

# Multiple Conflicts and Their Transcendence in Global Propagation of Martial arts

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**Abstract:** In order to understand the problems in the global propagation of martial arts and reduce time cost as well as sunk cost in this procedure, this paper, based on literature research and logical analysis, sorted out multiple conflicts in this regard: 1. Conflicts between traditional martial arts and the propagation of martial arts on the international stage; 2. Conflicts between profound and adapted martial arts; 3. The contradictions between official and non-official cultural communication; In addition, it is necessary to strengthen studies from other cultural perspectives. Finally, more emphasis should be placed on researches about communication strategies of audience segmentation.

## 1. Introduction

It is undeniable that since the first national martial arts conference in December 1982 which clearly put forward the goal of “carrying out international exchanges to actively and steadily promote martial arts to the world”, we have made brilliant achievements both theoretically and practically in the past decades. Specifically, we have not only gained a new understanding of martial arts in the modern world, but also took an active part in cultural exchange and the construction of discourse system for martial arts under the principle of “maintaining and sharing beauty”. [1] However, the global propagation of martial arts has been caught in the bottleneck as the “seemingly flourishing project” wasn't truly rooted in the land of the western world. Martial arts is still not fully promoted internationally, and the awareness and understanding of martial arts in various countries are to be deepened[2] This situation has restricted the transformation of martial arts into a modern art. At the same time, our hope of eliminating cultural deficit of martial arts, building the national image and enhancing the “soft power” of Chinese culture has been severely affected.

## 2. Multiple conflicts in the global propagation of martial arts

### 2.1 Value conflicts in the global propagation of martial arts

No matter what cultural standpoint they hold, scholars have concurred on the main trend of martial arts' modern transformation and international propagation. It is the value orientation of martial arts that is fundamentally conflicting. Those who advocates for its internationalization believe that it is essential to find a way to overcome cultural barriers, eliminate prejudices and misinterpretations of individuals, groups or organizations from different cultural backgrounds, therefore facilitating the transformation of martial arts. For this reason, there is a need to think about problems from an international point of view. In fact, it is under the guidance of this consideration that martial arts began to seek transformation in order to transcend barriers and spread around the world. Although internationalization does not necessarily mean westernization, the mature sports culture of the western world under the “pre-domestication” model has forced non-western sports culture to follow the established rules of the game. In the process of international propagation, martial arts followed the western model and adapted itself to the international standard. During the transformation, the rules of martial arts have been subjected to constant revisions along with introduction of standard division system. The 29th Summer Olympic Games held in Beijing on August 8, 2008 marked a turning point of these efforts. In order to grasp this important opportunity to incorporate martial arts into the

Olympic Games, there was a stronger and more urgent call for the internationalization of the martial arts, accelerating the process of self-transformation of martial arts. It also proposed the theoretical principles of “trend over nationality” [3], advocating the necessity to walk out of national identity and build up a new international awareness of martial arts, or the Olympic awareness of martial arts. The rationale behind this principle is that “too much emphasis on national character will weaken our international character, something the IOC is trying to avoid” [4]. In addition, the experience of other sports also provides important support for the internationalization of martial arts. For example, judo and taekwondo were successfully incorporated into the Olympic Games because of their constant adjustment and adaptation to the techniques and rules of the Olympic Games [5]. That is to say, the value orientation of martial arts’ internationalization inevitably requires the weakening of its nationality. However, the dilution of nationality would not only cost martial arts its cultural identity, but also arouse concerns from conservatives who stand for traditional martial arts.

## **2.2 Disagreements on the value orientation of martial arts**

Since the rising awareness of “nation and state”, the national characteristics between countries have become a kind of soft power. Therefore, there have been voices repeatedly stressing that the biggest difference between martial arts and the martial arts of other nations lies in its rich and profound culture. On January 5, 2018, a joint survey was conducted by the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies (original China International Publishing Group Communication Research Center) and the well-known survey institution Kantar Millward Brown. The survey, Report of China's International Image 2016-2017, claimed that martial arts (44%), Chinese cuisines (52%) and traditional Chinese medicine (47%) are the three features best representing Chinese culture in the eyes of overseas respondents. Martial arts serve as a cultural landmark of China because it is an important carrier of traditional Chinese culture. Martial arts are distinguished from other martial arts because of its connotation of traditional culture. Therefore, without the core elements of traditional culture, martial arts will surely lose its cultural personality and charm. A Research showed that British martial arts lovers learn Chinese martial arts mainly to acquire the ability of attack, defense and fighting as well as to gain an understanding of Chinese culture. The study also pointed out that “when foreigners learn traditional martial arts, they should not only pay attention to actual combat, but also pursue the traditional cultural connotation of martial arts.” Moreover, “If traditional martial arts is deprived of its cultural connotation, it will not be fundamentally different from martial arts of other countries, thus greatly lowering its popularity.

## **2.3 Conflicts between international communication channels of martial arts**

The “standardization” of martial arts is undoubtedly conducive to its international communication and unification of its cultural image to avoid confusion among audiences from different cultural backgrounds and to improve the efficiency of its international communication. In addition, authoritative official channels have become the main sources of foreign exchanges for martial arts competitions, playing a leading role in this process. The institution organizes and undertake martial arts sports activities, arrange martial arts athletes, coaches and high-level domestic training programs for foreign martial arts athletes, give permission to overseas students to come to China for martial arts training, and take charge of tour performance, academic publicity and promotion works. It is an important platform for China to introduce and spread martial arts to the world, and it also effectively implements the strategy of “going out” of Chinese culture. Of course, the official channels will inevitably encounter some unpredictable difficulties. For example, the international spread of martial arts based on Confucius Institutes is sometimes affected, especially when it involves trade frictions and cultural discourse competition.[6]

## **2.4 Conflicting interests in international communication of martial arts**

Although the competitive martial arts management department has adapted the sport to a certain degree, there is still a large scale of programs as the foundation to increase the likelihood of gold medal in competition. Take the gold medal system of martial arts in Asian Games and World martial arts Championships as an example. Ignoring the medal setting of free combats, in terms of the routine

statistics, the Asian Games involves 8 medals in total, including men's long boxing, women's long boxing, men's broadsword and cudgel play, women's broadsword and cudgel play, men's southern style boxing, and women's southern style boxing. In the World martial arts Championships, there are 8 sets of martial arts gold medals, namely men's long boxing, women's long boxing, men's southern style boxing, and women's Taiji, men's broadsword, women's sword play, men's cudgel play and women's spear play. No matter in the martial arts competition of Asian Games or the World martial arts Championship, Chinese martial arts athletes have a high probability of winning the eight gold medals in total. If the Chinese martial arts athletes could maintain the momentum, the entry of martial arts into the Olympic Games means that we could have a even better performance in the medal competition. Obviously, the establishment of a system endowing us an absolute advantage on the gold medals is placing martial arts in a dangerous position of self-entertainment in the international spread of martial arts.

### **3. Academic attribution and transcendental path of multiple conflicts in international dissemination of martial arts**

#### **3.1 Lack of empirical researches on communication effects**

Communication, in the simplest term, is a process of transmitting information from one source to another. Political scientists summarize this linear communication process with five W's, while D.Berlo proposed an even more refined linear mode consisting of S (source) -M (information) -C (channel) -R (the receiver). For the international communication of martial arts, we pay more attention to the first three elements while the communication effect for the audience tends to be ignored. That is to say, the policy failure of martial arts' international communication is not only related to the "path dependence" formed by the system and the mode of thinking, but more importantly, the support of research results. This is not, of course, a lack of high-quality researches. At present, the academic circle attaches more importance to the study of international communication of martial arts, and the research results and research dimensions are gradually enriched. However, most of the existing studies are speculative qualitative studies, which are based on the propositions and demands of their respective cultural standpoints, and lack of abundant empirical results of international communication of martial arts. For example, some scholars pointed out that "studies on international communication of martial arts are mostly based on documentary materials", that is to say, most researchers reach corresponding conclusions through the collation, reading and analysis of literatures while "there are few in-depth field investigations and studies." As a result, the establishment of decisions on the international communication of martial arts is too subjective without enough proof. With the progress of time and debates over conflicting values, the stability of policy on martial arts' international communication is heavily affected.

#### **3.2 Lack of research from the perspective of audience**

If "the spread of culture to the rest of the world is not a hobby, but an inherent spirit and core value of culture", in this sense, researchers from different cultural backgrounds could serve as an important driving force behind the global propagation of the martial arts, especially in the interpretation of martial arts from the global perspective. For example, Luo Lingna, a German student at Shanghai Sports University, examines problems arising from the promotion of martial arts in the west from the perspective of Chinese and western cultures. It is pointed out that the emphasis on the publicity and display of competitive martial arts has objectively weakened the status of traditional or classical martial arts, so that many westerners have bias and misunderstanding of martial arts and its connotation. It is of vital importance to obtain first-hand information from the audience and learn more about their literature atmosphere, folk customs, their value orientation, understanding of martial arts and aesthetic needs. Obviously, this kind of research has inspired studies and practices of international communication of martial arts. However, the current communication activities of martial arts on the international stage has been consciously or unconsciously labeled "publicity" with few

academic activities involved, leading to the lack of researches from the perspective of audience, as well as extensive and in-depth academic activities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

International communication of martial arts is strategically significant to the shaping of national image and sports power. We have made brilliant achievements in the past decades. However, the international spread of martial arts is being caught in a dilemma between conflicting choices. Therefore, we need to clarify the current situation, further enrich relevant research results, and reduce the excessive time cost and sunk cost in the modernization process of martial arts.

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