

Raúl Sánchez García (2019) *The Historical Sociology of Japanese Martial Arts*. Abingdon: Routledge.

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As I am going to show, Raúl Sánchez García's book offers a couple of merits. In *The Historical Sociology of Japanese Martial Arts*, Sánchez García outlines the development of several types of sports in Japan. I would like to start this review with a remark about this book and the situation of sociological research in general. Even decades after its publication, it seems that Elias's (1987) lament about 'the retreat of sociologists into the present' proves to be true more than ever. By following the method of historical sociology, the author's book is an exception to this mournful development in the discipline by focussing on *very* long-term historical developments in his study of the evolution of martial arts over a time scale approximately 1300 years long. He starts his investigation in the Nara period of the eighth century AD and proceeds as far as modern combat sports.

At this point, I would like to highlight a further important characteristic of the book. The author does not offer a 'description' of history. That is to say, the term 'description' does not properly express Sánchez García's methodology. In fact, 'description' specifies more or less the type of approach by traditionalist historians who are trying to work out a narrative about 'how things actually were', following the assertion of Leopold von Ranke (1956 [1824]: 57). Sánchez García does not merely recount a history of martial arts in Japan; rather, the author follows a more complex research program by arranging and ordering quite a high number of dates and events in accordance with a certain theoretical perspective. Thus, the aim was not to write a 'story' but a theoretically informed explanation of processes and ways of understandings cultural change. By doing so, Sánchez García follows the approach taken by Norbert Elias discussing events, dates and long-term processes, in this case from three different interrelated perspectives.

First, the book focuses on the Japanese processes of state-formation. It gives information of the early phase of centralisation by the imperial court in the first millennium. Afterwards, Sánchez García describes the various developments that follows gradually from the decline of centralised imperial authority to the conflicts between powerful warlords and the stabilisation of power with the rise of the Tokugawa regime. This is followed by an analysis of the reforms of the Meiji era (AD1868–1912) that led to the militarisation of Japanese society in the years between the 1890s and 1945. Finally, the author discusses the rise of democratic Japan after the Second World War.

Second, following the logic of the process theory of civilisation the author correlates those socio-genetic state-formation processes with developments of psycho-genesis. In doing so, Sánchez García analyses the processes of habitus-formation of warriors, fighters, and other persons involved in martial arts. Those various types of habitus were closely connected to changing status-positions of these agents over the centuries.

Third, Sánchez García links up these long-term perspective of state- and habitus-formation with the development of martial arts itself. Thus, he gives an account of the evolution of archery, sumo, sword fighting,

and modern sports like judo and karate, to name but a few. In linking-up state-formation with the evolution of martial arts, the reader gets a good impression of *why* particular sports evolved out of certain techniques of warfare. The study also makes clear, *how* this happened in the long run.

The book is organised chronically and is divided into three major parts (Warriors, Retainers, Martial Artists). In the first part, the author is concerned with the evolution of martial arts in the context of early warfare. The second part focuses on the Tokugawa period and the third part explains developments since Japan was forced to open itself to the world. Following this logic, Sánchez García's study follows a trajectory of the evolution of techniques of warfare into sporting disciplines.

I would like to discuss some important stages of this trajectory. During the Heian period (AD794–1185), it was the imperial court where martial arts were cultivated and refined for the first time. Sumo tournaments were held in the imperial court. After the decline of the emperor's power, such techniques were also performed in other places of the country. During the Kamakura period (AD1185–1333), the focal point of power shifted to the shogun (essentially a military dictator functioning as the *de facto* rule of Japan), who also organised tournaments in martial arts.

In the fourteenth century, a period of permanent war, a warrior-class developed whose members saw themselves as being distinct from the old town-based nobility. As Sánchez García mentions, this new warrior-class had its own warrior ethos (the Muromachi code). The style of warfare also changed in this period. Archery was supplemented with sword fighting. Both became cultivated by the samurai. Archery became an object of cultivation by high-ranked warriors, sword fighting (sword-related *ryū*) by the common warriors, and schools of swordsmanship were even founded.

Sánchez García explains that in the sixteenth century the type of 'survival unit' changed, too. Families and alliances between families were no longer regarded as the most important group affiliation in order to defend against enemies. Instead, the allegiance to a *daimyō* – a powerful feudal lords living on large estates with armies of vassal-warriors – superseded the older family-based system of defence. *Daimyō* armies became larger and their infantry was equipped with firearms. After the Battle of Sekigahara (AD1600), the Tokugawa shogunate was established, which had several consequences for martial arts. The new Shogun confiscated firearms and reduced the numbers of soldiers in private armies. Therefore, a large number of masterless samurai roamed through the country, disrespectfully referred to as *rōnin*. In this period, large battles became rare, with single combats becoming more common. In this context, on the base of *musha shugyō* – which was a samurai's pilgrimage improving his skills by means of duels and training with other fighting schools – veterans developed a number of new fighting technics. In the end, these pilgrimages of samurai-warriors and *rōnins* led to the establishment of new fighting schools.

In this violent situation, fighting-skills were linked to esoteric Zen-Buddhist knowledge. Sánchez García explains the spread of this esoteric knowledge through the means of the process theory of civilisation. This type of knowledge functioned as danger control. It represented a 'non-predominant civilising trend acting within the predominant decivilising trend' of this cycle of violence (p. 63).

Sánchez García goes on in describing the shift of warriors into retainers during the later Tokugawa period. This shift in the status of warriors also provoked a shift in their habitus. As retainers, they were involved in less fighting but they were forced to foster a greater degree of self-control. Martial arts turned into a commercial business organised by licensed instructors and performed as indoor-training in training halls. Training with small weapons became more popular as well as more specialised types of instruction. Private academies were founded open not only to samurai but also to commoners. Hand-to-hand combat also flourished, which later became jujutsu and judo. The professionalisation of sumo wrestling was also initiated

in this period. As Sánchez García observes, Japanese society witnessed a first process of functional democratisation in which the status positions of non-samurai and non-warrior classes increased dramatically.

As a result of the reforms of the Meiji period, traditional manners were modified in the course of a process of informalisation. Western lifestyle as well as Western sports like basketball became popular in Japan. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the pendulum soon went back in the other direction. Traditional Japanese manners and cultural practices were re-invented in a wave of cultural nationalism that accompanied the militarisation of Japan during the First Sino–Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905). In these decades, militarisation and nationalism fostered a new sense of Japaneseness. Now, sumo became the symbol of ‘national’ sport in Japan. Sánchez García describes this development as ‘reformalisation’. He emphasises the importance of the nationalistic discourse on bushido.

After the short interlude of the democratic and liberal Taisho era (1912–1926), during which Western manners became widespread and women started to wear Western outfits, in the early Showa period (1926–1945) stronger militaristic values became dominant once more. These decades are characterised by the tension of two different social trends. On the one side, Western sports influenced and modified Japanese martial arts. Championships in judo were organised and women were allowed to participate. On the other side, ultra-nationalist organisations like the Dai Nippon Butokakai (Greater Japan Martial Virtue Society) were opposed to the idea of Western-style sports. During this time, a very traditional form of *budō* (‘martial way’ or ‘way of war’) was also founded that related an esoteric and mystical understanding of martial arts to anti-sport sentiments.

Sánchez García uses de Swaan’s (2015) theory of the ‘compartmentalisation of violence’ in order to understand these contradictory double-sided processes. He creates the concept of ‘suicidal habitus’. Highly fantasy-laden political ideologies, militarism, and a certain understanding of martial arts were linked together in this instance. This habitus fostered a fighting spirit that became important for the Japanese Soldiers in the Second World War.

Only in the decades after the war have martial arts become detached from militarism. Above all, commercialisation has changed their face forever. Martial arts merged with the global sports figuration. In sumo, professional tournaments led even to the dominance of foreign wrestlers. The integration of Japanese martial arts into world sports has also generated hybrids. An example is a sport, which in the early 1960s was called kickboxing by Japanese fighters. Kickboxing, like other modern combat sports, can be described more as a display of ‘spectacularised violence’ rather than a tradition of militarism. In the context of the theory of civilisation, this type of violent behaviour can be interpreted as being more instrumental and rational rather than affective and expressive, as one can find it in traditional martial arts in Japan as well as in violent games in pre-modern Europe.

The book has only one weakness. For readers not being experts in Japanese history or cultural practices, the large number of facts, dates and Japanese terminology makes it sometimes not easy to follow. Conversely, this weakness indicates the strength of the author’s ability to integrate a multitude of aspects into a synthesis.

As I have mentioned at the beginning, the book has a number of merits. The reader not only learns much about the political history of Japan but also much about Japanese cultural practices in general and Japanese martial arts in particular. However, the most important merit is that the study demonstrates the long-term perspective as fruitful and necessary for understanding major developments in human societies.

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