



HUI MUSLIM *WUSHU* IN CHINA: HISTORY,
DEVELOPMENT AND CONTEMPORARY
CHALLENGES

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the history, the development and the contemporary challenges of Hui Muslim *Wushu* in China. It traces the origin and historical development of Hui *Wushu*, classifying the different styles of Hui *Wushu*, and arguing that the Hui possess a double identity where Islamic and Chinese cultures are reflected in Hui martial arts. The work examines the social process of transmission of Hui *Wushu* practice based on extensive field research. The study is based on library research and fieldwork performed in China for a number of years. It utilises participant observation and oral interviews with 24 Hui martial arts masters. The research finds that Hui created some martial arts forms with special features and adopted many elements from Han martial arts to enrich the Hui *Wushu* system. This subsequently contributed to the further development of Chinese *Wushu*, especially through the emergence of outstanding Hui martial artists. In the last 20 years, several types of Hui *Wushu* have faced a severe crisis of inheritance. The thesis recommends the integration of the local governments and communal efforts to revive Hui *Wushu*.

ملخص البحث

تركز هذه الدراسة على تاريخ وتطور والتحديات المعاصرة التي يواجهها فن ووشو الدفاعي لقومية خوي المسلمة في الصين. كما تتبع أصل فن ووشو خوي وتطوره التاريخي، وتصنيف الأنماط المختلفة لفن ووشو خوي ، والذي يمتلك هوية مزدوجة تجمع بين الثقافة الإسلامية والصينية، وهو ما ينعكس في فن خووي للدفاع عن النفس. كما تسلط الدراسة الضوء على عملية التحول الاجتماعي لممارسة ووشو خوي اعتمادا على بحوث ميدانية واسعة النطاق. وتستند هذه الدراسة إلى البحوث المكتبية والبحث الميداني التي امتدت لسنوات عدة في الصين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تستخدم الدراسة الملاحظة المعتمدة على المشاركة والمقابلات الشفوية مع 24 من خبراء فنون الدفاع عن النفس. ويخلص البحث إلى أن خوي خلقت بعض أشكال فنون الدفاع عن النفس مع ميزات خاصة واعتمدت على العديد من العناصر من الهان لفنون الدفاع عن النفس لإثراء نظام ووشو خوي ، والمساهمة في وقت لاحق في مزيد من تطوير ووشو الصينية، وخاصة من خلال ظهور خبراء متميزين في فنون الدفاع خووي. وأخيرا خلص البحث إلى أنه في السنوات العشرين الماضية واجهت ووشو خوي أزمة حادة في توريثها. وتوصي الدراسة بتوحيد جهود الحكومات المحلية والجهود المجتمعية لإحياء ووشو خوي.

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DECLARATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FMA	Filipino Martial Arts
GEM	Great Eastern Mosque
POC	Republic of China
PRC	People's Republic of China

A NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

The People's Republic of China (PRC) decided to employ the *pinyin* (The official phonetic system for transcribing the Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet in the PRC.) system of Romanization for foreign publications in 1979. The *pinyin* system is now recognized internationally. As a result, the *pinyin* system is the preferred method for Chinese names and terms in the dissertation. Prior to this decision by the PRC, the Wade-Giles system had gained wide international acceptance. Certain terms, therefore, may appear under spellings unfamiliar to the reader. For example, Wades-Giles *T'ai Chi Ch'uan* appears as *pinyi Taijiquan*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Martial arts is considered to be a system that blends the physical components of combat with strategy, philosophy, tradition or other features that distinguish them from other physical activities. Humans practice martial arts for a variety of reasons: self-defence, military and law enforcement applications, competition, physical fitness, mental and spiritual development and entertainment.¹

It is suggested that the martial arts developed early in India, China and Okinawa. Most of them have been developed by prehistoric men in fighting amongst themselves and against animals, and tribal wars. There are more than 150 different martial arts styles in the world.² There are African, American, Brazilian, Chinese, European, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Malay martial arts styles according to the country of origin.³

Chinese martial arts is one of the typical forms of traditional Chinese culture. It is a sport which utilizes both brawn and brain. The theory of Chinese martial arts is based upon classical Chinese philosophy, while the skills of the arts consist of various forms of fighting: fist fights, weapon fights, and other fighting routines (including such offence and defence acts as kicking, hitting, throwing, holding, chopping and thrusting) and unarmed combats.⁴ Hui Muslim *Wushu* (also known as *Jiaomen Quan*)

¹ Martial Arts, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial_arts> (accessed 25 August 2016)

² List of Major & Minor Martial Arts Styles, <<http://www.blackbeltwiki.com/martial-arts-styles>> (accessed 25 August 2016)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wu Bin, *Essentials of Chinese Wushu*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1992), 1.

⁵ is the martial art which has been spread by the Hui people in China. It is an essential part of Chinese martial arts.

It is a well-known fact that the Han Chinese have contributed significantly to the development of the martial arts over the centuries. However, the minority classes in China have also played their part, in particular the Hui Muslim. Chinese martial arts have a long history, and many Muslims have participated at the highest levels of Chinese martial arts. Some martial styles such as *Baji Quan* (八极拳),⁶ *Cha Quan* (查拳)⁷ and *Xinyi Liuhe Quan* (心意六合拳)⁸ particularly associate with Chinese Hui Muslims. However, in the literature, the Hui's tradition and contribution to Chinese martial arts have been almost totally neglected. In fact, in the generally well-researched *Encyclopaedia of Martial Arts of the World*, there is not a single mention of Hui martial arts on the entries on China and Chinese martial arts.⁹ This study aims to fill the lacuna in the knowledge of Hui martial arts in China.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. How was Hui *Wushu* originated and developed in China?

⁵ The term *Wushu* (武术) most often used to designate martial arts practice in China, meaning literally, martial arts. I use this term frequently in the text. *Quan* (拳) is a romanization of “fist”, used to identify schools of Chinese martial arts which are strictly unarmed disciplines of “Chinese boxing”. Wrestling for example, does not fall under *Quan*. In China, the martial arts however, refer primarily to *Quan*, or these forms of unarmed combat. In this thesis, my main concern will be with Hui forms of *Quan*. Hui *Wushu* is often termed *Jiaomen Quan* (教门拳), meaning Islamic martial arts. It is worth mentioning that *Kungfu* is also the romanization of the Cantonese pronunciation - *Gongfu* (功夫) in Mandarin - of a phrase originally meaning “hard work,” “human effort,” “exertion,” or “skill” depending on the context. It is only in the late twentieth century, that this term was used in relation to Chinese martial arts by the Chinese community. It is now used extensively in the English language to refer to the Chinese martial arts.

⁶ Literally Eight-Extremities Fist

⁷ Cha Boxing, Cha is the boxing founder's surname.

⁸ Literally Mind-and-Intention Six Harmonies Fist

⁹ Green, Thomas A., (ed.), *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2001).

- ii. What are the different styles, social practices and transmission processes of Hui *Wushu*?
- iii. What are the challenges faced by the Hui *Wushu* in modern times?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are the following:

- i. To trace the origin and historical development of Hui *Wushu*.
- ii. To study different styles, social practices and transmission processes of Hui *Wushu*.
- iii. To analyse the challenges faced by the Hui *Wushu* in the modern time

1.4 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The topic of my dissertation is “Hui Muslim *Wushu* in China: History, Development and Contemporary Challenges”.

This thesis will look at the “double identity” of Hui Muslims in China. The People’s Republic of China is a multiethnic nation-state comprising 55 nationalities, including 10 minority nationalities who profess the Muslim faith. The group known as the Hui is the largest of the Muslim minorities in China, amounting to a total of 9,816,805 in the 2000 census.¹⁰ They are not to be confused with the Uyghur, who are of Turkic origin, speak a language which belongs to the Turkic family of languages, and whose homeland is in Xinjiang, in the far north of China. The Hui speak the Chinese language, are distributed throughout the entire Chinese territory, and are

¹⁰ Yang Wenjong, “The Population Distribution of the Hui People and Comparative Analysis of Its Urbanized Level: On the Basis of the Data from China’s Fifth Census of 2000”, *Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Study*, no. 4 (2006): 88-97.

distinguished from the Han Chinese¹¹ majority primarily through their firm identification with the Islamic faith. They are the descendants of Arab and Persian soldiers and traders who have been plying the maritime and overland trade routes to China since the 7th century,¹² as well as artisans and soldiers resettled in China by the Mongols under the *Yuan* dynasty (1271-1368).¹³ During the *Ming* dynasty (1368-1644), these foreign Muslims, who by then had lived in China for several centuries, were subject to a strict policy of assimilation. They had to adopt Chinese surnames and Chinese local dialects in place of Arabic and Persian as their lingua franca, marry with Chinese, abide by Chinese habits and festivals, dress like Chinese, etc.¹⁴

As a result, the Hui became the most acculturated of the various Muslim ethnic minorities. However, Hui elites at that time took two steps striving for the survival of Islam: one was mosque-based teaching, and the other was explaining Islam in accordance with Confucianism. From their conciliatory efforts toward the majority Han culture, Hui Muslims represented themselves as Chinese outside the community, but kept their belief inside. Culturally, a double identity emerged, with Islam retained as the core identity. Hui *Wushu* is an example of this acculturation and double identity. It is also an example of the fusion of two cultures. Perhaps it can also mean that Muslims learned something good from another culture, then injected an Islamic spirit into it and enriched it with Islamic elements. In this sense, it is a testimony to the creativity of Muslims. It is worthwhile for us to know more about this experience of Hui Muslims in their encounter with Chinese martial arts. Their experience would probably be inspiring to us.

¹¹ The Han Chinese is an ethnic group native to China. They constitute approximately 94% of the population of Mainland China.

¹² Qiu Shusen, *Hui History in China*, (Yinchuan: Ningxia People Press, 1996), 16, 66.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 361-370.

1.5 SCOPE OF STUDY

This dissertation will generally discuss Chinese martial arts as a cultural phenomenon, especially in relationship to Chinese religious thought and practice, in particular Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. It will mainly focus on the history and development of Hui *Wushu*. It will also study the Islamization of *Wushu* by Hui people and the transmission of martial arts in the Hui community.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Hui *Wushu* is to be found in three provinces of China (i.e. *Henan*, *Hebei* and *Shandong*) all with their own regional traditions. However, in this dissertation, the empirical study of Hui *Wushu* is only restricted to *Henan* province (my hometown). Furthermore, I have focussed on folk *Wushu* and have taken little account of the *Wushu* forms which have developed under state patronage and encouragement.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This is the first comprehensive study account of Hui *Wushu*, which includes historical development, different styles and famous masters. Furthermore, it is the first in-depth study based on empirical research on the transmission of Hui *Wushu* written in English.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The thesis is qualitative in nature and utilizes various methods to achieve its objectives which include the primary sources such as library research from the primary documents in the Chinese-language, such as martial arts chronicles. Besides, it uses participation observation through my extensive and intensive personal

experience with *Wushu* practice. Furthermore, it conducts 24 oral interviews with Hui martial arts masters.

1.9 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review here, I shall firstly identify the themes which have been raised in the study of the martial arts in China, namely the relationship between religion and martial arts, the role of the military in Chinese martial arts, the development of Chinese martial arts in the future and empirical studies from an anthropological perspective. Secondly, I shall focus on the studies done on the Hui martial arts. In general; however, it can be said that much of the literature is of a descriptive and technical nature and it is with this literature that I begin the review.

Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia is a magnum opus edited by Thomas A. Green. Its editorial board and contributor list consist of plenty of scholars and experts who are both academics and active martial arts practitioners. They strive to present clear, concise descriptions of martial arts topics based on sound research principles. This makes it an important reference for those who are especially interested in the world's martial traditions. At the end of the book, we can see the chronological history of the martial arts. It is very precious for the martial arts researchers. The subjects on Chinese martial arts include *Shaolin* styles, *Baguazhang* (Pa Kua Ch'uan),¹⁵ *Taijiquan* (Tai Chi Ch'uan),¹⁶ *Xingyiquan* (Hsing I Ch'uan),¹⁷ *Yongchun* (Wing Chun),¹⁸ animal and imitative systems in Chinese martial arts, folklore in the martial arts, Chinese influences on Japanese and Korean martial arts,

¹⁵ Literally Eight Trigram Palm.

¹⁶ A Chinese form of exercise derived from Taoism, one of China's oldest belief systems. The practice of Taiji Quan is beneficial to health and it is also a subtle, sophisticated and scientific method of self-defence.

¹⁷ Literally Form-Intention Fist or Form and Will Fist.

¹⁸ Literally Spring Chant.

religion and spiritual development, women in the martial arts, wrestling and grappling, *Kung Fu/Gung Fu/Gongfu*, written texts, etc.¹⁹

In *The Kung Fu: History, Philosophy and Technique*, David Chow and Richard Spangler argue that the target of *Kungfu* in general is not to end up as a killing machine, but through training to gain health and spiritual awareness.²⁰ It seeks to deepen our real understanding and appreciation for Chinese martial arts. However, it needs to make further efforts to illuminate that the martial arts are truly an ingrained element of Chinese culture, not just sideshow sports.

There are also plenty of books on the techniques of Chinese martial arts. For example *Ba Gua: Hidden Knowledge in the Taoist Internal Martial Art* by John Bracy and Liu Xing-Han,²¹ *Hsing-I: Chinese Mind-Body Boxing* by Robert W Smith,²² *Cultivating the Civil and Mastering the Martial: The Yin and Yang of Taijiquan* by Andrew Townsend,²³ *The Art of Shaolin Kung Fu: The Secrets of Kung Fu for self-defence, health and Enlightenment* by Wong Kiew Kit,²⁴ and so on and so forth. These books, mostly address practice-training exercises and combat applications of martial arts.

More academic writings on the Chinese martial arts have addressed the question of its origins, whether in religion or in the military.

¹⁹ Green, (ed.), *Martial Arts of...*, 16-18/26-32/65-72/119-122/123-135/199-200/299-300/455-462/689-692/705-710/745-748.

²⁰ Chow. David, Spangler. Richard, *Kung Fu: History, Philosophy and Technique*, (Glastonbury: Unique Publications,1980)

²¹ This book is the first literature on Ba Gua (also Known as Ba Gua Zhang, one of the three internal Chinese martial arts) in English which fills a void.

²² The book, initially published in 1974, was one of the first books on Hsing-I (Xingyi and Hsing-I are different English translation schemes for the same “Form and Will Fist” which is one of the three internal Chinese martial arts)

²³ This book is a complete guide for anyone who practices *Taijiquan* (one of the three internal Chinese martial arts). The content covers the full range of *Taijiquan* and includes sections on the basic principles, specific explanations of separate postures, pushing hands and martial applications, etc.

²⁴ The book offers an encyclopedic and practical introduction to *Shaolin Kung Fu*. It includes practical exercises and meditation techniques.

A name that is greatly associated with the study of Chinese martial arts is Charles Holcombe, a member of the history department at the University of Northern Iowa. He published the article, “Theater of Combat: A critical Look at the Chinese Martial Arts” in 1990. The long article gives a balanced introduction and investigation into the historical development of Chinese martial arts. He argues that “In China the martial arts are an aspect of religion, with all of the attendant mystery and miracles. At the same time, the public face of the martial arts has often been that of the entertainer, and the self-image of the martial artist has been thoroughly imbued with motifs drawn from fiction and the theatre. The martial arts of today must be understood as a influence of China’s unique approach to physical combat, Buddho-Taoist religion, and theatre.”²⁵ This work deserves careful consideration since it helped to establish the Chinese martial arts as a legitimate academic pursuit in the early 1990s.

In the Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts published in 2009 by University of Hawai’i Press, Meir Shahar makes a scholarly attempt at explaining how the Buddhist monks of *Shaolin* successfully negotiated the cognitive dissonance caused by commitment to Buddhist principles of non-violence on one hand and mastery of martial arts on the other. The book also succeeds in recognizing and clarifying the role of Taoist thought and cultivation practices in the development of *Shaolin Kung Fu*.²⁶

In Michael M. Tophoff’s paper, “Daoist Principles in the Martial Arts Their Relevance for Illness Prevention”, one of the important arguments is that the internal styles of the Chinese martial arts “integrate and activate certain key Taoist principles

²⁵ Holcombe. Charles, “Theater of Combat: A Critical Look at the Chinese Martial Arts”, *Historian*, vol. 52, no.3, (May, 1990): 430-431.

²⁶ Shahar. Meir, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 199-202.

and make active use of the dialectic reciprocity of movement and stillness in both meditation and training.”²⁷

It is important to mention here the most influential Western scholar, Stanley E. Henning, who studies Chinese Martial Arts.²⁸ He has met many key Chinese martial arts scholars and experts in the People’s Republic of China and collected a lot of valuable writings on various aspects of the subject. In contrast to the above authors, Henning highlights the role of the military in the development of Chinese Martial Arts.

When Stanley E. Henning began to study the history of Chinese martial arts, he first published an article entitled, “The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective”. As he mentions, “This article will, therefore, attempt to paint a picture of the Chinese martial arts in proper perspective, based on available historical evidence and will, in the process, hopefully extract them (the Chinese martial arts) from the realm of myth and pave the way for placing them in the realm of reputable historical research.”²⁹ He describes the origins and development of the Chinese martial arts across Chinese history. He argues that these arts are the developmental physical practices of armed and unarmed combat primarily as military skills and were gradually spread throughout the population and practiced by individuals from all walks of life, including some monks, Taoists and folk religion believers.³⁰

²⁷ Tophoff. Michael M., “Daoist Principles in the Martial Arts Their Relevance for Illness Prevention”, *Journal of Daoist Studies*, vol. 6, (2013): 172.

²⁸ Stanley E. Henning is fluent in Mandarin Chinese and practices *Yang* style *Taijiquan* and *Shanxi Che* Style *Xingyiquan*. He published a plenty of articles in *Military Affairs*, *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, *China Review International*, *Classical Fighting Arts*, *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, *Journal of Chinese Martial Studies*, *Taijiquan Journal*, *The Chen style Taijiquan Journal* and so on. And he also is the contributor for the two important books *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia* and *Martial Arts in the Modern World*.

²⁹ Henning. Stanley E., “The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective”, *Military Affairs*, vol. 45, no. 4, (December, 1981):173.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 174-175.