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AIKI AND IDO SWIMMING. CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SWIMMING AND MARTIAL ARTS

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Pływanie *aiki* i *ido*. Związki pływania ze sztukami walki

Streszczenie

Historyczne związki pływania ze sztuką wojenną są niewątpliwe. Umiejętność pływania jest wciąż cenna nie tylko w marynarce wojennej (co jest dość oczywiste), pokonywania przeszkód wodnych wymaga się od żołnierza wojsk lądowych, a siły specjalne uczą dodatkowo sprawnego nurkowania. W okresie japońskiego średniowiecza samuraj powinien być, dla pełnego wykształcenia w umiejętnościach wojennych (jap. *bugei*), poznać zasady pływania w zbroi i z bronią (jap. *suei-jutsu*) i zdobyć odpowiednie umiejętności praktyczne. Współcześnie zaś, w praktyce sztuk walki i sportów walki, pływanie zalecane jest jako znakomity sport uzupełniający.

Czy zachodzą inne jeszcze związki pomiędzy historią, filozofią i kulturowym dziedzictwem sztuk walki a pływaniem? W analizach wykorzystane zostaną pojęcia z tradycji japońskich sztuk walki oraz odniesienia do kilku odmian sztuk walki o japońskiej proweniencji. Autor przedstawia tu swe autorskie koncepcje wynikające z doświadczenia własnego, obserwacji i przeprowadzonych analiz.

Słowa kluczowe: sport, sztuki walki, rekreacja ruchowa, rehabilitacja, pływanie.

Abstract

The historical connections between swimming and the art of war are unquestionable. The ability to swim is still valuable not only in the navy, which is quite obvious. Overcoming water obstacles requires the same from a soldier of the land forces, and special forces additionally teach efficient diving. During the Japanese Middle Ages, a samurai should, for a full education in martial skills (in Japanese: *bugei*), learn the rules of swimming in armour and with weapons (in Japanese:

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suei-jutsu) and acquire appropriate practical skills. Nowadays, in the practice of martial arts and combat sports, swimming is recommended as an excellent complementary sport.

Are there other connections between the history, philosophy and cultural heritage of martial arts and swimming? In further analyses, concepts from the tradition of Japanese martial arts and references to several varieties of martial arts of Japanese origin will be used. The author presents here his own concepts resulting from his own experience, observations and conducted analyses.

Keywords: sport, martial arts, physical recreation, rehabilitation, swimming.

Introduction

Swimming is a form of physical culture. It is practised for various purposes. It is an Olympic **sports discipline** (since 1896), but also a valuable form of physical education and a preferred recreational sport (Jankowski & Krawczyk, 1997; Cynarski, 2017: 151–156). In the last hundred years there have been changes in the technique of swimming. It wasn't until 1935 that Volney Wilson invented the butterfly style, also known as the dolphin. Here, the footwork was changed later. To this day, there are 4 main styles in sport – crawl, breaststroke (classical), dolphin (butterfly), backstroke, and medley (combined applications of the four styles in competition) (more: Mauss, 1973; Colwin, 2002; Escalante & Saavedra, 2012). It is also indicated as a valuable **complementary sport** for people following the path of martial arts. It provides the improvement of such abilities as “coordination and fluidity of movement, endurance and efficiency of the body; relief of the spine and joints, and relaxation” (Cynarski, 2009: 98; more: Cynarski, 2019: 223–236).

For elderly population, people who are seriously ill or need rehabilitation, swimming is recommended. Here, the effort according to its volume (time) and intensity (speed of movement in water) can be properly dosed. The author tested it on himself in just such an application, i.e. that it is an excellent **physical recreation** or also **physical rehabilitation**. It can also be a competitive training on one's own measure, i.e. according to one's own current capabilities. And in this sense, swimming is part of the educational systems of martial arts according to their general theory (the General Theory of Fighting Arts) and their meaning for the area of physical culture (*cf.* Cynarski *et al.*, 2014; Cynarski, 2019).

Let us explain the meaning of two important concepts from the world of martial arts. The Japanese concept of **aiki** is translated as “harmonizing / balancing opposing energies”. *Ai* means “in accord” and *ki* means “breath” or “energy”. *Ki* (*qi* / *chi*) manifests itself in coordinated movement or as the circulation of “internal energy” in the body – blood and lymph, but also nerve impulses and “air” / oxygen. On the other hand, **ido** (Jap. *idō*) is an ambiguous concept. Here we will use this term in the literal sense of a smooth, continuous, “perpetual motion” (Cynarski, 2022: 142–158). This translates into the practice of traditionally practised martial arts. But how does this translate to the way you swim?

Method

The first question was: What is the relationship between swimming and martial arts? In further analyses, concepts from the tradition of Japanese martial arts and references to several varieties of martial arts of Japanese origin were used. The author presents here his own concepts resulting from his own experience, observed and conducted analyses. It is the experience of over 40 years practising martial arts (*aikijutsu* / *aikidō*, *idō*, *judo*, *jūjutsu* and others) and swimming. It is, in particular, participatory observation / observant participation (Green *et al.*, 2019) and analysis of a broad discourse in the undertaken thematic area (Krippendorf, 2004).

Aiki swimming

Good coordination of movement with breath makes it possible to call a given activity *aiki* activity – an activity that implements the principle of harmonizing energy. That is, similar to *aikido* (*aikidō*). These are – as in the Taoist opposition *Yin-Yang* (Japanese *in-yō*) – inhalation and exhalation, rising and falling, pulling and pushing, hardness and softness, masculine and feminine elements, etc. As *aiki* stems from the concept of philosophical Taoism, **strenuous effort should also be avoided** when running or swimming. So it should be a moderate pace that is good for recreation and physical rehabilitation. Depending on how you feel, you can even change the butterfly / dolphin style (requiring more effort / energy) to breaststroke or backstroke and continue swimming at a leisurely pace, as if walking.

In *aiki* swimming, the term “*ki*” means both “coordinated movement” and the circulation of oxygen through the breath, and specifically the coordination of movement with breath. Then, the kinetic action and physiological functions of the body render an optimal effect. Concentrating on the smoothness of movement in coordination with one’s breath is more important than focusing on the strength or speed of action. Breathing is particularly important here, which is analogous to the issues of relaxation in yoga and controlled breathing in traditional martial arts (*cf.* Krenc, 2001).

Taoism recommends avoiding extremes and operating in accordance with the laws of nature; therefore, it is in contradiction with sporting achievement. By the way, the exercises of the systems stemming from this philosophy are effectively used in rehabilitation and even in therapy (in particular *Yang taijiquan* and various types of *qigong* breathing exercises) (Włodyka & Cynarski, 2000; Maciaszek, 2009; Cynarski & Sieber, 2015; Cynarski, 2018; Skrzeta *et al.*, 2021). Terry Laughlin (2011) also points to the opposition of scientific knowledge and

intuition, as well as the ease and burden of practical experience, resulting from Taoism. All this finds a state of harmony in the *Tao* and an application in the act of swimming.

What is, sometimes demonized, *ki* (Chinese *chi*, *qi*)? It is like additional strength resulting either from good psychophysical coordination of the body and mind (mental attitude and eye-hand coordination, as in *aikibudo*, *aikido*, *ai-kijutsu*, but also in *karate* and other martial arts), or the circulation of energy in the body (nerve impulses, blood and lymph). In acupuncture and acupressure, it is especially about correcting disorders in this area. Good health is when breath (oxygen) and this internal energy (circulation of impulses and body fluids) function efficiently / remain in a state of homeostasis. On the other hand, activities performed by humans in the external environment should be harmonized with this natural environment. But this does not mean that man should remain passive towards the elements of nature. However, he shouldn't fight them when he doesn't have to.

***Ido* swimming**

How to achieve the *ido* swimming skill? Try to make your swimming movements so as not to dissipate energy and splash water. It is supposed to be smooth movement in the water – quietly (without splashing) and without haste. This idea of economy of movement, without unnecessary dissipation of energy, is close to the principle of *seiryokuzen'yo* (obtaining maximum effect with minimum effort, i.e. economy of movement) and the principles of *jū-no ri* (flexibility) and *wa-no ri* (harmony in the interaction of body and mind). And these are the principles of *jūjutsu* – the old Japanese “art of flexibility”.

In the case of the breaststroke (classic style) and the open frog (we breathe above the water), it is relatively easy; all limbs move under the surface of the water. It is more difficult to swim with other strokes. In front crawl and open front crawl we try to put our hands into the water without hitting the water with them. Both in front crawl and backstroke we do not hit the surface of the water with our legs. Slight bending of the knees makes us swim noiselessly. In the case of working the hands in the backstroke, their alternate pulling out of water must inevitably cause slight splashing / splashing, but also here we do not hit the water surface with our arms.

Butterfly/dolphin is a relatively difficult style on its own. All the more so it is not easy to achieve fluidity and the ability to enter the water with your hands without splashing. On the other hand, the movement of the legs, modelled on the movement of the dolphin's tail, also causes waves and splashes. However, the guiding, general rule here is **moderation, fluidity, harmony**. So the opposite

of the slogan present in competitive sport and the Olympic motto “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (“**Faster, Higher, Stronger**”). In *ido* swimming, you should strive for a kind of calm walk on the surface of the water. It is supposed to be a **state of harmonization** with water, which is not a natural element of man, although all biological life on Earth came out of water. This can be regarded as a kind of atavistic activity.

How to exercise? The author prefers swimming in a “variable style,” i.e. alternating crawl, dolphin, breaststroke and backstroke. Overcoming the length of the pool with successively mentioned basic styles allows the effort (load) to be distributed successively to different parts of the body. In addition, it is possible to swim sideways (crawl on the side), open breaststroke (breathing above the water), open front crawl, doggie, backstroke with only legs, diver (underwater), various ways of practising swimming with a board, which causes yet another work of muscles and other muscles’ parts.

How much should it be – what amount of training / rehabilitation load? The author prefers about 35 minutes of relatively continuous swimming once or twice a week. This is, for example, a total of 20-24 standard pool lengths (25 m) with rest breaks. If we add a shower, Scottish whips and a Jacuzzi, we get, in addition to recreational exercise, also hygienic and physiotherapeutic values (water massage), a **hardening and wellness treatment**. In addition, wiping with a towel from the lower limbs towards the lymph nodes is an additional self-massage.

Discussion

From the perspective of sports training theory/sports science, both talent (psychophysical predispositions), teaching and training are taken into account; a number of success factors lead to the best results in sports competition (*cf.* Born *et al.*, 2020; Layne *et al.*, 2020). What is important here is the level of motor skills, personality traits, the influence of training methods, fatigue, stress, etc. For example, in their work, Fernandes *et al.* (2023) point to such factors as: coordination, energy cost, fatigue, technical proficiency, velocity, swimming technique, and force.

On the other hand, it is difficult to overestimate swimming as a multistimulating and multifaceted exercise in the field of physical culture. This applies to a wide area: from physical education, through physical recreation to physical rehabilitation (*cf.* Becker, 2009; Escalante & Saavedra, 2012; Lee & Oh, 2015). This is generally consistent with the observations and conclusions of the author of this study.

Even for physically weak people and chronically ill patients, regular exercise 2–3 times a week at a rather moderate intensity is recommended (*cf.* Woźniew-

ski, 2017; Junger *et al.*, 2019; Junger *et al.*, 2020). Swimming in a calm, smooth way, without forcing the body, fits well with this type of recommendation.

The novelty of this work is the original idea of applying the philosophical and tactical concepts of martial arts (*aikijutsu*, *jujutsu*, *judo-do / ido* (Vide: Cynarski, 2022)) to swimming, especially recreational and rehabilitation. This does not exclude other possible uses of this form of physical culture.

The limitation for inference is the lack of support for the theses presented here with quantitative empirical research. So we are at the stage of hypotheses.

What would be possible directions for further research? *Aiki* and *ido* swimming can be assessed by observation (assessment by an external observer), and also in a fully objective way by measuring the noise (water splashing). The ideal is complete silence, noiseless movement in the water. This kind of objectification would be a possible direction for further research on this issue. Logical deduction indicates that this more economical move should translate into better swimming performance (a competitive sport application). But that too would require further research.

Summary and Conclusions

Swimming according to the principles of *aiki* and *ido* improves the overall fitness and efficiency of the body, similarly to other methods of swimming. However, in this case, it is a valuable recreational or rehabilitation exercise, which also brings hygienic and physiotherapeutic values (water massage), as well as a hardening and wellness treatment. The Taoist principle of not pushing the body is implemented here, as it is recommended to patients with oncological diseases, cardiovascular diseases and, in many cases, physical rehabilitation (Woźniewski, 2017). This principle is manifested in the execution of movements in a smooth and harmonious way. This is how swimming (*aiki* or *ido*) can be successfully used by the elderly, chronically ill and convalescents.

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