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Athletic Letter

Generalities of martial arts and their introduction in Cuba

Generalidades de las artes marciales y su introducción en Cuba

Generalidades das artes marciais e sua introdução em Cuba

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Currently, martial art is a social phenomenon that does not escape the transformations of modern society, so it is considered necessary to begin by analyzing and arguing its definitions from which its characteristics and relationships can be identified.

In research on the subject, martial arts come from the god Mars, the Greek god of war who also coincides with the god of war in Eastern mythology. To say martial arts is to refer, on the one hand, to the ideology or religion of the Far East, mainly Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, and on the other hand, it defines any activity that presupposes fighting, confrontation using weapons or hand-to-hand combat. Martial art is an attitude that is taken



as self-defense and not as aggression. Martial arts can also be used to benefit health (Tai Chi Chuan).

There is a classification of martial arts according to the type of weapons used; Kendo Martial Arts: fencing with wooden sword; KyuDO (archery). Unarmed varieties include aikido, judo, karate, kung fu, and tae kwon do. (Cabal, 2012; Guirao, 2013)

Sports and medicine authors such as Herrera *et. al.* (2019) who highlight martial arts (MA) and combat sports (CS) for their prophylactic benefit, classify them as:

According to Dijk, G. *et al.* (as cited in Herrera *et. al.*, 2019), the different AM&DC have specific characteristics, classified into two large groups: "hard" or "external" MA&CS and "soft" or "internal" MA&CS. 'Internal' MA&CS, such as Tai Chi, are characterized by gentle, relaxed movements that are often performed slowly; aiming at the regulation of posture during the execution of its movements. This type of martial art has been used ancestrally in China both as a method of maintaining health and as a complement to therapy in multiple diseases.

For their part, "external" MA&CS are characterized by fast, vigorous and dynamic movements aimed at generating and transmitting the maximum possible strength to the attack surface. Nowadays, research on the effects that "external" MA&CS can have on health is increasing; there are studies on balance, muscle strength, bone mineral density, cognition, among others, in different groups of the population. (p.2)

Other authors such as Bertran (2023) define martial arts as:

The set of sports which objective is to subdue or defend oneself in hand-to-hand fights without any type of weaponry, beyond body parts and some accessories to protect oneself or one's opponent. In this sense, they are sports in which combat techniques are perfectly defined and regulated, which differentiates them from simple street fights. In a martial art, not everything goes. There are codes that must always be respected. (p.2).



In this definition, the author mentions that in martial arts, hand-to-hand fights are without any type of weaponry. While it is true that there are martial arts that have hand-to-hand techniques that do not use weapons, most of them include some type of weapon in their training, mainly the so-called bladed weapons (knives, sabers, stars, darts and others). Likewise, there is a variety of martial arts that base their practices specifically on traditional weapons and Bertran himself (2023) mentions some of them such as:

Kendo: it is a martial Japanese origin in which the struggle is developed by means of words bamboo. With a clear origin in the samurai culture, the opponents must be protected by an armor and only it is allowed hit the forearm, trunk, the throat and the head. (p.6)

Kyudo: is a martial art of Japanese origin practiced by further of half million of person that consists on dominating the art of archery, that is to say, the shot with arch. Further that as a sport, it is understood as a way of finding balance between body and spirit. (p. 8)

From the perspective of the authors of this work, martial arts are understood as the practice of specialized exercises for self-defense with particular methods and styles, which conceptions are concerned with the perfection of fighting with weapons, the body itself as technique itself for direct confrontation, as well as the development of the practitioner's physical and mental capabilities. Martial arts were traditionally created under principles and ethical codes of conduct that respond to a philosophy of life that has been transmitted by generations of practitioners.

Currently, new styles have emerged, even within the same martial art. In general, a classification is assumed, grouping them by their essential characteristics in terms of their training purpose, into the following:

Traditional martial arts are those that maintain the foundations of their techniques and exercises, according to their original conception based on personal defense. Therefore, they are martial arts that have not been modified by modern sporting regulations.



In this classification, the "pure" martial arts (AMP in Spanish), which are made up only of their original techniques, as well as the traditional mixed martial arts (AMMT in Spanish), which are made up of the combination of techniques from other traditional martial arts.

The sports martial arts are those that, respecting the traditional bases of martial arts, have assumed modifications in their training systems as a result of regulations and requirements established by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), to develop knowledge and skills aimed at achieving high sporting results, framed in the competition circuits associated and recognized by the IOC.

Professional martial arts are those martial arts that have adopted training systems and self-defense applications for military purposes, bodyguard services such as Krav Maga, an Israeli self-defense system that combines a selection of techniques from other martial arts, as well as lucrative activities such as rented sports martial arts.

In rented sports martial arts, competitive regulations are incorporated based exclusively on the spectacle with monetary interests of its competitors, organizations and sponsors. Among the most representative of this classification, we highlight Kickboxing, Full contact, Muay Thai and MMA, an acronym in English that means Mixed Martial Arts. MMA is the most popular today and is the combination of techniques from different martial arts and combat sports. The same is generally used to combat in the context of combat sports and for personal defense (Fariña, Héctor, 2002).

It is convenient to specify the differences between AMMT (traditional mixed martial arts) and MMA. The first only combines techniques from other traditional martial arts, while the second combines, for tactical convenience, any technique that has to do with hand-to-hand combat, both martial arts and combat sports, the techniques being more Distinctive ones come from Olympic Wrestling, boxing, Jiu Jitsu, Taekwondo and Judo.

Understood in this way, MMA is defined as combat systems that take techniques from martial arts and combat sports to convert them into their own forms of training, creating and combining complexes of technical and tactical exercises for self-defense.



From the extreme sports point of view, professional MMA martial athletes train to achieve competitive results under minimum regulations to take care of the competitor's physical integrity. Competitions of this type are organized by different federations and associations such as the private company Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC).

Regarding therapeutic *or health* martial arts, it can be said that the practice of martial exercises is used as prophylactic means to improve the quality of life, as well as eliminate and minimize some conditions of the practitioners. Although all martial arts can be used to develop a healthy culture of movement and mind, there are martial arts that are well known in this classification, such as Taiji-Quan.

Martial arts in Cuba

According to Vargas (2003), some scholars point out that in the Cuban wars of independence (1868-1898) of the 19th century, there were Chinese who fought alongside the Mambises, sometimes using the Taiji-Quan technique, a style of Kung fu (p.5).

For his part, Moya (2006) highlights that with the settlement of Chinatown in Havana in the first decades of the 19th century, martial arts such as the Wu-shu style of Kung Fu began to be practiced by small groups of immigrants (p. 10).

Other writings

This author assumes that the use of the Cuban machete as a weapon of war by the Mambises constitutes one of the first indigenous Cuban martial arts, which has a certain similarity between the machete and the sword of the Iberian Celts called gladius hispanus and that of the *ancients* Greeks named machera (Moya, 2006, p. 10).

From these studies, it must be inferred that due to the use for more than 30 years of the mambí machete in the so-called machete charges, introduced by General Máximo Gómez with the beginning of the war against the Spanish on October 10, 1868, very specific combat practices and styles to master the machete with combat effectiveness were developed.



The above is based on the known successes of important battles of the Mambises in "the battles of Pino de Baire, La Indiana, La Sacra, Palo Seso and others, where the use of the Mambi machete was decisive in these important victories (Moya, 2006, p. 17). However, unfortunately no writings have been found so far on the technique of using the mambí machete as a weapon of war.

Currently, Cuba enjoys great international prestige for its quality in martial arts, mainly in sports versions such as Judo, Wu-shu, taekwondo and karate do, with champions and medalists in multiple events and Central American sports. Pan American, World and Olympic.

Of this development it must be mentioned the Cuban Association of Martial Arts, which currently groups a little more than 40 martial arts and styles practiced throughout the country, which are officially registered after a rigorous evaluation, in the following groups:

- Chinese martial arts.
- Korean martial arts.
- Japanese martial arts.
- Modern, new, mixed arts and defense systems.
- Traditional karate academy (ACAM, 2023).

Before concluding, it is fair to mention the work of the "Manuel Fajardo" University of Physical Culture and Sports Sciences (UCCFD) in its contribution to the development and improvement of Cuban martial arts, as well as the Escuela Ramal of the National Institute of Sport, Physical education and Recreation (INDER in Spanish) which recently held, in the month of February 2023, the first interdisciplinary course "The methodological preparation in the *Modality of the Forms in Martial arts*", where the first scientific discussion workshop took place with the participation of masters of karate do, Taekwondo, Krav maga, Hapkido and Jiu-jitsu, coming from university martial sports, the School of Sports initiation (Eide) "Mártires de Barbados", The Provincial Sports Commission of Havana and the ACAM.



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The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents



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