

Body of 氣 – Body in 氣

A Paradox of Asia in Multiperspective Critical Consideration

Problem and Epistemological Interest

In the West there are numerous esoteric ideas about 氣 (Kubny, 2002). Also in the martial arts 氣 is dealt with. The philosophers Yamaguchi (1997) and Schmidt (2007), for instance, negotiate—each specific—appearance, modes of action and exercise methods of 氣. Their explanations stand in remarkable—partially rather contradictory—relationship to representations of critical researchers. Thinking, experiencing and training the body in the martial art can refer fundamentally to 氣—if one believes in it. But a cleared and profitable attitude towards 氣 can be developed only on the basis of a reflected and critical-scientifically arranged conception of 氣.

Objective and Method

The objective of the study is to critically examine 氣 from the perspectives of various scientific disciplines: philology, philosophy, religious studies, medicine, natural sciences, health and movement sciences with a view to their significance for martial arts. Hermeneutics is chosen as the method. It is based on an extensive literature search.

Findings



Discussion and Research Perspectives

氣 is not a phenomenon, but a construct and as such a pre-enlightenment attempt to give a name to the—experienced, perceived, and observed—inexplicable. This happens in everyday-life pragmatic-utilitarian regard, whereby humans can be imagined as „body of 氣“ and „body in 氣“—as a matter of course. Terms such as "life force" or "vital energy" are misleading because 氣 is not good per se, but can only be understood as ambivalent and paradoxical. "But why does one do so mysteriously with it", [Sh]Issai Chozan (1659-1741), author of Tengu-geijutsu-ron, the martial art of the mountain goblins, asks (Kammer, 2007, p. 74). "it" refers to the art of sword fighting. And the question aims at connecting mystery to art. The answer given at that time is highly revealing for the context of martial arts today: "If one does mysteriously with it, it happens for the beginner. If one does not do mysteriously with it, then the beginner has no confidence. This is merely a pedagogical trick. Therefore all secrecy is not essential, it is not the core of the matter" (ibid.). Thus, is 氣 in the end nothing more than a marketing instrument? This is where clearing martial arts related research can attach and, e.g., deal with questions of esoterically upgrading course offers by 氣, the reception of course offers dressed up with 氣 by target groups, the biomechanical analysis of so-called 氣 exercises etc.

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