



## **The 1st International Transdisciplinary Martial Arts Conference in Taiwan**

Martial Arts Project (MAP)  
CEFC, Academia Sinica, Taipei  
Chinese Culture University, Taipei  
22-25 May 2024

*"Wu Tao Taiwan"*

### Convergence and Mutation of Martial Arts in Taiwan: Diversity, Tradition and Modernity

2024 will be the 400th anniversary of the first Taiwanese city, Tainan, but also that of the first conference of the Martial Arts Project (MAP). We wish to take advantage of this event to highlight the diversity of work relating to martial arts in a transdisciplinary approach. This will be an opportunity to build bridges between the different disciplines and to highlight and connect Taiwanese and foreign researchers who work around this multi-faceted object. This event will be divided into four days of presentations, workshops, and demonstrations, mainly at the CEFC of the Academia Sinica and at the University of Chinese Culture in Taipei.

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*"You can not see its form. You can not hear its voice. Yet there is an order to its accomplishments. We call it Tao."*  
Guanzi

Chinese martial arts and foreign fighting arts have played a unique role in Taiwan's history and society. For practitioners, they are not only a self-defense or combat technique, but also a way of life. Martial arts in Taiwan are deeply influenced by Chinese culture. Those who practice martial arts often emphasize the moral values and virtues (*Wu Tao* 武道) that are instilled as a result of beginning their martial arts journey. Compared to other fighting techniques, traditional martial arts training pays more attention to spiritual exploration through their Buddhist and Taoist origins.

Like the notion of Tao, which refers to the way or origin of all things, the origins of martial arts in Taiwan are multiple. While the earliest martial arts stem primarily from Chinese martial arts, they were also influenced by local Taiwanese and Japanese cultures. More recently, they have been nourished by the arrival of new practices from other countries such as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), Taekwondo, etc.

As defined by Laozi, "The Tao produced one; one produced two; two produced three; three produced all beings". In this quote, the expression of the Tao is represented by a thousand things. Similarly, the manifestation of the Tao martial continues to influence various areas of Taiwanese society. The involvement of martial arts is therefore not limited to its practitioners but affects

daily life and traditions in Taiwan. As an integral part of traditional culture, they are closely linked to notions of religious rites. For example, during the Taoist *Bugang* (步罡) ritual, martial artists and monks pledge to seek harmony between Heaven and Earth and protect the security of the country. They are also deeply rooted in literature. A certain romantic heroism is reflected in Taiwanese film and television, which in some cases is exported worldwide. Finally, in everyday life, martial arts in Taiwan are not only a means of adjusting body and mind but also a catalyst for social life.

The life of martial arts in Taiwan is also not limited to their presence inside the country. They have been inviting themselves outside of Formosa for a long time in sometimes unexpected forms. Several Taiwanese creations use them directly or indirectly through stage performances in dance or theater, thus giving them international visibility, but also real artistic originality. In the case of Taiwanese masters, some have built up a reputation that allows them to frequently give workshops abroad. Others have even gone abroad for a while or settled there to teach martial arts generated from Taiwan. This is the case, for example, in Europe or the United States, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, in Africa. This has not escaped researchers from all over the world who are studying these Taiwanese martial arts from the point of view of their presence abroad.

Thus, all this richness and crossbreeding of martial arts in Taiwan can be found in the various academic disciplines that study and observe them. For example, in the field of social and political sciences, martial arts in Taiwan are studied from the angle of their cultural importance or even their impact on public or private society. In the fields of sports and health sciences, scientists dissect them to better understand the biomechanics as well as the benefits on physical or even psychological health yielded by their practices.

We can see here that martial arts in Taiwan, which combine Chinese martial arts as well as various cultures, are like a banyan tree with intertwined roots, which feeds on Taiwan's unique customs and spreads its branches and leaves. Their importance is manifested in both their tangible and intangible penetration into Taiwanese society through various fields. Therefore, Taiwanese martial arts perfectly symbolize the complex life experience of this island nation. Their meaning and connotation deserve urgent re-examination at a time when Taiwan's identity has never needed reaffirmation as much.

To do this, this conference proposes to reflect on the relationship between martial arts and history, society, politics, culture, economy, science, dance, theater, and media in Taiwan. Below, we propose six themes around this object for the intervention proposals. Certain themes are not limited to martial arts in Taiwan.

1. A History of Martial Arts in Taiwan

Through its complex history, migrations and colonial presences, among other things, have had a large influence on the formation of Taiwanese identity. We want to better consider this historical framework in its diversity. We will welcome here the papers relating to subjects on these different sequences in an approach with multiple angles: historical, anthropological, ethnographic, etc.

2. Martial Arts in Dance, Theatre and Media

If the film *Tigers and Dragons* by Ang Lee, a Taiwanese, American, and Chinese co-production, directly put the spotlight on martial arts in Taiwan using cinema, the latter was already present and continues to be so in multiple forms in art and the media. Some companies like Cloud Gate, U-theatre, or Legend Lin Dance Theatre are other examples

of the fusion of martial arts and Chinese tradition with Western dance and theatre. Here we would like to acquire papers or proposals in the form of “practice as research” that explore the presence of martial arts in dance, theatre or media, in Taiwan or abroad.

3. Martial Arts, Philosophy and Taiwanese Religion

Religion, traditional medicine, and education are intertwined with different aspects of martial arts including spiritual notions from Taoism and Buddhism. Between philosophy and anthropology, we would like proposals that analyze the common themes and the influence of this spiritual contribution to reflect on the present and future development of martial arts in Taiwan and the rest of the world.

4. Martial Arts and Health: an Approach Through Sport and Medicine

Sports and health sciences have been offering a new look at martial arts in general for several years. From the study of movements to the consequences of martial practices on health, researchers are developing an increasingly scientific vision of the subject. The questions of sportization and modernization of certain practices such as modern Wushu also raise certain questions. We would like to highlight the papers that can account for the progress of this type of research in Taiwan and the rest of the world.

5. Society, Politics and Martial Arts

Culture and the arts carry implications that go beyond their simple manifestation or practice. Martial arts are no exception to this rule. The Chinese example of the dissemination of Wushu in developing countries demonstrates that this can be used as a tool of cultural diplomacy, particularly in the context of major projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative. We are looking for contributions that highlight the importance of martial arts for the country in terms of protecting its intangible heritage, cultural diplomacy, and soft power.

6. Chinese Martial Arts in the World Today

In this section, we would like to explore more generally the sporting, cultural, and societal issues surrounding Chinese martial arts in the world today, not just in Taiwan. In the People's Republic of China of course, but also in America, Europe or Africa, Chinese martial arts are also prevalent. They are found in different forms which sometimes follow different logics or goals. In this section, we would like to reflect on the current state of Chinese martial arts from an international perspective.

To participate in the conference, you are invited to submit your paper. You are also welcome to propose a panel topic (maximum three people per panel) or proposals in the form of “practice as research” to [info.tmaproject@gmail.com](mailto:info.tmaproject@gmail.com). The submission by **15 January 2024** must contain:

- A title
- An abstract in English (max. 300 words). Please also submit a Chinese version if you plan to present it in Chinese.
- A biography (200 words max.)
- Keywords (5 max.)
- Your email and academic links or pages (if available)

Confirmation date for propositions: **15th February 2024**.

Registration fees: Presenter **4000 NTD** / Participant or student **2000 NTD**.

**Please note that if your proposal is accepted, you are free to present in English or Chinese on the day of the conference. Paper presentations last 20 minutes, practice as research presentations 30 minutes.**

If you have any questions, you can write in French, English, or Chinese to Dr. Ho Ai-Cheng ([aho.tmaproject@gmail.com](mailto:aho.tmaproject@gmail.com)) or Alexandre Mathys ([mathys.tmaproject@gmail.com](mailto:mathys.tmaproject@gmail.com)).