

The Development of an Inclusive Taxonomy for Classifying Global Fighting Traditions

Abstract

A number of approaches have been made at classifying fighting traditions; such approaches tend to focus on specific elements such as a select culture (e.g. Armstrong, 1994; Donohue and Taylor, 1994) or are somewhat simplistic (e.g. Maliszewski, 1992; Reid and Croucher, 1983). None of the classifications offer a globally-inclusive approach to explain how, or why, fighting traditions developed. Holistically, however, each of the approaches can inform a new classification system and the development of an inclusive taxonomy to encompass fighting traditions globally. This paper consequently proposes that the adoption the taxonomy can provide a foundation from which to analyse the histo-philosophical basis for the development of individual fighting traditions.

Introduction

Fighting systems may be found in almost every culture globally, from tribal war dances, personal safety systems, military skills and certain sports (Donohue and Taylor, 1994; Reid and Croucher, 1983). Indeed, there is a rich diversity within Europe such as the quarterstaff, sword and buckler, halberd, bare-hand fighting, among others, taught in a systemised way (Brown, 1997; Rector, 2006). Although approaches have been made to classify such fighting traditions (e.g., Armstrong, 2004; Donohue and Taylor, 1994; Maliszewski, 1992; Reid and Croucher, 1982), no single approach explains how or why fighting traditions developed, additionally certain approaches appear to focus on one specific culture (e.g. Draeger, 1994). Consequently, through analysing previous approaches, a new classification approach may be advocated which is fully inclusive of global fighting traditions, and which, in turn, may serve as a foundation from which to explore the histo-philosophical basis of individual fighting traditions. Each existing approach will be subsequently examined.

Donohue and Taylor's (1994) classification

According to various authors, this distancing of the fighting traditions from other violent acts is due to an integral philosophy (Donohue and Taylor, 1994; French, 2003; Payne, 1981). Payne (1981) suggests that the purpose of such a philosophy within fighting traditions transforms the student for the better, rather than producing a better fighter although alternate philosophical reasons are posited by Donohue and Taylor (1994:21-22), some of which actually favour developing a better fighter. They list these as: *Pragmatism (getting the job done)*; *Sportsmanship (fighting fair)*; *Personal honour or responsibility (fighting your own fights, defending yourself)*; *Pacifism (avoiding trouble)*; *Nationalism and sacrifice (defending the country)*; *Civic responsibility (keeping the peace)*. Although Donohue and Taylor (1994) do not advocate the list as a classification system, this serves as a useful starting point from which to examine the spectrum of fighting traditions.

Continuing with the philosophical debate, Donohue and Taylor (1994) report that certain philosophical or religious systems can be applied to fighting traditions. They do, however, stress that such belief systems are seldom the basis on which the art has evolved, rather that the surrounding culture will influence the fighting tradition. Such examples of how philosophy and martial arts integrate are the influence of Taoism on Tai Chi, Bagua, Hsing-I; Buddhism on Shaolin; Christianity on medieval knights and Islam on Maro. Accordingly, the prevalent belief system, within the socio-geographical context, could be used to classify fighting traditions. However, identifying the prevalent belief system can be problematic. For example, in China, the population subscribe to an eclectic mix of philosophies, where Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, among others, interplay on a daily basis: a person may celebrate Christmas but still pay homage to idols and ancestors. Consequently although philosophy appears fundamental to the martial arts, this still does not necessarily define or classify fighting traditions in any depth apart from noting the importance of a philosophy.

Draeger's classification

An attempt to define different fighting traditions was proposed by Draeger (cited in Donohue and Taylor, 1994:22) who outlined a two-part classification of fighting systems (Table 1). The classification involved combat systems designed for the battlefield and combat systems for civilian arts, primarily empty-handed self-defence

systems for urban environments. Furthermore, Draeger noted that both systems would coexist in cultures where there is a hereditary warrior class and a disarmed civilian class.

Table 1: Draeger’s classification of fighting systems (Donohue and Taylor, 1994:22)

Martial Arts	Civilian Arts
Promote group solidarity	For self-protection and home defence
Designed for battlefield use	Largely urban based
Designed and practiced as weapon arts	Mainly ‘empty handed’; limited weapons use
Designed for natural terrain and climate	Designed for ideal surfaces: roads, streets and floors
Designed for wearing armour	Designed for civilian clothing
Use a wide range of weapons and skills	Skills (and weapons) use is specialised and limited
Use genuine weapons rather than domestic tools	Weapons tend to be domestic tools
Developed by professional fighting class	Part-time training is best

Donohue and Taylor (1994) specify that the classification system is useful for discussing only the Japanese fighting traditions. To classify in such a way, may lead to difficulties in wider classification: We propose that the system can be used satisfactorily for fighting traditions external to Japanese culture. Wing Chun, a Chinese, civilian, art may similarly be analysed using Draeger’s classification. Wing Chun is characterised by techniques suited to an urban environment (for example, short-range fighting skills, empty-handed techniques, footwork used for even surfaces, etc.). Another example of such classification, is the Filipino, Escrima, which utilises a range of readily available, civilian weapons (i.e. sticks and short knives). Conversely, a number of fighting traditions external to Japan may be subject to such classification. Indeed any military system in operation in any country could be


deemed a fighting tradition, from the training of Spartans to Roman soldiers through to modern day special forces: all of the defining characteristics Draeger proposes are evident.

Perhaps, a beneficial concept from Draeger's classification system is that the various fighting traditions can be classified into one of two distinct categories: martial arts and civilian arts. As illustrated above, the classification may be utilised to encompass the global nature of fighting traditions, without wishing to exclude any on the basis of socio-geographical location.

Armstrong's classification

Armstrong (1986) extended Draeger's classification approach (martial/civilian), by specifying that the original intention of the fighting tradition (whether martial or civilian) may undergo a transformation: what originally started as a melee or practical purpose for the battlefield or street (a mortal combat system, fighting to the death), may undergo a change (or transition) to make the student a better person. In addition, Armstrong included a static classification where developing the spiritual dimension is paramount. Armstrong's system thus notes that a martial (or civilian) art may undergo a transformation or transition depending on socio-political circumstance (Table 2).

Table 2: Armstrong's classification system (adapted from Donohue and Taylor, 1994: 23-24)

Classification	Melee	Transition	Static
			
Intention	Strictly practical purposes on the battlefield or street	Intended to make students better human beings through teaching such virtues as sportsmanship, persistence and 'fighting spirit'	To create better human beings. Primary importance is spiritual, secondary importance are fighting skills.
Example	Battlefield (single or group combat) (i.e. gunnery, spear, halberd – arts associated with winning a war)	Agonistic (sporting) (i.e. Japanese Karate, Judo)	Non-competitive forms (i.e. Tai Chi, Pakua, Hsing-I)
Example	Self-defence (single or group defence) (i.e. Aiki-Jujutsu, Okinawan Karate – little stress on making a better person of having a 'fair-fight')	Duelistic (i.e. Kendo)	R-P-S training Religious, Philosophical, Spiritual training (i.e. Iaido)

Donohue and Taylor (1994) note that many specific fighting traditions could progress along the continuum posited by Armstrong, depending on how they are taught and for the students' motivation for enrolling. Thus a tradition which fundamentally trains for practical purposes may eventually transform to becoming a sport, or even a spiritual practice. Indeed, Tai Chi is testament to such a transformation, where many practitioners train for the spiritual aspects, neglecting the practical application: these students perpetuate the spiritual side once they become instructors and the entire

practical application of the system could potentially be lost. This diluting of fighting traditions is similarly discussed by Czarnecka (2001) in relation to Taekowndo.

However, what Donohue and Taylor do not indicate is whether this progression is purely unidirectional, whereby pragmatic combat traditions may transform into spiritual-based traditions, or whether spiritual-based traditions could transform into more pragmatic combat traditions. At first, this seems a ridiculous notion; however there are examples where such a reversal has happened, for example the Boxer Uprising, where *Boxers* engaged in spiritual practices before venturing into battle, assuming their practices would make them invincible in the face of opposition, while being impervious to bullets (Henning, 2001).

Armstrong's classification approach is thus useful in indicating that various fighting traditions can transform in nature. Indeed, this transformatory nature has been discussed by Buckler (2007) who proposed that a fighting tradition could be trained for three different purposes: for safety (where pragmatic fighting techniques for defence are the central focus), for sport (where the techniques or equipment are transformed to enable practitioners to engage in non-lethal combat), and for spiritual development (where the training is conducted as a form of mindful engagement). Theebom, De Knop and Wylleman (2008) propose a similar classification although only relate this to *martial arts* as they are practiced in the West: there are for sporting, efficiency or traditional purposes. Arguably as previously discussed in relation to Donohue and Taylor's (1994) classification system, such geographic barriers suggested by Theebom *et al.* (2008) should be negated in favour of a global classification.

Reid and Croucher's classification

A further bipartite classification system is posited by Reid and Croucher (1983). This system identifies the importance of the social group (however that is defined) and the way in which fighting takes place. As such, Reid and Croucher propose that there is fighting within the social group (fighting for entertainment, sport or ritual) and fighting between social groups (warfare). This could in turn be related to the classification system of Draeger in that the military are one distinct social group, civilians a

different social group. Table 3 summarises Reid and Croucher's classification system.

Table 3: Reid and Croucher's classification system

	Within social groups	Between social groups
Purpose	Entertainment, sport, ritual	Warfare
Weapons	Lighter weapons	Heavier weapons
Attack	Single or small group attack	Mass attack
Development	Skill	Strength

Although Reid and Croucher's classification does not distinguish specifically between combat systems, they do note that warfare skills are cruder between social groups than within social groups, the former relying on heavier weapons, mass attack and strength, as opposed to skill. This implies that fighting traditions within social groups are thus for entertainment, sport or ritual and not for other factors of personal defence. This again appears similar in nature to Draeger's classification approach, simplifying the classification by noting the conflict between groups or within groups. However from Reid and Croucher's system, it would appear that there is no need for a practical combat system within the social group. The question may thus be asked, 'are members of social group adverse to attacking one another?'

Maliszewski's classification

A final classification approach discussed here, is that of Maliszewski (1992) who proposed a tripartite classification with fighting arts and martial ways at opposite points, with martial disciplines centred between the two (Table 3.4). Maliszewski (1992) defines these as: Fighting art – comprehensive systems of combat involving unarmed and/or armed tactics which derive their roots from their respective culture or geographical setting; Martial way – systems which have a primary goal of a radical psychological authentication or transformation of the individual; Martial discipline – applied to both fighting arts and martial ways, where the student may experience features which would seem to apply to the other system but could also be used in a combative situation.

Table 4: Maliszewski's tripartite classification system

Fighting Art	Martial Way
Comprehensive system Unarmed or armed tactics Derive from respective culture/geographical setting Technique driven	Radical psychological authentication or transformation of the individual Self-improvement driven
Martial Discipline	
The student predominantly experiences one aspect (martial way) but could use skills in a combative situation.	

Maliszewski's classification appears to have been developed from Armstrong's, noting its bi-directional transformational nature. Indeed, it could be viewed that a fighting art gives rise to a martial way and from this the martial discipline. However the term *martial art* is left undefined: as such, all combat systems could be referred to as *fighting arts* unless there is a notion of personal transformation.

The classification systems outlined, together with key issues, relative strengths and limitations are summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Summary of the key issues, strengths and limitations of existing classification systems.

Author	Overview	Strength(s)	Limitation(s)
Donohue & Taylor	Different philosophies: Pragmatism Sportsmanship Personal honour or responsibility Pacifism Nationalism and sacrifice Civic responsibility	Detailed classification of different philosophies for fighting.	Do not suggest whether combat systems apply to one or more of the philosophies.
Draeger	Martial art and civilian art	Clear classification system.	No mention of philosophy.
Reid & Croucher	Fighting within and external to the social group. Within – entertainment, sport, ritual (martial art) External - warfare	Clear classification system applicable across all societies.	Would imply that combat systems within the social group serve no practical purpose. No mention of philosophy
Armstrong	Suggests that combat systems can transform, from melee, through to transition, then to static forms.	Introduces a transformative notion of combat systems.	Does not indicate whether this can transform in either direction. Philosophy only relates to the static system.
Maliszewski	Aim to produce a better fighter, a better person, or both.	Clear classification system allowing a combat system to be transformative.	Lack of detail on classifying where a combat system is based: one system could be in all three simultaneously depending on the intentions of students.

From Table 5, we propose that no single classification system is fully inclusive of any fighting tradition. However, a synthesis of the key elements from each of the classification approaches has enabled us to produce a new classification approach, as discussed below.

Draeger's system is perhaps the most fully developed in providing a classification between martial and non-martial, or civilian arts. As noted previously, it is applicable for a diversity of fighting traditions. This could be extended by incorporating notions of philosophy, whether from Donohue and Taylor, or Payne: such a philosophy should be concerned with self-development, either as becoming a better fighter or a better person. Furthermore, the addition of Reid and Croucher's classification of social influence could easily be incorporated. Ultimately from the discussion, a new classification approach could be proposed which synthesises these elements. In developing a new classification approach, the following criteria have been developed to provide a framework: it is clear and concise; it is applicable across all societies; it allows for transformation of a fighting tradition for different purposes if necessary (i.e. better fighter, better person, or both); it considers the notion of an integral philosophy; it encompasses a range of perspectives, from war through to self-development.

From these criteria, our basis for the creation of a new classification approach is summarised in table 6 below.

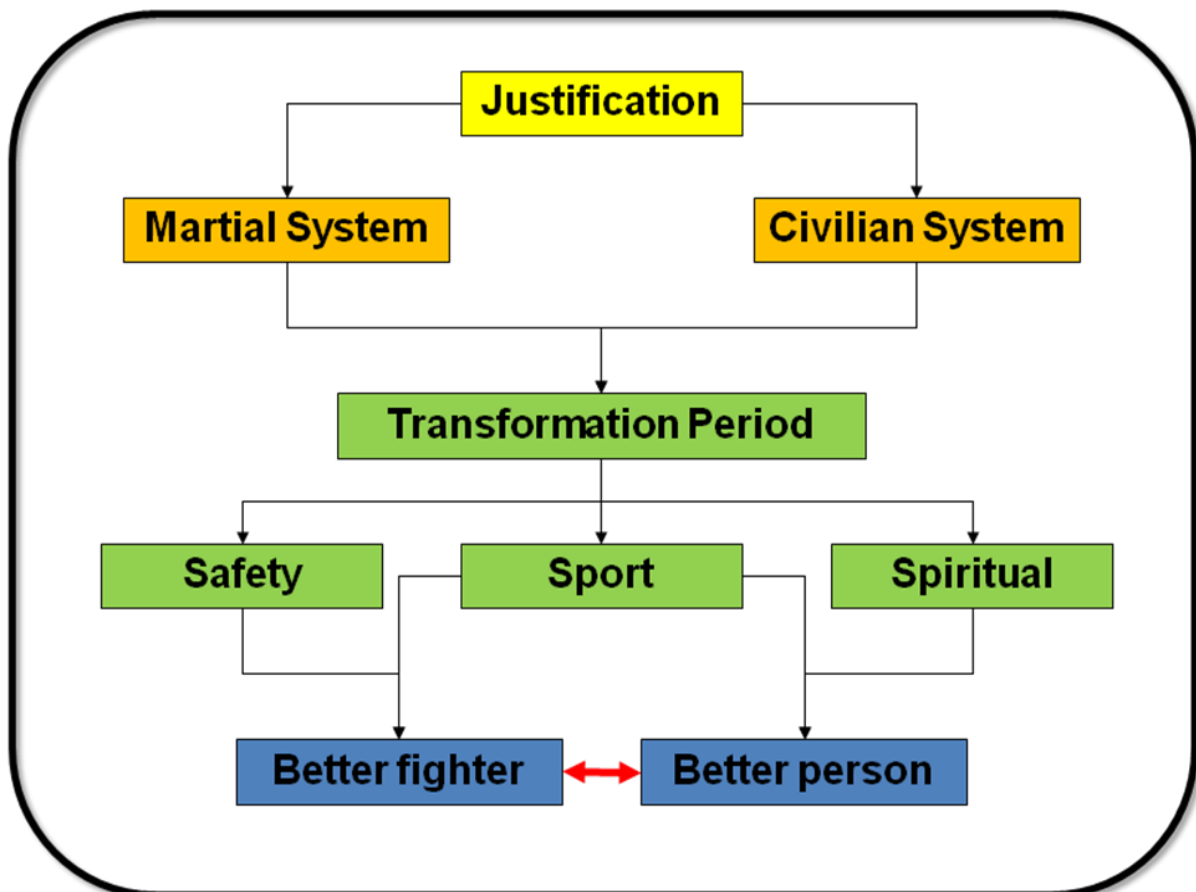
Table 6: New classification system

	Martial Systems	Civilian Systems
Social aspects	Inter-group	Inter- and Intra- group
Purpose	Promote group solidarity	For self-protection and home defence
Theatre of combat	Designed for battlefield use	Largely urban based
	Designed for natural terrain and climate	Designed for ideal surfaces, roads, streets and floors
Weaponry	Designed and practiced as weapon arts	Mainly 'empty handed,' limited weapons use
	Use genuine weapons rather than domestic tools	Weapons tend to be domestic tools
Skills	Use a wide range of weapons and skills	Skills (and weapons) use is specialised and limited
	High practical skill, low technical skill by an unskilled majority (e.g. conscripts); high practical skill, high technical skill by an elite warrior class	High practical skill, high technical skill
Training	Developed by professional fighting class	Part-time training is best
Clothing	Designed for wearing armour	Designed for civilian clothing
Philosophy	Predominant driver of an external (group) philosophy – pragmatism, nationalism and sacrifice, civic responsibility (better fighter)	Predominant driver of internal (individual) philosophy – pragmatism, personal honour or responsibility, civic responsibility (better person)

The classification approach proposed in Table 6 predominantly utilises Draeger's key distinction between martial and civilian systems (Table 1), however it also incorporates elements from Reid and Croucher's classification system relating to the importance of social groups (Table 3) with the philosophical orientations advocated by Donohue and Taylor.

Although this table demonstrates a clear distinction between martial arts and civilian arts, it does not allow for further classification of either system being transformative as Maliszewski and Armstrong have highlighted. As a result, it is necessary to demonstrate, through the integrated taxonomy, how a martial or civilian system may have arisen from a justification for attack or defence, before potentially transforming into three subsequent motivators for training (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Taxonomy of fighting traditions (Buckler, 2010:121)



As can be seen in Figure 1, the justification for fighting may either be for a society (martial) or for individuals (civilian), and this justification may be to attack others and/or for defence. The initial need may subsequently subside, although the skills are retained. During a transformation-period, the practice may be developed for

either developing the person to become a better fighter or a better person. A better fighter may indicate that the system retained a pragmatic combat element, and/or developed a sporting element. Conversely, a better person may indicate that the combat system had adopted a spiritual orientation, although arguably, sport may also be deemed to develop a better person (e.g. Cooper, 1998; Parry, Nesti, Robinson and Watson, 2007; Preece and Hess, 2009; O’Gorman, 2010). It must also be accepted that a person can train for all of these benefits or just one, so for example, a person may want to become a better fighter, yet through such training, they are developing to become a better person. Consequently the justification for a fighting tradition can transform into a pragmatic, safety-orientated practice, a sporting practice, or a spiritual practice. All three practices may equally develop health benefits. All three practices similarly share principles for effective training, and it has been suggested that all three practices culminate in a sense of growth.

Conclusion

This paper has explored existing classification approaches in an attempt to create a new, integrated classification approach, which also adopts a taxonomy to explore the histo-philosophical development of fighting traditions.

Despite the characteristics ascribed to either the martial or civilian systems, over an indeterminate period of time, a transformation may occur where the pragmatic combat roots of the style are realigned to either keep the focus on pragmatic fighting, safety skills, or whether they transform into a more sporting or spiritual practice. The taxonomy presented in this paper is synonymous with the position that training for pragmatic safety purposes promotes better fighting skills, while, as a spiritual practice, an individual may be deemed to become a *better person*. Of course, this term is open to interpretation, although our interpretation is that it means that the individual aims to continue to refine their nature, developing what they deem the positive elements while reducing the negative: as such, this may be deemed a transformative practice. The sporting element can be deemed to develop both fighting skills and personal attributes.

The proposed classification approach and resultant taxonomy have been specifically utilised in hermeneutically examining the histo-philosophical motivators for the

Chinese style of Wing Chun (Buckler, 2010). Indeed, the classification and taxonomy are offered as a theoretical basis for the exploration of any fighting tradition.

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