a given period.

### ***Role of Martial arts cinema genre and mass media***

Chinese martial arts owe their popularity worldwide to the Hong Kong Wuxia movies from the 60's and 70's, the Shaolin Temple movie with Jet Li, the Jackie Chan movies and the *Ip Man* series. The highly attractive choreography of such movies turned out to be the biggest supporter in promoting Wushu globally. It has created a vibe which has captured people's imagination and turned them from martial arts fans to martial arts practitioners.

### ***Women in martial arts***

Women were never excluded from martial arts practice as martial arts were never associated solely with combat and battles but were an integral aspect of rituals, official ceremonies in court, festivities etc. Martial arts were and still are a vital part of Chinese people's social life, thus, excluding women from engaging in their practice was seldom the case.

## **V. Conclusion and Further Suggestions**

In conclusion, there are three things to note. First, Poland has the highest rank in Wushu and Qigong related scientific publications, which is in accordance with its leading position in Wushu championships compared to other CEE countries. There is a definite correlation between the development of Wushu as a sport and its academic research, Romania being the other leading force in Wushu competitions ranks relatively high in the academic field as well. Yet, it is worth noting that this study is based on research papers only and does not include any literary works, books or articles in printed media. Second, Taijiquan and Qigong health related functions, martial arts tourism in the Shaolin Temple and Wushu modern history among others are the most dealt – with questions in the studies. Third, CEE scientific landscape is most definitely a versatile one discussing everything from ancient books to modern history, military training, health, philosophy etc. The aim of the present study is on the one hand, to highlight this diversity in research trends, and on the other, to organize the existing research data on Wushu and Qigong in order to outline new dimensions for future research.

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