

Difficulties Of Research And Innovation On African Humanities: Case Study Of African Martial Arts

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Abstract—Study Focus: This article put forward the thorny problem of researching on African Humanities. It uses African martial arts as case study to demonstrates that some historical underpinnings must be settled down to make possible any authentic study of African Humanities from historical perspectives.

Methodology: The content of this paper relies on written documents (including books, scientific journals, articles, and official reports) from primary and secondary sources most of which are available online as well as on the author's teaching experience in Chinese and African Universities.

Findings: (1) The dilemma on the existence of a Black African history that sparked century old debates among world scholars, going from denial to recognition of Africa's contribution to the world civilization, unfortunately is not yet settled. For, they are still lack of consensus on certain issues, especially regarding the Nile civilization. (2) Cut off from its historical roots of Ancient Egypt, the study of African Humanities in general sense is simply meaningless. In the case of African Martial Arts for instance, Ancient Egyptian civilization have provided solid archeological evidences for over 3000 to 5000 years of palpable history despite heated debates still surrounding the "Black African Ownership of Ancient Egyptian Civilization". (3) The scarcity of African writing systems, the lack of African historical classics, the geographical vastitude and the ethnic complexity of the African continent are among major factors

hindering the research and innovation on the field of African Humanities.

Conclusion & Suggestions: Unless African humanists, anthropologists and historians commit themselves to resolve some pending questions regarding ancient Egypt and the Nile civilization so that Black African can take full responsibility of their historical legacies, otherwise the Study of African humanities from historical perspective could not and will not be handled properly.

Keywords: African Humanities; Research and Innovation; African Martial Arts; Sociocultural Development;

I-INTRODUCTION

Humanities is the term used when referring to the study of various aspects of human society and culture using methods that are primarily critical, or speculative, and having a significant reference to historical elements. As distinguished from the mainly empirical approaches of the natural sciences, yet, unlike the sciences, Humanities have no central concept or disciplines. The Humanities include the study of ancient and modern literature (Rens Bod, 2013) ^[1], philosophy, history, archeology, human geography, law, religion and arts (Stanford University, 2013) ^[2]. In a word, Humanities can be seen as the study of humans' culture in a given society. However, sociocultural development traces processes that tend to increase the complexity of a society or culture, sociocultural evolution also considers process that can lead to decreases in complexity (degeneration) or that

can produce variation or proliferation without any seemingly significant changes in complexity (cladogenesis) (Andrey Korotayev, 2004).^[3] Societies exist in complex social environments and adapt themselves to these environments. It is thus inevitable that all societies change. Either positively in the sense of making progress or negatively by losing some of its historical values due to complex changes or interferences that may have occurred in its development processes. Civilizations that have degraded could be marginalized and in the long run excluded or absorbed by other more concurrent ones. Different nations create cultural achievements with distinct characteristics. We understand the diversity of the world by experiencing rich and colorful cultures. Culture is the most fluid and smooth factor in the communication between nations. It always exerts a subtle influence on people in a silent process. However, from the long history of cultural development, we can figure out that each culture's communication abilities and influence operate differently. Samuel Huntington, an American political scientist, believed that after the Cold War, the world pattern was determined by seven or eight civilizations, namely "Chinese civilization, Japanese civilization, Indian civilization, Islamic civilization, Western civilization, Orthodox Civilization, Latin American civilization, and possibly African civilization" (Samuel P. Huntington, 1996).^[4] This conception and approximation of African civilization still controversial in the academic world shows clearly how African civilization is marginalized among many other civilizations of the world, which undoubtedly hinders the inheritance and development of the African culture. African martial arts undoubtedly have a long history of sociocultural development and its footprints can be trace back to the very beginning of human civilization. But very few of them have survived the test of time and the complexity of human interferences. Compared with the fighting sports of other countries or regions of the world, the influence of African martial arts has remained relatively insignificant, and there has not been significant exchange and collision with other martial arts cultures. Compared with the Chinese Martial arts, Taekwondo of

South Korea, karate of Japan, kick-boxing of the United States and other martial arts, the development of African martial arts is lagging behind. Generally speaking, our work seeks to unscramble the socio-historical reasons behind a failure and deceptions in searching and innovating the African humanities in general and the "African martial arts" in particular.

II- DILEMMA ON THE EXISTENCE OF AN AFRICAN HISTORY

China since ancient times has shaped a central government, created a written system that has allow the country to write down a continuous history and store archives on its long road of development. With a relatively powerful military, China has been able to defend itself against foreign aggressors so as to keep uninterrupted historical records for over 5000 years. The early invention of ancient Chinese characters led to the compilation of classics and books that have had irreplaceable value for the study of Chinese history, culture and society of today. The continent of Africa in the earliest pages of its civilizations' history, was centered towards Ethiopia, Nubia (ancient Sudan), and ancient Egypt. The historical context and the map of these countries were very different from what is known or left today. Egypt was the hub of the most advanced sciences and technological achievements of the times while Nubia remained the military powerhouse of the Nile civilizations till their declines (Diop, 1992). Then on began the appearance of several Sub-Saharan African kingdoms, plugged with constant migrations of people being scattered across the continent. This situation lasted till the western involvement for slavery and then colonization that went on for around four hundred years, with consequences such as the balkanization of the continent in many countries, the destruction of historical materials, the acculturation of people, and so on, that lay down the seeds of obliteration of African humanities. Ever since, the sociocultural development of the continent was turned upside down. No study of African humanities was possible without facing a series of obstacles and challenges regarding the multiple interruption of

African History. However, utmost efforts have been made to reconstitute the legacy of African history. In fact, scholastic and political debates went on from denials to doubts, and from doubts to a proper recognition and acknowledgement of Black African History and some of its legacies. Hot points of these debates can be summed up as follow:

(1) Denial.

The most representative of these debates was the denial of an original art culture of black Africa. Just as denounced by the Chinese scholars Ru Xin and Ai Zhouchang in their book <Black African Civilization> in which they proposed that, *“the long-term dominating standpoint in European academic circles was that Black Africans have no history, no philosophy, no civilization, only darkness and stagnation”*(Ru Xin, Zhou Yichang, 2003)^[5] In fact, before the 19th century, leading scholars of western mainstream thoughts on Africa such as the German philosopher Hegel advocated that, *“Africa itself is not a continent of history, it shows neither change nor development”*. and black Africans do not have the *“ability for philosophy”*(Hegel, 1937)^[6], and that *“Black Africans are incapable of progress and cannot be educated. they are savage and uncivilized, for, their spiritual consciousness is weak, or rather nonexistent”*(Ru Xin, Zhou Yichang, 2003).^[7]

(2) Doubt.

Then there was a period of doubt. At the end of the 19th century, archaeologists discovered sculptures, works of art, etc. belonging to the glorious past of Africa. Such as the great Zimbabwe site, discovered in 1868, which German geologists declared as to be *“An Art works of ancient times”* (Jan Vasina, 1984)^[8]. In 1987, a British expeditionary mission captured the Benin City (in Nigeria) and returned back with a huge haul of carvings, which caused a sensation in Europe and led to the word *“art”* becoming associated with the name *“Africa”* (Jan Vasina, 1984).^[9] From 1907 to 1914, archaeologists brought the Meroe civilization to light, followed in 1931 by the discovery of the Nock civilization in Nigeria, which captivated European

scholars. But, later on, prejudices began to stir up debates. *“Could so much art, metallurgy, and architecture be produced by negroes?”* Then on the Hamitic theory was brought about to justify (Montagu Ashley, 1960).^[10] The so-called “Hamitic theory” held that black people were inferior and could not create a civilization, but that lighter skinned Hamite brought them high level civilization (Keith Allan et Al, 2013).^[11] Whenever a site of ancient civilization was discovered, a theory of transmission immediately arises.

(3) Recognition.

In the early 20th century, black Americans gained freedom from slavery with the abolition of the slave trade. Since then, a group of black intellectuals emerged from America and Africa at the same time and faced up the destiny of Africa and decided once for all to deal with the question of *“The existence of an authentic African Culture and Civilization”*. They refuted the ongoing biased theories on Africa from different aspects of history, culture, art, etc. demonstrating the unique features of the black African culture, increasing the self-confidence and pride of black people (Robert W., 1980).^[12] Among the most outstanding contributors were the scholars Cheikh Anta Diop and W.E.B. Dubois, who were hailed as *“the most influential African scholars of the 20th century”*. Through their researches, the two scholars refuted the claim that *“Black Africa has no history”* and further demonstrated Africa’s multiple contributions to world civilization (Du Bois, 1964).^[13] In 1954, in the book <*Nation Negre et Culture*>, Professor Cheikh Anta Diop systematically expounded the extensive and profound contents of the African civilization for the first time, demonstrating that Africa is not only the origin of all human beings (without exception), but also the cradle of the earliest human civilization, and that Black people were the earliest creators and rightful owners of the Nilo-Egyptian Civilization (not light skin people). This theory came out as the *“Afro-centric Theory”* and gradually gained worldwide recognition. W.E.B Du Bois on the other hand lifted *“the boundary between white and the people of color”* in a master piece < *The Soul of the Black Folk* > (Du Bois, 1903(1959))^[14] in

which he idealized the traditional and harmless spirit of the black people. At the same time, a group of Western scholars of good faith such as the Canadian historian Bogumil Jewsiewicki, Davidson, Oliver, Curting and others made their contributions by emphasizing the existence of an authentic Black African arts and civilization. It is worth mentioning that the book *<Bantu Philosophy>* published by Temple in 1945 demonstrated the ontology based on the existing dynamics of black people, breaking the “orthodox view that black people have no philosophy” since Hegel. In short, the original art and civilization of black Africa was finally recognized through centuries of debates, but not all opinions were agreed upon, especially regarding the Nile civilization.

In general terms, certain parts of African civilization and culture in our today’s world is still facing that problem of denials and non-recognition as to be authentic African cultural heritage belonging to black African. For example, the Capoeira dance (see picture below) formerly known and practiced in Africa (Angola) as “Engolo”, one of Africa’s native martial arts brought to South America by enslaved black Africans is today known by the world as the “Brazilian war dance”, Capoeira was granted special protected status by UNESCO as a “Brazilian Intangible Cultural Heritage” on November 26, 2014, which is obviously a historical injustice.



Fig1. Capoeira Fighting Dance (originally known and practiced in Angola as Engolo)^[15]

III- HEATED DEBATES ON BLACK AFRICAN OWNERSHIP OF “ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION”

If we cut off the history of ancient Egypt from the history of Black Africa, the history of the entire African continent from 3000 BC to 500 BC will remain a blank-page book. Ancient Egyptian civilization is as important to African history as ancient Greek and Roman civilization is to western history (Neil M.C. Sinclair, 2016).^[16] Under such chaos of time and space, even the modern and contemporary study of African humanities will lose its historical value. As the Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop put it so brilliantly: “Unless African historians dare to connect the history of Black Africa with the history of ancient Egypt, otherwise the history of black Africa will remain suspended in air. The Studies of languages, social institutions, etc. could not be handled properly; In short, it will be impossible to establish African humanities disciplines (Cheikh Anta Diop, 1992).”^[17] Moreover, the thorny question of “*who created the ancient Egyptian civilization*” so far will remained unsolved as well. In the course of history, Egyptologists have attempted to answer that question by proposing three different theories. The first theory proposed that ancient Egyptian civilization was created by “*white people*”. But that was closely related to the “*Hamitic theory*” obviously hindered by racial prejudice. Later rose up the “*black-created*” theory, as it was later put forward in the 20th century. It was the result of the joint efforts of a group of African and American black scholars who were determined to face up to the fate of the continent. Among the most successful and influential masterpieces produce on that occasion were *<Black Nations and Cultures>*, *<African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality>*, and *<Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology>*, written by the Senegalese anthropologist C. A. Diop. Relying on a large number of evidences, Professor Diop demonstrated his proposed theory of “*Black Origination of Egyptian Civilization*” in details from the perspectives of physical anthropology, melanin measurement, skeletal identification, blood type,

linguistics, classical literature and so on. In his two master's pieces <the African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality>, and <Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology>, Professor Diop expounded in details his main findings. These outcomes briefly summed up below pathed a way to what is seen today as "The Afrocentric Theory" (TALING, 2020)^[18]:

(a) The human race first came into existence in Africa in the region of the sources of the Nile.

(b) The earliest human beings (Homo sapiens sapiens) on earth were ethnically homogeneous and Negroid (Blacks).

(c) The earliest human beings' population spread out from Africa in the region of the sources of the Nile reaching other regions of the earth by only two routes: the Nile valley and the Sahara. In the Nile valley, the spread took place from the south in a northerly direction, in a progressive movement, between the Upper Paleolithic and the protohistoric periods. (Also see Neil M.C. Sinclair, 2016);^[19]

(d) The population of Egypt was Negro (black) since the pre-dynastic period, a conclusion contradicting the theory that the Negro element spread to Egypt in later times.

(e) The Nile is the birthplace of African civilization, here black people created agriculture, astronomy, calendar, mathematics, religion, medicine, literature, art, architecture and so on.

(f) Present-day Egyptians, particularly in Upper Egypt, belonged to the same blood-group, B, as the population of West Africa, and not to Group A, which was characteristic of the white race. (Diop went on to state that a conclusive anthropological study would also include 61 Ancient Civilizations of Africa osteological measurements and the study of blood-groups.)

(g) The Ancient Egyptian Civilization is to be counted among the assets of Black Africa. The Black world is the very initiator of the "Western (Greco-Roman) Civilization" flaunted before our eyes today. The Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of

the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science.

(h) Professor Diop considered that the science of Egyptology, a product of imperialism, had much to answer for in denying all the facts to which he had just referred (above).

These findings had owned Africa's history with a new chapter in the United Nations General History of Africa Volume 2 (UNESCO International Committee for the Drafting of General History of Africa, 27-83, Edited by Joseph Kizerbo). The works of Cheikh Anta Diop, together with the contribution of African Africanists such a Joseph Kizerbo, Kwame Nkrumah, etc. have provided Africa's history with a new narrative in modern academia and should be the foundation of any in-depth a genuine study of Africa humanities in modern days.

Finally, there was a third made-up theory according to which "white and black people" created ancient Egyptian civilization together. But the theory came up to conciliate the two previous ones, but mostly because facing the undeniable and irrefutable evidences gathered by professor Diop's theory. However, they were still unsolved questions that undermined the credibility of Diop's works such as the number of samples of mummified bodies available for studies in comparison to the hundreds of millions of ancient Egyptians that could have been part of the Egyptian legacy over generations. Therefore, some others scholars concluded that available data were not enough to fully and fairly conclude over the ethnological properties of ancient Egyptians.

While acknowledging the significant contribution of Blacks people to ancient Egyptian civilization, this group of scholars still supported the theory of "co-creation by blacks and whites". For examples, renown Chinese anthropologists such as Lu Ting'en, Ai Zhouchang et al put forward in the book titled <Course of African History> the following claim: "Ancient Egyptian residents first lived in today's

southwest region (of Africa) 30000 years ago, but because the Sahara desertification due to climate drought, they were forced to move along the Nile Valley and downstream river network areas. At this time of history, some tribes from Western Asia also moved to that area. The ancient Egyptian civilization was co-created by the integration of these two people.” In short, the debate on ancient Egyptian civilization has so far failed to reach a consensus. However, these debates are merely pure distractions aiming at distancing African people from their legitimate legacy. In fact, Ancient Egypt provides consistent archeological evidences for the studies of Black African humanities. In the case of African Martial Arts for examples, the earliest archaeological evidence of African martial arts can be traced back to ancient Egypt around 3,100 B.C. The Stone Tablet of Narmer discovered by the British Egyptologist James Edward Quibbell (1867-1935), tells us that the military strength of Kemet (ancient Egypt) and Nubia (present-day Sudan) was inseparable from the prevalence of religious rituals (Taling, 2018) ^[20].



Fig 2. The Stone Tablet of Narmer (about 3100 BC), discovered by James Edward Quibbell in 1897-1898 (Diop 1992).

Professor Cheikh Anta Diop explained in details the significance and symbols on the tablet in his book <An African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality>. According to him, the inscription describes the pharaoh standing behind the army with an oxtail in his hand. The army is made of five Nubian (Sudanese) military chiefs. The first four of them hold clubs with totems of different significance. The servant behind the pharaoh holds his sandals in one hand and a water jug in the other, which in the ancient Egypt (Kemet) meant that the pharaoh is preparing to perform the ritual of

sacrifice to the gods. In brief, The Stone Tablet of Narmer depicts the site of a sacrifice ceremony after the victory over the enemy (Diop 1992) ^[21]. This suggests that since ancient times, African military and religious practices were somehow connected.

In addition, at Beni Hasan, in four separate tombs, there are hundreds of paintings on limestone walls that for the most part, have since decayed. The paintings are of African martial artists using a variety of wrestling holds and locks. The illustrations total well over 500 individual pairs of wrestlers who are executing hundreds of sophisticated techniques. These images are mainly recorded in the tombs of governors, or princes by the names of Baqet III, his son Khety, and his son Amenemhat. They all reigned in Mahez during the 11th and 12th Dynasties. Illustrations were also found in the well-known tomb of Prince Khemenhotep. The paintings feature pairs of fighters who are wrestling, as well as illustrations of warriors using other forms of unarmed combat that employ kicking and punching techniques. There are scenes of martial artists using weapons such as a lance, short sticks, daggers, staffs, and bow and arrows. There are even scenes of warriors utilizing military technology such as a testudo, which is a shielding device used during the siege of a castle. The earliest representation of a castle in the world can be found illustrated on an incense holder that originates from Nubia, the mother civilization of ancient Egypt. All total, these paintings in Africa represent the most ancient, and prolific depiction of martial arts on Earth (Hayes 2008).



Fig 3. Image of military training in ancient Egypt found at the 15th tomb of Beni Hasan (Beni Hasan's tomb, 2000 BC)

In his work <Nubia Wrestling: The Origin of The Art (1990)>, the African-American sculptor Nigel Binns highlighted the ancient Nubian Wrestling (including the

battle map found in the great cemetery of Beni Hassan) and its close connection with ancient Greece, ancient Rome and even modern Western martial arts. He further explained that, in 776 BC, the Greeks began to practice wrestling in honor of the African god Amon, known in Greek as Zeus. The recognition of Greece-Roman wrestling is attributed by all ancient Greek and Roman scholars to the illustrations on the walls of ancient tombs discovered in Beni Hassan in ancient Egypt. These battle pictures show a complete system of fighting of ancient Nubia, the system only reached its climax in ancient Egypt. Egyptian antiquities scholar C. A. Diop proposed earlier that, the ancient Greek pantheon was a copy on African gods, the Greeks only changed the nomenclature (Diop 1992). Nijel Binns goes further to explain that ancient Greece was the first western civilization to combine Martial arts and religious rituals, but he stressed that the ancient Greeks copied ancient African traditional cultures, even though they did not fully apply them (Nigel 1990). Besides the accounts of ancient Greek historians themselves, information confirming the Greek's access to Egyptian arts and sciences were recorded by 17th and 18th century Europeans in Egypt such as Edme F. Jomard, James Burton, Jean Champollion, Robert Hay, and others. The most complete and often referred to archeological study of the Mahez tombs were compiled by the Englishman Percy Newberry. Working for the Archaeological Survey of Egypt between 1890 and 1892, Newberry carried out excavations at Beni Hasan. The results were published in a two-volume work as the First and Second Memoirs of the ASE (Percy E. Newberry, Beni Hasan, Part I [London, 1893] and Beni Hasan, Part II [London, 1893]. He states that graffiti on the walls that were written in Greek further proves that the Greeks were frequent visitors to the tombs in ancient times (Nigel 1990) ^[22]. In short, the military power of ancient Greece and Rome was well known, but both were built on the foundation of African martial culture. In addition, along the Nile civilization, ancient Ethiopia and ancient Nubia were prior to ancient Egypt. The Ethiopians themselves say the ancient Egyptians were one of their migrants, brought into Egypt by Osiris (Diop

1992). the Nubian military was the most influential in the ancient Nile civilization. Ancient Egypt was repeatedly attacked by foreign invaders and saved many times by the Nubian military (Diop 1992). This explains why there are five Nubian soldiers standing in front of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh on the stone tablet of NAMER, it also explains the closer relationship between ancient Nubia and ancient Egypt. The tomb of prince Masathi of Assiout, in the 12th dynasty of ancient Egypt (around 2000 BC), has also been found with an ancient Egyptian statue engraved with the ancient Nubian army (Diop 1992). The Nubians were called "fierce warriors" by the ancient Egyptians. The Nubian territory is also known as "Ta-seti or Ta Khentit", meaning "Land of the Bow" (Geoff, 2011) ^[23].



Fig 4.
Ancient Egyptian sculptures showing the ancient Nubian army (Sudanese Army about 2000 BC) at the Cairo Museum (Diop 1992).

In short, based on the present archaeological findings, African martial arts history can be traced back to at least 3100 years BC, that is to speak, at least 5100 years of palpable history. Cut off from these historical roots of Ancient Egyptian civilization, the study of African Martial Arts will be simply meaningless.

IV- THE SCARCITY OF AFRICAN WRITING SYSTEMS AND CLASSICS

The written language plays an important role in storing information and recording the history through books and classics. Even though the very first records of human writings as old as the Egyptian hieroglyphic's symbols were developed on the continent at a very early stage of human civilization, for historical reasons the continent has been one of the poorest in writing

languages. The scarcity of ancient writings and historical classics in Africa has hindered the recording of history. It should be revealed that, many records, classics and historical writings dating back of ancient Egypt and later African civilizations have disappeared mostly due to external aggressions and foreign interferences. In fact, historical evidences show that, the African continent has suffered three major invasions that led to a severe destruction of historical materials, triggered massive human migrations and people's acculturation:

(a) The first invasions were before 525 BC, when Ancient Egypt was successively attacked by Persia, Assyria, ancient Greece and Rome and gradually declined in 525 BC. Thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and civilization were eventually either destroyed or assimilated (Diop, 1992) ^[24]. The decline of Ancient Egypt ruled by black African triggered waves of massive migration of Black Africans towards the sub-Saharan Africa and gave rise to new-born civilizations and sub-Saharan kingdoms.

(b) The second major aggression of the continent was around the 7th century A.D. when Arabs from central East Asia entered the continent from North Africa and achieved the "islamisation" and ethnic cleansing of that part of Africa. The remaining Black Africans were once again forced to move southward to escape extinction or islamisation.

(c) The third major invasion of Africa happened with European enslavement and colonialism practiced in Africa since the 14th -15th century till the birth of newly balkanized African countries after the 2 world wars. The slave trade and colonization in particular caused unprecedented damage to sub-Saharan African socio-cultural values, which mostly got westernized. From languages to traditional customs, from cultural practices to religious beliefs, the cultural wiping out process was carried out as the "White Man Civilizational Burden". Data show that in the course of four hundred years of slavery, African blacks were massacred in tens of millions; It is estimated that the slave trade has cost Africa at least 100 million lives. According to statistics, Africa accounted for around

one-fifth of the world's population in the 17th and 18th centuries, but it dropped to one-thirteenth at the beginning of the 20th century (Beijing Normal University, 2014) ^[25]. For a martial arts culture, many African warriors, military leaders and spiritual guide were killed or taken to America through the slave trades, leading to the extinction or westernization (case of capoeira, see Taling 2016) ^[26] of many African fighting arts and martial cultures. Unlike the Chinese martial arts, there is almost no written classics or historical records on the history of African martial arts left, which is an unprecedented challenge to the study "African martial arts" with its long-standing history.

As for the roleplay by the spoken language in telling the history of the continent despite the scarcity of written systems, it was is vital. Africa has a long history of sociocultural development and has naturally developed a variety of languages, as many as 1,650 (UNESCO, 2012) ^[27]. But most of them did not develop the corresponding written symbols; The earliest written languages, such as many of the Nile civilization, have disappeared by today. For the surviving ones, most of them re-appear to public use much later (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) and were not widely used. This have had a great impact on the use of written history in sub-Saharan Africa. Just as noted by the historian J. Vansina, "*The African culture of the Sahara Desert and its south is largely oral*". But where the writing culture is less developed, there is a tendency to further up the use of oral culture. The spoken languages of Africa are far well developed than elsewhere. In sub-Saharan Africa, most of the ancient kingdoms recorded their history in spoken language, therefore naturally creating oral history just as recollected by the griot (African storyteller or poet who passes on oral traditions) A. Kagwa, "*When I was a boy, my father cut a lot of sticks and named each one after an important activist or figure in history. Then he called the names on the sticks before his sons and asked them to tell their stories*" (Shu Yunguo, 2012). ^[28] Such culture of "oral history" is far more developed in Africa than in other regions of the world. Consequently, Africa despite the scarcity of written systems, has possesses

rich “oral historical materials” that have become indispensable materials in the study of African humanities. As for African martial arts and combat traditions, the historical oral materials are even more abundant in tales and legends. In fact, countless tales, legends on gods and wars between tribes can be found in the African oral history. But the problem with the oral tradition is that it does not faithfully pass on information as context may differ from one generation to another. Additionally, the loss of people due to wars, epidemics and migrations eventually will lead to the loss of information. Previous efforts have been made by historian and African martial artists such as T.J.Desch Obi when tracing back the roots of the traditional African martial arts Engolo. The Nigerian scholar T.J.Desch Obi notes in his records the following: *“Whenever, wherever I ask my ‘Engolo’ teacher about the origin and development of ‘Engolo’, he will answer me ‘Engolo comes from the ancestors’. That answer bothered me. How do I interview my ancestors? since I don’t have any written documents prior to the seventeenth century”* (T.J. Desch Obi, 2002).^[29] In addition to the papyrus and texts found in ancient Egypt, the earliest written work related to African history was the <History> of Herodotus, the ancient Greek scholar who lived in the Mediterranean and visited Ancient Egypt, North Africa and other places. Although the book does not cover Much of Africa, its mostly covers the north African region and is of higher value when talking of African general history (Shu Yunguo, 2012).^[30] Later, other Greek scholars wrote about the lives of various African peoples during their travels to Africa. Such as <Voyages Around the Old Red Sea>, written by an anonymous Greek merchant (AD 50-60). But the book is confined to the study of people, economies and socio-political aspects of the east African coast. Later, with the Arab invasion of North Africa in the 7th century, many Arab authors also wrote histories about Africa, but mainly about the landscape, geography and mostly confined to North Africa.

All in all, these books despite having great values for African general history, have little or no reference to

the martial arts or the fighting traditions. The written materials about “African martial arts” are mainly limited to the 15th century after the colonial era, most of which were counting epics of slavery and white heroism in Africa. This demonstrates how the research on African humanities is challenging and mainly handicap by the quasi non-existence of African written systems as well as historical classics.

V- INCONSISTENT LITERATURE REVIEW ON AFRICAN HUMANITIES

Most of the research on African humanities are contemporary. African martial arts studies in particular are even recent than any other field of African humanities. And most of these researches are carry out by post-colonial universities and institutions. Among others, some of the most noticeable works were done by African scholars themselves while other were carried out by non-African scholars.

In Beijing Sport University, China, Mr. Meng Grua conducted research on all the athletes who participated in the fifth Kokowa Wrestling (of Senegal in west-Africa) Championship, using the usual measurement techniques proposed by SEMPE PEDRON and colleagues in 1979, their physical anthropometric characteristics were examined. Therefore, the physical attributes and physiological indicators of Kokowa athletes were evaluated (“A Study on anthropometry Characteristics of Kokowa Athletes”, Beijing Sport University, 2006).

In western countries, books such as Madison’s <Black Martial Arts: Combats Games of Northern Nigeria>, <Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation> by Svinth, <West African Secret Societies>, of Thompson F.W., <Afrikan Martial Arts:The Warrior Within Abeegunde Balogun>, etc. describe in detail various traditional Fighting systems and fighting sports in Africa. However, most of them are limited to depicting black people’s resistance and struggle for liberation from the slave trade during the colonial period. The slave trade has had a very damaging impact on African history, for it has caused a large number of Africans to migrate to America, along

with all the struggles that were consequent, so the study of “African martial arts” was naturally dominated by the epics of African Americans liberation struggles. But, major studies on the African continent emphasized on the spiritual dimension of African martial arts, for it shows the essence of African martial arts in close relation with the belief system from which they were created. The pioneering works of authors such as Cameroonian scholar Philippe Laburthe-Tolra (1985) for example show the “duality of the African warrior” in <Initiations and Secretes Societies in Cameroon>. He explains that the Cameroonian warriors of the Beti’s tribe can partner with other non-human consciousness through a traditional fetish called “Mebian”. Ludovic Mba Ndzeng (2006) further explained in <Para Societe et Pouvoir Politique au Gabon> that “Eseneya” is the phenomenon of spiritual communication between people and other non-human consciousness. Through the esenga (which can be the spirit of totems such as leopard or snake (Gorges Balandier, 2001) ^[31] the Beti warriors can attack their opponents and easily defeat them. People often combine with these intangible entities through some sacrificial rituals, dance and religious practices. Olivier P. Nguema Akwe (2011) in <Sorcellerie et Arts Martiaux en Afrique: Anthropologie des Sports de Combat> details the use of Mesing (a form of witchcraft practiced by the Fang people in Gabon, Cameroon and other countries) in local martial arts culture from the perspective of cultural anthropology. The Nigerian scholar T.J.Desch Obi interviewed ancestors through the human divination method while studying Engolo, a Kunene fighting arts. In his book <Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art Traditions in The Atlantic World>, The author describes his experience with “Ngangas (spiritual guides in the Bantu culture)” while doing fieldwork in Angola. In a word, there is not much research on “African martial arts” in particular, and there a lack of consistent scholastic works on African humanities from historical perspective in general.

VI- GEOGRAPHICAL VASTITUDE AND ETHNIC COMPLEXITY OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

Africa is made up of 54 countries with a total area of about 30.2 million square kilometers, 8000 kilometers in length from north to south and 7,403 kilometers from east to west, accounting for 20.2% of the world’s total land area. Africa is the second largest continent in the world after Asia. Human beings first emerged in East Africa and spread to the whole African continent and the whole world through long and complex migration routes, forming a very complex historical context in the continent (Diop, 1992).^[32] Ethnicity and geography are among the sharpest difficulties to overcome when studying African humanities. The vastitude of geographical area is not of any help in field studies or when following up migration movements in the study of human geography. Ethnicity and cultural diversities have become a very complex phenomenon in Africa, making the studies of African humanities a huge challenge for researchers. However, the earliest settlers of the central African region currently recognized by the classic academia are the “Bantu people”, who settled on the borders of Niger and Cameroon in central and western Africa about 4000 years ago (2000 B.C.) and moved down over time (see Figure 6 below) (Jan Vansina, 1995).^[33] There is evidence of iron-making in the Central African Republic and Cameroon, dating from 3000 to 2500 BC (Zangato, 2010). ^[34] Despite the huge diversity in people and ethnicity in the sub-Saharan Africa, the ancestors of oldest occupants as currently understood by modern academia, were originally the Bantu people, who lived in West Africa near the southwest border between Nigeria and what is now Cameroon. They moved down over time to form a branch of the Bantu language Niger-Congo.

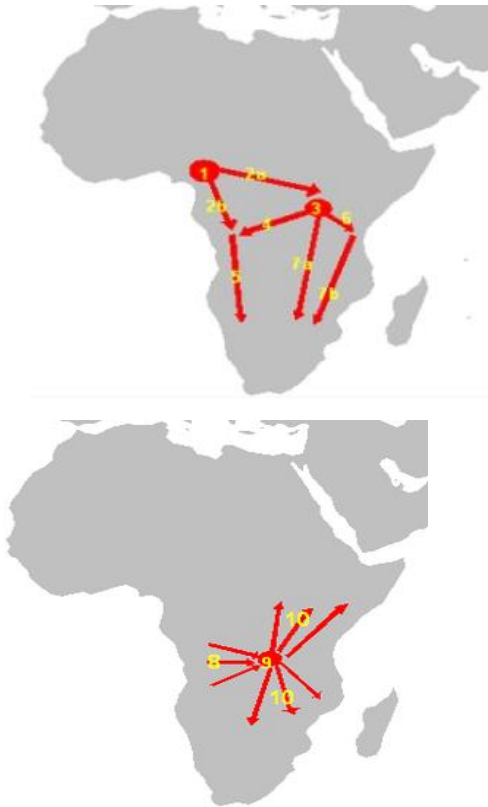


Fig 5. History of the earliest population movements in Central Africa^[35]

Trade and improved agricultural techniques supported more complex societies, leading to early civilizations such as Sao, Kanem, Bornu, Shilluk, Baguirmi, Wadai. Due to common historical processes and extensive population movements, the cultures of the region have many similarities. Similar cultural practices derived from common origins, mainly among Nilo-Saharan or Bantu speaking peoples. Their cultural features include music, dance, art, decoration, initiation and marriage ceremonies. Today, 54 independent developing countries have formed in the new African continent, but the structure of each country is still complex, with multiple tribes, language groups and customs still characteristic of most African countries.

Although there are many challenges in the inheritance and dissemination of African martial arts, there are also opportunities for development. If African culture wants to get rid of “marginalization” and stand tall again among the diversity of the world civilizations, it must promote core cultural concepts and traditional values. Fundamentally, we should constantly explore

our own cultural foundation and base ourselves on our own traditional culture. While protecting our own cultural diversity, we should actively and courageously communicate and dialogue with other cultures to build deeper and more permanent cultural self-confidence. African martial arts have deep historical roots in Africa. Attaching importance to African humanities is conducive to enhance the sense of identity and pride of African people. Cultural identity and self-confidence is an important step that will help reconcile with our past and better prepare the next generation for our future.

CONCLUSION

Africa despite being the birthplace of humanity, have been the cradle of human culture and civilization. Archeologists and anthropologists have gathered enough evidences to show that human live and sociocultural development on the continent of Africa were prior to any other place in the world. But as simple and naïve as these affirmations seems to be, they have been hotspots of the most violent scholarly discussions. It took the scientific community centuries of debates and roundtables to get closer to the reality that black African have made significant contribution to the world civilization and that some of the world’s wonders such as Nilo-Egyptian civilization which relics are still visible today bear the fingerprints of Black Africans. As banal as the claims of these historical legacies seems to be, their missing effects on black African history is disastrous with multiple consequences. Among others, the difficulties of establishing an authentic African humanity from historical perspectives. The African martial arts studied here showcase of that persistent academic gangrene. In fact, cutting off existing archeological evidences of more than 3000 B.C rooted in Ancient Egypt, it will be merely impossible to achieve any consistent historical works on African martial arts or African humanities in general terms. That’s why the Senegalese historian and anthropologist C.A. Diop warned decades earlier: “foreign intellectuals, who challenge our intentions and accuse us of all kinds of hidden motives or ridiculous ideas, proceeded any differently? When

they explain their own historical past or study their languages that seems normal. Yet, when an African does likewise to help reconstruct the national personality of his people, distorted by colonialism, that is considered backward or alarming (.) Our investigations have convinced us that the West has not been calm and objective enough to teach us our history correctly, without crude falsifications. (.) In a word, we must restore the historical consciousness of the African peoples and reconquer a Promethean consciousness. define the image of a modern Africa reconciled with its past and preparing for its future" (Diop, 1974) ^[36].

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