

TRADITION IN KUNG FU: BRAZILIAN MASTERS BETWEEN PERMANENCES AND CHANGES

TRADIÇÃO NO KUNG FU: MESTRES BRASILEIROS ENTRE PERMANÊNCIAS E TRANSFORMAÇÕES

TRADICIÓN EN EL KUNG FU: MAESTROS BRASILEÑOS ENTRE PERMANENCIAS Y TRANSFORMACIONES

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Keywords:
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Abstract: This article investigates and analyzes Brazilian masters' views on tradition in Chinese martial arts. The five Brazilian masters interviewed were disciples of Chinese masters, and their views about the subject were recorded through thematic oral history. A comparison of those narratives to the theoretical framework showed that masters' views about tradition surround maintenance of the past and changing the perspectives of martial arts over time, thus creating an elaborate relationship between structure and change.

Palavras chave:
Artes marciais.
Narrativas pessoais.
História do século
XIX: China.

Resumo: Esse artigo se propõe a investigar e analisar a concepção de mestres brasileiros sobre a tradição nas artes marciais chinesas. Para tanto, foram entrevistados cinco mestres brasileiros, discípulos de chineses, dos quais foram registradas, por meio de história oral temática, suas visões acerca do objeto em questão. O cotejamento dessas narrativas com o referencial teórico adotado possibilitou analisar que as concepções dos mestres sobre a tradição gravitam em torno da manutenção do passado e das perspectivas de mudança da arte marcial ao longo do tempo, trazendo à tona uma sofisticada articulação entre estrutura e transformação.

Palabras clave:
Artes marciales.
Narrativas
personales.
Historia del siglo
XIX: China.

Resumen: Ese artículo se propone investigar y analizar la concepción de maestros brasileños a respecto de la tradición en las artes marciales chinas. Con este fin, fueron entrevistados cinco maestros brasileños, discípulos de maestros chinos, de quienes se registraron, a través de historia oral temática, sus visiones acerca del objeto en cuestión. Cotejar esas narrativas con el referencial teórico adoptado permitió analizar que las concepciones de los maestros a respecto de la tradición gravitan alrededor de la manutención del pasado y de las perspectivas de cambio del arte marcial a lo largo del tiempo, trayendo a la superficie una sofisticada articulación entre estructura y transformación.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Kung Fu is the name by which all the different systems, schools and martial arts families of Chinese origin are known. It achieved great impact in Brazil from the 1960s on, largely due to appropriation promoted by the cultural industry through comics, television series and movies, and migration of Chinese people to the country, including martial arts masters (APOLLONI, 2004; MARTA, 2009; FERREIRA, 2013).

These phenomena are related to the changes occurred in China since the mid-19th century, when colonial attempts by European nations, together with the discredit of the Chinese empire, gave rise to a series of internal and external conflicts. Fairbank and Goldman (2008) point to the Empire's not only economic, but also political and intellectual "demoralization" as a result of those events, culminating in agreements and reforms that strengthened colonization. Shortly after that, in 1911, the imperial regime and the feudal system fell down and a nationalist republican government came to power, and in 1949, after another period of civil wars, the Maoist-oriented People's Republic was founded.

The fast social, economic, political and cultural change had important effects on the views about Chinese body practices, and martial arts took center stage in the discussions. Raised to the status of "national physical culture" (MORRIS, 2004, p. 242), there were several attempts to change them towards the European model of competitive sports in order to "modernize" them. However, the Chinese diaspora that occurred after that period changed the global scenario of martial arts as migration of masters to Hong Kong, America and Europe established a counterpoint to that sports model carried out by the standardization of Kung Fu by both the republican State and the Maoist State (MORRIS, 2004; BROWNELL, 2008). Many masters who came to Brazil in that diaspora found conditions to spread their practices as they had been prior to that restructuring, although they experienced and possibly incorporated the changes of martial arts in China. That spreading was based, among other factors, on the contact with and training of Brazilian disciples (FERREIRA, 2013).

Besides its historical approach, this study is a result of the author's concerns as a "researcher-practitioner" of martial arts in his contact with his Brazilian master, who is in turn the disciple of a Chinese master. That allowed him to formulate some guiding questions: What is a master referring to when says that a technique is traditional? What does he meant by traditional? What is the importance of tradition for Kung Fu? Focusing on these questions, this article aims to investigate and analyze the views of Brazilian masters who disciples of Chinese ones about tradition in the Chinese martial arts.

2 THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This qualitative research was based on interviews with Brazilian Kung Fu masters who are disciples of Chinese ones, between August 2012 and September 2013. The choice of subjects was based on diversity criteria in well-established Kung Fu systems, that is, it favored masters who represented styles of various Chinese martial arts nationwide. Thus, emphasis was placed to the multiple views about martial arts in order to prepare a comprehensive panorama of narratives on the tradition of Kung Fu. The masters selected included:

Leo Imamura – He is the leader of the Moy Yat Sang Clan from Ving Tsun and the only disciple of Grand Master Moy Yat in Brazil. He got to know martial arts because he admired actor Bruce Lee and by coming in contact with several forms of fight in high school at São Paulo's Colégio Objetivo, where Korean, Japanese and Chinese martial arts were widely practiced by students. At that time, after a brief but important period practicing judo and karate, he began his studies at the Ving Tsun with Master Li Hon Ki, the brother of Master Li Wing Kay. In a trip to Hong Kong, invited by his master's brother, Imamura made a stop in New York and ended up meeting the person of whom he would become a disciple in 1988: Grand Master Moy Yat. After establishing a close relationship with him and fully devoting himself to Ving Tsun, Grand Master Moy Yat gave Master Imamura the task of creating a program that emphasized aspects of what they called "Kung Fu Life" and in 2003 he developed and implemented the "Program Moy Yat Ving Tsun of Martial Intelligence". Since then, the clan led by him has trained several masters in Brazil, who now lead their own groups.

Angela Soci – She is a disciple of Grand Master Yang Jun of the Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan. She is the director of the Brazilian Society for Tai Chi Chuan and Eastern Culture of São Paulo's Yang Cheng Fu Tai Chi Chuan Center and a Director of Latin American Affairs of the International Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan Association. She started her Tai Chi Chuan practice after stopping her undergraduate studies in Psychology to seek what made sense in her life. Her relationship with Grand Master Yang Jun and his grandfather Grand Master Yang Zhenduo started on a trip to China, made possible by her husband and until then master Roque Severino. After intense contact and practices with both masters in China, she began bringing them to annual seminars in Brazil until, in 2010, she and Severino were invited to be disciples of Grand Master Yang Jun. On occasion she realized that being a woman created mistrust about her ability to practice Tai Chi Chuan. More recently, in 2013, Master Angela Soci was the first person to obtain the title of "Senior Instructor" from the International Yang Family Tai Chi Chuan Association. Despite having trained several students at the Brazilian Society of Tai Chi Chuan and Eastern Culture – founded by her and Roque Severino and where she teaches – and her notorious knowledge and practice in Tai Chi Chuan, Angela Soci preferred to be called a "teacher" than a "master".

Francisco Nobre – He is an international representative of the Eagle Claw style of the Lau Family and a disciple of Grand Master Lily Lau. He started to practice martial arts on his own, using movies and books still in his hometown Mineirolândia in the state of Ceará. Kung Fu has come to mean so much in his life that he decided to move to São Paulo, with financial help from his mother and a neighbor in order to learn from a master. Reconciling his work in furniture delivery, general services in a marble factory, and as a cook helper at Brahma brewery, Nobre began his training with Grand Master Li Wing Kay in 1993, with whom he won several titles in national and international championships. He began managing the schools of his master and decided to abandon other paid jobs and live out of Kung Fu only. In 2003, Master Francisco cut ties with Grand Master Li and two years later he came in contact with Grand Master Lily Lau in a relationship consolidated in 2010, when Master Francisco Nobre became her disciple in a ceremony held before the tomb of Master Lau's father, Grand Master Lau Fat Mang, in Hong Kong. Currently, he teaches in his own school in São Paulo's Santa Cecilia district. That interview included Master **Sérgio Queiroz**, also from the Lau Family's Eagle Claw, which contributed in discussions about tradition.

Paulo da Silva – He is a disciple of Grandmaster Chiu Chi Ling of the Hung Gar style and its sole representative for South America. His initial contact with martial arts took place through Karate Shinkyu Shotokan, in the town of Cabo de Santo Agostinho, Pernambuco. Due to the economic situation of his family and the possibility of having better living conditions in São Paulo, he traveled at the invitation of his brother to live in São Paulo in 1978. He began practicing Kung Fu at the insistence of his brother, who had found a school near their home. After some time and thanks to his previous experience with karate, Silva stood out and was invited by Master Miguel de Lucas to take over the school while working as an assistant mechanic and plumber. Master Silva ended up estranged from his first master who returned to Chile, but he was involved in the foundation of the first federations and confederations of Brazil. Some time later, Master Paulo traveled to the US and met Grand Master Chiu Chi Ling, whom he joined. His history as a martial arts practitioner or master is marked by racial discrimination and xenophobia for being a black man from Brazil's Northeastern region. He currently chairs the National Kung Fu League and organizes annual national championships with the presence of his master.

Thomaz Chan – He is a disciple of his father, Grand Master Chan Kwok Wai of the Northern Shaolin style and General Technical Director of the Brazilian Confederation of Kung Fu/Wushu. Still in his childhood, he was unwillingly sent to study Cantonese in Hong Kong, where he met some Kung Fu masters who were his father's friends. Back to Brazil, he began practicing Northern Shaolin with Grand Master Chan. On another trip to China, he knew Modern/competitive Wushu at Beijing University of Physical Education (now Beijing Sport University) – an affiliation that would grant him recognition as one of the great exponents of Kung Fu at competitive level, as both an athlete and a coach. Thus, he acquired some independence from his father's figure and, after hesitating for some time, he began to devote himself formally to educate and train new athletes of Modern Wushu in 1998, without, however, abandoning Grand Master Chan Kwok Wai's Kung Fu teachings. At the same time, he was part of the circle of masters who founded the first Kung Fu federations and confederations in Brazil. Currently, besides being part of the Board of CBKW, he manages and teaches at his own school in São Paulo's Pompeia district.

Interviews were conducted in two consecutive steps: based on Brazilian masters' oral history of life according to Meihy and Holanda (2007), Bosi (2004) and Rubio (2006) and followed by thematic oral history (MEIHY, HOLANDA, 2007) about tradition. Oral history is a process of oral transition to writing captured through oral sources, including interviews, in order to register and produce documents for purposes of analysis (MEIHY, HOLANDA, 2007). The research method is used here with a view to its ability to address the similarities and differences between individual memory and collective memory (HALBWACHS, 2006). Oral history has been recently used in the area of Physical Education as a special tool to investigate themes related to the socio-cultural universe of the leading role played by athletes and coaches (NASCIMENTO, 2012, LIMA, 2012), martial arts (NUNES, 2011) and specifically Kung Fu (FERREIRA, 2013). Ferreira, Marchi Junior and Capraro (2014) even point out the relevance of using oral history as a research method in martial arts, given the predominance of orality both in their history and in their pedagogical practices.

Because of the format of this article, only narratives related to thematic oral history were selected, while noting that those about life histories paved the way for a more fluid

and spontaneous dialogue between the researcher and the masters. Three questions were prepared specifically to address tradition:

1. “What is tradition for you?”
2. “In your opinion, is tradition important in Kung Fu? Why?”
3. “In your opinion, what is the difference between traditional and non-traditional Kung Fu?”

All interviews were transcribed and rewritten, when their narratives were rewritten in order to improve them aesthetically and enhance the understanding of what was said. They even recorded respondents’ non-verbal communication and intention of speech – a process that Meihy and Holanda (2007) call “transcreation”. The text produced by that translation from oral to written was sent to respondents. Master Leo Imamura requested a new interview to improve the text, teacher Angela Soci pointed out corrections to be made in the text sent to her, and masters Francisco Nobre and Paulo da Silva approved the story as it was sent by the author. All the material used for analysis results from that evaluation and approval by interviewees.

The picture drawn from these narratives was built and analyzed based on Bourdieu’s (2004) notion of “sports field”. The concept seeks to relate the dynamics of a particular body practice with its social context, so that “social distance translates into sports logic” (BOURDIEU, 2014, p. 209). Under that view, structure and change are not opposing concepts, so that we do not understand structure without understanding its changes. That theoretical contribution is relevant to this research since, when dealing with the theme of tradition – a fraction of the field of Chinese martial arts – the notions of permanence and change are crucial and the prospect of expanding the panorama for analysis of body practices as proposed by Bourdieu (2014) is essential to place this dynamic under synchronic analysis – in the space and time of masters’ life histories – and under diachronic analysis – regarding the history of Kung Fu. Therefore, such framework allows us to conduct a relevant analysis of the relationship between the recent history of Chinese martial arts and oral history, based on the narratives of Brazilian masters, i. e. the movement between their individual memories and the collective memory of Kung Fu.

Thus, it was possible to conduct a closer study on the tradition of Kung Fu and its permanences and changes. For an in-depth analysis of the concept, masters’ narratives were interwoven with the research’s theoretical framework, namely Gadotti (1975) on the relationship between master and student and Arendt (2011) on authority, as well as Hobsbawm (2006) and Thompson (1998) on the notions of invented tradition and customs.

Regarding ethical concerns, besides procedures for evaluation and feedback on texts produced in interviews, all respondents signed and kept a copy of the Consent and Informed Form as established by the Ethics in Research Committee of USP School of Physical Education and Sports, which approved the research.

3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Tradition: the passage of time and the authority of the ancestors

Initially, the masters agree that tradition is an element that constitutes the legitimacy of their practice. The imperatives of the relationship with time and the authority of the ancestors

were mentioned in nearly all narratives and seem to be crucial to masters' considerations about the importance of tradition in their practices.

Master Paulo Silva's words illustrate the relevance of the relation with time. Considering himself traditional because of his 40 years devoted to martial arts, he underscores the importance of the "passage of time" for one to gain experience and acquired experience itself is considered tradition: its constitution is in the effort and the work of those willing to start a practice.

Then, through difficulty or not, you are being persistent in what you are doing and it becomes tradition, it becomes habit, custom. I think you get fairly fanatic about it over time, depending on what you are doing. Because time is what gives us experience, it brings us experience. Experience is acquired over time. If you get it with time, it's tradition (Master Paulo da Silva. Interviewed on September 9, 2013).

Master Sérgio Queiroz shows the timeline of tradition when he puts into perspective the apparent arbitrariness in defining the criteria that ascribe traditional character or not to a branch of Chinese martial arts. By carefully observing that a recent practice cannot be seen as traditional, he ponders:

So let's assume you say that Jeet Kune Do, the art created by Bruce Lee, is not considered a traditional Chinese art. When is it not considered? Now or within 200 years? That's the question, you understand? Why? Because tradition also has to do with time, longevity, maintenance (Master Sérgio Queiroz. Interviewed on July 11, 2013).

Master Leo Imamura contributes to that need to pay attention to the ancientness of a practice when he mentions the observation of the genealogy of a martial arts system. Referring sometimes to concepts that are dear to the Moy Yat Ving Tsun Family – such as "Indirect Interpersonal Mobilization" – an action in which an individual mobilizes another so that the latter will mobilize a third one – and sometimes to "any genealogical study", Master Imamura thinks that the time for considering a martial art as traditional or any other relationship involving legacy is five generations.

[He explains it using the fingers of one hand] So if I learn it, I have to learn to convey it to a second person, but this second person also has to know how to convey it to this third person. So it is not enough that this first person learns how to convey it to this second one; this first one has to ensure that this second one conveys it to this third person, which is what we call Indirect Interpersonal Mobilization. [...] So there are three moments, but what's the point if I do that and this second person does it but this third one stops it, I mean, if they can't do direct or indirect Interpersonal Mobilization? I need this one, who started it, to ensure that this one, the third one, knows how to do Direct Interpersonal Mobilization, with a fourth one, and Indirect Interpersonal Mobilization with a fifth person. When this happens, the cycle is completed. I mean, that system won't die, that's why it's five generations old (Master Leo Imamura. Interviewed on August 17, 2012).

Therefore, tradition in martial arts suffers a time demand that, by its inexorability, puts the legitimacy of a more recent system to test, as genuine and circumspect as it might be, and validates a system for its ancientness, supported by generations that have safeguarded it. However, along with time, and Master Imamura's words show that, ancestors' authority in their legacy to future generations is another necessary element in the analysis of the masters interviewed about considering a martial art traditional.

It is the relationship between masters and disciples that provides historical ballast to time elapsed. In other words, time is considered in the evaluation of tradition, since it happens under it, but relations of succession and testimony between masters and disciples – the actors – provide tradition with substance and vitality. The authority of the ancestors is evidenced in the words of Teacher Angela Soci: “It’s as if your own spirit was communicating with the spirits of the ancestors who developed this tradition” (Teacher Angela Soci. Interviewed on November 12, 2012).

In this relationship with masters, disciples “grow towards the past”, according to Arendt (2011), for they seek authority that legitimates their projects in the martial art in the contact with masters coming from genealogies that date back to the foundations of the systems. Master Thomaz is the only one who does just the opposite: his relationship with genealogy, much more intimate and inherited through blood ties, made it difficult to have pathway independent from his master and father– a pathway that he built in the sports side of Kung Fu. Against colonization of his identity by association with his father, Master Thomaz became one of the most recognized masters of Modern Wushu, but that was because genealogy already guaranteed him the legitimacy as a Northern Shaolin master. Moreover, as Gadotti (1975) points out, a master is the person who works to be overcome, who teaches disciples to act for themselves under a principle of self-annulment. In other words, good masters provide testimony without preventing their disciples from treading their own paths, even if it means finding another master or even another line of practice.

The imperative of the past, which is present through the authority of those who were close to the foundation of the martial art style, system, family or school, does play a role even when involved and reinterpreted through a sporting lens. Those masters who are closer to the management of regulatory institutions of Kung Fu in Brazil are often challenged by attempts to include practices they do not consider traditional because they lack ancientness backed by genealogy. Master Thomaz appreciates them because “behind those non-traditional styles there is the traditional in their fortress”; they were not invented without an effort at careful historical and technical observation by their creators.

For our federation to accept a style, for example, it must have a mapping at the federation. The federation requires that mapping so they participate in our rules. So before that, they need to know where the family tree comes from, what its history is and the names of the Katis. Then I think there are some styles, each style already has this... and the new ones also have it. So I’ve had it, I’ve had this prejudice, but today I... Look, the value that I have behind it is so strong that sometimes I look to non-traditional Kung Fu, I see it with good eyes, if it can invent something, it seems OK to me. I don’t have this creative ability to invent a style, I don’t. (Master Thomaz Chan. Interviewed by the author on November 29, 2012).

Master Paulo, in turn, treats the affiliation of a style of he recognizes in a different way in his League. It does not depend on analysis of genealogy and its foundation or on the technical quality of its method, but on the legal documents necessary to associate an organization to the League. Recognition, in turn, demands historical study of the style, verification of genealogy and origin in some Chinese art:

Because many masters today have schools that are regular, everything OK, registered as legal persons, with bylaws, everything right, but the style they teach was actually invented. What matters is the documents the guy has. [...] [But for recognition] that is not enough, because I’m not affiliating you, we’re doing

recognition of your style. So it's different. Now if we were doing recognition of style, I would seek the origin of your style in China, who your master was, where it came from, this and that (Master Paulo da Silva. Interviewed on September 17, 2013).

While the relevance of time and ancestors' authority are a consensus in masters' interpretations, disagreements happen when they show the ways they justify the importance of tradition. The past and ancestors' testimony are mobilized according to a dynamics that reaches the Kung Fu field decisively. This is the relationship between maintenance and change of tradition.

Tradition is as current today as it used to be. Why should it be changed?

The approach to tradition as maintenance of what has operated since its foundation to create meanings to those who are involved in the practice is recurrent in the universe of Chinese martial arts and is present in the speeches of some of the masters interviewed. According to Bourdieu (2004), this is a vision that proposes that tradition is what Kung Fu has as permanent, as continuity of the past. In other words, tradition is recognized for being the structural component of that body practice. Therefore, changes in that structure are seen with suspicion and safeguarding it is the responsibility of the leaders of each system.

Master Francisco Nobre is an example of a leader concerned with maintenance regarding the past on the one hand and the legacy to future generations on the other. The intention to propagate a one-thousand-year-old history for another thousand years, as his master says, is based only on that view of tradition as a permanent structure of the system. The structure must be maintained because it refers to an uninterrupted flow from creation to the present. Thus, saying that an art is a thousand years old is defending its linearity and maintenance as it is thought to have been at its foundation. Master Francisco puts it clearly in his concept of tradition:

Within the martial art, tradition, in a word, would be maintaining. Maintaining what? First maintaining its aspect. Because we always speak of tradition, a lot of things that tradition is, it's traditional, but it ends up escaping. So tradition in Kung Fu is to maintain the first principle, to maintain the founder's vision, to maintain the master's vision, to maintain... it's so much that ... but I think tradition is that, it's maintaining what is ancient, the ancient gift for future generations. I think that's tradition. (Master Francisco Nobre. Interviewed on November 7, 2013).

Similarly, Master Paulo da Silva refers to the millennia-old origin of martial arts in order to distinguish traditional Kung Fu that "has existed for over five thousand years" and Modern Wushu, related to "forms developed by the Chinese government [...] to enter the Olympics". Master Chan Thomaz dialogues with these thoughts when speaking about the importance of tradition:

[...] It's where it all started, where the essence came from, where the first path is. The traditional is very strong, you can't escape tradition; it's the basis, the essence. It's where we can penetrate and acquire many visions. And it's only in tradition that we can see, right? Although what I told you about modern, it helps a lot, it has its merit, it's another configuration. But it [the traditional] is all, it's history, it's where every detail has meaning. (Master Thomaz Chan. Interviewed by the author on November 29, 2012).

The seemingly contradictory condition of those masters' words – turning to the maintenance of the foundation at the expense of historical processes that have reached practices – alludes to the conservative character of "traditions invented" by the British nobility

in Hobsbawm studies (2006) and the rebellious (but conservative) character of “customs” of the English working class analyzed by Thompson (1998).

If Hobsbawm (2006) says that discursive proliferation on traditions occurs in historical times when ancient traditions are undermined, it is possible to say that conservatism based on and expressed as maintenance, as permanence and continuity of the past is an expression of resistance to rationalizations imposed by the European sports model, which brings the novelty of standardization, spectacularization and the focus on competition. It is no coincidence that the masters who adopt the discourse of maintenance are those that dialogue more, although in different ways, with the sports universe: they recognize that this is today’s established model of diffusion of body practices, but while we should approach it, we should also “keep” our feet firmly planted on the authority of the foundation of Chinese martial arts.

The dis-encounter with expressions of European sport just over a century ago was the likely trigger of speeches asserting tradition that refer Chinese martial arts to their millennia-old and permanent character. It was amid the backdrop of intense conflict and competition for cultural identities that martial arts were challenged, sometimes using practices related to the “civilizational backwardness” of the Chinese empire and sometimes strengthening national identity so necessary for the establishment of the republic (MORRIS, 2004; FAIRBANK; GOLDMAN, 2008 BROWNELL, 2008). If the State adopted the sports model for Chinese martial arts in order to deal with such paradoxical issue, it is conceivable that discourses about founding myths and the ancient tradition of Kung Fu were also strengthened both as a counterpoint and as support to sportivization.

The discursive stance of Teacher Angela Soci when she says that there should be no non-traditional martial art illustrates the discussion involving tradition and modernity. Mentioning modern Tai Chi Chuan, which, in her view, focuses on superficial issues of the techniques and its sporting goal, she says that tradition is what informs about the principle with which humans must connect.

I think non-traditional martial arts should not exist. But that’s what humans are like and there’s nothing we can do. Today you have, for example, what we call modern Tai Chi Chuan, right? But the modern has to be based on some tradition. They took the knowledge from masters Yang, Chi Manching and they developed things, but they want to disconnect tradition by transforming that into a body technique only. I believe that tradition is maintained by human beings. As young as you might be, if you have your spirit connected with the principle, you’ll get what is traditional and that pathway ends up being inevitable (Teacher Angela Soci. Interviewed on November 12, 2012).

Therefore, narratives linking maintenance, preservation and continuity of tradition in Kung Fu can be seen as *attempts at discussion and conservative resistance regarding efforts aimed at sportivization of martial arts*, and which tend to diminish the role of the historical and symbolic components of those practices for the benefit of their athletic and aesthetic elements. Therefore, those manifestations point out the need for body practices in today’s martial arts to be “rooted” in their history and mythological narratives, based on ancestors’ authority (ARENDT, 2011) and on the establishment of the time lived by them. Resuming his narrative, Master Francisco Nobre speaks about what the response of Chinese martial arts should be to the scenario of changes the world is undergoing and he uses the example of religious practices as a comparative model that should also be expanded to Kung Fu:

Let me tell you something: someone once said to me, like, that the world is always in evolution, it's always evolving, everything is changing, that the techniques are changing, right? And I realized one thing: that ours – Eagle Claw – it's traditional, because the masters, the founder, the other masters, the monks, they maintained this tradition, they maintained the principle of that tradition at the beginning, when it was founded, it's as current as it used to be, right? So why change it? There's no need to change; it's got to be maintained just as it was, still, it's like religion, right? If you see, religion has... Christianity is two thousand years old and it is as current as before, right? (Master Francisco Nobre. Interviewed on November 7, 2013).

Despite considering that even religions undergo processes of change that shake their structures, the comparison is relevant because it shows the references that inform about the narratives of maintenance: the millennia-old character, direct connections with the founding myth, and similarity between past and present practices. Thus, while maintaining tradition is an expression of suspicion at the European sporting discourse, it ascribes little relevance to the changes that are part of the history of Chinese martial arts and culminate in what they are today. Back to Bourdieu (2004), structural history can only be understood when we consider the changes in the sports field, i. e. there is interdependence between structure and change that cancels the need for clear conceptual separation between them.

Do you know why Chinese culture is ancient? Because it always changes.

If the structural history of Kung Fu denominations can only be understood by analyzing their changes, how would it be possible to associate tradition – so full of narratives involving maintenance, preservation and permanences – to change without contradiction? That question – apparently insoluble in view of the positions presented so far – does not seem to prevent a conceptual view that sees the tradition as a living process. In this sense, while teacher Angela would later emphasize aspects of maintenance, she presents a concept of tradition that considers the effect of the historical processes in constituting practice:

Tradition is a road to what is most spiritual in humans. I have seen that in several traditions, not only in Tai Chi, but I understand the word *traditional* as a means to access what really makes you try to be a better human being: harmony – communication harmony. When tradition is not lost, it is transformed. *Tradition is not religion*. It is not something crystallized. Tradition is tradition because it is alive and it is transmitted from generation to generation (Teacher Angela Soci. Interviewed on December 11, 2012).

Again there is reference to religion as a framework for comparison with tradition in Chinese martial arts. However, by referring to change, that mention is used to demarcate refusal to religious model. Thus, by referring to religious practices, Master Francisco and Teacher Angela support the view that there are two distinct narrative approaches to justify the importance of tradition in Kung Fu and they sometimes point to the need to preserve and sometimes to the prospect of updating and contextual change of tradition.

Thus, it is not about transposing experience – and therefore mere continuity – but rather rethinking the experience of ancestors in different historical and semantic contexts, something that requires interpretive and analytical effort. Therefore, this perspective is parallel to the view of authority put forward by Arendt (2011) in which the testimony of the ancestors adds to present experience, but at the same time it should not be automatically transported as a model for present human relations, at the risk of proving to be tyrannical. In addition, it is close to the understanding that disciples cannot be copies of their masters or express servile adoration for

them, which are signs of misunderstanding of the relationship between master and disciple. As Gadotti (1975) warns us, the work of a master is to assert the disciple in his or her own existence; the disciple, in turn, cannot be dominated by the master's experience. Tradition is about fidelity to the walk, not to the path.

Master Imamura's narrative is closer to those two theoretical frameworks when he comments on the source of legitimacy of a cultural heritage and its relationship with the transmission of the legacy among subjects involved, based on the authorization of older people and which does not follow the same way because each generation builds their own legacy:

What characterizes immaterial cultural heritage or its legitimacy is not its resemblance to the original; where does that legitimacy comes from? It comes from acceptance of the legacy, from passing the legacy on from one generation to another, authorized, traditional transmission that is legitimized by the previous generation, so I say: "You are the best of Ving Tsun", but you have your views and they are not necessarily the same as mine, that does not make your Kung Fu illegitimate, quite the contrary, but you accepted it. Why do I know that you are the best? Because you accept my legacy and now you're doing yours [...]. And that is why martial arts, truly traditional ones, are still valid today: when you see some anachronistic movement, which does not make sense, that whole thing, you can see, it is a copy of the same, it is the repetition of the same, and not a renewal of something similar (Master Leo Imamura. Interviewed on August 17, 2012).

Note that Master Imamura also considers the current nature of traditional Chinese martial arts, but from a point of view that is different from Master Francisco's. While the latter advocates that being current is driven by maintaining the tradition that has remained since its foundation, Imamura believes that what guarantees it is not repetition, but the renewal of the legacy. The change of tradition is also recognized by Master Sérgio Queiroz when he complements and discusses Master Francisco's narrative showing that even among masters of the same denomination of Kung Fu, in this case the Eagle Claw of the Lau family, there are nuances regarding views of tradition.

In fact, it is not that tradition does not need to change; art is made of evolutionary aspects and tradition brings memories of why things took place that way at that time. So what I consider interesting in tradition is the power to observe what, over time, remains constant, you know? And what was getting expectations of change over time (Master Sérgio Queiroz. Interviewed on November 7, 2013).

Although the narratives on maintenance and preserving tradition are relevant considering sports colonization and proliferation of branches that have no historical ground, they are challenged by the one who understands tradition as a process that includes changes based on observation of the meanders of historiography of Kung Fu and the unfinished character of the work of a master his or her towards disciples. If the title of the previous section questioned the need for change, a possible response to it would include the *interpretive and historical character of tradition that projects its permanence onto mobility and change*:

I will mention a situation I experienced when I was in New York: my master had a student who was a director from Hong Kong, a film director, a very cultured person named Patrick, Patrick Kong. In Chinese, his name was Leung Kong and he saw my dedication because I was there studying the tradition, the whole thing, I wanted to know the whole tradition and then one day he came to me and said: "Leo, do you know why Chinese tradition is more than 4,000 years old?". I said: "No". "Because it is always changing" (Master Leo Imamura. Interviewed on August 17, 2012).

Therefore, while these narratives consider change in tradition, they do not do it in order to reject it. At one point, they are also interested in its permanence, but they realize that this cannot be done without an effort to uncover the historical elements that take legitimacy from that tradition. And that is why they also reject, perhaps even more strongly, sportivization of martial arts. Thus, they point to the fact that traditions – besides the intrinsic character of the relationship between masters and students – are intensely related to a society's historical and political processes. Ultimately, the narratives that refer to changes in tradition point to the need for those involved in martial arts to appreciate, study and criticize the meanings brought by tradition, often produced in and for different contexts.

5 FINAL REMARKS

In all interviews, the masters evoke two essential factors in conceptualizing tradition: time and genealogy. In other words, what gives legitimacy to traditional Chinese martial arts, according to the masters, is the confluence of their ancientness with the historical foundation of ancestors' testimony. In this sense, we do not question the importance of tradition for the authenticity of a Chinese martial art.

However, speeches pointed out two distinct narratives regarding 1) tradition as maintaining past experience (structure) and 2) consideration of changes undergone by tradition. The former is aimed at reproducing past experience in the present through the relationship with the foundation, in a direct line of succession. There is concern with the history of the martial art, but a properly historiographical analysis is not emphasized, and its core is the mythological and symbolic narrative, mainly related to the founding myth and ancestry.

The latter seeks to contextualize tradition and calls for a more careful analysis of the historical process of each Kung Fu system in order to understand when tradition was crossed and changed because of historical and political events. Thus, it revolves around criticism to reproduction of tradition and the need for an interpretive stance towards ancestors' legacy.

Both are reticent towards the sports model, but from different perspectives: while one refers to the lack of symbolic and philosophical content on the emphasis on technicism, competitiveness and aesthetic appeal of sporting events, the other underscores the issues involved in martial arts regarding political and cultural domination they suffered at certain times in history.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that the debate concerning tradition in Chinese martial arts is also a place for dispute over meanings and significances. Thus, this research showed that such circulation of dialogical narratives, sometimes consensual and sometimes conflicting, is significant for understanding the sports field of Kung Fu in Brazil. In addition, Chinese martial arts proved to be a privileged field for those involved to be in touch with sophisticated issues about the close relations that history, politics, culture and society can establish with body practices.

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