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## REFLEKSJE HISTORYCZNE, SOCJOLOGICZNE I PSYCHOLOGICZNE / HISTORICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

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### The Japanese fighters are more skillful than their Chinese counterparts, or when the context is more important than the text / Japońscy wojownicy są sprawniejsi niż ich chińscy przeciwnicy lub kiedy kontekst jest ważniejszy niż tekst

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**Abstract:** The present study proposes a reflection over different elements such as: politics, economy, military, society, culture etc. that condition the perception, introduction and acceptance of the martial arts in other cultures. Particularly and from an analysis of the Chinese and Japanese martial arts articles that were published in different Spanish illustrated magazines starting from 1899 to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this study will point out differences between the international success of Japan and its *jujutsu* when compared to the difficulties that China faced at that time and the lack of representation of its martial practices in such an international context.

#### Introduction

The introduction of the Asian martial arts in the West as well as other non-Asiatic countries started over a century ago. Despite its youth, we cannot but be surprised at the staggering number of Asian martial art practices in today's society all around the globe. In Spain – and perhaps the same situation is shared by other western countries –, and without being too precise, *jujutsu* gave way to *judo*. Shortly after *karate* and *aikido* were introduced, they were followed by *taekwondo*. The next wave of Asian martial arts were *wushu* and *taijiquan*, then this number grew with the arrival of *full contact*, *kick boxing*, *choy lee fut*, *wing chun*, *baguazhang*, *jeet kune do*, *xingyiquan*, *ninjutsu* followed by a long list of other martial practices until the most recent of them, such as *Brazilian jiu jitsu* and *mixed martial arts*.

As curious observers, we ask about the reasons that have defined the flow of such practices, many of which have ancestral roots, hence “*they have*

*always been there*”, and have been more or less accessible to foreign observers. The crux of the matter is why have these martial practices been imported in certain historical moment and not in others?

One possible explanation based on the individual characteristics and differences of particular martial arts and assuming a logical evolution, could be that those martial arts that have been more effective, in say self-defence, have replaced those less effective martial arts. The same could be applied to other areas of martial arts in today's society such as sport competitions, education, spiritual or aesthetic fields.

Despite the above mentioned possible explanations, which might have some truth in them, we want to argue that it is not the martial arts themselves, but the *images* that society has of the martial arts that have strongly determined the way in which they have been introduced into the social frame of the western and non-Asian countries. As it was presented by Rodao [2002:

20–21], these images can be “understood as the lens through which one perceives reality”, a sort of lens that not only simplifies, but also affects reality in many ways, and that is key to understanding any human endeavour. Any particular image – as can be the case of any martial art – is influenced by broader images related to the political, racial, religious or cultural make up of a nation. Similarly the different conceptions create complex relationships grouping or distancing themselves in function of their commonalities and differences. In any case and once again paraphrasing Rodao [2202: 25], “it is necessary to know these images during their generative process as well as to the end, because the above mentioned lens can be tainted with many colors, which can be applied at different times and with diverse motives”.

Based on given considerations, this study will aim to explain the importance of the images that accompany the introduction of the martial arts by, analyzing the images about the Chinese and Japanese martial arts that were communicated through different Spanish illustrated magazines at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The illustrated magazines – that is, printed media that complement its content through the use of illustrations – are of great relevance in the history of the press. As was commented by Sánchez [2008], during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, illustrated magazines were a powerful and massive way for cultural diffusion, an authentic “window to the world” – with lenses – through which was transmitted a great deal of information and ideas using text and pictures. Based on these qualities, we agree with Almazán [2001] that the illustrated magazines provide relevant historical information and for that reason they deserve to be studied. At the same time we need to emphasize that the information related to China and Japan was dependent on the material contained in similar foreign publications [Almazán 2001, 2005], so the images contained and transmitted by the Spanish illustrated magazines had a more international focus and not exclusively local.

The search for articles was done in centers of such as the Spain's National Library (Biblioteca Nacional de España), Madrid Municipal Newspaper Library (Hemeroteca Municipal de Madrid), and Digital Newspaper Library of the Spain's National Library (Hemeroteca Digital de la Biblioteca Nacional de España). An analysis of the content found was followed by an interpretation based on the different historical backgrounds that were remnant in China and Japan during that period.

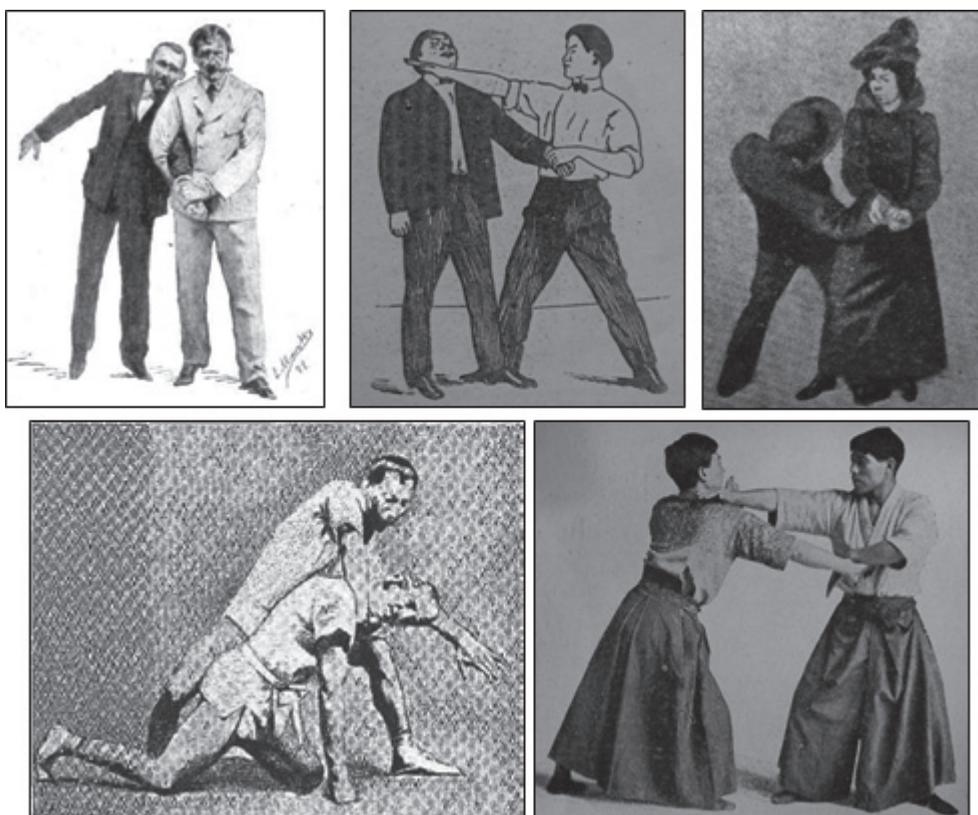
## Jujutsu and Chinese martial arts in Spanish illustrated magazines

The publication of the first articles dealing with *jujutsu* – the first of the Japanese martial arts exported to the West – in the Spanish illustrated magazines can be located during the peak in Japanese cultural awareness by the international community of the time. After Japan's late cultural opening to the world in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the short time span of a few decades, Japan became a world power after several victories in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and its participation in the Boxer Rebellion (1900–1901) as a member of the Eight Nation-Alliance. These victories awoke the interest of the international community towards Japanese culture and more specifically for our study, for the Japanese martial arts.

On June 7, 1899 the *Alrededor del Mundo* [*Around the World*] magazine published in its first issue what can be the first article dealing with Asian martial arts in Spain. The article entitled “El nuevo arte de defenderse” [The New Art of Self-defense] and whose author was Mr. Barton Wright that had a great following in England, presented a “new” system based on practical and scientific principles. The seven articles that comprised the series, pin pointed the influence that the Japanese martial arts had on Barton Wright's system [see: Noble 1999]; in five cases the following corollary was included “It is well known that Japan has the notable fighters in the world, their exploits are wonderful”.

Until 1907, the year in which *jujutsu* made its “official debut” in Spain [Gutiérrez 2003], several illustrated magazines such as: *Alrededor del Mundo*, *Nuevo Mundo* [*New World*], *Por Esos Mundos* [*In those Worlds*], and *Gran Vida* [*Great Life*] all published articles praising the characteristics of *jujutsu* as a revolutionary fighting system. Among these characteristics that were discussed were its scientific approach, practicality, esoterics, elegance, invincibility, its ancient roots and its characteristics as a self defense, gymnastic and sport system [Gutiérrez 2003, 2006, 2007]. Unifying these ideas of tradition, modernity and technical wealth of *jujutsu*, the images that accompany such articles were diverse, they depicted Asian and non-Asian persons – including women – dressed in traditional Japanese as well as western outfits while practising different self-defense techniques of callisthenic exercises (see images of *Group 1*).

In the first – somewhat daring – attempt to synthesize the above mentioned arguments, we



Group 1: Some pictures of Japanese martial arts in Spanish illustrated magazines (1899 to 1905)

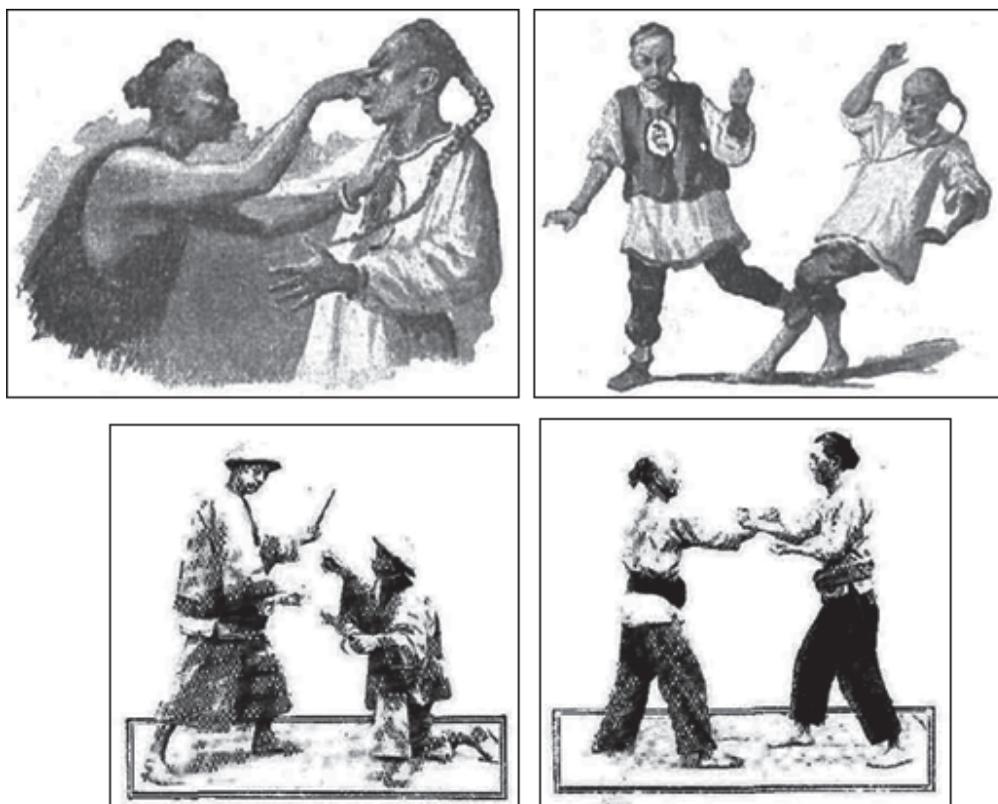
Grupa 1: Kilka ilustracji przedstawiających japońskie sztuki walki w hiszpańskich magazynach ilustrowanych (1899–1905)

could say that *jujutsu* was presented in the illustrated magazines as an ancient fighting system created by the noble samurai class, perfected through practice and the application of scientific principles in the human body to extremes hard to comprehend; as a result developing an art that would allow a weak person to be capable of defeating a stronger opponent with minimal effort. This art overcame the social barriers as not only a self-defense or sport but also as a physical education and moral inspiration for the Japanese people. These concepts are similar to those covered by other authors in a western context [Brousse 2000; Brousse and Matsumoto 1999, 2005; Wingard 2003, 2009]; all these works made the first set of images that *jujutsu* and the Asian martial arts in general were measured by. At the same time this practice started to be strongly introduced in the western powers, in the civil as well as military fields.

As for where the Chinese martial arts are concerned, the number of articles dedicated to their study is limited; the few existing references could be attributed to the awareness brought about the Boxer Rebellion. *Boxers* was the name used to refer to the rebels that raised arms before the colonial powers in China; these rebels made use of the native martial arts. An article of the period describes “The English called these fanatics *boxers*, because their favorite weapon was the fist, using

them to strike lethal blows” [n.a., 1900c].

In this context, the Chinese martial arts were presented as ancient but effective fighting systems, without using a more decorative style in this description as was the case with *jujutsu*. In 1900 the *Alrededor del Mundo* magazine published the article “El arte de los luchadores chinos” [The art of the Chinese fighters], possibly the oldest article dealing with Chinese martial arts in Spain. This article starts off by describing that “the Chinese fighters are almost as famous as their Japanese counterparts, the former make use of tricks and strikes capable to put their opponent out of commission and even to kill him if necessary, by only using their hands and fingers”. The article also describes that the Chinese fighters were experts in using their fingers to strike targets like the eyes to blind and the throat to take the breath out of their adversary. Strikes using the fists to the temple, knee and kick strikes to vital points were also part of their repertoire. If this was not enough, the article affirms that “they do not waste time with courtesy or gentlemanly, the Chinese fighters go straight to the point, which is to finish off their adversary as quickly as possible”, the article then concludes that “few westerners could match the Chinese fighters’ skills”. Along with the article there are two illustrations of fighting techniques with the subjects wearing Chinese outfits, in the first case a



Group 2: Pictures of Chinese martial arts in Spanish illustrated magazines (1900 and 1903)  
 Grupa 2: Ilustracje przedst. Chińskie sztuki walki w hiszpańskich magazynach ilustrowanych (1900 i 1903)

kick to the shin is shown and in the second case a simultaneous strike to the throat and the eyes (see images *Group 2*).

Three years later Juan Mencarini, considered by Rodao and Almazán [2006] as an authority and a key character of the period, who served as a bridge between Spain and East Asia, published in *Por esos Mundos* the article “En el país de los Chinos” [In the country of the Chinese] a wide work dealing with different aspects of Chinese culture, among them a section about “Chinese Sports”. Mencarini describes the practice of double machetes – even though in the picture that accompanies the article the reader can only see one of them – as a military skill that characterize the Chinese army “and the remarkable jumps and pirouettes of the fighters”. Also there is a mention about the popularity of wrestling, even though it points out that “the Japanese wrestlers demonstrate more skill than the Chinese in this exercise”. The picture that accompanies the text shows two practitioners in fighting stance. In this photography the wrestlers wear traditional Chinese outfits (see images *Group 2*).

### Distorted images

Did the Japanese fighters demonstrated, as described by the articles, more skill than the Chinese counterparts?

This argument appears to be questionable due to the fact that there is not enough historical evidence to confirm such superiority. There are no reliable sources about matches between Chinese and Japanese fighters similar to those in the many martial arts movies we are accustomed to and even in the case of such matches, their outcome would be a consequence of the quality of the fighter rather than the style itself. There is, however, clear evidence of the Japanese military superiority over China during the discussed period of time. In the theater of modern warfare, the value and efficacy of the traditional martial arts is very low. However, empty hand skills have value in civilian self-defense and the creation of a dare-to-die attitude in the soldier.

The renown works by Draeger [1996a, b], Ratti y Westbrook [1994] have revealed that after the pacification at the Tokugawa era (1600–1868) in Japan, the traditional martial arts (clásic *bujutsu*) were losing progressively their battlefield realism in favor of other aspects related to ethical behavior, discipline and aesthetics practices (classic *budo*). Other studies by Draeger [1996c] and Patterson [2008] point out that the recovery of traditional martial practices during the Meiji (1868–1912) had a dual goal. On the one hand, it was a humanistic and educational sense as hygienic as well as sport and self defense systems, with the clearer example

coming from Judo founded by Jigoro Kano. The other goal was to see these systems as an educational exercise aimed to the ideological indoctrination of the nation by the imperialist government of Japan during this historical period. It is worthwhile to stress that this ideological indoctrination in the above mentioned studies, in which the practice of the traditional martial arts sought the latter (in the form of cultivation of loyalty toward the emperor and the nation, patriotism, honor, discipline, courage and a spirit of sacrifice) rather than their practical usage of these arts in the battlefield, which loss their importance with the invention of fire arms and their use in modern warfare.

On the other hand, the Chinese martial arts were also suffering of a “crisis of realism”. By the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) the famous general Qi Jiguang (1528–1588) criticized in his book of *Effective Discipline* (1560) (*Jinxiao Xinshu*) the existence of what he called “flowery fists” [Henning 1981] (*hua fa wuyi*), in contrast to those used by the military (*shi zhang wuyi*) (Gewu, 1995). During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) this lost of realism was even more evident, to the point that it affected the military practices and their leaders recognize this fact (CCTV 2008–2009). Hence, the rebels of the Boxer Rebellion, who were mostly civilians, fought with their “flowery” skills and outdated weaponry an enemy well equipped and trained in the latest military tactics.

The above description can be complemented by considering the influences that the Chinese martial arts had over the Japanese martial arts in their long and violent history. Particularly, in the case of *jujutsu* which, during the Tokugawa period [see: Henning 2001 and Mol 2001], for some styles and/or techniques had Chinese origins and probably the same practical effectiveness.

Therefore, as we have pointed out, if we could question the superiority of the Japanese warriors over their Chinese counterparts, it has to be based on the obvious military superiority of Japan over China in this time period [Whitney 1983; Gelber 2008]. This superiority was demonstrated in different military conflicts in which Japan succeeded making it the Asian superpower. Once again David had defeated Goliath, and in this case twice.

Japan’s military success attracted the West’s attention not only to its military development, but also towards other aspects of Japan’s culture, generally in praiseworthy tones [Almazán 2001, 2004, 2005]. Japan demonstrated to be a vital country on the world stage that incorporated modernity at gigantic steps, however, Japan also preserved its most precious cultural traditions; Japan became the most western country of Asia.

Even though this conception was tinged with racial superiority overtones [Rodao 2002; for a specific description regarding *jujutsu* see: Gutiérrez 2003], it was very attractive to the western audience. In the particular case of the martial arts this East-West fusion was manifested in a paradigmatic way in *jujutsu*, a modern product (scientific, sportsmanlike, useful as self-defence in a dangerous urban setting, morally educational) that maintained strong roots in those traditional practices and concepts among the most important one the idealized code of honour of the samurai (*bushido*) [Wingard 2003, 2009]. This concept favoured the import and introduction of *jujutsu* in military, sports, educational and performance fields in the West and in many other non-Asiatic countries.

On the contrary, the status and international image of China, a country colonized and overpowered by the military superiority of western nations and Japan during the First and Second Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860), the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the first Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Rebellion, found itself at a level much inferior than Japan. China was considered as a decadent empire –inhabited by idle, lazy and untrustworthy people– in words of Rodao [2002], with barbarian and cruel characteristics according to Almazán [2005] – and a cake ready to be split among the colonial powers. In fact, the Chinese people were given the derogative name of “the sick men of Asia” due to the incapacity of the government to defend their own country. As an example of this perception we can quote the commentary by J. Lapoulide [1900] in relation to the role the western powers had to have toward the Boxer Rebellion:

If there is the need to fight, let civilization fight off savagery (...) If they [the Chinese] had the qualities of any western nation, this enterprise would be unimaginable. Even more, if this was the case, then it is us who should be thinking what we could do against the Chinese. / Moreover, the racial and civilization differences can be overcome with ways within reach of even the more inferior. It is this, the yellow danger that was foreseen, depicted on a famous drawing, by the German emperor. / Those whose advice to westernize (Costa dixit) the sons of the Celestial Empire, have not considered that if this was so (something that is very difficult but not impossible in time), it will bring the ruin of the western world. / However, right now we see that to tame the colossus it is not necessary the use of extreme force based on its size but on its strength. And it is this, that is lacking. A few hundred European marines and soldiers were enough to keep at bay millions of rebels, boxers, pugilists or whatever one wants to call them (...) much had to have changed from previous wars, even in the Sino-Japanese War, for this events turned out to be different.

Under these conditions, the social image transmitted of the Chinese martial arts was placed in the field of the exotic and anecdotic, without an effective transfer to the West. In words of Rodao [2002: 59], “It is enough to listen to a suggestive tale with descriptions of their kind or even seen them in a drawing or framed in a photograph to confirm the previous opinions about their savagism or how strange they are. However, there was no interest in understanding this culture”. As an example, the image of a Chinese fighter, half shaved, with a hanging shirt and attacking in a cruel manner the throat and eyes of a surprised foe with a long hair tail.

## Conclusions

This study emphasizes the importance of the study of contextual factors in the comprehension of the historical evolution of the martial arts, as well as the social images in their transmission. In the case that was analyzed, these contextual factors explain the construction of images used to differentiate the Chinese and Japanese martial arts, and also the many reasons the Japanese martial arts were introduced in the west and non-Asian countries ahead of the Chinese martial arts. In some the observers wrote about the level of skill of the Japanese fighters when compared with their Chinese counterparts based their conclusions by extrapolating the reality (the Japanese military superiority) to a different level (the efficacy of the traditional combat skills), polluting the information that was presented to the readers of such magazines (and possibly these arts' future followers).

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**Słowa kluczowe:** Chiny, Japonia, Zachód, sztuki walki, jujutsu, wyobrażenia

#### Streszczenie

Niniejsza praca proponuje refleksje dotyczące różnych elementów z dziedzin m.in.: polityki, ekonomii, wojskowości, socjologii, kultury itp., które warunkują percepcję, przedstawienie i uznanie sztuk walki w innych kulturach. W szczególności analizie podlegają artykuły dotyczące chińskich i japońskich sztuk walki, które opublikowane zostały w różnorodnych hiszpańskich magazynach ilustrowanych począwszy od 1899 do początku 20-tego wieku. Praca ta wykazuje różnice pomiędzy międzynarodowym sukcesem Japonii i jej jujutsu w porównaniu do trudności, z którymi musiały się wówczas zmierzyć Chiny i brakiem reprezentacji swoich praktyk sztuk walki w owym międzynarodowym kontekście.