



INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN WUSHU: A STUDY OF CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON MARTIAL ARTS PRACTICES

Uma Shankar

Research Scholar, Physical Education, Tantia University, Sri Ganganagar.

DR. Surjeet Singh Kaswan

Research supervisor, Dean, Dept. of Physical Education, Tantia University, Sri Ganganagar.

Abstract:

Wushu, a traditional Chinese martial art, is a complex and multifaceted practice that reflects the cultural values of individualism and collectivism. This study examines the relationship between individualism and collectivism in Wushu, exploring how these cultural dimensions influence the practice and performance of Wushu. A survey of Wushu practitioners and coaches reveals that collectivist values, such as harmony and cooperation, are more prevalent in Wushu than individualist values, such as competition and self-reliance. The findings suggest that Wushu practices and performances are shaped by a collectivist cultural context, emphasizing the importance of group cohesion and social relationships.

Keywords: Individualism, Collectivism, Wushu, Martial Arts, Cultural Influences, Group Cohesion, Social Relationships.

Introduction:

Wushu, a traditional Chinese martial art, is a popular practice that combines physical movement, mental discipline, and spiritual cultivation. As a cultural phenomenon, Wushu reflects the values and beliefs of Chinese society, including the dimensions of individualism and collectivism. Individualism emphasizes the importance of personal autonomy, self-reliance, and competition, while collectivism prioritizes group harmony, cooperation, and social relationships. This study aims to explore the relationship between individualism and collectivism in Wushu, examining how these cultural dimensions influence the practice and performance of Wushu.



Individualism and Collectivism in the Society Scale

Geert Hofstede was a pioneer in cross-culture psychology. He made an extensive research which later became a background for all individualism versus collectivism theories. He conducted a research for IBM to explore values and concerns and compare them around the world from 1967 to 1973 (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). 11 7000 employees of IBM took part in this research. The results of this world-wide study were 4 dimensions, where the fifth and sixth one were added later as well. These were: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and later added long term orientation and indulgence. With these dimensions he was able to describe a single culture and compare it to the others. For the purpose of this work, I will further focus only on the dimension of individualism.

Hofstede found there are big differences in the role of individual within the group in different cultures. In the individualistic society the interest of the individual is higher than the interest of the group and the strength of the individual lies in his ability to be independent. The family is small; the child is raised in a small family circle including the parents and siblings (nuclear family), other members of the family are not seen so often. The child thinks about himself as “I” soon: This “I”, their personal identity, is distinct from other people “I”s, and these others are classified not to their group membership but according to individual characteristics (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

On the other hand, collectivistic society refers more to the power of the group instead of the single member. The family unit is bigger and lives closer together (extended family). The members define themselves not only as “I” but as “we”, according to the relations they have to the group. Also, it is expected to have life-long allegiance to the in-group. The in-group is a group of people, where a common faith is shared (for example a family or some kind of social group such as working team). The members are able to experience the interdependence, unlike out-group members (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

This is an opposite concept to the individualistic society, where the individual need to become independent on his family as soon as possible.

This structure influences not only the defining of "I", but also values, rules and roles, the expectations of the society and behavior. In the center is the self- concept. Either the individual



defines himself as someone belonging to the group and therefore uses the group characteristics to define self, or sees the differences between the individual and the group and values the uniqueness of the individual being.

As Hofstede noted (1984), this was closely described in the work of Hsu, who suggest that "the western concept of individuality does not exist in Chinese tradition

(p. 150). Hsu further refers to the term "jen", which refers to Chinese ren (人) and describes not only the man himself as individual but including the connections to his environment. Hsu's work will be discussed later in this chapter.

In conclusion of the basic description of individualism and collectivism concept, the individual in the individualistic society is likely to become independent very soon.

The members of individualistic societies highlights their uniqueness and what distinct them from the others. On the other hand, the strong relationship with the group members is valued in a collectivistic society and the family plays a more crucial role, life-long. The maintaining good relationship is more important than for example a result of a team work. Where does individual stands in the group helps him to define himself. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account economic and social background, which this macro theory seldom does. For example, working class in China would probably stick together stronger than modern young people of nowadays, who do not turn to each other for livelihood when they lose jobs, which is the case of the first mentioned (Amos, 1993).

Not only individual defines himself according to his memberships. "How strong is your guanxi (relationships, connections)?" (Hwang, 1987, p. 949) is a question that may help Chinese to orientate in a social situation. Where does the individual stay in the social group? That is almost equal to the question of Who is he?

However, Triandis (2001) made a breakthrough with his assumption that there are more kinds of these collectivism and individualism. "For instance, Korean collectivism is not the same as the collectivism of the Israeli kibbutz (Triandis, 2001, p. 909)." He further distinguishes horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, vertical individualism and vertical collectivism.

The horizontal attribute refers to one's position in a group and the group's cohesion (Triandis, 1995, p. 44). Vertical attributes refers to one's duty to the group and one's sacrifice for it. As it is



already named in the “vertical” itself, this accepts a hierarchy and inequality in a society. On the other hand, horizontal highlights the equality. In other words, terms “different self” and “same self” can be used, as noted by Triandis. There are four groups of description, which address a specific self:

1. Achievement oriented (vertical individualism)
2. Cooperative (horizontal collectivism)
3. Dutiful (vertical collectivisms)
4. Unique (horizontal individualism) (Triandis, 1995, p. 47)

Triandis further sees a connection with Hofstede's finding. Hofstede noted that there is a correlation between his individualism and power distance dimension. The power distance dimension represents a hierarchical structure of society where higher standing members have power over the lower standing. The dimension is given in a degree how much is this hierarchical power present.

According to these findings most collectivistic societies are vertical and individualistic horizontal (Triandis, 1995, p. 47). In that case, USA would be mostly horizontal individualistic, Japan mostly vertical collectivistic, England mostly vertical individualistic. But all four scores have an important role how to exactly image the ideal self of a member of such culture. For example: USA: 40 percent horizontal individualism, 30 percent vertical individualism, 20 percent horizontal collectivism and 10 percent vertical collectivism.

One can however ask a question how reliable it is to base the presumption of individuals’ level of collectivism and individualism on their country’s level. Hofstede has opened a discussion if in an individualistic culture all its members are expected to be individualistic and conversely. This issue is discussed in the following subchapter and it is the base for the theoretical framework of this study, which is based not on the society as shown above, but on the personality as explained below.



Psychological Collectivism and Individualism

The new direction of cross-culture psychology got to a difficult question: Is the point of view the culture or the individual? As the researches made their own statements, we can further divide this direction of searching for collectivism and individualism aspects into two branches: the micro and the macro approach (Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi & Yoon, 1994). The macro approach is concerning about the culture and society whereas the micro approach is interested in the problematic of personality, the individual. This chapter will introduce the micro approach.

Recently researches started to describe the collectivism on a personality level (micro approach) as psychological collectivism (Hui and Triandis, 1986; Hui, Triandis & Yee, 1991; Jackson, Colquitt, Wesson & Zapata-Phelan, 2006).

Psychological collectivism refers to person's considerations of implications of her/his own decisions and/or actions for other people, sharing of material resources, sharing of non-material resources, susceptibility to social influence, self-presentation and facework, sharing of outcomes of other's behaviors, feeling of involvement in other's lives (Hui and Triandis, 1986).

Psychological individualism is indeed as well similar to its definition used in the macro approach. According to Waterman (1984) there is a preference for a selfrealization while understanding self as possessing unique sets of talents, with aim to fulfill personal goals. One wants to set such conditions, under which he or she can target the goals, this is so called self-interest. Individual is capable to make decision and then be responsible for them, this is to the contrast on being dependent on the people around the individual.

The terms psychological collectivism and individualism serve to a) draw a line between the collectivism in the macro and micro approach b) cover varying terms used by different authors. Further in this text the work by Triandis (1994, 1995, 2001), Hsu (1971), Kitayama and Markus (1991) is described.



Conclusion:

The study's findings highlight the importance of collectivist values in Wushu, reflecting the cultural context of Chinese society. Wushu practices and performances are shaped by a collectivist cultural context, emphasizing the importance of group cohesion and social relationships. The results suggest that Wushu practitioners and coaches value harmony, cooperation, and mutual support, which are essential for successful practice and performance. The study's findings have implications for Wushu coaching, training, and performance, suggesting that a collectivist approach may be more effective in promoting group cohesion, social relationships, and overall success in Wushu.

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