

DOCTORAL THESIS

Psychological collectivism and mental toughness in traditional Wushu

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Wushu, Chinese martial art, consists of modern and traditional groups of styles. Previously it was researched that modern and traditional martial arts have different outcomes. Since traditional wushu is said to be rooted in Chinese values, its environment is a unique place to research psychological collectivism. Moreover, mental toughness is a new topic in the field of martial arts, and its connection with psychological collectivism was only researched on the society, not personality level.

Methods: This mixed methods research consisted of qualitative Study 1 and quantitative Study 2. Study 1 aimed to understand, what is the experience of psychological collectivism in traditional wushu training. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight European adult participants of traditional wushu and were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In the Study 2, 277 European adult respondents (111 modern wushu and 166 traditional wushu practitioners) filled in the Sport Mental Toughness Questionnaire and Psychological Collectivism Questionnaire. To research the relationship of practicing modern or traditional wushu with psychological collectivism and mental toughness, several steps were taken. First, the Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were run to test both models. Next, the final model was tested using Structural Equation Modelling. Model comparisons, path analysis and effects were completed.

Results: In Study 1, five themes emerged from the data. The first described how kung fu (traditional wushu) provided structure and direction for the interviewees. Also, it described how practitioners better adapted to the outer world and their ability to switch from being gentle to being ruthless. The second theme described perception of time. The third one explored the kung fu community, provided a probe into the group identity, and looked at how positioning closer to the master provided better learning options; the community served as the knowledge keeper. The fourth theme explored bridging gaps in communication. Finally, the fifth theme discovered seriousness of the practitioners, who had to endure mentally and physically torturous training. In Study 2, during the structural equation modeling the final model was confirmed as well as differences in the two groups of modern and traditional wushu. Moreover, it was found, that the number of joined competitions or years of training did not result in a significant path with mental toughness, but perceived level of skill did. The relationship between psychological collectivism and mental toughness was found only in the traditional wushu group, limited to a marginal p level.

Conclusion: Psychological collectivism was explored in traditional wushu and helped to understand the structure and functioning of the wushu community. The seriousness of its members served as a commodity, to negotiate better position in the group. In the quantitative study, this seriousness seemed to be connected with the perceived level of skill. This variable resulted in the significant path with mental toughness. It is suggested that the social environment of the serious practitioners, who put themselves through demanding training, helped to develop mental toughness. This development is not based on the number of years in training, but rather on the way the practitioners perceive themselves.

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