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TOURISM OF MARTIAL ARTS. SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY OF TOURISM

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Abstract
Background. The study presents the account of a trip to the Shaolin monastery within the anthropological framework of martial arts and concept of martial arts tourism.
Problem. The aim of the paper is to show the uniqueness of the place of destination of many tourists including the authors. The study is meant as a contribution to the further study on the tourism of martial arts.
Method. The main method used here is participant observation, and additionally, an analysis of the subject literature. This is partially a case study, and an analysis of facts, literature and symbolism. The method of visual sociology was also used (the main material are photos taken during the trip).
Results. The authors conducted field research in the area of Dengfeng: Shaolin and Fawang temples cultivating *kung-fu*. The description is illustrated with photographs (factual material) and analysis of facts. It was found that in the case of the Shaolin centre both commercialisation of martial arts and tourism occurred. However, as *wushu* schools around the historic monastery are functioning, this is still an important place for martial arts, especially related to the Chinese tradition.
Conclusions. Shaolin appears as a special place, especially on the map of "tourism of martial arts". The whole world of martial arts has been benefiting from the Shaolin heritage up to now. The Chinese were able to commercialise this popularity, arranging in the adjacent area of the monastery a museum for tourists and *wushu* schools.

Introduction

In the anthropology of martial arts and martial arts tourism a concept of taking a trip to the Shaolin monastery appeared [Bolelli 2008; Cynarski 2012, 2013, 2015a]. It is a manifestation of not only tourism for the purpose of entertainment but also self-realisation tourism. The aim of the paper is to show the uniqueness of the place of destination of many tourists including the authors. The study is meant as a contribution to the further study on the tourism of martial arts.

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The authors conducted a kind of field research. The tourist, as compared Dean MacCannell [1976], occurred here in the dual role also as a cultural anthropologist or sociologist of culture/sociologist of tourism. In addition, direct share entitles to use the qualitative method, which is participant observation. Also the method of visual sociology [Sztompka 2004; *cf.* Dawn 2010] was used and the content analysis of literature. The main material of the research are pictures. Photography is here treated as a factual material: material for visual sociology, or also as spontaneous art (artistic photography). This allows an additional (*post factum*) analysis of the behaviour of participants in the event: their words, gestures or acts of ritual.

Jujutsu masters such as: Shirobei Yoshitoki Akiyama, the founder of the Yoshin-ryu school and Dr Wally Strauss (Idokan); *karate* masters: Chojun Miyagi (Goju-ryu, *kung-fu)* and Dr Keith Kernspecht (WingTsun) travelled to China to learn. There are many instructors from Europe and other parts of the world who currently are there in order to learn *wushu* and *taiji quan* [Albrecht, Rudolph 2011; Raimondo 2011].

Shaolin is a special, half-legendary place. It is worth considering why this place is visited willingly especially

by fans of *kung-fu* and *karate* [Ciesielski 2005]. Tourism on the route Europe – China is not the only one. However, many varieties of Chinese, Korean and Japanese martial arts derive their origin from this place (the so-called South Shaolin, Shorin-ryu *karate*, Shorinji *kenpo* etc.) [Lind 1999].

It is where fighting techniques were combined with ethical principles, breathing exercises and meditation, creating educational and ascetic system [*cf.* Maliszewski 1992; Obodynski, Cynarski 2003]. *Kung-fu* can be translated as "human perfection" or the "ability gained by hard work", which concerns not only fighting skills. The idea that through effort and discipline it is possible to become a better man, was then implemented in the other systems of psychophysical improvement, they are modern arts (ways, methods) of fighting.

The special place

The statehood of Han peoples/nationality was born on the Yellow River. In the province of Henan, there are old capitals of China: Loyang and Xian. In particular, on Mt. Song (Songshan), near the city of Dengfeng, there are shrines of three religions popular in China: Buddhist (Shaolin), Taoist and Confucian. Shaolin Temple and Pagoda Forest were listed in 2010 on the UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is as if the heart of China.

Despite the explanation provided by the mass culture, the name Shaolin comes from the neighbouring mountain peak and forest surrounding the temple. Bodhidharma [photo 16], called Damo in Chinese, came here before centuries to teach Chan Buddhism (in Japan and Korea known as Zen). He arrived by sea, contrary to the legend that he managed to go through the Himalayas. Interestingly, the same Buddhist patriarch, as well as the founder of Buddhism Prince Gautama Shakyamuni, came from the Kshatriya caste, so they were probably closely related to the Lechitas (hg R1a1 Y-DNA) [*cf.* Cynarski, Maciejewska 2016]. Built in the fifth century AD Shaolin Temple is an important centre of Buddhism Chan/Zen. It is still an active place of worship. In front of the entrance there is a series of five Buddhas. It is unique for China and Mahayana Buddhism, as there are usually three Buddhas presented. But it is unique for other reasons as well.

Shaolin is the centre of traditional Chinese medicine (acupuncture, *qigong*, herbal medicine). Above all, however, it is a historically significant centre of learning martial arts. Apparently, while meditating Bodhidharma watched the fights of animals and started practising techniques of snake, crane, tiger, monkey etc. The monks originally became famous for wielding a six-feet-long stick. Later, they began to create various forms of *kung-fu.* Today the most popular form is the "long fist" Shaolin [*cf.* Shahar 2008]. Currently several dozens *wushu* / *kung-fu* schools are working here (i.e. in the vicinity of the monastery) and additionally 12 major schools are listed in the guide of the Dengfeng Municipal Tourism Administration. The largest of them in Asia has 40,000 students [photo 1].

Photo 1. The authors in front of the biggest kung-fu academy in China: the Shaolin Temple Tagou Martial Arts School (or Shaolin Tagou Wushu School)

Present popularity and extreme commercialisation of the facility are the result of activities of Shaolin's efficient manager – abbot Shi Yongxin. As a result, the temple has become primarily a tourist attraction [Nadolski 2016]. For a fee (10 *yuan* or 20, depending on the format) you could take a picture while posing with any *kung-fu* weapon with a monk in a ceremonial costume. So the monk serves here today as a kind of decoration.

Photo 2. Gateway to the Shaolin Temple.

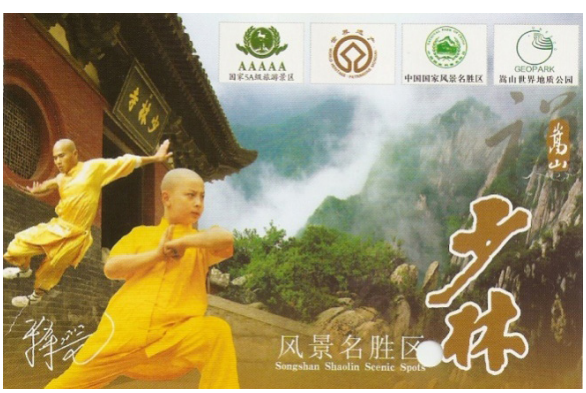

Photo 3. Admission ticket.

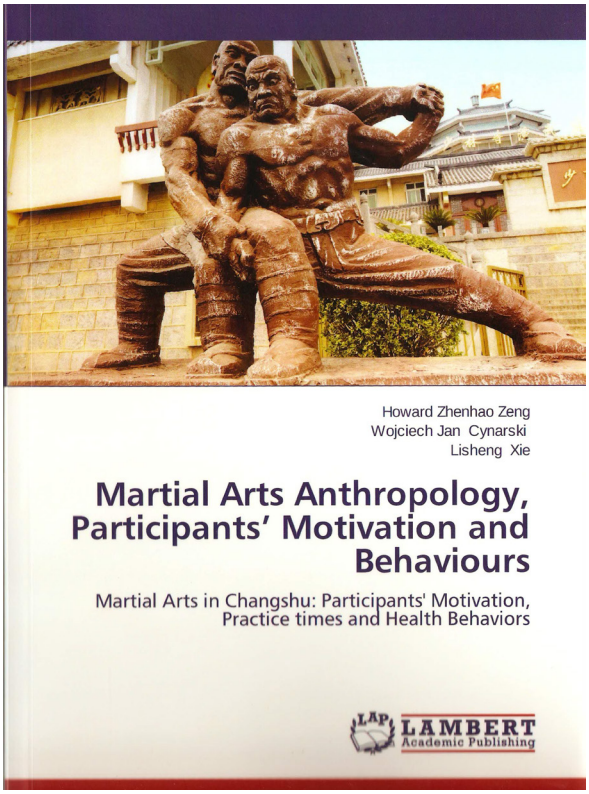

Photo 4. Book cover on *wushu*.

The monastery was once inhabited by several thousand monks, today there are only a few left. The reminder of the old days, for example, are the holes in the bark of *ginko biloba* trees, which are the result of fingers strokes. The leaves of this tree are used to prepare medicinal tea. Monks still have it just like in the old days. They have it only twice a day for breakfast and lunch. They follow a vegetarian diet, no alcohol and no hot spices.

Photo 5. Place of *wushu* shows

The main gate to the Shaolin Temple is a symbolic place, famous due to *kung-fu* films made in Hong Kong and PRC, and it appears on the map of the premises (*Mt. Songshan Travel Book*), on advertising materials and admission tickets [photos 2-3]. This is where the way a young adept: a monk and a warrior had its beginning. The gate is called the Mountain Gate.

The cradle of martial arts

Meir Shahar [2008] in his book asks why Buddhist monks turned for a little help on the battlefield combat techniques, and answers: "Styles of combat late period of the Ming were not created for the purpose of combat. Techniques of fighting with bare hands popular at that time were not intended solely for combat, but were meant to be used as treatment and spiritual improvement. They developed them through the fusion of gymnastics and breathing techniques (intended primarily for health and religious reasons) and martial art without weapons. This resulted in the synthesis of martial arts therapy and religious self-improvement" Shahar [2011: 235]. So it was not about effectiveness in combat, but rather a form of practice within the meaning similar to the system of *hatha yoga*.

In this way, during the late Ming dynasty, methods of combat turned into the way of martial arts in their understanding that, as determined in the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts: "'Martial art' is a historic category of flawless methods of unarmed combat fights, and the use of weapons combined with a spiritual element (personal development, also in transcendent sphere)". [Cynarski, Skowron 2014]. "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-realisation. 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 [Cynarski 2013].

Shaolin monks did not create fighting techniques, but they have refined and added to their practice a deeper meaning [*cf.* Henning 1999; Acevedo, Gutierrez, Mei Cheung 2010]. In a similar way Taoist schools and school based on the principles of Confucianism have been developed. The tradition of many varieties of *wushu / kung-fu*

Photo 6. Students practise in a *wushu* school dormitory. Shaolin 2016.

Fig. 1. The main monuments of Dengfeng area [*Dengfeng Municipal Tourism Administration* 2016].

was inferred from the Shaolin Temple, but this applies not only to Chinese martial arts. The origins of Shaolin can be seen in *karate* schools from Okinawa and Japan, Shorinji *kenpo* and a variety of Korean martial arts. So Shaolin became a legendary place. Numerous films in the "martial arts" genre (as "Shaolin Temple", 1982) and productions from Hong Kong, and television programmes (such as US series *Kung-Fu* starring David Carradine, 1972-1975), created a modern myth of the monastery [*cf.* Cynarski, Slopecki 2016].

Combining physical exercises (combat techniques) with the improvement of the practitioner (through moral of religious origin) is present in the humanities of *karate* oriented schools (*Karatedo*), especially those that reject sports competition [*cf.* Sieber, Cynarski 2002; Sieber 2011]. But in *wushu,* its sports version is dominated by motives quite far from asceticism and spiritual development [*cf.* Zeng, Cynarski, Xie 2013]. On the other hand, a *wushu* boarding school is like military barracks *[photo 6].*

Travel and stay

It was not a standard tourist trip to China, where the visit to the facility of Shaolin and watching the show would be one of the points of the tour. But it was a purposeful trip to the Shaolin Temple, the Mecca of many varieties of martial arts, the birthplace of martial arts in the traditional sense, as defined above. Researchers prepared for a trip by arranging not only hotel reservations, tickets and visas, but also by gaining a basic knowledge of the destination.

The first day was the flight to China (Rzeszow – Warsaw – Beijing). In the capital of the Middle Kingdom there was a short time for acclimatisation and adaptation to Chinese time zone and some exploration of the most popular (as the Imperial Palace of the Ming and Qing dynasties in the Forbidden City [photo 7]) or less known places. Every day in Beijing in one of the theatres there is a group demonstration of *wushu*. There are also martial arts schools and headquarters of national organizations of combat sports and martial arts. But it was only a short stop-off, because the next day there was a long route to be covered: Beijing – Zhengzhou – Dengfeng.

Dengfeng and Shaolin were the destinations. Studying martial arts and fieldwork (implementation of statutory research) were the main purpose of the visit. So the travellers visited the Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Museum, two martial arts schools [photo 8], shops with traditional *mohai* weapons; viewed demonstrations of *wushu kung-fu*. They talked to experienced people in Shaolin and completed their planned research.

In Shaolin, shows for tourists, performed by students of sports *wushu,* take place five times a day. The shows watched by the authors included calisthenics and energizing *qigong* (so-called "soft" and "hard"), 18 forms of traditional weapons, hand forms of the long fist Shaolin

Photo 7. Imperial Palace in Beijing [China Youth Press, undated].

style, and technical systems in pairs. During the show a few people from the audience were invited and asked to repeat some technical forms. Physical fitness of *wushu* students is indeed admirable. A few monks served as the background for the extremely commercialised spectacle.

Shops with weapons [photo 9], souvenirs and cookware, are a manifestation of the aforementioned commercialisation of the site of the temple. For a fee

Photo 8. Meeting with the Director Jia Guo Jian.

you can take a picture of a monk in the company of young students of *kung-fu*. You can even practise for some money the "long fist" style or meditate.

The authors visited the temple grounds and the "forest of pagodas" – the tombs of monks. How much is

Photo 9. Traditional *wushu* weapons can be bought here

left here with the idea of *kung-fu* and widely understood perfectionism? It can only be written on the blackboard: "knowledge for practice of kung-fu, and the practice – for knowledge" [photo 10].

The travellers also visited a Buddhist temple Fawang. It is located at a distance of only three kilometres from Shaolin. It is slightly older, and also is associated with

Photo 10. Motto: "Knowledge for practice kung-fu, and the practice – for knowledge" – a marble plaque in Shaolin.

practising martial arts (*kung-fu*) [photo 11]. This fact is little known outside China and to the narrow environment specialists. Interestingly, the entrances to the temples Fawang and Shaolin are very similar [photo 2, fig. 1].

"Shaolin International Hotel" [photo 12] in Dengfeng served Chinese cuisine. So, it was not only a visual experience but also "culinary tourism" [Cynarski, Obodynski 2006] in this place. The meals included e.g. beef with garlic and yellow soybeans, dumplings with pork, mushrooms, sweet potatoes, etc. Chinese cuisine is considered the best in the world, as it is both tasty and healthy. The hotel's interior alluded directly to the tradition of Shaolin *wushu* [photo 15]. But there is also a picture of Bruce Lee, who has significantly contributed to the global interest in the cultural tradition of martial arts.

The trip to Shaolin was held thanks to the cooperation of tourist agencies from Poland and China, and the University paying for research funding. Travellers did not feel any surveillance services, but only there was a problem with access to the Internet [*cf.* Albro 2012]. Today's China proved for the authors to be generally a country of pleasant and polite people.

The return journey consisted of the same flight destinations only in a reverse order. The entire trip consisted of a total of 16,100 kilometres. Luckily, LOT Polish Airlines have proven to be reliable. What is more, on the same plane to Warsaw a large group of young Chinese people was travelling to the Chopin festival.

Observations and impressions

Great monuments, sculptures and bas-reliefs around the Shaolin monastery show fighting monks in typical poses used in wrestling techniques and to fight at a long range [photos 4, 5, 18]. Thus, it is suggested that some combat techniques developed at that place. And indeed, it concerns a "long fist" of Shaolin (combat at a distance), some grappling techniques (*chin-na*), wielding traditional white weapons, etc.

Wushu demonstrations carried out in the hall filled to the brims, were not the peak of perfection in the techniques of combat and wielding weapons. A better kind of such a spectacle could be seen in the performance of Chinese demonstration groups travelling in Europe since the 1980s. On the other hand, excellent physical fitness and gymnastic preparation of the students of *wushu* sport schools cannot be underestimated. Traditional "stick of Shaolin" and "animal" forms are now somehow less carefully cultivated.

The authors of the paper were somewhat surprised by the unexpectedly great number of many thousands of Chinese people, tourists visiting the area of Shaolin [photos 13-14]. These people were from different Chinese provinces. Many of them work in the tourist centre: athletes and *wushu* instructors, guides, servicemen, shop assistants and law enforcement officers.

Many VIPs from the world of politics and from important institutions come here as well. Before August 20, 2016 the site was visited by Vladimir Putin, a highly controversial person, however certainly passionate about martial arts. In December 2015 the Indian Foreign Minister was here, so were many delegations of Japanese organization *Shorinji kenpo*, various *wushu*, *karate* associations e.g. an international association IMACSSS (the International Martial Arts and Combat Sports Scientific Society).

Photo 11. Near the Fawang temple. Summer 2016.

Photo 12. Shaolin International Hotel in Dengfeng.

Photo 13. Tourists in area of the Shaolin centre, 2016.

Photo 14. Next to the gateway to the Shaolin Temple.

Photo 16. Patriarch Bodhidharma - between temples of Shaolin centre.

Photo 15. A picture with young *Shaolin kung-fu* athletes

Photo 17. Shaolin monk on the statue.

Chinese travellers admired nature, beautiful mountain landscapes and the charm of the ancient temples. That is where the idea of *dojo* ("place of the way") comes from [Cynarski 2005]. Originally these were the areas of temples dedicated to the practice of meditation or exercise forms of fighting. In contrast, there was no urban fauna, particularly dogs, cats, sparrows or bees to be seen. It is difficult to determine whether it was due to particular culinary tastes, political decisions or cultural reasons. At the stations there were not any newsagents and colourful magazines so plentiful in Europe. Tourists can find them only in grocery stores. The vast majority of Chinese people, who the authors talked to, associate Poland mainly with the attack of the Third Reich in 1939. But also with the person of Frederic Chopin.

And numismatic curiosity – all notes bear the image of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung). So every *juan* is the reminiscent of the great leader of the Chinese nation.

Discussion

It was a trip connected both with scientific study and martial arts' tourism. The sociological and anthropological-cultural studies, concerning, among others, the symbolism of the place and the ethos of *kung-fu*, were completed [photos 10, 15-18]. *Kung-fu* is striving for perfection and a great effort undertaken by students, often from an early age [photos 1, 15]. A novelty for the state of knowledge here is the first-hand information, a description of the facts and attempts to explain the cultural phenomenon of this special place. The authors managed to obtain knowledge so far absent in the popular discourse of mass culture and a little-known even for researchers of martial arts.

Ming gesture [photos 17-18] means: 1) stop the aggression, 2) infinity, 3) a reference to the Chinese, national Ming Dynasty, 4) greeting of *wushu* students

Photo 18. Greeting with the Ming gesture.

and masters. Perfection of human *kung-fu* is the result of his inner harmony (which are religious practices, ethical principles, breathing exercises and meditation), with discipline and long-term, heavy training. This symbolism is present in many Chinese schools of martial arts and other forms of educational systems [*cf.* Sieber, Cynarski 2002; Bolelli 2008: 69-71; Sieber 2011; Cynarski 2016]. Today, martial arts still benefit from the world's heritage site of Shaolin.

The participants of the described trip pursued their important scientific research objectives while studying in an exceptional for martial arts place. Both of them have been practising martial arts (not only Shaolin *kung-fu)* from an early age. The trip was both a dream come true and the implementation of the scientific task. There was the opportunity not only to see demonstrations of *wushu*, but also to work under the guidance of local instructors. So these are the criteria for both scientific and martial arts forms of tourism not only for the purpose of entertainment [*cf.* Raimondo 2011; Cynarski, Duricek 2014; Cynarski 2015a, b; Cynarski, Sieber, Mytskan 2015].

While Shaolin is a special place for Asian martial arts and a place of pilgrimage for followers of Buddhism Chan/Zen, there are also other important tourist destinations for martial arts. For example, for the Afro-Brazilian *capoeira* birthplace of the art of dance and martial is Brazil [*cf.* Griffith 2016]. In the case of different varieties of martial arts, for their passionate nature of travel "to the source" is somewhat para-pilgrimage. However, Shaolin remains the "flagship" of the tourism of martial arts [Miller Griffith 2010].

Commercialisation, sometimes extreme commercialisation of martial arts is a fact. In the case of Shaolin it is combined with the commercialisation of tourism [Seydel 1989; Woodhad 1998; Nadolski 2016]. As Raimondo explains, "From the late seventies, cultural heritage has also been reaffirmed as an economic value, as a tourist attraction, which has resulted in the restoration of important monuments such as the Forbidden City and the Great Wall. Since 1982, with the publication of the Heritage Conservation Act, the conservation of cultural heritage has been strengthened through the promotion of scientific research, also on an increased local scale through patriotic educational initiatives aimed at defending the revolutionary gains, however based on the exploitation of the traditional, cultural identity" [Raimondo 2011: 54; *cf.* Sofield, Li 1998].

However, due to *wushu* schools which are functioning around the historic monastery, this is still an important place on the map of martial arts, especially in Chinese tradition. It is still an inspiration for film makers [*cf.* Zygmunt 1998; Bolelli 2008; Cynarski, Slopecki 2016].

Conclusions

The authors conducted field research in the area of Dengfeng, at the Shaolin Temple, but also visited the neighbouring temple of Fawang, which is older than Shaolin, as well as cultivating *kung-fu*. A description of this special place is illustrated with numerous photographs, which were also used as a material in the method of visual sociology. The name Shaolin was explained; generally it is translated incorrectly, as "Young Forest". Impressions from the trip were presented, too.

Shaolin is a really special place, especially on the map of tourism of martial arts. The myth of the place has become popular owing to *kung-fu* films, however, the whole world of martial arts has been benefiting from the legacy of Shaolin up to now. At this point, it is still hard to determine what it means for Chinese people themselves. Undoubtedly, they will continue to use this fame for commercial purposes.

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Podróż do kolebki sztuk walki: studium przypadku turystyki sztuk walki

Słowa kluczowe: *wushu*, Shaolin, turystyka kulturowa, antropologia sztuk walki

Abstrakt

Ramy naukowe. W perspektywie antropologii sztuk walki i koncepcji turystyki sztuk walki podjęto temat podróży do klasztoru Shaolin.

Problem. Chodzi o ukazanie wyjątkowości miejsca, będącego celem opisanego wyjazdu, oraz wyjazdów wielu innych turystów. Ma to być też przyczynek do opracowania szerszego na temat turystyki sztuk walki.

Metoda. Główną zastosowaną tu metodą jest obserwacja uczestnicząca, a ponadto – analiza treści literatury przedmiotu. Jest to po części studium przypadku, po części zaś analiza faktów, treści literatury przedmiotu i form symbolicznych. Wykorzystano także metodę socjologii wizualnej – głównym materiałem badań są zdjęcia wykonane na miejscu.

Wyniki. Autorzy przeprowadzili badania terenowe w rejonie Dengfeng – na terenie świątyń Shaolin oraz Fawang, kultywujących *kung-fu*. Opis został zilustrowany zdjęciami (faktografia) i analizą zagadnień. Stwierdzono, że w przypadku ośrodka Shaolin nastąpiła jednocześnie komercjalizacja sztuk walki i turystyki. Z racji jednak funkcjonowania szkół *wushu* wokół historycznego klasztoru, jest to nadal ważne miejsce dla sztuk walki, zwłaszcza tradycji chińskiej.

Wnioski. Shaolin jawi się, jako miejsce szczególne, zwłaszcza na mapie 'turystyki sztuk walki'. Z dziedzictwa Shaolin świat sztuk walki czerpie do dziś. Chińczycy potrafili tę sławę skomercjalizować, urządzając na przyległym terenie ośrodek muzealny dla turystów i szkoły *wushu*.