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DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN PHILOSOPHY**

**The hermeneutic approach of the martial art of Tai Chi in the  
horizon of intercultural dialogue between the culture of the Far  
East and the culture of the West**

**PHD THESIS**

**SUMMARY**

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### ***Keywords***

Far East, West, China, Japan, Tai Chi, martial arts, hermeneutic philosophy, intercultural dialogue, Aristotle, Dilthey, Schleiermacher, Yang Jwing-Ming, David Dorian Ross, hermeneutic circle, parts and whole, the form of martial arts, moving meditation, medication motion, hobbies and sports, philosophy of life, Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism

## **The hermeneutic approach of the martial art of Tai Chi in the horizon of intercultural dialogue between the culture of the Far East and the culture of the West**

### **Abstract**

The research theme of the doctoral dissertation consists in the study of the possibilities of intercultural dialogue between the Far East and the West, in the horizon of hermeneutic philosophy. I examine the development of the dialogue between the two cultural horizons, as well as the possibilities for further development that this dialogue may have. I consider very important to study the points of connections between Western and Eastern cultures, especially on widely known cultural areas. The analysis of the dialogue in this regard highlights those areas that constitute the space for development of the most intense forms of the intercultural dialogue, having the most important effects.

According to my hypothesis, the popularity of martial arts practice was significant for the development of intercultural contacts between East and West. At the same time, Eastern philosophies through the promotion of Eastern martial arts spread and integrated in the Western culture. Based on Jiyuan Yu's research, we can recognize a significant analogy between the Dao concept of Chinese philosophies and the components of the concept of areté in Aristotle's philosophy. Yu believes that the main goal to be achieved, means for the man to find the right path (represented by the Dao), which in Confucius' vision, is achieved through humanity (ren) or moral virtue (de). According to the Aristotelian interpretation, we can describe the good life with the concept of areté, which means physical, mental, spiritual excellence and virtue.

In my doctoral dissertation I discussed a particular philosophical aspect of the cultural relations between the Far East and the West, analysing the more important stations in the arrival of the art of the Tai Chi in the West. An important constituent part of my doctoral dissertation is the analysis of the philosophy of Tai Chi on the one hand throughout its own millennial past and, on the other hand, along the theoretical and practical aspects of its Western receptions.

Tai Chi arrived in the West following a historical process through several centuries. In my doctoral dissertation, I examined the chronology of this process, and I also researched the significant philosophical analogies, along which important philosophical concepts can form parallels in the processes of the philosophical interpretations. The philosophical basis of Tai Chi consists of the interweaving of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. The central concept of Tai Chi is the concept of Dao. This concept of Dao not only expresses a way of life, but at the same time means excellence, aspiration to the maximum human potential, through the practice of martial arts. Regarding the conceptualization of life exercises, I examine the meanings of the Dao concept and the *areté* concept in the hypothesis of the conceptual similarity of the intercultural dialogue.

In the analysis of intercultural dialogue, I follow a historical perspective. I use the hermeneutical methodology in the interpretation of Tai Chi. Concerning the aspects of realisations of the intercultural dialogue, I follow also the direct and indirect possibilities of the realization of this dialogue. With the comparisons of the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, the main goal was to deepen the interpretations along the philosophical currents defined by Tai Chi. To achieve the philosophical analysis, I argued for the identification of conceptual systems that contain similar philosophical values. For the hermeneutic research I have chosen classical hermeneutics, using the comparative and divinatory method of Fr. Schleiermacher.

In the following interpretations on emphasize the philosophical hermeneutic concept of H.-G. Gadamer, the *Erfahrung*. This concept enters into dialogue with the tradition that shaped humanity. Implementing the analysis concerning Tai Chi exercise, in comprehension of goals and motivations, I consider important the philosophical interpretation of the experience.

I consider an important part of my dissertation the interpretation of the concepts of theory and practice in the relationship of intercultural dialogue, because they realize the principle of Tai Chi and the philosophical current (Daoism) that integrates this martial art through practice of life.

In my bibliographical research, I paid attention to classical philosophical works, the works of famous sinologists and books written by martial arts masters. Regarding the works of sinologists, I note the encyclopaedic work of Joseph Needham. Among the works of martial arts masters are the books of Yang Jwing-Ming, Havasi András and Mantak Chia.

For the Western interpretation of Eastern martial arts, which differ in modes of expression from Western-type movement cultures (see above: the expression of the concept of exercise through practice). I considered important to develop the possible interpretations in the aspects

of hermeneutic circle, including the relationships between the whole and the parts. At the same time, emphasizing the implementation of Schleiermacher's methodology, I also reflected on the changes in the temporality of oriental teachings with sacred aspects, which are achieved following the interpretation from the West.

In my research, I have considered the main intercultural and philosophical historical features of the "departure" of Tai Chi from the Far East. I have completed the research with the help of the best-known monographs and major textbooks published in Western literature looking the "migration" of martial arts from the Far East (as well as the "philosophies of existence" that penetrate them) until its arrival in the West. Among these publications I would highlight the books of the authors John Panter and Andrew Townsend.

In the chapter on cultural interactions between the Far East and the West, I aimed to highlight an important historical perspective for hermeneutic research. In order to outline the dialogue process as accurately as possible, I tried to find more and more points of similarity. I started the analysis of intercultural dialogue by exploring the most important features of the Chinese and Western worldviews, which are crucial in observing the realization of intercultural dialogue. Next, I examined the philosophical characteristics of previously known martial arts cultures (the cultures of Japanese martial arts). As precursors to Tai Chi, they formed an important reference in the development of the hermeneutic dialogue between the two cultures.

A highlight of the intercultural dialogue between the Far East and the West regarding martial arts is the example of legendary martial artist and actor Bruce Lee. Due to the lifestyle initiated by his example, and through his original interpretations of martial arts in the sense of philosophies of life together with interpretation of the culture of movement, with emphasis on the physical side of the martial art practice, could deepen very much the understanding in various martial arts styles, especially from China and Japan. In the analysis of intercultural dialogue in the case of Tai Chi, I recognized that the influence of this legendary martial artist contributed to the effective integration of Tai Chi in references of martial arts and the philosophies of life.

The philosophy of the martial art of Tai Chi is made up of the interweaving of the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. In separate chapters, briefly presenting these philosophical currents, I try to reveal the basic concepts that are decisive in the functioning of the intercultural dialogue. These concepts in the case of Confucianism are the concepts of humanity, rites and the wise man; in the case of Daoism, Dao and in the case of Buddhism, the concept of enlightenment.

In the doctoral dissertation, during the development of intercultural dialogue, I distinguish three main directions of interpretation of the reception of Tai Chi. These are consistent interpretations of hobbies and sports, medication motion and moving meditation. In this separation of interpretations, I also paid attention to the tradition of Chinese martial arts, but in defining the three main directions I defined as the main basis the understanding of the goals and motivation of practicing the Tai Chi in the West.

In the chapter *The possibilities of interpretations of Tai Chi in terms of purpose and motivations*, I consider the aspects of interpretation and the possibilities of intercultural dialogue in accordance with the cultural perspective of the Western world.

The interpretation of Tai Chi according to the hobby and sports exercise is possible through the specific forms of martial arts associations. In these associations, it is possible to practice martial arts forms which fulfil their basic meanings, both in terms of hobbies and sports that are accepted in the standards of forms of international competitions, and ~~also~~ in understanding their primary attachment to the meanings of authentic martial arts. In this chapter, I present the characteristics of martial arts culture which, through their relationship with sports, do not embody the practice of full martial arts, but are complemented by features borrowed from the world of sports. The purpose of this chapter was to identify philosophical concepts and understand the aspects of practice of life along which Tai Chi, as well as the philosophical current that integrates it, the Daoism, was introduced in Western references, as a powerful phenomenon of the pop culture, in addition to more important meanings of philosophical understanding.

Despite the many differences and similarities in the interpretation of sports and martial arts, I concluded that it is a specific part of intercultural dialogue, which is not only a component in terms of dialogue, but also a part of Chinese martial arts culture analysed in terms of view of the whole and the parts. I articulate this conclusion in the second part of the doctoral dissertation (*The possibilities of interpretations of Tai Chi in relationship with the theory of the whole and the parts*), related to the hermeneutic interpretation.

An analysis of Tai Chi in the aspects of hobbies and sports is followed by an overview of the theoretical and practical implications of medication motion. This chapter is partly related to the previous one, emphasizing the importance of physical conditions of the body as well as mental health. The chapter on medication motion also provides an opportunity for a more detailed overview of Qigong exercise, which is considered a composing part of Tai Chi, or in many cases "its little brother" as interpreting the circulation of qi energy. In his detailed systematizations, Master Yang Jwing-Ming presents the important schools of Chinese Qigong

movement culture based on the historical tradition of Master Da Mo's teachings, through the concepts of external and internal schools. This is also important because, in addition to spreading medical stereotypes, it provides an opportunity to deepen the dialogue between the Far East and the West. This deepening provides a deeper understanding of Chinese martial arts through Qigong practices and thus contributes to the improvement of the practice of Tai Chi. In my doctoral dissertation I sought not only to research the theoretical implications of the practice of Tai Chi, but in a broader sense to highlight all the important results that define the intercultural dialogue and the significance of medical results according to the studies of the famous Harvard Medical School.

An important part of the research is the examination of the possibilities of interpreting the moving meditation of Tai Chi. Based on the observations made during the research, I have concluded that moving meditation is the closest to the so-called "whole", which I tried to formulate with the concept of philosophies of life as expressions of martial arts. In this chapter, I focus on the problem of defining the Dao, and I also sought to present the views of Buddhist philosophy on the enlightenment and living of the present moment from a martial arts perspective. According to the analysis of Tai Chi as moving meditation I consider an important observation that the interweaving of philosophical currents is not so tight (as in the case of interpretation of Tai Chi through hobbies and sports, or the interpretation of Tai Chi in the philosophies of life), because the special emphasis is placed on philosophical currents that "serve" enlightenment.

W. Dilthey's interpretations of the philosophy of life are extended by Bollnow. Analysing Bollnow's, interpretations on the problems of the philosophy of life, I consider the martial art of Tai Chi to be comparable to the Aristotelian meaning of Eudaimonia. Eudaimonia is presented in Aristotle's ethics, representing the concept of fulfilled life, good life.

In the chapter *The Possibilities of interpretations of Tai Chi in relationship with the theory of the whole and the parts*, I draw a parallel between the hermeneutical interpretation of the text and the interpretation of martial art of Tai Chi. An important element of the Western reception of Tai Chi is the interpretation relations of the part and whole. While in its original culture, Tai Chi is not decomposed into the practitioner's lifestyle, worldview, world interpretation, here in the West, from the beginning, it tries to articulate, analyse and fragment both the form of the movement, as well as the Eastern philosophical tendency that includes it, the Daoism. I go through the analysis of this kind of interpretation of the whole and parts because in my research I realized that this principle of articulation is used by the West to integrate the philosophies of life and martial arts from the East. I understand the form of the martial art of Tai Chi as one



that holds the constituent parts together, like the substance of form in Aristotelian philosophy. I identify the concept of part in accordance with the principles that define Tai Chi, regarding the aspects of martial arts of Tai Chi. For the realization of the whole, the principles must also be fully realized. Based on the interpretations of master David Dorian Ross, the principles of Tai Chi have both a spiritual and a physical meaning. The continuation of the research is based on this important observation, which is also reflected in the physical and spiritual realization of the general form.

In the chapter *The possibilities of interpretations of Tai Chi according to the principles of the Tai Chi classics*, I examine the principles mentioned above along the main directions of intercultural dialogue (hobbies and sports, moving meditation, medication motion) analysed in the doctoral thesis. At the same time, I analyse the functions of the principles with the methods of text analysis of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic, in, both understandings, the physical part and the part of martial art expressing the philosophical meanings related to it.

According to the logic of the research, I consider it necessary to study the possibilities of interpreting Tai Chi in accordance with its main styles. Master Chen Xiaowang believes that knowing the form of martial arts is only the first step in learning a martial art, as well as is the case of Tai Chi. By understanding the practice of life through exercising the form, one can reach a true level of martial arts. Oleg Tcherne's research on Tai Chi finds that the physical expression of the culture of movement, teaches us a very much about understanding one's own philosophy of Tai Chi. I also analyse the approach of Frantzis Bruce, who recognizes the wholeness of the martial art of Tai Chi in harmony with the practice of martial arts technique and basic philosophy, belonging to this line of thinking. In order to achieve a more deepened dialogue, I consider necessary to analyse the Tai Chi styles, which are very common in the western world. Based on the researched literature, I identified the Yang and Chen styles as very frequently used styles. These are among the most common styles practiced. The spread of the Yang style consists in a special approach, which expresses the idealism of Daoist philosophy, and which can be linked to the current of the river water. The deep philosophical aspects of the Yang style can be found in various basic positions and basic techniques. In many cases, these basic forms also represent the inner schools and their associated Qigong, which exercises related to qi energy facilitate the approach to the intercultural dialogue of martial arts and at the same time make this style easier to interpret. Instead, the Chen style is a more dynamic form of movement that is harder for beginners to understand than the popular style discussed earlier. The peculiarity of the Chen Tai Chi style is the combination between external and internal schools, which highlights the possibilities of the exercise of a very rich philosophy of life.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutic interpretation proves to be useful in terms of styles, as it allows the interpretation to be deepened, both by comparing styles with each other and by presenting their individual philosophical meanings.

For the significance of the doctoral dissertation, I emphasize the novelty of the philosophical study of intercultural dialogue with reference to Tai Chi. The popularity of the Tai Chi in Europe and the United States has intensified in the second half of the twentieth century.

Concerning the literature I studied, I consider the importance of the fact that, in addition to a series of interpretive approaches, from the point of view of intercultural dialogue, I concluded that I should analyse the Tai Chi in wholeness. In my dissertation, I examined the dialogue between the martial arts of Tai Chi of the Far East, and their Western interpretations. Although Tai Chi is still exotic in the West, in relative short period time could mobilize large masses. The hermeneutic study proved to be suitable for researching intercultural dialogue in addition to the three main directions defined in the doctoral dissertation (hobbies and sports, medication motion, moving meditation) and for the successful deepening of all the characteristics of the hermeneutic circle. Regarding the hermeneutic circle, the philosophical deepening of the intercultural dialogue was achieved by interpreting the principles found in the classics of Tai Chi articulated in the hermeneutic horizon, in accordance with Schleiermacher's methodology.

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