

Deepening the China-Africa Cultural Understanding: Difference Between Chinese and African Martial Arts Conceptions

Taling Tene Rodrigue*

Center for African Film and TV, Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, No. 688, Yingbin Avenue, Jinhua, Zhejiang, China, Postal Code: 321004

Abstract

China and Africa have become culturally closer as the relationship and economic endowment between both sides are growing in leaps and bounds. The martial arts culture can provide a new outlook to deepen the China-Africa cultural understanding as well as to open new windows for other cultures to better connect with Chinese and African people. In this regard, this paper looks into the African and Chinese conceptions of martial arts cultures from historical and traditional perspectives. In fact, the trinity made of “*Combat+Spirituality+Dance*” that constitutes the core values of African Martial Arts is investigated. In addition, some explanatory examples such as *Engolo*, *Dambe*, *Laamb*, *Donga*, *Zulu Stick Fighting* etc., still practiced in Africa today and that show the uniqueness of the African martial arts culture are displayed. Moreover, the Chinese concept of *Wushu* which has its own unique core philosophy rooted in Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism is examined. These cultural complexes of knowledge, beliefs and practices created by the histories of China and Africa have set up avenues for new possibilities to boost the China-Africa cultural exchange agenda and deepen the mutual understanding between both sides.

Keywords: African Martial Arts; Chinese Wushu; Cultural Understanding; Martial Arts Culture;

1.Introduction

From barbarism to civilization, humans in their development processes, had naturally created series of fighting techniques and martial practices. Africa is known to be the cradle of earliest civilizations (Diop 1991) and the present day rising continent. Martial practices such as *Engolo*, *Dambe*, *Laamb*, *Donga*, *Zulu Stick Fighting* and so on, have a long standing history and still exist in today's African societies, and together are constituencies of the larger family of *African Martial Arts*. These cultural patterns are reservoirs of African people's unique ways of living through space-time and are reflective of the connection between African people and their environment. Some authors such as Philippe Laburthe-Tolra (Laburthe-Tolra 1985) has emphasized the “Duality of the African Warriors”. He explained that since ancient time, traditional warriors of the Beti tribe in Cameroon could set alliances with other non-human consciousness and connect their bodies through *Mebiang*. Ludovic Mba Ndzeng (Mba Ndzeng 2006) also explained that “*Eseneya*” in the Fang traditional wrestling (middle Africa) is a frequently used supernatural phenomenon that aimed at connecting wrestlers to supernatural beings through a well-designed ritual. Similar phenomena could be noticed in traditional African martial arts cultures and could share some light on a unique conception of *African Martial Arts*. From an African perspective, what is the cultural connotation of the concept *African Martial Arts* and what makes it unique in feature and style? On the other hand, China is known to have long standing history of martial arts and is one of the birthplace of human civilization as well. In their development process, the Chinese people have shaped their own unique ways to deal with their opponents on the basis of some core philosophies such as Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism (Po & Xiao & Dong 2006)...and this has given rise to a unique conception of Chinese martial philosophy. In their languages, the Chinese people call their martial arts “*武术*”(pronounced *Wu-Shu*), appellation that does not entirely matched with the western expression “*Martial Arts*”. How to understand the Chinese expression *Wushu*? And what makes it different from other martial arts and particularly from the *African Martial Arts*? what is the cultural gap between the martial systems of China and Africa and in which extent could they complement? The following lines examine the above questions.

2.Genesis of the Chinese and African Martial Arts concepts.

2.1 Delimitation of the Concept “*Martial Arts*”

Studies show that, since ancient times the phenomenon of “fighting against the beast for survival” or “competing with the fellow human being for land or resources”, etc. have globally being in existence in any corner of the world where human have appeared (Darwin 1859), and these struggles have fueled up the desire for humans to improve the efficiency and development of more and more advanced martial techniques. As result, the forms and types of the world martial arts have become diverse, different in style and unique in features. Each nation has come to developed its own unique system, such as Chinese Wushu, Japanese karate, Korean Taekwondo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, American Kick-boxing, Thai Boxing etc.(Wang Gang 2008). Throughout the long history of the origins and development of the world's martial arts systems, it is not difficult to realize that they have certain

common features, such as “punching”, “kicking” and “wrestling”. But at the same time possess fundamental differences. For example, in addition to their basic elements of “attack” and “defense”, Chinese and African martial arts have their own artistic forms. The Chinese people call their martial arts “Wushu(武术)”, appellation that carries a unique meaning above the semantic expressed by the western term “Martial Arts”. In fact, the expression “Martial Arts” is derived from Latin, meaning “Art of Mars”(Clements 2001), Mars here represents the Ancient Roman god of war. The original meaning of “Martial” is military, or is related to military activities. Such as “Martial law”, “Martial music”, “Martial spirit” and so on. The term “Art” on the other hand can be interpreted as an artistic or technical skill; it reflects an exquisite practice. In a word, from a western perspective, the original meaning of Martial Arts is “military techniques” in reference to a technical use of force to achieve a certain goal (defense or attack against a given adversary), which symbolizes the tactics used by the military in ancient times (prior to fire weapons). It includes attack and defense tactics, cold weapon tactics, troops tactics, and so on. Because of this, many scholars such as Donn F. Draeger, Robert W. Smith and other people think that some fighting systems do not fit into the appellation Martial Arts (Draeger, Smith 1981), especially those systems that historically are unrelated to the war, including some combat systems created by civilians (such as some modern combat sports and performances). According to these schools of thoughts, “Fighting Arts” or “Fighting Systems” are more suitable appellations for such varieties of combat systems. However, the modern concept of Martial Arts covers all aspects of combat-related systems, including karate, judo, boxing, wrestling, and fighting sports. The anthropologist Thomas A. Green of Texas University and the American editor Joseph R. Svinth gave a more complete overview of the modern definition of Martial Arts as: “*A systematic bodies of knowledge, belief and practice that are associated with methods of attack and defense against human adversaries and their extrahuman allies*”(Green & Joseph 2010). In other words, Martial Arts are cultural bodies practices related to attack and defense used by humans to deal with their opponents (human or non-human). In this sense, Chinese martial arts or Chinese Wushu Just as Japanese martial arts, Korean martial arts, European martial arts and African martial arts”, etc. fit into the western definition as a subset of the large family of the world Martial Arts.

2.2 African Martial Arts Conception

2.2.1 The Trinity “Combat+Spirituality+Dance”

From the above explanation of Martial Arts, the concept of *African Martial Arts* can be understood as a cultural complex of body knowledge, beliefs and practices created by African people in the course of history and in accordance with their needs of dealing with their adversaries. However, from an African perspective, the understanding and definition of the concept *African Martial Arts* may differ from that of the West and the East, due to the cultural factors and the uniqueness of African people to deal with nature and their opponents. In fact, Africa is a diverse society with many languages, different ethnic groups have different words to represent their understanding of martial arts. Such as *Nekang* in *Bamilekes* people of Cameroon, *Laamb* in the *Wolof* people of Senegal, *Umladlo Wezinduku* in the Zulu of Southern Africa, and *Mgba* in *Igbo* people of Nigeria etc. If the core philosophy of African Martial Arts could be summarized in three words, it should be “*Combat+Spirituality+Dance*”. The component *Combat* here is understood as the “military skills” or “fighting techniques” involved, so to speak, the practical pursuit of defeating an opponent through body combat. The component *Spirituality* as the basis of all African religious beliefs, is mostly expressed through ritual practices, the ultimate goal is to connect the human body and the spiritual realm, and therefore elevate the African martial artist to a supernatural dimension from where the physical combat could be won in the most efficient way. For example, the fighter can be protected from attacks or can easily defeat an opponent with less possible effort on the counterattack. In certain cases, the African martial artist could paired with non-human or bodiless entities to achieve its goal. For instance, herbs, invisible consciousness or beings, or the simple usage of words such as poetries, incantations, etc., are often involved through rigorous ritual and initiation processes and are generally used for “self-defense” or “counterattack” purposes. The African Martial Arts are finally embodied in the “Dance” culture. The African Dance is more or less an ideological expression of the martial artist’s (dancer) soul through the rhythm of music, organized, beautified and expressed through the body’s movements. Just as the Congolese Dancer Malonga casquelord (1947-2003) once noticed: The African Dance contains a lot of fighting techniques, but their usage and expression depend upon the dancer’s intentions. When the dancer wants to express beauty, he expresses beauty; when the dancer wants to express fighting, he expresses fighting. If the dancer wants to have the monkey's agility, he must first take “The Monkey's Medicine”, if the dancer wants to have the speed of the snake, he must first take “The Snake's Medicine”(Thomas & Joseph 2010). In short, the African Martial arts contain in one hand, the practical pursuit of body combat, contain in the other hand the spiritual ingredients that connect the visible and invisible world, and finally it contains the techniques of the rhythm embodied in the African Dance. In a word, “*Combat+Spirituality+Dance*” appear to be the core constituencies of the concept *African Martial Arts*.

2.2.2 Archaeological findings on African Martial Arts

The earliest archaeological evidence of African martial arts can be traced back to ancient Egypt (*Kemet*) around 3,100 B.C. *The Stone Tablet of Narmer* discovered by the British Egyptologist James Edward Quibbell (1867-1935) , tells us that the military strength of *Kemet* (ancient Egypt) and *Nubia* (present-day Sudan) was inseparable from the prevalence of religious rituals.



Figure 1. *The Stone Tablet of Narmer* (about 3100 BC), discovered by James Edward Quibbell in 1897-1898 (Diop 1992).

Professor Cheikh Anta Diop, an Egyptologist scholar from Senegal (West Africa), explained in details the significance and symbols on the tablet in his book <An African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality>. According to him, the inscriptions describe the pharaoh standing behind the army with an oxtail in his hand. The army is made of five *Nubian* (Sudanese) chiefs military. The first four of them hold clubs with totems of different significance. The servant behind the pharaoh holds his sandals in one hand and a water jug in the other, which in the ancient Egypt (*Kemet*) meant that the pharaoh is preparing to perform the ritual of sacrifice to the gods. In brief, *The Stone Tablet of Narmer* depicts the site of a sacrifice ceremony after the victory over the enemy (Diop 1992). This suggests that since ancient times, African military and religious practices were somehow connected. In the armies of many ancient African kingdoms, ritual sacrifices to the gods before and after the war were common, and even today such traditions are still found in some African countries. In short, early African understanding of martial practices was inseparable from religion and ritual processes, these processes often involved music and dance. In addition, at *Beni Hasan*, in four separate tombs, there are hundreds of paintings on limestone walls that for the most part, have since decayed. The paintings are of African martial artists using a variety of wrestling holds and locks. The illustrations total well over 500 individual pairs of wrestlers who are executing hundreds of sophisticated techniques. These images are mainly recorded in the tombs of governors, or princes by the names of *Baqet III*, his son *Khety*, and his son *Amenemhat*. They all reigned in *Mahez* during the 11th and 12th Dynasties. Illustrations were also found in the well known tomb of Prince *Khemehotep*. The paintings feature pairs of fighters who are wrestling, as well as illustrations of warriors using other forms of unarmed combat that employ kicking and punching techniques. There are scenes of martial artists using weapons such as lances, short sticks, daggers, staffs, and bow and arrows. There are even scenes of warriors utilizing military technology such as a *testudo*, which is a shielding device used during the siege of a castle. The earliest representation of a castle in the world can be found illustrated on an incense holder that originates from Nubia, the mother civilization of ancient Egypt. All total, these paintings in Africa represent the most ancient, and prolific depiction of martial arts on Earth (Hayes 2008).



Figure 2. Image of military training in ancient Egypt found at the 15th tomb of Beni Hasan (Beni Hasan's tomb, 2000 BC)

In his work <Nubia Wrestling: The Origin of The Art (1990)>, the African-American sculptor Nigel Binns highlighted The ancient Nubian Wrestling (including The battle map, found in the great cemetery of Beni Hassan) and its close connection with ancient Greece, ancient Rome and even modern Western martial arts. He further

explained that, in 776 BC, the Greeks began to practice wrestling in honour of the African god Amon, known in Greek as Zeus. The recognition of Greece-Roman wrestling is attributed by all ancient Greek and Roman scholars to the illustrations on the walls of ancient tombs discovered in Beni Hassan in ancient Egypt. These battle pictures show a complete system of fighting of ancient Nubia, the system only reached its climax in ancient Egypt. Egyptian antiquities scholar C. A. Diop proposed earlier that, the ancient Greek pantheon was a copy on African gods, the Greeks only changed the nomenclature (Diop 1992). Nijel Binns goes further to explain that ancient Greece was the first western civilization to combine Martial arts and religious rituals, but he stressed that the ancient Greeks copied ancient African traditional cultures, even though they did not fully apply them (Nigel 1990). Besides the accounts of ancient Greek historians themselves, information confirming the Greek's access to Egyptian arts and sciences were recorded by 17th and 18th century Europeans in Egypt such as Edme F. Jomard, James Burton, Jean Champollion, Robert Hay, and others. The most complete and often referred to archeological study of the Mahez tombs were compiled by the Englishman Percy Newberry. Working for the Archaeological Survey of Egypt between 1890 and 1892, Newberry carried out excavations at Beni Hasan. The results were published in a two volume work as the First and Second Memoirs of the ASE (Percy E. Newberry, Beni Hasan, Part I [London, 1893] and Beni Hasan, Part II [London, 1893]. He states that graffiti on the walls that were written in Greek further proves that the Greeks were frequent visitors to the tombs in ancient times (Nigel 1990). In short, the military power of ancient Greece and Rome was well known, but both were built on the foundation of African martial culture. In addition, along the Nile civilization, ancient Ethiopia and ancient Nubia were prior to ancient Egypt. The Ethiopians themselves say the ancient Egyptians were one of their migrants, brought into Egypt by Osiris (Diop 1992).the Nubian military was the most influential in the ancient Nile civilization. Ancient Egypt was repeatedly attacked by foreign invaders and saved many times by the Nubian military (Diop 1992). This explains why there are five Nubian soldiers standing in front of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh on the stone tablet of NAMER, it also explains the closer relationship between ancient Nubia and ancient Egypt. The tomb of prince Masathi of Assiout, in the 12th dynasty of ancient Egypt (around 2000 BC), has also been found with an ancient Egyptian statue engraved with the ancient Nubian army. The Nubians were called “fierce warriors” by the ancient Egyptians. The Nubian territory is also known as "Ta-seti or Ta Khentit", meaning “Land of the Bow” (Geoff 2011).



Figure 3. Ancient Egyptian sculptures showing the ancient Nubian army (Sudanese Army about 2000 BC) at the Cairo Museum (Diop 1992).

In short, base on the present archaeological findings, African martial arts history can be traced back to at least 3100 years BC, that is to speak, at least 5100 years of palpable history. In addition, African martial arts are deeply rooted in the ancient Nile civilization and since ancient time have integrated “*Combat+Spirituality+Dance*”.

2.2 The Chinese Concept of Wu-Shu(武术)

The Chinese concept of *Wu-Shu* (武术) is profound and contains rich cultural connotation. Chinese martial arts have a long standing recorded history (Deng Ming 2009). The term *Wu-Shu* first appeared in China during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589 AD) on “*yǎn wǔ xiū wén* (偃武修文)’s proposition” (Dai Guobin, 2011), talking about civilian governance without military rule. Literally, *Wu-Shu* is the methods and techniques of “Wu 武”. Meanwhile, “Shu 术” expresses the artistic skills involved in an action. So, what does the character “Wu 武” means? According to professor Dai Guobin, Dean of the School of Chinese Wushu, Shanghai University of Sport, the Chinese people have two main understandings of the character “武”(Dai Guobin 2011): The original meaning of “武 Wu” is related to military affairs, the use of violent means and military national governance and laws. In this regard, the Chinese thinker Confucius in the Spring and Autumn Period of the Zhou Dynasty (202 BC), in accordance with China's *Zhouwenwang* civil governance, *Zhouwuwang* military governance, the state administration of the law were divided and classified as “*Wen-Wu*”, then idealized as “Civil and Military Ways” of governing, from then on the famous philosophy of alternate “tension with relaxation”, “soft with hard” etc., was known. Since then, many people have tried to understand the meaning of

Wushu from its military origination, and so *Wushu* was defined as the art of attack and defense.

The second understanding of “武 Wu” is “止戈 Zhi-Ge”, namely “Stop Fighting”. According to the oracle bone scripts the character can be part in two components (Dai Guobin 2011):

$$\text{武 (Wu)} = \text{戈 (dagger-axe, weapons)} + \text{止 (stop, footleg)}$$

The understanding of “武 WU” as stop fighting “止戈 Zhi-Ge” began in the Spring and Autumn Period, there is a Chinese classic called <Chunqiu Zuozhuan> in which is recorded a part of history as follows: King *Chu-Zhuang* defeated *Jin's* division, when the minister requested to display the enemy's corpses in form of Pagoda to exhibit their victory, king *Zhuang* used the character “武 Wu” as “止戈 Zhi-Ge”, and rejected the suggestion of the minister. The understanding of "武 WU" as stop fighting “止戈 Zhi-Ge” is scattered among various Chinese cultural classics. For example, the Chinese ancient book, <Yizhuan> says “The best army does not kill people”, another ancient Chinese book <Sunzi's Art of War> mentioned that “the ideal army subdue the enemy without fighting”.

In other words, in traditional Chinese classics, “Wu” is a military concept that expresses virtuous and morality in the process of dealing with adversaries. The two different understanding of the concept have led to the formation of two cultural forms of *Wushu*: *Taolu* (routine performances) and *Sanda* (free combat), *Sanda* retains its military fighting's main features (such as the pursuit of practical effectiveness in the fight through real opponent), when the *Taolu* (the aesthetic form) reflect the Military Fighting ideal (Imaginary or subtitle opponent).

Table 1. Military Interpretation and Cultural Formation of “武 Wu”

“武 Wu”	Military Interpretation	Development of Wushu	
		Development path	Cultural Formation
1st understanding	Use force	<i>Combat</i> (Attack/defense)	<i>Sanda</i> (Practical effectiveness of fight)
2nd understanding	Non use of force	<i>Routine</i> (Dance/Performance)	<i>Taolu</i> (Innovative aesthetic play)

Of course, other martial arts cultures have developed similar philosophy of “morality in combat” in the course of history, such as Japan's “Bushido”. The concept of Bushido was first discovered in the Japanese classic <Shoku Nihongi> written in 797 AD (Kazuhiko 2014). The book records that the term “Bushi 武士 (Japanese warrior)” first appeared in Japan around 721 AD, which is generally referred to the “Virtuous Warrior” committed to peace and justice in the Confucian philosophy. In a word, the philosophical thought of “non use of force” or “Virtuous Warrior” is a feature of Chinese Martial Arts that makes the concept of *Wushu* unique.

3. Explanatory Examples of African Martial Arts.

African martial arts culture have evolved following the development process of the African society, many African combat systems did failed to survive the long course of history and foreign interference. In fact, the African continent suffered three major invasions that caused irreparable damages to the people and civilizations on the continent: the first one around 525 BC, when ancient Egypt (*Kemet*) suffered successive and continuous attacks from the Persians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans; the black civilization of several thousand years gradually declined and was finally destroyed (Diop 1992). The continent witnessed an unprecedented massive black African migration from north Africa southward. The second foreign invasion took place around the 7th century AD, when Middle-East Asians conquered North Africa, they made that part of the Continent Arab ever since. Black Africans were further pushed southward across the Sahara desert. The third major foreign invasion of Africa happened under European expansion and imperialism of the 14-15th centuries. The European led slave trade caused unprecedented and irreversible damages to the culture and people of Africa. The westernization of Africa took place from languages to traditional customs, from the ways of living to the ways of worshiping. The martial arts cultures as well did not remained unchanged. Many African soldiers and military chiefs were gunned down or caught as war prisoners then traded into slavery to the Americas. Therefore, many combat systems and martial techniques mainly developed and practiced by African fighters got extincted or re-emerged but westernized. However, some African martial arts styles did survived and can still be found in African societies nowadays. Here are some typical but non-exhaustive ones:

Engolo: The Nigerian scholar T.J.Desch Obi (2008) explains that: “Engolo's evolution is likely to have come from the ancestors' understanding of *Kalunga*, the inverted spiritual world” (Desch Obi 2008). The unique story about the origins of Engolo is outlined in the oral history of the *Kunene's* clan, which is said to have been passed on generations to generations through their deceased ancestors. “*Kalunga*” refers to the inverted world (the spiritual realm), which is a basic concept in African Bantu cosmology. In the *Kalunga* world, ancestors are said

to be walking upside down. This is why when practicing Engolo, the body is mainly supported by the two arms, while the feet are most the time flying in the air. In addition, “like most African fighting combats, the Engolo ritual is inseparable from music and dance”(Desch Obi 2008). During the colonial era, Engolo was spread to the Americas through enslaved Africans (early 16th century, the Portuguese entered the southwestern region of Africa and enslaved a large number of African people to South America. Most of the Africans were from today’s Angola, Congo, Namibia etc. In order to strengthen their bodies and minds to survive the oppressor’s brutal treatments and to keep alive the hope to gain back their dignity, the enslaved African on the basis of their old practices of Engolo, created the “Capoeira Dance”, an artistic oriented form of *Engolo* adapted to their enslaved conditions. Engolo in its original form was very brutal and mostly war oriented (tho its smooth version was sometimes used in religious rituals and ceremonies contexts), it used “reverse kicks” for attacks, and “acrobatics moves” for defense. Capoeira has kept many features of its African ancestor “Engolo” but mostly applied in performances and entertainment, and is today well-known as the “Brazilian War Dance”. It is to be noticed that Engolo is still practiced in the present day Angola in Africa.



Figure 4. Engolo Practice, photo taken by the author T.J.Desch Obi in the countryside while doing field work in Africa (Desch Obi 2008).

Dambe: *Dambe* is a fighting system in western Africa originating from the Hausa people (mainly in northern Nigeria, southern Niger and northern Cameroon). *Dambe* fighting style originated from the ancient African soldiers using the “Spear-Shield” fighting method. In ancient times, African soldiers fought holding the spear in one hand and the shield in the other. *Dambe* has evolved from this mode of fighting; in its modern style, the fighter's hand tightly wrapped in a boxing glove is called “spear”, mainly used for attack, while the other hand called “shield”, without glove or any protection is prohibited from attacking and can only be used in defense. *Dambe’s* competition is divided into three rounds, kicks are allowed from both feet, but only one hand (the spear) is allowed to punch. Although the origins of *Dambe* lack written sources (just as many other African martial arts), but still they are scholars such as Edward Powe , whom in the study of Nigerian martial arts culture, noticed that the *Dambe’s* “spear-shield” pattern is strikingly similar to the fighters’ images of the 12th and 13th dynasties (about 1975-1640 BC) in ancient Egypt(Powe 1994). In today’s haussa societies, *Dambe* is mostly practiced in Traditional and modern (sport) form. Whether traditional or modern, percussive music and chants precede the competition. The music and chants are more often associated with both supporters and competitors, and serve to call boxers to the ring, taunt opponents, and encourage audience participation. In traditional *Dambe* competition, amulets are often used as forms of supernatural protection. Amulets are seen in modern urban bouts, too, but officials generally discourage the use of magical protection on the grounds of fairness. It is still common that amulets are placed in the feather filled pillows which fighters place in their wrapped fists, and fighters often scar their striking arm, rubbing salves and resins into the healing wounds which are meant to provide extra-strength for defence(Green 2005).

Donga: In Ethiopia (East Africa) to the south of the Nile, the *Suri* people invented an aggressive stick fighting system deriving from local customs of using long sticks called *Donga* to protect their cattle against wild animals and other dangers. From ancient times to the present days, the *Donga* stick fighting has only one rule : “The challenger(s) should not kill his(their) opponent(s)”(Olavarria 2014) . In a duel, it is common to bleed or to get seriously wounded. The duel is very compelling, because every attack is full of force and no mercy, and fighters have no body protection. The *Donga* competition is very flexible, with 20 to 30 contestants on both sides, challenging by turns. Each contestant is allowed to possess only one stick in the *Donga* competition, and the victory is won as soon as one party bleeds down or surrenders.



Figure 5. Donga stick fighting (Olavarria 2014).

Laamb: The traditional Laamb wrestling takes its root from the wrestling tradition of the Serer people, formally a preparatory exercise for war among the warrior classes depending on the technical readiness (Senghor, Brunel 2007). It was also an initiation rite among the Serers people. It is said that the word *Njom* derives from the Serer principle of Jom (from Serer religion), meaning heart or honour in the Serer language. (Gravrand 1990) The *Njom* principle covers a huge range of values and beliefs including economic, ecological, personal and social values. Wrestling stems from the branch of personal values of the *Njom* principle. One of the oldest known and recorded wrestler in Senegambia was Boukar Djilak Faye (a Serer) who lived in the 14th century in the Kingdom of Sine. He was the ancestor of the Faye Paternal Dynasty of Sine and Saloum (both Kingdoms in present-day Senegal). In some parts of Senegal (West Africa), the traditional wrestling is even more popular than football. The current forms of wrestling are mainly competitions and performances. Contestants compete, and punches are allowed, which makes the wrestling more exciting. The openings are usually preceded by dance performances and ritual ceremonies. Even though strange to outsiders, dance and rituals practices are indispensable in the *Laamb* competition and make it unique (Olavarria 2014). Although the *Laamb* traditional wrestling is actually practiced only on the continent of Africa, it is estimated that up to 50,000 visitors from around the globe and millions locally are fans and some of the top ranked athletes can get very substantial incomes, sometime paid as much as \$200,000 per game.



Figure 6. **Laamb wrestling** (Indoor Senegalese wrestling, Paris-Bercy, 2013)

Zulu Stick Fighting: The Zulu people mainly live in southern Africa, their war history records, especially that of the 19th century is awe-inspiring (Coetzee 2000). there is no doubt that the most famous Zulu figure in history is the leader *Shaka kasenzangakhona* well-known as *Sheka Zulu* (1787-1828). Facing the colonists advanced fire weapons, the leader Shaka developed the *Zulu Stick Fighting* to a unprecedented stage. In today's Zulu people daily customs, the combination of music, dance and Cudgel still reflects the historical relationship between the Zulu people and the military legacy of the leader *Sheka*. In the traditional Zulu society, the social responsibility

of teenagers starts from the age of 5 and 6. Under adults supervision, young boys gradually develop their sticks techniques to protect their cattle when herding them. It is only at the puberty age that they began fighting with sticks in public, mainly in famous contexts such as “Umgangela”, “Iphapu (The Lung-festival)”, wedding ceremonies and other public rituals ceremonies. Historically, it is said that Zulu fighters have used spiritual or supernatural ingredients before or during the combat in order to control the course of the battle (Coetzee 2000). For example fetishes such as “Impi Kayibon” can blind the opponent's eyes, sometimes the used of poetry and incantations such as “Izibongo” or “Izigiyo” were noticed. Nowadays in some South Africa's urban areas, people can be seen gathering to perform Zulu sticks, or competing at certain occasions, or taking courses from advanced teachers



Figure 7. Zulu leader Sheka Zulu 1787-1828.



Figure 8. Zulu regiment dancing in the cattle pen of Shaka Zulu recorded by European tourists (1827) during their visit to the Zulu Kingdom.

The above mentioned are some tiny examples among the large and diverse family of African Martial Arts that have survived the cultural destruction navigating the continent the past two millennium. Their modern practices could still reflect the ancestral bodies of knowledge and wisdom embedded in a long standing African culture history and that embodied the African ways of dealing with their adversaries as well as the close relationship between the African martial artist and nature.

4. Wushu and Chinese philosophy

From an historical point of view, Chinese Wushu and different types of Chinese philosophies are closely related and mutually associated (Po & Xiao & Dong 2006). The Chinese Wushu is an embodiment of core Chinese philosophies and beliefs systems such as Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. In the course of history, the Chinese martial arts have evolved from means of survival to the ways of living than. Martial arts have become parts of Chinese religious beliefs and until today, have a considerable influence on how people view themselves connected to the rest of the creation.

4.1 Wushu and Yin-Yang

During the course of history, ancient Chinese martial artists integrated the philosophical dialectical thoughts such as the Yin-Yang into their martial practices, enriching the ideological theories of *Wushu*. Therefore, Wushu became more like a realistic carrier of Chinese philosophy, a way of life rather than a simple physical practice. The word “Tai-Qi” for example, first appeared in <The Book of Changes> . The book says: “*I (The Change) has Tai-Qi, which gives birth to two states. Two states then developed into four images, and the four images gave rise to eight hexagrams*”.



Figure 9. Tai-Qi Yin-Yang Ba-Gua image representation

In the figure9 above, the white side represents the *Yang* and the black one the *Yin* (the two states). When the Yang reaches its apogee, it becomes Yin and vice-versa. In Chinese culture, Yin and Yang are interchangeable, which is also reflected in Chinese Wushu as well as life phenomenon: day-night, cold-heat, good-bad, etc. Sixty-four hexagrams (*Gua*) circumnavigate the two states of Tai-QI (energy), each of which is made of six parallel broken or unbroken line segments (*Yao*). Each of the sixty-four hexagrams has a unique designation; its image (*xiang*) refers to a particular natural object and conveys the meaning of human events and activities. The overall symbol thus has generated a special way to decipher the universe. It mainly incorporates three elements: *xiang* (images), *shu* (numbers), and *li* (meanings). They act as the mediators between heavenly cosmic phenomena and earthly human everyday life.

4.2 Wushu and Taoism

The roots of Taoism go back at least to the 4th century BC. Early Taoism drew its cosmological notions from the School of *Yin-Yang* and then expounded a philosophical system about how to keep human behavior in accordance with the alternating cycles of nature. The <The Book of Changes> (Tao Te Ching 道德经), a compact book containing teachings attributed to Laozi(老子), is widely considered the keystone work of the Taoist tradition, together with the later writings of Zhuangzi. Different expressions of the core principle of the “Yin-Yang” philosophy elaborated in <The Book of Changes> , such as the combination of “dynamic and static, softness and strength, compression and extension, quick and slow etc.” can be observed in Wushu routines (*Taolu*) practices and most importantly in the Tai-Qi boxing. The Taiji-Quan, Bagua boxing and many other internal styles of Chinese Wushu known as *Wudang styles* are mainly influenced by the ancient Taoism in China. Tao is one of the most important thoughts of ancient Chinese philosophy. Tao reveals the world's original truth and is the origin of everything with the Yin-Yang as backbone. Taoism advocates the self-governing or self-ruling principle embedded in all existing things in the universe. By following the simple course of nature, people and things can rule themselves (waters for example follow the natural course of their canals). This current of thoughts influence the Chinese Wushu and is reflected on the Wushu theory of “Attack and Defense”, and has integrated the theory celestial being, the necromancy, astrology, medicine, etc. into one set called “Neijia-Quan” or “Internal Boxing”.

4.3 Wushu and Confucianism

The Confucian philosophy mainly deal with the morality and personality of the Chinese martial artist, it has contributed to set up the ethical code of the Chinese Wushu. *Rén* (仁) is the Confucian virtue denoting the good feeling a virtuous human experiences when being altruistic. It is exemplified by a normal adult's protective feelings for children. It is considered the essence of the human being, endowed by Heaven, and at the same time the means by which man may act according to the principle of Heaven (天理) and become one with it (Tay 2010). The concept of “Wu-De 武德” mainly influenced by the Confucian philosophy refers to the ethical norms used to regulate the words and deeds of the Chinese Wushu practitioners. In a word, Chinese Wushu is a concentrated embodiment of Chinese cultural and philosophical spirit. It emphasizes the skill and technique of Wushu, but the cultivation of noble morality and personality of the practitioners, both of which complement each other.

4.4 Wushu and Buddhism

The Shaolin Wushu system well-known for the Shaolin bare-hands boxing and the Shaolin stick fighting and routines would had not exist till today without the Shaolin Temple. During the prosperous period of Sui and Tang dynasties(581-907 AD), Buddhism flourished and the martial arts practiced in the Shaolin Temple became

famous and its fame spread far across Asia. Later with the rise of movie stars such as Jet Li, the Shaolin Wushu gain the world recognition and admiration as it perfectly associates martial practices and religious beliefs in one single system. Huang Zongxi described martial arts in terms of Shaolin or “external arts” versus Wudang or internal arts in 1669 (Henning 1994). The Shaolin Temple has two main legacies: Chan (禪), which refers to Chan Buddhism, the religion of Shaolin, and Quan (拳), which refers to the martial arts of Shaolin. In Shaolin, these are not separate disciplines and monks have always pursued the philosophy of the unification of Chan and Quan (禪拳合一). In a deeper point of view, Quan is considered part of Chan.

5. Conclusion

Africa has a long standing history of cultural development, the *African Martial Arts* as an intangible part of the African culture have since their formation, integrated “*Combat+Spirituality+Dance*” as core ingredients; although supported by palpable archaeological evidences, there is a serious shortage of relevant classics and written materials mainly due to the multiple aggression and cultural destruction that Africa has suffered from antic imperial powers to modern superpowers, leading to the interruption or declines of some of its civilizations (*Kemet, Nubia*, etc.) and the acculturation of its people. However, the rising African society is still displaying some relics of authentic African martial practices the growing economy of the continent as well as the emergence of new partner such as China, is boosting the rebirth and rejuvenation of the African cultural identity. The *African Martial Arts* are inalienable part of that cultural identity with the unique features of being grounded on the pursuit of *body Combat* through the powerful bodies of African warriors, while rooted in *Spirituality* (processes connecting the martial artist body to the spiritual realm), and fully expressed through the artistic beauty of the African *Dance*, in one expression: “*Combat+Spirituality+Dance*”. At the contrary, the Chinese Martial Arts history is supported by many classics and written sources due to the uninterrupted course of the Chinese civilization. In addition to its rich cultural connotations the Chinese Wushu despite of sharing some common features such as “fighting and performing” with African martial arts and many other world martial arts systems, has integrated the philosophical thoughts of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, and has come to shaped a very unique and distinctive martial arts philosophy expressed in well-known sayings such as “Alternate hard with soft”, “Defeating its opponent without fighting” etc., most importantly, the concept of “Virtuous Warrior” has earliest been noticed in the *Chinese Wushu* and has shaped the Wushu warrior moral standard. “仁”(Ren) as the kindness part of human nature well expressed by the Confucian philosophy, has gradually shaped the formation of the moral code “武德”(Wu-De) guiding the practice of *Chinese Wushu* today. Meanwhile, “道”(TAO or DAO), literally the *Way* (in Wushu can be understood as the *Martial Way* , the right path that the upright martial artist should pursue) of Taoism is still considered today by many Chinese as the origin and the end of everything (all existing matters). finally Buddhism has unified the *Fist* (拳) and the *Faith* (禪) and wrapped all in *Shaolin* (拳禪合一, unification of 拳 and 禪) or external styles of the *Chinese Wushu*. Its crystal clear that a huge cultural gap is still existing between China and Africa, despite the booming economies and trade relationship between both sides. Sustainable economic development should be enhanced by in-depth Cultural understanding. In this specific case of martial arts cultures, the distinctive and unique features presented by African and Chinese systems shown in this paper are proofs that there is a space for both cultures to complement, and that, the China-Africa people to people exchange is still at an embryonic stage. In this fast changing world where global forces are getting China and Africa more and more closer, it is important to deepen all aspects of cultural understanding in order to safeguard the co-existence of cultural diversities and promote their co-prosperity.

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TALING TENE RODRIGUE: PhD. from Cameroon, is a Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University (China) and Secretary-General of the Center for African Film and TV, Zhejiang Normal University. The author is mainly researching on Kung-Fu movies' communication in Africa as well as the rebirth of Traditional African martial Arts Cultures in the context of Sino-African cultural exchanges. The author is founder of China-Cameroon Cultural and Linguistic Center, and has published various articles in Chinese and international Journals.