Educational aspects of Karate: discussing their representations in filming[1]*

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Abstract

Karate is a fighting style that originated in Okinawa, an island in the south of Japan. Historically, it spans over three periods: from the seventeenth century, as bujutsu, a clandestine fighting technique; later, as budo, when it was turned into a traditional Japanese combat form in the late nineteenth century, promoting educational and identity values; and finally as a fighting sport, when it was associated with motor performance and competitiveness in the twentieth century. In considering the role of karate as a carrier of values of an idealized Japan – Japaneseness –, the present study analyzes representations of this fighting style in filming. The analysis focused on the educational aspects portrayed in the American film *The Karate Kid* (and its two sequels) and in the Japanese film *Kuro Obi*, being conducted according to three categories: the relationship between theory and practice; noises and conflicts between teacher and student; and student training as a future teacher. Results show that these cinematographic works criticize the sportivization of karate while emphasizing the representation of educational aspects associated with the periods of bujutsu and, specially, of budo. They also collaborate to reaffirm and actualize Japaneseness by treating the principles of budo and its educational transmission in an idealized way, without alluding to its modern form. Moreover, the films diverge from the contemporary proposal of a pedagogy of martial arts based on the science of human motricity. On the other hand, these cinematographic productions contribute to the educational area in that they allow discussions about educational processes and their mishaps, which are portrayed in an original way, using the concepts of yin/yang related to the Zen Buddhist principles of budo.

Keywords

Karate – Japan – Filming – Pedagogy of martial arts – Zen.

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***Karate*: From *Bujutsu* to Budo**

In Japanese writing, the word karate comprises two characters (kanji): *kara* (空), empty; and *te* (手), hand(s). Therefore, karate, or empty hand, is the practice of turning the body into a weapon.

There are several narratives about the origins of karate. Dealing with them immediately implies the object of this text. In fact, the development of karate over the last three centuries has rearranged the goal of "turning the body into a weapon" by connecting it with different (and conflicting) educational ideas and worldviews. In this respect, Martins and Kanashiro (2010) warn that stories about karate must be read in a contextualized way, thereby considering the links between the existential situation of its practitioners and the events in the wider perspective of socioeconomic structures and conjunctures. From this historiographical perspective, these authors showed the demarcation of three periods of karate, which are associated with the concepts of *bujutsu*, *budo* and fighting sport.

The period of bujutsu (武術), a word that can be translated as "fighting technique", is characterized by the creation of rudimentary combat practices by the inhabitants of the Okinawa island from the 17th century. Little is known about this period, and the information is contradictory. Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957), as will be seen, a central character of karate, says there are scarce records about the possible inventors and the origins of these fighting techniques:

> Its early history can only be deduced from ancient legends that were orally passed down to us, and these, like most legends, tend to be imaginary and probably incorrect creations. (FUNAKOSHI, 1994, p. 42).

Even so, sources agree that Okinawa's location in southern Japan and near the routes to China and Southeast Asia facilitated the contact of its inhabitants with other peoples from whom they could have learned some techniques – notably the Chinese, with their forms of *kenpo* and *wu-shu* (BARREIRA, 2004; MARTINS; KANASHIRO, 2010; WILLIANS, 1975). In turn, being a commercial hub, Okinawa suffered for centuries the yoke of external conquerors, particularly the Japanese. Invading clans who sought to secure their power over the island's inhabitants more than once prohibited them from carrying weapons and practicing these primitive fighting techniques. Thus, historiography tends to associate such techniques – which would later be known as *bushi no te* (武士の手, "the hands of the warrior") or simply *te* – with clandestinely trained forms of combat as a means of resistance to armor-and-swords enemies, which could only be transmitted orally and through less conventional means, such as disguising it as folkloric dance (FUNAKOSHI, 1994). In this genealogical aspect, karate resembles capoeira, which arose in Brazil almost synchronically (MORI; CARMO; GONÇALVES JUNIOR, 2015).[4]

4- Barreira (2004) says that this narrative is challenged by historians of *bujutsu*; even so, we will take advantage of these possible historical analogies to treat karate in the present study in a similar way as Gonçalves Junior (2009) does to capoeira, i.e., by considering it not as a martial art (which would refer to a militarized worldview with Greco-Roman features), but as a fight (understood here as a collective endeavor of self-assertion of identity and resistance to oppression).

If bujutsu is characterized by motor knowledge transmitted in an unsystematic way with a mainly combative purpose, the emergence of budo represents a major discontinuity. This is related to events occurring in Japan, which in the late nineteenth century progressively undoes the feudal structures of the shogunate and opens itself to the West. The culmination of this process was the advent of the Meiji Restoration, which began in 1868 and was widely described as the beginning of Japanese modernization. It would be Japan's definitive entry into capitalism, which also meant the Westernization of national customs (SOUSA, 2013). This was accompanied by a sort of petrification of traditions of the time of shoguns, now idyllically treated as immaterial heritage.[5]

In the case of Japanese fighting techniques, which were based on the ethical and spiritual principles of the samurais (who formed the shogunate's guard), this was expressed in the dissolution of their warlike purposes and in promoting their educational values, whether in the moral sphere or in the sphere of ascesis and transcendence. Thus, the samurai arts of *kenjutsu* and *jujutsu*, for example, were turned into a means to building the Japanese character, and were henceforth referred to as *kendo* and *judo* (MARTINS; KANASHIRO, 2010). The replacement of the *jutsu* character (術) by the *do* character (道) does not only demarcate the nominal difference between traditional and modern fighting styles – now with formal codes and transmission systems –, but it also has a deeper meaning. *Do* can be translated as "path", and is read in China as *Tao*, i.e., supreme or absolute, expressing the essence of reality: the movement of the opposing forces *yin*/*yang*, which is, in fact, inexpressible (COOPER, 1985). Therefore, if bujutsu refers to combat practices, even though based on a code of conduct, the notion of budo seeks precisely in the spiritual principles of that code (not only in the Chinese doctrines of Tao, but also in their relationship with Indian Buddhism and the Japanese national religion, Shinto, all mixed together in Zen doctrine) the power to turn the technique into a system or doctrine – other forms to read the character 道– in order to reaffirm precepts regarded as typically Japanese, which are to be preserved from the attacks of modernizing Western values.

In the context of Okinawa, annexed to Japanese territory in 1879, analyzing the path from bujutsu to budo requires looking carefully into the complexity of the relationships therein. If the Meiji Restoration imposed the need for the Japanese to find balance between conservation and modernization, with regard to social and production relationships, the Okinawan faced the additional challenge of safeguarding their own traditions (transmitted at great cost, if we remember the clandestine status of *bushi no te*) and acting as Japanese citizens, which they had never been.

Gichin Funakoshi then emerges as the agent who can organize the Okinawan bujutsu to turn it into a Japanese-Okinawan budo. Born in the year of the Meiji Restoration, Funakoshi was aware of the opportunities – including academic ones – arising from the

5- According to Sant'anna (2009, p. 52), "in the Eastern world, objects were never seen as the main depositories of cultural tradition. The permanence in time of material expressions of these traditions is not the most important aspect; what really matters is the knowledge necessary to reproduce them. In these countries, in short, it is less important to preserve an object as a testimony of a past historical and cultural process than to preserve and transmit the knowledge to produce it, thereby allowing the experience of tradition in the present." Sant'anna adds that Japan instituted its first legislation on the preservation of its cultural heritage in the 1950's, encouraging people and associations to maintain "scenic, plastic, ritualistic and technical traditions" (SANT'ANNA, 2009, p. 52).

closer relations between the island and the empire, and in his autobiography he renders an account of the backstage of a karate demonstration in the capital Tokyo in 1921 (FUNAKOSHI, 1994).

That would be just one of his several efforts to convince the imperial authorities that those techniques with remote Chinese roots could constitute a Japanese *do* perfectly well. In addition to this dissemination activity, Funakoshi operated two essential processes: he selected the movements to be preserved, compiling them into a progressive system inspired by that of judo; and he gave the fight a new designation, *karate-do* (空手道). The character 空, which can be translated as "empty", brought karate closer to yoga and meditative practices that Zen absorbed from India, thus characterizing Okinawa's fighting practice as a path to emptiness, the pacification of being, and detachment from the outside world. This esoteric reading of karate as "Tao of empty hands" or "doctrine that leads to emptiness through techniques" is corroborated by Funakoshi's own writings (1973, 1994) – finally positioning the fight as a Japanese product, alongside with kendo and judo (and iaido, aikido, etc.).

A product for exporting Japaneseness

With the advent of the period of karate as budo, the mystical connotation that placed it together with other arts interested in Buddhist enlightenment (such as calligraphy, floral arrangement and tea ceremony) altered the very nature of its teaching contents. The *sensei* (teacher) would be for the *dojo* (training site) as the Zen master would be for the monastery.

Zen expresses a fundamentally Taoist cosmology, in which knowledge is considered true if it results from the minimization of conceptual thinking (COOPER, 1985). A common feature between Zen masters and modern Japanese fight instructors is thus understood: they speak little. After all, to explain, to conceptualize, to rationalize – all that is nothing but banal speculation. *Satori* (spiritual awakening) is equally fleeting in thought: "As soon as I think of satori, it ceases to be. Satori is an experience, not an idea. One who possesses the idea of Satori never comes to experience it" (HANDA, 1991, p. 43).

For Williams (1975), this detachment from theorizing pervades the oriental arts, and it is represented by *zanshin*, a state of total consciousness that is not intellectually attained, but *experienced* (BARREIRA; MASSIMI, 2003, 2008; LAGE; GONÇALVES JUNIOR, 2007). Zanshin implies subtracting conscious thought, which is replaced by instinctive, immediate reactions (BARREIRA; MASSIMI, 2008); these, in turn, are only possible when the *karateka* (karate practitioner) immerses in a state of *mushin* (vacuity or non-mind) (COOPER, 1985; WILLIAMS, 1975).

In the mid-20th century, when karate reaches the fighting sport stage – its third period, one of its main actors being Masatoshi Nakayama (1913-1987), a disciple of Funakoshi (BARREIRA, 2004) –, many of these concepts are put aside in the name of biological aspects such as motor performance, physical fitness and individual performance in tests and competitions. If karate as budo displayed a religious ritual, thus conveying Shintoist and Confucian values such as reverence for the master and cordiality among

practitioners, in the fighting sport the rituals are different. They refer to the acceptance of tacit, arbitrary rules on a thin line between ludic and agonism. But even though sports karate's biologizing paradigm seeks to impose itself hegemonically, this movement is not free from resistance – which is also the case with other Japanese fighting styles in the process of sportivization, such as judo (EBELL, 2008). In general, the contemporary practice of karate, while relying on the precepts of competitiveness and individualism, also preserves the educational aspects of budo (MARTINS; KANASHIRO, 2010).

The possibility of exporting karate – foreseen by Funakoshi and carried out by disciples such as Nakayama after World War II – engaged this fight into a bolder project than opening Japan to the West: disseminating and actualizing Japaneseness. In anthropological studies, Lourenção (2011, 2016) identified that kendo fulfills this function of "making Japanese people", i.e., conforming bodies and behaviors according to traditions pertaining to an idealized Japan. Training this Japanese fencing in Brazil would supposedly be able to turn its practitioner into a Japanese (even if not phenotypically), at once artificial and genuine (i.e., possessing the predicates of a native Japanese), both in the dojo and in private life.

There are indications that karate also operates as a 'Japanese-making device' (MORI, 2017), which leads us to the perspective of this text. Indeed, since the late twentieth century, when karate established itself as the most widespread Japanese fighting style in the world, not only has its practice globalized, but the creations of the cultural industry (COELHO, 1981) have come to represent it so as to convey values and ideologies – including the Japanese national identity (SOUSA, 2013) or, what we take as a synonym, Japaneseness. Among these products, the cinematographic productions, due to their penetration in the various social classes, constitute a privileged means. Although they may present distorted visions of the fighting styles by exploring them as violent techniques in action films, our initial hypothesis is that films can also represent karate by valuing its educational aspects as bujutsu and budo (BARREIRA; MASSIMI, 2003) and by depicting sportivization more or less critically.

In this respect, these films are material that can raise reflections about educational practice, the main goal of this study. We believe that such discussions can, secondarily, contribute to formulating an emancipatory pedagogy of fights, in which practices such as karate may serve not the culture of demonstration of superiority, which leads to aggressing and silencing the other, but new possibilities for expression and movement.

Several authors have advocated the proposition of this pedagogy which, based on the science of human motricity (SÉRGIO, 1991) and considering the specifics of the fights developed by different peoples, can also provide a curricular and methodological reference for school education contents (GONÇALVES JÚNIOR, 2009; LIMA, 2000; LOPES; TAVARES, 2008; RUFINO, 2012).

A path for a research

We selected two cinematographic narratives (probably the most relevant ones for the dissemination of karate in terms of appeal among practitioners and non-practitioners)

to analyze them: The American film *The Karate Kid* and its sequels (THE KARATE, 1984, 1986, 1989), directed by John Avildsen; and the most recent *Kuro Obi* (KURO, 2007), by Japanese Shunichi Nagasaki.

The analyzes were based on authors of the literature on qualitative research – such as Bogdan and Biklen (1994), for whom such investigations are descriptive and assign central importance to meanings. We followed, moreover, Rose's (2000) guidelines on moving picture analysis, which highlight aspects such as direction and framing for the signification process.

Below are short descriptions of the two cinematographic productions, which were also analyzed with other purposes by other researchers (HARAMBOURE, 2013; RICHARDSON, 1998; SOUSA, 2013).

The Karate Kid

The Karate Kid tells the story of Daniel LaRusso after he moves to a Los Angeles neighborhood where he falls in love with a girl, Ali Mills. This provokes the jealousy of her ex-boyfriend, Johnny Lawrence, who starts to bully Daniel with the karate he learned at the Cobra Kai, a dojo owned by the unscrupulous sensei John Kreese.

However, Daniel meets an old Japanese immigrant, Mr. Miyagi, and asks him to be taught the Okinawan art. Miyagi reluctantly decides to train Daniel, establishing a deep friendship with his new pupil. Over the course of the three films, many challenges will test the skills and character of both Daniel and Miyagi, from which lessons and reflections will emerge.

We analyzed the 1984 debut film and its first two sequels, disregarding a third 1994 sequel with totally different characters except for Mr. Miyagi.[6]

Kuro Obi

Kuro obi takes place in Japan in the 1930's, with the Japanese takeover of Manchuria, when the imperial army comes to dominate territories unrestrictedly.

The film portrays the conflict between two karate students taught by sensei Eiken Shibahara, who died shortly after his dojo was taken over by the army. Shibahara's last wish is for student Choei to decide who will inherit his legacy, represented by the *kuro obi* (his black belt).

Choei is faced with the difficult choice between the fearless and overbearing Taikan who, seduced by the advantages of joining the army, engages in conquering all the local dojo for the training of troops, and the peaceful and humble Giryu, a fighter who, instead of attacking, fights only by blocking and dodging blows while remaining indifferent to military ambitions.

6- There is a 2010 remake also titled *The Karate Kid* and directed by Harald Zwart, which keeps the essence of the 1984 movie plot. It will not be analyzed here as it portrays a kind of wu-shu, rather than *karate*. In 2018, a TV series (*Cobra Kai*) was first aired showing developments of the events occurred in the original trilogy over 30 years later.

Results and discussions

We will develop this section considering three categories: 1) the relationship between theory and practice; 2) noises and conflicts between teacher and student; and 3) student training as a future teacher. They were designed after we watched the films, each being compared with the academic research cited in the first section of this text, in addition to Funakoshi's writings (FUNAKOSHI, 1973, 1994; FUNAKOSHI; NAKASONE, 2005).

Rose (2000) argues that both the theoretical framework and the goals of the study are the criteria that should guide the selection of audiovisual materials and their transcription/translation into text in the case of analyzes such as this one. Thus, the categories emerged from watching scenes that involved dialogues between characters portrayed as teachers and students (since we are interested in discussing educational issues), which thus constitute the episodes that will be our units of analysis.

The theory-practice relationship

As said earlier, Zen-influenced arts do not found their teaching-learning process on values such as logic and analytical thinking, and its success is assessed precisely by the capacity to cancel this kind of thinking. Thus, the relationship between theory and practice tends to emphasize the latter and to reinforce the role of the learner's particular experience for learning (BARREIRA; MASSIMI, 2003). In this respect, Funakoshi (1994, p. 114) says:

> Frequently, a man devoid of that essential quality of absolute seriousness will take refuge in theory. [...] let's say someone has been practicing a certain *kata*[7] for a few months and then says, with a sigh of dismay, "No matter how hard I train, I can't seem to master this *kata*. What am I to do?" A few months! How could he master a kata in a few months?

In this account, it is evident that, in karate, the experience must be accompanied by a patient and resigned attitude on the part of the student – what matters here is for him to evolve naturally through a non-directive process. This practical contact with the art is reinforced, and thus, teaching is centered on repetitive routines, to the point where movements become instinctive reactions, without the mediation of thought.

In the first *The Karate Kid* film, Daniel is disappointed at Miyagi's initial lessons. The training consists of performing boring, mechanical tasks apparently unrelated to karate, such as: waxing cars, sanding a wooden floor, and painting a fence. It is difficult for the apprentice to realize that, thus, the sensei conveyed fundamentals (*kihon*[8]) of some blocks; for example, from the circular motion to apply and remove wax from cars, Miyagi extracted a kihon for the *nagashi uke* defense. At the same time, Miyagi sought to awaken in Daniel the state of zanshin to react spontaneously in fighting, while saying nothing

7- Translated as "form", the term refers to pre-determined movements executed sequentially. In karate there are dozens of kata, which aim at different kinds of training and have various names.

8- The *kihon* training consists in the guided repetition of movements.

of his purposes and leaving to the apprentice's disposition to go on with an apparently illogical training. But soon Daniel surprises everyone (and himself) by qualifying for the final of a tournament that he felt compelled by Kreese and Lawrence to enter. Herrigel (2007), about his learning in the art of kyudo (archery), makes the following comment about this *Japanese didactic*:

> [...] it is this mastery of form that the Japanese method of instruction seeks to inculcate. Practice, repetition, and repetition of the repeated with ever increasing intensity are its distinctive features for long stretches of the way. At least this is true of all the traditional arts. Demonstration, example, intuition, imitation, that is the fundamental relationship of instructor to pupil [...]. (HERRIGEL, 2007, p. 50).

The initial scenes of *Kuro Obi* resemble Daniel's training. In the opening shot, Choei, Giryu and Taikan perform kata Sanchin, "Three battles", during the day. Shibahara watches the fighters slowly perform the repetitive blocks and blows, advancing with short steps. A few scenes later, it is already night and the students, drenched in sweat, perform the same kata, which will appear again before the army arrives at the dojo. The training is portrayed as tiresome, repetitive, and discouraging, although apprentices do not show disappointment.

In sum, regarding the relationship between theory and practice, the films agree with the literature on budo and with Funakoshi's philosophy, emphasizing the role of experience rather than rationalization. For both films, learning karate depends on the spontaneous development of the apprentice, in line with *wu-wei* (which we address in more detail in the next subsection), a Taoist concept also appropriated by Zen (COOPER, 1985). The learning of characters such as Daniel, Giryu and Taikan are due to their particular experiences, and it involves disciplined and often mechanical and unconscious practice.

Haramboure's analysis (2013) criticized that aspect of *The Karate Kid*, and considered instead that contemporary pedagogies advocate the need for the learner to know the relevance of the contents under study. To the author, the scene of the kihon training proposed by Miyagi, albeit historically credible (given evidence that everyday activities were used in the teaching of karate as bujutsu), portrays something pedagogically incorrect.

Thus, the conception of educational work conveyed by the films can hardly fit the concept of praxis, i.e., theoretical-practical unity. According to Vázquez (2011), praxis is any human creative activity that is ideally set up in thought before assuming an objective form. It not only differs from theoretical activity, since its outcome takes on a substantivity that persists regardless of the individual who created it, but it presupposes that theoretical activity. In this respect, the films do not convey values associated with the emancipatory character of the pedagogy of fights, which emphasize precisely the praxis aspect of education (GONÇALVES JUNIOR, 2009; RUFINO, 2012; SÉRGIO, 1991), endorsing instead a pedagogy that can be considered traditional. It is impossible not to associate this pedagogical conception – which, as seen earlier, Herrigel (2007) calls the Japanese instruction method – also with the concept of Japaneseness: while it is portrayed in the films as the correct, millennial and sole form of transmitting budo, it refers to a

tradition crystallized in an imaginary or a myth, not necessarily anchored in facts of the historical development of Japanese fighting styles (SHOJI, 2001).

However, Richardson (1998) disagrees with these analyzes as he detects a teleological teaching in *The Karate Kid*. In considering the moment Daniel discovers he learned the nagashi uke, the author writes:

> *Knowledge* (or content) is gained through the physical *experience* of labour, but the overall *experience*, understood through an epiphany moment, is dependent on a strategically revealed *knowledge* of the teacher's guiding intent. (RICHARDSON, 1998, p. 221, emphasis in original).

Therefore, it is worth emphasizing the indispensable nature of the teacher and his activity intentionally directed to an end, namely the education of the learner.

Noises and Conflicts between Teacher and Student

In the second sequel of *The Karate Kid*, Daniel begins to question Miyagi's methods. He goes to the Cobra Kai dojo to be instructed by Terry Silver, Kreese's friend (and just as nasty as Kreese). In these trainings, always involving *kumite* (fight)[9] – while Miyagi emphasizes kata –, Silver has Daniel learn disloyal techniques and go beyond his physical limits, striking hard materials which, on a daily basis, eventually cause him to be injured ("And you know what he's going to learn from me? Pain in every part of his body, and fear in every part of his mind!", Silver says to Kreese). Funakoshi describes a similar routine at the time of bujutsu in clandestine training sessions in his teachers' backyards and other not easily accessible places. He does not hide from the reader his training's painful times or his teachers' strictness. However, his tone is not one of moaning; it is resignedly Zen:

> Night after night, often in the backyard of the Azato house as the master looked on, I would practice a kata [...] time and again, week after week, sometimes month after month, until I had mastered it to my teacher's satisfaction. This constant repetition of a single kata was grueling, often exasperating and on occasion humiliating. More than once I had to lick the dust on the floor of the dōjō or in the Azato backyard. But practice was strict, and I was never permitted to learn another kata until I had satisfactorily understood the one I had been working on. (FUNAKOSHI, 1994, p. 21).

In the films, this disharmony between the actions of the teacher and the student is essential in the dramatic arcs of the characters involved in the pedagogical relationship. Everything revolves around the consequences of these conflicts, which are settled at great costs, e.g., injuries and – like in Funakoshi's account – humiliation. For example, in all three *The Karate Kid* films, Daniel is challenged by rivals when accompanied by girls he is interested in, and is usually beat up. In *Kuro Obi*, Giryu is called a coward by three characters, in addition to being beaten by criminals. Taikan is humiliated in front of his

9- Karate is based on the three k's: (形), *kihon* (基本) and *kumite* (組手).

army students by rival Takaomi Togo. Not even Miyagi is spared: in the first sequel, his antagonist Sato insults him repeatedly in front of both his beloved Yukie and Daniel.

The films relativize the seriousness of such events, portraying them instead as normal or even indispensable for the development of the heroes – which echoes Funakoshi's philosophy, for whom "learning depends much more on experiencing one's own suffering" (BARREIRA; MASSIMI, 2003, pp. 381). On the other hand, this sounds unacceptable in a pedagogical relationship guided by dialogue, mutual respect and freedom (RUFINO, 2012; SÉRGIO, 1991).

Another conflict portrayed in the second sequel emerges from a discussion about competing. Having won the previous edition of the tournament, Daniel believes he is at an advantage if he contends again, but Miyagi dissuades him:

> Daniel: I don't know what the big deal is. I mean, what is your problem with this?
> Miyagi: Daniel-san. If karate used defend honor, defend life, karate mean something. If karate used defend plastic metal trophy, karate no mean nothing. Understand? (THE KARATE, 1989).

This sequence echoes the first film, when Miyagi refused Daniel's request to teach him. Daniel wanted to learn karate in order to take revenge on Johnny Lawrence, but Miyagi explains: "Karate only for defense".

There is an identical conflict in *Kuro Obi*. Taikan disobeys Shibahara by inviting the military to fight in the dojo, which is being disputed. Shibahara warns: "Taikan! There's no first strike in karate. Just dodge the blows. Remember: never hit the opponent. Don't kick him either. This is my teaching." Taikan, however, strikes and defeats the soldiers one by one, until his master asks Giryu to replace him. Then, Taikan bitterly provokes: "Are you going to follow Sensei's lesson? When you lose, I'll come in." He is perplexed as he observes Giryu defeating Captain Kiichi Tanihara only by defending and dodging, but he does not change his attitude; on Shibahara's deathbed, he asks:

> Taikan: Sensei, tell me one thing: you've always banned fighting. You don't allow blows or kicks. But what use is training if we can't use our skills? Please, explain it to us.
> Shibahara: Taikan! Silence! Your skills should be geared only to yourself. Only then can you experience a sublime moment of fulfillment.
> Taikan: I don't understand. We have to fight to grow stronger.
> Shibahara: Where is the merit in being better than someone inferior? [silence] That won't make you stronger. (KURO OBI, 2007).

According to Funakoshi, *karate ni sente nashi* – "there is no first strike in karate", a sentence that is frequent in films[10]– is one of the basic principles of budo:

10 - In the first sequel, Daniel observes two inscriptions on the wall of Miyagi's dojo in Okinawa, and asks their meaning. Miyagi says: "Here are the two rules of Miyagi-Ryu Karate [Miyagi style Karate]. Rule number one: karate for defense only. Rule number two: first learn rule number one". In fact, the inscriptions are 空手無先手, "in karate, there is no initiative", and 先正其心, "firstly, the heart" – the character 心 (*kokoro*) can refer to heart, mind or soul. The second inscription resembles the fifth principle of Funakoshi and Nakasone's (2005) book, *gijitsu yori shinjitsu*, "thought [heart] over technique".

> In karate, the hands and feet can be as deadly as the blade of a sword. Thus, the principle that "there is no first strike in karate" is an extension of the basic samurai principle that one must avoid the reckless use of weapons. It underscores the absolute necessity of patience and forbearance [...] On the other hand, when circumstances beyond control cause practitioners to have recourse to action, they must respond wholeheartedly and without concern for life or limb, allowing their martial prowess to shine to the best of their ability. (FUNAKOSHI; NAKASONE, 2005, p. 24-25).

Although Giryu follows Shibahara's directions strictly, his understanding of the essence of karate is also incomplete as he never has "recourse to action", according to the fragment above. For example, when facing the children of Tanihara, who want to avenge their father's defeat, Giryu allows himself to be seriously injured by a spear, motionless.

Taikan and Giryu represent the opposites yang and yin. Both move away from a more sensible position, the former out of impulsiveness, intemperance and ambition; the latter by fatalism, passivity, and nihilism. They do not act according to wu-wei – "non-claiming, something that moves according to the currents of life and Nature, avoiding friction and allowing the rise of the natural rhythms of both physical and spiritual life" (COOPER, 1985, p. 136) –, the former because he does not accept it, the latter because he understands it as non-action, although its meaning is closer to unpremeditated, spontaneous action, in line with Tao, rather than a mere laissez-faire or unthought spontaneity (LIMA, 2000).

The concepts of yin/yang can also apply to the very dynamics of the training of the karateka portrayed in the films. This educational process is structured as a clash between, on the one hand, the student's conceptions and expectations, which stem from his purity[11] and naivete, concerning what is internal to him (yin), and on the other, his violent erupting from his own state of ignorance and lack of clarity through the teacher's external (yang) teaching.

In conclusion, the conflicts between teacher and disciple, as portrayed in the films under analysis, provide two discussions on educational aspects. On the one hand, they present these conflicting relationships – especially when causing disciples humiliation and suffering – in a naturalized way, as if they were rites of passage. Given the lack of awareness of those involved in the pedagogical relationship about the necessity of such rites, they do not have a place in the practice of a pedagogy of fights with an emancipatory character, since they only show negative relationships of hierarchy and indoctrination (RUFINO, 2012). On the other hand, the films contribute to an original understanding of the relationship between master and apprentice by showing how the Taoist concepts of yin/yang, actualized in karate as budo, can be productively used to analyze the educational process, which starts from an asymmetry between the teacher's wisdom and the student's aspiration.

But, eventually, balance can be reestablished, allowing the transmission of the master's legacy.

11- Symbolized by the white belt – clean, immaculate – which ties up the uniforms of beginners.

Student training as a future teacher

In fact, the pursuit of balance is the subject of several scenes in *The Karate Kid*, and there is a literal lesson from Miyagi about this, when he has Daniel perform a kihon while standing on a boat in the water. Richardson (1998) comments on that episode:

> The lesson of balance occurs immediately after the "wax on, wax off" epiphany, and marks the division between "teacher-centred" and "learner-centred" educational control. After this lesson, there is no more indirectness, no more concealment. Balance puts the teacher and student on equal ground. The teacher still knows more, but the student now stands on his/her own, making decisions beyond the simple level of obedience. Balance is the lesson that connects the teacher and learner because it is a lesson that never ends. It is a walk down the road of discernment, a dynamic sink or swim plunge into the real world of responsible living. (RICHARDSON, 1998, p. 224).

In *The Karate Kid*, Daniel begins at a disadvantage in the final fight against Mike Barnes (another fighter for the Cobra Kai dojo), who uses forbidden blows, as ordered by Terry Silver and John Kreese. There seems to be no hope: "Mr. Miyagi, it's over! It's over; forget about it!" he tells the sensei before the sudden death decision. But Miyagi responds: "Must not! It's ok to lose to opponent, must not lose to fear! [...] You must stay focused! You best karate still inside you! Now time let out". Then, based on the master's encouragement, Daniel finds strength to return to the fight, not in a guard position (*kamae*), but performing the kata he learned from Miyagi.[12] Barnes, hesitant and baffled by that attitude, takes risks and is defeated. Starting the fight with a kata secured victory, though Miyagi did not teach that. The "sublime moment of fulfillment" (as Shibahara says in *Kuro Obi*) was Daniel's discovery of his own way, no longer emulating the steps of the master. The yin/yang duality was overcome.

Kuro Obi portrays a similar journey. Taikan says, after saving Giryu from a beating: "I learned how things really are. Giryu, one can't live with such a pure heart. The world is made up of good and bad things. To be strong, you need to absorb both." Taikan speaks of the need for this neutralization but, contrary to what he thinks, he did not reach that state either. Only the end of the film will house this reflection, portraying a *shinken shobu*, "fight to the death". So, the film turns to black and white, highlighting the dualities, and Taikan and Giryu launch into an almost endless fight witnessed by Choei. Taikan starts striking Giryu severely, and provokes him: "Try to fight back! Do you think you can win only with defense techniques?" Then, after receiving two more strikes, Giryu throws his first punch, to the perplexity of spectators and Taikan's delight. A few more minutes of fighting are shown without cuts until the final dialogue of the two karatekas, exhausted, when the colors return to the screen and Choei reappears with the kuro obi:

> Taikan: Now I understand the meaning of Sensei's words. The man who nullifies the opponent's attack is the strongest.

12- The kata is called Seienchin, "Calm in the Storm", a very symbolic name for Daniel's attitude at that time.

> Giryu: Thank you. Going against Sensei's words, you taught me. You have improved your attack techniques.
> Taikan: That is why I chose this path.
> Giryu: Taikan...
> Taikan: The kuro obi is yours. [Taikan's last words]
> Choei: Taikan...
> Giryu: Taikan... Taikan! [Choei hands the kuro obi to Giryu, who puts it in the hands of Taikan's dead body]. (KURO OBI, 2007).

Taikan is then shown in a dojo, performing kata Nijushiho, "Twenty-four steps", and wearing the kuro obi. Then Giryu appears with kata Seipai, "Eighteen".[13] The narrator describes the future of the remaining Giryu and Choei: "To fulfill Taikan's desire, Giryu founded his own dojo, with the help of Choei. Though it was a small dojo, many wanted to learn there." Two new masters were ready.

The achievements of the characters of both films can be summarized in this thought of Herrigel (2007, p. 56):

> The teacher and master is not concerned with how far his student gets. As soon as he has shown him the right way he lets him walk alone. Only one thing remains for him to do so that the student may pass the test of loneliness: He releases the student from himself, from the master, heartily enjoining him to get on his own and to 'mount the master's shoulders'.

This is the process of teacher training subsumed to Confucian or Shinto ethical duties, actualizing Japaneseness once more and triggering the role of karate as a 'maker of Japanese'. After all, with karate as budo, its practice is irreversibly linked to the notion of karate as the practitioner's life itself (LAGE; GONÇALVES JUNIOR, 2007), therefore its meaning must be applied to all things (FUNAKOSHI; NAKASONE, 2005). In the relationships between budo and Japaneseness, the public and the private (dojo and home) merge together (LOURENÇÃO, 2011)

Conclusions

Analyzing the films allowed discussing educational aspects of karate which are the object of several studies (BARREIRA; MASSIMI, 2003, 2008; HARAMBOURE, 2013; LAGE; GONÇALVES JUNIOR, 2007; LOPES; TAVARES, 2008; RUFINO, 2012).

Overall, the films convey an idealized view of teacher-student interactions, thus corroborating an equally imprecise image of karate itself. For example, in the first sequel

13- 18 = 108/6, with 108 being a sacred number in various Eastern traditions, including Zen. Some karate kata allude to the mystical character of that number – the name of kata Suparimpei literally means 108 in Chinese, and the name of kata Gojushiho means 54 (= 108/2) in Japanese. If we consider that $108 = 9 \times 12$, then Nijushiho also evokes the sacred number, since $24 = 2 \times 12$. It is significant that the end of *Kuro Obi* still refers to Zen, thus ensuring the viewer that the plot narrates these fighter's satori. In his analysis of the final combat in *Kuro Obi*, Sousa (2013) also mentions the transcendental aspect of this fight to the death – literally portrayed in the case of Taikan, and symbolically in the case of Giryu, who rises to a new understanding of karate.

of *The Karate Kid*, when Daniel and Miyagi travel to Okinawa, the film seeks to situate karate in a pure, bucolic space that resists capitalist modernity, represented by Sato, a businessman and ex-karateka. The same is true of *Kuro Obi*, which portrays the imperial army as the villain that mutilates the surviving traditions in Shibahara classes – located in a remote and secret place that evokes Okinawa's clandestine training. But these elements, portrayed as traditional and characteristic of Japaneseness (obedience to Zen principles and dojo rules, execution of kata aimed at satori, meditation and other asceses, Japanese didactics, etc.) originated when bujutsu was converted into budo – in a process, it is worth repeating, attributed to Funakoshi and which occurred during the Meiji Restoration, nearly at the turn of twentieth century (MARTINS; KANASHIRO, 2010).

Also, we believe that these elements in movies are not only dramatic resources to stage the heroes' arcs, but they are also cinematographic resources which allow exploring, for example, the aesthetic aspects of traditional costumes (strongly present in *Kuro Obi* and in the first sequel of *The Karate Kid*) and the comic exoticism of a character who is the portrait of Japaneseness (Miyagi). This possibility is hinted by Sousa (2013): Japanese or foreign film productions, when taking Japanese fights as a theme, usually emphasize, for example, the plasticity of their movements.

However, in addition to this, the films allow insights on the pedagogy of fights and (why not?) on education in broader terms. Some characteristics of teacher-student interactions are well described in the material we analyze, especially the conflicts between master and disciple and the challenges in the future teacher's initial education. The apprentice is portrayed as having the ethical duty to overcome and differentiate himself from the master, thereby disseminating his legacy.

The scripts propose several metaphors to convey this, as in these lines of Miyagi in the second sequel of *The Karate Kid*: "Only root karate come from Miyagi. Just like bonsai choose own way grow because root strong you choose own way do karate same reason". *Kuro Obi* also highlights this issue, and both films stage the educational journey as the search for balance between the style of the trainer (yang) and the intuition of the apprentice (yin) – an interesting vision that can be transferred into examining others contexts than those strictly related to the teaching of fights.

Other discussions raised by the films refer to academic criticism of the teaching of karate (LOPES; TAVARES, 2008; RUFINO, 2012): the excessive hierarchy at the dojo, which sets a barrier between teacher and students, and between students at different levels; the conformist attitude of students, immobilized at a stage that is short of critical and creative attitudes; and the emphasis on mechanical, unconscious execution of movements, rather than on the praxis of a being who recognizes, expresses and moves himself/herself (SÉRGIO, 1991). Also, in the films analyzed, although the critique of the sportivization of karate is omnipresent, the abundance of action scenes contributes to spectacularize kumite. There are thrilling combats with fast-paced cuts and dramatic soundtracks: that is so when Miyagi rescues Daniel from a beating in the first *The Karate Kid*, as well as in the scene where Taikan saves Giryu in *Kuro Obi*. Even though Daniel does not learn to strike before the second half of the original film, and Giryu not before his final

scenes, characters like John Kreese, Johnny Lawrence, Terry Silver and Taikan stand out in moments of pure exaltation of violence.

The elements above must be reflected on and questioned. After all, the journey from to bujutsu to budo to fighting sport represented acquisitions for karate that enclose diverse possibilities for the human movement. In this text, we endeavored to oppose the biologizing, centralizing and dogmatic perspective that, especially in the case of the fighting sport – and, in some aspects, of bujutsu and budo – presents itself as the pinnacle in the art's evolution. To the contrary, we seek to view karate as an avenue for human education which can be guided by an emancipating and dialogic pedagogy based on human motricity. Quoting once more Manuel Sérgio,

> By showing us that Man makes discoveries – including his own self – in the intentional movement, motricity indicates that an exhaustive knowledge of the human passes through Bios, but it does so on its way to *Logos*, in order to auscultate the direction of the *path* that is being followed. [...] the movement towards the humanizing freedom begins with an option that, because it is cultural and political as it invokes principles and values of justice, solidarity and honesty by assuming an awakened and vigilant critical spirit, it is not only biology, because it is a path towards the Absolute [Tao?] (SÉRGIO, 1991, p. 92-93, emphasis added).

In our path, we sought to demonstrate the possibility of debates and reflections on the educational aspects of fights, with possible impacts on the very conceptualization of educational processes in a broader way.

Other paths, however, are always possible.

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