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Martial Arts Fighting Styles - An Introduction

Martial arts fighting styles are many and varied with not only techniques but principles, cultures and philosophical approaches varying widely.

One of the difficulties in classifying fighting styles is that there is no definite consensus on what is the definition of a true martial arts fighting style.

For the purpose of this article I will use the definition of a martial arts fighting style as any system or methodology pertaining to fighting and combat situations, as this complies with the dictionary definition of the terms martial and art.



Some "authorities" would argue that they must originate from Asian cultures; an opinion that does not take into account the fighting systems of ancient Greece or Europe and their modern derivations.



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From a general perspective martial arts styles can be separated into those that emphasize the use of weapons, those that concentrate on striking and those that emphasize grappling techniques.

This is only a very general classification as many systems combine two or more of these classifications and although many commentators would argue that a true martial art requires the use of all of these aspects of fighting that is not the case with many of the accepted martial arts disciplines.

Systems of martial arts fighting styles have evolved from the fighting techniques and methods used by warriors throughout the world and can be as diverse as full systems taught in schools of military training to

systems of fighting developed and kept within families.

It is only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that we see the systematically taught instruction of styles that we see today, evolved.

Many of these systems have lost their practical fighting ability to the so called meditative aspects of the particular art or have been completely turned into just sports.

Some martial arts fighting styles have only appeared within the last 100 years and have never been exposed to the rigorous selection of real fighting that their predecessors underwent.

In the weaponry rich systems we find the Japanese systems of Kendo, Kenjutsu, Iaido, Jodo together with the Karate weapons systems derived from the Kobudo weapons systems. Striking and grappling is either absent or very poorly developed in all of these systems.

The Chinese arts also utilize many weapons as part of their Kung Fu systems but these are taught as part of unarmed combat systems as well.

Probably the richest weapons systems are those of the Philippines and nearby areas of Malaysia and Indonesia; the blade and stick-fighting systems of Kali, Escrima and Arnis.



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These fighting systems also have very complex and powerful unarmed combat components, together with the weapons and some also utilize throwing and ground fighting, these systems were very much family trained systems.

The Europeans also have the quarter-staff, sword and dagger systems which were extremely well developed and if you want to accept the definition that martial arts fighting styles are systems and methods of war and fighting then you would also have to include the disciplines of modern firearm and bayonet usage in this classification.

The striking systems are probably the most well known and most practiced throughout the world with the Karate system of Japan being the most well-known. There are many different styles of Karate each having slightly different emphasis on different methodologies and while most include some form of weaponry at higher levels it is certainly not well developed and doesn't have a practical realistic usage, apart from exercise and strengthening value which is normally the justification for using them as part of their systems. Much of it is drawn from the Kobudo group of weapons and has lost a lot of its functionality in ritual.

The most powerful striking martial art would be Muay Thai and its close cousin Burmese boxing; these striking systems are extremely well developed and deliver strikes with incredible speed, power and ferocity.

Brazilian Capoeira is a very acrobatic striking style that has lost much of its practical fighting ability that existed in the original African system from which it was derived. A similar situation is demonstrated by the Chinese martial art of Wushu which has become very flashy and demonstrates little practical fighting ability.

Do we include western boxing in martial arts? I think that we should because it fulfills much the same requirements of Judo as a martial art. It has suffered the change of time in placing rules on it but in the past it was certainly more brutal than it is now.

It carries its own philosophy and that introduces me to the argument that a martial art should have an underlying philosophy, a point that I definitely agree with, however, who



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is anyone to say that the philosophies by which we westerners do things are not as valid as the philosophies of the eastern cultures.

Modern wrestling is in the same genre being derived from the ancient Pankration and now controlled by rules but again it was originally used for fighting and had and still has a distinct philosophy behind it.

Now we come to the self defense systems of Close Quarter Combat and Krav Maga again that would fit the classification of a martial art as set down by the other determinants. This is even though Krav Maga does not claim to be one, but one only has to read the original intent of its founder to determine that it is a martial art.

The striking arts of the malaysian, philipino and indonesian area are also very well developed with the silats demonstrating a very complex and rich understanding of fighting principles and concepts.

The fighting styles that emphasize grappling include Judo, Jiu jitsu, Aikido and sumo from Japan together with Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and Chin Na from China. Here we find the strongest support for the argument that some of the systems I have classified as martial arts above should be included.

If you are to remove boxing and wrestling from the classification of martial arts then you have to remove Sumo and Judo as well.

Russian Sambo, American Catch, Free-style and Greco-Roman wrestling are fighting systems that exist on that fringe of the classification are usually classified as a sport.

The richest of the martial arts fighting styles are the multi-discipline martial arts such as Ninjutsu and the Chinese Kung Fu although the latter has many different styles with most only emphasizing one or two aspects of fighting.

The most dominant fighting system at the present time is Mixed Martial Arts. This together with its inspiration from Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and Vale Tudo is the biggest thing that has happened to martial arts since Bruce Lee.



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There are those that would argue it is not a martial art - in my opinion this is completely absurd it has all of the requirements apart from the use of weapons, but neither do many of the other accepted fighting disciplines.

The philosophy is a western style of philosophy of mental toughness and training discipline and, I say again, what is so different about that and eastern philosophies. Particularly as we see eastern philosophic driven societies demonstrating anti-humanistic and anti-environment practices throughout the modern world many of which are driven by the philosophies of Sun Tzu and the Go Rin No Sho as underlying guides.

This article is by no means a complete account of all fighting systems as almost every country around the world has a fighting system as part of its culture each having evolved as time has gone by and lifestyles have changed that in turn has led to us utilizing the values of martial arts for different reasons.

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