An examination of the transmission, cultural roots, and modern re-invention of martial arts in East Asia, and their practice in New York City. Exploration of the adaptation of East Asian practices in an American context through historical research and ethnographic fieldwork on a local martial arts school. Analysis of methodological problems arising from the application of historical perspectives to contemporary practices, from ethnographic research, and from the combination of these approaches. Consideration of how cultural and embodied knowledge is transmitted from person to person and through time.

Limit: 15 students

Requirements

Class Project:

Historical and ethnographic research on a local school or club that teaches an East Asian martial art. This may be a Columbia club. Where sources permit, the scope of historical research should include the founding of the school and the history of the martial arts lineage(s) in which the main instructor trained. Ethnographic research may include interviews with students and instructors, observation of classes and events such as tournaments, and interviews with students and instructors. Participation in classes is optional. While some types of investigation will be required of all students for discussion in class and in weekly journal, others will depend on the individual student’s project. It is not necessary to conduct field research every week. Students should narrow the scope of field research over the course of the semester as they develop their final papers.

Class Participation: 20%

Includes occasional short presentations and class discussion. Come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings, study questions, and field research findings where relevant. If you cannot make it to class, let me know as soon as possible, preferably in advance. Be considerate of classmates. If you disagree with them, attempt to express your reactions constructively. Grade will be based on quality of contributions rather than quantity.

Weekly Journal: 40%

Based on field research at local martial arts school (see Class Project). Should incorporate analysis of readings in relation to specific ethnographic situation. Average 3-5 pages/week, beginning with project proposal (due Febr. 9). Journals are to be turned in at the beginning of Monday morning’s class. You may skip the journal assignment up to two times.

Final paper (25-30 pages): 40%

History and ethnography of chosen martial arts school. Papers will be presented and discussed formally at a final course conference. While the weekly journal should cover a broad range of questions and topics, final papers should narrow in scope to develop a thesis.
Readings Available on Reserve and for Purchase at Labyrinth:


Research Resources Available on Reserve:


Recommended for Research Reference:


Key to Readings:

**ERESERVE, EBOOK, JSTOR, EJOURNAL**: Access via Clio

[Suggested additional reading]
Unit I. Orientations

Assignment: Choose a martial arts school. Begin preparing a tentative one- to two-page description of the school, instructor, and research plan (participation, observation, interviews). [due Febr. 9] Students should sign up to meet me at IAB 917 sometime during the next two weeks to discuss their projects.

Week 1

1. Introduction Jan. 21

Week 2: Designing the Ethnographic Project

Consider these readings in relation to your research project design. Would you feel comfortable with “covert” ethnographic research? If not, who are the “gatekeepers” that you might approach about conducting research? How might you go about approaching them? What “Plan Bs” might you use if your request is refused, or if at some later point people become reluctant about talking to you? What factors do you need to consider in order to make good field notes and analyze them?

2. Problems of Fieldwork Jan. 26

  

3. Fieldnotes and Analysis Jan. 28


Week 3: Change Through Time

4. Historical Narrative Febr. 2

What varying roles or meanings can history have for participants in a martial art? What is the relationship between what happens historically, and the ways in which historical narratives are constructed? What issues does this raise for the reading and analysis of histories of the martial arts schools you are studying this semester?

How does Zarrilli connect historical traditions with contemporary practices of *Kalarippayattu*? Do you find his analysis compelling, or does Zarilli draw connections where they might not be justified? What questions does he raise that you might want to consider in your own historical research? What sources will you use?


5. Cultural Mixing

For East Asian martial arts in NYC, we are looking at transmission across cultures. How might we think about exogenous cultural influences, or cultural mixing? In a New York City context, who is appropriating and translating what? What motivated both the presentation of particular images of kung fu, for example by Bruce Lee, and the reception of these, for example among African-Americans in the 1970s? Think about how you might approach questions such as these in the historical side of your research project.


Unit II. The School

Week 4: The School in Space and Time

Writing/field assignment (due Febr. 16): Map the school and activities that take place there. Does the instructor attach meaning to the arrangement of the school’s space? Do students? How does the space of the school structure activity there? What is the structure of the classes and other activities? What is the schedule of classes and other activities over a week/month/year? Which might you attend? Consider as you read what other questions you might ask and what you might look for.

6. Places


7. Events


Week 5: Teaching and Transmission

Writing/field assignment (due Febr. 23): How did the head instructor become a martial artist? Is martial arts teaching a source of income for the instructor(s)? Is it a primary source of income? Does that affect decisions about teaching? (How might you go about ascertaining that?) What is the instructor’s approach to teaching? Does the instructor interact with students other than in formal class settings? What happens there? Does the instructor accept all students or restrict entrance? Does the instructor have a set curriculum? Are there advanced classes for students who are being trained to become instructors? Who takes these? If not, how are future instructors trained, if at all? Have these aspects of instruction changed over the history of the school?

8. Modes of Transmission

What are the “modes of transmission” of knowledge in your school? How might you go about uncovering the relationship between mode of transmission and the knowledge transmitted?

  

9. Embodiment

What is embodiment? How is it transmitted? How might you go about exploring it in your fieldwork?


  

Unit III. Historical Roots/Resources

What do “historical roots” have to do with contemporary practice? Is there any point to studying them, beyond their meaning for practitioners? Is there a connection otherwise between historical traditions and what people do now? What is it? How do we get from ancient China to contemporary China, Japan, Korea, or New York City? Do New York City practitioners study these historical roots? Do these studies contribute to what happens in the martial arts school?

Week 6: Lineage

Writing/Field Assignment (due March 1): Chart the lineage of the school’s head instructor. What sources of information do you have besides the report of the instructor? Are there other instructors at the school who come from different lineages? What are the meanings of lineage for people in your school? Do particular students or teachers have expectations about the student-teacher relationship based on East Asian models such as those studied in class? Are there problems in your school due to people coming to the relationship with different expectations?

10. Traditions of Transmission in China Febr. 23

What was lineage, and why was it important in China? How was knowledge understood to transmit in various traditions in early and medieval China? In what ways did people differ about the ways in which knowledge should/can be best transmitted? What was the nature of the student-teacher relationship? Note that the monkey character in Journey to the West is humorously subverting numerous conventions of the master-disciple relationship. And numerous other conventions as well. What are these conventions? By the sixteenth century, when this was written, what were the myths and ideals of esoteric learning?


†Sun Wu-k’ung, also spelled Sun Wukong, in Japanese Son Goku — yes, the basis for the “Dragon Ball Z” character Goku.

11. Traditions of Transmission in Japan

In what ways is the *iemoto* similar to or different from Chinese lineages? Do Japanese traditions of transmission specifically draw on, depart from, or transform Chinese traditions?


Week 7: Approaches to Power

Writing/Field Assignment (due March 8): Do the teachings of your school claim links to these ideas or to these specific classical sources? If so, how are these discussed or taught?

12. Virtue/Potency/Power and the Dao

What is the “Dao”/”Tao”? What is “De” (usually translated Virtue, Potency, or Power)? What is *qi*? In what ways do these ideas differ between the readings? What are the ideals of being human, and the ideals of power in these readings? What types of power do these works critique?


13. Strategic Positioning

What is *shi*? With what type of battle is *The Art of War* concerned with? How does this contrast with earlier Chinese approaches to battle? With early western traditions?


Week 8: The Body and the Universe

Writing/Field Assignment (due March 22): How is the body discussed in your school? Are ideas such as Yin and Yang (In and Yô), Qi (Ki), or the Dantian (Tanden, “Cinnabar Field”) used to teach the way the body should operate? Do your schools teachings differ from the readings assigned here?

Final Paper Assignment (due March 22): Tentative Final Paper Topic

14. Body as Microcosm March 8


15. Alchemy, Cultivating Life, and Qigong March 10


SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Buddhism

Writing/Field Assignment (due March 29): Does your school claim a Buddhist heritage? What is it?

Final Paper Assignment (due March 29): Annotated Bibliography

16. Chan/Zen and Tantra March 22


17. Shaolin March 24


Week 10: Fiction

Writing Assignment (due April 5): Can fiction really tell us anything about martial arts? If so, what? Does it contribute in any way to martial culture? Does martial culture contribute to fiction? For ideas, consider our discussions of the Zarilli reading (class 4) and Sun Wukong (class 10).

Final Paper Assignment (due April 5): Preliminary Thesis and Outline (1 page)

18. Chinese Fiction March 29


19. Japanese Fiction March 31


Movie Night: TBA
Week 11: Cinema

Writing/Field Assignment (due April 12): Does cinema enter into the ways in which you see people in your martial art practicing or talking about martial arts? In what ways?

Final Paper Assignment (nothing due): Begin writing final paper

20. Hong Kong Martial Arts Film


21. Japanese Samurai (or “Period”) Film


Movie Night: TBA
History and Ethnography of Martial Arts

Unit IV. Modern Transitions

Is your martial art a “modern tradition”? What makes it “traditional”? What makes it “modern”? What makes it “national,” or “international”? Does the school’s self-history make claims to authenticity? What are these claims, and how are we to evaluate them? What historical processes of the last century contributed to its current shape and practice? What current factors do you see contributing to its continuing change?

Week 12: “Traditional” Martial Artists

Writing Assignment (due April 19): Who were the “martial artists” in the centuries leading up to the Twentieth? What martial “traditions” did they carry — or not? In what ways did the social and cultural place of martial pursuits differ in China and in Japan? Do you see this affecting practice in your school?

Final Paper Assignment (due April 19): Sketchy rough draft (~10-15 pages) with revised outline

22. Martial Arts, Class, and Gender in Late Imperial China

- Wile, “Social and Historical Background of T’ai-chi Ch’uan in the Nineteenth Century,” Lost T’ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch’ing Dynasty, pp. 3-30.

23. Edo Samurai

- Hurst, Armed Martial Arts of Japan, pp. 7-100.
Week 13: Modern Invented Traditions

Writing Assignment (due April 26): Is there something about modernity in particular that is conducive to the invention of traditions? In what ways is your own school’s martial art a modern invented tradition?

Final Paper Assignment (due April 26): Complete Rough Draft (~25-30 pages)

24. Modernity and “Invented Traditions” April 19


[Prasenjit Duara, “The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China,” History and Theory (October 1998), 37.3:287-308.] JSTOR

25. Invented Martial Traditions April 21

- Hurst, Armed Martial Arts of Japan, pp. 147-176.


- Brownell, Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic of China, pp. 34-64. ERESERVE


Week 14: Globalization

Writing Assignment (due May 3): What is “Globalization” in the martial arts? The transmission of elements of East Asian cultures (or particular cultural practices) to the “West” runs contrary to the flow usually assumed for processes of globalization. What might that tell us about globalization theory? What is global or local in your martial arts school?

Final Paper Assignment (due May 3): Complete First Draft

26. Nation, Colonialism, Diaspora, and Identity April 26


27. The Global and the Local


Unit V. Methodological Problems Revisited

Week 15

Final Assignment (due May 7): Polish Final Paper. Alternate due dates may be arranged no later than May 3.

28. Problems in History and Ethnography

In the case of the traditions of martial arts, which are more poorly documented in the written record, can we write history as phenomena in the past connected and changing through time? Or can we only write about it as myth? What is East Asian about East Asian martial arts practiced in New York City?