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**The Dissertation Committee for Adam Dean Frank Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**TAIJIQUAN AND THE SEARCH FOR THE LITTLE OLD  
CHINESE MAN: RITUALIZING RACE THROUGH  
MARTIAL ARTS**

**Committee:**

---

Deborah Kapchan, Supervisor

---

James Brow

---

Avron Boretz

---

Ward Keeler

---

Pauline Turner Strong

---

Nancy N. Chen

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CHINESE MAN: RITUALIZING RACE THROUGH  
MARTIAL ARTS**

**by**

**Adam Dean Frank, BA, MA**

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## **Dedication**

To Sandi

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A project of this scope involves a cast of thousands. My apologies in advance to anyone who I may have omitted. My apologies also to those I remembered but cannot name, especially to the teachers who patiently and with considerable good humor transmitted their substantial art. I hope someday the weather will change to the point where I can give you back your names. My special thanks to the members of the Shanghai Branch of the Jianquan Taijiquan Association, particularly to the late Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, without whom the art of Wu style taijiquan would not be nearly so rich. In the United States, I also owe a great debt to my teachers over the years: At the University of Texas, my committee chair and teacher, Deborah Kapchan, gave enthusiastic encouragement throughout the research and writing. John Nelson and the members of his 1997 seminar on ritual pointed me toward the discipline of anthropology in general and this project in particular. The dissertation would not have come to fruition without the critiques and support of a writing group that included Jessica Hester, Brandt Peterson, David Sandell, Peter Kvetko, Peter Siegenthaler, and Michelle Wibbelsman. Richard Flores's work on the Alamo continues to inspire me, as does Nancy Chen's writing on qigong and healing.

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Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Adam Dean Frank, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Deborah Kapchan

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the martial art of taijiquan as it is practiced in Shanghai, China, and the United States. Drawing on a growing literature on ethnicity, critical race theory, the phenomenology of race, and globalization, the author discusses racial formation as a process of ritualization, which he defines as the exercise of power through the formal transmission or receipt of knowledge. Chapter 1 focuses on race and community formation in the monthly meetings of the Jianquan Taijiquan Association (JTA) in Shanghai. The chapter is also concerned with folklore and origin stories about taijiquan; with the history of Daoist studies in and outside of China; and with the social and individual embodiment of the key concepts of “*qi*” (vital energy) and “*yi*” (mind-intent). Chapter 2 chronicles the author’s study of taijiquan with JTA teachers,

touching on both the process and poetics associated with mastering the art. Chapter 3 explores the social milieu of practice in Shanghai city parks and the processes through which race, ethnicity, and gender are embodied during public park practice. Drawing on recent literature in urban studies, Chapter 4 focuses on taijiquan in the context of Shanghai's history and development, positing it as a form of public art that reflects Shanghai people's simultaneous negotiation of past, present, and future. In Chapter 5, the author approaches taijiquan as a master symbol of the Chinese nation. He combines historical analysis of the JTA with a discussion of tournaments and popular martial arts tourist destinations such as the Buddhist Shaolin Temple and Chen Family Village. He also discusses the Chinese Communist Party's attempt to include taijiquan as an Olympic event. Chapter 6 focuses on the world of poetry, kung fu movies, novels, and oral tradition that influence martial arts practice in China. Chapter 7 draws on recent debates about transnational processes to trace the entrance of taijiquan into the United States and the transformation and hybridization of the art in the American context. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of how processes of individual experience, urban life, nationalism, and globalization inhabit the body, contribute to the sensual experience of race, and, ultimately, raise fundamental questions about the relationship between "doing" and "being."

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## Romanization and Pronunciation Guide

I generally use the Chinese pinyin romanization system throughout the text. This is the system used in the People's Republic of China and also widely used in scholarly publications in the United States (other common systems include Wade-Giles and Yale). In some cases, I maintain transliterations that have, through force of habit, maintained their presence in American English. For reasons that will make sense in context, I occasionally use both the colloquial and the pinyin form of the word (e.g. “kung fu” vs. the pinyin form “gongfu”). Finally, I standardize systems within direct quotations: Words and names that originally appeared in another romanization system now appear in pinyin. Titles mentioned within the text and bibliographic entries are the exceptions to this rule.

Mandarin Chinese has four tones (five if one counts the neutral tone). I have not included the standard diacritical marks to indicate tone. The following pronunciation guide, however, should prove useful to the non-Mandarin speaker. I have reproduced this guide from *The Pocket Interpreter* (Chen and Ying 1988).

### Initial sounds:

b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, w, y	roughly the same as in English
ch, sh	but curl the tongue up toward the roof of the mouth while pronouncing the “ch” or “sh” sound
c	ts as in <i>cats</i>
q	ch as in <i>cheese</i>
r	zhr, like in <i>pleasure</i>
x	sh as in <i>banshee</i>
z	ds as in <i>cards</i>
zh	dg as in <i>fudge</i>

### Final sounds

a	ah
ai	eye

an	ahn
ang	ahng
ao	ow
ar	are
e	uh
ei	eigh as in a <i>sleigh</i>
en	un as in <i>run</i>
eng	ung as in <i>hung</i>
er	cross between ar and er
i	<i>ee</i> , but after c, ch, r, s,sh, z, and zh, it is silent
ia	<i>ee-ah</i> (quickly, as one syllable)
ian	<i>ee-an</i> (quickly)
iang	<i>ee-ahng</i> (quickly)
iao	<i>ee-ow</i> (quickly)
ie	<i>ee-eh</i> (quickly)
in	<i>een</i> as in <i>seen</i>
ing	ing as in <i>ring</i>
iong	<i>ee-ōng</i> (quickly)
iu	<i>eo</i> as in <i>Leo</i>
o	o as in <i>or</i>
ong	ōng
ou	oh
u	oo as in <i>moo</i>
ü	cross between <i>oo</i> and <i>eeu</i> , as in French <i>tu</i>
ua	wa as in <i>wash</i>
uai	why
uan	wahn, as in <i>wander</i>
uang	wahng
ue	weh
ui	way
un	won
uo	wo as in <i>wore</i>

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## Introduction

### I

Among twenty snowy mountains  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

### II

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

–Wallace Stevens  
*From “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”*

It was March 4, 2000, in Shanghai, and Mr. Pang Tianzhu, a forty-six-year-old mechanic and long-time practitioner of the martial art of taijiquan, had finally obtained his passport. At the American firm where he worked, Mr. Pang’s taijiquan student, a foreign businessman who had helped Pang obtain the job, shook his hand and wished him luck. Within a few minutes, holding on to the subway car’s safety bar with one hand and clutching a letter of invitation to the United States in the other, Pang sped toward the neighborhood of Shanghai’s American consulate. Pang carefully buttoned his jacket, checked that his cell phone was fully charged, anxiously attended to each station so he would be sure not to miss his stop. Exiting at Hengshan Road, he bought two vegetable steamed buns, headed past the TGIFridays, and moments later found himself waiting with dozens of other visa applicants in the long line that snaked alongside the consulate.

A soft, fragrant rain began to fall. Those fortunate enough to have remembered umbrellas popped them open with a light symphony of snaps, while others either purchased one from a nearby street hawker or simply endured the rain as the price they had to pay for the possibility of a coveted tourist or student

visa. It seemed that everyone—nouveau riche businessmen, poor students, and working class stiff alike—had to suffer an occasional muddy splashing from a passing taxi or a curious, perhaps even jealous glance from a pedestrian. Nevertheless, the mood was a positive one. Nervous as they were, everyone smiled, exchanged tales of previous visa attempts, and joked about whether the future would hold riches or dishwashing opportunities.

At 2:15 p.m. Pang's number came up. As the guard waved him through to the consulate's visa section, his hands began to sweat a little. The situation—standing here at last in the American Consulate on this rainy day—did not seem quite real. Pang suddenly realized he was luckier than most. His dream had at least come this far. His thoughts drifted back to times that were both difficult and sweet. In memory, Pang watched Master Ma effortlessly drift through the taiji spear form, spinning, whipping, full of power and life, yet quiet. Smiling, Ma stopped, put his spear aside, beckoned Pang over...

“Please move quickly, Sir.” The voice of one of the consulate's American staff, speaking in heavily accented Chinese, jerked him out of his reverie. This man led Pang to an inner room and pointed him toward a middle-aged white woman with a tall pile of files in front of her. Though polite, she seemed irritable to Pang, as if she had not eaten yet that day. He was about to offer her the remaining steamed bun in his pocket, but the visa officer had already launched into questions about his employment, previous travel experience, number and location of family members, and purpose in traveling to the United States. It took a moment for Pang to get used to her accent, but in this regard, his experience with foreign students served him well. Pang showed the officer his letter of invitation from Seattle and said that his friend, an American citizen, had invited him to come to the States to practice taijiquan together for a short time. Asked if he intended to return to China before his potential American tourist visa expired, Pang assured the visa officer that he would return. He had a good job in China

and his young son had not yet graduated from middle school. Ever helpful, Pang added that he himself was a taijiquan teacher and that he hoped one day to teach taijiquan in the United States but that, for the present, he wanted only to pay a short visit to a friend.

Since consular officials seldom volunteer the information on which they base their visa decisions, it is generally difficult to say exactly why a visa officer rejects an application. Normally, such rejections hinge on the applicant's inability to prove that he or she intends to return to China.<sup>1</sup> On this day, however, the visa officer took the unusual step of revealing at least part of her rationale to Pang. "Mr. Pang," she politely explained, "I'm afraid your story just doesn't ring true. Taijiquan teachers are old. You're obviously too young." At this, Pang could only scratch his head, politely thank the visa officer, and exit into the drizzling afternoon of Shanghai spring.

### ***Rationale and Definitions***

This dissertation is an ethnographic analysis of race as it is seen through the lens of martial arts practice in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States. Through the vehicle of taijiquan, the dissertation describes a personal journey from seeing race as socially constructed to understanding it as an act of consciousness, a dialogue between collective expression and sensual

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA) places the burden of proof on the applicant to show that he or she does not intend to immigrate to the United States. U.S. consulates in China and the Immigration and Naturalization Service within the United States have experienced instances of organized attempts to circumvent U.S. law by smuggling Chinese into the United States under false pretences. The most famous case, the "Shanghai 32," involved a group of student visa recipients who, in an apparently well-organized alien smuggling operation, fled from the Los Angeles airport just before they were supposed to return to China. Since that incident, visa applicants at consulates all over China have faced ever higher hurdles in meeting the burden of proof. Decisions are at the discretion of the officers who interview visa applicants. As a result, the standard for meeting the minimum burden of proof requirement is not uniform among consulate staff and is even less so between the various consulates scattered around China. Taijiquan teachers are only one among many groups that have been informally blacklisted by some visa officers.

experience. My fundamental proposition can be expressed in two words: race moves. In its broadest terms, the dissertation focuses on how human actions and interactions in the world are always on the move and, therefore, how one sees oneself and others is likewise always in motion. In other words, we define ourselves in relation to one another and to our physical, social, and political environments, which are themselves in a state of constant change. I acknowledge at the outset that these self-definitions are not limited to racial or ethnic identities. Nevertheless, because of the dominant position that questions of race occupied in my fieldwork, because the way I learned and came to understand taijiquan in China had much to do with my whiteness, and because fellow practitioners of taijiquan time and time again talked to me about the art in the context of misperceptions about Chineseness, what began as a project about martial arts evolved into a larger discussion of race. Though I will at times turn down other roads—for example, to the nuances of daily practice, the particulars of Shanghai, martial arts as national identity, and the globalization of taijiquan, the discussion inevitably returns to race throughout.

Understanding the place that “ritualization” occupies in the dissertation is crucial to my understanding of how race moves. How, after all, can race be “ritualized”? First, I define ritualization as a formal exchange of knowledge that involves the exertion of power over oneself or others, and, second, as specific techniques that allow one to move fluidly between instances of *doing* and states of *being*. I am not, therefore, taking the position that *everything* may be subsumed under “ritualization.” Rather, I am interested in a conception of ritualization that can include public and private, secular and profane, yet is still distinguishable from our daily activities. In the course of my fieldwork in Shanghai, I began to see both the public and private rituals associated with martial arts practice (for example, performances in a park or private practices between student and teacher) as opportunities for both *affirming* notions of Chineseness and *confirming*

suspected differences attached to convenient dichotomies like foreigners-Chinese (*waiguoren-Zhongguoren*), white people-Chinese (*bairen-Zhongguoren*), or Han person-minority (*Hanren-xiaoshu minzhu*). In the United States, martial arts also brought out specific notions of what it meant to be “Chinese,” “Chinese-American,” or “white.” And, in the bureaucratic, liminal ritual space that embassies and consulates occupy (for example, in Teacher Pang’s interaction with the U.S. consular official) issues of race took sometimes bizarre turns: Chinese people imagining a paradisiacal world of white people who are themselves imagining kung fu-fighting little old Chinese men. Whatever might have come before, in the world of transnational martial arts practice, it seemed, ritual not only delineated relationships between teachers and students, consumers and producers, upper class and lower class, masters and disciples, it also delineated categories of race and ethnicity.

I am interested, therefore, in examining how racial categories are both constructed and experienced through martial arts, which, like many other arts, involve constant engagement in often repetitive, ritual-like exchanges of knowledge, as well as subtle negotiations of power among practitioners. I am interested in how such moments of action and power not only contribute to the formation of the art, but also how the art contributes to notions of identity in the PRC and the United States.

### ***Taijiquan as a Vehicle for Understanding the Ritualization of Race***

Taijiquan (pronounced “tai jee chuan,” popularly transliterated in English as “t’ai chi ch’uan” or simply “t’ai chi”) is the general term for several distinct styles of martial arts that include slow and fast solo sequences of postures; a self-defense training exercise called *tui shou* (“push hands”);<sup>2</sup> solo and two-person

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<sup>2</sup> Smith (1999) prefers the translation “sensing hands.” My choice of “push hands” or “pushing hands” is a direct translation and the more common one in English. Smith’s “sensing hands,” however, captures the purpose of the exercise more precisely.

weapons forms; yoga-like meditation, stretching, and strengthening exercises; and sparring. Borrowing from Chinese cosmology, the term itself couples *taiji*, literally “supreme ultimate,” with *quan*, which translates as either “fist” or “boxing.” Taijiquan is one of many Asian martial arts that emphasize the development of *qi*, or “vital energy,” in the body in order to attain both longevity and martial skill. To an even greater degree, taijiquan emphasizes using *yi* (“mind” or “mind-intent”) over *li* (“strength”). For the increasing number of Americans who have heard of or even practiced taijiquan, the art evokes a plethora of images: cotton-clad, aging hippies moving in slow motion, the strains of Kitaro or Enya wafting in the background; badly dubbed Chinese movies; tourist promos from PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that feature throngs of old-people moving in harmonious unison through the morning mists. Chinese practitioners in PRC have their own stereotypes of taijiquan with which to contend (images which I will discuss in the chapters that follow). They also have their own stereotypes of the generic foreign martial arts aficionado, confronted as they have been in recent years with *gongfu* (kung fu)<sup>3</sup> bums, martial arts tourists, and anthropologists.

Such images and stereotypes provide fertile ground for a discussion of race in terms of ritualization. Implicit in my approach to “race,” “ritualization,” “social construction,” and “embodiment” are some specific definitions and assumptions that are themselves nexes of intense debate. The notion of “race” continues to spawn a vast literature of its own and, as genetic science advances into evermore precise territory, a renewed intensification of the age-old “nature versus nurture” debate. Likewise, concepts like “ritual” and “ritualization” in which so much of

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<sup>3</sup> *Gongfu*, commonly written in English as “kung fu,” also refers to “skill,” “work,” or “free time.” The “kung fu” that has become part of American vernacular functions in English as a kind of catch-all term for Chinese martial arts, but it is only sometimes used this way in Chinese, often, for example, when the conversation revolves around foreign practice of martial arts or when the term *wushu* is avoided. *Wushu* is the term for “martial arts” in Mandarin Chinese, but it has

anthropology finds its historical roots, continually undergo reconfiguration, redefinition, and, to some degree, intellectual marginalization. Further, in the postmodernist “moment” that has dominated anthropology for the better part of two decades, the constructivist approach to social relations, though still in service, has been subjected to increasing scrutiny. Meanwhile, phenomenological anthropology—the sub-discipline in which I situate myself in referring to “individual experience”—remains on the fringe of anthropology, despite the fact that it has become a central focus of cross-disciplinary exchange between social sciences, arts, and Humanities.

That such debates are unlikely to subside at any time in the near future makes it imperative to specifically define the above terms as I wield them within the bounds of this dissertation and to situate my approach within the appropriate literature. In regards to race, this dissertation is located within the broad topic of critical race theory and, more specifically, within the literature on the phenomenology of race,<sup>4</sup> which, amongst American writers, includes W.E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1969[1903]); the novels and ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston (1970, 1990, 1995); Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*; Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976); and Frank Ching’s *Ancestors* (1988). While I am not primarily concerned here with literary approaches to the phenomenology of race, it is important to emphasize at the outset that subaltern literatures have contributed a great deal to

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acquired a complicated association with performance-oriented martial arts that have little or nothing to do with combat training. Practitioners of a particular art will usually refer to it by name.

<sup>4</sup> One immediately encounters a “term problem” in discussing a phenomenology of race. Terms like “Chinese” and “white” suddenly become woefully inadequate (as if they were not already). I try to address this problem in a straightforward way: when I wish to call attention to the term problem within the context of my arguments, I place quotation marks around terms like “Chinese,” “Euro-American,” “foreigner,” “white,” etc. When I ask, momentarily, that the reader accept these categories, for example, in my discussion of Chinese history, Chinese American immigration, etc., I refrain from using quotation marks. To some degree, my choice is a negotiation between deconstructing race as a biological category and respecting the needs of those

creating a space for the explicitly academic critical race theory that arose in the 1960s. In recent years, this writing has included Linda Alcoff's work on the phenomenology of racial embodiment (1999, 2001); Frantz Fanon's classic on race as lived experience, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1967; see also Macey 1999); Craig Vasey's work on being and race (1998); Jeremy Weate's critical look at Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of race (2001); and Robert Bernasconi's edited volume, *Race* (2001), an essential reader on the "invention" of race. Joseph Graves *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium* (2001), though not strictly a work of critical race theory, reviews the most recent refutations of race as a biologically constructed category.

Critical race theory is a relatively recent addition to the sinological literature. Stevan Harrell, Louisa Schein, Dru Gladney, Frank Dikötter, and David Yen-Ho Wu have all made important contributions to reconfiguring our understanding of race and ethnicity in China. Harrell's *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (2001) and his edited volume, *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontier* (1995) not only complicate our view of what it means to be "Han" versus "minority" in China, but also provide wider discussions of how scholars from diverse disciplinary perspectives have dealt with questions of difference. Perhaps the key point in Harrell's approach to racial-ethnic difference is his emphasis on the importance of the rise of the state:

I think it is mistaken to draw too wide a line between cultural-local-linguistic-racial-kin collectives in non-state systems, and such collectivities as they operate after the development and imposition of state power. The majority of the *bases* of differentiation—language, culture, territory, kinship, physiognomy—were there already in New Guinea or the Amazon or the North American plains in the absence of state systems. It is the *specific manner* in which these bases of differentiation are *used* that

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who, finding themselves subsumed under such categories, use alterity as a position from which to maintain control over the process of constructing identity (see Alcoff 1999; Bernasconi 2000).

changes when the state appears, and changes again when the state takes the form of the modern nation-state. [Harrell 2001:18].

As will become apparent in my later discussion of the modern Chinese state's requisition of martial arts to further privilege "Han-ness," Harrell's notion of "collectivities as subordinate to the state" is key to my approach to race in this dissertation.

Schein (1997), while acknowledging the importance of the state in the production of Chinese minority identities, argues that a male-driven, "internal orientaling" contributes to Han majority image-making about minorities that goes beyond state attempts to "package" minorities for the consumption of the foreign tourist industry. This is to some degree an extension of Gladney's (1994) argument that "Han" as unmarked category is essential to the modern project of creating national identity in China. He makes the convincing case that the notion of Han people as a "91.96 percent" component of China's population is a product of Sun Yatsen's anti-Manchu program in the early part of the twentieth century, an argument later supported by scholarship on the history of the Manchus (Crossley 1997; Elliot 2001). Sun needed to overcome the linguistic and cultural differences that divided Northerners from Southerners and rich Shanghai merchants from their Zhejiang counterparts. Because it drew on legendary common origins in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), a newly configured Han nationality (*Han minzu*) created a structure that served this purpose well.

Dikötter (1992; 1997) takes us even more deeply into the origins of constructing multiple "Chinese" identities. In *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, he looks at race in Chinese history from several chronologically organized discursive positions: race as culture (pre-1793), race as type (1793-1895), race as lineage (1895-1903), race as nation (1903-1915), race as species (1915-1949), race as seed (1915-1949), and race as class (1949 forward). While Dikötter is mainly concerned with Chinese perceptions of whiteness, he also deals with anti-

Manchu and other anti-minority sentiments, as well as the same questions of “Han-ness” in which Gladney is interested. Like Dikötter, David Yen-ho Wu (1994) looks at the critical issue of how one group can consider themselves fully “Chinese,” while another group denies them their Chineseness. Wu is concerned with how

Chinese conceptualize their own Chineseness in the peripheral situation, demonstrating the complex process whereby they are able to incorporate indigenous language and culture without losing their sense of having a Chinese identity—not even their sense of having an authentic Chinese identity. [Wu 1994:165].

Wu thus approaches the question of racial and ethnic identities as discursive dialogue.

While I characterize the dissertation as, among other things, a work on the phenomenology of race, I attempt to extend this literature by focusing not only on how one perceives oneself in the world, but also on how one is perceived by others. I treat race as a mutually constituted moment that simultaneously involves the construction and the experience of identity, an identity that we must constantly negotiate. Such an approach requires a suitable definition of race, a task that has confounded better minds than mine.<sup>5</sup> Rather than positing an all-inclusive definition of race, I take Morton Klass’s cue in proposing an “operational definition of race” (see Klass’s “An Operational Definition of

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<sup>5</sup> Among them, Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. In the early days of anthropology, when such definitions still seemed possible, Boas stated that “a race must not be identified with a subjectively established type but must be conceived as a biological unit, as a population derived from common ancestry and by virtue of its descent endowed with definite biological characteristics. To a certain extent these may be unstable, because subject to a multitude of outer influences, for the biological character of the genealogical group finds expression in the way in which the body is shaped under varying conditions of life” (Boas 1938:37). Benedict provides a similar discussion in *Patterns of Culture* (1934). Both wrote in the context of anthropology’s early, public mission to separate *personality* traits from phenotypic traits. For more on the history of conceptions of race in anthropology, see Lee Baker’s *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* (1998).

Religion,” 1996), one I hope captures the practice orientation of looking at the ritualization of race through martial arts: *Race is the collective translation of the individual perception that specific behaviors, beliefs, social practices, and physical abilities arise from or are related to phenotypic variation.* This definition is both a nod to the past—the Boasian *ur*-project of using social-cultural anthropology to deconstruct behavioral traits and social characteristics as biological truths—and to a relatively recent approach to race as an indeterminate category of human perception. While the definition has its limitations, it remains serviceable in light of the discussion of martial arts that follows.

What I am *not* arguing in this dissertation is that human beings are somehow genetically wired to perceive *phenotypic* difference as *social* difference, though a look at the biological basis of race *in the biology of the beholder* would be an interesting project for future research. I *am* interested in re-energizing anthropology’s role in deconstructing notions of race as biological truth. After more than a hundred years of arguing the position, it is not the anthropological notion of race that rules public policy, but a much older and recently reconstituted notion of a “clash of civilizations” that is, at its core, racist (Huntington 1993, 1996)<sup>6</sup>. In my view, anthropologists have been less than energetic in confronting the more radical strands of this paradigm, preferring debate with one another to direct engagement with “the enemy.” In intellectualizing racism, we have surrendered a considerable swath of territory in the realm of public discourse. In other words, whereas our disciplinary grandparents fore-fronted *public* intellectualism, we have tended, instead, to intellectualize the very notion of “the public” and, by so doing, have marginalized ourselves as public intellectuals.

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<sup>6</sup> Huntington states his hypothesis as follows: “Civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another” (Huntington 1993:22).

Understandably, we can blame much of this situation on the institutional and disciplinary requirements of the Academy in the twenty-first century. Public intellectualism, while lauded by colleagues, is often overlooked in tenure decisions. My choice of focusing on race, therefore, is essentially an activist one.

If race presents definitional problems, then defining “ritual” and “ritualization” presents at least as many. Underlying my definition above is the notion of ritualization that Catherine Bell outlines in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992). Bell argues that ritual is a “strategic arena for the negotiation of power relations” (Bell 1992:290). Key to Bell’s notion of ritual is her focus on “ritualization.” She states,

In ritualization, power is not eternal [*sic*] to its workings; it exists only insofar as it is constituted with and through the lived body, which is both the body of society and the social body. Ritualization is a strategic play of power, of domination and resistance, within the arena of the social body. [Bell 1992:204].

In the sense that Bell is concerned with the interplay between power and subjectivity, her approach to ritual draws heavily on Michel Foucault. She cites, for example, Foucault’s argument in “The Subject and the Power” that

At the heart of power relationships lies an insubordination or resistance, an “essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom,” which means that there can be “no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight” [Bell 1992:201; Foucault 1980b]

In other words, the illusion of freedom is essential to the perpetuation of relationships of power. Yet, in extending Foucault to *ritualization*, Bell departs from him in significant ways. Whereas Foucault will neither confirm nor deny human agency, Bell’s focus on *practice*, on what she refers to as “mind-body holism” does inject agency into the equation. In order to show the specific

features of the territory Bell stakes out as a “practice theorist”, it is worth quoting her at some length in this regard:

A third assumption addresses the issue of individual agency, how persons “in their everyday production of goods and meanings, acquiesce yet protest, reproduce yet seek to transform their predicament.” Basic to this concern is a focus on the physical mind-body holism as the primary medium for the deployment and embodiment of everyday schemes of physical action and cultural values—as in the arrangement of a home or the orchestration of a game—that are the means by which culture is reproduced and individual categories of experience are forged. Finally, implicit or explicitly, many practice theories suggest the value of jettisoning the category of ritual as a necessary first step in opening up the particular logic and strategy of cultural practices.[Bell 1997:240; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992].

In adopting the assumption that individual agency is a variable for which we must account in the power relations inherent in ritual and in situating the discussion in the world of *embodied* practice, we must be careful to neither equate Bell’s notion of embodiment with Bourdieu’s *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1991b) nor with Durkheim’s discussion of totemic principles as “real forces” that can “mechanically engender physical effects” (Durkheim 1995:226). Bourdieu conceives *habitus* very nearly as a Judeo-Christian God—all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, yet demanding moral responsibility.<sup>7</sup> For Bell, power is wielded through ritualization, yet there is no power outside the individuals who participate

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<sup>7</sup> My reading of Bourdieu is admittedly idiosyncratic. I do not see Bourdieu as entirely rejecting agency. Rather, regardless of his personal belief in God, I see him operating as a kind of theistic existentialist (see Sartre 1957). John B. Thompson’s portrayal of Bourdieu seems accurate to me: “He portrays everyday linguistic exchanges as situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce” (Bourdieu 1991a:2). In the context of linguistic exchanges, Thompson’s statement implies agency, but emphasizes “traces of social structure.” Agency is a fleeting thing. For Bell, ritualization as an exchange of power is always mediated by the freedom to act.

in a ritual process. Bourdieu, on the other hand, reifies power to some degree; Bell is careful not to. Still, Bell is overly concerned about traps that might lie in definitions, unsatisfied as she is with previous attempts in this regard. One gets the sense that Bell sees a tendency in Bourdieu toward the very structuralism he wishes to escape. She is equally critical of Durkheim. Her notion of “physical mind-body holism as the primary medium for the deployment and embodiment of everyday schemes of physical action and cultural values” (Bell 1997:240) shares some theoretical ground with Durkheim’s “mechanically engendered physical effects,” but Bell is not at all interested in using primitivity as a yardstick for measuring the significance of such forces in any given time or place.

Because I treat both the specific practice and the social world of taijiquan as arenas of ritualization, Bell’s work contributes significantly to this dissertation. I link her understanding of ritualization with my own fieldwork-based observations and experiences about race. The interpenetration of ritual and race become even more apparent within the context of taijiquan’s historical development. Over the span of one hundred and fifty years, taijiquan (or the art that was to become what we now call taijiquan) has undergone a series of transformations and homogenizations that have virtually supplanted its early context and function as a fighting art. Except for a relatively small number of practitioners who continue to study the practical self-defense application, sparring, weapons, and advanced meditation methods of taijiquan, passing on their arts through family relationships and discipleship, the vast majority of practitioners limit themselves to the practice of the slow, empty-handed form and perhaps a few sword dances. On the martial arts tournament circuit, standardizations of traditional family forms have become the order of the day as China vies to make taijiquan an official Olympic event in 2008. At these tournaments and at other “Chinese culture” events, it is now common to find synchronized taijiquan teams performing their martial dances to rock music and flashing lights. Many taijiquan schools field fighting teams at

tournaments as well, but one can rarely discern any difference between the taijiquan fighter's style and that of any other art.

From where, then, do high expectations about the martial efficacy of taijiquan come? The partly fictionalized account of Teacher Pang's experience described in the opening paragraphs above not only recounts one overzealous visa officer's misconceptions about taijiquan, but also reflects the larger questions about the construction and experience of Chinese identity with which this dissertation is primarily concerned.<sup>8</sup> In addressing these questions, I emphasize the Wu Jianquan style of the art, but at one time or another touch upon the myriad other taijiquan styles as well. The analysis is largely based on more than two years of fieldwork in China and the United States, but history, film, and literature studies play important roles as well. The focal point of the project is the Jianquan Taijiquan Association (JTA), originally established in Shanghai in the 1930s and now the most famous PRC branch of the Wu/Ma family style of taijiquan.<sup>9</sup> A major task of the project is to lay out the details of how martial arts actually move transnationally, through people and media (e.g. kung fu movies, novels, and

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout, I have changed the details of key identifiers (name, profession, locations, etc.) in order to protect the confidentiality of participants in this project. The exception to this rule is that I have used the actual names of deceased persons. In martial arts circles, one must negotiate between people's desire to maintain privacy and their often much stronger desire to gain public acknowledgement for their skills. Nevertheless, I prefer to err on the side of caution and have therefore used pseudonyms for all living participants mentioned in the body of the text, unless they explicitly gave permission for their names to be used. Regarding Mr. Pang, the substance of the story is factual: During a visa interview, an American consular officer did indeed tell Teacher Pang that he appeared too young to be a real taijiquan teacher. I have fictionalized the details of Pang's trip to the consulate in order to capture the sense of an experience that he shared with many other Shanghai Chinese c. 2000. Where noted, I have made similar choices with other passages. This stylistic strategy recalls current and past debates in anthropology on the fictionalization of ethnography. In *Works and Lives*, for example, Geertz (1988) responds to criticisms of Ruth Benedict's work by reconfiguring it in terms of literature. See also Gordon 1990; Handler 1986; Hurston 1970 and 1995.

<sup>9</sup> The style is properly referred to as "Wu style taijiquan" (*Wushi taijiquan*). When I conflate "Wu" and "Ma" family names in this dissertation, my purpose is to specify the lineage that has developed through the married couple of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. Wu Yinghua is the daughter of the creator of the Wu style, Wu Jianquan. Other branches of the Wu lineage have established schools in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Toronto, and Rotterdam.

martial arts tournaments), and how they function both personally and socially in the very different contexts of urban China and the global diaspora of Chinese people and public culture. Naturally, the scope of such a project requires certain limits. In this case, I am unable to make more than passing reference to the unique situations of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. Nor do I deal in more than a cursory way with the large population of immigrant martial arts teachers in Canada and the significantly different rules under which they cross borders. It is important to state at the outset that I do not take Shanghai to be representative of all of the People's Republic of China—or *any* of it for that matter. Shanghai is a unique place that is in the odd position of being both aberration and trendsetter. In places as widely spaced as the tourist city of Zhuhai in the south and the ancient city of Kaifeng in the north, one can find clothing stores advertising “Shanghai style” goods. Yet, due to their relative wealth and to their public discourse about themselves as the most cosmopolitan of Chinese cities, Shanghai people sometimes suffer estrangement from their compatriots. As far as possible, therefore, I treat Shanghai as Shanghai.

Shanghai women taijiquan practitioners play less of a role in the dissertation than I had originally planned. While I consider issues of gender to be crucial to developing a sophisticated understanding of taijiquan practice in the PRC (where the majority of taijiquan practitioners may in fact be women), several obstacles minimized my opportunities to collect gender data. Since the death of the JTA's matriarch and president, Wu Yinghua, in the late 1990s, the JTA has become even more male-dominated than it had been when Wu was alive. Majority male membership is by no means the rule among taijiquan associations in China, but it is the reality for the JTA. In addition to lack of women in the JTA, my own maleness often precluded the kind of personal interviews with women that I had with men. The male skew to the research, however, resulted in new understandings of how maleness and femaleness in Daoist cosmology play out in

the practice of taijiquan within the JTA, both within the bodies of practitioners and between men and women who practice together. My discussion of gender focuses on this application of the cosmological to the social.

While I hope the dissertation will be of interest to non-academic taijiquan practitioners, it is not a “how-to” manual. There are already dozens of English-language books on the market on taijiquan or other internal martial arts that deal in detail with many of the issues I cover only briefly (see “Literature on Martial Arts,” below). Many of these books have been written by practitioners who spent decades, rather than years, seeking out teachers in PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, devoting many hours of pain and sweat to both the study of the Chinese language and the attainment of *gongfu*. My minimal skills and relatively low level in the art prevent me from adding much to that literature for the present, but I hope that the serious practitioner will find something of value in the research.

### ***Literature on Martial Arts***

The academic study of martial arts has spawned a rich scholarly literature in Chinese and a small but growing literature in English. The earliest significant published fieldwork on martial artists came not from anthropologists but from martial arts “missionaries,” people who found themselves for various reasons in positions to collect information on martial artists while working in other professions. These writers produced martial arts travelogues, works geared toward a popular audience but offering something more than mere recounting of technique. My use of the term “travelogue” should not be construed as a criticism of these writings. Many of them offer highly personal and moving accounts of powerful life experiences, and, much like the work of Paul Theroux, go well beyond descriptions of people and places. Perhaps the earliest and best known of these is Eugen Herrigel’s *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1971). A philosophy professor in Japan in the 1930s, Herrigel studied archery for five years, and his

book did much to popularize Zen Buddhism in the West following the Second World War. In the post-War period, the best of the martial travelogues came from Robert W. Smith, a former marine and CIA analyst who was stationed for several years in Taiwan. Smith published an account of his experience learning martial arts in the Taiwan of the early 1960s called *Chinese Boxing: Masters and Methods* (1974). After several decades of publishing among the best of the “how-to” books on martial arts, he then wrote an exceptionally detailed and literate memoir, *Marital Musings: A Portrayal of Martial Arts in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1999). Smith has little interest in debating social theory (other than an occasional swipe at Republicans), but his books do go a long way toward introducing martial arts to a well-educated audience that includes many non-practitioners. More importantly, Smith’s books and teaching are the flip side of David Carradine’s *Kung Fu* TV series and other imaginative representations of martial arts (Pinto 1993; see Chapter 7): Smith’s writing has inspired countless martial artists to train and learn.

More recently, there have been several ethnographies published on South and Southeast Asian martial arts, including Joseph Altars *The Wrestler’s Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (1992), Phillip Zarilli’s *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses, and Practices of Power in Kalarippayattu, a South Indian Martial Art* (1998), and Kirstin Pauka’s *Theatre and Martial Arts in West Sumatra: Randai and Silek of the Minangkabau* (1998). Karl Friday’s *Legacies of the Sword: The Kashima-Shinryu and Samuarai Martial Culture* (1997) is a detailed history of the methods and social milieu of Japanese swordsmanship written by a practitioner. John Donahue, an anthropologist, has written two books that primarily focus on the practice of martial arts in the United States, *Warrior Dreams: The Martial Arts and the American Imagination* (1994) and *The Forge of the Spirit: Structure, Motion, and Meaning in the Japanese Martial Tradition* (1991). Neither of these offer detailed ethnography (this is not

Donahue's purpose in either case), but they do offer some useful conceptual frameworks and typologies from which to begin discussion of martial arts as practices imbued with rich cultural significance. In the realm of book-length treatments of Chinese martial arts, the only English-language academic work is Douglas Wiles's *Lost T'ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*. Wile's work is noteworthy not only for the skill in which he translates for the first time many of the "classic" writings on taijiquan but also for his creative, well-grounded discussions of authenticity and masculinity. As of this writing, the present work is the only book-length, English-language ethnography of a Chinese martial arts association. However, this situation is unlikely to last for long. During my 2001 fieldwork in China, I was aware of at least two other scholars working on ethnographies of Chinese martial arts and one other who had been engaged for several years in researching a history of taijiquan.

In terms of shorter works, Charles Holcombe published "Theater of Combat: A Critical Look at the Chinese Martial Arts" (1990) in the journal *Historian*. It provided a concise overview of Chinese martial arts history and folklore. Stanley Henning's "Academic Encounters with Martial Arts" (1999) and Helena Hallenberg's "Muslim Martial Arts in China: *Tangping* (Washing Cans) and Self-defence" (2002), are both fine accounts of martial arts that incorporate extensive Chinese sources and first-hand experience. Hallenberg in particular breaks new ground by treating martial arts practice among the Hui ethnic minority as a negotiation between Hui and Han identity, where the Washing Cans form reproduces through movement the washing cans used for absolutions in Hui mosques. The transformation makes the form uniquely Hui. Hallenberg's work has special import in my later discussion of the invisibility of Manchuness in Wu style taijiquan.

In addition to the authors cited above, an increasing number of articles have appeared in recent years in professional exercise science and alternative

medicine journals. The *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* (JAMA) reserves a section of the journal for “academic articles,” and many of the above scholars publish regularly in the journal. I cite several JAMA articles in this dissertation. The Chinese academic literature on martial arts is much more extensive, but also narrower in scope. China has several dozen sports universities (*tiyu daxue*) that publish martial arts-related articles (see Chapter 5 for a more complete survey of this literature). While most of these articles deal with exercise science topics, in recent years, authors have addressed cultural topics as well. A non-academic popular history publication, *Sports Culture and History* (*Tiyu wen shi*), is dominated by such articles. In addition, several martial arts histories have appeared through publishing houses that specialize in sports or martial arts books, among them the massive *Encyclopedia of Chinese Martial Arts* (*Zhongguo wushu baike quanshu*, 1998) and *The Illustrated Dictionary of Chinese Martial Arts* (*Zhongguo wushu tu dian*, 1998). The latter not only includes well-researched sections on recent martial arts history, it also provides one of the best sources for photos and illustrations of numerous popular culture artifacts associated with martial arts. These and similar reference works are quite detailed but tend to be produced by sports science or sports history scholars rather than Chinese history specialists. They also tend to present a rather skewed picture of the development and history of martial arts, minimizing or excluding as they do Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities. Still, they provide invaluable references, especially for the development of martial arts in the PRC over the last hundred years. Finally, a crucial and perhaps less ideologically constrained source of Chinese language material comes in the form of popular magazines and martial arts association newsletters. The JTA has published a newsletter several times a year since the early 1980s and has also produced a commemorative book from the 2000 meeting the association sponsored in Shanghai. These are valuable resources

for understanding the structure and regular activities of the organization (JTA 1982-2001, 2000) .

### ***Methodology***

The underlying structure of the dissertation (perhaps more appropriately the “rhythm” of the thing) reflects the *taiji tu* (“diagram of the supreme ultimate,” or, colloquially, “the yin-yang symbol”). My adoption of the *taiji tu* is in keeping with the general notion that things, people, and relationships are somehow “mutually constituted” in the world, an outgrowth of anthropology’s long-time interest in the dialectic. For Marxist anthropologists, this implies some form of dialectical materialism. For others, it is a more abstract notion, Hegel’s thesis-antithesis-synthesis without the political economy, and for still others, the dialectic is the irreconcilability of antinomies, a symbol of the limits of reason, thesis and antithesis without synthesis, which, in folklorist Gregory Schrempf’s reading, is essentially the argument that Kant develops in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Schrempf 1992). If we can still find some value in “the Durkheimian tradition of comparative sociology,” as Schrempf does in his comparison of Greek and Maori cosmological dialectics (Schrempf 1992:5), then our first impulse is look for what Malinowski (thesis) and Geertz (antithesis) refer to as “the native point of view” (Malinowski 1961; Geertz 1983) in symbols that lie outside the world of Western philosophical discourse.<sup>10</sup> But where is that world?

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<sup>10</sup> Schrempf’s book begins with a discussion of Zeno’s paradoxes that seems particularly relevant to the phenomenology of race: “Zeno’s paradoxes,” Schrempf writes, “all revolve around portrayals of a kind of basic mental activity of “dividing up”; but they add a further concern. Although dividing might be a modality of consciousness, consciousness, in Zeno’s portrayal, cannot be reduced to merely the sum of particular acts of mentally dividing. As portrayed by Zeno, dividing is something that takes place within, or produces, a consciousness of dividing or an *idea* of dividing. The consciousness of dividing (as opposed to dividing as an activity of consciousness) becomes a source of speculation in its own right, and particularly so with respect to the question of the “totality”—the ultimate bounds—of this activity. Zeno’s paradoxes thus suggest that cosmology—in the sense of the raising of speculations lying beyond any empirical situation—may be immanent in the way in which consciousness is conscious of its own activity.”

The question is whether such a mental move is possible in so thoroughly a globalized world as we now live in. Schrempf, for example, pays homage to Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (1955-58), a multi-volume work that cross-references thousands of images and archetypes "cross-culturally," not because he believes it accurately describes the world in which we live, but because it presents "a masterpiece of cosmology in an atomistic scale" (Schrempf 1992:xv). Schrempf, in other words, argues that the act of comparison itself is worthwhile simply because it is pleasurable.

That pleasure in exercising the dialectic goes at least part of the way toward explaining the transnational attraction of the *taiji tu*, a symbol that has arguably become the international signifier for "mutual constitutedness."<sup>11</sup> It is also the symbol with which the art of taijiquan has come to be specifically identified. It is therefore no accident that the *taiji tu* serves as the primary hermeneutic tool for this dissertation. When I refer to it at specific points in the pages that follow, I do so in order to emphasize the flow of ideas, identities, experiences, and ways of configuring race that arise out of taijiquan practice in a transnational context. In some ways, using the *taiji tu* is my attempt to both borrow from and question the "anthropology of experience" approach pioneered by Victor Turner and Edward Bruner in the 1980s (Turner and Bruner 1986). As Bruner writes in his introduction to *The Anthropology of Experience*,

By focusing on narratives or dramas or carnival or any other expressions, we leave the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people, rather than imposing categories derived from our own ever-shifting theoretical frames. Expressions are people's articulations, formulations, and

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For a representative application to a phenomenology of race, see Du Bois on "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Historically, the *taiji tu* has undergone several transformations. The symbol I adopt here is the most popular modern representation of *taiji*, the first extant representation of which was found in the works of the Confucianist Philosopher Zhou Dunyi (1017-73 A.D.). See Kohn 1993; Fischer-Schreiber 1996.

representations of their own experience. Although expressions are not necessarily easy places to start, because of their existential complexity, they usually are accessible and isolable, in part because they have a beginning and an ending. As Milton Singer, Dell Hymes, Richard Bauman, Victor Turner, and others who have written about performance have taught us, expressions are not only naturally occurring units of meaning but are also periods of heightened activity when a society's presuppositions are most exposed, when core values are exposed, and when the symbolism is most apparent. [Turner and Bruner 1986:9-10].

In that taijiquan and events or media associated with it are expressive performance, I believe we can learn something about core values by understanding it. The *taiji tu* is also an expression and has the added advantage of distilling symbolically a core value associated with taijiquan. Where I differ from Turner and Bruner, however, is in minimizing the value of our “ever-shifting theoretical frames.” Particularly for expressive practices that cross borders, is it really possible to treat them as “isolable”? Of course, Turner and Bruner acknowledge the mutual constituted quality of meaning, where performance and interpretation interact dialogically.



Figure 1: Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (*taijitu*)

The *taiji tu* provides a useful, if semiotically charged, model for looking at the individual experience of both identity and social relations.<sup>12</sup> According to the standard exegesis, in the *taiji tu*, the feminine, soft, and dark (yin) and the masculine, hard, and light (yang) transform one into the other in an ever-changing process. The seed of one is always contained within the other. At the same time, yin and yang are “changeless;” that is, the process of motion and change is perpetual. Yin becomes yang and yang becomes yin again. Adopting the *taiji tu* as an analytical tool offers several advantages for a transnational project on martial arts. In regards to individual identity, where “self” is yin and “other” is yang, it allows us to view identity as an ephemeral thing, an ever-changing process of sometimes strategically, sometimes instinctually re-interpreting ourselves in relation to others and being interpreted by others. In terms of a dissertation on the ritualization of race through martial arts, it provides an abstract stimulus for addressing key questions about “Chineseness”: What is a taijiquan teacher saying about being Chinese, for example, when he uses the word “*qi*” in a public lecture? At the beginning of the twenty-first century, how do both Chinese and non-

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<sup>12</sup> My adoption of an ostensibly “native” symbol as a hermeneutic tool has precedent in Weber’s use of “ideal types” as cross-cultural markers and Sahlins’s interest in the transformation of symbol (“structure of the conjuncture”; Sahlins 1995). Weber defines an “ideal-type” as a “one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view” (Weber 1946:90) and the synthesis of a wide variety of actual, individual phenomena into a unified analytical construct. At the same time, he emphasizes, this construct is a kind of “utopia” that can never be found in its pure form in the real world. Regarding *taijiquan*, my argument is that the *taiji tu* serves as just such an ideal type and does so in the context of multiple conceptual sites (body, city, nation-state, etc.). Sahlins argues that “the dialectics of history...are structural throughout. Powered by disconformities between conventional values and intentional values, between intersubjective meanings and subjective interests, between symbolic sense and symbolic reference, the historical process unfolds as a continuous and reciprocal movement between the practice of the structure and the structure of the practice” (72). In looking at the transformation of Hawaiian myth after contact with Captain Cook’s expedition, Sahlins states that Hawaiian culture did not just reproduce itself at the time of the initial contact, but it actually transformed itself into a distinctly different structure through the contact itself (35). “Any comprehension of history as meaning must recognize the distinctive role of the sign in action, as opposed to its position in structure” (68). Sahlins’s argument is particularly salient to my use of the *taiji tu* because its reference to “action,” or movement. I am not in agreement with Sahlins regarding his notion of “structure,” but I *am* in agreement with his implication here that we can *read* social change in the transformation of symbols.

Chinese people understand, sensually experience, and communicate what it means to be Chinese? How is Chinese identity constructed in the weird amalgamation of fractured, permeable borders, paranoia, fascination, and distrust that marks the Age of Globalization? In terms of social relations, the *taiji tu* provides a means for looking at how the several levels of analysis I adopt in this book (the body, the city, the nation-state, the imagination, and the transnation)<sup>13</sup> exist discretely and simultaneously, interacting continuously within the context of taijiquan. Like the relationship between yin and yang, the interaction of the self with the world might be modeled as an ever-changing, yet changeless process. I therefore reference the *taiji tu* throughout the dissertation, linking it at key points to the ritualization of race, the enactment of particular identities, and the multiple sites of the city, the nation, and the transnation.<sup>14</sup>

The research for this project began in 1997. That summer I conducted five weeks of preliminary fieldwork in Shanghai with the Jianquan Taijiquan Association. One day a Chinese friend and I practiced push hands in a Shanghai's People's Park. As we concluded our practice, my friend made the offhanded comment that, "Only Chinese people can really do taijiquan anyway." My friend's comment made me wonder if the taijiquan *I* imagined was the same as the taijiquan that *he* imagined and where, among taijiquan players, the line between "them" and "us" could properly be drawn. I wondered if, to return for a moment to Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," among the snowy peaks of identity, was the self the only thing moving? I continue to

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<sup>13</sup> The term "transnation" replaces bulkier terms such as "transglobal processes," "diasporic community," etc. I conceive the transnation as inclusive of both of these terms but specifically implying the formation of transnational communities that cross not only political borders, but racial and ethnic borders as well. In a sense, I am further problematizing the term "diaspora," as well, since that term has come to denote ethnicity rather than practice. In this dissertation, one of the diasporas that inhabits the transnation is the diaspora of taijiquan players.

<sup>14</sup> My understanding and use of the *taiji tu* is, of course, colored by my own time, by the weight of the discipline of Daoist studies, and by popular Americanizations of Daoism to which I am as susceptible as anyone else.

reference Stevens throughout the dissertation, placing one or two of his “thirteen ways” at the top of each chapter. In using Steven’s poem, I am emphasizing the process of re-positioning that one must go through to understand things like “culture,” “race,” “Chineseness,” etc. However, as I believe Stevens is, I am in the end claiming that such things *can* be seen. The difficulty of the challenge need not render them invisible.<sup>15</sup> In a sense, then, I am using the tools of poststructuralism to take an empirical turn.

After my return to Texas in 1997, I produced conference papers and journal articles on the concept of *qi* and taijiquan (Frank 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). The project soon expanded into a full-blown treatment of a subject that, fellow taiji players constantly reminded me, would take more than one lifetime to understand. A Ma family member, a retired biochemist, admonished me at the start of my formal fieldwork in 2001 that “your research questions are too big. You need to break them down into smaller questions and then maybe you can understand some small part of taijiquan.”<sup>16</sup>

The formal thirteen-month fieldwork period spent in Shanghai between December of 2000 and January of 2001 involved daily push hands practice with teachers and classmates, corrections of forms<sup>17</sup> that I had previously learned, and acquisition of new empty hand forms, weapons forms, and basic exercises. In

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<sup>15</sup> There is some support of this in Stevens’ own letters. In a letter to Hi Simons in response to Simons’s questions about Stevens’ *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens wrote, “The abstract does not exist, but it is certainly immanent: that is to say, the fictive abstract is as immanent in the mind of the poet, as the idea of God is immanent in the mind of the theologian. The poem is a struggle with the inaccessibility of the abstract. First I make the effort; then I turn to the weather because that is not inaccessible and is not abstract. The weather as described is the weather that was about me when I wrote this. There is a constant reference from the abstract to the real, to and fro” (Stevens 1966:434).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ma family member, February 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded.

<sup>17</sup> Practitioners of Chinese martial arts refer to individual movements as “forms,” “postures or styles” (*shi*), or “frames” (*jia*). In English, the words “form” or “posture” are commonly used to refer to individual movements. Each of these individual movements also has a name, e.g. “single whip” (*dan bian*) or “downward posture” (*xia shi*). See Appendix I for a complete list of the Wu style taijiquan movements in sequence, translations of posture names, and a brief comment on the difficulties associated with translation.

addition, I engaged in several months of preliminary research between 1997 and 2000 attending taijiquan tournaments and interviewing practitioners throughout the United States, as well as keeping extensive notes on my own practice. The American experience also included activities that were not part of the formal research but informed my practice, and therefore the project, in important ways: attendance at workshops, teaching a limited number of students through the University of Texas at Austin Taijiquan Club, regular Sunday morning push hands practice with a group of stalwarts in Austin's Pease Park and at the Wushentao school's Monday evening push hands open in Bethesda, Maryland. Throughout the project, many students and teachers of taijiquan agreed to interviews and generously contributed their thoughts, views, and demonstrations of their skills. Finally, I have drawn considerably on eighteen years of "informal fieldwork" as a taijiquan practitioner before 1997. Much of this work came before I ever considered anthropology as a career, let alone decided to write an ethnography of taijiquan. Roughly, I divide these previous periods into three phases: 1979-1982, when I began my study of taijiquan in Tucson, Arizona, and spent one year studying in the San Francisco Bay Area; 1986-1989, when I lived in Hong Kong, began my study of the Wu style of taijiquan, and had my first brief, but formative contact with the JTA in Shanghai; and 1995, when I spent six months in Shanghai, ostensibly researching my masters thesis on Chinese political theatre in the 1930s, but often playing hooky with my taijiquan buddies in the park. The slowness of absorbing and understanding taijiquan is an oft-cited feature of the art, and for that reason, the present project should be seen as a work in progress.

The dichotomy I present here between "formal" and "informal" fieldwork is intended to call into question the whole notion that one journeys to and returns from "the field." In my own mind, the term has always evoked images of stuffy nineteenth-century schoolmasters draped in pith helmets and butterfly nets and

leading their young charges across waist-high meadows of wildflowers. While I am not alone in sensing the indeterminacy of fieldwork (see Powdermaker 1966; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Harraway 1991; Foley 1995), I will let sleeping dogs lie. I continue to use the terms “field” and “fieldwork” throughout the book—with the caveat that I am rarely clear where the field ends and the rest of life begins.

Ulf Hannerz and George Marcus have written, in separate papers, that the specific tools and methods of transnational (or multi-sited) anthropology are not fundamentally different from anthropology in general, but that units of study and cultural competence become particularly problematic (Hannerz 1997, 1998; Marcus 1995). Drawing from the “usual suspects” of participant-observation, interviewing, surveys, archival research, and videography/photography, my own research closely reflects the Hannerz-Marcus viewpoint.

*Participant observation.* My daily research in Shanghai involved observation of and participation in morning taijiquan practice in parks, observation and participation in martial arts tournaments, observation of the JTA’s monthly demonstrations in alternating Shanghai parks, and discussion of taijiquan with practitioners. Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland (1998) describe participant observation as “a particular approach to recording observations (in field notes).” Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) define participant observation as “a data collection technique that requires the researcher to be present at, involved in, and recording the routine daily activities with people in the field setting.” Generally, these definitions adequately describe my own understanding of participant-observation except for the particular importance of embodied practice (see below). On another level, participant-observation gives rise to several epistemological problems. As Benjamin Paul points out, “Participation implies emotional involvement; observation requires detachment” (Paul 1953:69, cited in Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998). Spradley describes a

continuum in participation, with “non-participation” and “complete participation” at either end (Spradley 1980:58-62, cited in Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998). Spradley’s continuum is useful in that it raises the question of how far one is willing or required to go as a participant. Complete participation (or “going native”) generally spawns “fringe” ethnography (Castañeda 1972; Silverman 1975; De Mille 1980) of a kind that may be more valued by the public than by one’s professional colleagues. For my own research, since issues of race and identity lie at the very core of the project, I chose to go as far as possible toward complete participation (i.e. as far as project participants and the Chinese government would allow). As a “white” person participating in a “Chinese” art, the method of participant-observation itself raised the kind of fundamental questions about doing versus being that I touched on at the beginning of this introduction.

*Interviewing and surveys.* In both the United States and China, I elicited information through structured, semi-structured and open-ended interview techniques, often within the context of the same interview. In Shanghai, I generally conducted interviews in Mandarin Chinese or a mix of Chinese and English, depending on the interviewee’s preference. Some older Shanghai residents, though they understood Mandarin, did not feel comfortable speaking it, and I used interpreters when necessary, though toward the end of my fieldwork, my understanding of Shanghai dialect had improved to the point where I could sometimes forego the interpreter. Generally, participants did not wish to be tape recorded. In the United States, I conducted interviews in Mandarin Chinese and English. In general, United States participants agreed to be taped.

Interviewing and surveys presented a number of problems in this research. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte define semi-structured interviews as “predetermined questions related to domains of interest, administered to a representative sample of respondents to confirm study domains, and identify

factors, variables, and items or attributes of variables for analysis or use in a survey” (1999:165) The same authors describe an open-ended question as one that “leaves the response open to the discretion of the interviewee and is not bounded by alternatives provided by the interviewer or constraints on length of the response” (1999:121). Both of these definitions assume that the interviewer is in the position of determining the boundaries of the interview, a situation that was not always the case in my own work.<sup>18</sup> While a discourse-centered approach to the *interpretation* of interview data can partially address the problem of power differentials in the interview setting (Urban 1991; Briggs 1986; Graham 1998), an understanding and willingness to participate in metacommunicative frameworks is essential.

Briggs (1986) cites an example from his work with *Mexicano* people in New Mexico that was directly relevant to my own concern with acquiring metacommunicative competence in Shanghai. Though Briggs tried many times to interview master woodcarvers, they refused to respond to his interview questions. He eventually came to believe that by doing so, they felt they would undermine the master-disciple relationship and that the proper context for him to ask questions about woodcarving was during the lessons in woodcarving themselves. Even then, Briggs found, his “interviews” sometimes consisted only of comments on his work by the master woodcarver. Thus, for Briggs, interviewing became much more than a verbal interaction. It included a metacommunicative complex that he had to master. My relationship with my taijiquan teachers reflected a similar quality. The metacommunicative world of push hands often *is* the interview. (see Chapter 1 for a brief discussion of the semiotics of push hands).

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<sup>18</sup> In one attempt to administer a written survey at a gathering of thousands of taijiquan players in Shanghai, for example, I was swarmed by a group of elderly women practitioners who, not knowing the content of the paper I was handing out, fought vigorously to acquire a copy, quickly stripping me of my entire supply. Few of these surveys ever came back to me.

*Archival Research.* In Shanghai, my chief archival sources were bookstores and the Shanghai Public Library. I also gathered materials from the library of the Shanghai Physical Education Institute (*Shanghai tiyu xueyuan*) and the National Library in Beijing. The rare books section of the Shanghai Public Library maintains a particularly fine collection of pre-1949 martial arts materials. Shanghai Book City (*Shanghai shucheng*) on Nanjing Road has a large martial arts section, including a series of re-prints of Republican-era martial arts “classics.” In Beijing, the bookstore of the Beijing Martial Arts Academy (*Beijing wushuyuan*) provided several key reference works. Chinese and American popular films, comic books, novels, and television programs, gathered in both China and the United States, acquired from friends, on the street, through magazine catalogues, etc., served as another important resource. In the United States, I researched Chinese American history at the University of Texas at Austin, the Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institution library; the University of California at Berkeley, and at the Asian American History Museum in San Francisco.

*Experiments in interpretation.* I adopted two somewhat unorthodox techniques for data interpretation, though neither is by any means new. First, in writing up field notes, I often drew on the techniques of *sense memory* and *emotion memory* developed by Constantin Stanislavski, a founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, and reinterpreted by Lee Stasberg, Sanford Meisner, and other American acting teachers who came out of the Group Theatre in the 1930s. Sense memory involves remembering in detail one’s actions and environment in order to evoke sensory experience and, to some degree, the emotions attached to the sensory experience (e.g. imagining a particular bar of chocolate you once ate at a relative’s funeral can cause you not only to salivate, but to cry in the present). For the present work, I specifically revisited early memories of eating Chinese food, interacting with Chinese friends at school, and experiencing San Francisco

Chinatown for the first time as a six-year-old child. Through this process, I began to see race as something sensed, something actually wired into our bodies through repeated experience and interpretation of that experience. Sense memory, a tool that I had learned as part of my early training as an actor, thus became a useful technique for disarticulating the sensual experience of race.

I also developed certain methods in collaboration with my teachers. These included keeping an intermittent video journal of my practice that involved filming form corrections in my apartment following daily practices. The video journal afforded an opportunity to both narrate and physically demonstrate the high points of the teaching, note unusual physical experiences, and generally comment on moods and emotional states. One teacher suggested that I use this process to maintain a “before and after” record of my experience in Shanghai. The video journal became an important feature of my overall learning process and eventually began to include some filming of lessons with my teachers. The teachers received copies of these tapes. Due to a general reticence among my teachers to be filmed or tape-recorded, however, such methods remained limited.

In addition to using technology in this collaborative way, the physical acquisition of the art—the act of practice itself—became an important methodological tool. As Deborah Kapchan has written in her study of collaboration between Moroccan Gnawa musicians and African-American jazz musicians,

Cultural memories live in the body as presence. We are possessed by the repetitions that we perform each day, by the sounds that reside in our soundscape. But we are also always involved in the coming to terms with cultural identity, the codification and objectification not only of other cultures, but of our own. [Kapchan 2003].

Both in terms of the broad project of understanding the specific processes involved in the ritualization of race through martial arts and in understanding the

subtleties of the art of taijiquan, this process of “coming to terms with cultural identity” by making some attempt at becoming “possessed by the repetitions we perform each day” constitutes the centerpiece of the methodology. While the importance of learning about other people by doing what they do (as opposed to simply watching what they do) may seem obvious in regards to a project about martial arts and has numerous precedents, such methods have a somewhat tainted history in anthropology (Frank 2000b). Frank Hamilton Cushing, one of the early pioneers in exploring what Mauss referred to as “techniques of the body” (1973), was faulted by his peers for “going native” (Cushing 1979; Green 1979; Hinsley 1983).<sup>19</sup> Because many of Castañeda’s claims of authenticity have not held up under scrutiny, his work continues to suffer from doubt and derision even though it outlines clear and useful methods for conducting phenomenological anthropology (Castañeda 1972; Silverman 1975; Brown 1977; De Mille 1980). More recently, Stoller (1997), Ots (1994), Sklar (1993), Chen (1995), Csordas (1993, 1994), and Kapchan (2003) have written detailed ethnographies and theoretical statements that significantly legitimize phenomenological anthropology. Sklar sums up the case for methodologies of embodiment as follows:

While I also sought, through words, to understand the abstract reasons why people believed and expressed those beliefs as they did, my point of entry into the *experience* of belief was corporeal. Based on the hypothesis that movement embodies cultural knowledge, I had discovered that to “move with” people whose experience I was trying to understand was a way to also “feel” with them, providing an opening into the kind of cultural knowledge that is not available through words or observation alone. [Sklar 1993:11].

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<sup>19</sup> Yet “going native” is at the heart of “doing versus being.” Certainly Cushing seemed to believe that he was just as Zuñi as anyone born in Zuñi pueblo. His peers did not agree.

In terms of affect, phenomenological anthropologists have stated their position clearly. But there are other, more practical reasons for adopting such methodologies. One advantage to acquiring knowledge through practice that has received little attention in the literature is the place of practice as “safe ground” in politically sensitive circumstances. In PRC, for example, while participants in the present project often expressed reticence about going down on tape, they enthusiastically shared movement. I conducted my fieldwork during an ongoing crackdown on the “heterodox” meditation practice of Falun Gong (“cultivating the Dharma Wheel”). In that context, taijiquan became hyper-legitimized (see Chapters 4 and 5), but practitioners still occasionally expressed nervousness about discussing much beyond the details of the practice, at least in public. Relatively silent practice involved a whole other route to communication that relieved some of this pressure.

The intensity of my practice—an average of four hours per day over a period of one year—provided a field for cultivating not only a sense of proper physical movement but also a sense, especially with certain teachers, of the mood and spirit of the person with whom I was practicing push hands. While some practitioners referred to this sensation explicitly as sensing *qi*, others remained silent on the matter. I can only lay claim to entering the periphery of this circle of sensitivity, but I came to share the view of taijiquan colleagues that the intangible feeling of the person with whom I pushed offered a valuable means for training skill and transmitting knowledge. The subject will be treated in detail in Part I.

Finally, a technique inspired to a certain degree by Frank Hamilton Cushing, Edward Sapir, Zora Neale Hurston, and other artist-anthropologists from the early days of American anthropology, was the use of art as a means of processing and teasing out experience.<sup>20</sup> For me, this primarily centered on writing poetry and

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<sup>20</sup> See Handler 1983, 1986, 1990; Clifford 1988; and Geertz 1988 for discussions of the relationship between ethnography and art

drama. These writings became essential, alternative expressions to fieldnotes through which I came to see the writing of a public, somewhat straightforward ethnography as something to be produced in tandem with works that are experimental, creative, and private.

### *Structure*

The story I tell in this dissertation follows several interweaving threads, each functioning as a level of analysis: the body, the city, the nation-state, the imagination, the transnation, and, finally, the body again. In Part I: “Body and Practice,” I lay out in detail the ritualization of race through taijiquan practice in Shanghai parks. In Chapter 1, “The Body: *Qi*, ‘Daoism,’ and the Mystique of Lore,” I introduce the JTA through a description of one of Master Ma Yueliang’s final monthly demonstrations, then look at how the demonstration serves as a multivocal performance of taijiquan creation myths and history. Through a review of the history of Daoist studies, I then look at how taijiquan has come to be seen in both China and the United States as a specifically “Daoist” art. The latter part of the chapter explores how notions of *qi* (“vital energy”) and *yi* (“mind-intent”) are socially and sensually constructed by taijiquan players. I treat the monthly meetings of the JTA and the public practice of push hands as specific ritual processes through which the public experiences an idealized (specifically “Han”) “Chineseness.”

Much of the dissertation’s detailed ethnographic data is presented in Chapter 2, “Practice: Bodies, Lineages, Alleys,” and Chapter 3, “Practice: Park Lives and Secret Spaces,” including the details of the various taiji forms and push hands, “outdoor practice” (e.g. parks) vs. “indoor practice” (e.g. the teacher’s home), the process of learning and teaching particular to the Wu style. I use Casey (1987), Csordas (1993, 1994), and Kapchan (1996, 2003) to analyze how race/ethnicity, gender, and class are performed in private and public taijiquan practice. Drawing

on Hallenberg's work on martial arts among northern Hui people, I also look at how Wu style's origins as a Manchu variation of a Han art have been made invisible and, conversely, how my own whiteness becomes highly visible in the context of daily study with my teachers.

Part II, "City and Nation," focuses on taijiquan in the context of the city of Shanghai and the nation-state. Chapter 4, "From Practice to City: Taijiquan as Public Art," looks at how the emergence of Shanghai as a cosmopolitan city simultaneously obsessed with past, present, and future is expressed through public art, including martial arts. Chapter 4 details the city's economic growth and the responses to that growth among JTA members. I chronicle the reinvention and representation of Shanghai, the role of museums and exhibition halls in telling the story of the city's modernization, the influence of Shanghai culture that is felt in other Chinese cities, the pride which Shanghai people feel toward the city and the city government, and the underground labor system that keeps development hurtling ever forward.

Chapter 5, "From City to Nation: Taijiquan as Master Symbol," presents taijiquan as an extension of Richard Flores's work on memory and the Alamo in Texas. Through a detailed look at martial arts tournaments and performances, a visit to the Shaolin Temple and to the purported birthplace of modern taijiquan in Henan Province, and through a brief discussion of the Chinese government's attempt to make taijiquan an official event at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the chapter examines how state-sponsored taijiquan forms (e.g. official twenty-four movement and forty-eight movement competition forms) often conflict with traditional, family-centered practice.

Part III, "Imagination and Transnation," focuses on how the imaginative production that surrounds martial arts in the United States and China provides a space for taijiquan and other martial arts to travel both temporally and geographically. In Chapter 6, "From Nation to Imagination: Fantasy, Poetry,

Heroes,” I focus on the specifics of how the “little old Chinese Man” continues to live through taijiquan practice in the PRC. I look in detail at how the poetic forms in the classic writings of taijiquan produce notions of authenticity; at oral transmission of “tales of power”; at the nightly *wudapian* (marital arts soap operas) that inhabit Chinese television; and at the films that inspired so many Chinese to study martial arts. In Chapter 7, “From Nation to Transnation: Chinatown in Space,” I then look at the global marketplace for taijiquan, focusing on a brief history of how *qi*-related products and practices have entered the United States over the last several decades. In the Conclusion, “From Transnation to Body,” I return to the notion that race moves and attempt to tie together the urban, national, transnational, and imaginary worlds as elements in the ritualization of race through embodied practice.

A final note on structure and style: in order to protect participant confidentiality, I have throughout the book used pseudonyms and occasionally changed the details of dates, times, and places, participants’ professions, and personal histories. Exceptions to this rule include deceased, historical, and public figures whose lives are already documented in print or are widely known by the general public. By way of example, the former patriarch and matriarch of the Jianquan Association, Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, shared an official designation as members of China’s elite one hundred grandmasters of the martial arts before their deaths. I use their actual names throughout. In addition, a few individuals granted permission for their actual names to be used.

## PART I: BODY AND PRACTICE

### Chapter 1

#### The Body: Qi, “Daoism,” and the Mystique of Lore

##### III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

–Wallace Stevens  
*From “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”*

In this chapter, I am concerned with three kinds of lore.<sup>21</sup> First, there is the lore of taijiquan itself—the creation myths, legends, tales of power and multivocal histories that help constitute taijiquan as “tradition” in the minds of practitioners. I introduce a monthly meeting of the JTA as an arena for reading such taijiquan lore. Second is the lore of Daoism that has come to be associated with taijiquan. While I am particularly interested here in the discursive space that the discipline of Euro-American Daoist studies has staked out over the last several hundred years and how that discipline has influenced modern conceptions of taijiquan outside of China, I also call attention to the way modernist, urban interpretations

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<sup>21</sup>Much of the material covered in this chapter has appeared in previous incarnations in papers written on *qi* and taijiquan over the last several years, among them “The Social Construction of *Qi*” presented at the Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, Boulder, Colorado, 1997; “Kung Fu Fighters without History: Imagining Tradition with Shanghai Taijiquan Players,” presented at the San Diego meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in March 2000; and “Experiencing *Qi*,” presented first in Deborah Kapchan’s seminar on body theory at the University of Texas at Austin, in revised form at the 1998 Western/Southwestern Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, El Paso, Texas, and published as “Experiencing *Qi*: Methodology, Mad Scientists, and the Anthropology of Bodily Experience,” in *Text, Practice, Performance* 2(2000):13-31.

of Daoism have kept taijiquan teetering between heterodoxy and orthodoxy in China over the last century. Third, I take some initial steps in this chapter toward exploring a personal lore of race—the pre-conceptions and stereotypical associations about race and martial arts that I brought with me to the research and the excavation of those preconceptions that I underwent—and continue to undergo—as a result of the fieldwork. This third category of lore, while perhaps opening up the researcher to accusations of self-indulgence, is meant to serve as a road map for others who take similar journeys into the ostensibly strange and exotic. The multiple layers of analysis through which I structure this dissertation—body, city, nation, imagination, and transnation—might be seen as way stations along my own path of trying to understand how I sensually experience “Chineseness” and “whiteness” through martial arts. My own perception of race was absent from the project at the outset. Configured as I often was as a white person during martial arts practice in Shanghai, however, I began to hunt for the origins of racial formation, and this took me into the wider world beyond the park. I began to see the lore about race that I carried with me had emerged from a complex interplay of early memories of things “Chinese” and a fuzzier world of “Asian culture” of which martial arts practice was only a part. The complicated nature of this interplay somehow forms persistent notions about race that become more difficult to recognize as they accumulate over the course of our lives. Logical unities are created—or we create them—that are notoriously difficult to penetrate. As a result of the hyper-awareness about race that I developed during the fieldwork, what began as a straightforward account of Chinese martial arts in a transnational context came to include some aspects of an unfinished personal journey as well. Sparingly, I return to this journey throughout the chapters that follow.

In his account of romantic nationalism in folkloristics, Roger Abrahams writes that

Although we no longer draw upon this legendary romanticizing as the basic way in which tradition and authenticity are established, an equally romantic story has taken its place as folklorists have collected directly from tradition-bearing performers. By recording and transcribing the “actual words” of an informant, we aver that we make a vital connection with some spiritually pure resource...Many habits of thought adhering to the idea of folklore maintain connections to this history. Insofar as we continue to search out and record the evidences of the past in the present, we cling to this line of argument and maintain the mystique of lore. [Abrahams 1993:13].

For many urban Chinese taijiquan players in Shanghai, as well as foreigners who seek taijiquan training in PRC, what Abrahams calls the “mystique of lore” lies at the heart of their search for “the little old Chinese man.” Indeed, since everyone brings a different lore to the occasion, it is not a single ideal typical little old Chinese man who is being sought, but many ideal types. One common thread that ran throughout both the fieldwork and archival research for this dissertation was the desire among practitioners to find a teacher who embodied the taijiquan they had read about in books or seen in movies or about whom they had heard stories as a child. While such tales of power did not dominate my interactions with fellow practitioners, they often found their way into our conversations. It was certainly at the heart of my own initial impulse to travel to Shanghai to meet then-eighty-seven-year-old Ma Yueliang for the first time in 1988.

In the sense that they “seek to record the evidences of the past in the present,” I treat both foreign and Chinese taijiquan players in Shanghai as folklorists of the type that Abrahams describes above, folklorists who use their bodies as recording media, rather than relying solely on tape recorders or video cameras. During the JTA’s monthly gatherings in Shanghai parks, concepts like *qi* (“vital energy”) and *yi* (“mind-intent”)<sup>22</sup> work as “historical markers” that allow

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<sup>22</sup> In the present context, my focus is on laying a framework for the remainder of the dissertation. I reserve details about the globalization of *qi*-related products and practices for Chapter 7.

taijiquan players to “make a vital connection with some spiritually pure resource.” Moreover, they make a connection to specific, albeit nuanced, notions of “Chineseness.”<sup>23</sup> I am speaking here of taijiquan players who consider themselves Chinese, as well as those who do not (for example, members of one of China’s fifty-six official minority groups and Euro-Americans). In that sense, there is more than one “Chineseness” being authenticated. I am *not* arguing that this is the *only* function of *qi* and *yi* in taijiquan practice (nor, for that matter, that taijiquan is only about race). Chapter 2 will focus on how these concepts become tools for teaching and learning taijiquan and how what Casey refers to as “habitual memory” (Casey 1987) forms a basic principle for passing on taijiquan across several generations. For the present, however, I am concerned with how the JTA’s monthly gatherings contribute to community “insiderness” and “outsiderness” through their evocation of certain ideal types (Weber 1946), how, for example, an old man’s apparent mastery of *qi* and *yi* evokes in spectators romantic images of the past and reassures them about the present. I am also interested in how, through the JTA’s 2000 commemorative book, the consumption of images and words becomes itself a ritual process in the construction of identity (JTA 2000).

Let me re-iterate what I mean by “ritual process” and how it relates to race. In an application of Bell’s work to the formation of identity, I am looking on the one hand at the practice of the taijiquan forms and push hands (private or semi-private rituals) as patterned, repeatable actions that enact specific identities. In the JTA, for example, such actions serve as actual tools for establishing relations of power and status within and between associations (which, in martial

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<sup>23</sup> An extensive literature has developed in the past decade around the construction of ethnicity in PRC and, specifically, the persistence of Herderian notions of identity in Chinese ethnology (*minzuxue*) and anthropology (*renleixue*). See Guldin 1994; Gladney 1994; Ebrey 1996; and Hallenberg 2002. I am approaching the state forms of taijiquan in Shanghai as practices that silence difference, render it invisible because of the combined forces of economic change, pride in cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and globalization. Family-based forms, however, I see as spaces that open the possibility of individual expression and individual physical and spiritual cultivation. See Hallenberg 2002 for an alternative perspective.

arts circles, are not always the same thing). On the other hand, I am referring to the more variable, generalized action of people gathering in a park to play and watch taijiquan (public ritual) or reading about the JTA in newsletters and books (indirect public ritual). On yet another level, I am referring to the reification (perhaps even fetishization) of things like *qi* and *yi* that arises out of communicating sensual experience and tales of power to others (intimate ritual).<sup>24</sup> Bell (1997:240) notes that “practice theorists tend to explore how ritual is a vehicle for the *construction* of relationships of authority and submission” and that practice theory treats ritual as part of historical processes “in which past patterns are reproduced but also reinterpreted or transformed.” In the same passage, she is also careful to point out the importance to practice theorists of attending to individual agency in conceptualizing ritual. She even suggests (not very seriously) that perhaps ritual must be abandoned altogether as a category for understanding social relations. I choose to maintain ritual as a category because I see it as underused as a means of modeling how we come to understand one another and ourselves in terms of race. In the context of urban China, I see the social world surrounding taijiquan practice as a key, often quite conscious tool for establishing “Chineseness,” i.e. Han-ness in juxtaposition with “minority” (*minzu*) and “whiteness.”

### ***The Monthly Meeting***

Summer 1997. On the first Sunday of every month, members of the Jianquan Taijiquan Association host a monthly meeting at a different Shanghai Park. These meetings afford a time for the hundreds of taijiquan players in the lineage of founder Wu Jianquan to gather together from all over the city. Since the patriarch and matriarch of the association, Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, taught for almost seventy years, many of their students and grand-students are

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<sup>24</sup> The typologizing of ritual into “private,” “public,” “intimate,” etc. is my own, not Bell’s.

highly accomplished teachers in their own right, and the rotating hosts of the monthly meeting often ask the grandmasters to demonstrate various empty hand and weapons forms, as well as push hands. The monthly meetings provide a rare opportunity for the senior teachers and their students from the Shanghai JTA's many sub-branches to reenergize their sense of community. The association, therefore, serves as a formalized structure for the preservation of Wu style taijiquan, and Ma and Wu, before their deaths, served as the standard against which other taijiquan players were measured.

The association's August gathering at Shanghai's Shangyang Park was typical of similar events I had attended in the late 1980s and mid-1990s. With carefully cultivated gardens, a wooded pathway that encircles the park, and a makeshift grass amphitheater, Shangyang is one of Shanghai's oldest and prettiest parks. Several small open areas and squares dot the park, and various exercise groups, mostly comprised of senior citizens, work out regularly there.

By 7:45, late by taijiquan standards, I had not yet seen any members of the Shanghai Park group with whom I normally practiced, but after concluding my own practice and scouting around the park for a few minutes, I found several of my classmates practicing push hands, including two of the senior students, Mr. Sun and Mr. Zhou (the older of two brothers, both JTA members). The three of us had all studied with Teacher Qian, a student of Ma's since the 1950s. Teacher Qian happened to be away from Shanghai that summer and did not attend the gathering. That in itself was significant, since Teacher Qian normally shared emcee duties with his *gongfu* brother,<sup>25</sup> Teacher Chen. In 1995, Qian and Chen carefully shared monthly meeting duties. Their place in the push hands

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<sup>25</sup> By "gongfu brother", I refer to membership in the same cohort within the Ma/Wu lineage. In this case, Chen began his study with Ma Yueliang several years before Qian did. Nevertheless, as two of the oldest and most skillful members of the JTA, they shared equal status. Chen, however, held the key position of Secretary in the official hierarchy of the JTA. See Appendix II: JTA Lineage Chart.

performance hierarchy, just before Ma's grand finale, affirmed their high status in the association.

At 8:00 a.m., we moved to the grassy performance area a few meters away. A crowd of about two hundred people had already formed around a fifteen-by-fifty meter rectangular space. JTA members informally congregated around their own teachers or circulated through the crowd greeting old friends. Aside from the JTA people, the spectators also included other Wu style martial arts lineages (in other words, they had not come through the Ma/Wu lineage, but they could nevertheless trace their lineage back to Wu Jianquan); martial artists from other schools and styles who had heard about the monthly demonstration; and people who happened to be in the park when the demonstration began. JTA members generally wear no special clothing or uniform to designate membership, so it was not always easy distinguishing association members from outsiders.<sup>26</sup>

One other foreign student attended that morning besides me, Bjorn, a Swede and student of Ma's. We greeted one another and watched the proceedings from the edge of the space. At one end, someone had set up tables, chairs, and a small banner bearing the association's name. Ma had not yet arrived, but various members of the "inner circle" – mostly Ma's older students – sat at the table. As we waited, Teacher Chen shouted into a small, screechy megaphone, reminding association members to pay their dues, alerting them to the new issue of the association newsletter sitting in boxes near the table, and announcing upcoming

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<sup>26</sup> By 2001, the JTA did have association sweat shirts and baseball-style caps, but members wore them only at occasional tournament or government-sponsored events. On a typical weekend, taijiquan players in Shanghai wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing, e.g. warm-up suits. Either because they wish to make a statement about status or they are on their way to work after taijiquan practice (among other reasons), some men will occasionally wear a suit and tie and some women will occasionally appear in a dress and high-heels. Occasionally, a *gongfu* uniform makes an appearance, but in Shanghai parks, at least as of 2001, this was rare. Hangzhou was another story. There, all along the shores of the famous West Lake, one can find *gongfu*-suited taijiquan players practicing every morning. I am unaware of the reason for these fashion differences between the two cities. One possibility is that Hangzhou is a city that wears "Chinese tradition" on its sleeve. It

meetings. JTA members trickled forward and paid the nominal fee that entitled them to their newsletter and official membership card.

Around the demonstration space, small clusters of people played two-hand *tui shou* together or chatted. In this situation, where familiar faces are mixed with unfamiliar, taijiquan players exercise a certain degree of caution regarding who they choose to push with, since an overly aggressive partner might sprain a neck, wrench an elbow, or break a finger or two. The desire to push hands is expressed in several ways, ranging from a verbal request, “*Tui shou?*” to a salutation like “*ni hao*” (the equivalent of “hello”), to simply indicating the desire to push by motioning with a single hand toward the potential practice partner.

In its most formal version, basic two-hand push hands is a bounded game with set rules and techniques. It begins with practitioners facing each other in a rear bow stance (*gongbu*). In other words, the opposing rear leg of each partner bears the weight, and the opposing front leg is empty of weight. The ideal stance is long enough to provide a good range of backward and forward motion, but not too long to interfere with this motion. The feet are parallel, shoulder width apart, legs slightly bent. Partners join the backs of their identical hands (i.e., right hand to right hand or left hand to left hand), middle knuckles touching and the upper joint of the middle finger lightly resting against the opponent’s wrist, so that the hands are “sticking” (*nian*) at the wrist and at the middle knuckle. The other hand is lightly placed palm down on the opponent’s elbow. One partner then shifts the weight one hundred percent to the front leg. Continuously sticking and shifting their weight backwards and forwards, the partners cycle through a series of four hand-to-hand techniques, coordinating a slight turn of the waist, shift of the weight, and alternation of hand patterns. Practicing the four basic “energies,” *peng* (“upward and outward”), *lü* (“diverting”), *ji* (“press”), and *an* (“press

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is possible that city tourism officials encourage taijiquan players to wear colorful *gongfu* suits as a kind of tourism promotion, but this is only speculation on my part.

downward”) through push hands is fundamental to Wu style, along with Yang, Chen, Sun, Wu (Hao), and other taijiquan styles. Such patterns, executed in a non-competitive manner, allow students to concentrate on loosening their joints, learning applications of certain movements from the solo form, and developing *tingjin*, or “listening energy.”<sup>27</sup> Beyond that, some practitioners claim that push hands provides an opportunity for the student to feel the teacher’s *qi*, develop a sense of inner calm and, ultimately, acquire the ability to read the intention of an opponent, even without touching. Throughout the exercise, players strive for smooth, methodical movement, eschewing unnecessary exertion of strength or speed. Punches, kicks, throws, and takedowns are all prohibited in push hands, unless partners agree beforehand to include them. Of course, such techniques do occasionally make surprise appearances.

The reality of push hands usually varies a great deal from the model practice described above. Often, in the midst of a debate about a particular technique or principle, one player (usually the senior one), will simply begin pushing as a means of explaining. Except in an explicit teaching situation, few players actually consciously go through each of the preparatory checkpoints, instead simply attaching hands and going through the hand patterns or launching into “freestyle.” Taijiquan players clearly differentiate freestyle from pattern practice. In the stationary freestyle method, partners maintain the bow stance of the basic training but follow no set hand patterns. Tempers can occasionally run high in these matches, especially when they occur in public, but this is quite rare. The remote possibility of confrontation, however, does not dissuade players from doing push hands, for the monthly meeting is a place to play and to jockey for status, not to learn patterns (even though the highest level players in the group constantly admonish students to practice patterns). Most players come not so much to advance their skills as to test them. They do not expect to actually learn

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<sup>27</sup> I will go into detail about push hands training in general and *tingjin* in particular in Chapter 2.

much at a monthly meeting, at least not in the same way or to the same degree they might learn in class or in a private workout with a teacher. Most would prefer to have at it, and freestyle pushing is a wilder, less structured game that often degenerates into something akin to elementary school playground wrestling. Properly executed, however, there is no real difference between freestyle and basic practice, since comparatively advanced practitioners can pull the basic techniques at will. Freestyle push hands can become an artful display of *gongfu*, and for that reason it comprises the show-stopping finale for every monthly meeting, following solo, two-person, and group forms performances by a variety of lower-level players.

As we waited for Ma to arrive, I spotted my mentor, Mr. Pang (who we have already met during his trip to the American Consulate), one of the younger master-level players.<sup>28</sup> My use of the term “mentor” is meant to convey that Mr. Pang was not only a more experienced, highly skilled practitioner, but that he had become a kind of assistant teacher who could offer an alternative view to teacher Qian’s, a reality to which Qian did not always take kindly. As a formal disciple of Qian’s, Pang remained somewhat beholden to his authority but often found ways to operate outside of it. In fact, Pang more often identified himself as Ma’s student and as a student of Ma’s second eldest son. Nevertheless, Qian often treated Pang as a kind of assistant teacher, pulling him aside to demonstrate a technique or asking him to push with newcomers seeking instruction. It seemed important to Qian to hold on to this relationship, perhaps because Pang’s skills had reached such a high level. Later, stemming from a misunderstanding

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<sup>28</sup> Unlike Japanese karate and judo or Korean Taekwondo, the vast majority of Chinese martial arts schools eschew belt systems. This results in the double-edged sword of meritocracy existing side-by-side with unspoken hierarchies of lineage. In the JTA, for example, a skillful “younger brother” might refrain from defeating a less-skilled “older brother” simply to avoid any loss of face. For some, the fiction might even continue in private practice sessions. Note that in the JTA, members avoided fictive kinship terms. Except in the case of the teacher, whom they referred to as either “*shifu*” or “*laoshi*” members generally use names to refer to one another.

regarding a foreign student, this tenuous relationship erupted into full-fledged estrangement.

Teacher Pang greeted me with his usual ready smile. We were about to launch into a round of pushing when Ma arrived. Like any audience about to witness a world-class athletic performance, the crowd was excited and full of chatter: comments on Ma's appearance, rumors about his health, and speculation on whether he would perform that day. His eldest son and adopted *gongfu* daughter took their places next to Ma at the table. In Qian's absence, Chen now worked with several other senior teachers to arrange the performance line up and conduct other business. Those who wanted to perform requested to be placed in the line up, but the order remained in the hands of Chen.

Within a few minutes, the demonstrations themselves began, including several different groups who performed solo forms, fast taijiquan, two-person mirrored fast form, double-edged sword, saber, spear, and push hands. One of Teacher Qian's students, Xiao Deng, a developmentally disabled man who performed his taijiquan with particular care, asked Chen if he could push hands with me in the public demonstration. Chen said yes, and a few minutes later we entered the demonstration space. The crowd tittered approvingly, and as we began the exercise, ripples of laughter occasionally erupted, for the sight of the "foreigner and the retard" pushing each other must have evoked some of the qualities of a small-scale Roman gladiatorial contest. In general, foreigners were notably absent from the push hands demonstrations, though we were often asked to participate in forms demos. Since most of us felt a little like trained monkeys when we performed publicly (or at least felt we were perceived as such), we did not mind staying in the shadows.

The significance of my interaction with Xiao Deng goes beyond the mere entertainment value. It constituted one of my earliest recognitions that the space where we played push hands at monthly meetings was also a space for the

ritualization of race. Not that other relationships were not also ritualized in that space—certainly the push hands event enacted certain notions about masculinity and femininity (see Chapter 3) and, to some degree, about the elite class that Ma and Wu represented versus the common people (*laobaixing*) who made up much of the audience, but for the brief period when foreigners entered the performance space, we enacted a very specific ritual of race.

Just as the practice engaged in on the sidelines is bounded, so is the demonstration. Push hands players do not, for example, invite all comers to challenge them, but the demonstrations offer important opportunities to visually communicate the power of *qi* both in the form of a health-related discourse (the best players are often the oldest) and a martial arts discourse (see below for an elaboration of a discourse-centered approach to *qi*). The best players are often said to use their *qi* to defeat younger and stronger opponents, though such comments tend to come from less-experienced practitioners or non-practitioners. JTA members seldom speak openly about *qi*, a fact that some attribute to Ma's emphasis on learning through constant practice, rather than focusing on esoteric notions of *qi*, at least at first.

After all of the senior players had pushed, Ma himself stood and entered the space. When I first had the opportunity to watch Ma in 1988, he was eighty-seven years old. At that event, he demonstrated the short spear form, which involves several leaping and jumping movements, then gave a dramatic demonstration of push hands skills. In 1995, he gave similar demonstrations, though not every month. In 1997, however, nagging leg problems limited him to push hands alone. In contrast to the previous performers, spotters surrounded Ma at the four corners of the space. He then engaged in push hands, one at a time, with a string of several of the highest-level practitioners in the association. Each of these "opponents" attached their hands lightly to Ma's forearm and wrist in the usual Wu style manner, and then Ma turned very slightly to the left or right,

throwing his opponents slightly off balance, bouncing them several feet away, or sending them flying into the arms of the spotters. Each of the opponents, expert players in their own right, responded with the distinct stamping, jumping, and reeling back motion that characterizes the Wu stylist's attempt to maintain "central equilibrium" (*zhongding*). In this way, they not only demonstrated the power of Ma's *qi*, but also the power of their own *qi*, for the stamping was, amongst other things, a kinesthetic way of saying "uncle," and only those who were of a high level themselves, they claimed, could "hear" Ma's energy before he bounced them away. Thus, the "demonstration" became an opportunity to enact specific relationships of physical (i.e. martial) and social power and, as I will discuss in more detail below, a specific quality of "Chineseness."

The crowd's response to Ma differed in several key ways from its response to the other push hands performances. Previously, at the conclusion of each demo, a few observers politely applauded. When Chen or Qian pushed, they turned up the applause a notch. In Ma's case, however, an especially enthusiastic round of applause erupted from the audience. As both the best player and the oldest, Ma became for his audience the embodiment of Chinese martial arts, a living treasure who exemplified the power of *qi* not only as a tool for developing *gongfu*, but also as a focal point for social relations. Moreover, Ma's power in this regard—his role, in effect, as ritual master—lay partly in the impression that the skill he demonstrated in this performance context (a public demonstration) was still present *outside* ritual. In other words, the highest level of martial skill could be delivered in "the real world." Among Wu style players, the most famous example of this bridge between performance and "reality" was an organized fight that took place in the 1950s between Wu Gongyi (a son of Wu Jianquan) and Chen Kefu, a master of the White Crane style of martial arts. Apparently illegal in Hong Kong, the fight took place in then-Portuguese Macau. Despite the fact that all proceeds were donated to charity, the fight remained controversial. However, it

served its purpose: demonstrating that taijiquan was a fighting art, not merely a martial dance (JTA 2000). That the fight itself was a performance seemed not to faze those who held it up as a testament to taijiquan's power. Within the JTA, there was some controversy on two counts: First, those who had seen the extant, grainy film of the fight were not overly impressed with either fighter's performance. Second, some Wu style practitioners on the periphery of the JTA had heard rumors that Ma himself had fared poorly when his skills were tested in the 1950s. Generally, however, the high quality of Ma's students spoke for him. Many of them could easily defeat younger, stronger opponents in push hands, and tales of power circulated about these disciples as well, tales that thereby magnified Ma's prestige. I will note only briefly here that such tales tended to be gender marked: tales of power associated with Wu Yinghua, the daughter of the founder, circulated around form, spiritual strength, and virtue. These were the yin tales to Ma's Yang.



Figure 2: JTA Demonstration, Shanghai Institute of Chinese Medicine (1995).  
Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 3: Teacher Qian pushing hands with author at monthly meeting, Shanghai, 1995. Photo: Anonymous JTA member.



Figure 4: Association officers at JTA monthly meeting, Shanghai Stadium, 2001.  
Photo: Adam Frank.

### *Creation Legends and Multivocal Histories*

Roland Barthes notes in *Mythologies* that myth is enacted in everyday life. “We reach here the very principle of myth,” he writes, “it transforms history into nature” (Barthes 1972 [1957]:129). Barthes’ statement is relevant to the rich folklore surrounding taijiquan’s history, a folklore that is often a focal point for debate among practitioners, ranging from uncritical acceptance of ancient origin stories as truth to complete rejection of such stories as “unscientific.” Martial arts “tales of power” constitute an important genre for performing subjectivities. As Kapchan notes,

Performed genres are particularly significant in creating new and hybrid identities, as actors use them to maintain reinforce, or revise the social imagination according to their interests. As a discursive field where the traditional past meets the contemporary invention of tradition, genre is a crossroads—of time and space, of convention and creativity, encoding history and determining the future. [Kapchan 1999:209].

In the case of taijiquan’s creation stories, the “crossroads” that Kapchan speaks of involves a considerable amount of negotiation between orality (verbal art), visuality (film and television) and literature. Scholars are only beginning to benefit from the recent availability of “secret” family documents to help them piece together the history of the art from 1800 to the present. Douglas Wile, a Chinese literature specialist and taijiquan scholar, identifies three useful “conceptual tracers” that nuance the debate: postures and form; training techniques and combat strategies; philosophy and legend (Wile 1996:xv). In the last of these frameworks, philosophy and legend, Zhang Sanfeng, a hermit who had eschewed government service for a life of contemplation, created taijiquan sometime during the late Song (AD 960-1279) or early Yuan Period (A.D. 1279-

1368).<sup>29</sup> Zhang was born at midnight on April 9, 1247, a date that many taijiquan practitioners around the world now commemorate. Zhang, according to legend, first mastered the Buddhist martial art of *shaolinquan*, and versions place him in the Buddhist Shaolin Temple, Henan Province, in his youth. A popular Jet Li film (*Taiji Zhang Sanfeng*) tells the tale of how, when Zhang and his best friend are expelled from the temple and exposed to the temptations of the outside world, they become mortal enemies. In this version, the shock and disappointment that Zhang feels at his best friend's betrayal drives him temporarily insane. While playing with a buoyant ball in a pool of water, Zhang is inspired to create taijiquan, eventually defeating his former friend in a climactic battle between hard and soft. In the "Zhang as *shaolin*" version, the monk turned mystic creates taijiquan by adding elements of Daoist philosophy to the supposedly hard, external style of *shaolinquan*.

Aside from the cinematic treatment above, there are three standard versions of where Zhang's initial inspiration came from. In the first, Zhang heard a commotion outside his door one day, only to discover a magpie (or crane in some versions) attacking a snake. Each time the magpie attacked, the snake evaded by moving slightly, while maintaining its circular shape. From this Zhang understood the advantages of softness and flexibility overcoming hardness. In another tale, Zhang invented taijiquan in a dream, and in a third tale, he invented taijiquan after witnessing several monks practicing martial arts with too much force and outer strength instead of softness and "intrinsic energy." The art then passed through several generations until Jiang Fa taught the art to Chen Wangting of the Chen Family Village (Chenjiagou) in Henan Province. Successive generations of Chen family members practiced the form until, according to documentary evidence Wile (1996) has collected from the mid-nineteenth century, the Chens taught the

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<sup>29</sup> I have drawn this version of the Zhang Sanfeng legend from a synthesis of written accounts in Jou 1980, from cinematic versions of the story, and from interviews.

art to two outsiders, Yang Luchan, founder of the Yang style, and Wu Yixing, founder of the Wu (Hao) style (not to be confused with the Wu Jianquan style).

According to family members as well as independent written accounts, Wu Jianquan style traces its lineage through Yang Luchan. In the mid-nineteenth century, Yang traveled to Beijing and ultimately became an officer in the Imperial bodyguard. The Yang family and those in their lineage generally place Yang as an officer and the chief martial arts trainer, while Chen style practitioners cast doubt over any high rank for the illiterate Yang. To my knowledge, there is no documentary evidence that Yang ever actually served in the Imperial bodyguard at all, but the fact that taijiquan stylists from several contending lineages agree on the story lends some credence to it.<sup>30</sup> In that position, Yang Luchan is said to have

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<sup>30</sup> One question that is occasionally raised by Yang style practitioners regarding this story is why Yang Luchan, who would likely have called himself “Han,” would willingly teach family secrets to Quan You, a Manchu. Yang and Wu family members agree that Yang was a martial arts instructor in the Imperial Bodyguard. The closeness of Yang Luchan’s relationship with Quan You remain unclear, but it is clear that Quan You, though actually a student of Yang Luchan, became the official disciple of Luchan’s eldest son after Luchan’s death. Based on interviews with the Wu family, Quan You was apparently a high-ranking officer responsible for guarding the city walls. This would have placed him in the Imperial Guard, rather than in the Bodyguard. According to Elliot (2001:81), the Imperial Bodyguard was the most elite of three special corps within the Manchu’s Eight Banner military structure (the others were the Imperial Guard, which protected the palace, and the Vanguard, which escorted Imperial family members when they left the palace). Members of the Imperial Bodyguard were drawn only from Manchus, whereas the other two corps included both Manchus and Mongols. However, there was also a separate Chinese bodyguard corps (as well as separate Chinese banners). A particularly skillful fighter among in the Chinese corps, especially one with connections, could easily be attached to the Manchu corps for training purposes. Likewise, if well-placed Manchu bannermen were aware of a skillful teacher, they could offer him connections and opportunities. Perhaps even more importantly, Manchu and Chinese had many reasons to bond in the mid-nineteenth century that had previously been absent. During the late eighteenth century, many Manchu bannerman had been forced out of Beijing in a misguided attempt by the Emperor Qianlong and his advisors to “re-Manchuize” them (after several generations, most spoke little or no Manchu, which remained the official language among the military elite; Crossley 1997:130). The majority of these soldiers and their families snuck back into Beijing, but were forced to live outside the law until reforms in 1763 gave bannermen permission to seek employment and live outside the garrison walls. Thus, they maintained banner registration but lived and worked like Chinese. Finally, when the Taiping Rebellion began c. 1850, it was violently anti-Manchu. Manchu bannermen fought side-by-side with Chinese soldiers in Taiping-held areas (Crossley 1997:161).

trained a Manchu member of the guard, Quan You, who was to become the father and main teacher of Wu Jianquan, the founder of the modern Wu style taijiquan.

Together with Yang Chengfu (Yang Luchan's grandson), Sun Lutang (a member of the Wu Yixiang lineage and creator of the Sun style taijiquan), and several other professional martial artists, Wu Jianquan began teaching modified taijiquan forms to the public in Beijing. Each of these martial arts luminaries created a slow-motion sequence of taijiquan based on the combination slow-fast movements that they had inherited. At the prompting of the new Republican government and with the added incentive of a *nouveau riche* community of businessmen, these teachers taught the modified forms to old, infirm, and recreation-oriented, middle- to upper class Chinese and, very rarely, to foreigners. The serious teaching seems to have remained, during this time, an "indoor" practice, reserved for family members and disciples deemed worthy of advanced instruction. Thus, two tracks of taijiquan were born, one public and one private.

Wu Jianquan later moved to Shanghai, where, in 1935, he established the Jianquan Taijiquan Association, operating out of the Shanghai YMCA (Wu, Ma and Shi 1987). After Wu's death in 1942, his daughter, Wu Yinghua, and son-in-law, Ma Yueliang, took over leadership of the association. During the anti-Japanese War (c. 1937-45), the Japanese military government banned the practice of martial arts in occupied China, and the association's activities went underground. After the war, they continued to train students until the mid-1960s when the Cultural Revolution put a stop to "feudalistic practices." In 1980, four years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the association officially reconstituted itself, and it has been active ever since. During the last twenty years, the JTA has increased its active membership from a handful of elderly practitioners to several hundred members of all ages.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Under the rubric of "membership," I include both dues-paying members of the JTA and regular participants in JTA activities, even if they have not paid dues.

In the years since the association was re-constituted, several of the Ma children, as well as other branches of the Ma/Wu family and non-family members of the Association, have emigrated to Germany, Holland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. At the same time, following the formal recognition of the PRC by the United States in 1979, the rate of martial arts exchange between the two nations has mushroomed. Students and scholars versed in the martial arts have come from China to study at American universities and have discovered a population of eager martial arts fanatics willing to pay for lessons in both time and money. Likewise, my own experience traveling to China and studying martial arts over a period of fifteen years reflects the growing number of non-Chinese citizens who have journeyed to PRC in recent years and then returned to teach in their home countries. Earlier pioneers, such as martial arts teacher and writer Robert W. Smith, had studied in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, or Malaysia as far back as the 1950s. Thus, the history of taijiquan's dissemination to the United States is also the history of Chinese immigration, post-World War II geopolitics, and the blossoming of Hong Kong and Taiwan cinema. The timeline I present below offers a primitive, but at least minimally instructive picture of how and why taijiquan has come to be a popular exercise form and martial art in the United States:

- c. 1850            First significant Chinese immigration to US begins. Widespread discrimination against Chinese immigrants. Protective “benevolent associations” (the Triads, which are also martial arts brotherhoods) consolidate power, further insulating Chinese communities from white majority (Gyory 1998; Lai, Huang, and Wong 1980; Lee 1976).
- 1882            Forty-seventh Congress passes Chinese Exclusion Act. Increasing violence against Chinese immigrants.

- c. 1902 President Teddy Roosevelt holds regular practice sessions with a Japanese jiu jitsu master associated with the Japanese Embassy (Clark 1992; Long 1997).
- 1945 US military and civilian personnel stationed in China, Japan, and Korea gain exposure to Asian martial arts, medicine, philosophy, and religion. Japanese judo and Okinawan style karate build popularity in the US
- 1949 Communist victory on the mainland; retreat of Nationalist government to Taiwan results in withdrawal of all US military personnel from mainland and massive increase of personnel stationed in Taiwan. First major exposure of Americans to Chinese marital arts begins at this time.
- c. 1949 Sophia Delza, a dancer and a student of Wu style taijiquan teachers Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua of Shanghai, begins teaching taijiquan in New York City (Delza 1961, 1996).<sup>32</sup>
- 1952 Immigration and Nationalities Act ends absolute exclusion of Asian immigrants to US, but sets quotas (Lee 1976).
- c. 1960 Ed Parker, an ex-soldier who had learned Kenpo Karate in Okinawa, pioneers great commercialization of Asian martial arts in US. Incorporates “ki” (Japanese equivalent of *qi*) into his teaching.
- c. 1965 Repeal of quota on Asian immigrant visas to US. Influential taijiquan teachers Guo Lianying and Zheng Manjing (a.k.a. Cheng Man-ching) emigrate to US from Taiwan (Zheng with the assistance of former CIA analyst Robert Smith). Guo settles in San Francisco and Zheng in New York City. Bruce Lee, a US-born, Hong Kong-raised martial artist, stars as Cato on *The Green*

*Hornet* television series. Guo, Zheng, and Lee open martial arts schools to non-Chinese students, the earliest Chinese teachers to invite large numbers of non-Chinese into their classrooms (in California, Marshall Ho and Abraham Liu were perhaps the earliest, in the 1950s).

- 1969 Young people looking for peace, love, and answers turn to taijiquan, yoga, and many other “energy development” practices. The classic hippie road film *Easy Rider* includes a brief sequence of a white male practicing taijiquan.
- c. 1972 Shanghai Communiqué. US formally adopts one China policy. Nixon visits Mainland China, becoming the first US President to do so, opening the door for increased cultural exchange.
- c. 1973 Bruce Lee’s kung fu films make him a star. David Carradine stars as Shaolin priest on the run in the American West in *Kung Fu* television series.
- 1979 Jimmy Carter establishes formal diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China, severing formal diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan).
- c. 1980 First generation of Guo and Zheng’s non-Chinese students establish taijiquan schools throughout the US.
- 2000 Aging population, fitness craze, and continuing immigration of PRC, ROC and Hong Kong martial arts instructors to US contribute to steadily increasing interest in taijiquan.

A focus on place rather than practice offers yet another history of taijiquan. Until the creation of treaty ports following the end of the Opium War in 1842,

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<sup>32</sup> Delza was probably only the second foreigner to study with the JTA. She was certainly the first to publish a book on Wu style taijiquan in English and may have been the first to publish *any* book

Shanghai was a small but thriving port city slightly inland from China's East coast. Following the war, Shanghai became a quasi-colonial, cosmopolitan city divided into foreign and Chinese sections. By 1863, the Americans merged with the British settlement to form the International Settlement, which was governed by an elected body, the Shanghai Municipal Council (minus the French Concession, which maintained its own government council). During this period, trade, rather than manufacturing, dominated the Shanghai economy. It was not until the Japanese defeated the Chinese in the war of 1895 that foreigners were granted the right to build factories in the treaty ports, and Shanghai became a true industrial center.

This was the beginning of a period in which Shanghai became known as “the Paris of the East,” a center for vice, drugs, and general shadiness. By the 1930s, the city had more prostitutes per capita than any city in the world (Honig 1986). More thoroughly industrialized than any other Chinese city, Shanghai also attracted peasant agricultural workers, including men, women, and children, to fill factory jobs. The city's modern economy allowed for a certain degree of social mobility that produced a middle and upper class of Chinese business people who formed the core of the white-collar economy, along with their European, American, and Japanese counterparts. In this atmosphere, martial arts thrived both as part of a continuing nationalist *tiyu* (“physical training”) discourse (Morris 1998); as a means for skilled teachers to make money; and as an important path by which gang members could gain social capital (Seagrave 1985; Wakeman 1997).

The situation in Shanghai remained relatively static until 1937, when the Japanese military first attacked the city. By 1941, they had established full control, imprisoning foreign belligerents and terrorizing local Chinese, while, ironically, providing safe haven for European Jews as compensation for Jewish

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on taijiquan in English. (See Delza 1961).

financing of the Russo-Japanese War. Despite the Japanese ban on martial arts during this period, Japanese martial artists frequently sought out Chinese teachers for instruction. Chinese teachers were thus placed in the position of either suffering the ire of their Japanese occupiers by refusing to teach or being ostracized from the Chinese community and branded as collaborators.<sup>33</sup>

Following World War II, Shanghai suffered serious famine and economic depression. My father, a young sailor aboard the *USS Panamint*, set ashore in Shanghai in 1945 and remembers a harbor filled with small merchant boats from which peasants hawked wares, endless solicitations by prostitutes, and starving children begging at the docks. Other than the foggy memory of a wild night at the Foreign Correspondent's Club, his only lasting legacy from the shore leave was a carved, wooden Buddha, exact copies of which I would encounter fifty years later in Shanghai.

After the Communist victory in 1949, Shanghai remained economically depressed and saw no significant economic or infrastructural development until a serious program of economic liberalization began under Deng Xiaoping in 1979. By the early 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had transformed Shanghai into one of several Special Economic Zones (SEZ). Since then, the city has embraced the task of recapturing its former glory as a world-class, cosmopolitan city, setting the goal of surpassing Hong Kong as China's most important economic center by the early 2000s. For Shanghai citizens, these rapid changes have meant a massive disruption in the pace of daily life combined with a significant increase in moneymaking and leisure opportunities. Twenty-four hour building construction, the refurbishment or demolition of Shanghai's older, Concession-era neighborhoods, the building of subway lines, and the increase in

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<sup>33</sup> For a detailed description of the suffering that the occupation produced for Shanghai artists and intellectuals, see Fu 1993.

automobile traffic have transformed Shanghai from the sedate, crumbling city that it was in the late 1980s into a high-stress, fast-paced metropolis, a city where window shopping, watching foreign movies on bootleg video compact discs (VCD), and taking a taxi have become commonplace for a burgeoning middle class. Built on what was pristine farmland only fifteen years ago, the “gem” of this change is Pudong, a conglomeration of dozens of sparsely occupied skyscrapers, luxuriously wide streets, and modern housing across the river from Shanghai’s old financial district.

### ***Quasi-Daoism and the Origin of the Little Old Chinese Man***

For Shanghai people, these changes have meant not only new opportunities, but a re-birth of class divisions and the emergence of eerie simulacra of the Shanghai of the 1930s, including nightclubs that adopt the names of pre-1949 clubs, clothing and hairstyles that mimic 1930s film stars, and homeless children and starving peasants sleeping in the gutters (though by no means on the scale of the old Shanghai). At the same time, ostensibly “traditional” cultural practices like taijiquan that experienced something of a re-birth immediately after the Cultural Revolution, have found themselves increasingly unable to attract new, young practitioners. In addition, many long-time practitioners have found themselves drawn away from the practice by business and educational opportunities, both in China and abroad. Underlying the creation legends and multivocal histories above, as well as the practice and performance of taijiquan that one encounters at monthly meetings in urban parks, is a persistent vision of taijiquan as essentially “Daoist.” While these links between Daoism and taijiquan may go back only as far as the mid-nineteenth century (Wile 1996), the popular assumption is that taijiquan is ancient *because it is Daoist*, that it was *originally* a kind of Daoist esoteric practice. But the Daoism with which taijiquan is associated is not so much the popular, temple-based religious practice (*taojiao*)

that has seen a resurgence in China in recent years as a kind of modernist philosophical Daoism (*taojia*) that grew out of a Euro-American scholarly tradition of Daoist studies. This link to modernist conceptions of Daoism goes a long way toward explaining the continued immense popularity of taijiquan both in China, despite the pitfalls of development outlined above. My best estimate is that approximately one hundred million Chinese practice something they call taijiquan in one form or another. Of these, perhaps ten million practice regularly. Among those, maybe a hundred thousand have dabbled in the martial aspects of the art, perhaps ten thousand have acquired an intermediate level of martial skill, and possibly a thousand living practitioners have reached the highest levels of skill in the art. The anti-superstition campaign of the 1990s that led to the outlawing of Falun Gong and several other popular, but “heterodox” *qigong* forms (Chen 2003) has only increased the popularity of taijiquan as an “orthodox” means of performing tradition and enacting a brand of Chineseness that supposedly erases ethnic, religious, class, and gender difference.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Europe, Japan, Latin America, and Africa, millions more practice something *they* call taijiquan. Like all arts that travel both geographically and temporally, an odd combination of hybridization and reification of “authentic” forms is part of this process. And modernist conceptions of Daoism, as they have trickled into popular culture, are at the core of taijiquan’s popularity in these countries. The process is a mutually constitutive one that occurs through several routes including the following: Chinese teachers immigrating to the United States with no previous foreign contact; Chinese teachers meeting foreign students in China and then immigrating to or visiting the United States; foreign students coming to China either to study martial arts or for some other reason and ending up staying for lengthy periods; organized martial arts tour groups from foreign countries to China; organized martial arts tour groups of “masters” who travel to the United States to participate in tournaments,

performances, and workshops; distribution of Chinese martial arts films in the United States; distribution of American martial arts films in China; normalization of state-to-state relations through politics, diplomacy, and trade; normalization of people-to-people relationships through foreign study; improvement in China's tourism infrastructure; participation by epistemic communities in international professional organizations; and the rise of a global New Age marketplace where quasi-Daoist, *qi*-related products and practices provide an arena for fetishizing Chineseness.

Much of the fetishization (and accompanying ritualization) of race that surrounds taijiquan has its roots in the way Daoism as a project of modernity has seeped into the popular mind via the Daoist studies, albeit in different ways and at different times in China and the Euro-American world.<sup>34</sup> Barrett asserts that the study of Daoism is “almost entirely a twentieth-century phenomenon, and largely a phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century at that” (Barrett 1987:329). He cites 1926 as the seminal date for the real beginning of Daoist studies because of the fourth and last printing of the *Dao Zang* (the Daoist Canon) by the Commercial Press in Shanghai. However, significant work occurred well before this date, though it was hampered by incomplete sources and cultural biases toward Neo-Confucian classicism. Giradot (1987) cites Matteo Ricci (1553-1610), an Italian Jesuit priest, as the true founder of the scholarly tradition we have come to know as Sinology. Ricci's linguistic proficiency and relative objectivity reflected the general policy of the Jesuit order to conduct scholarship, yet tread lightly in foreign lands, a policy that was to characterize Chinese-European relations until the papal suppression of the Jesuits in 1773.<sup>35</sup> As Giradot

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<sup>34</sup> See Eric Wolf's (1982) *Europe and the People without History* for arguments that inspired this line of thought.

<sup>35</sup> Giradot makes an interesting argument for why the academic discipline of Sinology has tended to look at the Chinese as somehow less “religious” than other traditions. The event that led to the papal suppression involved the “rites controversy.” Specifically, the Jesuits argued that *Shangdi*

points out, however, the Jesuits often adopted the intellectual biases of the Chinese literati, including their rejection of Buddhist and Daoist viewpoints in favor of Neo-Confucianism. As a result, they paid very little attention to translation of Daoist texts or ideas.

The enthusiasm and respect for Chinese culture that marked the Jesuit mission gave way in the nineteenth century to the belief that China was “inherently stagnant” (Giradot 1987:314), a position crystallized in Hegel’s idea of Confucianism’s “retarded spiritual development.” The study of Chinese religion adopted a Herderian tone as the new humanistic sciences in the West (especially folklore studies and anthropology) took *Volksgeist* as a central paradigm. Influenced by the European preoccupation with “national spirit” at this time, it was French scholarship, drawing on the work of the Jesuits, which solidified Sinology as a distinct field. Jean-Pierre Guillaume Pauthier (1801-1873) published a popular partial translation of the *Daodejing* (“Classic of the Way”) in 1838 and Stanislas Julien (1797-1873) followed with a more complete translation and commentary in 1841. The choice of these works foreshadows James Legge’s later essentialization of Laozi (“Laotse”; also “Laotzu”) and Zhuangzi (“Chuangtse”; also “Chuangtzu”) as the Daoist ideal.

Nineteenth-century Anglo-American scholarship was not professionalized to the degree the French scholarship had been, although the diplomat and missionary-scholars that made up the Sinological corps often engaged in creative and high-level work. Needham cites missionary Joseph Edkins’s pioneering 1855 paper “Phases in the Development of Daoism,” which may contain the first mention of *neidan* (internal alchemy) and *waidan* (external alchemy) practices, though Edkins could not adequately explain the significance of *neidan* (Needham 1983). Edkins’s morphological difficulties reflect an interesting quirk of Anglo-

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(*tian*, heaven) could be considered genuinely theistic, an argument tied into the larger Euro-American debate regarding Deism as the natural religion of reason.

American scholarship: Much of the scholarship centered on deriving accurate equivalents for Chinese religious terms as part of the overall Protestant proselytizing mission. Like the Jesuits before them, the Protestant missionaries found themselves embroiled in a “term controversy” focused on the proper word to represent God in the Chinese version of the bible (Giradot 1987). The more liberal faction of these missionary scholars did not allow petty linguistic controversies to derail their work, and they demonstrated an amazing variety of interests. In addition to his *neidan* work, Edkins generated studies on the *Yijing* (I Ching), and Ernst Eitel produced papers on *feng shui* (geomancy) (Giradot 1987; see also Wong 1996). But the greatest and most influential missionary-Sinologist was the Scottish Congregationalist James Legge. Legge’s involvement in the term question led to his eventual disillusionment with the missionary world, and he subsequently turned to a primarily scholarly life. Nevertheless, Legge was a man of his time, a man who spent his formative years immersed in the British imperial project.

In an article devoted to Legge’s “invention” of Daoism, Giradot argues that Legge’s revised and expanded set of Chinese Classics known as “Sacred Books of China” represents “the definitive Sinological contribution to what Raymond Schwab, Edward Said, Philip Almond, and others have identified as the nineteenth-century tradition of ‘Orientalism’” (Giradot 1992:188). Legge’s translation of the *Daodejing* constructed “Daoism” as clearly situated within the Victorian tradition of “classic” Chinese texts. His entrenchment in the idea of religious purity came to a head in an argument with Herbert A. Giles that appeared in *China Review*. In the debate, Legge supported the position that Laozi was a historical figure through parallels to the Gospel. It was in the course of this argument that Legge clearly asserted his position that the pure, speculative Daoism of Zhuangzi and Laozi must be separated from the later, “ordinary” religious Daoism (Giradot 1992). Through Legge, we can trace a broad arc of

Neo-Confucianist, classically oriented Sinology from its Jesuit beginnings to late nineteenth-century France and England. Legge's work marks a transitional category from a classicist position that was largely created by Neo-Confucianist literati to a more subtle, Orientalizing position that subsumed "the Three Great Religions" of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism (*sanjiao*) into an exoticized, subjugated category. The increasing interest in *neidan* practice that would appear over the next hundred years contributed to the image of an exotic Chinese Other.

At the turn of the century, French scholars continued to dominate the Sinological tradition. Most notable among these was Édouard Chavannes (1865-1918), who combined unsurpassed technical skills with an understanding of the usefulness and importance of native Chinese textual scholarship and anthropological field experience (Giradot 1987). Following in Chavannes' footsteps, but better known than Chavannes for their scholarship on Chinese religion, were Marcel Granet (1884-1940) and Henri Maspero (1883-1945). Granet's great innovation was to apply a Durkheimian sociological framework to Sinology, but it was Maspero who made the truly paradigmatic advance in the study of Daoism.

The son of a prominent Egyptologist, Maspero succeeded Chavannes at the Collège de France in 1920. Maspero's work surveyed various aspects of sectarian Daoism and broke with Legge's school by arguing for a continuity between the classics of Laozi and Zhuangzi and the later religious traditions. He made full use of the newly printed *Dao Zang*, "anticipating, and to some degree inspiring, the broad interest in the overall Daoist tradition that would emerge in the sixties" (Giradot 1987:318). Maspero's Daoism research, however, was not published during his lifetime. His death at Buchenwald in 1945 meant that other scholars had to piece together his diverse and detailed notes, and the first French edition of his work did not appear until 1950 (Barrett 1987). In his forward to the English translation of Maspero's *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (1981), Barrett

notes that Maspero represented the last of an era in which scholars were expected to match their counterparts in both depth and breadth (Barrett 1981). The significance of Maspero's work lies not only in the revelation of specific *neidan* techniques and the phenomenology of practice revealed in the ancient texts, but also in Maspero's open-minded, yet even-handed treatment of the material.

During this same period, Richard Wilhelm and Carl Jung combined forces on two popular works: Wilhelm's somewhat free translation of the *Yijing* and his translation of the *Tai yi jin hua zongzhi* (The Secret of the Golden Flower). Jung provided commentary in both volumes. These works achieved tremendous popularity in the 1960s and 1970s and serve as something of a bridge between nineteenth-century popular conceptions of Daoism and the changes that the concept is undergoing in the popular mind at present. Part of the reason may lie in the unusual sensitivity both men showed toward their subject and their reflexivity about the kind of postmodernist angst that characterizes responses to the Orientalist (Wilhelm and Jung 1938; Giradot 1987). The following excerpt from Jung is representative of this reflexivity:

A thorough Westerner in feeling, I am necessarily deeply impressed by the strangeness of this Chinese text. It is true that a certain knowledge of Eastern religions and philosophies aids my intellect and intuition in understanding these ideas, partly at least, just as I can fathom the paradoxes of primitive religious ideas "ethnologically", or as a matter of the "comparative history of religions". This, in fact, is the Western way of hiding one's own heart under the cloak of so-called scientific understanding. We do it partly because of the *misérable vanité des savants* which fears and rejects with horror any sign of living sympathy, and partly because an understanding that reaches the feelings might allow contact with the foreign spirit to become a serious experience. [Wilhelm and Jung 1938:77].

In China, Daoist studies had been an erratic affair since the beginning of the century. The May Fourth period (c. 1919) brought important innovations to

Chinese historiography, including the publication of the seven-volume *Gushi bian* (Critiques of Ancient History), which effectively brought an end to the Confucian classical method (Giradot 1987). Identified with this publication and with the “Doubting Antiquity Movement” that produced it was Gu Jiekang, one of the founders of Chinese folklore studies. During the 1930s, Chen Yinge and Chen Yuan also devoted a small volume to the development of Daoism, though this was based on previous Japanese scholarship (Barrett 1987). In general though, for May Fourth scholars such as Hu Shi and Liang Qichao, “folk” studies had a place only within the larger context of progressive politics and social change. The combination of the Christian missionary movement, “the classical Confucian aloofness” (Giradot 1987) toward “superstition,” the advent of Western social science methods, and the eventual adoption of an officially atheistic, Marxist orthodoxy, meant that Daoist studies as a field was simply set aside for most scholars.<sup>36</sup> Overshadowing all of these factors, of course, was the long period of war that constantly disrupted or destroyed scholarly work.

The appearance of Maspero’s writings in 1950 proved a significant turning point in Daoist studies. Unfortunately, Maspero left no students. However, Granet, his contemporary, did train several scholars who turned their interests to Daoism, including Max Kaltenmark, Rolf Alfred Stein, and Michel Soymié. These scholars in turn trained Isabelle Robinet, Kristofer Schipper, and other members of the current elite in Daoist studies. The prolific output of these

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<sup>36</sup> This was not necessarily the case, however, in popular writings on Daoism. Parallel to the scholarly disinterest in Daoism during the May Fourth period, there was a “scientific rediscovery” of both Daoist texts and practices that began with Jiang Weiqiao’s publication of *Yinshizi jingzuo fa* (Quiet Sitting with Master Yinshi) in 1914. Jiang’s work is based on his experience of using a Daoist *neidan* text to heal himself of tuberculosis. The account is modernist in tone and presents Jiang’s self-taught method in a straightforward, no nonsense way. Kohn (1993) traces the beginnings of the modern *qigong* movement to this text, though we certainly must also include the popularization of martial arts as a parallel route for *qigong*’s introduction to the general population.

scholars insured that Paris would remain the center for Daoist studies in the Western world.

In China, Chen Guofu, an historian of science who had worked closely on the study of alchemy with Tenney L. Davis at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1940s, published an expanded version of a 1949 monograph on the *Dao Zang* in 1963. Other, less fortunate scholars had their work on religion confiscated during the 1950s, and the Chinese Daoist Association, a society that had been formed in 1957, was shut down during the Cultural Revolution. Thus, Chinese scholarship came to an almost complete standstill, at least publicly, by the mid-1960s. Only in the last ten years has Daoist scholarship once again become an important subject in the Chinese academic world (Giradot 1983; Barrett 1987).

The significant expansion of China-related studies in the United States by the 1980s is partly the result of general increases in Cold War-era funding for American universities and partly due to the appearance of several key texts that appealed not only to the academic community, but also to the layman. These included C.K. Yang's *Religion in Chinese Society* (1961) and Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* (1954-). The 1980s also saw the wider dissemination of Schipper's important fieldwork. Regularly billed as "the first Westerner to be initiated as a Daoist priest" (Giradot 1987), Schipper's *Le Corps Daoïste* appeared in 1982 and in English translation in 1993. While Schipper's emphasis on the Daoist liturgical tradition as the "real" Daoism is shared by several of his contemporaries (Strickman 1979; Saso 1978 and 1990), he has been criticized for a "self-assured tone" (Giradot 1983:177) that reveals a certain tendency to proselytize. However, the quality of Schipper's detailed textual work over the last three decades is virtually unmatched.

What this brief history shows us is that the *popularization* of Daoism has had peaks and valleys. In the Europe and America of the 1920s and 1930s, Jung's

and Wilhelm's work reached a large audience of intellectuals and artists. Amongst others, a teenage Woody Guthrie (1943) sat for hours in the Pampa, Texas, local library pouring over mystical" text about Asian religion and philosophy. Daoism's association with particular schools of painting and poetry in China has its equivalent in the attraction of translated Daoist texts for the American artistic and intellectual elite. The real explosion of Daoism as popular culture in Europe and America, however, occurred in the 1960s, when Daoism, along with Zen Buddhism entered the United States through many of the routes that I will describe in Chapter 7. For the first time in American history, there was a critical mass of enthusiastic "native" teachers, opportunity for Americans to seek teachers abroad, exchange of popular culture, and translated texts that could not only support existing interest but generate new interest among a well-educated middle class. Of special importance, this period spawned the largest crop of college students the country had ever seen. Daoism was one among several exotic philosophies that offered alternatives to existing paradigms, and thus made an important contribution to counter-culture ideology. Popular presses like Shambala Books heavily weighted their catalogues toward Eastern mysticism. Editors at Shambala, *Yoga Journal*, and *New Age* magazine not only published based on what they thought their public wanted to read, but often led the way in explicitly or implicitly linking practices like taijiquan with Daoism. It is not that the link between Daoism and taijiquan was "invented" during this period. Wile (1996) shows that the Chinese literati made this link as early as the mid-nineteenth century. But the hunger for alternative spiritual paths combined, to some degree, with the marketing of taijiquan as a "path to ancient wisdom" created a perception among American taijiquan aficionados that there were appropriately ancient little old Chinese men out there waiting to share their secrets. True, some of the knowledgeable teachers who came to America at this time were elderly, small in stature, and male (Zheng Manjing in New York, the great popularizer of taijiquan

in the United States of the 1960s embodied this image for many American practitioners), but the powerful, racialized combination of such images arose largely through the trickling down of Sinological scholarship on Daoism to the general public.

### *The Social Construction of Qi*

For most practitioners, taijiquan tends to be Daoist in general ways rather than specific ones. Because the diagram of the supreme ultimate (*taiji tu*) is the most famous symbol of Daoism, the name of the art itself calls out to a mystical Daoist origin. Indeed, when push hands players engage in two-hand push hands, their hands, arms, and bodies combine to physically form the *taiji tu*. Likewise, yin and yang play key roles in daily practice. For example, in the Wu style, a palm facing up is a “yin palm” and a palm facing down is a “yang palm.” Teachers admonish students that they are too yin (relaxed) or yang (stiff) in their movement or push hands. And the feet are also referred to as yin (empty of weight) or yang (full of weight). Finally, the concept of *qi* (“vital energy”) provides a bridge between taijiquan and Daoism, traditional Chinese medicine, and many other aspects of daily life. While *qi* has many meanings (including “air”), in taijiquan it can take on definite “Daoist” connotations, though this is certainly not the case for all practitioners. *Qi* is also a practical, frequently used concept for teaching and learning how to understand the relationship between breath and movement in taijiquan. The assumed Daoist inner alchemic (*neidan*) roots of taijiquan are thus closely linked to the way *qi* is socially constructed through practice. This is even more the case among practitioners in the United States and Europe, where *qi* is a term imbued with a heavy mysticism closely linked to the kind of popular Daoism discussed above. For such practitioners, simply talking about *qi* evokes racial images, and discussion about *qi* at martial arts tournaments and workshops creates a space for the public ritualization of

Chineseness. For many American practitioners, *qi* is a kind of mantra that gets one in touch with “ancient” wisdom through shared discussion and training. In that sense, it is both socially and experientially constructed.

Because I conceive the social and the sensual as mutually constitutive, I approach the concept of social construction with a light hand. Lavie and Swedenburg critique the anthropologists’ propensity for essentializing social construction, arguing that “even their construction of the social was often indeed an essence” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:12).<sup>37</sup> I generally agree with the critique but, like Patsy, King Arthur’s unfortunate servant in the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, I must emphasize that “it’s only a model.”<sup>38</sup> For my purposes here, social construction is one component of a dialectic that must also include reported experience, or what Varella and Shear (1999) refer to as “first-person” approaches to understanding consciousness.

The *Concise English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary* (1980. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press) defines *qi* as follows: 1. Air; atmosphere 2. Gas 3. Breath 4. Smell; fragrance 5. Airs; manner 6. Spirit; morale. While a dictionary definition gives us a starting point for how to think and talk about *qi*, it does not do justice to the contested, discourse-centered meanings of the word

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<sup>37</sup> Lavie and Swedenburg are indirectly responding to anthropology’s embrace of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman’s landmark 1967 treatise on the sociology of knowledge, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Their basic argument is that “reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes in which this occurs” (Berger and Luckman 1967:1). Berger and Luckman do not claim to have invented the idea of social construction, duly crediting a long line of intellectual precursors (1967:5-18). They consider their attention to the reality of everyday life to be their primary contribution. In much of the anthropological writing that takes a social constructivist position, the paradigm has become so pervasive that Berger and Luckman are seldom cited at all. In my view, anthropologists have found in Berger and Luckman a convincing counterbalance to biological constructivism and have therefore tended to essentialize social constructivism. To be fair to Berger and Luckman, however, phenomenology has a place in their work. They differentiate between “objective reality” and “subjective reality” and are perhaps not so strict in their definition of social construction as many of the anthropologists who have used their work.

<sup>38</sup> In the scene in question, Arthur and his newly recruited Knights of the Round Table spy the castle in the distance. “Camelot!” says one. “Camelot!” says another. “Camelot!” says a third. “It’s only a model,” mutters Patsy. “Shhh!” the Knights reply in unison.

(Sherzer 1987; Briggs 1986; Urban 1991) and the even greater difficulties that an English speaker faces in borrowing a word that really has no English equivalent (see Chapter 7 for my brief analysis of *qi* as a “borrowed” word). One way around these difficulties is to look at the dynamic, ever-changing relationships between various *qi* discourses:

In a *cosmological* discourse, for example, *qi* is a kind of ether, spirit, or life force that permeates the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the body. In a *martial arts* discourse, *qi* becomes a tangible energy to be cultivated within the body as a kind of weapon. Taijiquan is the most popular of the “soft” martial arts associated with this martial cultivation, manipulation, and issuing of *qi*.<sup>39</sup> In a *medical* discourse, *qi* is the bodily energy that is balanced and unblocked through the use of herbs, acupuncture, moxibustion, and *qigong* exercises. In a *textual* discourse, *qi* is part of oral tradition, film, fiction and comic books. It is a romanticized, mysterious force that lives more fully in the imagination than in everyday life. In the *New Age* discourse, *qi* becomes a tool of charismatic healers who use *qigong* and *qi*-related products to conduct mass spirituals or healing sessions. The highly publicized Falun Gong movement, which the Chinese government outlawed in the summer of 1999, is one example of this discourse (Frank 2003). In the *sexual* discourse, *qi* references the preservation of *jing*, (“semen” or “sexual energy”), in order to maintain health, increase longevity, and enhance sexual pleasure. In the *environmental* discourse, most visible in the popular practice of geomancy (*fengshui*, literally “wind and water”), *qi* is something to be read from the land to determine auspicious building locations and configurations. In a social context, these contending discourses shift fluidly one into the other, sometimes separate and sometimes existing simultaneously in the mind of the individual, creating semiotic structure where socially constituted sign

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<sup>39</sup> Properly speaking, one does not issue (*fa*) *qi*, but *jin* (energy) in Chinese martial arts. In theory, *qi* is the source from which *jin* is drawn.

systems co-exist at multiple levels (Hawkes 1977; Saussure 1966). The *taiji tu*, the utility of which I discussed in my introduction, graphically represents this interaction of discourses. At any point, one field of discourse may be yin or yang, dominant or submerged, but their interaction in urban Chinese society is constant and continuous.

As is the case with virtually every aspect of martial arts, the emphasis on specific guiding principles varies considerably between teachers and varies even more between arts. Taijiquan and other so-called “internal” martial arts lay particular emphasis on the mastery of *qi* in the body and the use of *yi* (“mind-intent”), rather than *li* (“strength”). Yet many teachers eschew any discussion of the concepts, considering them to be rather esoteric distractions for beginning level practitioners. Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua and many of their disciples exemplify this school of thought. In their writings and in person, Ma and Wu spoke in only a limited sense about *qi*.<sup>40</sup> While harsh treatment at the hands of the Red Guards during Cultural Revolution (1966-76) may have contributed to their reticence on the subject, they seem to have also genuinely believed that thinking about the *qi* led to distractions and that too much focus on “using” *yi* led one nowhere. Teacher Pang, for example, claims that Ma seldom spoke of *yi* and that *yi* and *qi* were both principles that became clear through constant repetition of forms and push hands practice.

Discussion of *qi* in the wider social milieu, however, is another story. Lexically, *qi* combines with dozens of Chinese words ranging from *shengqi* (“angry”) to *kongqi* (“air”) to *qidu* (“boldness of vision”). The word is so pervasive in the language that the mystical associations non-Chinese speakers associate with *qi* are diluted. *Qi* has no English equivalent that reflects this contextual richness. Yet, even for the native Chinese speaker, *qi* can be a slippery

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<sup>40</sup> That is not to say that Ma did not discuss *qi* more deeply with his intimates. My relationship with Ma was, to my regret, a fleeting one and our meetings were far too infrequent.

concept, particularly when the discussion turns to martial arts and quasi-Daoist esoteric practices.<sup>41</sup> In the context of push hands, the *social* construction of *qi* occurs at several distinct moments: between the two partners who engage in push hands; among outsiders who observe and interpret the push hands event through the lens of martial arts movies, comic books, and novels; and among teachers and students who use *qi* to varying degrees as a guiding concept for how to move the body and how to focus the mind.

Wu style taijiquan keys in to a cosmological discourse on *qi* (and to a modernist conception of Daoism) in some explicit ways. The opening position of the feet in Wu style taijiquan (called, simply, “*pingxing bu*,” or “parallel step”) is generically referred to as a *wuji* (“ultimate void”) posture—feet parallel, weight evenly distributed, knees slightly bent, hands dropped in a relaxed manner at the sides, standing erect and alert, gazing ahead at a forty-five degree angle. This opening stance is at the same time the easiest and the most difficult posture in the sequence of movements that make up the Wu style slow form because it is the embodiment of *wuji*. In Daoist cosmology, a state of *wuji* preceded the creation of the universe, and from this state arose *taiji* (“extreme ultimate”). *Taiji*, symbolized in the *taiji tu*, is the dynamic relationship between yin and yang. *Taiji* is also the *source* of yin and yang. The ever-changing union of opposites comprises the structure of *Dao* (“way” or “road”; Robinet 1997; Graham 1989; Kohn 1993). As the late Chinese American taijiquan teacher and scholar Jou Tsung Hwa succinctly explained it,

The relationship between a person and a piano is *wuji* if the person has no intention to play it. When the person starts to play the piano or even has the

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<sup>41</sup> “Quasi-Daoist” refers to modern spiritual and meditation practices that claim roots in much older esoteric practices, despite lack of textual evidence linking them (or sometimes because of the lack of such evidence, since the implication of secrecy can itself lend weight to claims of authenticity; see Kohn 1989). See Ownby 2001 for a discussion of Falun Gong in the context of heterodox practices; Chen 2003 for a discussion of contemporary *qigong* practices.

intention to play, the relationship becomes *taiji*. *Wuji* then exists before anything happens, for even the intention to act arises from *wuji*. [Jou 1980:78].

*Qi*, in this worldview, permeates the universe and, within the micro-universe of the individual, is the life force that permeates the body.

For the internal martial artist, usually more concerned with the practical than the mystical, *neigong* (“internal practice”) is differentiated from *waigong* (“external practice”) through the practitioner’s understanding of how *qi* actually works in the body – both his or her own body and the body of the adversary. Depending on one’s style of martial art, for example, various supplementary *qi* development exercises (*qigong*) are practiced to enhance one’s ability to sink the *qi* to the *dantian* (“cinnabar field”), a point located approximately an inch-and-a-half below the navel. As the practitioner masters such abilities, he or she relies more and more on *xin* (“mind”) and *yi* (“mind-intent”) to enhance the accumulation and circulation of *qi* in the body. Such exercises have a sometimes-cultish life of their own completely outside of martial arts circles (Falun Gong is the best-known example outside of PRC), but, in various incarnations, they form an important component in the meditative practice of certain Daoist and Chan Buddhist schools (Ots 1994; Chen 1995, 2003).

The difference between *xin* and *yi* is a subtle one. As Ma and Wu explain it,

The word “*xin*” in Chinese denotes mind, that is the activities of the cerebral cortex [sic]. There is a saying in Chinese martial arts, the *qi* is directed by the *yi*. The word *yi* in Chinese denotes sensing. Although sensing is closely related to mind, there are differences between *xin* and *yi*, the former orders and the latter implements [sic]. [Wu and Ma 1988:20].

The advanced practitioner of taijiquan claims to move the *qi* at will to any part of the body, and, by combining this ability with specific techniques, can repel,

bounce back, or divert oncoming force with a consummate economy of effort. But the movement of the *qi* follows *yi*. Thinking about *qi* directly will result in “stagnation.”

*Qi*, of course, is not an energy mastered solely to execute acts of violence. It is also a concept that operates within a health-related discourse, both in terms of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and physical fitness. In the micro-level application of the cosmological principles described above, *qi* as healing discourse is firmly rooted in Chinese medical theory and practice (Hsu 1999). The healing discourse refers to *qi* in terms of energy balance. Because this energy runs along twelve specific meridians, containing several hundred acupuncture points, the TCM practitioner can alter the flow of the *qi* along these points with needles and herbs or with *qigong*, thereby returning the body system to a balanced state. Thus, the modern, slow motion solo form of taijiquan has become famous as a kind of healing *qigong*. The ideal martial artist of old was expected to master healing as well as fighting. Taijiquan as TCM extends beyond the cure of specific diseases. TCM doctors particularly tout it as an effective means for improving circulatory, intestinal, and cardiac problems (Chen 2003; Zee 2002). It is also considered the exercise of choice for the elderly, more as a kind of preventive medicine than as a cure-all. As one retired schoolteacher put it, “I often spend several hours a day in the park doing stretching and calisthenics, playing taijiquan, and ballroom dancing with my wife. I’m really more interested in taijiquan for physical and mental health, rather than for martial skill.”<sup>42</sup>

Amongst all of these ways of seeing *qi*, for the non-practitioner (or the non-patient, for that matter), it is the textual discourse that is the primary source of imagery and symbol about *qi*. An oft-told taijiquan tale of power will serve as a case in point. In this story, Yang style founder Yang Luchan was one day accosted by a band of brigands who beat him with a dizzying succession of hands,

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with anonymous practitioner, summer 1997, Shanghai.

feet, and blunt objects. Yang wrapped himself in his cloak and sunk to the ground. Leaving him for dead, the brigands went on their way. But as soon as they were out of sight, Yang rose to his feet unhurt, brushed himself off, and continued home. The next day, it was reported, the brigands fell ill and several died. The implication here is that the brigands' bad *qi* killed them, or that Yang Luchan somehow killed them through a skillful manipulation of his own internal *qi*. *Qi* is thus transferred ever deeper into the realm of romanticized mysticism.

The New Age *qi* discourse feeds on such romanticization.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the popular, tent show-style mass healings that *qigong* healers engaged in through the 1990s, regular *qigong* programs appeared on Chinese television; large crowds gathered in sports stadiums where *qigong* "masters" miraculously healed the ill and lame with a kind of laying on of hands; and provincial and nationwide *qigong* associations formed to promote physical fitness (Chen 2003; see also Xu 1986). Many of these associations promoted a kind of neo-Daoist or neo-Buddhist cosmology as well, similar in some respects to the White Lotus and other Millennialist movements in China's past (Ownby 2001; Perry 1980). I use "neo-Daoist" in the same sense that the recent coinage of "neo-Confucian" implies a return to traditional values (or values that are seen as traditional through modern eyes) combined with free market economics, but which are also responses to the encroaching pressures of Western values, rapidly changing technologies, and economic reforms.

Edward Sapir speaks in terms of *master ideas*, the central themes that a particular people unconsciously select and value "as intrinsically more [important], more characteristic, more significant in a spiritual sense than the rest" (Sapir 1994:33-4; see also Whorf 1956). We can just as easily speak of a *master discourse* that synthesizes the *qi* discourses mentioned above and that allows the

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<sup>43</sup> See Frank 2003, Barmé 1994, and Dutton 1998 for discussion of the New Age from a Chinese perspective.

push hands player or the observer of push hands to relate the sensory and bodily experience of *qi* to the larger context of how each individual has come to understand *qi*. In other words, each individual will come to the push hands event with a different conception of *qi* or perhaps no conception of *qi* at all. What that individual observes or experiences in the push hands event becomes part of the master discourse. The construction of this master discourse happens at a semiotic level as well as a physical level.

***“Use yi, don’t use li”***

Crucial to understanding how push hands is taught and passed on within the group is the principle of using *yi* (“mind-intent”) rather than *li* (“strength”). A central taijiquan precept that appears in various forms throughout the *taijijing*, the sparse canon of classical Chinese writings on taijiquan, is that “mind directs the movement of the [*qi*], which must sink deeply. Then it [the *qi*] can be gathered in the bones. When the [*qi*] circulates the body freely [sic], without any obstacle, it can easily follow the mind” (Jou 1980:183; see also Wile 1996). When the mind can direct the *qi* to any part of the body, the body instantaneously and unconsciously interprets oncoming force. This interpretation of force entails the development of several types of *jin*, or “energy,”<sup>44</sup> including sticking, following, and listening energy, among others. In theory, the push hands players should never attack, but are constantly listening for the opponent’s *intention* to attack. Over time, the taijiquan player learns to turn the body into a giant, life-sized spring that can absorb energy as it coils, then explosively release energy as it uncoils. By practicing push hands with a variety of partners at many different levels of skill, coupled with form practice and a kind of *qigong* training, the taijiquan player learns to intimately understand and feel *zhongding* (“central

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<sup>44</sup> *Jin* might also be translated simply as “strength.” While I use the translation of “energy,” I acknowledge that in English this has a somewhat mystical connotation that contributes to the “search for the little old Chinese man” complex among non-Chinese practitioners.

equilibrium”) and simultaneously learns to sense the opponent’s center of gravity (*zhongxin*). This involves an active listening, where one is ready and alert.

We can also think in terms of push hands as a kind of communicative act (Hawkes 1977), where the communicative code is a kinesthetic, sensual one, for both partners understand through the use of all their senses and awareness that an attack is underway. This interpretation arrives through the context of circles and spirals of energy that lead the push hands player to differentiate between an attack and, say, a friendly handshake. The practice of push hands, then, becomes a continuous exercise in attempting to get inside the opponent’s circles and spirals, both the mental circles of the opponent’s intention and the circles and spirals actually expressed kinesthetically. In other words, push hands is by no means an intellectual exercise. It is a specific technique for relaxing and sinking one’s gravitational center in the face of oncoming force. The key to advancing in the technique is attentiveness to oneself and one’s opponent. What Ferdinand de Saussure speaks of in terms of language also applies to push hands:

[L]anguage does not offer itself as a set of pre-delimited signs that need only be studied according to their meaning and arrangement; it is a confused mass, and only attentiveness and familiarization will reveal its particular elements. [Saussure 1966:104].

In the Saussurian sense, *yi* equates to “attentiveness.” What Saussure does not address is the moment when signified and signifier are indivisible yet are potentially divided, or, in terms of Daoist cosmology, the moment when *wuji* (complete emptiness) becomes *taiji* (supreme ultimate).

While all this may seem irrelevant to the reality of actually being punched, kicked, or shoved, it is key to understanding how both physical and social power are generated at the highest levels of skill in taijiquan, and, perhaps more importantly, the standard to which Wu style push hands players in Shanghai hold one another, for they consider Ma Yueliang’s push hands skill to have reached a

level where Ma could virtually push an opponent over with *no physical contact*. In other words, Ma could play so deftly with a partner's intent that the partner would simply topple over in a state of distress and confusion. Those who experienced this sensation with Ma described a sense of queasiness or disorientation or even fear. Others described a sense of being unable to move in the moment before Ma knocked them off balance. Indeed, certain internal martial arts related to taijiquan, such as *yiquan* ("mind boxing"), sometimes incorporate push hands practice methods that *prohibit* actual physical contact. The master teacher will *fajin* ("issue energy") from a distance, and the "attacker" will hop backwards, sometimes for dozens of meters. The would-be attacker may even fall over in the manner described by Ma's students above. A version of this hopping action is also part of the Wu practitioner's training. At first, beginners push against a tree with both hands and learn to hop backwards in a centered, alert posture. Eventually, they incorporate this into their push hands training. In a practical sense, the function of the hopping is simply to maintain one's central equilibrium, in order not to fall over. In the more esoteric sense, the person hopping is sensing the *qi* and *yi* of the opponent. Certain teachers will hop out when their students push properly, even though no apparent physical force has been exerted. Others, like Qian, would never hop out. Ma himself apparently did not do much hopping, at least not in his old age, but many of his disciples do incorporate the hopping into their training.

While some would swear by the method of pushing without touching, others consider it a useless training device, reserved for what Ren Nailong, a Shanghai television actor and martial artist, disparagingly referred to as "literati push hands" (*wenren tui shou*). A hulking fellow, Ren demonstrated his meaning one day in 2001 in Shanghai's Haiyang Park. At my explicit request, he agreed not to kill or injure me. We had just begun to push hands when suddenly he grabbed my front arm, pulled me into his chest, and bounced me backwards

several feet. Momentarily shaken, I simply said, “Very formidable” (*hen lihai*). As he was a friend of one of my teachers, he was concerned that he had hurt me, but I assured him I was uninjured (perhaps out of remorse, Ren later graciously secured me an audition for *Flatland* (2001), a joint U.S.-China TV production filming in Shanghai; see Chapter 6 for details of this production). Many other players share Ren’s skepticism and most push hands matches, particularly in formal competition, degenerate into what I have already characterized above as playground wrestling. Handcuffed by rules that disallow punches, kicks, and throws, yet unable to execute proper push hands technique, players simply hold on tight and shove with all their force to throw the opponent out, often tearing clothing, knocking noses, and biting tongues along the way. Things are little better in the park, where egos often get the best of even the friendliest players. Caught in the public gaze, few are willing to follow the fundamental taijiquan precept of investing in loss.<sup>45</sup> Those who do generally stick to practicing set patterns, rather than randomly trying to push the opponent out. Ultimately, if they practice diligently, these same players are the ones who are most likely to be able to handle substantial force when it is thrown their way. A mild insult taijiquan players occasionally direct toward one another is “he/she uses too much force” (*ta yong li*) or “his/her push hands is too hard” (*tade tui shou tai ying*). Where mastery of *qi* and *yi* are concerned such insults are not uncommon in the park on a Sunday morning of push hands practice. The teacher who stays above the fray, never using too much force, never breaking a sweat while bouncing much larger, stronger, younger opponents left and right, never getting angry, acquires status and demonstrates mastery of *qi* and understanding of *yi*. The teacher, in other words, embodies a specific kind of ideal-typic (and, I would argue, racially

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<sup>45</sup> In fact, people often got hurt in the park, though seldom seriously. Teacher Pang often admonished me to “protect myself” (*baohu ziji*) in the park. His initial experience of push hands involved having his face driven into someone’s knee. After that, he considered push hands a defensive art in its own right, not merely training for defense.

marked) *harmony* that not only represents the best qualities of taijiquan, but also the best qualities of being Chinese. Push hands thereby not only evokes an ideal type of martial skill, but also an ideal type of person. The diagram of the Supreme Ultimate graphically symbolizes such harmony, while, as Roy Rappaport describes in regards to the relationship between actions and words in religious performance, the performer “gives substance to the symbol as that symbol gives him form” (Rappaport 1979:200; Sklar 1993:13). And by so doing, the performer-teacher reifies power relations and provides a ground for others to place themselves on a continuum of power. That Ma’s combination of skill and age had this effect on JTA members is apparent in some of the comments that they made about Ma after his death in 1998. Teacher Pang, for example, would often remark in regards to Ma’s level, “he’s not like us.” Pang’s comment went beyond a reference to mere skill: it also encompassed the working-class Pang’s gauging of himself in relation to the well-educated Ma. Likewise, in my conversations with Zee Wen, one of Ma’s long-time students and Ma’s social equal, he often said, “too bad you didn’t get to push with Ma more often. He was really something.”

When a foreigner enters the equation, the ritualization of race through push hands is nuanced in a different way. My own experience with Teacher Qian is illustrative. At a May 1995 gathering in People’s Park, I pushed publicly for several minutes with Qian. Under the circumstances (a public demonstration), I felt compelled to maintain a semblance of good push hands technique, proper hopping, and mastery of central equilibrium. I pushed rather gently and Qian, in turn, bounced me around rather gently. But, since I had spent the previous half hour watching senior students get dramatically uprooted and fired in every direction by senior teachers, my curiosity overcame me, and I quietly asked Qian if I could use *li*, or muscular force.

Qian nodded and agreed in his usual nonchalant way. After some additional bandying, I pushed Qian nearly full force in his mid-section. For a

moment, I felt suspended, as if my body were an arrow notched in a bowstring just before the archer releases it. Suddenly, I found myself reeling backwards in the usual Wu style hopping method, but this time I could not stop myself, as if I had just been released from the bow of Qian's body. By the time I came to a stop, I found myself in the middle of the crowd on the edge of the demonstration space. I had traveled some thirty or forty feet. Qian had not used his hands to push me but had used the principle of “sinking the *qi* to the *dantian*” to turn my force back on itself with the slingshot of his own body. The force came back up through his own body and emerged along the vector of my push. He had uprooted me in a similar manner—actually bounced me off my feet and through the air—countless times before, and, in more private situations, had easily deflected my kicks and punches as well.<sup>46</sup> I was therefore not surprised at the result. Others described similar experiences pushing with Ma Yueliang. In his book on Wu style taijiquan, Zee Wen related the story of one man who had pushed with Ma during a monthly gathering:

One taichi [*taiji*] participant told me, after tumbling backwards, “It’s strange; I could never do a back roll on my own, but Ma sent me into one and I did not hurt myself.” [Zee Wen 2002:112].

In regards to race, what is being enacted in this moment of the little old Chinese man launching the much younger, larger foreigner through the air? On one level, certainly it had nothing to do with race at all. The crowd enjoyed the demonstration of martial skill, regardless of whom was being sent flying. On another level, there is the thrill of the exotic, since one does not see a foreigner engaging in push hands everyday. It is possible that the moment offers a kind of symbolic throwing off of colonialism for some in the crowd. I should emphasize

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<sup>46</sup> I have no particular skill in this regard. How Qian might have fared against a skilled karate black belt or a Western style boxer was a subject of speculation among his students from time to time, though few of them took either of these arts as much of a threat.

that in my conversations with taijiquan players, no one ever explicitly connected pushing foreigners with colonialism. But the topic of the Opium War and China's colonial experience came up with surprising frequency in Shanghai—surprising primarily because the *appearance* of Shanghai is of a city that has overcome the ghosts of its colonial past (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of taijiquan in the context of the city). In *The Uncolonized Mind*, Ashis Nandy remarks that “the West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation” (Nandy 1983:12). In this sense, push hands between the Chinese teacher and the foreign student constitutes a noticeable moment of interpretation. It is a moment attached to a particular feeling: a sudden sense of hyper self-awareness that perhaps one is being seen as “not a human being,” a tittering in the crowd, a sudden realization that whiteness is marked, suddenly experiencing what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to in *The Soul of Black Folk* as “double consciousness” (Du Bois 1969; Bernasconi 2000:182).

As I have mentioned, my focus on race is not meant to imply that no other relationships of power are enacted within the public demonstration of martial *qi* (or that people are not primarily there to enjoy themselves, which they are). When a JTA member has violated some sense of order, push hands offers a relatively painless option for meting out justice. One Saturday in April 1995, Qian had been pushing with his students, rotating them in and out every ten minutes or so in order to give everyone an opportunity to push with him. Present that day was Dr. Lyle Bing, a Shanghai-born marital artist who identified himself as a general practitioner in New Zealand and who frequently returned to Shanghai to work with Ma, Qian, and Chen. Bing also had personal connections to the family.<sup>47</sup>

Bing believed that the only way he could learn to push properly was to use as much force as possible and watch the results. In contrast to the usual

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<sup>47</sup> The nature of that connection precludes me from providing details.

admonition among JTA members of “use mind, don’t use strength” (*yong yi, bu yong li*), Bing often urged me in our encounters to “Push harder! Use more force!” and would not hesitate to do so himself. Bing also occasionally provoked minor altercations with other martial artists in the park who doubted the efficacy of taijiquan. For a time, Qian put up with this. During weekend workouts in People’s Park, he often pushed with tremendous force against all parts of Qian’s body, grabbed at his arms, legs and the back of his neck, in short, tried every imaginable attack short of kicking, punching, and gouging. As far as it went, he still engaged in bounded push hands, but he stretched those boundaries much further than most students would dare to do with Qian in what Shakespeare aptly referred to as “the public haunt of men.” On this occasion, Bing had been taking quite a beating from Qian, being bounced back anywhere from ten to thirty feet and nearly losing his balance several times. Qian rarely used his hands, instead using his chest, mid-section and stomach to bounce Bing away.

Suddenly, Bing placed the much smaller Qian in a full bear hug. Qian responded by stepping in slightly. With a quick turn of the waist, Qian fired Bing into the ground at top speed, like a bullet shot from a gun. Bing lay there for a moment, stunned, then slowly rose and brushed the substantial dust from his *gongfu* suit (he was the only one wearing one in the park that day). The highly skeptical Bing later informed me that in the privacy of Ma’s home, Ma, Qian, and Chen regularly sent him flying through the air in an even more dramatic fashion and that he had witnessed Ma doing the same to Qian and Chen.

After that day, Qian refused to work with Bing any longer, or even to acknowledge his presence. He may have perceived Bing’s actions as some sort of public challenge or he may simply have grown bored with Bing’s unwillingness to adhere to proper etiquette. Qian never discussed the matter with me before his death in 2000, but to all who were present it was a clear show of strength at both a physical and social level. Qian was nearly as famous for the expletives he could

spew in a fit of temper as he was for his push hands, so the general assumption within the group was that Bing had crossed the line. I should emphasize that this sort of event was a rarity. Seldom were problems within the group allowed to go to such extremes. On the contrary, Qian and Chen, who taught side by side in the park, both frequently engaged in spontaneous, light-hearted demonstrations of power. Witnessing (and partaking in) these impromptu demos was one of our great pleasures. The spark usually came from a student who wanted to “test” the teacher and asked permission to do so. The student used substantial force and Qian bounced the force back. Qian then began pointing to different students who each in turn used substantial force as they pushed. After a few minutes, Chen joined Qian and began pushing students in the same manner. The overall impression was one of dueling master violinists. In the shape of his body and in the quality of his movement, Chen had the energy of a snake or a fire hose surging with water, while Qian’s short, rotund body had more the quality of a big, rubber ball or giant spring. Such displays served as important moments in establishing community.

### ***Experiencing Qi***

In the introduction to this chapter, I referred to the reification of *qi* that arises out of interpreting and communicating sensual experience to others. For many taijiquan players, *qi* is not socially constructed so much as bodily experienced. A rich literature has emerged in recent years on the highly subjective sensual experience of *qi*. Thomas Ots, for example, has conducted important research on *qigong re*, the *qigong* fever that spread to an estimated sixty million followers in China in the 1980s. Ots is primarily interested in *hexiangquan qigong*, or Soaring Crane *qigong*, a brand of spontaneous movement *qigong* (*zifa donggong qigong*). In order to support his thesis that Crane *qigong* practice creates a space for a *communitas* of cathartic release, a liminal arena for the

public performance of culturally stigmatized behavior (Ots 1994; Turner 1969; Chen 1995, 2003), Ots quotes liberally from *qigong* journals and news accounts of *qigong*. But it is in letters written to the founder of the Crane *qigong* movement that Ots discovers “an emotional world unheard of in the *qigong* journals” (126):

A woman described how she developed spontaneous movements after four days of practice, and how bodily movements made her become aware of her emotional state:

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I felt a stream of *qi* leaving the earth, lift me upwards and then turn me around in different directions. I had tried for three days, thus I felt self-assured and did not go against it. Suddenly, a force pushed me in the back. I stumbled forward and fell down on my knees. Now I became frightened. I wanted to finish the session, but before I could get up, another explosion of energy hit my front and pushed me backwards. I fell to the ground, and then this energy just whirled me around and around. Again and again, I tried to stop it, but I just didn't succeed. Then, for the first time in all these years, I became aware of all my sadness and shock. I started crying. What a relief! [Ots 1994:127].

In his article, Ots goes on to attest to his own participation in the Crane *qigong* practice and his own eventual trance experience. Indeed, invoking Thomas Csordas and Merleau-Ponty, he eloquently argues for the value of an anthropology where *Leib* (the “living body”) is experienced: “I argue,” writes Ots,

that it is time to reconsider our epistemological tools: the *Leib* cannot be thought of, it must first be experienced. This calls for an approach in *Leib* research where one goes beyond participant observation – ‘experiencing participation’ would be more to the point. [Ots 1994 134; Merleau-Ponty 1964].

In other words, Ots is advocating a kind of dialogic anthropology of the senses that includes elements of Merleau-Ponty's idea of “a primordial dialogue between body-subject and world” (Langer 1989:xvi; for a related discussion of “the dialogic” see also Bakhtin 1996:352). Nancy Chen echoes this sentiment in

her work on *qigong* practice in urban Chinese parks, writing that “the patterns of *qigong* association in the contemporary urban setting are distinct for the mental and emotional relief they provide from the physical landscape of the city” (Chen 1995:348).

In martial arts journals and books devoted to *qigong* training, we find similar personal accounts of *qi*-related experiences. In *The Power of Internal Martial Arts: Combat Secrets of Ba Gua, Tai Chi, and Hsing-I*, Bruce Kumar Frantzis writes about his personal experience of extended standing meditation:

Over time, as the seeds from the practice grew, and as both my internal and external coordinations improved, it was obvious that an internal infrastructure was taking root. From puberty, I had always felt exceedingly uncoordinated, no matter how well others thought I moved. This now changed as my whole nervous system was transformed month by month.

...

I could feel my arms and legs joining in an unbroken, connected way to my spine. Soon, bit by bit, I began to feel the sensations of *qi* in every place in my body. Some time later, I began to concretely feel chi motion emanating from my lower [*dantian*], and feel it actually becoming the motivating force behind the movement of my limbs and hips. [Frantzis 1998:154].

The remaining personal accounts, drawn from my own fieldwork, consist of interviews conducted in Shanghai and the United States between 1988 and 1998

Like Kumar Frantzis, Saul Krotki of Seattle, Washington, and Michael Phillips of Tucson, Arizona, find unique ways of communicating their experience of *qi*. Practitioners and teachers of taijiquan for more than thirty years, both Krotki and Phillips find themselves in an elite group of taijiquan players who were there at the beginning of the current popular wave of *qi* development practices in the United States and who have matured in their own practice to the

point where they experience phenomena that their teachers described long ago or that they have read about in the *taijijing*, the canon of classical writings on taijiquan.

For Krotki “*qi* builds very fine threads in the body,” akin to fiber optic threads.<sup>48</sup> When the fibers line up properly, “they’re terribly auditive. The *qi* has a propelled motion to it.” Krotki also talks about the conscious manipulation of the *qi* in the body, though he does not consider this a crucial element in his practice, commenting that “demonstrations of power are an obstacle to knowledge.” But he does describe an ability to change the color of his hands through conscious commands. “If I press down on the right foot, the *qi* goes to the left hand,” says Krotki. He calls this method “cross substantial” and considers it “very important to the Professor’s [Zheng Manjing] school of thought.” In playing with the *qi* in his own body, Krotki does not think so much in terms of regulation of the *qi* as removing obstructions from pathways.

Michael Phillips prefaces his discussion of *qi* with the caveat that in discussing *qi*, we have to remember “the map is not the territory.” In other words, the moment we start to speak about *qi*, we are already off track a bit. It is an elusive concept that requires modeling from several angles. Phillips is careful to differentiate between medical *qigong* and *qi*-development practices that emphasize martial skill. In experiencing martial *qi* “you feel incredibly heavy” and hard to yourself, but someone else would feel you as “soft and squishy.” When moving, “it feels hydraulic.” Phillips describes the body as a balloon filled with liquid and poses the question, “Why isn’t a balloon filled with liquid crushed when it is subjected to an increase in atmospheric pressure?”<sup>49</sup> The *qi* travels in a wave through the fluid of the body. Here, Phillips’ modeling of the *qi* experience interweaves a modern technological discourse with a traditional Daoist

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Saul Krotki, by telephone to Seattle, Washington, 26 April 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Michael Phillips, by telephone to Tucson, Arizona, 2 May 1998.

conception of “an economy of fluids” interacting in the body (Brownell 1995). In terms based very much on his own bodily experience, Phillips is re-stating and re-contextualizing an oft-quoted adage from the *taijijing*: “The *qi* depends upon the fullness or deficiency of the blood; the blood depends upon the rise and fall of the *qi* ” (Wile 1996:79).

The final description of bodily experience that I will draw on comes from an interview I conducted with Ma Yueliang during my first visit to Shanghai in 1988:

FRANK: Do you imagine circulating the *qi* through special paths during the exercise [of taijiquan] or does this happen naturally after long years of practice?

MA: I don't imagine circulating the *qi* through special paths during the exercise. The classics say, “Motivate the *qi* with the mind and motivate the body movement with the *qi*.” Actually, the effects of practicing taijiquan are three-fold: the mind, the *qi* and the body, both internally and externally with a sudden using of the mind, which in Chinese is *yi*. The classics also state, “Put stress on the spirit, not the *qi*. Too much preoccupation with *qi* results in stagnancy.” This may be difficult for the beginner to understand. For training the *qi*, it is more appropriate to practice “standing like a stake.” The learner is advised not to imagine the circulation of the *qi*.

FRANK: Once you begin to experience the circulation of the *qi* in the body, what do you do? Observe it? Play with it? Try not to think about it?

MA: The student is able to feel the movement of the internal *qi* going through the body, to some extent, after three years of earnest practice. But the learner is still in the early stage of *gongfu*. He should keep practicing as usual.

FRANK: Is it possible in your experience to push a person without touching them through the use of internal energy? If yes, why do people practice this skill? Of what use is it?

MA: Yes. The mechanism of pushing a person without touching the body is quite complex, but never is it mysterious. It is the effect of the

sensitivity of the mind, the *qi*, and the techniques of taijiquan on the parts of both the practitioners, the maturity of the skill of one's taijiquan, which means that one's skill is even more effective and stronger when used in real fighting. [Ma 1988:49].

The statements that Ma Yueliang makes in this interview reflect the odd juxtaposition in Shanghai taijiquan circles between the “traditional” and the “scientific.” Ma was a man of science, a medical technologist by trade (Zee 2002). For him, the empirical observation of the effects of *qi* is part of his personal experience of *qi*, as well as part of the empirical world in which he was trained. Born in 1901, Ma lived on the cusp of change in China's educational system. For people of his generation, a man of knowledge was one who both understood the past and could operate comfortably in the modern world. He is the embodiment of the *mythos-logos* dichotomy that Schrempp (1992) emphasizes in his analysis of Maori myth—in this case translated into the dichotomy of Daoism versus scientism.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have attempted to lay out a basic foundation of what taijiquan is, how it is practiced in a very general sense in Shanghai, and how the historical-social milieus that surround taijiquan create a space for the public and private ritualization of race. I would like to return for a moment to the notion of JTA members as folklorists who are, in a sense, on a collecting expedition, albeit one that may last a lifetime.<sup>50</sup> This is not purely metaphor, for, through their

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<sup>50</sup> I should emphasize here that I am not making a value judgment by calling folklorists “collectors.” The interdependent motivations of collector and collectee make collecting a complex relationship that has advantages and disadvantages for both sides. In the Shanghai of 2001, popular martial arts teachers had learned to both protect their forms from unauthorized videotaping and to strategically market books and video. The collecting I am concerned with here, however, is of a more reverent kind—collecting done out of a love for the art and a respect for the teachers.

newsletters and through their year 2000 commemorative book, JTA members concretely collect folklore about the association. In the urban Shanghai martial arts world, such commemorative books represent a kind of “hegemonic tradition,” in much the same way, for example, Pauline Turner Strong argues colonial American captivity narratives comprised a hegemonic tradition. Citing Raymond Williams, Strong asserts that such narratives offer “a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present” (Williams 1977:115-116; Strong 1999:200). The commemorative book provides a space for JTA members to tell tales of power, to engage in storytelling about the lineage, and in the context of an international meeting and a glossy, professionally produced book, to also tell a story about the link between tradition and modernity. The book itself thus becomes a kind of reification of *social qi*, a receptacle for the enactment of an idealized Chineseness for both the Chinese and non-Chinese people who participated in the meeting and appear in photographs in the books.

The cover of the book has a portrait photo of Wu style founder Wu Jianquan in the upper right hand corner. The rest of the cover consists of a red field on which is super-imposed the diagram of the Supreme Ultimate. On top of that is superimposed an image of Wu Jianquan performing the move “Diagonal Flying Momentum” (*Xie fei shi*). Inside, a welcome message depicts photos of the Shanghai *Qingnian bingguan* (Youth Society Hotel, formerly the Shanghai YMCA) where the first JTA had its home. Photos of old writings by early Wu stylists fade into a spread of the JTA’s newest publications. Pictures of Wu Jianquan, Ma Yueliang, Wu Yinghua and other luminaries follow. Next, the book lists each of the different styles (slow, fast, weapons, etc.) within the Wu system, providing a list of the names of each posture with images of Wu Jianquan doing various postures superimposed underneath the lists on each page. This is followed by a comparative set of photographs: first, photos of Wu Jianquan’s postures followed by photos of his daughter, Wu Yinghua doing her postures, each set of

photos with explanatory notes. Then comes a “tales of power” section, starting with the Wu Gongyi charity challenge match mentioned above, then offering short biographies of various Wu style masters and testimonials. Scattered through these pages are black and white portrait photos of Ma, Wu Yinghua, and other teachers, along with many photos of teachers engaged in push hands. A common shot depicts a student flying off his feet (no women are depicted in this manner). Ma and Wu Yinghua are shown doing push hands together. The book also includes Wu family photos, photos of Ma and Wu Yinghua teaching large groups of students in Shanghai and stories about their lives. The next shows photos of Wu style schools around the world that came to Shanghai for the 2000 meeting. The last few pages of the commemorative book are perhaps the most important for JTA members, for they provide detailed charts of the Wu style lineage from founder Wu Jianquan to the present. The story these charts tell is of clearly delineated discipleships, a finely honed machine that marches through time unperturbed by the chaos of the world. What they do not tell is the story of the pain that lies between the lines of the charts, neither the pain of practice nor the pain of China’s history in the last hundred years. A small part of that story is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Practice: Bodies, Lineages, Alleys

#### IV

A man and a woman

Are one.

A man and a woman and a blackbird

Are one.

—Wallace Stevens

*From* “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”

*Gongfu* in taijiquan is acquired not through dwelling on esoteric concerns about *qi* and *yi*, but through pain, through the process of what Elaine Scarry calls the “making and unmaking of the world” (Scarry 1985). On the one hand, it is the pain at the level of practice—the long hours of practice, the fatigue involved with learning to manipulate the energy in your body from the inside out rather than from the outside in, through hours of solo boxing practice (*lian quan*) and basic exercises (*jiben*). Beyond such pain, however, there is another level of psychic pain with which, in theory, many practitioners of taijiquan in Shanghai must deal before they progress. For the middle-aged and older members of the JTA, this pain is a tangible, everyday part of their lives. Especially for those who suffered during the Cultural Revolution or who remember the Japanese occupation (or both), taijiquan provides a means for dealing with psychic pain. In a way that “foreigners” can empathize with but perhaps can never truly understand, such pain determines in very specific ways what it means to be Chinese. In a phenomenology of race, pain has particular import. As Bernasconi (2000), Alcoff (1999) and others have pointed out, the hazard of unveiling race as a pure social construct lies in minimizing or negating the power of that construct for those who

must live it. The pain that defines JTA members who remember also empowers them.

In that context, the JTA becomes much more than a martial arts association for its members. It becomes a social ritual space for exercising power over one's conception of self. It becomes a place where fantasies of the past are played out side-by-side with the comfort (or comforting fantasy) that direct experience of the world is possible, a fantasy deeply entrenched in modern interpretations of philosophical Daoism. Practitioners note the interaction of yin and yang in the environment where they practice, in the movement of their limbs, and in the internal movement of their organs. In place of a subject and object embraced in a dance of mutual constitutedness, there is *neither* subject nor object. This is similar to the place of phenomena that anthropologist Thomas Csordas describes in his discussion of "somatic modes of attention":

What is revealed by a return to the phenomena—and the consequent necessity to collapse dualities of mind and body, self and other—is instead a fundamental principle of indeterminacy that poses a profound methodological challenge to the scientific ideal. The "turning toward" that constitutes the object of attention cannot be *determinate* in terms of either subject or object, but only *real* in terms of intersubjectivity. [Csordas 1993:149].

In Daoist cosmology, this indeterminate quality of subject and object is modeled in terms of the idea of "three in one." In other words, at first there is *wuji*, the one, out of which arises the two, yin and yang. The three is yin, yang, plus the unity of yin and yang, *taiji*. Thus, the *taiji tu*, the diagram of the supreme ultimate, represents both the separation and the intersubjectivity of subject and object. In terms of the ritualization of race in taijiquan, this relationship is manifested in a conception of Chineseness—in effect, a value judgment about what one is *supposed* to be—that is juxtaposed with direct experience, a direct experience understood only through practice. This state of knowing is the "ideal" in the ideal

type of taijiquan. (Dean 1998; Giradot 1983). To some degree, taijiquan as it is practiced in Shanghai negates alternative, minority identities. For Wu style players, the irony of the negation lies in the fact that Wu style is really a minority (Manchu) interpretation of an ostensibly “Han” Chinese art. Quan You, a Manchu bannerman, learned from Yang Luchan, a Han Chinese martial arts trainer. Yet, the “Manchuness” of the art remains invisible. It is certainly not spoken of as Manchu by the Ma/Wu family members, who are themselves of Manchu origin.

### ***Manchu Invisibilty, White Visibility***

A question arises, then, as to why Manchuness disappears in Wu style taijiquan, whereas, in the case of the Hui minority that Helena Hallenberg describes, for example, certain martial arts are configured as distinctly Hui. In order to understand this difference and to understand the role that invisibility-visibility plays in the daily interaction of learning taijiquan, it is worth going into Hallenberg’s work in some detail.

The Hui are the largest of China’s ten Muslim minorities, but they are distinct in that “they use Chinese in their everyday communication” (Hallenberg 2002:149).<sup>51</sup> Those who call themselves Hui (or are designated as such by the government) are found primarily in Northwest China and Yunnan Province. Hallenberg is mainly concerned with northern Hui martial arts. Hallenberg notes that in the course of her fieldwork, Hui frequently made claims about the Hui origins of certain arts, or, at the very least, considered their transformations of

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<sup>51</sup> One unfleshed out area in an otherwise thorough piece of research is Hallenberg’s propensity for referring to “the Hui” and “the Han.” The effect is to naturalize both groups, as if the very categories do not have historical-political contexts. While “Hui people” technically belong to one of China’s fifty-six official ethnic minorities, the fact that they live throughout the PRC and often marry outside the designation makes “Hui” one of the more problematic ethnic identities in China. To her credit, Hallenberg is concerned with self-designations here and generally sticks to informants who explicitly call themselves Hui.

what they called “Han” arts as making their *wushu* (martial arts) distinctly Hui.<sup>52</sup> Many Hui martial artists told Hallenberg that Hui people became skillful in martial arts because they had to defend themselves against Han people in centuries past, but they were quick to emphasize that “nowadays that need exists no more” (Hallenberg 2002:150). Hui arts share with Han arts certain common origin stories. For example, the Hui tell a story of the origin of *xinyiquan* (“heart-mind boxing”) that is almost identical to the story of Yang Luchan’s secret acquisition of the Chen family taijiquan in Chenjiagou. Among the arts that Hui martial artists consider distinctly Hui are *chaquan* (“Cha boxing”), which is said to have originated when a Muslim hero fought the Japanese with the style. Hui people also establish the Hui-ness of their arts through linguistic modifications. For example, the *Huihuidao* (“Hui broadsword”) is actually the same weapon Wu style taijiquan practitioners call *dao* (“broadsword”).

Hui also establish Hui-ness by forbidding the practice of certain arts popular throughout China. Monkey styles are forbidden because, Hui martial artists feel, they equate human beings too closely with monkeys, a violation of Hui *imams*’ interpretation of the Islamic doctrine of “God having created man from earth” (Hallenberg 2002:155). Hui also avoid drunken boxing (*zuiquan*) because of Muslim precepts against alcohol consumption. Buddhist arts, particularly Shaolin, are also off-limits, but ostensibly “Daoist” arts, such as taijiquan, *xingyiquan*, and *baguazhang* are acceptable, and taijiquan is quite popular among northern Hui. As is the case with Han arts, Hui arts are passed on through family lineages, but practitioners are forbidden to *koutou* (kowitz) to living teachers or to images of ancestral teachers (Hallenberg 2002).

Hallenberg is careful to question convenient divisions between “Hui” and “Muslim.” She sees certain aspects of the martial arts as more about establishing

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<sup>52</sup> In an apparent reflection of Hui usage, Hallenberg uses the term *wushu* in a more general sense than I do in this dissertation. My usage of *wushu* usually comes in the context of competition

Muslim identity (that is, explicitly demonstrating some link to religious custom), while others seem more about setting off Hui identity from Han identity. At the same time, because of their syncretism, she sees Hui martial arts as a way of establishing links to the larger ethnic-political world of Han-ness (Hallenberg 2002:170).

Several characteristics of Hui history and the current situation of Hui people in PRC separate them from the Manchus. Whereas the Manchus were a conquering people who were themselves conquered fairly recently, the Hui have always been a suppressed people in China. And, while there appears to be little stigma attached to calling oneself Manchu in the China of 2001, the historical reality is that in the wake of the Qing overthrow in 1911, many Manchu discarded language, dress, even their family names in order to blend in with the general “Han” population. While it was difficult to firmly identify anyone as actually being “Han,” it was a simple matter (at least in the popular mind) to ferret out (and often kill) Manchus (Crossley 1997). For the Hui, despite certain obstacles along the social ladder because of their minority designation, they need not contend with the same degree of historical hatred from the Han.

The consequence of these historical conditions for the JTA is an almost total invisibility of the Manchu origins of the art. Publications mention that Quan You was Manchu, but that is the extent of the discussion. Family members also mention their Manchuness, but admit that most, if not all, Manchu customs, language, and material artifacts have long-since disappeared from the family. The Ma/Wu family share this invisible history with many families in China of Manchu origin. We can speculate that during the time of Quan You, when the Manchu guardsmen were still members of a ruling class and had their own set of Manchu martial arts that emphasized riding and archery, the introduction of taijiquan to Manchu soldiers might have transformed it into what they themselves

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martial arts styles at tournaments.

considered a Manchu art. Again, no one in the JTA made such an argument during the course of my fieldwork in 2001. Nor is it mentioned in any of the JTA's written materials. I am emphasizing here the noticeable *lack* of discussion of Wu style taijiquan as a Manchu variation of a Han art.

In terms of everyday practice, racial-ethnic invisibility versus visibility are real issues, particularly for a white person who must deal with being a marked category. My contention in this chapter is that the negotiation of racial identity is a historical fact for Wu stylists that allows teachers in the JTA to deal with “foreignness” and “whiteness” in unique ways. I am not making an across the board generalization about the rather artificial designation of “JTA member” here. Rather, I am referring to my personal experience with three different teachers, Teacher Lu, Teacher Pang, and Teacher Chen, each of whom had to deal with their personal conceptions of Han-White difference in their own particular ways.

### ***Teacher Lu***

Teacher Lu and I sipped brandy late into the evening. Occasionally, he rose from his chair to make some point about push hands or to demonstrate some aspect of the form, but mostly we just drank brandy that night, which was fine, because my performance at our afternoon practice had been dismal—a proverbial step backward compared to several of our previous practices. Lu rarely criticized overtly, but his bitterness about the previous government's treatment of his family caused him considerable pain. His home—the very room in which we sat—served to constantly remind him of this pain, for the sitting room and adjacent bedroom were the only ones in the house that his family had retained after 1949. The remainder had been turned into individual apartments, though everyone shared a bathroom and the kitchen. In fact, Lu's family shared the fate of many of the other middle and upper class families who had lived in the French Concession area since before the war. Their relatively sumptuous homes, symbols of wealth and

colonization, had been among the first to attract attention under the then-new socialist government, and the families who inhabited them suffered terribly during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Lu's father, a businessman, had been tortured and eventually died as a result. Lu was a young Western-style boxer at that time, full of hopes and anticipating a college education.

Perhaps my own addictions and demons are what drew me to Lu as a teacher. He was a highly skilled and dedicated disciple of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. His place in the "inner circle" was technically assured, but his struggle to legitimize his position through teaching and practice had really only begun in the last several years following his lay off (*xia gang*) from his job as a heavy equipment operator. Through a series of overseas Chinese and foreign student contacts, along with a small group of Shanghai students, he had slowly begun to build a reputation as a teacher in Haiyang Park. Several other famous teachers taught in Haiyang, among them the *qigong* teacher Liu Jianwu, who had gained a considerable following amongst internal martial artists in the United States and Hong Kong.

We found ourselves on this particular summer evening engrossed in a discussion of Yu Pengshi and the practice of *yiquan*, or "mind-intent boxing." A disciple of *yiquan*'s founder, Wang Xiangzhai, Yu Pengshi had been the Lu family's neighbor. Yu introduced *yiquan* to martial artists in the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 1980s. His wife continues to live and occasionally teach there. When we walked through Lu's old neighborhood, he occasionally pointed out the villa where Yu Pengshi had lived. "His *gongfu* was just o.k. He was a disciple of Wang Xiangzhai. But Wang Xiangzhai was a braggart. While he was living in Shanghai in the thirties, he bragged a lot, but he was finally invited to leave town by some of the other teachers."

The sort of criticism that Lu directed at Wang Xiangzhai and Yu Pengshi often colored our practice sessions. I tended to be old school about criticizing

other arts and teachers; Lu simply spoke his mind. While Lu's criticisms occasionally caused some minor tension between us, my decision to study with several teachers in the group at the same time caused more. This decision came about partly as a result of Teacher Qian's death in 1999 and partly as a result of my desire to get as many perspectives as possible on the forms during my year of fieldwork in Shanghai. The danger lay in being thought of as a "martial arts whore," as one foreign colleague phrased it, who went from teacher to teacher extracting what I could and then throwing them away. Intent on avoiding this label, I restricted my formal studies to teachers within the JTA and made sure that the three teachers with whom I regularly worked—Lu, Pang, and Chen, who all knew one another well—gave their personal permission and blessing to this arrangement. I also kept them informed about other teachers I met, though I never shared the specifics of private conversations. The Shanghai martial arts world is a small one. To survive, one is expected to maintain a healthy respect for other people's private affairs. While the JTA teachers all understood my choice came from a desire to get the most out of the fieldwork, it never quite sat well with anybody, including me. By working with several teachers, I was violating a fundamental sense of order—the supremacy of lineage as a means of categorizing skills and understanding relationships in Chinese arts.<sup>53</sup>

The circumstances of this arrangement were complex. I had had no formal disciple relationship with Teacher Qian before his death. He had asked me to

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<sup>53</sup> I avoid the term "fictive kinship" to discuss lineage within the JTA and other martial arts groups, since the loyalties solidified through discipleship are not mere fictions of family relationships (see Schneider 1984 for a critique of kinship studies; see Amos 1997 for discussion of fictive kinship in martial arts). In fact, even within the JTA, some teachers felt compelled to stay with a teacher for life, while others saw their task in taijiquan as always seeking higher levels of skill, which justified working with other teachers inside or outside of the JTA. Teacher Pang, for example, was a formal disciple of Qian, but considered Ma to be his main teacher. He almost always spoke of lessons he had learned from Ma and only rarely spoke of Qian. Regarding violations of order, then, I was not alone in this regard, but the general rule was to at least make a show of remaining with one teacher, even if it was silently understood otherwise. My violation, therefore, came as much through my openness about the situation as through the act itself.

*koutou* (“kow tow”) to him, in the formal initiation ceremony of the *tudi* (“disciple”) in 1995, but I felt unprepared to do so at the time. When I returned to Shanghai in 2000, I intended to study full-time with Teacher Pang, who had been both friend and mentor under Qian. But Teacher Pang’s work as a crew chief for a large telecommunications firm often required him to travel, sometimes for several weeks or months at a time. I had worked some with eighty-year-old teacher Chen in the past, but he had considerably curtailed his teaching in the last several years, focusing more on form than push hands. Amongst the three, Chen was the acknowledged senior, though he did not always garner the respect one might expect. In contrast to Chen and Pang, Lu had plenty of time and willingness to teach. In the end, I accepted that I would have to treat my time in Shanghai as limited, rather than indeterminate. I proposed to each of these teachers separately that I study with all three. I continue to struggle with whether or not this was the right choice. In the end, perhaps it was simply the right choice for the anthropologist but the wrong choice for the student of taijiquan. As my Swedish friend, Bjorn, put it, “You can only have one teacher.”

When the past did not get in the way, Lu’s teaching was all business. I found this out on the first day I approached him in Haiyang Park to broach the subject of studying with him. While I had known Lu since 1988, when I first encountered the JTA in Shanghai, we had met and pushed hands only occasionally during teacher Qian’s classes at Zhabei Park or People’s Park. In the hierarchy, Qian and Chen were definitely Lu’s seniors, but they also shared the status of being Ma’s *tudi*. He was a regular presence amongst the weekend push hands crowd throughout the 1980s and 1990s. I had heard that he regularly practiced in either Shangyang Park or Haiyang Park, so I made a point of seeking him out in Haiyang one late winter morning in 2001. I found him practicing sword form by himself among some idle playground equipment. I watched for a time. The former boxer was apparent in Lu’s movement. He probably weighed

very nearly the same as he did when he did Western-style boxing in the 1960s. Lu always paid attention to his appearance as well, always wore well-pressed pants, a crisp shirt, and polished, leather shoes. I rarely ever saw him wearing “work out” clothes, though at one point he suggested wearing a white *wushu* uniform for a video session we did together. Lu’s forms were very close to Ma’s, I noted, though he seemed to take lower postures than the Ma I had known in his later years. Lu later explained that Ma’s postures had been lower too until he reached his eighties and his knee began to deteriorate. By then low or high made no difference to Ma, since his taiji had transformed into a higher level of skill. Lu attributed his own excellent form to Wu Yinghua’s teaching, rather than Ma’s, and he was fond of relating the story of how Wu Yinghua would cajole her husband for his form mistakes, but then begrudge him his push hands skills.

I frankly did not know what to expect from Lu at this point. I knew both from personal experience and by reputation that he was highly skilled in push hands, but I had no idea whether or not he took students or how much money he might charge. Lu asked to see my taiji slow form and I performed the first couple of sections. “You’re doing old people’s taiji,” he informed me. “Your postures are fine for old people, but you’re still young. It should be lower.” He then demonstrated the first section of the form, moving through very low postures that reminded me of photos I had seen of Wu Jianquan in Ma and Wu’s basic Wu style form manual. I attempted to go through the postures in the manner that Lu described and found myself tilting forward at times when I should have been holding myself straight up and down and holding myself straight when I should have been tilting forward. My legs, at the age of thirty-nine, were no match for Lu’s fifty-five-year-old body. After this form practice, we pushed hands for a while. Lu remarked that my push hands was “not bad” (*bu cuo*) compared to other foreigners he had met. We discussed some of his past foreign students, one who now lived in Beijing and another who was a well-known tournament competitor

in the United States. Lu also mentioned that a group of students had come over to Shanghai with their well-known teacher from Dallas the previous year and that several of them had learned exceptionally well within a short period. He and the Dallas teacher, it turned out, had been childhood schoolmates in Shanghai, before the teacher's family moved to Hong Kong (the teacher later immigrated to the United States). I had taken some workshops with the Dallas teacher and even interviewed him in 2000. My previous relationship with the JTA and my relationships, albeit tenuous, with other people who Lu knew seemed to put him at ease regarding my seriousness in practicing. He generously suggested a rate of tuition that I could afford and added the single condition that I pay promptly every ten lessons.

The issue of tuition rates among Shanghai martial arts teachers is a complicated one. In the 1980s, when large numbers of foreigners began streaming into the PRC to study martial arts, teachers took a chance by accepting direct payment, so rates were often low or teachers simply taught for free if one showed enough fortitude. By the mid-nineties, Teacher Qian, for example, freely accepted payment, but it was difficult to determine a price, since many teachers still had only the vaguest idea of how much a foreign student might be able to afford to pay. By 2001, the market had become more transparent. While foreign university students generally paid more than local university students, they probably paid less than wealthy Shanghainese business people seeking private instruction. Race may also have been a factor. Rumor had it that Japanese students were charged more than Euro-Americans, and African students, when they studied at all, were charged less. While I never received any sort of confirmation of this allegation (my teachers had only Euro-American students during my fieldwork), it would conform to the general assumption in Shanghai that Japanese were the richest group of foreigners and Africans the poorest. For Lu, the problem of past

relationships and connections outweighed any consideration of race. He needed the money, but he refused to let money get in the way of serious practice.

Lu and I met two or three times per week, either at his home or at one of the nearby parks where he regularly practiced. Lu's schedule and the nature of our practice generally determined our location—we could practice empty-hand forms, sword forms, and push hands in the park, but it was easier to practice spear forms in the alley that led to his house than to carry spears to the park, and he preferred to teach basic exercises out of public view. Lu began his teaching by completely re-vamping my Wu style slow form, a process that I had already undergone on two previous visits to Shanghai—in 1995, when I relearned the form to adapt my Hong Kong-style Wu form to the Shanghai version—and in 1997, when Teacher Pang pointed out differences between Ma's standard form and Teacher Qian's individualized nuances. This deconstruction and re-construction of the postures comes as no surprise to the long-term practitioner of taijiquan. Individual variations between teachers aside, practitioners undergo various levels of understanding the most “natural” way of linking postures. As kinesthetic understanding increases, the forms become more natural. Thus history is passed on through habitual memory. As Casey writes,

Habitual body memory involves “an active immanence of the past in the body.” In such memory the past is *embodied* in actions. Rather than being contained separately somewhere in mind or brain, it is actively ingredient in the very bodily movements that accomplish a particular action. [Casey 1987:149; see also Kapchan 2003; Stoller 1989].

In taijiquan, the teacher's goal is to teach history by teaching the standard frame (*jia*), i.e. the frame that was created and held up as a standard by a practitioner whom others respect, so that the learner can find freedom through form. In this respect, taijiquan is not much different from painting, poetry, and calligraphy, all arts that emphasize mastering discipline before seeking individual

variation (Watson 1971, 1984; Yip 1997). At the same time, like those arts, a great deal of respect goes to those who successfully break free of form to create something new.

In order to transform my taijiquan from “old people’s taijiquan” to “real” taijiquan, Teacher Lu spent a considerable amount of time taking me through low postures, always emphasizing “don’t rise up.” This is an admonition mentioned in the *taiji jing* and every taijiquan teacher tells his or her students “don’t rise up,” but until one experiences a teacher who holds this concept sacred, little real progress can occur in the art. Chen, Pang, and Lu were all such teachers, having studied with Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, but Lu especially emphasized the concept. This made for rigorous, painful practices. Lu would usually start us from the beginning of the form, the “raise hands” posture common to almost every taijiquan style and work slowly through the entire form. From beginning to end, it was not unusual for us take forty minutes to complete a single round of form practice. After several months, Lu had worked me to the point where one day in Haiyang Park we ran through three forty-minute rounds consecutively, for a total of two hours straight form practice. Except at the end of each round, where the form requires it, there was “no rising up.” While Lu showed little sign of fatigue from this marathon, my legs shook almost to the point of collapse by the time we were finished. Two-hour marathons remained a rarity in our practice but eighty-minute versions were quite common until we moved on to an emphasis on basic exercises and weapons forms.

I do not wish to give the impression that Lu was merely concerned with practicing long and hard or that our practice was limited to simply running through the form. While Lu sometimes projected a macho persona, he had learned through long and bitter experience studying with Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua that taijiquan was ultimately about softness, that power could not arise in taiji boxing without it. The sole purpose of our exercise in pain was to provide a

foundation for softness and relaxation. Lu's main command as we practiced low postures was always "relaxed" (*fangsong*). While he often acknowledged that his skills were not what he had hoped by this point in his life, he also noted that he had improved considerably in recent years, since retirement had allowed him to actually practice much more often and regularly (Lu was not alone in this experience; several JTA members expressed the opinion that both Qian and Ma improved considerably after retirement). Lu felt strongly that he could attain Ma's level of skill and often said, "within five years I'll be as good as Teacher Ma." Lu based this opinion partly on recent personal experiences he had had.

"Is it *qi*?" I asked him once. "Can you describe the feeling?"

"It's really difficult to say," he answered. "It's just a very strange feeling."

This would often happen when he lay down to sleep at night, sometimes after practicing some slow form or taiji *qigong* in his living room, but sometimes for no apparent reason at all. Lu also claimed that his push hands had grown softer and had improved considerably. This was difficult for me to gauge, partly because my level of skill did not approach his anyway, and partly because I had never pushed hands regularly with him before becoming his student. Nonetheless, I could say that he often demonstrated a formidable combination of softness and power.

To attain softness was not only a matter of developing a strong foundation through the legs. Proper alignment was perhaps even more important. In fact, many of the older teachers did not seem to rely on leg strength at all to propel opponents away during push hands. Instead, they used *tingjin* to "hear" the opponent's force. Once heard, the force could be turned back on the opponent and amplified, but all this required the consummate understanding of body mechanics with which the form was meant to inculcate the practitioner. Much of our practice in the park and in Lu's alley concentrated on subtle adjustments to shoulders, elbow, knees, even fingertips. The transitions between moves were even more

important—Teacher Pang, for example, often emphasized that the secret to taijiquan was in the movement between the postures, not in the postures themselves.

One day, Lu emphasized a basic principle that had evaded me for many years and that became one of the most important pieces of technical information I obtained regarding form during the entire year. That “the hands should lead the movement” is something that I heard from Michael Phillips, the teacher who first introduced me to taijiquan several years earlier and who has since become one of the most accomplished taijiquan practitioners in the United States. I did not understand him at that time. For years, I had interpreted the precept from taijiquan’s canon of classical writings that “the waist leads the movement” to mean that the waist turned and then, like a string of pearls pulled along behind it, the body followed. In fact, the opposite is true. In order for the waist to “lead” the movement, the fingers, hands, and wrists must first turn to their “natural” position—“seating the wrists” as Phillips put it.<sup>54</sup> This allows the whole body to relax before turning to a new position. The sensation is one of muscles, tendons, bones, and viscera all sinking downward through the joints and into the feet.<sup>55</sup> Lu’s explanation was less exotic and esoteric. He left it at, “you can’t relax if you don’t turn the hands first,” and he showed me that every time one turns in the form, the hands in fact lead the way. Lu made this turning of the hands an explicit, separate step at first. Eventually, we worked on making the movement continuous, yet initiated at the hands. The result of this simple adjustment was to achieve a sense of central equilibrium and relaxation through the shoulders, back, and legs to a much greater degree than I had previously experienced.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Michael Phillips, by telephone to Tucson, Arizona, 2 May 1998.

<sup>55</sup> This graphic description comes from Peter Ralston, an accomplished taijiquan teacher and champion fighter who taught for many years in the Bay Area.

<sup>56</sup> My previous confusion regarding the use of the waist in taijiquan arose because the Chinese word *yao* (waist) includes the upper torso above the hips, including the ribcage. The word *kua* refers specifically to the entire hip-sacral unit. In English, students interpret the command to “turn

On a typical day of training, Lu watched as I ran through the slow form. During our most intense period of form corrections, we would practice short sections repeatedly, rather than going through the form from beginning to end. A variation on this method would be to go through the form from beginning to end, but to increase the number of repetitions of certain postures. For example, “Low Posture,” (*xia shi*), which is normally practiced in only one direction, could be repeated continuously on both sides of the body. Lu mentioned that Wu Yinghua emphasized this method as essential to improving form, since each movement received much more concentrated attention and many more repetitions. In a single round of standard Wu style slow form, for example, “Step up, Fairy Lady Shuttles Back and Forth” (*shang bu yu nü chuan suo*) is performed only four times (once to each corner). In the “repetition” version, the movement could be practiced eight times, twelve times, sixteen times, *ad infinitum*.

Neither Lu nor I were interested in hurrying through the forms. He did, however, often throw more information at me than I could easily digest in a short time. Even with my previous experience, I often needed several weeks to master a move to his satisfaction and this was understood to be merely the basic level of achievement for something that would take me several more years to learn. Lu’s goal throughout was to train me as a teacher. He therefore maintained a fairly high standard and a fairly rigorous practice, though sometimes I believe he relented out of recognition of my limited abilities. Despite such obstacles, Lu kept us on a path that would allow me to learn the complete Wu style basic system, including the slow form, fast form, saber form, double-edge sword form, twenty-four movement spear, thirteen-movement spear, push hands, and basic exercises. Lu emphasized that Wu style was an internally logical kinesthetic that has to be

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the waist” to include the hips; in Chinese, teachers say “*zhuan yao*,” which may mean to actually isolate the hips while turning everything above the hips. The ability to do this in an instantaneous, relaxed manner contributes greatly to the taijiquan player’s stability in push hands.

treated as a complete system in order to be understood. If any one component was missing, the system could not be adequately understood.

As soon as I mastered a movement to his satisfaction, Lu gave me something new to play with. Once I had mastered an entire form (e.g. the slow form), Lu and I discussed what I should learn next. He would usually defer to me in this regard. That is, if I asked to work on spear form or fast taijiquan, he would defer. He did, however, often give me surprise “quizzes,” asking me to run through certain forms that we had not practiced together for several weeks in order to test whether or not I was actually practicing these at home. Generally, I passed these quizzes, but all too often, I discovered gaps in my practice only when I failed to perform well in front of Lu. This was the case with form practice. Push hands, which I tended to favor to the neglect of form practice, generally escaped such quizzes, since it was a two-person exercise and it was understood that progress was measured in a different way.

By summer, Lu and I were fully immersed in the spear form. In Shanghai’s brutally hot and humid summers, I would sometimes last only an hour wielding the spear in Lu’s alleyway. Practice there consisted of going through a series of basic spear exercises, endless repetitions until my arms and legs began to feel numb and ready to collapse. At these points, sweat dripping from my skin, my clothes soaked, Lu would go upstairs and emerge a few minutes later with his plastic, China-shaped tea set. We would down several cups of hot, green tea and, energized, return to the practice. In the first few weeks, I was unable to lift the spear with one hand for more than a few seconds. With daily practice, I incrementally improved my one-handed spear holding. The spear form, which is performed in more or less straight lines, took up about half the length of Lu’s approximately thirty-meter alleyway. There was a considerable amount of foot and bicycle traffic in and out of the alleyway, which dead-ended near the doorway to Lu’s home. Since our practice generally occurred in late afternoons, the postal

woman often bicycled up to deposit the mail. A serious woman who wore her uniform with unusual polish, she at first looked upon the scene with what I took for disdain, but after several months of watching us sweat through these rituals, she occasionally smiled as she wheeled her Flying Pigeon bicycle around with its heavy load of mail. It became instinctual to pause in our practice when people passed by. Lu's neighbors sometimes joked with us and, as time passed, occasionally complimented me on my improvement and said that I was "*hen nuli*" ("very hardworking"). I, of course, knew about all the missed opportunities to practice, the self-indulgences, the succumbing to little temptations like VCDs and Oreo cookies that blocked my way and made me wonder whether I would have been better off doing some sort of more "traditional" fieldwork in a remote village somewhere. I knew of these things, but they did not, so I simply smiled and gently admonished these neighbors for exaggerating. Anyway, what they generally saw was simply the endless repetition that constituted the core of the training method.

In practice, attaining a "sense" (*ganjue*) of the movement receives the same emphasis as repetition, and this sense is not something that the teacher could impart. I often found myself asking Lu questions about particular principles and he would simply tell me to practice the movement. After several days or weeks of practicing, he might notice a change, and then, without me bringing it up, he would answer my original question. For him, I had to reach a certain moment of sensual, kinesthetic understanding before I would even understand the answer to the question. Lu once revealed to me that Ma taught in very much the same way, sensing when students had reached a level of understanding that allowed new information to be passed on.

Of equal importance to our forms practice was push hands. Though I had learned all of the basic Wu style patterns many years earlier, Lu felt it was important to concentrate on basics and took me back to the simplest, one-hand push hands patterns. Lu also incorporated a kind of "full-strength" one-hand

pushing that he claimed came from Ma, but which I never practiced with any other teachers. In this method, Lu and I attached hands and each in turn pushed against the other's wrist with all our strength. The defender's aim was to maintain space between his defending arm and body. At first, Lu easily collapsed my circle, but after several months, I began to learn how to mentally fill the circle and it became more difficult for Lu to penetrate. We concentrated on such one-hand patterns for several weeks, though we would also run through the basic four energies (ward-off, press, push, divert) and the thirteen hand operations of the Wu style push hands, which trained additional basic energies (e.g. pulling, plucking, shoulder stroking, etc.). At some point, Lu would "break" the patterns and begin pushing freestyle (i.e. with no set hand patterns), easily, but gently uprooting me. He would then require me to do the same to him—push him with enough force to uproot him. These uproots were accompanied on both sides by the distinctive Wu style hopping backward method, which enabled practitioners to maintain central equilibrium. In the hopping method, one would absorb the push into the foot bearing the weight, and then allow this force to actually bounce the body backward. Some practitioners would bounce at the mere intention of a push, while Lu and others eschewed unnecessary hopping as counterproductive and would require an actual, physical push before they hopped. In either case, the method was meant to train the interpretation of energy. Generally, after I pushed Lu two or three times in this way, instead of hopping, he diverted my push and somehow turned the force back on me, causing me to break my own root and thus hop out myself. I, in turn, took two or three pushes in this manner, then attempted to divert his push.

In the park, Lu's other students occasionally joined us for push hands practice. One of these, a man about Lu's age who seemed to always be nursing a chronic bad knee, pushed at about my level of skill, which gave us an opportunity to understand something about our own energy. Lu generally kept us within the

bounds of patterns, but occasionally asked us to really push with the intent of defeating the opponent. Another student, a construction worker in his early twenties named Tianshu, showed up on rare occasions. In the sense that he had great difficulty hearing Lu's energy and consequently often fell to the ground while pushing with Lu, the young man was somewhat less experienced than I was. At first, when Lu required the two of us to push together, I did not have the neutralizing ability to adequately handle Tianshu's aggressive pushes. By the end of 2001, however, probably as a result of my comparatively regular practice, Tianshu could no longer push me over easily. He still continued to fly to the ground when Lu pushed him. Sometimes I wondered if they had set this up for the benefit of the people in the park, but the same thing happened in Lu's alleyway. Tianshu absorbed Lu's pushes at several points on his body, too many points to process all at once. He had not yet developed his *tingjin* to the point where he could consistently understand where the push was coming from. Only slightly ahead of him in the game, I had generally figured out how to stay on my feet in a push hands situation, though my minimal abilities precluded any showy displays of magical powers.

What became apparent regarding push hands was that the combined, systematic practice of form, basic exercises, and push hands had definite physiological benefits. Regular, aware practice yielded the benefit of experiencing a "zone" in push hands with increasing regularity. In this zone, my joints felt loose and every part of my body felt heavy. I had a clear awareness of the bottom of my feet, a clear sense of a root (*gen*), and became difficult to push over, or, when pushed over, I continued to feel in balance. These moments were rare in Shanghai, but, as I continued to practice after my return to the United States in 2002, they became increasingly frequent. Accompanying this awareness of change was a *lack of awareness* about that change. Feelings of intense dejection arose when, for a fleeting moment, I seemed to understand some elusive principle

in push hands, and then it was gone. After one year, it seemed that my push hands had only marginally improved. At times like these, Lu argued that my *tingjin* had improved rapidly considering the short duration of my practice and that taijiquan was an art that could not be rushed. Pang often echoed that theme in our intense weekend push hands meetings.

On average, Lu and I practiced for two hours. At times, he stretched this into three; at others, he cut it short to one. Lu generally asked me to come in to share tea and conversation inside his sitting room. If his wife were present, she would join in. In times of bad weather, the small sitting room became our main practice space. It afforded just enough room to do basic form practice and plenty of room to do stationary push hands. Occasionally, Lu and his wife invited me to stay for dinner, an event usually accompanied by brandy. As the brandy flowed, the conversation turned from martial arts to many other subjects: the Lu's son, who was attending college overseas or the comparative politics and history of the United States and China or the world economic situation. Teacher Lu would not shy away from any subject. During the US-China spy plane incident in the spring of 2001, Lu was one of the few people I knew who speculated on the causes of the mid-air collision that led to the political crisis. Lu did not consider himself an educated man—in fact, felt that life had cheated him somewhat in this regard—but, like many Shanghai people, he kept up with world events, and, to the degree possible in China, with the domestic news. Inevitably, our conversation returned to martial arts. Lu often told stories of his days studying with Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. He also gave his (generally negative) opinions of other martial arts and martial artists. Lu would always invite me to express my own views on these matters and seemed unconcerned if I disagreed. He generally used these conversations to ask me about my experience practicing with Chen and Pang and my dealings with other teachers both inside and outside the JTA.

“So you saw Liu Jianwu in Haiyang Park the other day?” Lu once asked me.

“Oh, yeah, I saw him. I was practicing at lunchtime and I saw him there.”

“Did you push hands with him?”

“Just a little.”

“So what did you think?”

“He seems pretty good. Very relaxed.”

“He doesn’t have much *gongfu*.” And Lu proceeded to show me what he considered the major faults with Liu Jianwu’s push hands. He seemed to feel that Liu was a spiritual fellow, adept at Buddhism, but he did not have much martial skill.

“Liu Jianwu practices with me sometimes. He wants me to show him push hands.”

I, of course, was just as interested in getting Lu’s opinion about many of these same teachers and, while I was always careful to protect confidences, often cross-checked information with him that I had heard from other sources. He, in effect, was cross-checking with me as well. There is a considerable amount of rivalry and jealousy among teachers and lineages in Shanghai, as well as a degree of animosity between lineage-oriented groups and the state-sponsored martial arts academies and physical education college martial arts departments.<sup>57</sup> Generally, teachers and students from various styles respect one another’s position, but occasional actual fights or intentional injuring arises out of these rivalries. My conversations with Teacher Lu often helped me sort through rumors that I heard about various teachers.

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<sup>57</sup> These schools generate the bulk of China’s competitive martial arts athletes. The athletes often become coaches themselves. Because of their position within the state sports bureaucracy, they are often able to reap benefits unavailable to other teachers. At the very least, they are paid to do martial arts, whereas many members of non-professional martial arts associations like the JTA are usually unable to practice full-time until their retirement or, in the case of Lu, lay offs from a job.

Regarding cultural matters, Teacher Lu generally deferred to his wife. Mrs. Lu was an excellent painter (in the style of Chinese traditional painting). One of her finer works hung in the sitting room, on the wall above the dining table. From the sofa opposite the wall, I often admired the delicacy of her brushwork. One night, as we ate and drank, Teacher Lu remarked, “we are accomplished in the cultured and the martial (*wen-wu quan cai*).”<sup>58</sup> He pointed to a bit of calligraphy that a previous foreign student had commissioned for them with the characters for “wen” and “wu” rendered in broad strokes of black ink. As if to underscore its point, a small collection of pottery sat on a table beneath the calligraphy and several other pieces were scattered about the room. Next to these, Lu’s collection of swords, spears, and other exercise equipment complimented the pottery.

As I mentioned earlier, Lu seldom directly addressed racial difference in our practice, but one incident brought home to me the significance of race in my relationship with my teachers in Shanghai. As early as 1995, Teacher Qian had taught me part of a set of basic exercises that I had never seen before. I never learned the set thoroughly, and the lack of emphasis that Qian placed on the exercises did little to inculcate in me a sense of their importance in the Wu style system. Lu watched me practicing these exercises and once remarked that they were generally not taught to foreigners. Again, my response was momentary shock that my whiteness factored into the equation of practice at all. After a few seconds, I realized the absurdity of assuming that somehow the locals did not notice I was white. My shock turned to wistfulness. Somehow I had convinced myself over the years that old Teacher Qian had overlooked my whiteness back in 1995. He had, after all, taught me “secrets” before he died. But sweating there in Lu’s alley, I realized that this was not the case at all. In fact, there was a great deal

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<sup>58</sup> My notes are unclear on Lu’s exact wording. He may have said, “We are a cultural and martial family” (*women shi wenwu de jia*).

that Qian *hadn't* taught me for reasons I would never know. Why had I expected him to? I realized I was still prisoner to my romanticism. I still had not escaped the search for the Little Old Chinese Man. While I harbored no hopes that my Chinese teachers could forget my whiteness, I became convinced that my own continued racialization of the practice was the biggest obstacle to progress. Yet, at the same time, to ignore the social and cultural contexts of the practice would also lead me down the wrong path. It seemed an unsolvable conundrum.

### ***History and Method***

In the world of martial arts, there are as many training methods as there are teachers. Taijiquan is no different in this regard. Taijiquan training methods have shifted along with historical and social changes in China. In the nineteenth century, when various internal martial arts began to coalesce into what is now known as taijiquan, the training was one component of a larger martial agenda. At the very least, taijiquan instructors taught peasants basic empty-hand and weapons methods to defend themselves against marauding warlords and gangs of bandits. Yang Luchan, whom I mentioned in my introduction as a key founder of modern styles, is purported to have been the chief martial arts instructor to the Imperial Bodyguard, where he surely taught officers and soldiers who had already attained considerable martial prowess. Some practitioners argue that taijiquan is an art that developed out of armored combat and probably originally emphasized weapons training over empty-handed fighting. Indeed, for anyone who has both fenced and studied push hands, the resemblances in terms of both strategy and the use of “energies” (e.g. “sticking” and “diverting”) are inescapable. As taiji branched into different family lineages, the training emphases also diverged. According to Chen family lore, the art continued to serve an important function for village self defense well into the twentieth century. The Yang family, however, seemed to have taken the art in a different direction, one more concerned with individual

self-defense than with actual combat. As was the case with many family martial arts, when firearms began to displace traditional weaponry in the military arsenal, martial arts more or less ceased to serve combat function, and, as Donahue points out, became more about “art” and less about “martial” (Donahue 1994). That is not to say that contemporaries did not consider them systems for training self-defense. They were, but the scenario shifted from the battlefield to the city street.

By the early twentieth century, particularly following the Chinese revolution and the overthrow of the Qing Emperor in 1911, taijiquan underwent yet another transformation, branching into an “authentic” road that emphasized intense martial training and a “popular” road that introduced modified solo forms to the general public. This change came about in tandem with the new Republican government’s desire to become a player in the international community, combined with a policy to encourage a sense of nation among a linguistically and geographically fragmented population. Teachers opened their schools for the first time to wealthy businessmen. Wu Jianquan, for example, taught classes on the Tenth Floor of the Shanghai YMCA to a clientele that held equal interests in martial arts, tennis and swimming. This brand of taijiquan was part of a gymnasium movement borrowed more or less intact from the colonial powers that continued to control Shanghai (Brownell 1995; Morris 1998).

At the same time, Wu Jianquan and other teachers continued to teach the martial aspects, as well as methods for training internal energy, to a select group of disciples, both in and outside the family. For outsiders, access to those family secrets had to be earned and *tudi* (“disciple”) status was not granted easily. In a lifetime of teaching, Wu Jianquan probably only had a few dozen *tudi*. Likewise, Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua had only a few dozen each, and, among these, even fewer attained a high level of skill.

All of these factors contributed to a more or less standard training method that exists today both inside and outside of China. My own training history is

typical. In 1979, in Tucson, Arizona, I spent about six months learning a Yang style short form developed by Zheng Manjing, then learned some rudimentary push hands forms from Zheng's style. Early on, I also learned some simple, basic stretches and occasionally did "post standing" (*zhanzhuang*), a kind of standing meditation where the weight is on one leg and the arms are held out in a circle in front of the body. By the end of my second year, I had learned a short stick form and a double-edged sword form, along with a few basic punching and kicking drills (these latter techniques are atypical among mainland Chinese taiji practitioners, with the exception of Chen stylists in and around the Chen family village; also, taiji fighters who train for tournament full-contact matches obviously learn fighting techniques early on). I also did more intensive post-standing during this period. After my third year of training, I moved to the Bay Area and studied at the Wen Wu School for a short time. That school, which taught both hard Shaolin styles with high kicks and a relatively rare taiji style called the Guangping Yang style, emphasized intensive stretching and other warm-up exercises, as well as intensive "post holding." I also briefly became involved with another school that emphasized sparring, but I did very little sparring myself.

In Hong Kong in 1987, I began studying Wu style taiji and once again learned basic stretches, the slow form, and one or two weapons forms, along with some push hands patterns. When I encountered the JTA for the first time during that period, I went through a similar process, although my initial interest was in push hands. When I returned for six months in 1995, Teacher Qian completely renovated the form I had learned in Hong Kong. This involved a combination of group and one-on-one practice.

In Shanghai, new practitioners follow a similar pattern. They generally begin with basic exercises—usually stretches and stance postures similar to post holding—then begin practicing a version of the slow taijiquan. The three major

styles of taijiquan—Chen, Yang, and Wu—approach the form training in slightly different ways, but few teachers question the logic of teaching forms before, say, sparring or push hands. There are some exceptions to this rule. In 1995, I once asked Qian what he thought about teaching push hands right away. He said that he had no problem with it, as long as students learned form at the same time. In 2001, Teacher Chen gave a similar response.

### ***Teacher Pang***

Both my process of learning from Teacher Pang and my relationship with him differed markedly from what I experienced with Teacher Lu. Pang and I had been friends before I began to call him “teacher.” I met him in the winter of 1988 when I first came to Shanghai. At that time, he practiced every weekday morning with Teacher Qian in Zhabei Park and every weekend morning he practiced with the group in People’s Park. Among the Wu style players, Pang was one of the few who understood early on that there was little difference between solo forms and push hands. When Pang pushed, he often appeared to be using specific postures from the form. In addition, he had tremendous *tingjin*. Any use of excessive force would have unpleasant results, and those of us who pushed regularly with Pang had to learn how to push softly and quietly. In fact, Pang’s secret, aside from innate talent, lay in his work ethic and his inclination for precision in everything he did. While other would-be teachers spent a considerable amount of time *talking* about technique and coaxing their opponents into playing their game, Pang remained silent and simply let his partner make mistakes. Pang was always willing to push with the foreign students and taught so well that many of them would naturally gravitate toward him. His relationship with foreign students later became a source of resentment for Teacher Qian.

Generally, because of his soured relationship with certain members of the JTA (and the great distance he would have had to travel to practice with them),

Pang stayed away from practice in the park after 1997. In 2001, he came to People's Park, a central hub for Wu activity on the weekends, perhaps half a dozen times. Even when we worked alone, Pang preferred to teach inside. For him, a secret was a secret, and if certain aspects of push hands had been communicated to him indoors, he preferred to pass them on in the same manner. I once asked Pang how he defined a "secret," since it seemed that so many of the secrets taijiquan people talked about were actually written in books. Pang replied, "A secret is something that isn't written down."

In 2001, Pang and I generally met once or twice per week on the weekends. At first, Pang helped me work on my fast taiji, but as time went on, we worked almost exclusively on push hands. We usually practiced in my home on Saturdays, late in the afternoon after I returned from morning practice at People's Park and after he had met with his other foreign student, Cal. In fact, I had met Cal during my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 1997. Cal had met the Wu style group the previous year, and Pang and Cal had worked together continuously for five years. The intensity and length of their relationship had yielded great results for Cal. Other JTA members frequently commented to me that they wished he would come out to the park more often because he was the most skilled of the foreign students they had met. Cal had originally started with Teacher Qian several years earlier and through the People's Park group had met Pang. At some point Qian became convinced that Pang was trying to steal away his foreign students and, one day in People's Park, Cal felt that certain students of Qian were deliberately trying to injure him during push hands practice. This was the immediate incident that led to Pang and Cal eschewing park practice for indoor, private practice. Because Pang was working on different things with each of us, he preferred to teach us separately, so, despite our common teacher, Cal and I seldom met to practice together. Occasionally, in Teacher Pang's absence, we would meet to push hands, but this often turned into more of a social occasion

than serious practice (Cal usually had a stock of high quality coffee on hand, which he meticulously ground by hand—and generously shared).

While Pang's out of town trips were frequent (as were my own), we usually stuck to our weekend schedule. Our normal routine started with a cup of tea or instant coffee and a brief chat. While these chats would sometimes touch upon personal matters, we quickly moved back to the topic of taijiquan, Teacher Pang's favorite subject. As time went on, I acquired a decent collection of taijiquan books, and we would sometimes leaf through these books, comparing photos of postures by various famous Wu style teachers or, less often, looking at other styles. For a short time, Pang tried to take me through a well-known book by the famous Wu style master Wu Gongyi, a son of Wu Jianquan who many considered the chief inheritor of Wu style taijiquan. Wu Gongyi had primarily established his reputation in Hong Kong, so there was a certain degree of rivalry between the Hong Kong branch of the association and the Shanghai branch (this spilled over to the Toronto branch of the Wu family, which traced its lineage through Wu Gongyi). Pang would usually choose a line or two of Wu's text, explain it, and then demonstrate the principle as he understood it.

Pang's demonstration of a point was usually enough to get us on to our feet and pushing in the small space of my sitting room-bedroom. In a similar manner to Teacher Lu, but to a much greater degree, Pang emphasized going back to basics with our push hands and constant practice of the one-hand push hands methods. While Lu was precise, Pang was obsessive about precision, and when we practiced, we explored every permutation of the one-hand push hands. We often used Ma and Wu's push hands manual (in English, with photographs) as a reference. Pang would demonstrate a technique, then open the book to the appropriate page and point to a photograph of Ma and his son, Ma Jiangbao, pushing in precisely the same manner. The fact that both Pang and Lu emphasized the one-hand method at first made me wonder if they had

communicated with one another about how to train me, but I later concluded that they were simply teaching as they had been taught and, realizing that I had never spent sufficient time with one-hand push hands, took me back to square one. Pang emphasized that the one-hand methods together required a minimum of three months practice, at least twice a week, and that each subsequent push hands method also required several months of practice in order to fully understand the movement and develop *tingjin*. As it turned out, we did concentrate on the one-hand methods for three months, though, as was the case with Lu, we would always review the four basic energies and the thirteen hand methods as well, since I had studied them in previous years.

Pushing with Teacher Pang was a unique experience. I had seen him progress from a technically expert push hands player in 1988 to a level of mastery in 2001. There was nothing overtly different about him, except perhaps a little less reliance on joint locking techniques as his *tingjin* developed. Yet, he now manifested a quality that had not been there before. My Swedish Wu style friend spoke at times of the importance of working with a teacher with the right *qi* (my friend referred to *qi* with a certain degree of irony). His intention was not to wax esoteric, but to make a point about not only the technique one learns from a teacher, but also the spirit one acquires from that teacher. My friend claimed that he felt this sort of connection with Ma Yueliang and that when they pushed, the feeling was tangible. I believe my experience pushing hands with Teacher Pang was something akin to this. When, in the course of push hands practice, we connected at the backs of the hands, I often experience a sensation of deep relaxation. At the point of contact, there appeared a discernible warmth or even a slight vibration just at the edge of consciousness, like sensing a sound without actually hearing it. I occasionally experienced this feeling with other push hands players too, including, later, some of my own students in the United States. If one push hands player set the proper, relaxed pace, and the other followed with a

relaxed mind, as well as body, then it was possible to reproduce this feeling of intense relaxation. Other push hands players in Shanghai, both foreigners and Chinese, described similar experiences to me. Some referred to it as sensing *qi*, but others seemed to studiously avoid the term *qi*.<sup>59</sup>

It was not unusual for us to push hands for two hours continuously without noticing the passage of time. If neither one of us had immediate plans, I would then cook a simple meal or, more often than not, we would take the elevator down from my twelfth floor apartment to a noodle shop around the corner. There we usually each ordered a simple bowl of noodles with sesame paste and perhaps a can of coconut juice or a pot of tea. Our conversations turned to subjects other than taiji: his son's performance in school, the rigors of travel associated with his job, my wife's teaching gig in Thailand, Cal's wife's pregnancy, possibilities for traveling to America. The latter subject came up often. Teacher Pang had already experienced his share of unsuccessful attempts applying for visas at the U.S. consulate (see "Introduction"). Over several years, Pang, Cal and I had strategized more than once about how to convince the consulate that Pang would indeed return to China. So far, we had had no luck, but Pang had at least had the luck to travel to Switzerland in the spring for a week of training for his job, his first trip outside of China. We continued to harbor hopes that the foreign stamp in his passport would make obtaining the U.S. visa a little easier. The events of September 11, 2001, however, removed any possibility of quick visa fixes.

With Pang, it was always a challenge to find a way to reciprocate. Cal had been able to find Pang a job with a foreign company and had tried to help him

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<sup>59</sup> During 2001, I heard much less discussion of the term "*qi*" in the context of taijiquan than I had in previous visits to Shanghai between 1988 and 1997. I am only speculating here, but it seemed that the Party crackdown on the *qigong*-based spiritual movement of Falun Gong and other popular, mass *qigong* movements led to a tendency to disassociate taijiquan from these systems in a variety of creative ways, including dropping frequent references to *qi*. No one ever explicitly made this connection in conversation, but taijiquan players did occasionally criticize Falun Gong in my presence, perhaps assuming my status as a Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences research scholar had put the eye of Big Brother upon them.

secure a visa several times, but I had neither the material wealth to properly compensate Pang for the treasure he dispensed nor connections. Since Pang would accept no money or gifts for his teaching, I finally suggested that tutoring his teenage son in English might be beneficial for everyone. At first, Pang's son seemed amenable to this, and for two months, I traveled weekly to Pang's home on the Southern outskirts of Shanghai.

On one such night in mid-summer, I got off the bus at its terminal stop, a wide thoroughfare surrounded on all sides by the concrete housing estates where most of Shanghai's legal working class resided. At the entrance to Teacher Pang's housing estate, the lights shown brightly from a newly opened supermarket and a few vendors sold house wares, fruit, newspapers, and other practical items. I bought four cans of coconut juice and made my way through the alleyways that led to Pang's apartment. I asked a news vendor in one of the small kiosks inside the complex if he had any martial arts magazines. He said that there was not much call for them. On summer nights, the housing village was full of life. Children ran through the alleys kicking soccer balls. Old people sat in small groupings chatting and fanning themselves. Many had seen me often enough not to register surprise. For others, the presence of a foreigner in the complex was a highly unusual event and met with some suspicion. I did not speak to anyone and no one spoke to me. Under other circumstances, I might have, but I always worried that if these people knew who I was going to see, it might somehow cause trouble for Pang and his family.

I mounted the dark stairway up to Teacher Pang's apartment. His building lay at the far North edge of the complex. On the other side of the fence, a building was going up, and, as was the situation with most construction projects in Shanghai, the noise never stopped. As I climbed the steps, the sound of jackhammers reverberated off the concrete walls and the bright, flickering light of welding irons lit my way. I knocked on the door and Mrs. Pang answered. She

always had a simple “ni hao” waiting and a smile. I squeezed into the narrow entry, slipped off my shoes, and greeted Teacher Pang and Jin, who addressed me as “Uncle Adam.” Handing off the juice to Teacher Pang, he admonished me for standing on courtesy (which, in fact, I rarely did) and invited me to sit. He slipped into the kitchen for a moment and I looked around the small living room of the two-bedroom apartment. It always astonished me how dismal the outside of these government housing units could be, yet how warm the people who lived there managed to make them. In the Pang family home, the furnishings were simple, but good quality tile covered the floors. Across from the kitchen, a wooden cabinet with delicate glass doors enclosed several shelves of books. Attractive wood molding gave the room a warm feeling (I suspected the molding had come from Shanghai’s popular IKEA outlet or one of the many family-run interior design shops that seem to have popped up in every corner of Shanghai). To my right, a new computer sat atop a small desk. For the most part, this was Jin’s domain, though in fact he had his own bedroom in the apartment. The entire apartment probably occupied no more than 300 square feet, but it was far roomier than many of the older, box-like apartments that still filled much of inner-city Shanghai, especially in the French Concession area and the Old Walled City, though even these were rapidly being replaced with new housing, often forcing current residents to the outskirts of the city. This had been the case with Teacher Pang’s family. Space and relatively modern conveniences were the trade off for the inconvenience of living so far away. At the same time, even in Pang’s neighborhood, things were changing incredibly fast. A greenbelt of parkland occupied much of what used to be a blighted cityscape and plans were afoot to expand this parkland even further. Of even greater significance to the lifestyles of the people who occupied this rather typical neighborhood, construction of a new subway line was underway that would cut travel time to downtown Shanghai in half by 2005.

Teacher Pang came out of the kitchen with two glasses of coconut juice in hand. He sat down beside me and we chatted for a while. I apologized for being late, as I always seemed to be doing. No matter how hard I tried, I never seemed able to correctly time my travel around Shanghai. I had held up this family's dinner more than once. While we talked, Jin sat in his room finishing some homework and Mrs. Pang cooked in the kitchen. Teacher Pang pulled out the Wu Gongyi book from the glass case, along with some photographs of his wedding. Ma Yueliang, Wu Yinghua, Teacher Qian and Teacher Chen were all there in the photo, seated around a banquet table with the beaming Pangs next to them. I never asked Pang directly about the falling out he had with Qian (Cal had recounted the story to me and Pang rarely brought it up himself, lest he be thought of as someone who excessively criticizes others). However, having known Qian myself, I knew all too well how withering his temper could be. I had heard that Qian and Chen had also had a falling out, and I asked Pang about that. "I don't know," he said. "They used to be very good friends. I don't know."

"It seemed that Qian always wanted to push very last at the monthly meeting," I said. "I wonder if they had a disagreement over that."

"Perhaps. I don't know." Pang seemed uncomfortable with the conversation. Perhaps I had been disrespectful in my criticism of Teacher Qian. Sometimes my desire to understand the intricacies and politics of the JTA got in the way of good taste. Pang forgave me my faux pas and changed the subject, launching into an explanation of one of Wu Gongyi's passages. After a few moments, I suggested that we call Jin in for his English lesson, but Pang waved it off and said it really was not necessary to do the lesson, that Jin had other things. I reminded Pang of our agreement and finally said that we could do some English in a few minutes, and then he continued with his discussion of Wu Gongyi. "They are not like us," Pang said. "Wu Jianquan, Wu Gongyi, Ma Laoshi, Wu Laoshi, they were on a different level."

“You’re on a different level from me,” I said.

“But they were on a higher level of *gongfu*. I don’t really understand what Ma Laoshi did.”

“But I know later, after a few more years of practice, you’ll achieve Ma’s level.”

“That’s not possible. They were cultivated people.”

Unlike Lu, Pang never expressed regret about not having the educational opportunities of the current generation. In fact, he had graduated from a technical school with the equivalent of a diploma in machine repair. His precise nature made him the perfect choice for fine repair work, and this is eventually the direction he headed, working for several large American manufacturers in various capacities. Yet, despite his level of skill as a mechanic and as a taijiquan player, he considered himself quite ignorant and those who did not know him well sometimes took his simple way of expressing himself as a lack of intelligence. Pang’s opinion of himself seemed low at times, not in the sense of lacking self-worth, but in his almost caste-like belief that upper class intellectual families like the Mas and the Wus could somehow better understand taijiquan. He also believed that the Ma sons had received secrets that non-family members would never know.

In Shanghai, class divisions that were once suppressed on pain of death have once again bubbled to the surface. Teacher Pang’s comments indicate a wider belief in the PRC in general and particularly in Shanghai that class divisions are somehow natural rights and that in the new Shanghai, one may reclaim not only lost rights, but also lost properties. Some nouveau riche Shanghainese have apparently taken to buying back properties that had been seized decades earlier (I will discuss the reasons for these re-emerging divisions in more detail in later chapter). As a working class person, Teacher Pang considered certain kinds of knowledge inaccessible to him. Growing up in an

ostensibly “classless” society as I did, I was never able to fully understand the depth of class division in China, nor the willingness of Shanghai people to so readily return to it. Within the JTA, these differences were partly erased by the shared experience of practice, yet they remained.

Teacher Pang called Jin into the room and we started our English lesson. Teacher Pang always participated in the lesson, along with his son. At thirteen, Jin could sometimes be highly critical of his father (and of his English teacher), but the family was a close and loving one, so Jin’s outburst’s at his parents lack of education, incorrect pronunciation of Mandarin (they generally spoke in Shanghai dialect), or lack of computer skills were generally met with good-natured smiles from the parents, who could not mask their pride in Jin. Jin worked hard during our English lessons and progressed rapidly. Teacher Pang, Jin, and I concentrated on pronunciation exercises and reading passages aloud, throwing in a little conversation when we could. In this way, both Jin and Pang got the benefit of the lesson and I could steal a little Chinese instruction as well (as if the taiji were not enough).

Unfortunately, my plan to compensate Teacher Pang through English lessons for his son was an ill-fated one. When Jin discovered that my American English differed in subtle ways from the British English curriculum to which he was accustomed, he lost interest in the lessons. I tried to assure him that the differences were too minor to affect his test scores in the off chance I gave him some “incorrect” American English, but my arguments were ignored. Under the intense pressure of the secondary school examination system, the potential loss of even a point was almost too great to bear. Jin was apparently convinced that I did not really know English very well at all (if he based his assumption on my Chinese, then it was a wise one). In the end, I was left without any means to compensate Teacher Pang and my concern over this led me to cancel several lessons with him until I could find an alternative.

English lessons usually lasted for no more than an hour, just long enough to work our way through one of the chapters in Jin's text. As soon as we finished, Mrs. Pang announced dinner, the three men moved the dining table to the middle of the room and Mrs. Pang served her Sunday meal, good, solid Shanghai fare that usually consisted of some fried eggs, fish, perhaps chicken or pork, stir-fried vegetables, and rice. Teacher Pang neither drank nor smoked, so, unlike similar dinners at the Lus, drinking was never part of our social interaction. At these dinners, the Pang's often asked about my wife and my family in Arizona. That week, I had received news that my father had gotten his fourth angioplasty and I tried to explain the procedure to them. If the details got lost in my translation, they at least understood there had been an illness in the family and were very kind and sympathetic. I filled them in on the latest details about my wife's planned trip to Chiang Mai, Thailand, to teach elementary school.

"She'll be a lot closer," Jin remarked, and got up to look for Thailand on the world map hanging on the wall.

"Are you going to visit?" teacher Pang asked.

"Yes. In September, for our one-year anniversary."

"Can she come here?"

"We'll try. But the Chinese government might not give her a visa. She doesn't have an American passport yet."

When we finished eating and had sat for a while, Mrs. Pang rose to clear the dishes. I rose too and started to carry a couple of plates toward the kitchen, but when I saw Mrs. Pang turn a little red and insist that I put the dishes down, I relented. What might have been taken as polite in Austin, Texas, apparently came off as a little inappropriate in Teacher Pang's house.

Pang wasted no time in launching back into a discussion of taijiquan principles. Tonight's main topic was *nian*, or "sticking." Pang and Lu both heavily emphasized sticking energy in their training. I usually took such

commonalities as evidence of the relative weight Ma Yueliang gave to certain principles. Sticking energy, of course, was in no way particular to Wu style taijiquan. The *taijijing* and almost every modern taijiquan text mention the importance of sticking. But the actual training of *nianjin*, or “sticking energy” was another matter. The classics provided few guidelines for how to train this energy (at least few literal guidelines). Pang’s method was straightforward. We stood up from the table and moved it back to its place, then shifted to the center of the tiny room. Joining hands for two-hand push hands, Pang moved us through the exercise at a very slow, relaxed pace. It seemed I was watching from a distance as our hands, arms, and shoulders went through the various patterns. Pang asked me to pay attention to not letting go at any one point, either mentally or physically. I mentioned the popular taijiquan saying “*bu diu, bu ding*.” (“don’t let go and don’t harden up”). Pang said that *bu diu, bu ding* was indeed all about sticking.

I suddenly noticed the time and told Teacher Pang that I had to go. My last bus would leave in a few minutes. “There’s never enough time,” he said, and I believe he meant it. While many of the taiji players I met in Shanghai enjoyed taijiquan, or even found that it added some meaning to their lives, Teacher Pang really was consumed by the art—its subtlety, its seemingly endless power derived from seemingly bottomless softness, its practicality. Even with his erratic schedule, Pang found ways to practice. He lacked the benefit of having dozens of students with whom he could constantly practice his skills, instead relying on his motley band of foreigners and an occasional Chinese person who happened to recognize his talent, but still managed to constantly improve his skills. Pang and Lu both encouraged me to teach my students when I returned home. From their experiences, I understood why.

Pang escorted me down the dark stairs, through the alleyways, and to the bus stop, where we waited several minutes for the resting driver to finish his break. I then boarded the bus and waved a good bye to Teacher Pang. The ride

through the night to catch the last subway at People's Square was far too bumpy and dark to take decent notes, but the long trip afforded me plenty of time to think about what I had learned from Pang that night. I usually left a lesson with Pang feeling an odd combination of disappointment and inspiration. When I pushed with Pang, he spent a lot of time allowing me to push him back, which gave me an increasingly better understanding of what a proper push felt like, how to generate a proper wave of force from my own center, and how to catch the opponent's center. Sometimes Pang would accompany his explanations of proper pushing with flick of his tongue, in imitation of a snake's tongue, or he would pause for the moment and grab a nearby object, like a bottle or a glass of water, and launch into a discussion of where the center of gravity lay in that object and how that equated with the human body, or he would evoke metaphors, like a heavy ship floating on a body of water, to demonstrate a point about the proper feeling one should have during push hands practice. Mostly, however, we just worked on basics.

### ***Teacher Chen***

The kind of private practice I experienced with both Teacher Lu and Teacher Pang differed considerably from public practice in the park. On Thursday, Saturday and Sunday mornings, I usually participated in eighty-year-old Teacher Chen's practice at People's Park. He taught a small group of senior citizens in 2001, though many of his students from across the years came to the park on Saturdays and Sundays. After the passing of several of the older teachers in the 1990s, Teacher Chen had assumed the mantle of senior teacher in the JTA. His official position in the organization had always placed him at the forefront of business matters, and one would always find him collecting dues and distributing JTA newsletters at the monthly meetings. Just as importantly, after Ma and Wu passed on, and then Qian a year later, Chen became an important link to the past,

and it was Chen who generally pushed last during the push hands demonstrations at the monthly meetings.

My relationship with Chen centered on practice with the senior citizens. Every Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday morning, Chen rode his motorcycle from Zhabei district to People's Park, usually arriving between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. By that time several of his students had already arrived and begun practicing or just chatted. It was a small group of five or six men and one, sometimes two women, all retired (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of gender in the JTA). The informal leader of the group was a kindly man named Deng whose daughter and son-in-law ran a blind person's massage center that I occasionally frequented when practice had gotten the best of me.<sup>60</sup> Throughout my fieldwork period, Deng was always willing to help me get through one organizational difficulty or another. Aside from Deng, there was Auntie Wang, who had a daughter overseas, Uncle Tong, who kept me regularly supplied with comic book versions of classic Chinese stories, Uncle Li, who was always nursing an arthritic arm and who rarely spoke, and Mr. Peng, a businessman in his fifties who still worked and came when he could. In addition, I introduced one new member to the group, Uncle Ou-Yang, at the same time the most competitive and the most ebullient member of the group, who had a chronic bad knee. Uncle Ou-Yang and I began learning sword form with Teacher Chen at about the same time, so we became fast friends.

Chen's practice always began with a ten-minute version of the taiji slow form. He did not cut out any of the moves, but he speeded the form up a bit. Because of Chen's long-time relationship with Ma, his postures were generally considered to be among the most standard in the JTA. In fact, he performed the form only slightly differently from Lu and Pang, but his movements were perhaps

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<sup>60</sup> Large, well-equipped blind person massage centers (*mangren anmo zhongxin*) were extremely popular throughout China in 2001.

the lightest of the three. What differences there were in terms of movement might have been a matter of changes creeping in over time, as they did with almost every taijiquan player, or perhaps with the era in which he studied with Ma and Wu Yinghua. There was no question that the development of the Wu style form was an ongoing project in its early days and that the “standard” Wu and Ma form that became the centerpiece of training manuals was apparently Wu Jianquan’s final version of the public slow forms before he died. Chen studied with Ma in the 1940s, so what he did was probably very close to this version. It certainly would have been out of character for Chen to make any major renovations to the Wu style, for he was not an innovator and did not see much use in creating new forms merely for the sake of making a name for himself. Instead, Chen was content to spend his decades perfecting the forms as they had been given to him. It was in push hands where he could express his individual style and understanding of the art. Lu and Pang both often commented on Chen’s exceptional *tingjin*.

Chen’s approach to the maintaining the integrity of forms was shared by most JTA members. Forms are about tradition, preservation, respect, perfection. Fighting (including push hands) allows one to differentiate oneself from others. It was often said that one could not determine a practitioner's skill merely by looking at his forms. Good forms usually did not translate into skill in push hands or fighting. Likewise, I met several players who had unexceptional form, but who showed tremendous skill and generated tremendous power in their push hands. Teacher Qian, my first teacher in Shanghai, probably stood out as the most prominent of a group of taijiquan players who had a little interest in the form, and therefore taught it in a non-standard way. Qian’s students sometimes criticized him for this behind his back, and the Ma family frequently “corrected” Qian’s students. During one weekend visit to the Ma family home in 1995, Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua patiently watched me run through my form, then chuckled a bit

and remarked that my foot placement showed I was indeed one of Qian's students.

No one could deny Qian's skill as a push hands player, but the perception that he neglected form sometimes sent his students either furtively or openly seeking further instruction from Ma Yueliang, Wu Yinghua and their sons, especially the son who eventually migrated to Europe. This had been the case with Teacher Pang, who was listed in the JTA's 2000 commemorative book as one of Qian's senior disciples (JTA 2000), though he always identified himself as a "student" of Ma Yueliang, with whom he studied once or twice weekly for more than ten years. With Chen there were no questions about lineage or about form. But Chen had always been more humble than Qian. Even in the days when they taught side-by-side in People's Park, Chen usually stood off to the side with his collection of two or three students, while Qian dominated the practice space with a dozen or more. If they had any animosity toward one another at that time, it was subdued, and, at least for public consumption, they were simply *gongfu* brothers of equal status.

Following our round of slow form, Chen checked his watch, and then headed for the bathroom, which was just at the edge of the practice space. The rest of us chatted for a bit or practiced our individual forms. Most of the people in the group were working on sword form with Chen, but Uncle Ou-Yang and I, who were relative newcomers to the group, were starting with the relatively simpler saber form. When Chen returned, he had a few points to make about the slow form first, a few corrections to give and a few points to discuss regarding both proper posture and the function of the movements. Chen had little interest in teaching taijiquan as a kind of dance. Like most of the JTA members, taijiquan was clearly a martial art and, even for those who had no interest in acquiring fighting skill, understanding the function of the moves was crucial to understanding the forms. Therefore, Chen always spent a few minutes using me or

one of the other players as practice dummies, though he was always quite gentle in these encounters. Early on in my 2001 fieldwork, I more or less stayed on the edges of these demos. In the early spring, when I asked Teacher Chen to formally teach me the saber form, I also joined in for form and push hands. Knowing that I was a teacher of Qian's in the past and knowing that I was studying slow form with Lu, Chen seldom gave me corrections unless I asked a specific question. In fact, he seldom gave individual form corrections to anyone in the group after they had learned their basic forms. After that, it was up to them to pay attention and to ask questions. In the initial learning stages, he was more hands-on. For example, when Uncle Ou-Yang and I began our saber practice, he would ask us first to run through the form together as far as we knew it, then he would either give us corrections, or, if satisfied with what we had given him, teach us a new move. In this manner, we learned the entire saber form within two months. Uncle Ou-Yang and I then continued practicing while Chen went off to teach something to the other group. Because of his bad knee, Ou-Yang usually dropped out after one or two rounds, while I continued, often repeating the whole form two or three times, and the new movements we had learned that day a dozen times more.

Once everyone had spent some time with form practice, if time permitted, Chen played push hands for a few minutes. For this group at least, push hands practice was secondary. I also got the impression (and it was only an impression) that Chen had lost interest in push hands to some degree, at least in teaching it. This may have merely reflected my relationship with Chen, which was a warm one but not oriented toward "serious" (i.e. painful or intense) instruction in the same way that my relationship to other teachers had been. For Chen, it seemed to have become more about the spirit of the thing, about the pleasure of coming to the park every morning and sharing the art with a few friends. For this group, taijiquan as health exercise superceded any curiosity in learning martial application, and this seemed to suit Chen fine. Without the burden of intensive

push hands training, which always seemed to breed competition, this group was almost completely without ego in the way they approached learning taijiquan. For me, that became the most important lesson I learned from Chen and his retirees. Despite my pretenses to master taijiquan as a *martial* art, I came to appreciate it here as *art*, as a creative act that people practiced for the joy of it (Donahue 1994; Sapir 1949a). Despite the lack of vigor in these Thursday morning practices (or perhaps because of it), I learned a great deal about not only lightness of body, but also lightness of mind in approaching the learning of taijiquan. When practicing in this way, the creativity manifested itself in an increasing awareness of how the body works. Each time we practiced the slow form, it became a way of reframing one's experience of the world. For twenty minutes (or however long it takes to run through a single round of slow form), one makes a stab at being "natural" in a world that is full of imposition and artificiality. My practice with Lu was about developing strength and a powerful foundation; with Pang it was about developing skill and nimbleness; with Chen, who both Lu and Pang considered to be still quite nimble (*ling*) at the age of eighty, it was really more about poetry. Practicing with Teacher Chen made me a little less cynical about racializing or being racialized. Doing and being moved a little closer together. With Teacher Chen, it was easy to imagine that while the search for the little old Chinese man was ninety percent folly, it was also ten percent possibility.

I was certainly not the only one who felt that way about Teacher Chen. During the summer of 2001, several dozen JTA members threw a banquet for him at a small meeting hall in Xiujiahui District. Whereas the love that Wu style players showed for Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua bordered on veneration at times, people seemed to approach Chen more like a kindly old grandfather. I believe this reflected both his place in the JTA and his personality. At the banquet, Chen sat at a place of honor with his own family and Ma family members. At another table sat many of the other senior teachers in the JTA,

including Teacher Lu. I sat at another table with the retirees and other invited students. I had asked a flower shop I frequented near my apartment building to put together a special bouquet for Chen's birthday and they had done a particularly fine job (everyone asked where they were located). We joked lightly with Chen and took turns getting our pictures taken with him and his family. Fortunately (though I was distraught at the time about this), I left my own cameras at home, so tonight, I was more participant than observer.

Even with the festive atmosphere, a certain amount of politics was at play in the room. The seating arrangements themselves reflected a hierarchy within the group, though it was notably not a hierarchy of social status *outside* the group, i.e. doctors and professors sat with workers if they shared a level of status within the JTA. While interaction between tables was free and relaxed, one did not sit at another table unless invited. At one point, for example, Teacher Lu waved me over to the senior teachers table and asked me to repeat a story I had told him for the benefit of Mr. Sun, who was an old acquaintance, a disciple of Ma, and a regular at People's Park on the weekend.

"Adam, tell the story about your friend who ran into someone at the department store on Huaihai Road," asked Lu. "You remember."

"I remember, sure." It was a story my Swiss friend had told me several months earlier. I moved next to the teachers' table and leaned in a little so that my Chinese would not be quite so difficult to understand. "My friend was in one of the department stores on Huaihai Road one day. It was very crowded. He's kind of a big guy and he said that normally if there were so many people it wasn't a problem for him. He usually just used his shoulder to move people out of the way. On that day, however, he ran into someone who didn't move. He thought he recognized the person as a Wu style taijiquan person, but he wasn't sure."

Everyone at the table laughed, then Mr. Sun spoke up and said, “That was me. I remember that day.” The mystery resolved (and because everyone was a little drunk), we laughed all the harder.

The night ended early, but not early enough to keep several of us from getting quite drunk. I lived only a few walks away, so managed to make my way home unassisted.

Like the monthly meetings, events like Teacher Chen’s birthday party seemed to bind the JTA together. Especially after Ma and Wu’s deaths, when there was no member of the Ma family remaining in Shanghai who approached their skill, it became even more important to the JTA members to find ways to maintain the association’s integrity. In terms of the formal structure and public face of the organization, the eldest son and head of the association, did the best he could under the circumstances and even reluctantly performed his slow taijiquan when requested. In fact, though he made no claims to greatness, his taijiquan form was excellent and had the added advantage of coming directly from his grandfather, Wu Jianquan, who had taught Ma’s eldest son as a young child. The eldest son practiced the elder Wu’s form, because after his grandfather’s death, the circumstances of war and revolution precluded him from further study with his parents. After these crises had passed, he devoted his time and attention to the study of biochemistry, though he continued to practice with his parents as time allowed. Like his older brother, circumstances had also prevented the youngest brother from studying taijiquan as regularly as he would have liked. In recent years, the youngest brother had devoted more time to both study and teaching of taijiquan. Still too young to retire, he managed time to teach only a small number of students with the assistance of Bjorn, who was a good friend. Among the Ma brothers, the son many JTA members felt had received the art with the fullest understanding was the second brother, who now resided overseas and rarely came to Shanghai. Some JTA members even expressed concern that as far the family

members were concerned, it was the end of the line for Wu style taijiquan in Shanghai. No one in the next generation had bothered to learn. If the art were to be preserved, it had to come through *tudi* outside the family, several of whom, like teacher Chen, were acknowledged masters in their own right and whom had successfully transmitted at least part of the art to their students. Other notables in this regard were Wang Haoda, a disciple of Ma's who had gained a considerable reputation conducting workshops in the United States and who continued weekly practice at a Shanghai park until his death in 2002; Gao Jingshen, who was a long-time student of Qian's, but eventually became the *tudi* of Ma Yueliang (apparently causing a rift in their relationship), the younger *gongfu* brother of Qian; Teacher Lu, who was slowly building a reputation in Shanghai and national martial arts circles; and Teacher Bing, a contemporary of Teacher Chen's, whose son maintained an active competition and teaching schedule. Thus, the art lived through those who had spent years devoting themselves to understanding what Ma had to offer. At the same time, the passing of Ma and Wu allowed jealousies and conflicts to erupt. With no clear patriarch or matriarch for the art (as opposed to the formal Association, which had a clear hierarchy of officers), such problems became increasingly acute.

### ***Conclusion***

In one way or another, all three of the teachers who I have described in this chapter define themselves through their practice of taijiquan. If anyone has an acute understanding of "indeterminacy," they do. Ranging from middle age (forty-five) to aged (eighty), they have all seen difficult times in Shanghai. While each has their own reasons for practicing and teaching taijiquan, they share a sense of trauma that is particular to Shanghainese of their generations. They are traumatized people (traumatized *bodies*), who, by practicing taijiquan, chose at some point to deal with what Casey calls "fragmentation":

Another facet of the particularizing proclivity of traumatic body memories has to do with the *fragmentation* of the lived body. Where habitual body memory typically concerns the body as a coordinated whole—indeed, constitutes it as a single *compositum*—a traumatic body memory bears on what Lacan has called ‘*le corps morcellé*.’ This is the body as broken down into uncoordinated parts and thus as incapable of the type of continuous, spontaneous action undertaken by the intact body. [Casey 1987:155].

Through taijiquan, practitioners seek to re-harmonize yin and yang in the body, to reintegrate the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*). As high level teachers within the JTA, each of them emphasizes martial application in their teaching of taijiquan and yet their lives are testaments to the therapeutic claims about the art. Following Ma Yueliang’s and Wu Yinghua’s example, they embody the possibility of re-integration at both a physical and emotional level. Yet they would generally eschew speaking of such things explicitly or even making any claims about taijiquan as emotional tonic. For them, practice is practice.

Yet, practice is also a means of establishing specific identities in a time and place when the lines between Han, Shanghainese, Chinese, and foreigner are becoming increasingly blurred. To return for a moment to an idea I introduced at the beginning of this dissertation, race moves. For my “Chinese” teachers and for their “white” student, the sense of moving identities was a constant factor in our practice. Because the barriers that self-conceptions of racial, national, linguistic, and class belonging create in the student-teacher relationship, because the consciousness of self is mutually constituted and ephemeral, the very practice changes in the transmission. Race moves in the sense that one moment it is there, and the next it is not. One moment my whiteness is preventing the teacher from passing along certain information, certain exercises, certain physical frames; the next moment the information flows. One moment my search for the legendary

little old Chinese man keeps me from hearing what the actual Chinese person in front of me is saying; the next moment I am listening.

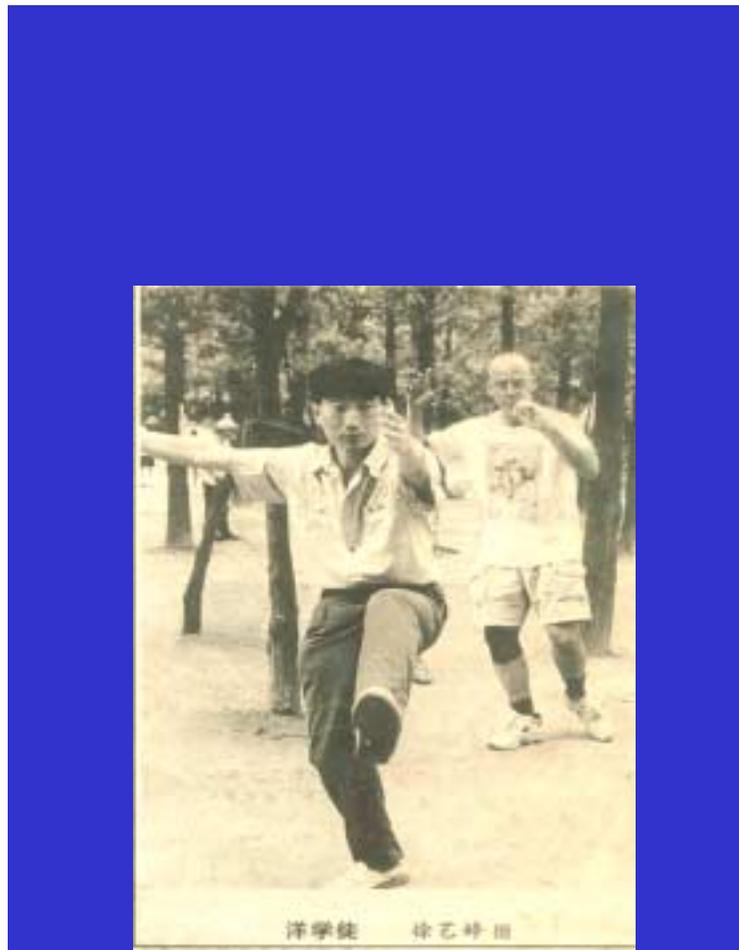


Figure 5: "Foreign Apprentice." Photo of Teacher Pang and author from Shanghai newspaper (source unknown), 1997.

Figure 6: Teacher Chen's Thursday sword class, Shanghai, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank.



## Chapter 3

### Practice: Park Lives and Secret Spaces

V

I do not know which to prefer,  
the beauty of inflexions  
Or the beauty of inuendos,  
the blackbird whistling  
Or just after

–Wallace Stevens

*From “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”*

As opposed to the official feat, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. [Bakhtin 1984:10].

In the exterior, the world that Bakhtin describes above is not approved of in modern China. It is exactly the opposite of what one finds in a typical Shanghai park on a Sunday afternoon. The “established order” of the Party is ever-present: the quiet presence of public safety officers (*gongan*), the sudden appearance of a Starbucks, the celebration of the Party’s anniversary. Despite the presence of such phantoms, parks maintain a veneer of being places where one can discard prohibitions. They are festive places, full of flower shows in the spring and taijiquan players all year round. Foreign tourists passing through Shanghai are impressed with the city’s parks. Shanghai people themselves are generally impressed as well. Unlike parks in most other cities in China, which are showcases for Chinese from other parts of the country, many of Shanghai’s parks are also showcases for the outside world. But for the people who spend everyday

in the park, they are nestings of hegemonies too. On the one hand, the park is simply a fun, relaxing place to spend one's time. On the other hand, it is place where one must "protect oneself" (*baohu ziji*). The carnivalesque, therefore, is usually more subtly portrayed in the park, sometimes even privately experienced. In that sense, playing taijiquan is participating in a kind of internal festival.

### ***The Life of the Park, Part I***

Each park in Shanghai has its unique character, largely determined by the people who inhabit the park, its association with particular historical figures or activities, and whatever construction and development is going in the neighborhood that surrounds the park. While I probably practiced in two dozen parks in Shanghai alone during the course of my research, in 2001 I mainly spent time in three parks: People's Park, the former Shanghai race track and, coupled with People's Square, the central hub of the city; Haiyang Park, for decades one of the central meeting places in the French Concession, and one of the closest parks to the Ma family home; and Hengshan Park, the park closest to my apartment building. While I met with my teachers at each of these parks (though rarely at Hengshan Park), I often ventured there at other times when my teachers were absent or stayed in the park for several hours after most of the other Wu style players left in order to practice on my own. In this way I acquired a circle of friends and acquaintances outside the immediate Wu style community, some of them involved in taijiquan, some of them in other martial arts, some of them interested in *qigong*, and some of them merely people who liked to spend their leisure time in the park.

Haiyang Park presented problems in terms of private meanderings. Since a famous *tudi* of Ma's, Pei Junhai had died a few years earlier, Teacher Lu had divided his time between Haiyang Park and Shangyang Park and had become known as one of the top Wu stylists in these parks ("top" was usually determined

through more or less friendly push hands matches). I knew that if I went there on my own and played with other teachers, there was always a chance I would run into him. If I did not, word inevitably got back to him that I had been in the park the previous day or the day before that. Haiyang Park especially was a small world, where all the martial arts aficionados knew each other and were generally friendly toward one another. But I was ignorant of the rivalries and the nuances of these decades-old relationships. Since I knew that Lu might otherwise take offense, I made sure to drop names of mutual acquaintances with whom I had recently spoken in the park, though I avoided giving details about these conversations. My hope was that this would reassure teacher Lu I was not doing anything behind his back. It also gave us an opportunity to engage in some light gossip about the various teachers who inhabited the park. My impression was that Lu expected discretion from me when I interacted with other teachers, and he understood that my reticence to discuss conversations in detail applied to our own conversations as well.

A typical day in Haiyang Park began when the gates opened at around 6:00 a.m. Because the park housed an art gallery and a chic club that was popular with expats and yuppie Shanghainese, there were sometimes people emerging from it rather than entering into it when the gates opened in the morning. Couples sometimes wandered out of the bushes late at night. On one particular spring morning, when there was still the remnants of a winter chill in the air, several small groups of old people stood huddled outside the gate waiting to enter the park. I bought what must have been the last of the winter sweet potatoes from a vendor, standing next to his hot coals to stay warm and, with my compatriots, taking in the beauty of the morning. Several cleaners in municipal government work clothes and maintenance workers in army fatigues pulled tools out, swept, hosed down sections of the entryway, and opened the ticket kiosks. When the gates finally opened, there was a minor rush for the entrance, but nothing like the

afternoon rush to get on the bus or in the subway cars. Here, people rushed at a leisurely pace. After all, there was plenty of space for everyone.

The old people flashed their senior passes and I flashed my monthly pass. The ticket seller reminded me that it was almost time to buy a new monthly pass, I thanked her and told her that I would be sure to get it next time, and then entered the park. A large open space greeted those of us who entered from the back entrance, a space filled with freshly planted flowers in preparation for a government-sponsored flower festival. A snack shop, small teahouse and several newly renovated offices lined the walkway and a large statue of Karl Marx dominated the view. Several old men had already begun stretching and other warm up exercises around the base of the statue. A little further on, a singing group had gathered around and had begun singing a mix of pop, folk, and patriotic songs. A song leader posted lyrics on a large board in front of them. Down the path to the left, a few urban fishermen carefully baited their hooks and tossed their lines into the large lily pond at the center of the park. Grandparents and parents doted over small children, still sleepy from being forced to rise so early in the morning. Several old people had deposited themselves on benches that would remain their closely guarded territory throughout the day. And workmen drove small, motorized sweepers and mowers along the concrete pathways. The park at this time of morning was peaceful and alive at the same time.

I went to my usual spot not far from the fishing pond and began going through my own basic stretches, watching the action unfold out of the corner of my eye. I had come to Haiyang that morning in search of a particular famous taijiquan teacher and *qigong* teacher, Liu Jianwu, about whom I had learned from a well-known taiji teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area. Liu Jianwu had become even better known following the publication of a book in the United States based on his training methods. He was popular among Chinese martial arts aficionados of all stripes because his method, based on a deep understanding of relaxation and

alertness, allowed the practitioner to generate tremendous power with very little effort. Similar to *yiquan* (“mind-intent boxing”), the technique required precise and long-term training, but several American martial artists swore by it. A conversation with another skillful push hands player in Haiyang Park alerted me to the fact that Liu Jianwu regularly practiced there when he was not out of the country conducting workshops as part of his international *qigong* organization. My friend also knew Teacher Lu well, and Lu knew Liu Jianwu, though I could not say they were friends. When I finally did meet Liu Jianwu that morning and he found out that I was a student of Lu’s, he seemed to turn a bit reticent about participating in an interview. He seemed slightly uncomfortable.

I watched Liu Jianwu and several other men, including my friend, practice Liu’s technique. Liu Jianwu first assumed a basic push hands posture with a partner. With little or no discernible movement in play, Liu then flew back ten, twenty, even fifty yards, lightly hopping the whole way. He repeated this several times, and then traded with his partner. It was an exaggerated version of the hopping I engaged in with Lu and which was a staple of the Wu style system. Originally a Yang style taijiquan player, Liu really did not consider himself a taiji player at all anymore. He claimed to be more interested in spiritual training, and others who knew him often attested to his deep understanding of Buddhism. Still others claimed that Liu did indeed teach martial arts but required large sums of money. But here in the park, he was just another old man playing push hands. I joined hands with him at my friend’s invitation (not Liu Jianwu’s) and felt an energy that was both full and soft. I tried to “hear” his intention, as Liu instructed me, and jump back according to the strength of what I heard, but failed to do so. I was told that I did not yet have the sensitivity to “hear” properly. We continued in this way for several minutes, pausing on occasion to let some rollerblading Japanese exchange students go by. While Liu would not engage in any sort of freestyle push hands with me, our mutual friend sometimes would. He had

exceptional *tingjin* and could easily push me over, propelling me several yards away. Like many push hands players who had gained a level of *gongfu*, he also seemed anxious to share his skill and knowledge. One has a sense with these taijiquan players that the feeling of power is somewhat addictive. That is not to say my friend was addicted, but if he were, I could forgive him. Push hands skill especially gave older people a sense of empowerment they might not otherwise enjoy. True or not, they felt push hands could protect them from assaults on the street. The few times I met with Liu Jianwu's group (usually without Liu Jianwu present), I occasionally saw Teacher Lu's actor friend as well. In fact, it was during one of these visits that the actor executed his famous full belly punch against me, sending me flying backward through the air several feet.

On the day I did meet Liu, the meeting did not last long. I looked at my watch and noticed that I was late for an appointment. Thanking Liu and exchanging cards, I asked if he would mind speaking to me about my dissertation research. As usual, I explained (and the card attested to the fact) that I was an American research scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences doing a dissertation on taijiquan, that one of his students in San Francisco had referred me, and that I only wished to talk to him at this point. Nothing I said moved him. He politely but firmly refused.

Nonetheless, I thanked him and continued on my morning swing around the park. Near the fishing pond, I ran into another character in Haiyang Park who had gained something of a reputation as a crazy man. He loved to push hands and would do so in an aggressive way, apparently with the intention of starting a fight. I had found that agreeing with his many theories about taijiquan, none of which he was able to back up with skill, seemed to calm him. On this day, he accosted me and began the somewhat awkward, expansive movements that he called "push hands." This man pushed awkwardly and his hands and nails were usually dirty, so my main concern when pushing with him was to avoid being scratched or hurt

in any other way. After a few minutes, I told him how strong and powerful he was, and begged off pushing any further. Someone else in his circle pulled me aside and said, “He’s crazy. You shouldn’t push hands with him.” I thought the fellow harmless enough, but a few days later, I noticed that he had an enormous shiner. It was not difficult to imagine how this might have come about.

The character of People’s Park differed considerably from Haiyang, both in the variety of activities the park afforded and the types of martial arts found there. In many ways, People’s Park was the “showpiece” park for central Shanghai. In the late 1980s, the park still retained much of its post-1949 character. It had seen very little development during the first forty years of the PRC, yet it held a kind of seedy charm, surrounded as it was by the concession period hotels and office buildings that served as symbols of Shanghai’s colonized past. In the early 1990s, the park underwent the first of a series of major renovations with the construction of Shanghai’s subway. The People’s Square stop (the square is located across from the park) became the central point for the system and included exits outside the park itself. By 1997, the park had been half torn apart again as part of a major renovation program that included the construction of a hub for the cities new East-West subway line. When I returned in 2000, the park I found was virtually unrecognizable from the one that I had left in 1997. Virtually all of the lawn and packed dirt had been covered over by brick and concrete pathways, interspersed with gardens. Most of the man-made hills and grottos that had given the park a “traditional” character in the past had been replaced with an enlarged fishing pond, an arboretum, and, on the western edge of the park, a small art gallery and a Starbucks. Outside the western gate, what had once been the main branch of the Shanghai Public Library had been completely transformed into a small, but world-class contemporary art museum. Of course, my nostalgia was someone else’s modernity. At the northern edge of the park, just outside the gate, one could either access the subway or spend an hour or two viewing the exhibits

in the Shanghai Municipal Exhibition Hall, which not only glorified and advertised the “new” Shanghai, but also served the practical purpose of allowing prospective home or apartment buyers a preview of projected development (see “The City” for more on the exhibit). The park also became a preferred site for big events, such as the annual spring flower and plant show, which organizers held under a quarter-mile long, semi-permanent outdoor awning. There was always something going on in People’s Park.

That did not, of course, prevent people from getting in their early morning exercise and, especially for retired people and laid-off workers, having some way to escape the cramped quarters of home. For the JTA, the changes in the park had become a little more problematic. Since the reestablishment of the Association in the early 1980s, it had maintained an official practice area in People’s Park (as it did in Haiyang Park). A sign said that park officials had nailed high up on a tree read "Wu style taijiquan." I cannot honestly say whether the JTA had been forced to re-locate as part of the construction or the construction had simply continued around the practice site. The park had been so utterly transformed from its initial configuration c. 1988 that not even the regulars knew for sure. But disruptions occurred as the result of subtler changes, some physical, some social and economic. In the spring of 2001, for example, workers laid brick and constructed stone-encircled tree wells in the JTA practice area. This created a kind of obstacle course of which push hands players had to be constantly aware. While no one ever received serious injury because of the tree wells, many people tripped and stubbed a toe or turned an ankle. It was an accident waiting to happen. In a city so heavily populated (and where complaints at the level of municipal construction would go unheard), no one complained (except for the foreigner).

Social and economic change had a much greater impact on the nature of practice in the park and on who comprised the People’s Park regulars. When both Qian and Chen actively taught Saturday and Sunday mornings, they served as a

kind of a magnet for players who could not practice during the week. Clearly in charge, they also served as an emotional center for the practice. When arguments arose, they were there to quell them. And their age and push hands skills provided a standard that could guide the group as a whole. Qian especially expected his students to show up early and most enthusiastically did. By 2001, after Qian's passing, much of the motivation for coming on weekends also passed. Many of Qian's formal disciples began to set themselves up as teachers at that time or simply stopped practicing regularly. Few formed student-teacher relationships with other top teachers. Chen, for example, did not take over Qian's students after Qian's death, though "outdoor" students like me, who had never undergone the formal discipleship ceremony (*baishi*), had somewhat more leeway in this regard. In fact, privately, there was a great deal more exchange going on than publicly, but the general impression on weekends sessions in 2001 was one of a headless group with a considerable amount of jockeying for position. Some of the older students occasionally expressed a sense of loss about Qian's absence, but they continued to come. Lu occasionally showed up on Saturdays, but there was not much in it for him. It was not a place where one could really attract new students and he and Chen, when they pushed at all, did so in private. Pang came even more rarely and really only did so as a way of meeting up with me for our later lesson in the afternoon. When the exception of those of Qian's old students who had been involved in the conflict some years earlier, other JTA members really looked forward to Pang's infrequent visits, because they knew they would be treated to exceptional push hands.

In lieu of a single teacher, the senior disciples became the standard bearers. Among them, Mr. Sun and the Guo brothers (Old Guo and Young Guo) were the most regular. Sun (who had been bumped by Bjorn in the department store) was a disciple of Ma's and the officer in the JTA responsible for the production of the newsletter. In the last year, he had not only produced a highly

professional, glossy newsletter that really brought the JTA into the Age of Technology, but he had also designed and produced the very impressive 2000 commemorative book (JTA 2000), which chronicled the JTA's history, lineage, and the main features and theories of Wu Jianquan style taijiquan. Among all the push hands players, Sun's push hands was the most aggressive. He did not push aggressively out of malice. Rather, it was his interpretation of how to train the martial aspects of the art. As he saw it, one had to always be ready for the unexpected kick or punch. In our own interactions, I accepted many months of hard pushes, bordering on open-handed strikes, from Mr. Sun, and I suspected that my willingness to do so without complaint raised his opinion of me somewhat. In fact, Sun was practicing a kind of mental alertness that most western-style boxers understand, but that few push hands players do, since they rarely have to deal with any real force on their bodies and, therefore, rarely experience the heightened awareness or even fear of the boxer. Pushing with Sun, one had to have one's antennae up or else suffer a certain amount of bruising (both in body and in ego). Sun was fifty years old, and, like many JTA members in his age group, deeply regretted the loss of the association's best teachers. He also expressed frustration on occasion that his work did not allow him more time to practice. He once commented to me that he knew his skills were not that good (I disagreed on that count), but that it was more about time than anything else. Sun seldom gave away his secrets. He pushed opponents around readily, but rarely told them how he was doing it, so, when he shared information with me, I considered it an honor. One day, for example, after consistently pushing me over with the same slight motion, he asked me to note how he moved my center of gravity so I came up on my toes, and only then would he *fajin* ("issue energy").

As had been the case when Qian was alive, we changed partners every few minutes during weekend practice. However, whereas Qian had often paired us up as he saw fit, we now simply looked around for a partner and offered a hand. On

occasion, I chose to practice form instead of push hands. Occasionally, someone took this as an insult, but I never meant it as a snub. If I had no other time to practice form, I practiced during the weekend, as did others. A great deal of chatting went on during these sessions. Pushing with Sun, one had no time to chat, but for others, push hands was more of a social occasion. Many JTA members felt the need to take on the role of teacher when I pushed with them. Generally, I accepted this graciously, but moodiness and personal frustration sometimes got in the way. Sometimes I could not stand to hear one more “lesson” from someone whose skills were on par with my own. Generally, however, I accepted the teacher attitude as an essential part of both the project and the training. In fact, I found that if I remained open and humble, I could learn something from everyone. After all, my search for the little old Chinese man that began in 1988 had been an implicitly racist one. The search itself was a kind of ritualization of Chineseness. My unquestioning exoticizing was one component of a ritual process that included being exoticized as well. Now, in the park, we were collaborating on a ritualization of whiteness that was no less important in exerting power within the JTA. I do not mean to portray this ritualization of whiteness as entirely negative. Most people meant well and genuinely wanted to share what they knew. Still, once accustomed to “Othering,” it is difficult to become the Other.

The Guo brothers never demanded to teach and were always very generous with their time and their knowledge. The older Guo was a formal disciple of Qian and had spent many hours pushing with Ma Yueliang as well. His push hands was very soft and light and he generally stuck to the “four basic energies” format with his partners, though he was not averse to scrapping it up on occasion. The Younger Guo, for whatever reason, was a disciple of Chen’s, but he had studied with several teachers, none of whom he ever named to me. Among the players in People’s Park, Young Guo’s English was perhaps the best, and he

usually preferred to communicate with me in English when we pushed. Guo's method was quite different than most of the other players. With some, he would spend time on the four basic energies, but seldom engaged in what could be characterized as "freestyle" push hands. Generally, he did a lot of belly pushing. In this method, one person would fold their hands in front of their belly and the other would gently push on the hands. The person being pushed gently moved his belly back and forth, a little bit like a bee moves its stinger. Young Guo emphasized one principle more than any other player did: "can push, but don't push," which he often repeated in English. This involved not only a mental decision, but also proper alignment, dropping the elbows properly, and keeping the chin dropped. When we reversed the roles, and I pushed on his hands, folded in front of his belly, it had a filled quality similar to what I had experienced from old Qian and other top-level players. For Young Guo, mastery of this method was the foundation for everything else, and, when he and I pushed, we did little else. This went on for the whole of 2001, until near the end of my stay, when I began to get some sense of what he was talking about (at least according to him).

Other friends also inhabited these weekend push hands meetings: Old Peng, who had just opened a small shop and always pushed with silent pleasure; Mr. Wu, who specialized in *liuhebafa* (Six harmonies, Eight Methods) and who had discernible internal power—he really embodied the old taiji adage of an "iron bar wrapped in cotton"—and who never spoke while pushing (whenever I ran into Wu on "off days," he always welcomed me to push with his little group). One retired friend, who regularly attended Chen's Thursday morning class, but who also played *liuhebafa* with Mr. Wu, was notable for his willingness to always practice the regular push hands patterns. While his knowledge of how to use these patterns was minimal, he never competed. Finally, Mrs. Yu, a gregarious and skillful player who always asked me hard questions about my research, showed

up on occasion, but usually stood off to the side smoking because of a chronic injury.

Figure 7: “Wu style taijiquan” (JTA space marker), Shanghai People’s Park, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank



### *Erasing Masculinity, Erasing Femininity*

The occasional appearance of Mrs. Yu called attention to the relative lack of women players in the JTA. I rememberd that while Ma and Wu were alive, there were many women players. Teacher Qian taught a regular class at Tongji University that attracted as many women as men. And some of Teacher Chen's best students were also women, but they seldom made an appearance in People's Park in 2001. I had hoped to make gender an important part of the project, fully expecting that the women in the JTA would be as enthusiastic about talking to me as the men were. However, this was not the case. Except for Auntie Wang in Teacher Chen's Thursday class and Mrs. Yu, I had little contact with women players. I was somewhat perplexed by the situation in the JTA, since all around me other taijiquan and *qigong* groups seemed to have equal representation of men and women.<sup>61</sup> After a time, however, I came to feel that the machismo had been turned up a few notches since the passing of Teacher Qian. Push hands in the park was no longer the relaxing, recreational event it once was. There seemed to be a lot more negativity and competition in the air. Thus, the women's absence underscored the simultaneous privileging and erasure of femininity in the People's Park group (and the consequent erasure of masculinity). Indeed, women's absence calls attention to the oppositional nature of how progress is measured in taijiquan.

In his study of male bodybuilding in the United States, Richard Dyer writes,

The built body presents itself not as typical but as ideal. It suggests our vague notions of the Greek gods and the Übermensch. Organised as a competition, bodybuilding encourages discussion of the best body. [Dyer 2002:265].

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<sup>61</sup> See Yang 1997 and 1999 for a discussion of Shanghai women in the public sphere and the transnation.

Dyer's comment brings to mind the question of what constitutes "the best body" among male taijiquan players? The brief answer is that the "soft," i.e. the most yin, or feminine, body is privileged over the hard, yang body. The power of taijiquan both as folklore and as martial art is in its deceptive weakness. It is not the Big Young Adonis for whom young taijiquan players search, but the little old *man*. The ideal type is conceived as weak in appearance (old), externally male, but internally female. In the context of Taoist sexual yoga, Douglas Wile (1992:16) notes, "We might say that the Taoist ideal of eternal youth seeks the best of both worlds [status and youth]: a youthful glow on an old man. This is a common theme in popular iconography and a motif met more than once in the sexual literature and art." From a technical standpoint, one can only learn to develop the powerful, spring-like quality of taijiquan (yang energy) by first learning softness and neutralization (yin energy). From a more esoteric viewpoint, the male can only understand his masculinity by fully exploring and understanding his femininity first. Taijiquan teachers and writings often use the analogy of water to describe the source of the art's power: like water, the appearance is soft, but, over time, water will wear away rock. Within the bounds of this male-centered theory, where are women? How are women to obtain power?

Part of the answer to these questions may lie in the relationship between yin and yang in Daoist cosmology and how that world view continues to play out in the modern socialist state. Douglas Wile, in his translation of Daoist sexual yoga classics, writes

Leaner and more abstract than such mythical personifications as Venus and Apollo or Shiva and Shakti, the yin-yang paradigm nevertheless gives ample scope for man and woman to play the roles of heaven and earth and adds a metaphysical dimension to the commerce of the bedroom. The early texts are marked by the existential loneliness of yin and yang for each other, and their union consummates a cosmic energy; whereas in the later sexual alchemy tradition, yang is concerned only to steal a bit of like

essence from the heart of yin to mend its own missing link. [Wile 1992:29].

My citation of this passage is in no way meant to imply that push hands in the park is a form of Daoist sexual yoga. Any player who even hinted at sexual innuendo during push hands practice would be made short shrift of in the park. Yet, at an internal level, Wile's statement rings true for taijiquan. Male players frequently comment on the "superiority" of women push hands players, i.e. they are softer, more yin, than the men. At the same time, the same men will often differentiate between superior yin and actual combat skill. One JTA member once described Wu Yinghua's consummate perfection in form, but, in implying that her push hands was not at a high level, said, "Of course, she's a woman." Still, Wu Yinghua is associated with her own tales of power. One tale that circulates in the group is how Wu, as a young woman walking down a street in Shanghai in the 1930s, easily neutralized an improper advance by an American sailor. In addition, one female disciple of Wu's is a regular push hands performer at monthly meetings and demonstrates a high level of skill. Yet, standing in the crowd one day while she performed, I overheard a male JTA member say that this was "just a performance," with the obvious implication that the male performers were doing "real" push hands.

Women in the JTA are placed on a pedestal to some degree: they are complimented for their yin, but not truly given their yang, no matter what their level of skill. This says a great deal about the place of women in the changing socialist state that was 2001 China. Increasingly, women have assumed traditionally male roles in business, but have been largely excluded from the upper echelons of Party politics. True, the right to work, the right to education, and the right to decide on one's own marriage partner have been enshrined in the Chinese system for decades, but these rights are attached more to pre-1949 modernism than to post-1949 socialism. Nevertheless, women in China have

historically risen to the highest peaks of power despite their exclusion from the formal hierarchy. The most famous example is Cixi, the Empress Dowager, who died several years before the fall of the Qing Dynasty. At the level of the nation, Cixi embodied the same kind of strong, archetypal maternal figure that Wu Yinghua represented for the JTA. With Wu Yinghua as official president and Ma Yueliang, her husband, as vice-president, the “proper” hierarchy seemed to be turned on its head within the association. In fact, this was not so. For the men in the JTA, Ma Yueliang’s martial skills made him the head of the JTA in practice, if not on paper. At least that was the public story. In private, male disciples who had studied with Wu Yinghua often adopted the nuances of her forms over her husband’s. Still, upon Wu’s death, the JTA returned to the “natural” state of all-male association officers. Wu may have remained “Queen Mother of the West” in memory, but in practice, the status quo held the day.<sup>62</sup>

In the Shanghai of 2002, however, the older JTA men face an erasure of their own. The very conception of masculinity is shifting in Shanghai. Nancy Chen (2002:317) describes this shifting in regards to new meanings attached to old terms:

In the contemporary Chinese context, meanings of masculinities have shifted to reflect the growing engagement with a market economy and consumer culture. Colloquial terms such as *nanxingde*, translated as “male sexuality,” and the more popular term *nanzizhan* (manly) center upon characteristics that in the 1990s referred to having masculine looks, the ability to make money, and power. Urban-based intellectuals are quick to

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<sup>62</sup> The Lord King of the East (*dongwanggong*) and the Queen Mother of the West (*xiwangmu*) are the two deities who embody yin and yang in the pantheon of Chinese gods associated with Daoism. According to Kohn (1993:55-56), these gods are “next in rank after the highest deities of the religion, who themselves are none other than the Tao—the Heavenly Venerable of Primordial Beginning, the Lord of the Tao, the Highest Venerable Lord...” See also Schipper 1982:105,110. In light of my earlier discussion of the history of Daoist studies as a factor in the construction of Chineseness, modernist/post-modernist interpretations of Daoist cosmology must be taken worth a grain of salt.

point out that *nanzizhan* in this era is much different from what it was a generation ago.

In this context, when young male members are as absent as female members, older male JTA members may feel emasculated. Taijiquan is somehow seen as *too yin*.

Chen also makes the case that femininity is marked among *qigong* masters who become highly visible through public teaching. She cites the arrest of Zhang Xiangyu (a *qigong* master during the *qigong* craze of the 1980s and 1990s), and the “witch hunt” that surrounded her arrest after she became one of the most popular *qigong* practitioners in China (2003:325-327). Chen’s point is well taken. While it is true that many male *qigong* masters were arrested in the anti-superstition crackdown of the late 1990s, gender was never mentioned as a factor. “Power” and “maleness” sit comfortably as far as *qi*-related practices are concerned, “power” and “femaleness” less so.<sup>63</sup>

Among JTA members practicing in the park, if such gender-centered threats exist, they are generally invisible (at least to the men). If anything, push hands practice between men and women provides something of an egalitarian moment in an otherwise heavily male-oriented society. In push hands, men and women are allowed to engage in public, asexual touching. Especially among elderly men and women, touching non-family members of the opposite sex is limited. In the context of push hands, however, one is allowed a degree of human contact absent in most other social contexts. Since pushing between men and women is usually cooperative, rather than competitive, it engenders a therapeutic quality and generally operates as much as an extension of the relaxation practice of the solo, slow form.

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<sup>63</sup> See also Schein 385; Connell 1995; Eng 2001.

### ***The Life of the Park, Part II***

My experience of People's Park was not limited to taiji practice. My regular presence there made me part of an eclectic community of retired people, out-of-town visitors, workers, foreign tourists and the mentally ill. Some of these park dwellers had spent their daytime hours in the park at least since 1995. A woman named Jian, probably in her late fifties, always smiled brightly, sang popular songs at the top of her lungs, and begged for money. Since we went back a long way, I always gave her spare change. Others sometimes tried to shoo Jian away, but most of the taiji players, like me, seemed to accept her as part of their daily experience in the park. Another regular character—and a particularly skilled *qigong* practitioner—was Mr. Xu. Xu was probably the closest thing in the park to the popular conception of a “Daoist” in the sense of someone who wore clothing and engaged in actions that seemed to mimic (or perhaps generate) images that Shanghai locals saw nightly in television serials about the old Daoist masters. Winter or summer, Xu wore a light, long-sleeved *gongfu* suit and carried a fan. His normal exercise pattern was to walk extremely briskly about the park, sometimes for hours on end, gently undulating back and forth, as he walked and gently scolding park-goers with his fan as he walked by them. I was often the recipient of such scoldings. At first, I simply assumed that Mr. Xu was mad as a hatter, but as time went on, we began to speak, and I learned a great deal not only about the rationale behind his own method, but also about his long experience studying taijiquan with one of Shanghai's most famous, but reclusive taijiquan teachers. Xu had suffered from both physical and mental illness as a youth (he did not provide the details), and he very squarely studied taijiquan for its health benefits. Xu occasionally showed me moves from his Yang style taijiquan form, including essential basic exercises, and it was apparent from what he chose to show that this was something of a high level. He had developed an unusual flexibility in his joints and ribcage. He accompanied these actions with “healing

sounds” and claimed that his taijiquan was part of a specific Daoist system. Despite the benefits Xu had derived from his practice, he did not consider himself a high level practitioner and did not practice much taijiquan anymore. Instead, he had created his own method, which we saw in the park. From his appearance, Xu might have been thirty-five years old, but he claimed to be in his fifties. Amongst the People’s Park retirees, he had acquired a small, but enthusiastic following, mostly retired women. He accepted no money for his teaching, merely inviting people to walk along with him if they were so inclined. Xu could be quite enthusiastic about taijiquan and its accompanying arts. He could become quite demonstrative, but his movements were unusual, and, coupled with his behavior, occasionally attracted unwanted attention from the police. During one conversation, we stood by the park’s arboretum and chatted about internal methods. The methods Xu showed me included a series of intense inhalations and exhalations. The noise that Xu produced finally prompted a policeman, who had been watching us, to come over and inquire. While the policeman did not push the issue, the incident made us nervous enough to end the conversation and move on for the day. Particularly since the Falun Gong crackdown, everyone in the park assumed Big Brother was watching. The added presence of a foreigner made the situation even more tense.

Taijiquan is not the only martial art practiced in parks. I occasionally watched an American acquaintance practice a Shaolin method near the Nanjing Road side of the park. Watching people walk *baguazhang* (“eight trigrams palm”) circles was a common sight, as were the occasional *xingyiquan* (“shape-intent boxing”) players walking their lines of joining attacks back and forth.<sup>64</sup> Sword

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<sup>64</sup> *Baguazhang* (Eight Trigrams Palm) basic practice involves walking the circumference of a circle in a bent-kneed posture. The hands face toward the center of the circle, requiring an extreme twisting of the waist. *Xingyiquan* (Shape Intent Boxing) involves walking in straight lines while making vigorous, whipping attacks with the hands and feet. *Xingyiquan* is famous for “joining attacks,” i.e. strikes that are made while intercepting an attack.

dances, especially *mulanquan* (“Mulan boxing”), were popular among the older women, and, despite (or perhaps because of) the crackdown on Falun Gong, there always seemed to be some new form of *qigong* popping up that no one had ever seen or heard of. But the large group practice of *qigong* that I had noted on my previous visit in 1997 seemed to have disappeared entirely. Taijiquan, *mulanquan*, and various fan and drum dances, along with the ever-present ballroom dancing, were now the order of the day.

The workers in the park saw all this from a somewhat skeptical distance. As a rule, the laborers in People’s Park (and, I assume, other parks around the city) were illegal Anhui workers who park officials had hired to complete short-term projects. There were also crews of legal Shanghai residents who took the regular gardening and maintenance positions. The Anhui workers tended to be male, ex-military, young, and willing to work with no weekends, low pay, and little rest. Compared to many of the other jobs that drew on illegal labor around Shanghai, the park workers seemed to feel that they had a relatively comfortable situation. Park construction projects—e.g. laying garden stones, refurbishing bathrooms and kiosks, repairing plumbing—were generally devoid of the kind of dangers that came with hi-rise construction projects, tunnel-building, and road construction.

One day, after I had completed an hour-long practice in the park, a young laborer with whom I had a nodding acquaintance waved me over. Indicating the four or five friends with whom he was eating lunch at the moment, he said, “We were just wondering if you work.”

At the time, I was teaching English classes in the evening, so I told him, “Yes, I work in the evening, but mostly I study.”

“You’re still in school?” my friend asked.

“I’m a research scholar,” I replied.

“You practice a lot.”

“I’m researching taijiquan. I’m writing a taijiquan dissertation.” This seemed to satisfy my friends. “How about you,” I asked. “Do you practice martial arts?”

My friend laughed. “Yeah,” he said. “I practice Shaolin.”

I asked my friend about his situation, how he came to work in the park, how he came to Shanghai. He said that he had lost a job in Anhui and had friends in Shanghai, so he came there looking for work. It was common, he said, for city park foremen to scour the streets looking for workers. There were so many out-of-towners looking for work that it was easy to hire them.

### *Secret Spaces*

While my formal practice in Shanghai was limited to the JTA, push hands provided a gateway for practicing with many other groups and individuals. In and outside of Shanghai, I always sought taijiquan players against whom I could test my skills or from whom I could learn something new. These were not teacher-student relationships. Rather, they were interactions with friends. Some of these interactions took on a regularity of their own. One accomplished Yang and Wu style player, a disciple of the Wu style teacher Wang Haoda (who was in turn one of the better-known disciples of Ma Yueliang), invited me to participate in a regular Thursday evening practice he oversaw in an office of a Shanghai factory building. Lo Yisheng, in his early forties, was among the more accomplished push hands players I met in Shanghai. We first met in a park and were joined by some of Lo’s friends (Lo called them “friends,” though they insisted in his presence that they were also his “students”). Each of these players came from a different taiji style—Wu, Yang, Sun, and Wu (Hao)—but the glue that held them together was Lo’s emphasis on basic taiji principles. They rarely dealt with particular forms or postures, instead emphasizing the application of the eight basic energies. Lo was an accomplished martial artist who had studied many other styles in his youth and

who had some boxing skill. For him, taijiquan was more about proper application of mind and energy than anything else. Unlike Teacher Pang, Lo had a rather specific pedagogy and, partly because of his training in TCM, a constant interest in relating taijiquan to the *Yijing* (I Ching), to Daoist and Buddhist cosmology, and to physics. In fact, Lo had developed something of a following among the French New Age community and had traveled to France to conduct seminars several times. He cultivated relationships with other foreigners in Shanghai, both through his own contacts, and through the many foreigners that came to study with Wang Haoda, who had become one of the chief Wu style proponents in the U.S. through his annual workshops there. Thus, the Thursday night group, crammed into a tiny room from which we needed to remove all the desks and tables, became a kind of intimate meeting place for exchange among foreign and Chinese practitioners. Aside from me, the other foreigner who most often participated was a French acupuncturist, magazine publisher, and businessman, though we were joined by other foreigners on occasion.

A typical Thursday night practice session at the factory included some polite tea drinking and conversation. While Lo maintained that he was not the teacher, we all treated him as one because of his skills. The other participant who gained such treatment was Professor Ding, a philosophy professor from Nanjing University, who had also studied Wu style for many years. Ding and I had met at the Ma family Qingming<sup>65</sup> commemoration, and it was Ding who originally introduced me to Lo. In the course of the tea drinking, Lo would usually expound upon a particular point, e.g. the application of *peng* (upward and outward) energy or the proper execution of *ji* (press) energy. For him, there was no difference in taijiquan between “techniques” and “energies.” One could not understand techniques, in other words, without understanding energies and the transformation

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<sup>65</sup> Qingming (Pure Brightness), also known as “grave sweeping day,” is a day in early April when families journey to the tombs of their ancestors to pay their respects.

of one quality of energy to another. After some discussion, Lo would get up and borrow one of us for a demonstration. From there, he would invite everyone else to stand up and push with one another. The pushing in this group was always gentle and respectful, and participants were quite strict about adhering to taiji principles and avoiding the usual degeneration into playground wrestling. Participants were free to sit out, chat, and drink tea as they pleased. After an hour or so of practice, occasionally punctuated by an explanation from Lo, we all sat down, still sipping our tea and “processed” the experience of the evening. Lo asked each of us to briefly comment on what we had gotten out of the evening. Again, these exchanges were exceedingly polite. In every case, Professor Ding would begin his comments with profuse compliments for Lo, which Lo would deflect, always commenting that his senior, Ding, was the superior. We, of course, all knew this to be untrue. We knew that while Ding had good *tingjin* and decent skills, Lo was a real fighter.

Out of Thursdays came an occasional visit to push with the Wang Haoda and the rest of his students in the park where they regular practiced. Wang Haoda was frequently out of the country in 2001 conducting workshops in foreign lands, but the few visits I managed to have with him were lively and informative. He was an extremely small man, but, his students told me, he could generate tremendous power. In written accounts, Wang himself claimed that it took many years of getting pushed around by bigger and stronger push hands players before he began to understand Ma’s methods. From there, in recent years, he had extrapolated his own. This extrapolation and individualization of style had led him away from many of the other JTA members. While I never heard any JTA member criticize Wang, he never participated in the JTA’s monthly meetings. Whether this was a matter of estrangement or simply reflected his busy travel schedule I do not know. Regardless of the explanation, Wang’s foreign followers,

many of them linking with him through the Chinese American martial arts teacher George Xu, did not interact with other Wu style players in Shanghai.

Wang expressed himself with a bluntness one could not help but appreciate. I had the honor of sharing his final birthday banquet with him (shortly before his death in the Spring of 2002). In the middle of the soup, sitting across from me at the large round banquet table, Wang said, “Mr. Frank, your push hands is really poor. If you come visit me on the weekends, I’d be happy to teach you.” Everyone laughed, including the butt of the joke.<sup>66</sup>

In yet another park, I occasionally pushed with a contemporary of Wang Haoda’s, Teacher Gan. I had known Gan since 1975, when he regularly practiced with Teacher Qian at People’s Park. At that time, he demonstrated a fondness for quickly doing “pull down” (*cai*), a technique which, if resisted, could result in a dislocated shoulder or elbow. I did not resist and usually found myself lifted off my feet and thrown back several feet. In 1997, at the urging of a friend and fellow student of Qian’s, I spent more time working with Gan, who had taken to separating himself from the main JTA group at People’s Park on the weekends. The man who I had originally thought to be something of a grandstanding bully turned out to be one of the more generous teachers I have ever met in China—kind not only in his willingness to share knowledge of push hands, but in his general demeanor as well. But Gan tended to express his kindness in a larger than life way. In 2001, I paid occasional visits to his regular practice place not far from Fudan University. Accompanied by my friend, I discovered a group of serious push hands players from many different taijiquan and martial arts backgrounds. Like Doctor Lo’s factory group, Gan eschewed the teaching of forms and concentrated solely on push hands. His teaching method was unique in its combination of martial realism, emphasis on total awareness, and requirements

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<sup>66</sup> I regret that I was never again able to take this great teacher up on his offer.

for gentleness and lightness. Few of Gan's students seemed to really get what he was doing. Gan's method often included a short shout (what the Japanese call *kiai*) and a very natural but powerful method of connecting with oncoming force. Pushing hands with Gan, one felt like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. A decision to attack was met with a yell, a soft but forceful deflection of your attack and an immediate pull down or uproot that sent you flying back words. Gan did break the biomechanics down for me at one time: he particularly emphasized a lifting of the rib cage while the lower body sunk downwards even further. Technique aside, Gan emphasized feeling and awareness. Toward that end, his better students, including my friend, refused to use any force at all in their practice. Like Liu Jianwu's *yiquan*-style ("intention boxing") method in Haiyang Park, Gan's relied on understanding the opponent's intention and moving accordingly. When I pushed with my friend, we strived to maintain lightness and often jumped back in the distinctive Wu style hopping method at the mere hint of attack. I never really gained the "sense" (*ganjue*) that my friend spoke of, but I understood its value and finally had to concede the victory to him in our ongoing discussion about the value of technique versus feeling. My friend felt strongly that technique in taijiquan was virtually useless, that everything had to arise naturally out of feeling. In the end, I agreed with him that feeling was paramount—one could not execute techniques without *tingjin*, understanding *yi*, etc. But I also felt that the boxer who did understand these things, who did have the feeling of the thing, could learn to execute techniques at a much higher level than without it. To me, this was where the real secret of how great martial artists like Ma Yueliang, Sun Lutang (a contemporary of Wu Jianquan), and Wu Gongyi (Wu Jianquan's son) gained their boxing skill. I never fully convinced my friend of this, but in the end, we agreed to disagree.

Gan's personal story was as interesting as his boxing method. He claimed to have been suffering from severe depression sometime during the Cultural

Revolution. He did not provide details, but recounted how taijiquan balanced him sufficiently to continue. Once healthy, he found that he was hooked on taijiquan. Despite his obvious martial skill, Gan claimed that his main interest was and continued to be health. He saw taijiquan as a great curative exercise, and, indeed, it was an opinion shared by the vast majority of taijiquan players in and outside of China who rarely study push hands to any advanced level.

Perhaps the most knowledgeable person regarding the history and present geography of martial arts that I met in Shanghai was a young taijiquan and *xingyiquan* practitioner who used the English name Danny. At twenty-five, Danny had already attained surprising power in his *xingyiquan*. In one of our occasional exchanges in his apartment one day, Danny offered to allow me to feel a *xingyi* “push.” I gamely offered him a shoulder to push and, in a flash, unexpectedly found my head bouncing off his living room wall. While I had seen the technique (that is, Danny had visible technique rather than the extremely short distance technique of the even more advanced internal practitioner) his display was surprising and impressive. Danny had briefly studied with my first JTA teacher, Teacher Qian, later studied with Teacher Lu, and pushed now and then with Teacher Pang, yet he often lamented his inability to study with a truly “great” taijiquan teacher. He had never known Ma, but had heard rumors that Ma had been defeated in the 1950s, so did not worship Ma to the extent that many Wu style followers did. For Danny, “great” had to conform in some respect to the stories of old, the tales that painted pictures of men of almost magical abilities. Danny, in effect, was looking for the “little old Chinese man” in a big way. Danny and I differed in one respect: I argued that we should make do with the best teacher we could find, strive to surpass him or her in understanding, then continue our search. Danny felt that working with less than the best could only breed bad habits, a feeling I believe he shared with my Swedish Wu style friend.

Like many serious taijiquan players I met in China and the United States, Danny expressed an inability to quite fit in. Highly intelligent, Danny had taught himself to speak exceptionally good English, but had never managed the grades or test scores to get to college. Through Chinese tutoring and martial arts, he cultivated relationships with English-speaking foreign friends. In fact, it was through Cal that I became acquainted with him and, on occasion, the three of us practiced push hands together. Danny had married an American lawyer working for a company in Shanghai and hoped to continue eventually with his university education. But his chief interest was internal martial arts. For the last several years, he had really devoted himself to *xingyiquan*, studying with an accomplished fighter who worked as a janitor at a middle school, Mr. He.

Danny was one of the few practitioners I met who articulated the phenomenological experience of the external transforming into the internal. In Teacher He's method, one went through several levels in order to attain true mastery. Danny, at level two or three, had begun to experience the sensation of turning a ball in the region of his *dantian*. "At first, I could not turn the ball consistently," he told me. "But as time's gone on, I've begun to be able to turn it at will. It feels extremely powerful, and that's where the power is generated from." Until a year after I left Shanghai, I could only guess at what Danny met, but eventually, my own practice of Wu style basic exercises began to generate a similar sensation (or what I took to be a similar sensation). For me, the level remained low: inconsistent, and the turning of the ball was often incomplete or somehow "flat." But when it worked, it felt quite clear. This came about most often in the course of push hands practice. On a "good" day, when I could turn the ball, I felt a strong, sticky connection between my feet and the ground. I became very solid below, but very light above and push hands partners reported that I felt like a "tree" or a "rock." While there is certainly a physiology to this particular phenomenon, its execution is less dependent on knowledge of anatomy than on

the disciplined practice of exercises over a long period of time and a certain “letting go” that allows the ball to move once one becomes aware of it.

All this, of course, leads to the most important aspect of practice of all: private practice. Here is where the individual experience of taijiquan as a set of *forms* manifests itself. Here is where one links directly to the noumena of practice that is passed on and modified across space and time. Here also is where one’s will is truly tested, for without the presence of teacher or coach, one’s capacity to *chi ku* (“eat bitterness”) is tested in more subtle ways. In Shanghai especially, it is easy to pop in a VCD, take a bus ride to Huaihai shopping district, or go to the library to catch the latest selection in the foreign film series. Distractions abound. Whereas in a rural area like Wenxian, where the Chen family village is located, the distractions are fewer (though VCDs are everywhere), the city itself is the biggest obstacle to progress in Shanghai. I will touch more on this in Part II. For the present, I will concentrate on the act of practice and the process of learning that I undertook in my daily individual practice.

Because I took so many classes and met with so many practitioners, finding time to practice individually sometimes became problematic. Progress required a minimum of two hours individual practice per day (this was on top of individual lessons or group practice). In order to achieve this, my main individual practice periods usually occurred immediately after a group practice, when I was already in the park, and on evenings or weekdays immediately following my practice with Teacher Lu, when I generally attempted to videotape form corrections and keep a video journal of the practice experience. My apartment afforded enough space to practice individual solo moves from the empty handed slow and fast forms, individual moves from the sword forms (with a chopstick substituting for a sword) and certain spear drills, if I angled my body properly. More importantly, since my teachers requested that I practice certain basic exercises privately, I restricted them to indoor practice. When I was not practicing

inside, I usually chose to practice near a set of clotheslines adjacent to my high-rise apartment building. My schedule coincided with that of one elderly woman who more than once admonished me for practicing in the afternoon or evening when I should have been exercising in the morning.

“Chinese people exercise in the morning,” she said one time as she pulled down laundry from a clothesline.

“I practice in the morning too,” I told her.

Frequently, I practiced in Hengshan Park, which was only a few minutes walk from my home, but which had limited space. From the beginning of my 2001 fieldwork, I set out to develop a practice routine that would emphasize basics. Since my teachers were very much geared toward this as well, it was not difficult to develop such a routine. I usually began with basic stretching and strengthening exercises. At first, these consisted of certain exercises I had brought with me from the states, from standard runners’ stretches to yoga-like stretches I had learned from other internal martial arts systems. By the summer of 2001, however, I had acquired enough knowledge of the Wu style basic exercises to incorporate them regularly into my own stretching regimen. In fact, they became a centerpiece of my training and eventually became the most important single practice method I learned from JTA teachers. The basic stretches and accompanying sitting meditation took anywhere from an hour to ninety minutes to complete. With the addition of other stretches, along with running through basic push hands moves in front of a mirror and simply practicing the shift of weight back and forth, my basic warm up took a full two hours to complete. My busy training and research schedule far too often meant that exercises were abbreviated, or, when traveling, eliminated almost entirely, but in general, I kept up with the routine and found tremendous benefit in it.

After completing the basics, I spent one or two hours concentrating on form practice. As I learned new forms throughout the year, the emphasis changed.

In the first three months, Lu and I devoted almost all of our time to the slow form, trying to re-vamp the foundation that I had begun to build under Qian many years before, but which had never really solidified into proper, repeatable technique. Under Lu and Pang, this soon changed. After three months of practice, I could no longer use lack of knowledge as an excuse for improper slow form. Through intense practice, I had begun to restructure my body in a way that allowed me to leave behind some of my previous poor habits. From there, I went through a similar process with the fast form, then picked up sword, saber, and spear forms. While many other weapons systems and exercises remain to be learned, I came away from 2001 with the complete basic Wu style system: basic exercises, meditation, slow form, fast form, saber, double-edged sword, spear, and push hands and accompanying drills for all these exercises.<sup>67</sup> With so many components to master, four hours daily practice was not even close to enough time. The fact that I was on a clock—albeit a yearlong one—compelled me to take on so much. It is not a path I would recommend to anyone else, especially for taijiquan. Taijiquan takes time to sink in. During periods of intense practice, I found, sleep and light practice days allowed for this to happen.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the many positives associated with intensive individual practice, there were consequences as well. Hubris was chief among them. It was easy to think that certain odd and interesting sensations translated into some sort of physical power in the real world. But as time went on, I came to the conclusion that only through long and rigorous practice of technique, particularly push hands,

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<sup>67</sup> The key word here is “basic,” for in taijiquan, as in most martial arts, the practitioner is not expected to have reached a level where real progress can happen until certain pieces of the puzzle are mastered at a rudimentary level. In various Japanese karate styles and Korean Taekwondo, the black belt is awarded not as an acknowledgement of mastery of the art, but rather mastery of the fundamentals.

<sup>68</sup> During my brief period of study with one of the most accomplished American taijiquan teachers and martial artists, Peter Ralston, he often described practicing up to eight hours per day during his most intense period of learning, but he also attributed certain persistent injuries to his unwillingness to allow his body to heal during that period.

could one manifest the internal power martially. In other words, individual practice was meant to set a foundation for partner practice, and this it did. In fact, it became increasingly apparent to me that the secret to the JTA success with push hands lay in this link between individual experience and partner exchanges. One could not truly learn one without the other.

What exactly does one develop in individual taijiquan practice? The question might be addressed in terms of popular, but decidedly obtuse notions of “*qi*,” but few taijiquan teachers in Shanghai spoke of *qi* with any great frequency. One works on one’s *qi* (thus “*qigong*”), but it is almost a secondary result of exercises that have very specific joint opening, stretching, or strengthening functions. The student at first focuses on basic principles. For example, Teacher Pang taught a simple exercise that required shifting the weight back and forth from *gongbu* (“bow stance”) to *xubu* (“empty stance”), making sure to keep the body from rising up while carefully and slowly shifting weight one hundred percent forward and one hundred percent back. As one’s leg strength increases (and this happens within the first month), the exercise becomes more about relaxing and maintaining a constant, light tension in the legs than simply strengthening. Over several months, one becomes more sensitive to “not collapsing, not resisting” (*bu diu, bu ding*) in the legs and feet. After still more time, combined with constant self-correction of postures, the practitioner begins to develop a definite sense of “rooting” in the feet. The shift of weight becomes more precise, so that when the weight moves forward, it moves into and pours down through the “bubbling well spring” (*yongquan*) in the ball of the foot, and the rear heel turns slightly out, both feet flat on the ground. When the weight shifts backwards, the focus shifts to the bubbling well spring in the rear foot. Actually, in both cases, the practitioner is aware of the bubbling wellspring point in both feet, but as the weight shifts, the primary attention shifts to the opposite foot.

As still more time passes and the combination of basic exercises, forms practice, and push hands opens the joints and rib cage more and more, one begins to feel tenuous connections between the hands and feet. At first, these are fleeting and wispy sensations, as if a few strands of spider web connect the feet through the hands, through the center of the body. Eventually, these strands become somewhat thicker, perhaps like guitar strings, and they become more numerous. If, as Tucson teacher Mike Phillips describes it, one “seats the wrists” properly, this feeling becomes both more consistent and more tangible. An advanced taiji body has a spring-loaded quality. However, before one can actually manifest the power, it becomes a feeling in the body.

Each system has a specific set of exercises that develop the connections between fingers and feet. The taijiquan slow form is itself such an exercise, but, in some ways, is advanced training rather than basic training. Teacher Lu, as I mentioned earlier, differentiated between “young person’s” taiji and “old person’s.” Young people, in his view, possessed the strength and stamina to actually transform the muscles and tendons of the body, but this took a commitment to low, rigorous posture practice and expansive movements. In fact, it is this sort of practice that both Yang and Chen family members described in their apocryphal stories in the nineteenth century. The Ma/Wu family tell the story that Wu Jianquan was forced by his father to practice for hours on end while standing under a sort of high table. Such tales are in keeping with the kinds of brutal training that once characterized (and still characterizes to some degree) the training of Beijing-style opera actors. A theatre designer at the University of Texas at Austin who trained in a Beijing Opera school in Taipei from childhood until his mid-teens described a life that seemed to come straight out of the movies (and was in fact depicted in detail in the Hong Kong film *Painted Faces*): children studying math while standing on their heads and hands, flipping pages with their

noses, regular beatings, and, together with a cohort, changing into costume on a moving motorcycle while eating dinner.<sup>69</sup>

The development of a true spring-action in the body, a structural transformation that resulted in the ability to naturally and effortlessly rebound force placed on any part of the body, requires rigorous and continuous training. It is not a skill that one acquires through the exclusive exertion of mental imagery and meditation, though once understood, mental imagery and meditation can enhance one's ability. For the practitioner, the ultimate game is a mental one, but few serious practitioners harbor the illusion that there is any easy path to "using *yi*, not *li*."

### ***Conclusion***

Habitual memory is often passed on in taijiquan with little or no comment. Casey (1987) views the transmission of habitual memory as a subconscious process in much the same way that Foucault traces the movement of institutional power through the body, but I would argue that even if the taijiquan student remains unaware of the process of habitual *memorization*, for the teacher, it is a very conscious process, one that the teacher *must* have gone through personally in order to be effective. Teacher Lu often knew when I had grasped a point about a posture or push hands well before I knew. He took advantage of that moment repeatedly to provide a new piece of the puzzle. Understanding came when my body began to answer questions before I had even become conscious of the questions. In a dialogue between the taught lesson and individual practice, the private realm of sensuality, experience led to progress. I may have read in the *taiji* classics, for example, that in the execution of a taijiquan technique, energy circulates through a "nine-pearl string" that is comprised of the wrists, elbows,

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<sup>69</sup> Public lecture by Phil Lin. Austin, Texas. 1999.

shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles, but this was meaningless information until I finally felt an actual connection.

It is less clear how sublimely intersubjective the student-teacher relationship is. If a certain habitual memory of Chineseness is passed on through taijiquan, do I become in some part Chinese by receiving the transmission? Herder's *Besonnenheit*, or reflection, may provide us with a partial framework for thinking through this question. Briggs and Bauman argue that for Herder

*Besonnenheit* is the "entire disposition of man's forces," a complex and unitary human capacity that encompasses "the total economy of his sensuous and cognitive, or his cognitive and volitional nature"... In the concept of *Besonnenheit*, Herder rejects the separation of faculties—reason, emotion, will, etc.—on which Kantian philosophy is built. For Herder, "all such words as sensuousness and instinct, fantasy and reason are after all no more than determinations of one single power wherein opposites cancel each other out"... in the concept of *Besonnenheit* the Kantian antinomies vanish. [Briggs and Bauman 1995:39-40].

It would be convenient to take Herder's position to mean that the antinomy of "Chinese" and "foreign/white" disappears in the glory of a hard practice on a hot summer day, but the issue of race is too persistent and complex to yield to facile approaches. A sense of race is not, after all, wired into us only through the micro-level interactions of individuals. In Shanghai, for example, the astonishingly fast transformation from socialist to capitalist economy that has taken place over the last twenty-five years involves not only exchanges of capital and goods, but also exchanges of images about who *we* are and who *they* are. Hegemonies operating at the level of city, nation, and transnation contribute to new racial formations. I turn to this process, starting with the level of the city, in my next chapter.

## PART II: CITY AND NATION

### Chapter 4

#### From Practice to City: Taijiquan as Public Art

##### VI

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

—Wallace Stevens  
*From “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”*

In the first section of this dissertation, I outlined how the concepts of *qi* and *yi* play out in terms of sensual experience, practice techniques, and the social relations within the JTA that unfold at the level of the park. I was initially concerned with not only the idea of the body as an inscribed site of social relations, a space for the ritualization of race, and an expression of gender and class difference, but in the actual nuts and bolts process of inscription that occurs in the everyday practice—the learning and teaching—of taijiquan. In this chapter, I move from the micro-level of individual experience and the transmission of the art, to the larger project of looking at how the city of Shanghai, through its history, its political economy, and its infrastructure, inscribes and is inscribed by taijiquan. I am particularly interested in the process by which Shanghai city planners implicitly embrace “traditional,” martial arts-oriented taijiquan styles as public art that fill park space, while at the same time displacing them by privileging non-martial taiji styles that are simulacra of tradition as it is conceived

by the JTA. In other words, many JTA members and other martially inclined taijiquan practitioners who continue to have a strong memory of pre-1949 conditions in their art differentiate *chuantongde* (literally, “traditional,” but in this sense, connoting “authentic”) taijiquan from *biaoyan* (“performance”).

### ***Inscribing the City***

The inscription of both place and time on the body has become paradigmatic in the anthropology of bodily practice (Foucault 1977, 1980, 1984; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Mauss 1973; Bourdieu 1977). But the converse notion of bodies inscribing the space of the city has been explored to a lesser degree: Regarding taijiquan as an art that inscribes, one might begin by asking, “If taijiquan were to disappear tomorrow, would it have any effect on the city of Shanghai?” In Shanghai alone, tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of people have practiced taijiquan at one time or another. It is difficult to imagine a Shanghai morning without taijiquan practitioners scattered throughout the parks and other open spaces of the city. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the practice has virtually disappeared from the city on more than one occasion—specifically, during the Japanese occupation and during the Cultural Revolution. In more recent times, loosely related practices such as Falun Gong have been banned outright and, despite the highly visible presence of Falun Gong practitioners in parks only a few years ago, they are now nowhere to be seen (Chen 2003; Frank 2003; Ownby 2002). So “disappearing” a practice that seems so essential—indeed, one that essentializes Chineseness as both a racial category and as an expression of nation—is a very real possibility. What would be missing from Shanghai under such circumstances? What does the presence of the art, the presence of thousands of slow-moving bodies appearing at sunrise each and every morning, inscribe upon a city that prides itself on both its cosmopolitan heritage and its hyper-modernity?

### ***Past, Present, Future***

Shanghai often seems to be a city obsessed with time. At any given moment, on any given street, one can look about and find a pastiche of past, present, and future in architecture, in clothing and hair styles, in movement, in brand names, and especially in the conscious reconstruction and preconstruction of the city. There is perhaps no more concise example of this odd simultaneity built into the city than the temporal pastiche that lies adjacent to, above, and below the southern entrance to People's Park. One of the many People's Square subway access points, the exit lets out only a few feet from the park, and those who opt to take this exit must first pass through a historically approximate replica of a 1930 Shanghai street scene (*Shanghai 1930 fengjing jie*). Lined by a few actual shops and coffee houses, the "street" is probably no more than twenty-five meters long. The shops have been designed to resemble old storefronts. At one end of the street, a photograph of a park (perhaps Fuxing Park) covers an entire wall. If one looks closely, it is apparent that the people sitting on the park benches are dressed in clothing that significantly post-dates 1930. At the other end of the street, between a short hall leading to the subway turnstiles and the stairs one must mount in order to return to the "present" above, there are several life-sized bronze statues. One particularly poignant statue depicts a shoeless peasant child shining the shoes of an imaginary customer. Nearby, another bronze depicts a street hawker in robes selling snacks. Between these figures, the front-half of a real streetcar emerges from a life-size photograph of Nanjing Road. Life-size cutouts of a woman, dressed in a *qipao* (a split-thigh dress popular in the 1930s and at present), a man dressed in robes and fedora, and a third dressed in a western-style suit, appear to pass by on the street behind the streetcar. A small display, written in Chinese and almost indecipherable English, provides a romanticized description of Shanghai street life before the Japanese occupation (the Japanese are not mentioned explicitly, but the date of 1930 may reference

1932, the year the Japanese began to secure territory through military means in China). Rather than a “replica,” which implies a striving for accuracy, this rendition of a 1930 street, like several similar projects scattered around Shanghai, is a simulacrum, a several-times-removed attempt to evoke a sense of place and time, rather than to duplicate it in any sort of detail. Like “Main Street” in the original Anaheim Disneyland, the 1930 Street is a reduplication of myth more than a reconstruction of the past.

Emerging from the subway station, one is immediately confronted by “the present”: the impressive Shanghai Museum across the street; and the innovative buildings of the Shanghai Municipal government complex, modern glass and steel structures that reference pre-Republican architecture with their distinctive Chinese “hats” line the wide, busy thoroughfare. The subway exit abuts the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall (*Shanghai chengshi guihua zhanshiguan*), a multi-story building that proudly displays Shanghai as not only “modern,” but also as a technologically cutting edge “green” city. Exhibitions on the lower floors include reproductions of a modern living room, tastefully decorated in IKEA; thinly disguised advertisements for various housing estates; a section on “green” technology, featuring details of Shanghai’s successes in cleaning up the formerly stinking Suzhou Creek, as well as an (unused) example of a flushless, odorless public toilet; and an amazing cinematic “puppet theatre” that projects a miniature scene of streetlife in pre-1949 Shanghai onto miniature buildings. The most impressive exhibit, however, is reserved for the top floor of the exhibition hall: a 3-D model of the entire city of Shanghai projects development several decades into the future. This model covers the entire floor and is surrounded by a raised platform. Visitors stand on the platform and glory in their panoptic gaze of what was (only weeks or months before), what is, and what will be. By pressing a button, one can see where new housing estates and other building projects will emerge in the coming years. By taking an alternate exit out of the exhibition hall,

the visitor can re-enter the 1930 street in the subway station from a slightly different direction—literally walking from the future into the past. A video compact disc available in the exhibition hall’s gift shop, entitled “Flying through Time and Space” (*Feiyue shi kong*) proudly states in its description of the hall, “As soon as you enter this gate, you will experience the Shanghai of yesterday, today and tomorrow.”

In order to understand how taijiquan fits into the temporal journey that is modern Shanghai, it will be useful to first look in some detail at the development of the city from its pre-Opium War origins into its present status as a significant driving force, as well as recipient of, processes of globalization. Through these details, we begin to see how the process of inscribing city on body occurs. Nast and Pile have written that

Both bodies and places need to be freed from the logic that says that they are either universal or unique. Instead, it would be better to think of the ways in which bodies and places are understood, how they are made and how they are interrelated, one to the other – because this is how we live our lives—through places, through the body. [Nast and Pile 1998:1].

In the case of Shanghai, this interrelationship between body and city inevitably comes back to questions of capital. In other words, by understanding the history of Shanghai’s economic transformations and the evolution of a commodity-oriented mentality in the city, we can read history, economy, and politics through the taijiquan forms themselves. Because of these links between city and practice, I treat taijiquan in this chapter not only as public culture, but more specifically as *public art*. In much the same way that city planners might commission a sculpture, mural, or garden to fill a space (positive), they create unfilled (negative) spaces where taijiquan players enact simultaneous moments of tradition and modernity.

### *Discursive Spaces*

Presenting Shanghai as I have as an almost Levi-Straussian collection of indigenous spatial mythemes stakes out only one among many discursive approaches to the city. A significant “Shanghai studies” literature has emerged in the past decade to constitute a multi-disciplinary sub-field through which several contending discourses vie for paradigmatic status. The first of these is a largely synchronic urban studies approach to the city that treats Shanghai as a collection of statistics. While the poststructuralist critique has opened up discursive space in urban studies that allows for other voices, the statistical discourse remains *operationally* the dominant voice at both the level of urban planning in Shanghai and at the level of global flows of capital. Among Chinese urban studies scholars, most of whom are attached to research institutes or universities in urban areas where municipal officials often seek their advice, it is, in effect, the exclusive discourse.<sup>70</sup>

The continued importance of the statistical discourse, both in and outside of China, is well-represented in a collection of revised papers from the 2000 conference, “The New Chinese City: Globalization and Market Reform” held in Shanghai. Edited by John Logan (2002), director of the China Research Network at the State University of New York at Albany, these essays emphasize statistical analysis over historical or cultural factors. It is not that the authors reject the value of such analyses, but their agenda is policy-oriented and the number-crunching language they employ is meant to sway officials and convince corporate moguls. Generally, therefore, the picture they paint is often a romantically rosy one, where the ill effects of *fazhan* (“development”) remain understated or unmentioned. The

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<sup>70</sup> In the halls of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, for example, one finds office after office sporting signs announcing social science “consulting” firms. It is now common practice for faculty to establish such firms under the auspices of SASS and to use graduate student labor to conduct the research that these firms generate. Highbrow discussions of Foucault, however interesting they might be to a particular faculty member, are not generally looked kindly upon by corporate clients.

volume does offer some exceptions to this rule, thus making it one of the first China urban studies volumes published in English where Chinese scholars use statistics to actually critique government policies. While most of these critiques are restricted to the municipal government rather than the CCP at the national level, they nevertheless mark an important sense of commitment among urban studies scholars to stake out political territory in Shanghai's development debates.

The statistical approaches in the Logan volume and other recent work tend to focus on the interaction between the movement of capital and the movement of people. Fu Zhengji, for example, provides a useful historical overview of the relationship between state and capital in post-Reform Shanghai. Fu argues that a collusion has always existed in Shanghai between municipal, state, and global capital levels (Fu 2002). He divides development in the city into six historical phases: the formation of modern Shanghai (1842-1895), when the British and American-dominated Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) and the French Municipality built infrastructure; the golden age of Shanghai (1895-1927), which began with the 1895 Treaty of Shimoneski that ended the Sino-Japanese war and gave foreigners rights for the first time to establish factories in China, transforming Shanghai from a capitalist mercantile city to a centralized industrial capital city; Nationalist Shanghai (1927-1937), which saw a combination of entrepreneurial activity and organized crime; the end of Shanghai's international status (1937-49), during which the city virtually ceased to function as either a destination of foreign capital or as a focal point of local entrepreneurial activity; Socialist Shanghai (1949—79), when the city rebuilt and even expanded its industrial base but focused almost entirely on internal markets; and Post-socialist (1979-present), during which economic reform has led to a massive inflow of capital and a massive outflow of exports. Fu makes the important (and surprising) point that China only began accepting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 1978, yet the city of Shanghai *alone* now accounts for 2.1% of *global* FDI. He argues

that this incredible surge in FDI could only have come about through a project-based, pro-growth coalition of government officials, local entrepreneurs, and international capitalists (Fu 2002).

Logan contributes further to this statistical history of Chinese urbanization, noting that China's population grew from 12% urban in 1950 to 30% urban in 1993 (Logan 2002). During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), 8.3 million new residents moved to cities each year. Then food shortages, combined with disbursement of military personnel from coastal areas to the interior, resulted in de-urbanization. During the Cultural Revolution, urban industry drew millions of peasants, but, during the same period, millions of urban youth were sent down to the countryside. At present, China has thirty cities with a population of over one million, but the urban system "tilted toward small places, with 375 cities of less than 200,000 population" (Logan 2000:8). Shanghai saw an overall increase in population between 1982 and 1990, but the core area of the city actually saw a decrease of 3%, while the suburban population increased 40-60%. The increase in FDI paralleled (or perhaps drove) population growth and suburbanization of major cities like Shanghai and Beijing. By 1996, FDI had reached \$16 billion (Wu Fulong 2000; in Logan 2002). Logan notes that

Many enterprises were transferred from central to provincial control, there was a shift from fixed to variable, negotiated price for products, local governments were allowed to retain 70 percent of surplus foreign currency earnings, and wage reforms were introduced at the enterprise level. Further, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were established in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen. [Logan 2002:10].

Logan cites the emergence of the powerful municipality as "a key innovation," attributing this shift in power as much to CCP decisions to decentralize as to the forces of globalization (Logan 2002:11).

The image of Shanghai as powerful economic machine is further strengthened by authors who use statistics to provide an even deeper look at the

macro-level infrastructural, industrial, and social changes that have accompanied development. Between 1980 and 1997, for example, Shanghai saw a rapid expansion of its service sector. Primary industry fell from 3.2% to 2.3%, secondary went from 75.7% to 52.2%, and tertiary went from 21.1% to 45.5%. This shift from heavy industry to the service and financial sectors was exemplified by the 1990 decision to develop Pudong, the expanse of farm and village land on the East side of the Huangpu, directly opposite Waitan (“the Bund”). During my first visit to Shanghai in the winter of 1988, visitors strolling along the Bund could note a few small buildings and warehouses on the other side of the river. By 2001, dozens of skyscrapers dominated the skyline, including one of the tallest buildings in the world, the I.M. Pei-designed Jinmao Tower (*jinmao dasha*), a structure that evokes Batman’s Gotham City. Not far from the Jinmao stands the Oriental Pearl Television Tower (*dongfang mingzhu guangbo dianshi ta*), one of the tallest (now non-functioning) broadcast towers in the world. In the shadow of such structures, one cannot shake the feeling that retro futurists have taken over China’s university urban planning programs. 1950s science fiction images of crystal cities rising through the clouds have apparently become a dominant design paradigm among Pudong’s municipal planners.<sup>71</sup>

Yet change and expansion in Shanghai are not limited to Pudong. From 1990 to 1997, Shanghai’s urban areas expanded from 748.71 square kilometers to 2,643.06; downtown went from 280.45 square kilometers to 359.36, increases of 253% and 28%, respectively. The city’s population in 1990 was 7.8 million; by 1997 10.2 million. This figure did not include the floating population (that is, the population that had not obtained legal permission to transfer their *hukou dengji*, or residence permit, to Shanghai), which amounted to some 2.32 million people (Wu and Li 2002; Logan 2002; Fu 2002). The notion that the now sleek and modern

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<sup>71</sup> It is important to note that my ironic discussion of “science fiction-inspired” design motifs is weighted with the Euro-American-centric notion that such motifs are somehow out of place in new

Shanghai has experienced perhaps the fastest economic growth in human history is only strengthened further when we look at some of the statistics associated with the city's infrastructural revolution. Between 1990-97, for example, spending on infrastructure development went from RMB 4.722 billion yuan to RMB 41.285 billion yuan,<sup>72</sup> an eight-fold increase; there was also an increase in grassland due to a tree planting initiative, which increased Shanghai's urban grassland from 12.36 percent to 17.8 percent (Wu and Li 2002:23-25).

Wu and Li (2002) argue that such radical changes would not have come about without a fundamental shift in municipal administration: the implementation of a new system that is known as "two levels of government, three levels of administration" (Wu and Li 2002:25; Pan Tianshu 2002; Yan, Li, Jia, and Weng 2002). This system spells out district divisions, encourages cooperation among districts, stresses function, coordinates development, and attempts to enhance the administrative and financial power of *jiedao weiyuanhui* ("neighborhood committees"). This reform laid the groundwork for the efficient demolition of slums. As a result of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Party Representatives, the city undertook a major initiative to replace them with new housing that had greater overall floor space, a goal that, in most districts, was largely accomplished by the end of 2000. Slum residents were given little choice regarding either the timing or the location of the move, but many experienced an improvement in their actual living space. Between 1990-97, housing area per capita increased from 6.6 square meters to 9.3 square meters. Construction and urban renewal shifted the population to the outskirts of the city (Wu and Li 2000:26-29).

In order to cope with both the influx of new residents and the displacement of populations in the old neighborhoods, the municipal government concentrated on the construction of new housing. Between 1980 and 1997, sixteen

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Shanghai. Even for the anthropologist, colonial paternalisms are difficult to shake.

new villages (more or less equivalent to public housing projects in the United States) were built in Shanghai and one hundred fifteen new neighborhoods were constructed. The new housing developments included “common housing” – built with relatively small square footage for the “difficult to house” from the old city; market-driven commercial housing for common people, generally larger than the common housing; and high-grade commercial housing that included better amenities and were geared toward foreigners (Wu and Li 2002:29). In line with the generally rosy picture that purveyors of the statistical discourse expound, Wu and Li comment that

From the start, Shanghai emphasized cooperation between redevelopment and construction. To its credit, the accumulated experience in the development of the city proper has thereby resulted in the formation of a nearly flawless operational mechanism. [Wu and Li 2002:32].

In the world of Chinese urban studies, such statements are no longer taken at face value. In fact, the same Wu and Li essay criticizes the population displacement and severe environmental impacts that breakneck development has wrought. Wu and Li, for example, comment that

[I]n order to guarantee a well funded [sic] and dynamic city construction, the government needs to rely more heavily on market forces, rather than administrative decree, to regulate city construction. [Wu and Li 2002:34].

They also note several problems that have arisen from development: moving residents to the outskirts of Shanghai has resulted in commutes of one or two hours each way, and the new areas lack schools. Many new villages lack a comprehensive plan (e.g. some end up with supermarkets, while others do not). Further, “big building pathology” has set in, where new community construction puts undue emphasis on material construction, “neglecting the facts of culture,

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<sup>72</sup>The Renminbi (RMB), or *yuan*, is the Chinese dollar. The current rate of exchange is approximately US\$1 = RMB7.8.

society, and neighborhood” (Wu and Li 2002:34). New neighbors, often from different districts, isolate themselves. “Apart from communicating with family members, they interact only with the technology of televisions and stereos” (Wu and Li 2002:35). In addition,

There is still much government interference in the social environment, which inevitably brings some negative effects that are especially damaging to the enthusiasm of residents, groups, and other community organization...Presently, it is rather urgent for the municipality to further clarify its own responsibilities and orient itself properly so as to achieve a desirable position in the course of Shanghai’s community construction. [Wu and Li 2002:35].

In another time, these statements might be seen as revolutionary signs of real dissent, and certainly their appearance in the context of an international conference lend them weight. But they also reflect the fact that the Party has opened the steam valve of dissent in certain areas where “letting a hundred flowers bloom” might result in practical improvements.<sup>73</sup> In many ways, this dissent is merely the natural result of Deng Xiaoping’s early statement that “it doesn’t matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice” and his post-Tiananmen re-affirmation of this principle during his famous “trip to the south” in late 1992.

Juxtaposed to the statistical discourse on Shanghai that tends to forget the past is a historical voice that equally tends to ignore the present. Historical literature on Shanghai constitutes a broad field that would require far more attention than I can devote to it in the space of a dissertation on taijiquan. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the evolution of Western historical writing on the subject from roughly the mid-1980s, when foreign historians had made substantial

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<sup>73</sup> “Letting a hundred flowers bloom” is a reference to Mao Zedong’s decision in the late 1950s to encourage public statements of diverse opinion among Chinese elites (Spence 1990; Hsü 1995). The effect (and intent) was to weed out resistance to the Party, resulting in the imprisonment or death of many of China’s most talented artists and intellectuals.

inroads into gaining access to city archives, to the present, when poststructuralists like Foucault and Derrida have insinuated themselves into historical writing on Shanghai. The worlds of these two modes of thought are radically different, yet each has its value in linking a bodily practice like taijiquan to the evolution and present reality of the city.

In the 1980s, English-language historical writing on Shanghai reflected the hunger for raw information about the city that followed the opening of China to Western scholarship. Like many essays from these period, Yan Zhongmin's brief history of urban growth in Shanghai begins with detailed geographical description, situating Shanghai East of the Changjiang Delta (a.k.a. Yangzi River Delta), occupying the two shores of the Huangpu River, describing the passage of Wusong Creek through the city as it drains from Lake Taihu, and noting that Shanghai is the meeting point of two major North-South rail lines, the Jing-Hu line (Beijing-Shanghai) and the Hu-Guang line (Shanghai-Guangzhou) (Yan Zhongmin 1985).<sup>74</sup>

According to Yan's account (1985:98-113), during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Shanghai became the major port of Changjiang (the Yangzi River). In the third year of the Southern Song Dynasty (AD 1267), it was declared an official administrative town (*zhen*) and first appeared at that time as "Shanghai City." By the twenty-ninth year of the Yuan period (AD 1292), the city had a population of approximately 300,000, and by 1842, the year before Shanghai became a treaty port as part of the Opium War settlement, the population had risen to 550,000. Yan is writing against the stereotype that arose during the period of foreign domination that Shanghai was little more than a sleepy fishing village before it was forcibly opened to trade with the Western powers. In fact, Yan points out, prior to 1843, Shanghai served as the chief port for Shanghai-Japan shipping

lines. In the vicinity of Shanghai, farmers cultivated cotton fields, thus making the city a major textile center. Since cotton cloth was redeemable as tax payment, the cotton industry took on even greater importance outside of trade. Shanghai shifted into a different type of economy by the 1850s when foreign companies opened a total of sixty-eight banks in the city, and the city soon became the central destination for foreign capital in China (Yan 1985:102). Between 1843 and 1943, the city's population rose to 3 million. By 1948, a massive influx of immigrants and refugees pushed the population to 5.39 million. Yan describes the pre-1949 economy of Shanghai as "a strange mixture of semi-feudal and semi-colonial" (1985:103): a paucity of basic industries, dependence on textile and machinery industries, and dependence on imported raw materials.

Three periods of migration followed the establishment of the PRC in 1949 (Yan 1985:109-09): 1950-54, when increases in production, reconstruction, and lack of restrictions on freedom of movement led to an increase of 2.69 million, many of whom were "encouraged" to move back home during this period; 1958-60 (the Great Leap Forward), when famine drove the rural population into the cities, followed by the forced return of about one million people to the countryside; and 1968-71, the height of the Cultural Revolution, when

890,000 school graduates, or educated youths, in Shanghai responded to the call to go to the countryside and mountain areas. This movement was known as the 'Shang Shan Xia Xiang' ["up the mountains, down to the countryside"]. It was not until 1978 that most of them returned home to work in factories as new policies were implemented. [Yan 1985:109].

The scenario that Yan Zhongmin describes in this straightforward, linear rendition of the city's history creates an image of a city that evolves, but one that is largely shaped by two forces: the city's requisition by foreign powers as a treaty

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<sup>74</sup> The alternative name for Shanghai, "Hu," comes from the term for a fishing tool invented during the Eastern Jin Dynasty and used in the area of present-day Shanghai. The Lower reaches of the Song River became known as Hu Creek (Yan Zhongmin 1985).

port and the communist takeover in 1949. The rapid change that has occurred in Shanghai from the mid-1980s onward (after the publication of Yan's essay) has opened up space for the more complex debate on the city that has arisen out of the postmodernist critique. While anthropology has more or less made its peace with such reflexive scholarship, the field of urban studies seems more conflicted. The heavily empiricist approaches found in Logan *et al* lie uncomfortably next to approaches to the city that incorporate body theory (Nast and Pile 1998; Pile 1996; Grosz 1998; Bordo, Klein, and Silverman 1998) queer theory (Gibson-Graham 1998), and philosophy/literature/cultural studies (Harvey 1989; Hebdige 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1987; Lyotard, J.-F. 1984; de Certeau, M. 1984; and Lefebvre 1991). Each of these approaches complicates our view of what cities are and how we relate to them in ways that are both sensual and removed.

### ***Taijiquan as Public Art***

For the remainder of this chapter, I will draw on this more recent theory in returning to the idea of taijiquan as public art, an art on which the city is inscribed and, in unexpected but very concrete ways, which itself inscribes notions of Chineseness upon the city. Attached as it is to the preceding discussion of the growth of capitalism in Shanghai, I take the position that city planning in Shanghai is guided by an egalitarian notion of "public city" where, in Sophie Watson's words, the city could become

a space of collective consumption where resources could be shared and services provided, in opposition to the capitalist city where provision of goods and services was linked to private capital and the pursuit of profit. In this formulation the public sector offered the potential for a more egalitarian city, while the pursuit of capital and private goods was seen to be inevitably implicated in the exploitation of one class by another. [Watson 2002:49].

To support the argument that a public city perspective is implicit in Shanghai planning policy, a position that sometimes conflicts with the reality of new economic relations in the city, I will focus on recently produced public art scattered throughout Shanghai and look at how the reconfiguration of public space in Shanghai inadvertently highlights taijiquan as a kind of moving sculpture that exists within a larger moving sculpture—Shanghai. In so doing, it postmodernizes taijiquan (i.e. blurs stylistic lines that many practitioners hold sacred) by privileging the more prevalent non-martial styles of the art, and, to a degree, marginalizing the family-rooted styles represented by the JTA. I draw on Watson’s work here to problematize orthodox attempts at creating “the public city.”

As Watson notes in the above statement, the idea of public city is juxtaposed to political economy approaches to the city. She also notes several other critiques of the public city that arise out of political economy’s focuses on inequalities. The feminist critique, according to Watson, sees the public city (and welfare state in particular) as run by men for men. She further notes how poststructuralist and race critiques of the public city model take account of multiple publics or subaltern counter publics. Watson does not call for a total disregard for political economy approaches, but a complication of political economy through the acknowledgement of difference and how difference can engender “different ways of thinking about the public city and public space” (Watson 2002:62-63).

In Shanghai, the kind of public art work found adjacent to the 1930 street in the People’s Square subway station seems very much about establishing commonality and community, both in the story that the artworks tell and in the spaces they mark out. Confronted with these images and spaces every morning as I pedaled, walked, or sped toward another taijiquan practice, I became acutely aware of how the city itself contributed certain images to my personal

construction of Chineseness. I imagined they also contributed to the construction of Chinese identities as well. All over the city, I stumbled upon similar pieces: either nostalgic portrayals of the past, usually in the form of murals or in replicated streets from the 1930s or pieces that portray a subtle idealization of everyday life in the present, usually in the form of realistic, life-size statues. Since all of this art is new, when it is juxtaposed with images of the future like those found in the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, the overall effect is one of a city without specific time, a city that is both reconstructed and preconstructed. I began to see taijiquan in this light as well, as public art, and, ultimately, I began to see my own complicity in the production of the giant, undulating artwork that was Shanghai. A white person, a foreigner doing taijiquan in a public park or square, I too became a kind of moving sculpture that shouted out Shanghai's future.

The future is hard to escape in Shanghai. Upon entering the exhibition hall, for example, one is immediately confronted by a long, bronze, social realist relief depicting scenes of labor: workers happily constructing the city, women engaging in a fan dance, young people carrying what appear to be stereo speakers. In the center of the entrance hall lies an enormous golden rendition of Pudong. Towering skyscrapers almost completely obscure the tallest radio tower in Asia (which is now completely exposed and the dominant piece of architecture on the Eastern shore of the river). Both the building and its contents constitute an important statement about Shanghai as a public city. On one sign, a message from the Shanghai Municipal Housing Development Bureau superimposed on a background photograph of Pudong states (English version),<sup>75</sup>

At the turn of the century, a grand plan for Shanghai's housing development during the next 15 years has been worked out. In conformity with the requirement for "high-level planning and design, high-quality construction, and standard management," we will speed up our housing

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<sup>75</sup> All signs in the exhibition hall or in English in Chinese.

modernization by relying on scientific advances. And we will stick to the principles of humanism and sustainable development in constructing high quality dwellings which are ecological balanced, energy-efficient, intelligent so as to provide more well-planned, multi-functional, environmental-friendly and rational-priced residential housing for people in Shanghai [*sic*].

It is grand performance, reassurance, and hegemonic statement all in one.

The Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall is not the only place where the city fathers have made efforts to ease the trauma of rapid development. In Pudong lies the sub-district of Liujiazui. In what was once the traditional, enclosed courtyard home of a wealthy family, the government has built the Liujiazui Development Showroom (*Liujiazui kaifa chenlie shi*). The sign at the entrance to the showroom states that “The renovated house now is the Liujiazui Development Showroom, where displays the past, present, and future [*sic*].” Inside the building, one is brought room by room through the history of the development of the once sparsely populated Pudong area. One room re-creates a bedroom of a wealthy family in the Republican period. Other rooms tastefully depict life in Liujiazui at various periods in Shanghai’s history. Maps and photographs tell the story of the rise of Pudong. Outside, between the showroom and the Liujiazui subway station a couple of blocks away, is a gathering of three life-sized, realistic bronze statues: Two male and one female Chinese business people. One man holds a briefcase, the other a cell phone. Both are dressed in fashionable suits. The woman wears a stylish mini-skirt. The statues seem to announce that one has entered an important financial center, a place where modern people can interact comfortably as equal partners in a global marketplace.

One can find similar life-size bronzes in other parts of Shanghai. In front of a small Ericsson Telecommunications office stands a bronze of a young, mini-skirted woman with bare midriff. She is speaking on her cell phone. Perhaps the most impressive of these life-sized statues are located on Shanghai Old Street, a

more detailed, above-ground version of the 1930 street in People's Square subway station. Like the 1930 street, Shanghai Old Street is full of shops. Many of these shops, however, are in fact life-size painted storefronts, depicting merchants and their wares from decades earlier. At the entrance to a real restaurant on the street, under three red lanterns, stands a bronze statue of a woman who is dressed in what appears to be an actual *qipao*, the distinctive split-thigh dress popular among Chinese women in the Shanghai of the 1920s and 1930s—red with white flowers. A real white purse hangs on one elbow as she appears to lean against the wall with one hand, while taking off a shoe with her free hand. Not far off, a bronze boy and girl, also dressed in real clothing, sit on a bench. The boy is playing a real accordion, while the girl looks on. And, in still another part of Shanghai, in the old French Concession area, a mural on the outside wall of one of the posh Jinjiang Hotel restaurants creates a scene from the same period: a Chinese couple appear to be staring out a window from inside the restaurant. Next to the imaginary window, on what is both the real and the painted outside wall, there appear to be several handbills: one shows a suave foreigner smoking Federal cigarettes; another shows a smiling, top-hatted Uncle Tom advertising a toothpaste that was called “Darkie” until just a few years ago (several lawsuits by Africans or people of African descent in the 1990s led the Asian maker of the toothpaste to change the name to “Darlie” and to change the top-hatted figure to a man of indeterminate ethnicity). On the other side of the actual restaurant entrance, the mural continues. A painted entrance is guarded by a uniformed, South Asian doorman. And several guests appear to be standing behind a large picture window of the hotel. It is difficult to know what this post-modernist depiction of Shanghai at its modernist peak is intended to communicate about Chinese attitudes toward race. Is it a romantic reminiscence of the Paris of the East days? Or is it a tacit sigh of relief that colonial days are past. On the one hand, the Jinjiang Hotel mural seems to support Frank Dikötter's argument that

Chinese attitudes toward race are historically occidentalist (1992:127-129). On the other hand, the sheer boldness of this mural tinges it with irony. Perhaps both interpretations can exist side by side. Discussing Mao's diplomatic overtures toward Africa after 1949, Dikötter points out, “

Despite the communist imagery of racial harmony and unity with the underdog, the Chinese adopted an aloof and exclusive attitude during their stay in Africa. Blacks studying in China also complained about racial prejudice. [Dikötter 1992:194].

My own discussions in 1995 with Burundian classmates at Shanghai Fudan University confirm Dikötter's remarks. That racially charged images are depicted in a mural splashed across the wall of one of Shanghai's historical landmarks receives little or no attention from passerby. Most Shanghai people would likely argue that the mural was just a stylish snapshot of a bygone era and that wistful renditions of Darkie toothpaste and South Asian doormen gave the city a certain panache that the Party could never take away from them. The mural could serve as resistance even as it fulfilled an official artistic plan to make the city more sophisticated.

Lest one think public art is limited in Shanghai to the old concession areas, it is important to note that in almost every section of the city, wherever new highways are built or new buildings go up, public art follows. Much of this is the kind of large, metal abstract sculpture found in many American cities. Likewise, restaurants across the city sport plaster sculptures of bare-breasted women. Taking all this in, one gets the impression that Shanghai people celebrate the sensual reputation of the place. But one should not confuse the intellectual and artistic choices that have arisen or re-arisen in recent years with the often more conservative tastes of the old people, outsiders, and working class who comprise the greater part of Shanghai's population.

In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising that taijiquan serves as a special type of sensual public art. What was once merely an activity evolved into public art when city planners and party officials began a policy of “greening” Shanghai that included increased leisure space, specifically increasing urban parkland. While spaces are not built (or left open) specifically with display and performance of taijiquan in mind, the sheer number of practitioners in the city keeps the art foremost in the mind of planners, whether it is park land or green belts that run along waterways or simply large, open areas between buildings or adjacent to housing estates. This inscription of taijiquan on urban areas is manifested in some specific ways. First, since the Falun Gong crackdown in 1999, the Party has actively encouraged new taijiquan or taijiquan-related styles. *Mulanquan*, named after the famous female warrior about whom Disney made an animated film several years ago, incorporates both sword and fan dances and appeared on the scene immediately after the crackdown. While some practitioners claim that it is an “ancient” art, its “inventor” did not begin teaching publicly until after the crackdown, and articles about *mulanquan* appear frequently in government publications, while television shows devoted to the practice facilitate its spread. Witnesses to the Falun Gong crackdown in 1999 claim that the Shanghai government literally bussed in taijiquan practitioners to fill up park space that had previously been occupied by Falun Gong practitioners. *Mulanquan* people added to these numbers, leaving little room at certain times of day for any other large-group activities. At the same time, the Shanghai government organized a massive taijiquan day and invited (some say compelled) the members of every registered taijiquan association in the city to perform. This event became annual, and the 2001 event drew several thousand practitioners to Shanghai Sports Stadium. For Shanghai people, the message was clear: Falun Gong is bad, taijiquan is good. Taijiquan is thus encouraged at the city level to displace the unacceptable, the

dirty, the messy. There is a symbiosis between taijiquan practitioners and city planners.

A more explicit example of how taijiquan inscribes urban space is the larger-than-life bronze statue of an old man in the Yang style taiji posture “White Crane Spreads Its Wings” that stands at the entrance of Old People’s Park in Hangzhou, the ancient capital of China that lies a short train ride from Shanghai. In some ways, Hangzhou and Shanghai are mutual extensions of one another, with the larger Shanghai dominating the relationship. On any given weekend, a large number of the people on the streets of Hangzhou are in town from Shanghai, there to enjoy the famous West Lake, drink Dragon Well tea, or visit the many temples that surround the lake. The taiji statue in front of Old People’s Park lies in a busy, prominent location, so Shanghai people who pass it can consider it of a piece with their daily lives.<sup>76</sup>

But what kind of taijiquan is this that inscribes itself on the city? In many ways, for members of the JTA and other lineages that still retain long memories of the pre-1949 Shanghai, there is a certain outsidership. They are what Watson described as the subaltern in the public city. Whereas massive taijiquan gatherings and bronze statues make the city planners’ case for the public city, martially-oriented taijiquan practitioners who *individually* seek *gongfu* are the case for the political economy of the city, a political economy where re-established class divisions (and, on the other side of the coin, re-established economic opportunities) breed alterity. Granted, the JTA participates in the annual, orchestrated mass gathering, but, compared to their monthly meetings, their participation seems somewhat artificial. In 2001, Wu style players from the various sub-lineages within the JTA all donned gray JTA sweatshirts and JTA baseball caps and practiced slow form as one large group. It was the only time in

my many years of association with the group that I saw members wear anything resembling a uniform. Some still hung out on the sidelines and played push hands, but there was a noticeable lack of community spirit on that day. The monthly meetings offer spectacle of a kind, but they are really more about building community. The government-sponsored mass gathering, on the other hand, emphasized spectacle, mere movement over the substance that push hands had to offer. Most JTA members did seem to enjoy the event, but one could not help but feel, if the expressions on their faces were any indication, that the older members of the group saw only simulacra of taijiquan in the fan dances, drum teams, and group taijiquan performances spread out before them. In that context, the JTA seemed to lose a little of the authenticity its members often claimed for themselves. The taijianqu inscription that the city chooses to incorporate is about spectacle over quietness, form over substance.

The inscription of the city upon the practice has a longer history and is explicit in the changes that have been incorporated into the postures at key points in modern Chinese history. As I mentioned in my introduction to this dissertation, before the establishment of the republic in 1912, taijiquan remained a rather secretive art. Several converging factors led to the ultimate public outing of the art. First, the shift in Shanghai to a manufacturing economy led to an increase in the city's middle class and to the rise of a consumer economy that mimicked European and American urban economies. Economic opportunity, along with the fashionability of the city, led many martial artists to move their families to Shanghai. At the same time, the new Republican government explicitly sought out the country's best martial artists to teach publicly. Andrew Morris has argued that the "YMCA" mentality that characterized the nation's increasingly Western-educated bureaucracy laid the groundwork for not only strengthening "the

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<sup>76</sup> In the mid-1980s a set of slightly abstracted public statues depicting taijiquan postures filled the spaces between the buildings of a major financial center in Hong Kong's Central District. To my

national body,” but also for instituting sports as leisure among the masses . (Morris 1998).

This was certainly the case in the Shanghai YMCA. Famous teachers such as Yang Luchan and Wu Jianquan joined with others to teach regular classes at the YMCA.<sup>77</sup> But they were not about to teach their secret family arts to just anybody. Instead, the similarities in the family forms, corroborated by the reports of family members, seem to indicate that a certain amount of exchange occurred among teachers that resulted in a decision to create a long, slow form with generally higher postures that could be taught to the general public, the old, and the infirm. The original, fast-slow, explosive forms, as well as serious push hands, weapons, and boxing training, would be reserved for serious students, and the energy training would be reserved for disciples (Wu and Ma 1988; Zee 2002). The Wu style taijiquan that wealthy Chinese learned during this period was thus a direct outgrowth of the economic and political change the city experienced.

### ***Conclusion***

In times of crisis, what seems to get preserved is not the public taijiquan, but the private taijiquan. During WWII as well as during the Cultural Revolution, JTA members reverted to the honing of push hands skills. Some claim that during Ma’s virtual house arrest during the Cultural Revolution, his skills actually increased because he concentrated on inner alchemy practices. And several of his

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knowledge, these statues are still there.

<sup>77</sup> In 2002, I visited the tenth floor of the old YMCA, which is now a hotel and restaurant. The elevator opens onto a busy kitchen. I arrived in the middle of lunchtime rush, quickly asked a passing cook and waiter whether they knew that this had once been a famous martial arts school. They said that yes, everyone knew. Back in the lobby of the hotel, I phoned a manager to request an interview. Almost as soon as I had launched into my abbreviated explanation of my research, emphasizing my affiliation with the prestigious Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the manger cut me off and said, “This is a hotel, not a museum” and hung up on me. Fortunately, I had better luck with the kind staff of what remains of the old YMCA itself on the second floor of the same building. The kind manager of the facility arranged an interview with the YMCA membership manager in the 1930s, a man who saw the comings and goings of the martial arts crowd on a daily basis.

top disciples, men and women highly skilled in the martial aspects of taijiquan, acquired their skills in the course of many years of clandestine visits to Ma and Wu Yinghua.

Today, the political economy of the city continues to inscribe the practice. But the discourse now is one of deterioration, rather than of evolution, as it was during the 1920s and 1930s, and again in the early 1980s. Top-level JTA members came of age in the 1980s, when they were once again allowed to practice, yet had minimal work and recreational activities to distract them. By the early 2000s, those who were still working suddenly found that they had little time to practice. They had tasted the serious taijiquan in their youth, but now they felt frustrated because the economy, while it provided better food and housing, took away from something they considered essential to their quality of life. More than one practitioner expressed to me, during breaks in push hands practice in the park, “I can’t wait to retire so I can practice more.” Of even greater concern is the slow erasure of taijiquan as a martial art from the minds of Shanghai youth. So few martially adept practitioners remain in comparison to the massive number of people who practice taijiquan as a kind of health exercise, that the belief in the efficacy of the art has waned. Moreover, the incursion of global culture into Shanghai has created a potpourri of distractions for young Shanghai people and their families. Computers, VCDs, rollerblading, hanging out in the shopping mall, all the things that occupy American youth also affect Shanghai youth. Older JTA members have little energy to recruit new members. Therefore, the practice slowly deteriorates. The fear that JTA members on occasion express is that *biaoyan* will permanently displace *chuangtongde* taijiquan, at least in Shanghai.

At the level of the nation, the subaltern status of martially-oriented taijiquan grows even more acute, for taijiquan has become not only the single most popular exercise in China, but also one of the most frequently projected

symbols of Chineseness that the Party projects to the world, the focus of Chapter 5.

Figure 8: Shanghai 1930 Scene neon sign, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank.

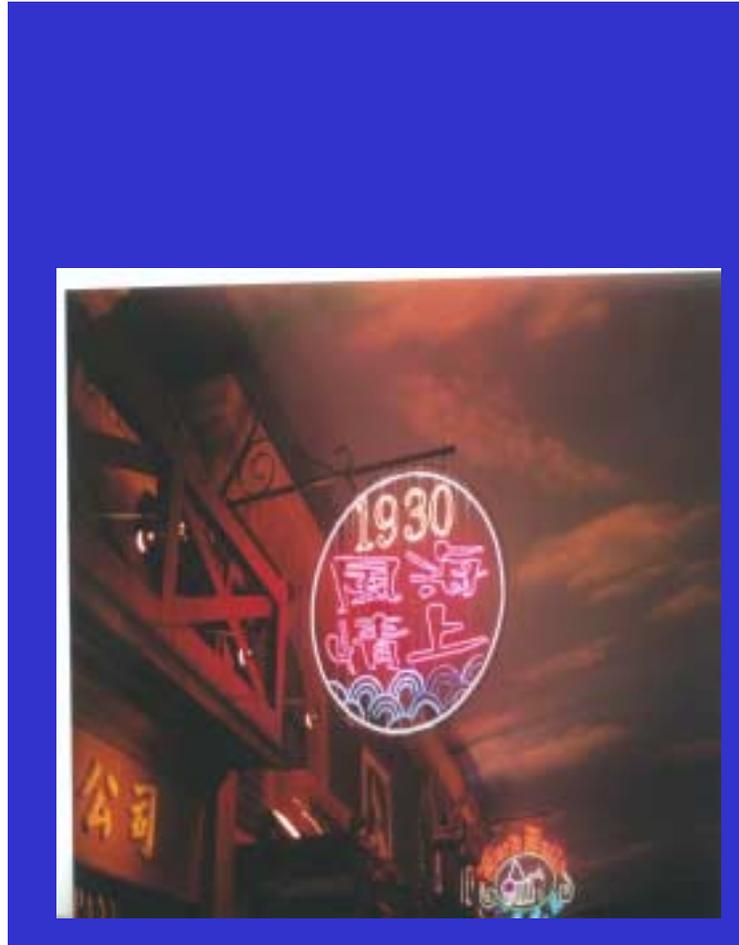


Figure 9: Shanghai 1930 Scene. Bronze statue of shoeshine boy. Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 10: Bronze girl, Erickson telecommunications building, Shanghai, 2001.  
Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 11: Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall city model, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank.

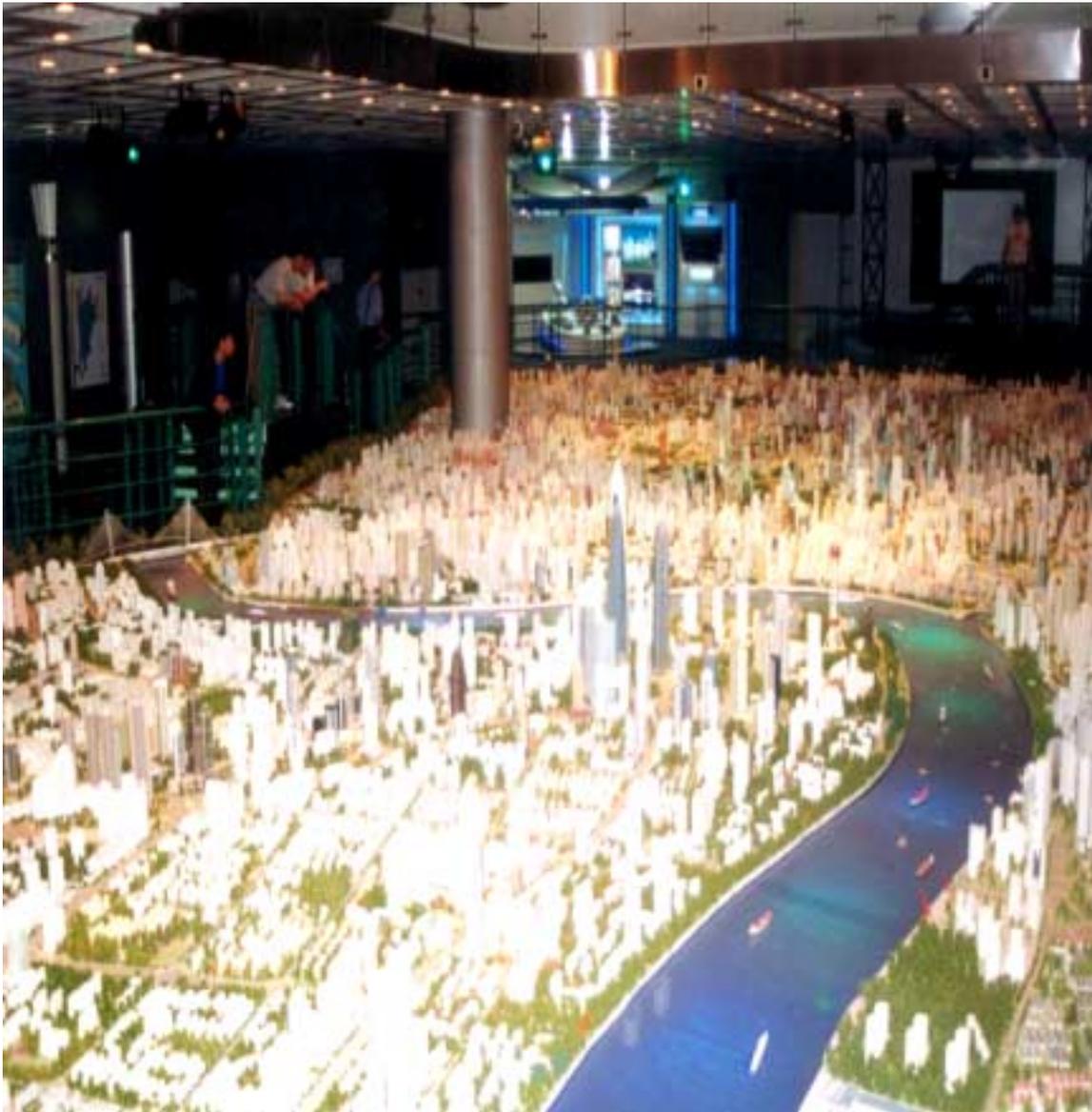


Figure 12: Jinjiang Hotel mural (detail): “Darkie Toothpaste (now Darlie Toothpaste)” ad, Shanghai, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank



## Chapter 5

### From City to Nation: Taijiquan as Master Symbol

#### VII

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

#### VIII

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know

—Wallace Stevens  
*From “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”*

In the previous chapter, I focused on how the art of taijiquan both inscripts itself on and is inscribed by the city of Shanghai. I looked at the homogenizing process that occurs when city planners adopt a “public city” agenda and begin to configure taijiquan as public art and how the JTA and other martially oriented, family-based martial arts styles must contend with this process of homogenization. If taijiquan styles are homogenized at the level of the city, this process occurs to an even greater degree at the level of the state. In this chapter, I will focus on how the Party has adopted taijiquan as a kind of “master symbol” of Chineseness and how the Party apparatus for cultivating taijiquan is sometimes at odds with family styles that encourage development of martial *gongfu*. Specifically, through a discussion of martial arts tournaments, tourist sites, and research in Chinese sports science and history journals, I will look at how a

nationalist discourse has developed in regards to martial arts in general and taijiquan in particular.

Most taijiquan practitioners in the PRC, despite their attraction to one style or another, are not really practicing a *particular* taijiquan. Rather, by playing the slow form or learning a sword dance or two, they are enacting an imagined moment in the past in order to clarify who they are supposed to be in the present: Chinese. My conception of taijiquan as master symbol is key to this argument. Here, I borrow heavily from Richard Flores's work on the Alamo, as well as from Edward Sapir's notion of "the cultured individual" as a driving force in social change. I also make a limited attempt to extend Benedict Anderson's classic notion of "imagined communities" to the case of early twenty-first century Shanghai.

The project that Richard Flores lays out in *Remember the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* (2002) closely reflects my process and intent in this chapter in discussing taijiquan as a symbol of modernity and national consciousness in China. Flores writes

In effect, re-membering [*sic*] the Alamo as a site of cultural memory, as a sacred site in the pantheon of American public history, serves to hide the material social relations and conditions that require such sites in the first place. This process of remembering has already stamped the Alamo as a naturally given icon of American cultural memory, leaving us to understand not its historical character but its "meaning." My reflections on the Alamo, as a symbolic form, follow a route directly opposite to that of its actual historical development, although I present events and actors from the past. The task of this book is to move backward from the "Alamo as given" to the historical and social conditions that serve as the necessary elements of its making and the work these elements achieve in the everyday world of social life. [Flores 2002:xviii].

Flores draws on the work of Frederic Jameson in laying out the territory of place as master symbol. Specifically, he cites Jameson's notion of the eruption of class contradictions at key moments of social change, key moments "in which

new practices and customs, forged from new relations of material and ideological production, ascend to a position of dominance” (Jameson 1981:85; Flores 2002:2). Taijiquan in the increasingly capitalized Shanghai of the 1920s reflects just such a moment of eruption: emerging class divisions between a wage earning working class and newly-monied elites—a consumption-oriented middle class, and a capitalist, entrepreneurial upper class that is largely displaced in the power structure by foreigners. These relatively new, capital-oriented class divisions nurtured an atmosphere in which martial arts, taijiquan in particular, could move from the realm of “low” art to an acceptable form of recreation and, ultimately, to a master symbol of Chinese modernity.

Taijiquan thus contributes to the creation of what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities.” Anderson argues that in the project of creating national identities, the “convergence” of capitalism with print technology overcame the obstacle of human linguistic diversity and that governments used “print-capitalism” as a means of codifying national language (and therefore language representative of a specific power structure) and cultivating nationalism. He notes, for example, that the Thai government (c. 1980) discouraged foreign missionaries from helping hill tribes to develop distinct writing systems for their languages, but the government made no attempt to control the *speaking* of such languages (Anderson 1993:45-46). A thorough treatment of Anderson’s work goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice to say that his enduring contribution, whether one entirely agrees with him or not, has been to force us to think of national consciousness as a *skill* that is passed from the Americas to Europe, is adopted by imperialist powers, and eventually is re-adopted by nationalist movements within colonized states (Anderson 1993). While Anderson is primarily concerned with print-capitalism in the creation of “vernacular languages of state,” I would like to extend his argument to include taijiquan as a kind of *kinesthetic* vernacular language of state. What is important, as the historical and ethnographic arguments

below will illustrate, is not the nature of the language (that is, it can be architecture or movement just as easily as print), but that the state controls the standardization of that language and privileges its standardized forms over other languages. Thus, certain taijiquan forms become vernaculars of the Chinese state, while others are looked at askance and subsumed within the nationalist discourse, if not banned outright..

The story of taijiquan as master symbol in China is also the story of the rise in nationalism that followed the overthrow of the last Qing Dynasty emperor, Puyi, and the establishment, in principle, of a modern republic in 1912 (Spence 1990; Hsü 1995). For some decades before the fall of the Qing, one faction of court officials, Tan Sitong and Kang Youwei among the most notable, had pushed an agenda of modernization (Spence 1981). Their plans included radical suggestions to replace the classically based civil service exam system with a modern education system that emphasized training in science and technology<sup>78</sup> and for the abolition of foot binding. Ultimately, even more radical revolutionaries, led by Sun Yat-sen, acquired the right combination of military strength, political influence, and luck to stage a successful revolt and dismantle the imperial structure. Many of these radical revolutionaries, including Sun himself, were educated in Japan, the United States or Europe. Their overseas experiences and educations heavily influenced their notions of China's priorities. Foremost among these priorities was the cultivation of national identity—a sense of “Chineseness”—that superseded the allegiance to local place and local language that had historically provided fertile ground for warlordism in China. They also hoped to use an energetic nationalism to overcome the sense of

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<sup>78</sup> Kang Youwei's notion of modernity went far beyond mere education reforms. Influenced by the utopian novelist Edward Bellamy, among others, Kang believed that the best model for Chinese government was constitutional monarchy and advocated a peaceful, voluntary shift in this direction. He ultimately lost out to the more radical, republican proposals of Sun Yatsen and other revolutionaries who formed the Guomindang (“Nationalist Party,” which eventually split into the fascism of Chiang Kaishek and the Chinese Communist Party). (Hsu 1995, Spence 1981)

inferiority that many Chinese had felt in the seventy-five years since the Opium War.

The magnitude of popular resentment toward foreign powers as a result of the Opium War should not be underestimated. In 1912, the very old still remembered the war, and their children and grandchildren, especially if they were from the key cities that played a role during or after the war, e.g. Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, often had family stories to tell that kept memories of China's shame alive. On the other hand, a degree of conscious fanning of the flames existed among high court officials, who could always draw on the foreigners' fear of popular uprising in their ceaseless negotiations with those who controlled China's ports. Indeed, the Boxer Uprising of 1900 could not have gained the momentum it did without the support of Cixi, the Empress Dowager (Spence 1981, 1990; Hsü 1995).

For the reformers who began the slow process of modernizing China's bureaucracy in 1912, then, the challenge was to channel this resentment into a positive energy that would place China in a strong enough economic position on the world stage to eventually wrest foreign concessions and "leased" territories like Hong Kong and Macau from foreign control. The creation of a national physical fitness movement was one among many such projects (Morris 1998; Brownell 1995; ZWBQ 1998). Many modernist reformers had attended American missionary schools in China and had gained an introduction to the Western, internationalist conception of athletic competition through that experience. A second significant influence was the strong presence of the YWCA and YMCA movement in China. These missionary cum social reform organizations were especially strong in Shanghai, where the YWCA organized literacy training for women factory workers (Honig 1986) and geared sports and theatrical activities toward all classes. The YMCA might have been more elitist—in Shanghai, its recreational activities were dominated by the rising middle class and newly rich

Chinese business community—but it strongly pushed a modernist gymnasium program that emphasized the concept that “strong bodies equal strong minds,” an idea not lost upon Mao and other CCP leaders in the early years of their ideological war against Chiang Kaishek and the Guomindang.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the recently constituted modern Olympic movement, which almost immediately became a proving ground for national pride, held a special attraction for new officials concerned with “strengthening the national body.” If Chinese athletes could excel in even a few Olympic sports, the resulting national pride would facilitate a sense of nation among the masses. It would also inevitably raise the new government’s standing in the international community (Morris 1998; Brownell 1995; Zhang Shan *et al* 1996).

Policy makers in the new government took this world of possibility to heart. Among other strategies, they reasoned that the easiest and quickest way to collect Olympic gold medals would be to advocate for the inclusion in the Olympics of “folk sports” (*minzu chuantong tiyu*) at which Chinese athletes could immediately excel (Jing Cai 1959; Zhang Shan *et al* 1996; Xu Guoda *et al* 2000; Morris 1998). The most popular and obvious choice among these sports were martial arts, since high-level teachers already existed, and, to some degree, international interest had already been generated in Asian fighting arts through the slow popularization of Japanese judo, which began with the synthesizing of the art in the 1880s by Dr. Jigoro Kano, “a Japanese reformer steeped in the lore of Western physical education” (Clark 1992:138; Long 1997:65; Kano 1937). Several years earlier, the Japanese had already instituted a nation-wide system of judo as sport, and it quickly spread. By the early 1900s, jujutsu (at the time, a term used more or less interchangeably with judo; see Long 1997) had also been introduced outside of Japan. No less a personage than Theodore Roosevelt

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with retired YMCA official, 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded.

regularly invited a Japanese official and jujutsu player, to “wrestle” with him in the White House (Long 1997:66).

In China, the call went out to martial arts instructors to teach publicly. Public martial arts halls had been part of China’s rural and town landscape for decades, if not centuries, but this was something new, for in years past martial arts were seen as an activity in which cultivated people did not engage, with certain exceptions: Buddhist and Daoist clergy, for example, had long historical-mythical traditions of engaging in martial arts (see discussion of the Shaolin Temple, below) and, to a degree, martial arts training seemed to be an open and accepted activity among the rural, landed gentry, who might find themselves at any time in need of well-trained self-defense militias to fight off bandits and would-be warlords. Indeed, the story of the rise of Chen family taijiquan in a small village in Henan Province centers around the benevolent bestowal of the “secret” art on the local peasantry by the wealthy village patriarch. Wile has documented the transmission of the art in the nineteenth century from the Chen family to the educated members of the Wu<sup>80</sup> and Hao families (Wile 1996).

In the new social configuration of the early 1900s, martial arts instructors were encouraged to open their arts to a new consumer class of middle and upper class Chinese (and a very limited number of non-Chinese). This led directly to the immigration to Beijing and, later, Shanghai, of many of China’s most famous martial arts practitioners. Together, and with government support, they formed associations for the passing on of martial arts to the public and also formalized their own schools and systems through the publication of training manuals (including photos and drawings) and articles. In a famous series of newspaper interviews, for example, the *xingyiquan* teacher and creator of *yiquan*, Wang

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<sup>80</sup> Wu Yixiang was no relation to Quan You and his son Wu Jianquan. The “Wu” in Wu Yixiang is the same character as in the word for martial arts, “*wushu*.” The character for “Wu” in Wu Jianquan is almost exclusively used as a proper noun.

Xiangzhai, touted the relative merits of his system in comparison to other martial arts. He was especially disdainful of taijiquan:

As for its method of training, a punch with a fist here, a slap with the palm there, a kick to the left, and another one to the right, that is pitiful and laughable. As for dealing with an enemy in a fight, against a master-hand, please do not even consider it, if the adversary is not stiff and sluggish, even the famous masters of this boxing have no chance to apply their skills. These abuses are so big that 'Taijiquan' might soon become just a mere form comparable to a chess manual....So ruined is this boxing that it has become useless, this is really deplorable. [Wang Xiangzhai 2001].

Wang's remarks tellingly reflect the shaky relationships that many martial arts teachers had with one another in the new world of Republican China. One year, they were the guardians of secrets stretching back several generations; the next, they were teaching in a YMCA in Shanghai. Amongst taijiquan practitioners, stories vary as to the quality and nature of these relationships. In the JTA, for example, the story is told that Wu Jianquan used to teach push hands to the leader of the Yang family taiji system, Yang Chengfu. The Yangs, on the other hand, often make the claim that it was Yang who taught push hands to Wu. Others simply settle on "they were close friends and used to practice together." As for Wang Xiangzhai, one JTA member who grew up next to the disciple of Wang's who brought *yiquan* to the United States simply says that "Wang *chui niu* (lit. "to blow like a cow"; to brag) and was basically run out of Shanghai in the 1930s by some of the other martial arts teachers. Whatever the conflicts between these early urban martial artists might have been, it is certain that they shared teaching spaces, if not teaching duties. A perusal of the teaching schedule at the Shanghai YMCA c. 1920 clearly shows several famous teachers of quite divergent styles slotted in to teach on the same day (Shanghai shi guoshuguan 1919?). In a 2001 interview, the man who served as the membership manager of the YMCA in the 1930s described the tenth floor of the building as a place where people studied

martial arts. He said, “Mostly, it was wealthy people who belonged to the YMCA. The teachers could make money there.”<sup>81</sup>

We cannot, of course, detach the profit motivation for teaching martial arts publicly in the Shanghai of the 1930s from the more idealistic nationalist agenda of young bureaucrats, for growing Chinese business, creating a market economy, and creating a consumer mentality were just as much a part of that agenda. It is impossible to know which martial artists taught publicly for the money and which taught out of a sense of patriotism. Perhaps it was a combination of both for many of them. When asked why his grandfather, Wu Jianquan, moved to Shanghai, a Ma family member simply said that “there was opportunity in Shanghai.”<sup>82</sup> In the tenuous economy of early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, opportunity was not something to be taken lightly. The presence of a wealthy, entrepreneurial class who were both interested in martial arts and could pay for “secrets” certainly must have been an attraction for teachers who worried about feeding their families.

The project of building national identity came only partly through the training of Sunday martial artists in YMCAs. Alongside this amateur training existed the serious training of boxing skills. By the mid-1920s, national martial arts tournaments with the equivalent of Western-style rules had been established. Contests had, of course, always been part of the martial arts world (Xu Wu 2000; Zhang *et al* 1996; ZWBQ 1998; ZWTD 1998; Li Jie 1998). After his arrival in Beijing, Yang Luchan, for example, caught the attention of the royal family through his prowess in public challenges. He became known as “Yang the Invincible.” An important feature of gaining martial arts skills was the willingness to make and accept “friendly” challenges in order to test one’s skills. Some authors suggest (Wile 1996) that before coming to Beijing, Yang Luchan actually made several forays from his adopted Chen village back to his home village in

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with retired YMCA official, 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Ma family member, 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded.

order to challenge local boxers. In matches several years apart, he was defeated by the locals until, after a long absence and continued training in the Chen village, he returned again and won decisively. His reputation established, Yang then set himself up as a teacher of martial arts and eventually accepted an invitation from a friend to go to Beijing. It was there that he ultimately became a trainer of Imperial guardsman, one of whom was Quan You, father of Wu Jianquan, the founder of the Wu style taijiquan practiced by the JTA. While such apocryphal tales are difficult to support with the scant documentary evidence so far uncovered about the Yang family (Wile 1996), they are still informative in telling us how martial skill was and still is valued in taijiquan. Still, the majority of tournament fighters who participated in the first, brutal organized national matches were generally not considered to be of the highest skill (as is the case with tournament fighting in China today). Boxing matches were bloody, often causing severe, permanent injuries to participants. Perhaps there was an initial expectation that the reality of combat would match the romanticized grace present in martial arts novels. Eventually, tournament organizers instituted rules to protect the boxers' safety, making groin and eye strikes illegal and allowing for the use of limited protective gear. Both men and women participated in these tournaments, though it appears that the women's matches were restricted to swordplay and long weapons sparring conducted with blunt sticks.

1936, the year of the famous Berlin Olympics in which Adolph Hitler walked out on the ceremony that saw Jesse Owens and other African-American athletes anointed with medals, was also a seminal year for early Chinese attempts to make taijiquan an Olympic event. Participating nations had an opportunity to show off their national athletic arts.<sup>83</sup> The Chinese fielded both men's and women's martial arts teams who performed short, modified taijiquan sets created

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<sup>83</sup> In Republican China, the state-sponsored martial arts movement was referred to as *guoshu* (national art). This term carried over to post-1949 China.

by several teachers just for the occasion (ZWBQ 1998:78,p17; ZWTD 1998:99). For the first time, taijiquan took its place as a symbol of a unified nation, an image that clearly did not jibe with the political realities of civil war. Both the venue and the choice of art are significant. Berlin at that time was not only the host city for the Olympics but also the center of Western scientific and technological knowledge. Many of the symbolic expressions of modernity in Shanghai—symbols with which Shanghai people were confronted on a daily basis—were German. Rich westerners and Chinese drew on the Bauhaus, for example, in constructing new homes and buying furnishings. The influence of Walter Gropius is visible in many of the restored homes and office buildings of the old French Concession in present-day Shanghai. Just as IKEA has become a symbol of modern chic in 2001 Shanghai, Bauhaus and art nouveau established a modern sensibility in the Shanghai of 1936 (Johnston and Erhe 1993). In a sense, the taijiquan presented at the 1936 Olympics was a Bauhaus rendition of traditional China: A streamlined form that was both practical and aesthetically rich. It turned taijiquan from a celebration of tradition into an expression of modernity.

This somewhat intellectualized approach to taijiquan virtually disappeared with the Japanese occupation that began in earnest in 1937. Within a few years, most of the top martial artists had fled the city. In the wartime capital of Chongqing, the government continued to encourage martial arts practice and sponsored martial arts tournaments, both for the morale of the displaced population and for the encouragement, in a limited fashion, of practical self defense training. Martial artists were as aware as anyone that their arts offered little protection in an age of mechanized warfare (nor had they for many decades), but martial arts offered an important means for boosting morale and helped solidify a sense of national spirit even as the country continued to fracture under the occupation. During this period, Ma Yueliang gave several well-remembered

public demonstrations of both forms and push hands in Chongqing (JTA 2000; Zee 2002). The story is reproduced in the JTA's 2000 yearbook as one of the tales of power that lent a mythical status to Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua even when they were still alive. Those who knew them well always attested to their kindness, humanity, and practicality, but for those who did not, such tales of power helped to situate them within the national myth about taijiquan and contribute to the rise of taijiquan to the status of a master symbol after 1949. Indeed, their inclusion among the "One hundred living treasures of the martial arts" in China reified the place they already held in the national imaginary.

The Party's glorification of martial arts and ongoing push to popularize taijiquan was both a continuation of Guomindang support for martial arts before the war and a continuation of the cultural policy that Mao outlined during the 1942 Yenan Forum (Holm 1991; Selden 1995). Taijiquan and other "regional" martial arts were folded into the category of *minzu chuantong tiyu* ("traditional folk sports"; ZWBQ 1998; Xu Wu 2000)). Squads of ethnologists filmed these arts during the great gathering of folkloric data that the Party cultural cadres initiated in the 1950s (Guldin 1994).<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, urban martial arts organizations such as the JTA experienced a second "golden age," and from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s, a new generation of men and women Wu stylists were trained to the highest level. Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua accepted a considerable number of formal disciples during this period. While the *tudi* relationship did not guarantee skill, it did generally mean that certain practices and types of information would be passed on in confidence. Zee Wen, whose translations of the JTA's training manuals contributed significantly to the popularization of Wu style outside of PRC, claimed that the *tudi* relationship also

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<sup>84</sup> A staff member of the archives of China's national television network confirmed the existence of such films, as did a Chen style taijiquan teacher and doctoral candidate at the Beijing Sports University. However, the exorbitant fees that the staff person attempted to charge (US\$500 per minute of film viewed) made a viewing impossible.

involved passing on secret hand signals with which one could recognize unfamiliar *gongfu* brothers (Zee 2002). Certainly, *tudi* are differentiated from simple dues-paying members of martial arts associations in these and other ways. Discipleship, however, does not instantly translate into high status. Non-disciples as well as *gongfu* brothers and sisters might disparage a disciple behind his or her back if the disciple is perceived to lack skill, and even those who possess both skill and the power of lineage are expected to meet the ideal that Ma and Wu set in terms of morality, unflappability, and kindness. For most, the standard is simply unattainable.

***“Through the Martial We Will Become Friends”***

Outside the basketball stadium in the city of Zhengzhou, capital of Henan Province, where the Seventh Annual International Shaolin Wushu Festival is about to begin, an old man is surrounded by a small crowd. He hunkers low to the ground. At his feet, lay several small bundles of old martial arts magazines that would be of interest to serious collectors, but to no one else. Those of use who thumb through his selections comment to one another about styles or about particular famous martial artists we recognize. Bruce Lee figures prominently in some of the magazines from the seventies, even though he had never been very popular in the mainland. I bargain a little and fork over some cash for a handful of magazines that feature articles on taijiquan or other internal martial arts. Soon, a policeman strolls by and tells the man to move on: He is not one of the official hawkers, has no official status, and is not allowed within the stadium gates. Nor, for that matter, do I have any official status. I had briefly spoken to one of the tournament organizers on the phone before heading to Henan, a Mr. Xu, but I had failed to track down the man with whom I had spoken. He was out, I was told, preparing for the opening ceremonies.

Zhengzhou is the capital of Henan. While it lacks the pizzazz and economic influence of Shanghai, the history of Xian, or the political muscle of Beijing, Zhengzhou remains an important center for trade and manufacturing. It is firmly and proudly *beifang* (Northern), yet maintains something of the entrepreneurial flavor of the South. “Things have changed a lot,” a cab driver informs me on my trip from the train station to a mid-range businessmen’s hotel across town. “The economy’s not bad”

“It seems to me there’s a lot to do,” I say, looking out the window at a new shopping district full of department stores, at one or two foreign-style coffee houses that have sprung up, at big parks.

“If you have time and money, no problem,” the driver says. “What’s it like in Shanghai?” he asks.

“You’ve never been there?”

“No. I’ve never been out of Henan.”

I tell him what I know about Shanghai. Lots of KFCs. People care too much about money compared to before.

At the stadium, I have finally managed to find one of the assistants, Mr. Guo. Guo goes out of his way to get me a visitor’s badge and a day’s worth of the rather expensive entrance tickets. I explain the project to him and tell him that I hope to shoot pictures and video from ground level, where I can get a much better view of the full contact fighting and the forms competition. Again, Guo waves me through, leads me down some stairs to the polished wooden floor of the stadium, and introduces me to the official cameramen and local T.V. crewmembers with whom I share the floor. Such enthusiasm for an anthropological dissertation project on taijiquan, though none of us know exactly what that means, was not unusual during the course of my fieldwork. Guo was only demonstrating a feeling that I had already encountered many times before: those of us who practiced

Chinese martial arts shared a camaraderie that seemed to transfer readily across national, cultural, even stylistic boundaries. At least on the surface. In fact, a great deal was at stake for the organizers of the Zhengzhou festival and other festivals of its kind to broadcast community spirit. Throughout the city, but especially in the vicinity of the stadium, banners broadcast community spirit in Chinese and English: “To make progress together” declares one banner in English, while a Chinese rendition says, “*yi wu hui you gongtong jinbu* (“using martial arts to become friends and make progress together”). As one of the largest comprehensive martial arts tournaments in China, the Zhengzhou tournament attracts participants from dozens of countries. Of paramount importance, it is also closely linked with the annual celebration of Shaolin style held in Dengfeng down the mountain from the Shaolin temple, and foreign visitors to the tournament inevitably travel on organized tours the few hours to the Dengfeng celebration, paying a visit to the temple before or after. Most organized martial arts tour packages also include a visit to the temple. The Shaolin Temple thus looms large in the ideological construction of Chinese nationhood through martial arts. It is the yang of Chinese martial arts to taiji’s yin.

Zhengzhou stadium is of fairly recent vintage and is not much different from the sort of stadium one might find at a midsize university in the United States. Fans first mount a broad set of stairs and then enter through the main doors on the level of the second tier of seats. An airy, circular hallway winds around the inside of the building like a running track, and in one section of the track a small marketplace has materialized. On table after table, merchants sell swords, spears, cudgels, and other formidable weapons; shoes and *wushu* clothing; books and VCDs; and souvenirs that seem to have little or nothing to do with martial arts, but have much to do with martial arts tourists who have fulfilled a dream by traveling to China for the first time. Many of these merchants make the regional or national rounds to martial arts tournaments throughout the year (interviews

with merchants, Zhengzhou 2001). They are entrepreneurs who have shops in their home cities. Business, they say, is not great, because there are not enough tournaments throughout the year to cover expenses. Nevertheless, at a big tournament like the International Shaolin Wushu Festival, they can expect to do well. *Gongfu*-suited foreigners and Chinese alike peruse the tables, test the balance and flexibility of sword blades, and chat with old friends in the space just inside the entrance. Neatly dressed ticket takers and security guards are especially careful to check for badges and tickets on the first day. Since admission is charged separately for each event, the guards need to watch out for cheaters. After each major event on the program, the stadium will be cleared of all but authorized visitors and the process will begin again in a few hours.

The tournament itself is organized along international rules, rules that have largely been developed as part of an international attempt, led by the Chinese government's sports bureaucracy, to add Chinese martial arts events to the already existing Olympic repertoire of Japanese judo, Western-style boxing, fencing, and various forms of wrestling (Xu and Wei 2001; Li Jie 2000). The first day is devoted to elimination rounds in all events, including full-contact fighting. Solo form events include empty-hand Shaolin routines, taijiquan and other internal martial arts, sword and saber forms, short weapon forms, long weapon forms, two person forms, and miscellaneous forms (which may include less-well-known or newly created arts). For the most part, forms competitors are serious *wushu* competitors (that is, performance martial arts) who, depending on their level of skill and financial support, compete both nationally and internationally. Many of them come prepared to do several Shaolin forms, taijiquan forms, a variety of weapons forms, and perhaps some two-person routines. This group is generally quite distinct from (and sometimes disdained by) the full contact fighters. A few excel in both forms and fighting, but this is rare. In the preliminary rounds of the tournament, the crowd sees a large number of amateur

competitors as well, especially among the foreigners, who have come for the thrill and experience of competing in China. Not a few small-town martial arts halls, whether they are in Matamoras or Monterey, are adorned with photos of the local sifu (Cantonese for “teacher”) cavorting with one famous master or another. Likewise, small town Chinese martial arts instructors can score a few points with *their* locals by pasting up pictures of themselves standing next to a foreigner.

Soon, the tournament is underway. The basketball court is divided into three separate spaces, each of which hosts a separate category (e.g. “women’s double-edged sword” or “men’s Chen style taijiquan”). Male and female judges, many of them famous martial artists in their own right, are announced by the emcee and march out in single file, accompanied by a string of young, glamorously dressed women who will handle various ceremonial and procedural duties. The national anthem plays and we all stand. After a wait, the first competitors stream out from the side and middle entrances at ground level. Everyone is dressed in colorful *gongfu* suits, some sporting the names of their respective schools from their respective countries. In the program, competitors are listed by both country and school affiliation, but it is clear once the competition gets under way that, like the Olympics and other international athletic events, this tournament is largely about national pride.

The loud speaker announces a member of one of the Italian teams, a man who must be in his fifties, in ring three. He will perform a taijiquan sword form. He begins his routine, and even from my vantage point in the stands, I can see that he is shaking with nerves. He forgets his routine. Under such circumstances, a competitor is allowed to re-start with some reduction in points. The Italian man begins but almost immediately forgets again. He is visibly disappointed with his performance, almost to the point of tears. He has embarrassed himself in front of a crowd of hundreds (it would have been thousands had he made it to the final rounds). Suddenly, the crowd erupts in a loud, sincere cheer and applause. Many

of them are locals, but many are fellow competitors who are enjoying the competition from the stands. This seems to raise the Italian's spirits as he exits the space.

On day two, I again move back and forth between filming from ground level and watching the tournament from the stands. I find myself sitting in the middle of one of three Mexican teams present at the tournament. I try to communicate with them in Spanish, but Chinese or a combination of Chinese and Spanish keeps coming out of my mouth. With great effort, I am finally able to form some basic Spanish sentences. Fortunately, one of the young Mexicans, Marco, speaks some English.

"I'm a little worried," he says, pointing down to the full contact fighting that we are watching in the center ring below. "Those guys are good. I hurt my leg and it's still hurt. But I didn't want to miss this. Being here is like a dream come true." A few minutes later, one of the Mexican team members enters the ring and goes up against a much larger member of one of the Chinese teams. They are fighting in the same weight class, but seem to be at opposite extremes. I join the Mexicans in cheering on their teammate. It quickly becomes apparent that he is seriously outclassed and is knocked off his feet several times, when the referees momentarily stop the fight. The Mexican team coach uses smelling salts and wet towels and lots of massage to revive his fighter, who seems o.k. He heads back out into the ring and is once again knocked off his feet with a long, powerful roundhouse kick to the head. This time, from the ground, he waves his hands in defeat. The ref stops the fight. The coach retrieves his battered fighter. Next to me, Marco looks worried. He has to fight later on in the day.

Figure 13: Banner, 2001 Zhengzhou International Shaolin Festival. Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 14: Medal ceremony, 2001 Zhengzhou International Shaolin Wushu Festival. Photo: Adam Frank.



### *The Birthplace*

My time in Henan is short, so I decide to skip the middle day of the tournament and head for Chenjiagou (literally, “Chen family ditch”), the Chen family village, the purported birthplace of modern taijiquan. On the recommendation of my Swiss anthropologist friend, who had already scoped out these parts the previous year (and even then found them well-scoped), I had already called a member of the Chen family, an accomplished teacher who had not yet traveled outside of China to conduct workshops, as many other family members had. Chen ran one of the several dozen Chen style taijiquan schools in Wenxian, Henan Province. The village itself was only a couple of miles away, so it was simple enough for villagers, most of whom are farmers, to work in the town. On this day, Teacher Chen, the school secretary, and another friend give me a short tour of the school. Outside, a Frenchman practices on his own, and another foreigner shows me the simple room he rents as part of his tuition at the school. For the most part, however, the students at the school are Henan boys and girls, the poor sons and daughters of farmers, who have been given the opportunity to study Chen style. Unlike even the Chen style taijiquan taught in urban settings like Shanghai, Wenxian provides enough space to have an actual training hall (a necessity in Northern Chinese winters). This hall sports a well-equipped gym with heavy punching bags and apparently high quality protective equipment. It is in this room that Chen stylists practice boxing as part of their training. Chen stylists have a reputation in China for being formidable fighters.<sup>85</sup> Wu and Yang stylists sometimes complain the Chen people lack sensitivity in their push hands (“they turn push hands into wrestling”). And Chen stylists, when they remark on it at all,

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<sup>85</sup> There is a saying among taiji players that “Wu style is for the urban upper classes, Yang style is for the urban working classes, and Chen style is for the peasants.”

simply state that here in Henan, people practice “original” taijiquan. Such gross generalizations are all part of the rivalries inherent in the martial arts world and are just as likely to be encountered within particular styles as among them.

I am curious about these Chen stylists’ push hands, but it would be impolite to ask the teacher to push with me or to challenge one of his students without his blessing, so I simply hope that he will invite me to do so, which, as it turns out, he never does. After a pleasant lunch at a one of the few local restaurants, Teacher Chen suggests we pay a visit to the village. We catch a *mianbaoche* (lit. “bread car”; a minivan taxi) and make the trip to the village in a quarter of an hour. The roads are good. As we enter the village proper, Chen points out a brand new, modern looking building.

“That’s a new school,” he says. “They just built it.”

As we enter the village, the newness of the school is suddenly not surprising. Even with the preliminary information I gathered on the village, I am surprised by the apparent wealth of the place. Though it is small—around 5,000 inhabitants—Chenjiagou has obviously benefited from its martial arts reputation. For international taiji enthusiasts, as well as for Chinese with the financial means to pursue their interests outside their hometowns, Chen village is a kind of mecca. The schools inside the village, as well as the many schools in Wenxian, provide a healthy income to the several skilled teachers who have chosen to carry on the family tradition. Those who have the right combination of skill, shrewdness, and *guanxi* (here, “connections”) obtain invitations to teach in foreign countries. Several have emigrated.

The style itself is quite different from Yang and Wu taijiquan, which are closely linked to one another. Chen style emphasizes the principle of *chansijin*, or “silk winding strength.” The forms themselves, as well as an endless variety of supplemental exercises, some incorporating equipment, train this energy. “Silk winding strength” refers to the silk worker’s ability to unwind silk from a cocoon

with continuous, unbroken motion so as not to break the strand of silk. In a similar manner, the Chen style emphasizes the drawing up of energy around the extremities and powerfully dispensing that energy (*fajin*) in an unbroken manner. All taiji styles incorporate silk winding, but, just as Wu style emphasizes mastery of *tingjin* (“listening energy”), Chen emphasizes silk winding strength.

As we stroll through the village toward Teacher Chen’s home, various villagers greet Chen and smile toward me. It is now, apparently, routine for foreigners to make their way through these streets, so the appearance of another foreigner goes barely noticed. The simple, brick homes we pass all seem to be undergoing remodeling of one kind or another—a new wall here, a new chicken coop there. And the bricks seem to be either new or recently cleaned. The whole village seems to gleam with energy. There are freshly planted flowers everywhere and evidence of a good harvest. The people seem relaxed on first impression. Finally, we arrive at Teacher Chen’s home. We enter into an outer courtyard where a young man shucks rich, yellow corn. Another grain dries in the sun. Chen only wants to stay a moment to make a phone call. He invites me to sit down in the courtyard. The young man and I chat for a few moments. He is a longtime student of Chen’s and a disciple. He has good things to say about his teacher without being worshipful of him. Chen comes out a moment later and shows off his corn. He says it is good corn this year and is obviously proud of the harvest. Chen notices me coughing (I have acquired a cold at some point during the day) and invites me to stay the night in his home, an invitation that my research obligations at the tournament will not allow me to accept.

Chen leads me down another path and a few minutes later, we end up at a small shrine, garden, and museum display. This is the wall, I am told, that Yang Luchan supposedly nightly peeked over in order to secretly acquire the art of taijiquan from his Chen master. Only a servant boy at the time, Yang continued in this manner until he was discovered and, because of his talent and diligence, the

master agreed to teach him openly. We try to enter a small room, but a young boy stops us and demands that I buy a ticket. Chen tries to negotiate with the boy, but he will have none of it. Visitors pay. Around the room, a life-sized diorama depicts the passing on of the true taijiquan from the Chen family to Yang Luchan. In one depiction, Yang kneels before his Chen master, accepting the secret training manual from him. In the background, the walls are painted with a kind of comic book version of the proceedings, complete with dialogue.

This all strikes me as very odd. “What,” I ask, “is this shrine to Yang Luchan doing in the middle of the Chen family village?”

“A Yang stylist from Taiwan donated money to the village for it,” says Teacher Chen. I read part of the description. It includes a recounting of the Yang Luchan story, a brief biography of the benefactor, and a thank you note to the Chen village residents.

As a focal point for so much interest about taijiquan in recent years, Chenjiagou appears on the surface to have coped well with the many challenges that face small tourist destinations in China. It benefits directly from martial arts tourism, and from the operation of martial arts schools. It is clear that Chenjiagou has emerged in the last twenty years as a key component in the Party’s requisition of taijiquan as master symbol at both the local and the national level, but the relationship between Party and village is apparently a highly symbiotic one. This development has occurred directly because of national-level encouragement of foreign participation in a small, local economy. The collusion from the village level all the way up to through national sports bureaucracy creates a space for taijiquan, inscribed by all the twists and turns of Chinese history, to inscribe itself on the national mind. The contradiction lies in the fact that Chen style, a family-based form that is actually still widely taught by family members, is also an extremely popular style in forms competition and has therefore undergone a certain amount of standardization in *wushu* academies and in the martial arts

departments of the major sports universities.<sup>86</sup> The negotiation between the village level and the state breaks down in the realm of secrets. Like other family arts, Chen style reserves some information for disciples, although there are famous Chen teachers on the international workshop circuit who claim to tell all. Nonetheless, the importance attached in taijiquan to individual attainment in *neigong* (“internal skill”) versus *waigong* (“external skill”) ultimately precludes standardization, at least if family members wish to preserve the art in a form that they consider “authentic.” At the tournament level, there is an erasure of individuality. At the village level, there is an acknowledgement of individuality as it is expressed in changes to the forms, an acknowledgement of what Sapir referred to as the importance “of bending form to one’s will, not a manufacture of form *ex nihilo*” (Sapir 1949a:321. Chen family members, like their Wu/Ma family equivalents, value preservation of the forms, but status is gained in Chen style through a combination of good form, fighting ability, and attention to *wude* (“martial virtue”).

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<sup>86</sup> The most important stylistic changes to come out of these professional sports training facilities are the “combined taijiquan,” the “24”, and the “48” movement competition forms. While some competitions allow for family styles, those geared toward ultimate Olympic competition require strict adherence to the State forms. Generally, other countries have gone along with this standardization process, reserving competition among other styles for domestic tournaments.

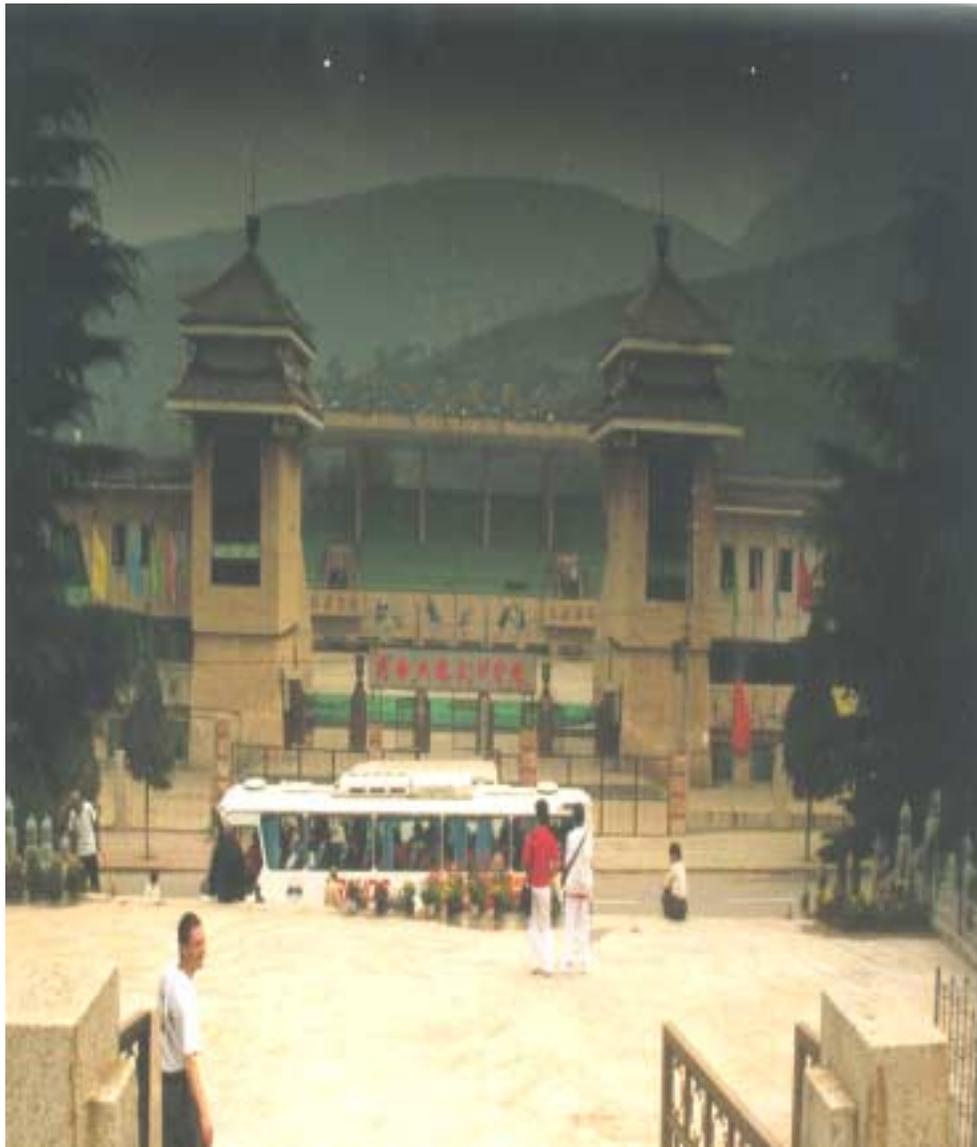
Figure 15: Cheng Zhangxin passing the art of taijiquan to Yangluchan, Chenjiagou, Henan Province, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 16: Chen family teacher with corn, Chenjiagou, Henan Province, 2001.  
Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 17: Tour bus in front of stadium, Shaolin Temple, Henan Province, 2001.  
Photo: Adam Frank.



### *Shaolin Temple and the Carnavalesque*

At the conclusion of the tournament, I have a few days remaining to visit the Shaolin Temple and to attend one of the largest martial arts-oriented performance in the world, the Shaolin Festival in Dengfeng. On this day, the day of the festival, the town is packed with tourists. Dengfeng is a town of close to half a million people. One would expect a thriving economy, considering the steady flow of tourists to the temple throughout the year, but the place looks poor. A shopkeeper on the corner, however, comments, “the Shaolin festival is good for the economy.”<sup>87</sup> I join the throngs that mill toward the town’s central amphitheatre, an enormous enclosed space that holds several thousand people. At the ornate front gate that leads into the open-air amphitheatre, air-conditioned tour buses and sleek black cadre sedans roll through the gates as a women’s *minjian yinyuedui* (folk music team) beats out a tune on their drums. The whole thing would seem like a scene from Rabelais, except that something is missing. This is no bacchanalia. The vast majority of people in the crowd are townspeople who have no chance of actually getting in to see the spectacle. Those lucky enough to secure tickets are trying to squeeze their way into a side gate, where a squad of soldiers and policeman have literally set up a human barricade.

Overflowing with cameras and tape recorders, I try to get all this in. I accost a young, working class motorcycle driver (or he accosts me) and ask him what he thinks of the tourists. He seems content enough to get some good business during the Shaolin festival but has some reservations about the quality of life.

“I don’t like them,” he says. “I liked it better before. Life was more peaceful.” One senses an edge in this town, a resentment of the ostentatious

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with shopkeeper, 2001, Dengfeng. Tape-recorded.

wealth that surrounds the festival and is therefore associated with the brand of Buddhism practiced at the Shaolin temple. My new friend decides that I might be just the ticket, literally, to get in to see the festival. He is an honest sort, it seems, and says he will help me find a decent price on a ticket from one of the many scalpers. Tickets are going for about US\$12 a piece, but I refuse these offers. Oddly, the price does not seem to have anything to do with the usual racism. Today I do not think my skin color is of particular importance in regards to the price. Everyone wants to get in, and in this atmosphere of *zibenzhuyi* (“capitalism”), scalpers are having a field day. Finally, I manage to find a guy who is selling for a slightly lower price and I buy a ticket. I do not have enough to buy two tickets and still take the bus back home, so my friend and I hatch a plan.

As we reach the front, I flash my ticket and pull my friend close, shouting out “*Fanyi! Fanyi!*” (“Translator! Translator!”) and pointing at my friend. Realizing the futility of trying to communicate in this mess, the policeman makes a snap decision and waves us in. Inside, we are confronted with a second tier of guards, who we deftly avoid, finally penetrating through into the vast open space of the amphitheatre. It is another world inside, a world of straight rows of folding chairs, thousands of them, red carpet, bottled water and complimentary baseball caps with the name of the festival blazoned across. On the high walls that enclose the space are various scenes from the Shaolin arts, including the image of the elephant-headed god associated with the Shaolin order.<sup>88</sup> My friend and I find some seats in one of the back rows. The day, fortunately, is rather cool. I take out the equipment and begin a panoramic sweep. The stage itself is a huge, raised affair, full of wires and lights, not unlike a typical rock concert set up, and, as quickly becomes apparent, a rock concert is probably the best way to describe the pop celebration of Shaolin boxing that follows. Two pop singers serve as emcees.

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<sup>88</sup> Bodhisattvas are sometimes depicted riding elephants. The origin of the Shaolin version of the elephant symbol remains unclear.

When they give the signal, an amazing succession of thousands of colorful helium balloons are released into the sky, and the emcees announce that the festival has begun. They guide us through the myth of the temple, which is enacted before our eyes by one of the crack Shaolin performance teams that travel nationally and internationally. Martial arts performances in the Shaolin style are sandwiched in between performances by of pop stars from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The famous Shaolin children's team comes out and does their shtick. Having gotten in the door, my friend has pretty much lost interest in me and is now even somewhat disdainful of all the gadgetry I am lugging around. He seems to feel getting in was his due. He is correct.

The performance lasts for about an hour, an endless stream of jazzed up feats of martial strength of the sort that have been popular in Chinese urban marketplaces and temple god possession rituals for centuries (Boretz 1995): bending swords with one's throat, catching arrows, etc. The performance ends without much fanfare. I wait until the crowd disperses somewhat so I can shoot some video closer to the stage. Finally, I too leave the amphitheatre and return to the real world. From the town, which locals say is rather sedate at every other time of the year, a steady stream of spillover tourists from Zhengzhou hop taxis to the top of the mountain, where the venerable old temple sits.

I share a ride with an Australian and a Greek, both of whom have been studying at one of the martial arts schools adjacent to the temple for the last several weeks. The Greek plans to spend months, but his agenda is atypical. Already accomplished in the Korean martial art of taekwondo, he has actually come to this Buddhist temple to study Buddhism, only the fifth foreigner ever to do so, he claims. The Australian has adopted a more typical program of working with a teacher on a regular basis. He is a serious practitioner back home, but has chosen to learn the routines in the children's class, which he finds challenging enough. He has come here to learn basics.

We disembark from our Taxi and walk up a narrow road lined by small shops selling martial arts equipment and paraphernalia. Since the mutual decision of the Shaolin order's abbot, Shi Yongxin, and the Party to promote the Shaolin Temple as one of the chief tourist spots in China, local people have found a steady, if not earth-shaking source of income (Jakes 2001). The short and long-term foreign students at the temple schools number in the thousands. Single-day tourists like me add thousands more. And the Chinese students who pass through the hundreds of martial arts schools, large and small, that surround the temple and spill out into the countryside number in the tens of thousands. Like the boys who learn Chen style taijiquan in Wenxian, many of the students in these Shaolin schools are poor peasant children who are fulfilling a dream come true.

Very few of the Chinese students and none of the foreigners ever actually participate in the religious life of the temple. The foreigners live in a hotel built specifically for the purpose of housing martial arts tourists, most of whom also eat in the hotel's canteen. The system for obtaining a teacher is somewhat haphazard. Those teachers who are actually monks will negotiate a reasonable price for martial arts training. The tiny number who study Buddhism, like the Greek, pay nothing for tuition, but must provide for their own room and board in the hotel. Donations to the temple are, of course, accepted. And they come readily, for among the clientele are a number of Hollywood stars, led here by "the kung fu teacher to the stars," Shi Yan Ming. Yan Ming grew up in the temple but defected to the United States while on tour with one of the Shaolin performance troops (Jakes 2001). He has since settled in New York City, where he runs a Shaolin school and teaches both Buddhist meditation techniques and martial arts. Yan Ming has also begun to make a name for himself in the film world. Among the Chinese film luminaries who call him "teacher" are Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh, John Wu and Chow Yun-fat (Jakes 2001).

For the Chinese students, life is considerably harsher. For the privilege of training with “the best,” they live in cramped quarters, eat bad food, and train long hours. Most of them train with former monks who left the order or former novices (*jianxi xiushi*) who decided not to join the order but who attained a moderately advanced level of skill in the martial arts. Therefore, they are being trained in martial arts system associated with Buddhism rather than being trained as disciples of a religious order.

In contrast, a certain number of young men are currently novice monks and do live inside the temple. They, too, study martial arts, but also participate in the daily religious life of the temple. Some of them have been sent to the temple by their parents and have no intention of staying. Others hope to continue in the temple rather than return to a difficult farm life. Some come from wealthy homes, so their decision to stay will be based on different criteria. In any case, by their late teens, the novices must decide whether or not they wish to stay, at which point a decision is made, if it has not already been made, whether or not to accept them. Depending on aptitude and interest, the novices then choose to specialize either in religious studies or in martial arts. Few do both, since the amount of time required to truly master even one of these is beyond the skills of any but the most talented.

After bidding good-bye to my foreign friends, who have just reported the presence of another Hollywood movie star prowling about the temple grounds, I decide to take a tour of the temple proper before it closes. At the entrance, several tables are manned by police officers, who can barely conceal their animosity as I purchase a ticket. I have no idea whether they are just sick of tourists or if something else has happened to put them in a bad mood. Based on the reports of other visitors to the temple who I have met, I suspect the former. As I move toward the entrance gate, I notice a Party office just to the right of the temple. The prominent location of the office and the presence of the policemen certainly give

one a visceral impression of Party hegemony in religious matters, despite the recently much-touted movement toward re-building religious shrines destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The temple has seen its share of trouble. In 1928, when warlords had divided up Henan, it was destroyed (Jakes 2001). In recent times, the battle has been fought on even more treacherous ground: Abbot Shi Yongxin has been engaged in intellectual property law suits in recent years to protect the Shaolin Temple name, which regularly appears on products in China and overseas (Xinhua 2002). Shi Yongxin's close relationship with the Party has resulted in some protection and resources.

Entering the temple grounds, I notice several monuments from international donors. Monks try to go about their business but appear to maintain an attitude of studied steeliness in response to the steady stream of cameras intermittently clicking and whirring on the grounds. I have seen these expressions before—well-fed but resigned to imprisonment—on the faces of zoo animals. I meet a young monk at the top of the stairs and, despite my worries that he has had enough of the gawking tourists, I ask him a few questions about his life there. The fact that we can speak in Chinese seems to warm him up ever so slightly, and he politely points out some of the routines of the temple in which he is engaged at this late hour: lighting incense, picking up litter left by the tourists, etc. He himself is a specialist in martial arts, he says. After a short conversation, he begs off and continues with his duties.

Finally, I meet up with an old man who sweeps up the gardens. He is not a monk, but a villager who is paid by the temple to do this work. He is quite friendly and happy to talk about his life. He had apparently been laid off from a job in the town and found the temple work soon after.

“Do you like working here?” I ask him.

“Yes,” he says. “The monks treat me pretty well.” He suggests I take a look at the inner courtyard before the temple closes in a few minutes. He warns

me that the last bus down the hill to the village leaves in less than half an hour. I wend my way through an ornately carved passageway into the inner courtyard. It appears to have once been a barnyard of sorts, with open, covered stalls on all four sides of the yard, but instead of animals in the stalls, there is another life-sized diorama, like the one in Chenjiagou, but this one is much more elaborate and depicts key moments in the history of the temple. Two teenagers, apparently Chinese tourists, playfully re-enact the scene in one of the stalls.

The sun is already dropping low in the sky, and I realize I had better head back. I walk out a gate and start looking for the bus stop. There is construction all over the place. On the other side of the road, I see a small stadium, which apparently belongs to the largest Shaolin school in the vicinity, a school that trains thousands of students each year.

“Pretty chaotic around here,” I comment to a construction worker who is resting nearby.

“They’re moving everything,” he says. “They are moving most of the schools down the mountain. The hotel will stay.”

“Why?”

“The government wants to protect the temple, so they want the businesses and the schools in the village.”

I notice people heading for a minivan and hop in. I sit in the back, next to three teenage boys who are students at one of the schools. Their ringleader, who could not be more than fourteen, lights up a cigarette and asks me about America. I ask him about martial arts. He says he wants to be a movie star. He asks if I study martial arts.

“I do a little taijiquan,” I reply.

“We should have a match in town tonight. We could make a lot of money.”

I decline.

We pass dozens of martial arts schools along the way, and I can see small groups of kids engaged in evening practice. It strikes me that Chenjiagou is so close to Shaolin geographically, only a couple of hours away by car, that the old story of Zhang Sanfeng, the inventor of taijiquan, first training at Shaolin actually rings true. All the great “internal” martial arts people seem to have come out of Henan or Hebei. There are many stylistic similarities, and the Shaolin people claim that theirs is also an “internal” system at the highest levels. The Chinese government has been very astute in understanding that martial arts in China are both separate and of a piece. In the nationalist project, Shaolin and taijiquan are easily lumped together. Therefore, it is no surprise that the tournament in Zhengzhou, ostensibly devoted to Shaolin, includes taijiquan events, or that Shaolin people compete in full-contact fighting and push hands at taijiquan events.

### ***Scholarly Production and Languages of State***

While practitioners of these arts would argue the relative superiority of their styles, the nationalization of martial arts through *tiyu daxue* and *wushuguan* or *wushuyuan* (sports universities, martial arts training halls, and martial arts training institutes) and their glorification as “folk arts” or “folk sports” creates a shared iconography—*gongfu* clothing, marketplaces for martial arts supplies, even music. Through standardization of forms and codification of tournament rules, the treatment of these arts as sport as opposed to combat arts subsumes and transforms the latter (Donahue 1994; Brownell 1995). This is no more readily apparent than in the substantial scholarly literature that has developed around martial arts in general and taijiquan in particular. In addition to the martial arts training manuals that are popular both inside and outside of PRC, a substantial literature has been generated through the *tiyu daxue* martial arts departments. Most of these sports universities produce journals, and many of the journals have

a section devoted to martial arts history and research. Several independent journals are devoted entirely to either martial arts or sports history, a field that has grown out of the folk sports movement of the 1950s. As in the United States, scholarly literature both keys in to existing discourses and generates its own discursive space. In the case of the martial arts literature, the three primary voices are *scientific*, *humanities*, and *social science*. The hard science articles are generally devoted to the medical aspects of taijiquan and to issues of kinesiology and physiology. Wang Jinghao's "Effects and Mechanism of Taiji Exercise on Hyperlipidemia and Diabetes II" (2001) is typical of this literature in that it trades on the mythos of modern science to validate and reify the "traditional" (taijiquan) as an essential feature of Chinese identity. Few such articles falsify the health claims made by taijiquan practitioners (in contrast, for example, to the veritable scholarly assault on the health claims made by Falun Gong practitioners; Frank 2003). Wang's is no exception. The "effects" he speaks of are positive ones.

Journal articles in the humanities vein tend to focus on the relationship of martial arts to other "traditional arts." The social science discourse is often explicitly linked with the project of Chinese nationalism. In "The Influence of Traditional Folk Sports Education on Student's Consciousness of Traditional Culture," for example, the authors use a survey of university students who have studied taijiquan for two years or more to make the claim that "university students who were systematically taught taijiquan more readily accept the idea of using traditional means to keep fit in comparison to a scientifically rational one" (Gao, Wang, and Gu 2000:56). Likewise, Xu Wu's "Explanation and Analysis of Social Values in Traditional Folk Sports" (Xu Wu 2000) focuses on the place of "martial virtue" (*wude*) in "traditional folk morality." Xu's essay accepts an Herderian notion of "*das Volk*" without question. Xu's discussion of martial arts in the article treat such arts as uniformly ancient, as if they are not modern inventions, or at least arts that undergo constant evolution. And Liu Xueqian's

“Propagation and Development of Wushu in Cultural Proliferation” (1997) takes a diffusionist approach to Chinese martial arts as a means of preserving and spreading fundamental Chinese values.

Taijiquan yields specific nuances in the scientific discourse. It is taijiquan, in a de-focused, generalized sort of way that the Chinese tourist industry has chosen as the *ur*-symbol of Chinese culture. The production of this image is precise: The symbol that the Chinese Olympic Committee adopted in its successful bid for the 2008 Olympics, for example, is an abstracted depiction of the taijiquan posture “Downward Posture” (*xia shi*). As the yin to Shaolin’s yang, taijiquan has a wider appeal, is more accessible, is practiced by a far greater number of people, and, since it is “internal” is open to a far greater number of generally false claims about practical efficacy gained through mental mastery alone (again *yi* versus *li*).

### ***Conclusion***

At an international taijiquan tournament in Zhuhai, the tourist city near the Hong Kong border in Guangdong Province, that I attended near the end of 2001, the uniformity of the tournament world was quite apparent, but the story the tournament told about being Chinese drew on popular conceptions of Daoism as individual cultivation. For the most part, Zhengzhou was a young person’s tournament and one dominated by men. In Zhuhai, middle-aged or old people held the day and they were of mixed gender. The high point of a taijiquan tournament is not the push hands or full-contact fighting, but the public performance by the old men and women who are the heads of their respective family lineages. The competition, models of state hegemony, is really secondary to the world of the “cultured individual” (Sapir 1949b) that the masters demos are said to represent. Competition and its apparatus provide the nuts and bolts for the state’s construction of taijiquan as master symbol, but the masters demos are the

spirit of the symbol, for it is here that the audience, both foreign and Chinese, can actually see, massed in one place, dozens of people who embody “the little old man” for whom they have been searching. Actual skill has nothing to do with it. One teacher of renowned family lineage revealed to me his trepidation about such displays. “My taijiquan isn’t that good,” he said. “I learned from my grandfather, but then I didn’t have enough opportunity to practice when I got older. I don’t really like to perform in front of people.” This teacher’s humility contrasted with the somewhat ostentatious displays of flowing robes and wispy beards that adorned the alleged “Daoist priests of Wudang Mountain” in their performances. “Wudang taijiquan,” the emcee announced in Zhuhai. “An aspect of Daoism, it is the original taijiquan.”

Like the Alamo’s position in the construction and experience of Texas modernity, taijiquan “is a shrine committed to memorializing a past event by authenticating a singular version of it” (Flores 2002:33), but in this case, the “event” is an ancient China whose history has been reconfigured by successive winners in the constant shift of dynastic power that has occurred over the centuries.<sup>89</sup> Flores writes

Because cultural memory imbues narratives with meaning, they are also involved in the formation of identities. As narrative resources, cultural memory emerges as objects of memory [that] are shared, further enhancing their utility as identity markers and makers.” [Flores 2002:17].

That the CCP narrates memory through its official sanctioning and encouragement of a standardized, internationalized “sport” taijiquan says a great deal about the power of the state to hegemonize the construction of identity, particularly in a setting where dissent must generally come only in subtle forms.

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<sup>89</sup> One could make the case that the body is not a shrine. Whereas the Alamo is essentially immobile, though by no means static in appearance, taijiquan moves through individual bodies.

The “outsiderness” that I referred to earlier to describe the JTA in the urban context of Shanghai holds even more true in the context of taijiquan as a master symbol of Chinese nationalism, an instance of consensual hegemony (Gramsci 1992) and an example of how national sports policy that actually pre-dates 1949 replaces the “real” (i.e. martial, individualistic, family-based practice) taijiquan with the “imaginary” (i.e. performative competition taijiquan). Further, the state uses the “real” to strengthen its displacement by the imaginary.<sup>90</sup>

Many people seem satisfied with this arrangement in urban China. Even among the JTA members, a Ma family member commented, there is little interest in learning “real” taijiquan. One teacher describes Ma Yueliang’s exclusion from the Shanghai *wushuyuan*, where standardized forms are taught, as a violation of tradition. A third disparages the abilities of state *wushu* coaches, who monopolize teaching of competitive push hands simply because they have come through the sports university system. However, for the most part, the many millions of people who practice taijiquan in China for recreation are content to simply find a decent teacher and a relaxed group of peers with whom they can enjoy their morning practice. If they had to practice boxing, or even push hands for that matter, most of the park taijiquan would cease to exist. Its very popularity, its very power to reinforce notions of Chineseness, lies in the ease with which most taijiquan can be learned and disseminated. The irony for the JTA, of course, is that Wu style taijiquan is a martially-grounded, Manchu offshoot of Yang style taijiquan. It is a “minority” art that has subsumed its minority origins to the grand discourse of Han-ness.

Chapter 6 details the processes of imagination through which this grand discourse is developed.

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Again, Casey (1989) notes “an active immanence of the past in the body.” It is a combination of activity and a *felt* immanence of the past that differentiates the practice from the shrine.

<sup>90</sup> Brow discusses a similar process in his study of development and spirit possession in the village of Kukulewa in Sri Lanka (Brow 1996).

Figure 18: 2008 Olympic Logo: Abstracted version of “Downward Posture” or “Serpent Creeps Downward”



### PART III: IMAGINATION AND TRANSNATION

## Chapter 6

### From Nation to Imagination: Fantasy, Poetry, Heroes

#### IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

#### X

At the sight of the blackbirds  
Flying in a green light  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

—Wallace Stevens  
*From* “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”

#### *Masters of the Image*

It is seven o'clock on a July morning in Shanghai, and on the Pudong side of the river, in and around a metal warehouse complex adjacent to the ferry pier, the day's filming is about to begin on *Flatland*. Crewmembers are sipping coffee and slowly setting up. Everyone is trying to preserve their energy as the blistering heat of Shanghai summer overtakes the coolness of the morning air. Stanley Tong and I are doing a little push hands next to one of the vans. Tong is a co-producer on this joint Chinese-Hong Kong-US production. He is also one of the most famous stunt coordinators in the Hong Kong film industry, a former full-contact kickboxer, a long-time taijiquan practitioner, and the director of Jackie Chan's first big hit in the U.S., *Rumble in the Bronx*. I tell Tong I am playing the role of

Ori, assistant to the bad guy, in the current episode. I also tell him a little about the taijiquan project and start to ask him about the director's role in producing the image of Chineseness, but it is much too early in the morning for this, so we end up talking martial arts and doing push hands instead. I push on Tong and find that he demonstrates a good level of the same kind of springiness that I encounter with many of the skilled taiji players I meet in the park. Tong says that he had certain ideas about taijiquan's practicality as a youth and that he favored kickboxing. Eventually, he said, after practicing for many years, he started to understand what his teacher taught him. Until recently, he had been out of contact with this teacher for many years. Because of his status in the film industry, he had been reluctant to make contact again for fear the teacher would somehow construe this as showing off, but once contact was made, he was happy to report, his teacher seemed pleased with Tong's progress in the martial arts.

I look around, hoping to spot Dennis Hopper. The Hollywood icon has a recurring role as Saint Michael in the series and is rumored to be in town. The other main cast members, young, up and coming American or Canadian television actors, trickle in as Shanghai's summer sun comes out in full force. The story they are performing seems to have little to do with the Shanghai I know. *Flatland* takes place in the Shanghai of 2010. Hopper's Saint Michael has been sent on a mission from God to catch the Devil and his colleagues (the character I play, Ori, is one of them). As Morgan describes it, "We have various villains who are white and black and Asian. The idea is to make it non-race specific, the same we did [the TV series] *Martial Law* on CBS" (Morgan 2003).

The show is full of potential. Aside from the participation of Hopper and Tong, it also has three other co-producers: Steve Feke, best-known for producing the syndicated series *Beastmaster*; Ren Naichang, a wealthy Beijing businessman; and Andre Morgan, Bruce Lee's old producer at Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong and more recently a producer of the American television series *Walker: Texas*

*Ranger* with action star, Chuck Norris, and *Martial Law*, which introduced Hong Kong martial arts icon Sammo Hung to American audiences. Morgan is one half of the Ruddy-Morgan production team (his partner, Albert Ruddy produced and won an Oscar for *The Godfather*). The producers are intent on making this first-ever joint China-US production of a television series a technical tour-de-force. The series is the first to film entirely in High Definition Video (HDV), a format popularized by George Lucas on his latest *Star Wars* films and later used by Robert Rodriguez on his *Spy Kids* films. *Flatland* has hired one of the best crews in the world to pull this off, mostly Australians. The plan is for the Australians (unbeknownst to them) to train a less-experienced collection of Shanghai television technicians in the nuances of HDV. From the beginning, there is a lot of talk among both crews and cast about how chaotic (*luan*) everything is. The translators are overworked and underpaid, and most of them are learning the film lingo for the first time (I do double-time for a couple of days as an interpreter for the make up crew and, on a later episode, pull duty as a dialogue coach). From accounting to office management, styles are very different. The Chinese crews and production staff are generally more used to a state-run mode of production, whereas many of the foreign crew have spent their lives working with big film studios like Miramax, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Paramount. Ren Naichang runs the money end of things and does so in a typical smoke-filled room fashion. I walked into my own negotiation with him knowing that I did not stand a chance, that I would surely lose face. The question was how much face would I lose. I had to be careful. I had initially heard about the project through Teacher Lu's *wudapian* (martial arts soap opera) actor friend, the one who had bounced me off his chest in Haiyang Park, and I needed to make sure that my own behavior would in no way reflect badly on either of them. Thus, the world between "fantasy" martial arts and "real" martial arts blurred at yet another level. Lu's friend had

complained about “literati push hands” (*wenren tuishou*) but here we were colluding in the creation of new fantasies.

Back on the set, I am told to head over to the second unit (the production unit that focuses exclusively on action sequences, e.g. car chases and flying from wires). An elaborate system of cranes, pulleys, and wires are in place that will allow Gina, a Canadian journalist and martial artist, to fly across a twenty-foot gap between two warehouse buildings. She is to run at full speed, then will be lifted on wires off her feet and across the chasm. Her instructions are to continue running in the air. Gina was hired to do a few fighting scenes. In fact, she admits, she is afraid of heights, but because of her similarity in build to co-star Francoise Yip, the producers put a wig on her and recruit her as a stunt double. Gina wants to be a trooper, so she agrees to do the stunts. On the other end of the wire, the flying crew carefully rehearses their task. Even under the safest conditions (and these are not among them), flying on wires is dangerous business and extremely strenuous. Ang Lee (Li An) describes the crew on *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* falling to the ground and vomiting after one particularly exhausting wire scene (Lee and Schamus 2000). Among the crewmembers on *Flatland* is a Shaolin novice monk who left the monastery to pursue a stunt career in the movies. The novice monk’s job on this set is to pull wire for a novice stuntwoman from Canada.

*Flatland* is *The Matrix* meets *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. In *Flatland*, Chineseness is a commodity. Despite Andre Morgan’s interest in creating a multi-racial cast of villains, *Flatland* still reproduces racialized images of China—ancient wisemen (Hopper’s Saint Michael is a kind of inter-dimensional guru with connections to China’s ancient past), Chinese kung fu henchmen, and white bosses (me). *Flatland* also presents the new Shanghai, a thoroughly cosmopolitan city of the twenty-first century. The show reproduces the essences that we have come to know as “Chinatown,” yet as no Chinatown we

have ever seen, it contradicts them. It is Chinatown in space. In *Flatland*, a series that takes place in Shanghai, Chinese people are marked by their invisibility (Bernasconi 2000). There is no “white guy town.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> My participation as an actor in *Flatland* made me complicit in producing an image about which I had some reservations. However, the opportunity to understand this image making from the inside through contact with some of the major players in the martial arts film industry made the opportunity too tempting to pass up. Besides, having dubbed more than a hundred kung fu movies, television programs, and cartoons in Hong Kong in the 1980s, I already had a history with the product.

Figure 19: Stuntwoman flying on wire, set of *Flatland*, Shanghai, 2001. Photo: Adam Frank.



### *Imaginings*

In Chapter I, I began with a description of one of the JTA's monthly meetings. I described how both practitioners and non-practitioners of taijiquan viewed the performances of Wu Yinghua, Ma Yueliang, and other old teachers through the lens of the popular culture interpretations of martial arts with which they grew up. For older people, this meant Chinese opera, classic vernacular novels like *Water Margin*, oral traditions, and marketplace performances where martial artists demonstrated feats of strength (Boretz 1995). For the younger generation, add the film, television, radio, comic book, and modern kung fu novels (*wuxia xiaoshuo*) with which they are inundated on an everyday basis. Growing up in this imaginative swirl of martial arts images, a process of what Althusser refers to as *interpellation* occurs, the unconscious rendering of identities of class, gender, ethnicity, etc. that emerge under specific political economic conditions (Strinati 1995).

The world of imagination that begins in China is the crucial component of the globalization of Chinese martial arts. This chapter provides a deeper analysis of how processes of interpellation play out in China in general and within the JTA in particular. First, I take a focused look at how the taiji classics, the *taijijing*, use specific structures and tonal patterns to evoke the past and thereby legitimize the art. Further, I will argue that taijiquan teachers in China strategically use the classics to market themselves and their arts. Second, I will map out a sort of history of martial arts as pop culture, focusing on martial arts novels, museum displays, kung fu movies and television serials in China. With its practitioners' emphasis on *qi* and its association in the United States and Europe with other ostensibly "Eastern" esoteric practices (hatha yoga, transcendental meditation, Zen Buddhism, etc.) that have become part and parcel of a global New Age

marketplace (Barmé 1994; Dutton 1998), taijiquan has taken a specific path in that process. Chapter 7 will look at several routes through which this process occurs: through language, through the commodification of taijiquan and *qi*-related products in the global marketplace, and through the movement of both foreign martial artists to China and Chinese martial arts instructors to the United States. For this latter discussion, I am particularly interested in the inspiration that kung fu films and television programs have had for recent generations of martial artists and how they serve as an obstacle for Chinese-American and Chinese immigrant teachers who must deal with the racialized images that film produces.

Weaving together the conceptual frameworks of imaginative production and globalization is not a neat project, nor is it meant to be. In line with my attempt in this dissertation to approach cultural analysis in terms of the *taijitu*, that is, by looking at the constant swirling of theses and anti-theses that confront us as individuals on an everyday basis, the sometimes shocking, sometimes sublime experience of seeing the world from multiple perspectives simultaneously, I approach this chapter as one instance of mutually constitutive frameworks. A satisfying, comfortable model, one that fits neatly into political economy or gender analysis or even poststructuralism would miss the point. My discussion of specific instances of imaginative production—movies, museums, etc.—should be read as the thesis to the antithesis of personal stories and impressions. Whereas the person-to-person ritualization of race that I described in Part I occurs at a relatively subtle level, the world of imaginative production is dominated by overtly racist images of Chineseness, and, for that matter, “white trash” of the international, colonialist sort. Again, these images are mutually constituted in a collusive flow of international capital, production processes, and professionals who “give the public what they want” (Ong 1996, 1999; Ong and Nonini 1997a, 1997b). The business relationships that drive popular culture production are also an arena for the ritualization of race. A wide variety of images of Chineseness

jockey for position in this imaginative world, but the images that dominate are the ones that flow from the largest fountains of capital: Hollywood producers or Chinese producers who have their eye on foreign markets. Again, I am not arguing the value of such images, whether they are racist, or simply racially marked. I am not interested in complacently sneering at all creative work that attempts to depict something about China or Chinese people. Such work might contribute just as easily to someone else's subjective sense of self-worth as to racism. Rather, I am interested in the processes by which power is exercised through the production of images, how the image frames a space for a global and public ritualization of race. These processes include the whole world of popular culture that surrounds Chinese martial arts and the subsequent fetishization of Chineseness that occurs through *both* Chinese nationalism and foreign consumption of popular culture products that reference racialized images of Chinese people or that invite one to actually *experience what it feels like to be Chinese* (for example, by learning taijiquan).

### ***Searching for/Manufacturing Authenticity through the Taijijing***

Claims to “ancientness” and “authenticity” in martial arts writings are bolstered structurally by borrowing specific forms, images, and tonal patterns from classical poetry. Such poetry thus serves martial arts instructors as a kind of implicit (and sometimes explicit) marketing tool. While textual analysis plays a key role in the formulation of the above arguments, I should emphasize that I am *not* concerned with “proving” the age or authenticity of particular taiji texts.<sup>92</sup> In other words, my use of the term “authenticity” does not refer to whether or not a particular passage was truly written by the legendary creator of taijiquan, Zhang Sanfeng, or by later, equally shadowy historical figures, but rather *how* the

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<sup>92</sup>The task of proving the authenticity of texts is counter to my concern with showing how the very notion of authenticity is used strategically in the martial arts world.

passages actually function to authenticate practice semiotically and structurally, regardless of their origins. Thus, even a contemporary taijiquan teacher who openly composes his or her own “classic” might legitimately borrow from classical forms to evoke a sense of the past—and not be thought any the less of for having done so.

“The past is a foreign country,” writes David Lowenthal (1985), and it is in this sense that the past is not only temporally remote, but culturally exotic that makes us willing to believe in the magic and timelessness of taijiquan. But the past is also “home,” a place to which we return through the nostalgic gateway of poetry. This is especially the case with Chinese poetry after the Eastern Han (A.D. 25-220) adoption of the *shi* form as a standard that would continue to hold sway for several centuries (Watson 1971:15-16).<sup>93</sup> The historical weight of the *shi* form provided the space for five- and seven-character lines to evoke the past, even as they continued to be used in much later periods to discuss the minutiae of boxing methods, *qi* circulation, and body alignment.

I draw heavily here on Wile’s (1997) socio-historical approach to analyzing the texts. This approach will serve as the basis for my own analysis of *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* (The Legacy of Zhang Sanfeng). Wile centers on the role that the nineteenth century gentry played in the acquisition, editing, and original composition of taijiquan texts. He recounts the story of the Wu/Li family: Wu Yüxiang, his two *jinshi* (successful candidates in the highest Imperial civil service exam) brothers, Zheng Jing and Zhu Jing, and his nephew, Li Yiyü, who

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<sup>93</sup> Watson (1971) cites the origins of the *shi* in the Latter or Eastern Han (A.D. 25-220). An earlier form known loosely as *shi*, appeared in *Shijing*, the *Book of Songs*, an anthology completed around 600 B.C. But these contained mainly four character lines. This form lost appeal around the time of Confucius, but was revived from Han times for hymns and state pieces that “drew dignity from its now archaic tones” (Watson 1971:15-16). New *shi* employed five character, and later, seven character lines. The earliest example from first century B.C. suggests the form was first associated with children’s songs and ditties (Watson 1971:16). By the second century A.D., the form was characterized by end-stop lines, except in the last couplet, which is sometimes a run-on line. They also usually employ rhyme at the end of each even-numbered line, linking each couplet (Watson 1971:17).

ultimately edited Yüxiang's own writings; edited the *taijijing* that Zheng Jing claimed to have acquired from a salt shop owner in Wuyang, where he served as an official; and composed some of his own taiji writings (Wile 1997:xvii). For Wile, Wu Yuxiang is the key figure in taijiquan scholarship, because his mid-19<sup>th</sup> century writings, through the editorship of Li Yiyü, are the earliest taiji writings that can confidently be attributed to a particular individual. Throughout *Lost T'ai-chi Classics*, Wile relies heavily on documentary evidence he personally collected from village gazetteers and uses this evidence as the current, best benchmark for determining the authenticity of a particular author. To the Wus and Lis, he not only credits the acquisition and composition of influential taiji texts, but also the very popularization of taijiquan in the contemporary world:

Without Wu Yuxiang's resurrection of eighteenth-century soft-style theory and his recognition of these principles in the Chen family art of Henan, there would be no international taijiquan phenomenon as we know it today. The Wus and Lis were not eremitists but highly engaged elites caught in times that tried the souls of men of Confucian conscience. Whether we conceptualize the contradictions as between Manchu and Han, East and West, Daoist and Confucian, civil and martial, or traditional and modern, taijiquan in the nineteenth century must be seen as part of a personal and broader cultural process of resolving these tensions. There may have been a subconscious sense that China was about to enter a second and deeper phase of internal cultural exile and that time capsules [such as taiji writings] would be needed to preserve spiritual values and national identity. [Wile 1997:30].

Living in the throes of the Opium Wars and on the brink of the Taiping Rebellion, Wile argues, the Wu/Li family had ample motivation to practice martial arts, despite the association of such arts with bandits and ruffians. Among other reasons, Wile cites a need among male elites, caught up in the spirit of “self-strengthening,” to strengthen the body as well as the nation. He also raises the possibility that such male elites, emasculated by China's recent defeats, adopted martial arts as a means of reasserting their masculinity (Wile 1997:27). Finally,

Wile proposes that we can view literati participation in taijiquan as a kind of “political allegory” (Wile 1997:25-26) where the “*nei*” in “*neijia*” is Han and the “*wai*” in “*waijia*” is Manchu.<sup>94</sup> Since taijiquan is characterized as an “internal” art, as opposed to such arts as *shaolinquan*, characterized (by taijiquan players) as “external,” then taijiquan becomes an act of resistance against Manchu domination.

Much of what Wile conjectures regarding social and historical contexts is highly speculative, and he readily admits a paucity of documentary evidence to support such positions. However, by engaging in such creative thinking he does provide a framework for the next step in the present analysis: analyzing taijiquan texts as “socially symbolic acts.” In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson argues that literature is essentially a “socially symbolic act” that we can read through three concentric, ever-widening horizons (Jameson 1981). The first horizon is the text as symbolic act. Here, Jameson draws on Lèvi-Strauss’ use of myth and antinomies to derive meanings from texts that are structurally constituted. For example, by looking at specific line structures, tonal patterns, and images as narrative elements within a larger, mythic or folkloric text that stands outside of poetry. In other words, structural elements in poetry reference “key symbols” (Ortner 1973, 1990) in Chinese culture, and these symbols spill from poem to poem. Ultimately, they move into the wider cultural milieu, so that, for example, a line from the *Shijing* (Book of Odes) might make its way into “The

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<sup>94</sup> The period about which Wile is writing is the Qing Dynasty, which was established in 1644 by Manchus from the north and which ended with the overthrow of the child emperor, Puyi, in 1911. In Wile’s argument, to be Han is to be “internal” (*nei*) i.e. of the country, whereas to be Manchu is to be “external” (*wai*), i.e. foreign. The modern word for foreigner is *waiguoren* (lit. “outside state person”). The colloquial Mandarin Chinese term for foreigner, a term which has a negative connotation (though the negativity may at times hover below the level of conscious awareness) is *laowai* (lit. “old outsider”). Wile’s argument is insightful but we should consider it in light of other lineages. The Ma/Wu family is of Manchu descent. Like many Manchus of their time, they sought to become “*nei*” in many ways, including changing their family name to the Chinese “Wu.” The invisibility of “Manchuness” in modern Wu style calls attention to the possibility of the emasculation of Manchu men after 1911.

Song of Pushing Hands” and then, later, into an advertisement for a health elixir or a new car on Shanghai television.

In his second horizon, Jameson describes the text as *ideologeme*, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic discourses of social classes. Jameson argues that this horizon is dialogical, since opposing classes fight it out within the structure (Jameson 1981:83). In regards to taijiquan texts, this second horizon works on at least two levels. First, as Wile points out above, the mere act of editing or composing taijiquan texts is imbued with class conflict. Within the text, images appear from other classical literature, and their appearance contends with the very subject matter, for literature is the purview of an educated class, whereas martial arts are the purview of a non-literate, largely peasant class. Second, Wile shows the stronger the urge to use the texts as tools of legitimization by taijiquan instructors, the “looser” those instructors are with the order, structure, and content of the texts. “On a subtextual level,” writes Wile, “one cannot help but detect a dissonance between efforts to wrap the classics in an aura of supernatural authorship and permissiveness in the treatment of the text” (Wile 1997:35).

In Jameson’s third horizon, text is history conceived as a sequence of modes of production. He sees these modes as competing sign systems that coexist within a given artistic process. To cite an obvious example, the four-character *shi* form from the *Book of Odes* wanes in the time of Confucius, then, by the late Han, is fully legitimized by the scholarly class in hymns and state pieces (Watson 1971:15-16). Watson speculates that it was partly the folkloric value of the form that led to its adoption by the elite. If such was the case, Chinese scholars of the Eastern Han preceded Herder by several centuries in understanding “the modern” by looking back to the pastoral. Thus, for the Eastern Han literati, the four-character form communicated a double meaning: one, a sense of the folkloric, nostalgic past, the other, a sense of elite membership for understanding the depth

and nuance of that past. It is here, perhaps, that we begin to see the use of poetry to both legitimize the present and edify the past.

It is also possible to couch Jameson's model in more specific terms: Poetry functions at the multiple levels of literal meaning, metanarrative (that is, narrative about poetry), tonal patterns, and allusion. The remainder of this section will focus on how these variables play out in specific taiji writings written in verse form, and how, as such, poetry ultimately serves as a legitimating vehicle in modern Shanghai. Much of what follows is based in my own idiosyncratic sense of what specific verses from the *taijijing* actually evoke in terms of meaning, structure, and allusion. Sometimes these connections are obvious, since they reference well-known writings or legendary figures; others are drawn more from the experience of practicing taijiquan than from anything inherent in the verse; and other connections, as with any poem, are based on a particular aesthetic sensibility. The verse that I examine here finds parallels in poems from widely divergent periods, and I will touch upon these poems as necessary.

*Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* is, according to Wile's ordering of the texts, number thirty-eight in the Yang family's "secret" *Forty Chapters*. The last three of these chapters are attributed to Zhang Sanfeng, are written in his voice, and make concrete connections between martial arts and Daoism (Wile 1997 64-65):

Heaven and earth are *Qian* and *Kun*;  
Fu Xi is the father of humankind.  
The drawing of the trigrams and naming of the *Dao*  
Came with Yao, Shun, and the sixteen mothers.  
The highest truths  
Were passed to Confucius to Mencius.  
The spiritual practices for cultivating body and mind  
Were exemplified in the seventy-two disciples, Emperors Wen and Wu.  
This was handed down to me  
Through Xu Xuanping.  
The elixir of long life is within the body  
That we may restore our primal purity.

Spiritual cultivation brings great virtue;  
Regulate it well and the *qi* and body will be whole.  
For ten thousand years chant the praises of eternal spring;  
Truly the mind is the genuine article.  
The Three Teachings are not separate schools,  
But all speak of the one Great Ultimate,  
Whose greatness fills the universe,  
One standard fixed for all eternity.  
The teachings of the ancient sages are a lasting heritage,  
Opening the way for truth seekers down through the ages.  
Water and fire form the hexagram *Chi-chi* (After Completion),  
Which represents the culmination of our life's quest.  
[Wile 1997:86]

Like many of the taijiquan writings, this verse is part mnemonic device (i.e. meant for the student to memorize and recite), part myth-building narrative. It differs from most of the *Forty Chapters* in that it is not a manual of techniques; rather, it is a kind of folktale. It also differs in that it is written in verse, whereas most of the *Forty Chapters* are written in classical prose, including the two alleged Zhang Sanfeng pieces that follow. Here, “Zhang” traces a descent that begins with Fu Xi, a prehistoric hero, proceeds through the mythical emperors Yao and Shun to the historical Confucius and Mencius, through the obscure Tang period eremitic poet Xu Xuanping, and finally down to Zhang himself. In the next line, Zhang seems to reject imbibing in elixirs of life, instead pointing out “the elixir of long life is within the body.” The remainder of the verse is a somewhat preachy admonishment to follow the “one standard fixed for all eternity.” “Water and fire form the hexagram *Chi-chi*, which represents the culmination of our life's quest” may explicitly refer to the notion that successfully sinking the *qi* to the *dantian* (“cinnabar field”), in Daoist esoteric practices, creates a “steaming cauldron” in the belly from which the Daoist adept can continually re-circulate the life force. At a deeper level, perhaps the verse refers to “completion” as the result of understanding. This interpretation seems to be supported in the preceding line

that declares “the Three Teachings [*sanjiao*] are not separate schools.” Any true path will lead to truth!

Before dealing with the structural elements in the verse, it is worth noting some details regarding the recent origins of taijiquan and the role that the Zhang Sanfeng creation story has played in that evolution. The five main schools of taijiquan—Wu (Hao), Wu (Jianquan), Yang, Sun, and Chen—all trace their origins to Chenjiagou in Henan Province. That, unfortunately, is where the agreement ends. By all accounts, Yang Luchan of Yongnian County, Hebei Province, served the Chen family and Chenjiagou for anywhere from several years to several decades.<sup>95</sup> While the Yongnian gazetteer makes no mention of Yang Luchan (Wile 1997:16), the history that follows is disputed only in the details (which are, of course, all important). Yang returned to Yongnian and eventually made his way to Beijing, where he became a martial arts instructor in the imperial bodyguard.<sup>96</sup> His sons acquired the art and passed it on through the Yang clan down to the present. They also passed it to Quan You, a Manchu soldier, who taught his own son, Wu Jianquan. The Wu (Hao) and Sun style are also closely linked with Yang Luchan, because Wu Yuxiang is said to have acquired his art primarily from Yang, though Li Yiyü’s text merely mentions “a certain Yang” (Wile 1996:20). Wu taught Li, who eventually passed the art on to the Hao clan. Sun Lutang, one of the most public martial artists of the Republican Era, synthesized the Wu (Hao) style with *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang* to create the Sun style. The details of these lineages are complex and heavily disputed, but

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<sup>95</sup> A taijiquan teacher in the Bay Area was told by one of the most famous of the current generation of Chen style taijiquan teachers, Chen Xiaowang, that Yang Luchan never got the real Chen art because he was not in the family (Anonymous interview 2000). In light of Chen Xiaowang’s comment, it is important to recall my discussion of the Yang Luchan memorial that now festoons Chenjiagou.

<sup>96</sup> Drawing on Gu Luxin’s 1963 *Taijiquan yanjiu* (Taijiquan Research) and the 1982 *Taijiquan shu* (Book of Taijiquan), Wile argues that Wu Yüxiang of Yang Luchan’s home county of Yongnian studied with Luchan when he returned from the Chen village after thirty years of study there. Yüxiang, who was an educated member of the gentry, arranged for Luchan to and his sons to teach martial arts in Beijing (Wile 1996:18).

the general story remains stable. With the important exception of the Chen family itself, all of the main taijiquan lineages claim Zhang Sanfeng, the elusive Daoist, as the creator of taijiquan.

I often asked taijiquan practitioners in Shanghai to tell me about the origin of the art. With very few exceptions, they began with Zhang Sanfeng. However, as time went on, I noticed that the version of the Zhang Sanfeng story I was hearing bore a striking resemblance to a popular Jet Li film called *Taijiquan Zhang Sanfeng*. Whether the story spawned the movie or the movie spawned the story is difficult to determine, but the story told through film, passed on orally, and passed on through the “ancient” *Forty Chapters* once again evokes Jameson’s third horizon, where conflicting modes of production co-exist and struggle within the same artistic process.

The historical, constant re-invention and re-authentication of Zhang Sanfeng add yet another layer to the story and inform the discussion of structure in *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* that follows. Wong (1979) and Seidel (1970) both trace the earliest Zhang Sanfeng to the early Ming, the period during which he is said to have lived and died. According to this early biography, Zhang was a Daoist recluse who, though sought by an official of a Ming emperor for many years, never journeyed to the Ming court. Instead, he took disciples in the Wudang Mountains and, according to several versions, gained the status of an immortal. In the centuries that follow, he appears at varying times and places, numerous supernatural feats are attributed to him in widely spaced parts of China, and he eventually becomes the basis for the nineteenth-century spirit medium cult led by Li Xiyue. Seidel contextualizes the Ming period Zhang stories within a whole genre of “immortals” stories that included such alleged Daoist adepts as Filthy Zhang, Ironcap Chang, Mountain Recluse Ma, Ironbelt Li, etc. (Seidel 1970:503). What these immortals have in common, aside from funny names, are rare, magical abilities, encouragement of Confucian virtues, and a discourse on

the syncretism of the *sanjiao* (“the Three Religions”). This is, of course, part of *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu*, where “Zhang” admonishes us to remember, “the three religions are not divided” (*sanjiao wu liang jia*). In that sense, then, we can see *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* as yet another version of the Zhang Sanfeng story. As such, it also becomes part of the wider genre of martial arts literature that encourages the value of *wude* (martial virtue) and, at the same time, glamorizes the kind of social banditry found in *Water Margin* and other vernacular novels (Wang and Xie 2001; Zheng 2000; see below for plot summary).

Returning to Jameson, the struggle between modes of production becomes even more apparent when we examine *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* in terms of structure. The verse adopts five-character lines in rhyming couplets, for a total of twenty-four lines. The degree of parallelism in these lines adds to the implication that the verse should be memorized, perhaps as part of a training regimen, as was commonly the case in martial arts halls until well into the Republican Era. While the inability to determine the period in which the verse was written makes it somewhat difficult to determine its tonal patterns (tones in Chinese have changed significantly over time), *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu*'s tonal parallelism is still apparent. For example, using modern Chinese tones as our benchmark, we can see that the last three characters of every fourth line have the same 2-2-3 tonal pattern. This tonal choice punctuates distinct units of thought in the verse: the first four lines evoke the ancient past (Emperor Fu Xi, *Yijing*, Yao and Shun). The second four lines focus on spiritual attainment. The third set of four lines involves the lesson conferred on Zhang by the Tang poet Zhu Xuanping.<sup>97</sup> The next four lines moves into discussion of the *qi* and the Daoist quest for immortality. The fifth four lines link the concept of *taiji* to the *sanjiao* (in other words, makes a

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<sup>97</sup> The verse thus implies that Zhu Xuanping has also attained Immortal status, since he would have died before the Ming period, where Zhang Sanfeng is usually placed.

claim for legitimacy). The sixth and final four-line segment echoes the preceding segment.

On the other hand, when we focus less on structure and more on the rich Daoist imagery in this verse, we discover a more purposeful evocation of ancientness, and, by extension, more explicit judgments about the way things *should* be in the future. In fact, as far as “*wude*” is concerned, *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* throws everything in but the kitchen sink: the *Yijing* (I Ching), gods, legendary kings, the wisest of philosophers, the most elusive of poets, advice on how to live forever—and all in twenty-four short lines. The verse provides a kind of road map of Althusser’s notion of *interpellation*, where a dominant ideology of identity calls out to the reader or hearer of the verse (Strinati 1995). Here, the verse seems to call out that “you are Chinese, and to practice Zhang Sanfeng’s methods is to reaffirm who you are at your very core.” Further, the author of this verse assumes a high level of literacy and expects the reader to recall several other texts simultaneously, something akin to the audience reaction when a great opera star emerges from the wings, drawing a concerted gasp of appreciation: The mere sound of the name or sight of the singer’s figure reels us suddenly into a foggy, nostalgic realm of memory and association. We are once again home, in the past. If we had to choose a single, fundamental structural technique for classical Chinese poetry, then surely it is this very conscious, intentional interpellation. We see it in Wang Can and we see it in Cao Cao<sup>98</sup> when they reference the Book of Odes, and we see it throughout the history of Chinese poetry: the *Shijing* as foundational “past,” interpellating through the Han, then through the Wei-Jin-Six Dynasties, Tang, Song, and all the way to the present, when one is assaulted by images of multiple pasts by merely walking down a Shanghai or Beijing street. Whether it is poetry or calligraphy or painting or martial arts, the past is a

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<sup>98</sup> Wang Can (A.D. 177-217) and Cao Cao (A.D. 155-220) were two of the most famous poets of the Late Han period (A.D. 196-220)

constant friend in China (for related discussion, see Watson 1971:37-38; Watson 1984; Faurot 1998:1; Yip 1997).

Because of the placement of key images in the latter half of the verse, *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* seems particularly intent on referencing the eremitic poetry, or “poetry of reclusion” (Watson 1971:68-89) that appeared among the disillusioned scholars who bridged the end of the Han and the beginning of the Wei period. Like a wisp of Debussy’s musical poems floating on the wind, these poems seem simultaneously sad and satisfying. They, too, speak of elixirs of immortality, of internal peace. Yet how much more successfully eremitic poets such as Juan Zhi, for example, wield the imagery of Daoism. The eleventh poem from Juan Zhi’s *Wen Xuan* is something of a non-identical twin of *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu*—outwardly different, but genetically quite similar:

Long ago, at fourteen or fifteen,  
High in purpose, I loved the Classics,  
Dressed in coarse brown, a gem in my heart,  
Hoping some day to be like Yan and Min.  
I threw open the window, looked out on the four fields,  
Climbed the hills and let my hopeful eyes wander: Grave mounds cover the  
heights, Ten thousand autumns, ten thousand years from now,  
What will be left of a “glorious name”?  
At last I understand Master Xian Men;  
I can laugh out loud at what I used to be!  
[Watson 1971:72]

Here we have a human being expressing genuine feelings about the same issues of spiritual idealism, understanding, and completion that appear in *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu*. Yet, this is a *real* person, much more real, it seems, than the one who composed the taiji verse—which reminds us, of course, that *Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu* is not actually a “poem” at all. Rather, it is a “verse” meant to communicate a specific lesson, so it functions more as prose narrative than as poetry, much like a snappy, inspiring pop song uses a cello or a flute to evoke

something beyond itself, something “classier.” By adopting the *shi* form, the taijiquan verse evokes the past. The reader or listener who has a minimal familiarity with *shi* (and anyone Chinese person with a middle school education would have at least some exposure) is automatically drawn into the past. Perhaps more importantly, if this verse is part of a set of mnemonic training devices, then it is meant to be recited, and the recitation itself draws the speaker into a visceral experience of the past, which, in turn, evokes specific images about what a Chinese person is *supposed* to be in the present. In a way that many Chinese poets surely were conscious of (and Wallace Stevens surely realized), there is a phenomenology of poetry that transforms it from an intellectual experience to an experiential one. Through poetry, the past sits in judgment of the present.

### ***Martial Arts Storytelling: The Production of Heroes***

As “martial arts literature,” the *taijijing* are of interest only to taijiquan practitioners and scholars. They are not popular writings in the sense that centuries old vernacular novels such as *Water Margin* and *Journey to the West* are.<sup>99</sup> These stories involve tales of martial power and strength in both the earthly and heavenly realms. Originally part of a long oral tradition of martial arts storytelling, these works also made their appearance on the stage in various local drama forms (Beijing style opera is the best-known of these outside of PRC). For the most part, however, these forms constituted a popular sub-culture, at times resistant to state hegemony and at times used in support of it (Hebdige 1991). In

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<sup>99</sup> Until the early twentieth century, most Chinese was written in a classical style, which differs from vernacular Chinese in significant ways. Popular novels, however, had used elements of the vernacular for centuries, lending some credence to the argument that they began as oral tales that were eventually written down. *Shui hu chuan* (*Water Margin* a.k.a. *The Tale of the Marshes*) takes place during the Northern Sung (ending A.D. 1126). It follows the adventures of a band of disaffected peasant-outlaws who live in the marshes near Mount Liang in Shandong Province. Song Zhang, their leader, is loyal to the Emperor but opposes corrupt local officials, much like Robin Hood. *Xi youji* (*Journey to the West*) follows the adventures of the Monkey King and his friends as they head for India in search of Buddhist sutras. Both stories remain especially popular with children. See Scott 1980 on Chinese popular literature and children.

the latter days of Emperor Qianlong's reign, operas based on *Water Margin*, a tale often compared to Robin Hood in its depiction of socially conscious bandits who defend the peasantry against ruthless gentry and noblemen, were banned outright. The official Hu Ding, appealing successfully to Qianlong for censorship in 1754, wrote "[*The Water Margin*] regards....rebels as remarkable and able people; those who revolt escape punishment, which is belittled." Hu goes on to say, "Actors have adapted it into dramas and in the marketplace worthless people watch them.... I, your subject, beg you.... to have the book blocks.... destroyed and to forbid its performance on the stage" (Mackerras 1983:111). Nevertheless, *The Water Margin* endured as underground literature.

It was not until after the May Fourth period (c. 1919), the period of China's modernist intellectual transformation, that martial arts stories began to infiltrate realms of "high culture." The film *The Legend of Mulan* (c. 1937), for example, depicts the famous legend of a filial daughter who takes the place of her aged father when troops are called to arms to fight invading barbarians. Within the context of that time, *The Legend of Mulan* may be read as both resistance to the incursions of the Imperial Japanese Army and as a modernist representation of Chinese womanhood. To echo Wile's early sentiment about the popularity of taijiquan among nineteenth-century elites as a re-masculating process, Mulan might also represent a call to social action for men who had become politically and militarily impotent under the double weight of colonization and Japanese militarism.<sup>100</sup>

Beginning in the 1950s, Hong Kong film directors began to hone the art of the *wuxiapian* ("martial chivalry," or "knight errant" movies); Kei, Chu and Foerster 1994).). At first, these films were almost exclusively period pieces. The

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<sup>100</sup> American social realism from the same period, which influenced early Chinese screenwriters as well as playwrights, provides similar instances of female characters pushing men to act. In Clifford Odets *Waiting for Lefty*, for example, Florrie pushes her fiancé, Sid, to stand up to corrupt taxi company bosses.

significant contribution of Bruce Lee (Li Xiaolong) and his producer at Shaw Brothers, Andre Morgan, was to move the martial arts film into the contemporary world. This was also the key element in Lee's rise to international stardom. Bruce Lee was born in the United States, but raised in Hong Kong. A child actor, he already had learned the basics of filmmaking when he returned to the United States in his late teens to study philosophy at the University of Washington. After several years in the United States, Lee returned to Hong Kong to work with Morgan at Shaw Brothers, where he made a series of intricately choreographed martial arts films that culminated in *Enter the Dragon*, the best-known film Lee completed before his death.

In Hong Kong, fans could not get enough of Lee. While he never quite attained the same icon status in PRC, where tastes still ran toward the period pieces, his association with both Hong Kong and the United States was enough to make him extremely popular. Taiwan also generated a large number of *wuxiapian* during this period, and the real art of the form reached its peak with King Hu, whose *A Touch of Zen* may be considered the first "A" kung fu movie (Garcia 1994). *A Touch of Zen* involved the efforts of a failed scholar in the late Ming to fulfill his mother's dream to pass the lowest civil service exam. The scholar would rather spend his time imagining himself a great general and devising innovative military strategy. By chance, he is caught up in the intrigues of an exiled princess who is pursued by an evil court official. He falls in love with the princess and tragedy ensues. All fairly standard stuff for kung fu films, except for the "touch of zen" of the title. Throughout the film, the local Shaolin monks intervene whenever the combatants start fighting. The monks' skills are so far ahead of any of the military men or women that they can easily control them without injuring them. Good guys and bad guys find their efforts to kill one another blocked by the benevolent monks. Eventually, the abbot is deceived by the chief bad buy, but even in death, his love shines above the scenes of bloody

mayhem (he bleeds gold). Aside from the exceptional cinematography in *A Touch of Zen*, the story offers the first sophisticated treatment of war and peace to appear in the genre. Ang Lee cites Hu's influence in the making of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

Ang Lee's career as kung fu movie director began well before *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* with his lesser known first feature film, *Pushing Hands*, a film that followed the trials of a taijiquan master who immigrates to New York City to live with son and the son's white wife. *Pushing Hands* is really more about the loneliness of an old man finding his way in a new country than a film about martial arts. He eventually hooks up with a local Chinese American community center and finds a place as a taijiquan teacher, but the almost magical abilities that the master demonstrates, Ang Lee explains, hark back to the same kung fu novels that inspired Lee to make *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. That *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was not nearly as popular in PRC as it was in the United States informs us about what Chinese audiences may and may not identify with in *wuxiapian*. In 2001, the number one complaint I heard in Shanghai about the film was that "the fight scenes were not very good." The film remained popular among serious film buffs and intellectuals, who often focused more on the cinematography and on the more esoteric elements in the story.

*Wuxiapian* underwent a further transformation in the 1980s and 1990s with the adaptation of Jin Yong's (a.k.a. Louis Cha) martial arts movies (*wuxia xiaoshuo*) for film and television. Jin Yong, a well-known muckraking journalist who owned and edited Hong Kong's *Ming Pao Daily News*, which he founded in 1959, came to the *gongfu* novel late in life, but he has become by far the most popular author in this genre, one of the few with a truly global appeal. Beginning in 1955, he wrote fifteen novels over a seventeen-year period (The Economist 1999). While firmly melodramatic in their representations of good and evil, his novels are challenging to the degree that they introduce aspects of Daoism,

Chinese mythology, and Chinese history that may otherwise be unfamiliar to modern, urban readers, many of whom are teenagers.

The 1980s also saw the rise of Jet Li (Li Lianjie) and Jackie Chan (Chen Long). Chan early on was touted as “the next Bruce Lee,” and his early films reflect attempts to force him into this mold. But Chan had other things in mind. Along with Sammo Hung and several other fellow stars, Chan had grown up in Hong Kong’s last great Beijing opera school (the Hong Kong film *Painted Faces* loosely depicts their experience). From an early age, he had been trained in the complex acrobatic-martial traditions of Beijing Opera, so he was performer first and martial artist second. After his initial Bruce Lee imitations, Chan made his mark with *Drunken Master* and *Drunken Master II*, two films that placed Chan in a long tradition of actors who had portrayed the late-nineteenth-century doctor of Chinese medicine, creator of Hung Gar (Cantonese for “Hong Family”) *gongfu*, and all-around folk hero, Huang Feihong (see below). He soon became known for his death-defying stunts, for his transformation of the usual *gongfu* format into artful comedy, and for his period pieces set in nineteenth-century British Hong Kong.<sup>101</sup> Chan’s popularity peaked in Asia in the late 1980s, but, except for an appearance as a stereotypical kung fu fighter in *Cannonball Run*, he still had not cracked the coveted US market and would not do so until he began to collaborate with Stanley Tong.

Meanwhile, the late eighties also saw an attempt to exploit the name of Bruce Lee, through his son, Brandon. Brandon had been raised in the United States, had acquired some martial arts after his father’s death, and, through his family, had good contacts in Hong Kong. He contracted to make a series of films

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<sup>101</sup> I appeared briefly in Chan’s 1988 *Project A: Part II*. Watching Chan direct, I was struck by both the loyalty of his crew and stunt team, and by his attention to detail. Including colonialism in the formula, Chan created a new variation on the *wuxiapian* genre.

intended to give him exposure in both the United States and Hong Kong.<sup>102</sup> This strategy did indeed open doors for Lee, leading directly to his critically acclaimed performance in *The Crow*. However, Lee died in a freak shooting accident on the set of *The Crow*, spawning whispers of a “Lee family curse,” for the elder Lee had died under mysterious circumstances at a young age as well.<sup>103</sup>

On the mainland, it was Jet Li who began to take the world by storm by the early nineties. Like Chan, Li made his mark with his portrayals of Huang Feihong in the *Once Upon a Time in China* film series, though Li’s exceptional skills in a variety of martial arts styles made him equally at home in period pieces such as *Taiji Zhang Sanfeng*, a film which Hollywoodizes the taijiquan creation myth. And, like Chan, Li was able to parlay his early successes into international stardom.

The origins of the “cult of Huang Feihong” are sketchy, but most PRC sources (ZWBQ 1998; ZWTD 1998) paint Huang’s life in anti-colonialist shades. He is usually depicted as defender of the average Joe against bad men everywhere. Few details are known of Huang’s life: It is clear that he lived in the southern city of Foshan, that he did indeed practice both martial arts and medicine, and that he did have something of a reputation as a modern Robin Hood. But the legend, as is the case with many martial arts greats, grew well beyond the reality of the man. This juxtaposition between life and legend is not lost upon Huang Feihong fans in China. Foshan sports a small museum devoted to Huang. The museum is divided into several rooms that deal with various aspects of Huang’s life and popular culture. One room deals exclusively with radio broadcasts from the 1940s and 1950s. Visitors can don headphones and listen to

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<sup>102</sup> During this period, I appeared as an extra in Brandon Lee’s Hong Kong-produced film *Legacy of Rage*. I was more innocent at the time, though even then, not unaware of my complicity in producing images of two-dimensional white colonialists and kung fu fighting Chinese. My brief conversations with Brandon Lee were tinged with romanticism because of his famous father. The younger Lee’s excitement about a new motorcycle purchase and about filming in Hong Kong, however, revealed a sensitive kid who was having the time of his life in his dad’s hometown.

snippets from various broadcasts simply by pressing a button. A second room is devoted to Huang films, from the famous portrayals by Kwan Tak-hing (Cantonese) in Hong Kong between 1949 and 1959 to the modern Huang interpretations in the films of Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Another section looks at what is known about the real Huang, including family photos, a renovation of Huang's home and medical office, which is adjacent to the museum, and a look at the spread of Hung Gar *gongfu* around the world. In the courtyard outside the museum, an hourly performance re-enacts aspects of Huang's life. According to Kei, Chu, and Foerster,

Between 1949 and 1959, at least 62 Huang Feihong films were produced. They rejected fantastic, stage-driven elements of the earlier martial arts films in favor of proper martial arts forms, genuine weapons, and authentic Chinese styles. Kwan Tak-hing, who played Huang in all these films, and Shek Kihn, who played his arch rival (best known to Western audiences as Bruce Lee's nemesis Mr. Han in *Enter the Dragon*), were both trained martial artists. The Huang Feihong films' use of true martial arts established the role of the martial arts instructor as an indispensable member of the production team. Aside from their tremendous success, the series helped document, promote, and preserve authentic Chinese martial arts. [Kei, Chu, Foerster 1994].

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<sup>103</sup> The elder Lee died of an apparent aneurysm in his early thirties.

Figure 20: Video CD cover for “Mulan Congjun” (Mulan Enlists), c. 1935.  
Scanned image: Adam Frank.



Figure 21: Video CD cover for *Taiji Zhang Sanfeng* (starring Li Lianjie). Scanned image: Adam Frank.

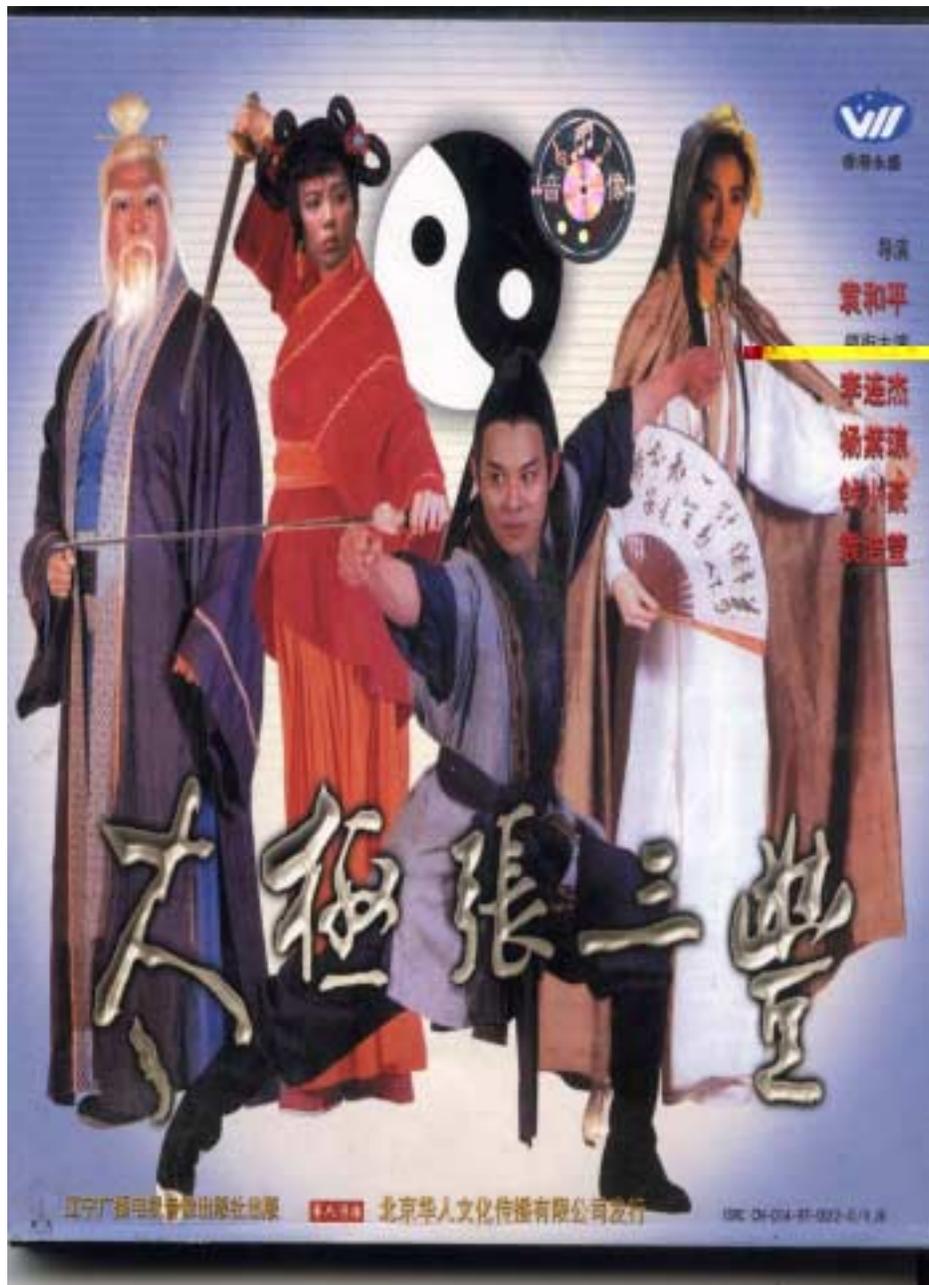


Figure 22: Video CD cover for *Tui Shou* (*Push Hands*, dir. Ang Lee). Scanned image: Adam Frank.



Figure 23: Animation exhibit at Huang Feihong museum, Foshan, China, 2001.  
Photo: Adam Frank.

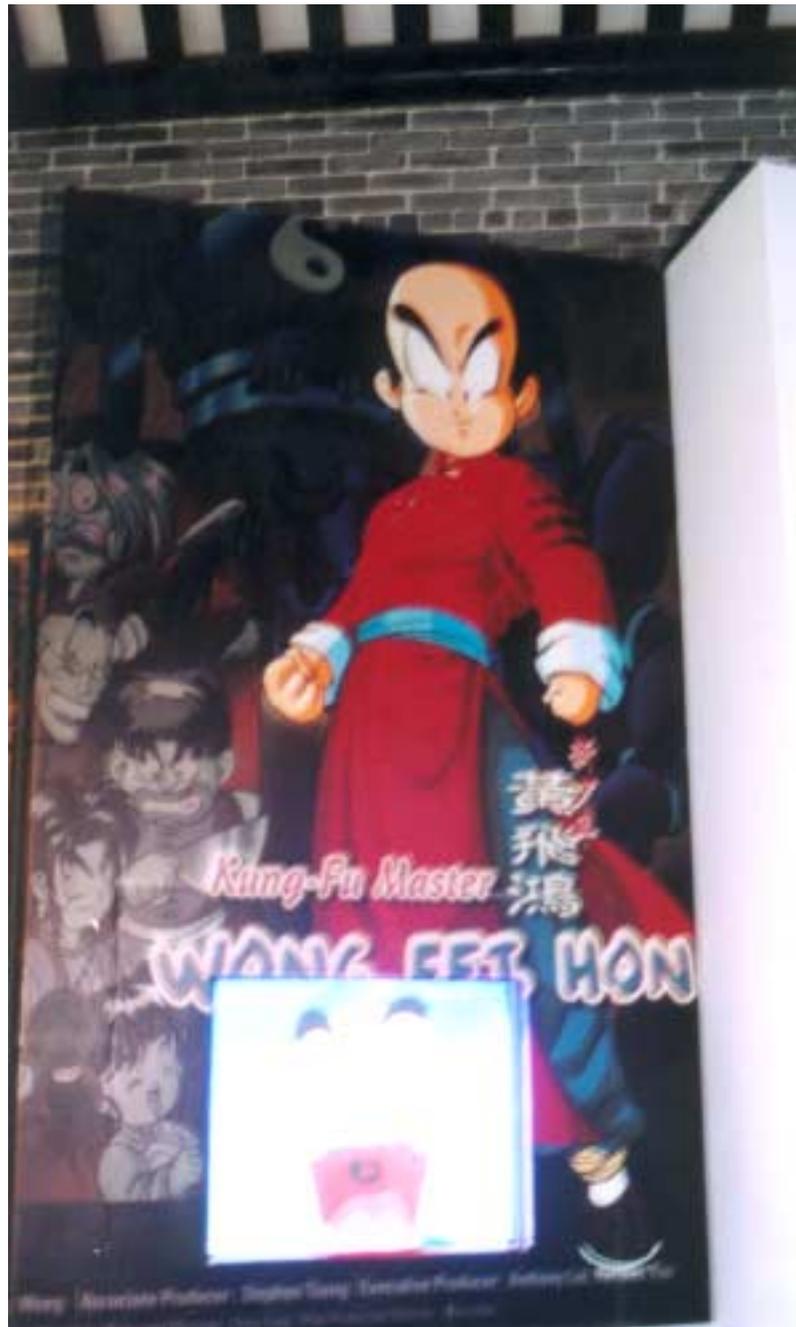


Figure 24: Marketplace, 2001 Taijiquan Tournament, Zhuhai, Guangdong Province. Photo: Adam Frank.



## ***Conclusion***

Add to the above films the dozens of martial arts soap operas (*wudapian*) that crowd the airwaves and the only question that remains is why there are not more young people actually practicing martial arts in cities like Shanghai. For the JTA, this is a significant issue. While JTA members see an explosion of martial arts popular culture all around them, the explosion inspires few young students to actually seek training. Older JTA members cite opera, novellas, and performances in the park as key reasons for their own entrance into the martial arts world. For young people in Shanghai, however, the space of imagination that *gongfu* pop culture occupies is also crowded with hip-hop, high fashion, and, perhaps most importantly, economic opportunities that have nothing to do with martial arts. There is little prestige associated with taijiquan, but a great deal associated with other endeavors that serve the transformation of China into a capitalist economy. For the younger generation, the new China translates to a transformed sense of self, one deeply steeped in the kind of nationalism only money can buy. JTA members cite the ups and downs the association has undergone over the years, but their very real concern now is that, with Ma and Wu's passing, and with the relatively few students that their sons have, there is a possibility the association will not continue. Already, older members note some factionalization. The one Ma son who is generally acknowledged to have acquired the skills, now lives and teaches in Europe. Ma/Wu family members and other JTA members reported greater enthusiasm among foreign students than among most of the local Shanghai students. There was a sense that "the little old Chinese man," in this case Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, had been found and lost, and with their passing, what was best about China had been lost. There was a sense that whatever the little old Chinese man was, perhaps it had emigrated to America,

and the foreigners would have to carry the torch. Suddenly, the former easy opposition of Chinese and foreigner was melting away as a new category of “taijiquan practitioner” emerged. In the face of such change, was it possible that taijiquan was no longer Chinese at all?

## Chapter 7

### From Nation to Transnation: Chinatown in Space

#### XI

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

#### XII

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

—Wallace Stevens

*From* “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”

#### ***Bruce***

It’s November of 2001, Shanghai.<sup>104</sup> An American-style bar and grill off of Nanjing Road. Bruce is an architect who has been in Shanghai for about two years. He is a rare commodity: a foreigner who runs a martial arts school in China. His school is located in the Gold’s Gym across the street, and he will soon marry one of his students, a Shanghai girl.

“I’m thirty-two years old,” Bruce says. “I was originally born in Dublin. My dad was studying out there. I went back to London when I was a kid, lived there till I was six, then moved to Canada. While I was in Canada, I was picked on quite a bit at school because I’m part Indian and—East Indian, not North

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<sup>104</sup> The following section excerpted from interview with Bruce, 17 and 24 August, 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded.

American Indian—and because of my British accent. My dad is about five foot nothing and...uh...is a doctor, so he fixes people, he doesn't hurt them, and he said I needed to go into—learn how to defend myself, so tried boxing a little bit and it didn't really work for me at the time. I was quite small, so I started doing a Tiger...Tiger style of *gongfu*....It was a bit of a hokey style but there were some bits and pieces. And I still remember at the end of the training hall there was this huge poster of Bruce Lee. And that started my interest in him, in Bruce Lee. But back then, I mean that was, I was six or seven years old. And at that time there were very few people who trained with Bruce Lee.”

### ***Theorizing the Transnation***

Like kung fu movies and television programs, Chinese martial arts constitute a kind of “Chinatown in space,” a space that brings to life sometimes conflicting notions of what both Chinese and non-Chinese people imagine what exactly it means to be Chinese. Martial arts are spatial and sensual festivals, through which participants experience Chineseness both inside and out. Everyone comes to these festivals with certain preconceptions, and whether those preconceptions were formed in a Chinese restaurant in Des Moines or in a farming village in Henan, they are somehow reified through martial arts. As it is constituted through martial arts, the components of Chinatown in space are both concrete and diverse. Throughout this dissertation, I have moved freely between these different components, these different sub-spaces: martial arts tournaments, festivals, foreigners studying at the Shaolin Temple, Chinese immigrant martial arts teachers, foreigners who have immigrated to China, David Carradine, Bruce Lee, etc.

My argument in this chapter is an attempt to refocus the way globalization as a conceptual framework is theorized. Theorists of the transnational have tended to see transnationalism in synchronic, de-historicized terms. Despite their often

insightful macro-level analyses, for example, Aihwa Ong (1999), Ulf Hannerz (1996), and Arjun Appadurai (1998) generally couch their arguments in terms of contemporary forces acting on contemporary populations. A second strand of transnational theorizing juxtaposes the global and the local, configuring globalization as a capital-driven process of erasure and/or the local as a site of resistance to such forces (Harvey 1989; Castells 2002). I find much value in Michael Peter Smith's critique of Harvey and Castells from an urban studies perspective. Smith (2002:109) addresses two dominant themes that have informed the construction of the "local" in the discourse on the global-local interplay in urban studies. "The local has been frequently represented as the cultural space of embedded communities and, inversely, as an inexorable space of collective resistance to disruptive processes of globalization." In classical sociological terms, the "urban" served as a place for the transformation of *Gemeinschaft*-like social relations into the mediated impersonal ties of a *Gesellschaft*-like urban society. Now, "urban" has been replaced by "global" as "metaphor for the central outside threat to the primary social ties binding local communities." So "globalization" is seen as a new form of "capitalist (post)modernity...inherently antagonistic to the sustainability of local forms of social organization and meaning-making" (109). Smith's goal is to argue against the urban structuralism of David Harvey and Manuel Castells which privilege the local as a place of "culture and community" while characterizing the global as a dynamic space of capital and information flows. He argues, instead, that much of the "global" emanates from a vital "local" (109). His aim is to "frame a more dynamic conception of locality" (110):

Writing from a social constructionist standpoint, I recommend that the sociological imagination be enriched by an engagement with a multi-sited mode of ethnographic research that is historically contextualized and recognizes the importance of everyday practices without romanticizing

the local or losing sight of the structures of power/knowledge created by human practice. [Smith 2002:110].

Regarding Harvey's argument that capital has a "dissolving influence on the local," Smith (111) interprets Harvey to mean that capital "is the only agent of social change: "As for the role of people in this grand narrative, we never know who lives, works, acts, and dies in Harvey's urban spaces since people are seldom represented as anything other than nostalgic romantics or cultural dupes." Here, Smith's critique is perhaps unduly narrow. Harvey does in fact pay attention to the dialogic relationship between global and local. His emphasis on "grand narrative" does not imply a disinterest in individuals. But this is not his project. While he does sprinkle his work to references to specific situations and particular institutional arrangements, he is more concerned in the main body of his work with creating an underlying theoretical structure that can explain complex relationships between space, capital, power, and the state. Harvey never really argues that capital is "the only agent of social change;" he does argue that it is the dominant one (Harvey 1999).

Smith also disputes Castells's view of the world as a combination of power/capital networks, or "flows." "On the one hand," Castells writes,

the space of power is being transformed into flows. On the other hand, the space of meaning is being reduced to mircoterritories of new tribal communities....The horizon of such a historical tendency is the destruction of human experience, therefore of communication, and therefore of society. [Castells 2002; in Smith 2002:112].

Following from this, "global domination produces local resistance." Smith (113) argues that Harvey apparently sees no possibility for resistance; Castells does, but the two share one thing: "For both, then, 'place' is understood as the site of cohesive community formations existing outside the logic of globalization...they both maintain a systemic disjunction between local and global social processes."

Smith is not, however, arguing for the displacement of Harvey and Castells's totalizing vision by the equally totalizing vision of postmodernist ethnographers like Tyler who would argue "that "discourse is the maker of this world, not its mirror" (114). He equates such "postcolonial" ethnography with colonial-era travel writing that relied on thick description "to master colonized subjects" (114). He sees Tyler as romanticizing "the process of 'intersubjective dialogue.'" "

In seeking to transcend the intellectual limits of structural-functional metanarratives this move unduly romanticized the "local narrative" produced by sensitive fieldworkers "on the ground" as a sure route to the partial truths of postcolonial subjectivity. [Smith 2002:115].<sup>105</sup>

Smith states a preference for Marcus and Fisher's (1999) postmodernism over Tyler's. He sees Marcus and Fisher as moving beyond "binary categories" of global and local, focusing instead on how "cultural worlds" come into contact and communication on the ground. They are interested in how people in daily life deal with changing conditions, global or local. Smith emphasizes,

The social imaginary necessary to discern the significance of urban social relations under conditions of contemporary transnationalism requires a kind of historically contextualized, multi-sited ethnography that can make coherent sense of our times and give concrete meaning to the notion of "global interdependence." [Smith 2002:119].

Smith cites de Certeau and Lefebvre as leading influences on researchers in the social production of the practices of everyday life, but lumps them together with Castells in their shared tendency to see "the local" in terms of resistance to "more global structures of domination." Smith would extend "everyday life" to include

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<sup>105</sup> To some degree, I stand accused of doing the same in this dissertation. I have attempted to compensate for such "romanticizing of the local" through the wider analyses I offer in Parts II and III.

the kind of lives led in transnational cities. He cites Massey's interest in tracing paths of individuals from, to, and within a place, focusing on what gives them meaning and where. Massey looks at connections they make by phone, post, in imagination, etc.(Smith 2002:123).

With Smith's cogent critique in mind, perhaps it is useful to reconfigure the global-local dichotomy in terms of individual consciousness, the lived experience of everyday life. From that perspective, the global is always an imaginary, whereas we are always living in the local. In term of martial arts as a transnational process of racial formation, I am less interested, therefore, in macro-level global processes than in how people actually *globalize one another*. Specifically, in this chapter, I will look at how the word *qi* has entered American English primarily through the context of internal martial arts and Chinese medicine and how the term is used strategically to establish identity credentials in very much the same way that specific poetic devices are used in *taijijing* to establish credentials for the Chinese-literate consumer of martial arts. I am also interested in the process of commodification that has grown up around the notion of *qi* through the circulation of taijiquan and other internal martial arts, and will look at places, products, practices, and media that reflect the Americanization of taijiquan and the concept of *qi*. Finally, in a limited way, I contextualize the contemporary experience of Chinese American and Chinese immigrant martial artists within the history of Chinese immigration to the United States.

### ***Sifu Wong***

San Francisco, November 2000.<sup>106</sup> Sifu Wong, one of the famous teachers of San Francisco Chinatown and a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine, is talking to me in his office. He tells me how his grandfather was originally a

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<sup>106</sup> The following section excerpted from interview with Sifu Wong, 21 November 2000, San Francisco. Tape-recorded.

citizen of the kingdom of Hawaii, so he gained American citizenship that way. In 1959, his father moved from Hawaii to San Francisco, and he and his mother arrived in April, 1960, from Hong Kong.

“At that time they don’t have ESL classes,” Wong tells me. “It was very difficult for us to learn English. The teachers tried to be nice and put us to classroom, you know, give us the first simple baby book to read. But if you born here, if you speaks English, even though you get the sound, you understand what’s going on already, to us, you know, learn how to read them, learn to understand what that is, you know, I mean, it’s very hard to learn English for us. Especially we live in Chinatown, you know, and all the, with the family or friends or buddies, we always speak Cantonese. And when we practice *gongfu* also speak Cantonese. So by the time I graduate from high school and still cannot make conversation with other people. You know, it’s uh...but anyway that’s the old days you know.”

“Did they let you speak Chinese in school?”

“You don’t, you don’t, no, normally, if you can’t speak English, what can you do? Either in front of the teacher just keep your mouth shut and turn around and talk to your buddies in Chinese, you know...Actually, I start pick it up from when I start teaching to the non-Chinese students.”

Wong’s bird starts squawking loudly. Then he takes a short phone call.

“At that time they don’t have ESL classes,” Wong tells me when he hangs up. “It was very difficult for us to learn English. Especially we live in Chinatown, you know, and all the, with the family or friends or buddies, we always speak Cantonese. And when we practice *gongfu* also speak Cantonese.”

### ***Historical Context of the Chinese American Martial Arts Community***

Sifu Wong’s story of combating racial images even as he taught combat arts gains even more impact when we contextualize it within the often difficult

and bloody history of Chinese immigration to the United States. The first recorded arrival of Chinese people in the United States occurred in 1785 when three men arrived on the ship *Pallas* (Lai, Huang, and Wong 1980). The first woman arrived in 1834 and the first college students in 1847. The California Gold Rush brought 25,000 Chinese people to the United States by 1851. And by 1852, the California legislature had already passed the California State Foreign Miner's Tax, which targeted Chinese. Between 1865-69, the Central Pacific and Northwest Pacific railways employed approximately 15,000. In 1854, the California Supreme Court ruled that laws prohibiting testimony of black and Indians in cases involving whites also applied to Chinese (Asian Arts and Media 1991:12). By 1885, hate crimes against Chinese immigrants had become commonplace. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, twenty-eight Chinese were killed and fifteen wounded in anti-Chinese riots.

The United States government took action to resolve this problem not by punishing the wrongdoers, but by punishing the Chinese. In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred Chinese from entering the United States, kept them from owning property, and prevented them from becoming naturalized citizens (Gyory 1998). But Congress did not stop there. Between 1880-1924, fourteen separate anti-Chinese laws were passed: in 1888, Chinese laborers were prohibited; in 1892, the Chinese were denied protection in courts; in 1904, Congress prohibited Chinese laborers and families from immigrating and extended the Exclusion Act ten more years; in 1906, Asian Children were excluded from public schools; in 1913, laws were passed that prevented aliens from owning or leasing land; a 1924 law prevented the entry of people from Asia who were ineligible for citizenship, including Chinese wives of American citizens.

In 1906, the San Francisco earthquake spawned the "paper sons" problem, whereby many Chinese entered illegally, claiming their birth certificates had been

destroyed in the ensuing fire. U.S. immigration officials implemented a rigorous interrogation and detainment system. Between 1910-1940, the majority of the 175,000 who entered the United States came through Angel Island, off the San Francisco coast, often enduring weeks or months of detention (many were deported without ever gaining entrance). Although the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943, it was replaced with an annual quota of 105 people. The Post-war Refugee Act and Displaced Persons Act of 1948 increased the entry of women (82% of Chinese immigrants were women between 1944-1953). In 1965, Chinese were finally allowed to enter on an equal basis with other immigrants, and Congress eased restrictions on immigration of family members. In 1986, the immigration bill again restricted Asian and non-European immigration through limitation on the “fifth preference” category, which covers siblings of U.S. citizens. By 1990, the Immigration Act increased U.S. annual immigration quotas dramatically (Gyory 1998; Asian Arts and Media 1991; Lai, Huang, and Wong 1980; Lee 1976; Ling 1998; Lyman 1972, 1976; Miller 1969; Siu 1987).

Sifu Wong’s story of his struggle with assimilation comes to make sense when we are confronted with the weight of history. Despite coming to the United States at the tail end of restrictions on Chinese immigration, he shares an experience with previous generations who were, on the one hand, forced to assimilate and, on the other hand, corralled into “Chinatowns” across the United States if not by force, at least because Chinatowns often afforded the only place where a Chinese immigrant could experience a sense of self-worth. In his classic study of Chinese laundry workers, Paul Siu writes,

Under the [restrictive] race and ethnic situation [of the United States], the Chinese immigrants were driven to make a choice, and they founded the laundry as a form of accommodation to the situation. But, since its establishment [in the 1850s] the laundry has served to isolate the laundryman and, therefore, has created a type of personality which is directly contrary to the expectation of assimilation. [Siu 1987:xxxii].

In a similar manner, martial arts teachers like Sifu Wong also occupy a space where they are not allowed to assimilate in certain ways, even if they wish to do so. Non-Chinese students come to Wong's study to experience Chineseness, even, through taijiquan or other martial arts, to become Chinese for a few hours during their day. They expect Wong to enact a certain brand of Chineseness. They expect him to spout "kung fu philosophy." Wong, in turn, both gives them what they want and confronts them about this expectation. The non-Chinese student comes looking for the little old Chinese man (even though Wong is young). Wong, on the other hand, wants no part of it. Other Chinese immigrant or Chinese American teachers, however, seem comfortable with the role and skillfully play up the expectations that non-Chinese students attach to their relationship. Martial arts become a path by which some teachers can exert a certain amount of influence, if not power, through the ritualization of race. Words can become the vehicle for exercising that power.

### ***"Qi" as a Transnational Marker of Identity***

When a speaker "borrows" a word, that act involves specific strategies on the part of the speaker to communicate social messages beyond the meaning of the word.<sup>107</sup> In the case of *qi*, the attempt to define the word actually provides one of the chief contexts for using it. In addition, even while the definition of *qi* remains unclear to the members of a speech community in which it appears, it is the very act of using the word that produces social solidarity, enhances the status of the speaker, and keys in to a shared image of an exoticized Chinese Other that supports a larger transnational discourse about *qi*. To support this hypothesis, I

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<sup>107</sup> Here I am drawing on Garland Cannon's "four-stage scale of naturalization" (Cannon 1994, 386). In Stage 1, the item is ephemeral or transient and is usually glossed or italicized. In Stage 2, the word has moved into early stages of phonetic, grammatical, syntactic, and semantic adaptation. In Stage 3, the word becomes an incipient loanword, recorded in unabridged dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary and Webster's. In Stage 4, the word is said to be part of the general language and appears widely in both written and spoken forms.

will draw on taped narratives and discussions involving *qi* that I collected at the 1998 A Taste of China, a martial arts seminar series and tournament held annually in Winchester, Virginia.

Because the major spoken dialects of China share a written language,<sup>108</sup> bilingual English-Chinese speakers (regardless of the Chinese language they speak) often refer to what they speak as a “dialect” rather than a “language. As Andrew Moody has pointed out, “variation between mutually unintelligible dialects of Chinese is primarily phonological rather than lexical” (Moody 1996). If Moody is correct, then speakers of mutually unintelligible Chinese languages share general conceptual frameworks for *qi*, even if those frameworks are somewhat nuanced by local linguistic variation. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, I will focus on the Mandarin Chinese usage and pronunciation of *qi*.

Before the end of World War II, the use of *qi* in English was largely restricted to a scholarly community of Chinese language and literature specialists, particularly those who focused on classical Chinese philosophical writings that take *qi* in its cosmological sense as a central concept. In addition, it would be reasonable to assume that bilingual Chinese-English speakers may have used *qi* when code switching or as a borrowing when communicating in English (see discussion of “borrowing” vs. “code switching” below). Following World War II, a number of transnational cultural processes led to the more widespread, though still restricted, usage of *qi* among native English speakers in the United States. First of all, starting from the mid-1940s, American military personnel who were

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<sup>108</sup>I use “share” in the broad sense here. In the 1950s, the government of the People’s Republic of China adopted a simplified writing system that utilizes a reduced number of strokes for thousands of Chinese characters. Outside of PRC, however, the traditional character system remains in place. Schooled in only one system, one will encounter some difficulty in reading texts written in the other system. Additionally, new words appear in one language, such as Hong Kong Cantonese, and are written with character combinations unique to that place. While the characters would be understandable to any literate Chinese person, the words would not be.

stationed in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan engaged in serious study of martial arts and encountered the term in its various phonological manifestations (the Japanese borrowing of *qi*, for example, is *ki*). Many of these martial artists returned to the United States to open their own schools, incorporating borrowed terms into their teaching lexicon. During this same period, the United State also experienced a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese-origin immigrants, a population that had been officially excluded during the first half of the century. Among these immigrants were practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine and martial arts who opened their practices to non-Chinese in the American communities where they made their new homes. A third route through which *qi* entered popular English usage was through the widespread interest in esoteric meditative practices that began in the 1960s. Isolated groups in the United States had been aware of such practices for decades, but the experimentalism that characterized the 1960s provided fertile ground for borrowing spiritual practice terms from root languages such as Sanskrit, Hindi, Japanese, and Chinese. The kinds of students who were attracted to Chinese martial arts such as taijiquan, therefore, often included an unusual combination of ex-military personnel and young people more interested in spiritual practices and mind-altering experiences than in practical self-defense. As the “hippie” population matured into the “New Age” population, an increasing number of publications appeared that commonly used either *qi* or *ki* (or their Sanskrit or Hindi equivalents) in the text of their articles. Such publications as *New Age*, *Yoga Journal*, and *Alternative Health* continue to draw heavily on non-Western practices and incorporate non-Western terms in their articles (Frank 1998). Finally, the most recent important trend that might explain the increased usage of *qi* in American English is the aging of the American population and the accompanying mushrooming in popularity of low-impact exercises such as taijiquan. Taijiquan has become a regular feature of health club curricula, is marketed through videotapes, and is featured on popular talk shows. In each of

these contexts, teachers choose when and how to use the term *qi* in the course of teaching a lesson.

In the last decade, several researchers have addressed the fundamental processes of borrowing and code switching and have consequently problematized the definitions for these terms. Fabian has argued against borrowing as a “necessary denotative matter” (Gysels 1992) that fills lexical gaps in the matrix language.<sup>109</sup> Instead, he sees borrowings (of French in Lubumbashi Swahili) as part of a communicative praxis that fulfils an expressive, performative function. Gysels adopts this view in her own work on Lubumbashi Swahili (Gysels 1992). Myers-Scotton argues that the major difference between borrowing and code switching lies in frequency, with borrowings occurring more frequently because they have been more fully incorporated into the matrix language (Myers-Scotton 1992; 1988). Significantly, Myers-Scotton emphasizes on the one hand that “borrowing is a phenomenon open to monolinguals while code switching is not” and, on the other, that single-lexeme embedded language terms may be considered code switching which give rise to borrowings (Myers-Scotton 1992). Gysels, in turn, rejects the idea that quantifying borrowings versus code switching is a determining factor at all. Instead, she argues, “for examining the way terms from the embedded language are used in a text” (Gysels 1992).

In the specific case of *qi*, I find Gysel’s argument the more convincing one. Both bilingual and monolingual speakers use *qi* as a borrowing when they are speaking to an audience of primarily monolingual English speakers (as I will demonstrate in the ethnographic material below). On the other hand, it would be difficult to argue that two bilingual English-Mandarin speakers are borrowing when they inject the word *qi* into an English conversation. This contextual basis for the use of *qi* in English leads directly into my discussion of how *qi* becomes a

linguistic tool for communicating social and transglobal messages that transcend the definition of the word itself, opportunities, in effect, for not only performing specific identities, but also for actually exerting power.

What do non-Chinese speaking Americans mean when they say “*qi*” or, for that matter, “taijiquan”? Several authors have addressed the practical, everyday efficacy of borrowing and codeswitching in asserting political power or emphasizing social factors such as class, educational level, and race. Heller takes a political economy approach in looking at the politics of language choice among French and English speakers in Canada. She draws heavily on Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital and on Gumperz’ concepts of speech economies and verbal repertoires. In Heller’s words,

it is necessary to display appropriate linguistic and cultural knowledge in order to gain access to the game, and playing it well requires in turn mastery of the kinds of linguistic and cultural knowledge which constitutes its rules. [Heller 1992].

Of course, “the game” need not be as overtly political as the situation of Canadian language conflicts. In the case of American martial artists who talk about *qi*, the politics are less about conflict than about establishing status and solidarity within a community of like-minded specialists. The ethnographic evidence cited below supports this model.

To illustrate this notion, let us turn for a moment to the story of Henry Look, a taijiquan teacher and workshop leader at the 1998 A Taste of China Seminars in Winchester, Virginia, one of the largest events in the United States devoted to internal martial arts training and competition. Look is a seventy-five-year-old architect and internal martial arts instructor from the Bay Area who grew up in southern China. He designed many of the Benihana Japanese restaurants in

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<sup>109</sup> Here, I am adopting Myers-Scotton’s use of Matrix Language versus Embedded Language, where the Matrix Language is the one with the higher relative frequency of morphemes (Myers-

the United States and is particularly well known in taijiquan circles for his workshops on the art of *yiquan* (“mind-intent boxing”) In this excerpt, Look is discussing an experiment conducted by Herbert Benson<sup>110</sup> of Harvard on one of Look’s *yiquan* instructors, Yu Pengshi. Look did not witness the experiment himself, but he did see the film negatives that Benson produced:<sup>111</sup>

I wish to explain a little bit more on *qi*. [unintelligible] on my own experience. When I first started with Professor Yu and Madam Yu, come over from Shanghai in San Francisco, [unintelligible] of Dr. Lloyd Benson in Harvard [unintelligible]. They went up and tried to measure the *qi*. Well, when [unintelligible], whether you believe it or not, it doesn’t really matter. However, when they put this helmet over Professor Yu’s head, all the wire’s running out, we thought he was gonna get electrocuted. Well, anyway, they showed this screen on the wall with a x-ray. [unintelligible] said, “All right, Dr. Yu. Just relax, just relax.” The screen was pitch black. “Measure your *qi*.” [Look makes ‘power’ sound]. Little stars going all over the screen. All the stars disappeared. Now, is this for real, or is somebody tampering with electricity? I don’t know. But I witnessed that myself. We have copies of the x-ray-like negative. Actually, we see all the little stars. So, when I do my seminars, like the *yiquan* standing meditation, I try to tell the students, “Look. Just imagine the *qi* traveling on top of your blood vessel, like little dots of lights, controlled by the *yi*, which is your mind. So any time you want to circulate the *qi*, just keep on using your mind to direct the travel of the *qi* to the *dantian* out to your limbs, to your arms, and up through your fingertips – out through your toes – whether you’re standing up or sitting down. So basically you’re doing the same thing. Now the other thing is that if you’re completely relaxed, if you do the standing, it doesn’t matter whether you do one posture or eight to ten postures, if you’re relaxed enough. And your posture is correct. Just like all the taiji classics [unintelligible], I’ll guarantee you you’re arms and hands and everything will be warm. Eventually, the heat goes all the way to your fingertips. Even to the [unintelligible] will be sweaty. Another thing that, whether you believe it

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Scotton 1992).

<sup>110</sup> Look refers here to “Lloyd Benson.” I am making an assumption that this was a slip of the tongue and that he meant to say “Herbert Benson.”

<sup>111</sup> All of the transcribed speeches in this dissertation retain pauses and non-lexical utterances. If a portion of the recording was unintelligible, I so note in the transcript. When appropriate, I have also added descriptives in brackets.

or not, it takes approximately thirty minutes for one cycle of the *qi* to circulate throughout your body. That is the reason why we say the longer you stand is better. Thirty minutes good, hour even better. So just weigh that, when you do that, and believe me, you'll feel so strong – I think some of the students...uh...in my seminars...they try to push me, and very effortlessly, I push them back. I'll tell you a secret guys: easy for me to push you right back because I always use my *qi*, focus on *qi*. I won't tell you then to move forward, move backward, move forward, right? [unintelligible] I say there's something more than that. So whether this is true or not [unintelligible] I experience that, that look at a old man like me you know what, able to push this guy backward, and whatever, right? Oh, this is something! That's what *qi*'s all about. And that's my own experience. And with Dr. Yu, we'd only have to touch him and he could make us spin all over the place, so would Madam Yu. Incidentally, she's still living. Ninety-one years old and teaching in San Francisco. [Joking] And anyone of you, wish to, get in touch with her, I'm her agent. You have to talk to me first [*audience laughs loudly and applauds*]. [Look 1998].

Look's story is partly an account of his bodily experience of *qi* and partly a story about the *manipulation* of *qi* first in someone else's body and then in his own. The narrative relies heavily on verbal art and performance, specifically ironic commentaries that refer to the observer being observed (Bauman 1986; Paredes 1977). Herbert Benson's experiments with measuring the physiological manifestations of various mind-body practices and his pioneering work on "the relaxation response" are well known far beyond the context of *qi* development practices (Benson and Klipper 1976). Look's narrative also illustrates both the performative aspect of actually *using qi* in everyday speech and the ambiguity of definition that I mentioned earlier. In other words, I am more concerned with what goes on *around* the word *qi* than with *qi* itself. Look employs rhetorical strategies in order to indirectly define *qi* for us, underscore his own status as a *qi* expert, and express solidarity with his audience. By using belief statements, the fuzziness of the concept, its lack of clear definition, and even its reality are all dealt with head on. In so doing, Look points up his own solidarity with audience members and

reifies our right to doubt what he is saying. Look also expresses solidarity with his audience by poking fun at technology (“all the wires running out, we thought he was gonna get electrocuted”), even as he invokes Herbert Benson, a famous Harvard scientist, to legitimize what he is saying. Finally, Look is using his own status as a master of *qi*-development arts and as a native Chinese speaker to indirectly define *qi* through references to bodily experience (“I guarantee you your hands and arms and everything will be warm”); through references to theories drawn from Chinese traditional medicine (“it takes approximately thirty minutes for one cycle of the *qi* to circulate throughout your body”); and through references to his personal experience (“easy for me to push you right back because I always use my *qi*, focus on *qi*”).

My point here is that most of the people in the audience have only a vague notion of what *qi* actually means. We can provide a dictionary definition for the word, but we find in usage that it is alien to English. At times, it more closely approximates the English word “energy” than the dictionary definition of “vital force” or “breath,” but energy does not consistently encompass the nuances of *qi*. As non-native speakers, as borrowers, we therefore rely on higher status members of our peculiar speech community to elaborate the parameters of how and when the word can be used. We also rely on these high status members to serve as our conduits to a transglobal cultural phenomenon – the spreading of *qi*-related practices beyond China

Emphasizing one’s avoidance of *qi* is another strategy speakers employed at A Taste of China. During a seminar on the topic of *taijiquan* and physiology, naturopathic physician and martial arts instructor Dr. John Painter talks *around qi* in order to help his audience get a handle on it. Like Henry Look, Painter, a native English speaker, is addressing a group of mostly non-Chinese English speakers:

In using your posture, when you hear all this talk, you know, about sink your *qi* to your *dantian*, lift your *bai hui*,<sup>112</sup> people don't have a clue what they're talkin' about. O.K. One of the things that developed that health and helped that spinal cord that we talked about [unintelligible] was after I had found this point. Right here. And sunk into it. And I let my shoulders sink. I need to also think about this...part of my head. Now why this point, O.K., well, forget the idea about *qi* right now. We'll talk about that later. Let's just look at the physiological [unintelligible], O.K.? [Painter 1998].

One of Painter's goals in this seminar is to remove *qi* from the realm of the magical and speak about the results associated with *qi*-development practices such as taijiquan in terms grounded in science and physiology (Painter and Berryman 1996). In order to develop solidarity with his audience, Painter invokes an informal storytelling style that draws attention to his Texas origins and disarms his audience with verbal art. (Bauman 1986; Sherzer 2002)<sup>113</sup> Again, as an audience member and participant in Painter's seminar, I believe that he knew he was contending with somewhat touchy-feely preconceptions about *qi*'s magicality and his discourse sets up an opposition to those preconceptions. In asserting "people don't have a clue what they're talkin' about," Painter enhances his own status as an expert practitioner but also enhances group solidarity with an implied "we." It is not that he is somehow insidiously manipulating us into seeing John Painter as a master of *qi*; rather, he gains this status simply by letting us in on his own struggle with the concept and his own approach to resolving that struggle.

The use of a borrowed term with unclear, disputed, or inaccessible meanings may involve specific strategies on the part of the speaker to communicate social messages beyond the meaning of the word itself. Speakers draw attention to the disputed nature of the term as a way of enhancing status,

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<sup>112</sup> The *bai hui*, sometimes referred to in English as "the crown point," is located at the top and toward the back of the head.

<sup>113</sup>Painter is not only a native-born Texan with a talent for storytelling. He is also a trained actor steeped in Shakespeare.

building a sense of solidarity with other members of the speech community, or simply trying to get a handle on the term. The actual usage or definition, therefore, becomes secondary to the act of wielding the term. As instances of transglobal cultural exchange, borrowed words can also take on larger roles as measures of interests and values that cross geographic and political boundaries. *Qi* is one such instance. The increasing use of *qi* in English, especially in the last twenty years, provides us with a small window into how values, tastes, and beliefs in American culture—at least predominantly white, middle class American culture—have paralleled, to some degree, those in Chinese culture. *Qi*, therefore, serves as an example of a living, moving Chinese diaspora,<sup>114</sup> an instance of borrowing that goes well beyond language.

### ***Hybridizing Qi and Taijiquan***

That the concept of *qi* did not gain a foothold among non-Asian Americans until well into the Twentieth Century and that the eventual dissemination came largely through post-1960 Asian immigrants and imported martial arts styles tells us something significant not only about the history of race relations in this country, but also forces us once again to re-visit the validity of categories such as “white,” “Chinese,” and “Asian.” The development of taijiquan (and the related industry of *qi*-related products) as commodity in both China and the United States provides us with a rich source for addressing these questions. Many products focus on developing the appearance of *qi* mastery through fashion and external body appearance. From the fetish of the commodity follows the mistake of taking the fetishized object for its essence, or, to borrow

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<sup>114</sup> “Diaspora” as a conceptual framework has undergone increasing scrutiny in recent years. In regards to linking “Diaspora” with “Chinese, Adam McKeown has written a comprehensive overview of the debate. He takes the position that “understanding diaspora as a category that can be used to define and describe social groups is not so desirable as the development of a diasporic perspective that can direct the analysis of geographically dispersed institutions, identities, links, and flows” (McKeown 1999:306).

from Baudrillard, to mistake the simulacra for the real (Poster 1988:1). In the case of taijiquan, of course, the “real” is equally elusive in China and the United States, albeit for different reasons. For the most part, taijiquan and *qi*-related products and practices are marketed by the little guy, for the little guy. One could argue that the global market somehow desecrates “traditional” concepts of *qi*, except that, traditionally, *qi* has always been marketed in one form or another, whether by the Ming dynasty village herbalist selling his wares or by taijiquan aficionados in Austin, Texas.

The earliest recorded European contact with *qi*-related practices came in the late seventeenth century through the interaction of Jesuit priests with Chinese medical practitioners. It was the Jesuits who actually coined the term “acupuncture,” from the Latin *acus*, “needle,” and *punctura*, “pricking or puncture” (Beau 1972:16). In 1671, the first European treatise on the practice appeared, Reverend Father Harvieu’s *The Secrets of the Medicine of the Chinese, Consisting in Perfect Knowledge of the Pulse, Sent from China by a Frenchman of Great Merit*. In the early nineteenth century, acupuncture became something of a fad in France. Velpeau, a well-known surgeon whose cynical prose about his colleague’s medical practice evokes shades of George Bernard Shaw’s *The Doctor’s Dilemma*, wrote the following in regards to Baron Jules Cloquet, a popular acupuncturist of the period:

Jules will quickly make a fortune, because countesses, duchesses, and princes are already flocking to him. Soon there will be so many that he cannot deal with them all...Public credulity can speedily fatten the purse of a man who knows how to use it, as Jules is well aware. [Beau 1972:16].

Thus, even at this early stage of contact with *qi*, class distinctions regarding who could reap its benefits were already apparent.

The great disseminator of acupuncture knowledge in the Nineteenth Century was George Soulie de Morant, who eventually became the French consul

in Shanghai at the beginning of this century. Well-versed in classical Chinese, Soulie de Morant spent several years studying Chinese medicine until he was eventually recognized by Chinese peers as a “Master Physician” (Beau 1972:18-19). In 1928, after twenty years in China, Soulie de Morant published a study of Chinese diagnostic methods, and in 1934, he published *Synopsis of the True Chinese Medicine*. He followed in 1939 with the first of two volumes that were to become the standard work on the subject, *Chinese Acupuncture*. As a result of Soulie de Morant’s work, by mid-century, reliable information on the basic principles of *qi* as it related to Chinese medical practice was available to any Westerner literate in French.

In the United States, as I noted earlier, until the early 1960s, the term *qi* was for the most part limited to Asian American communities, heavily concentrated among but not limited to Chinese and Japanese Americans and recent immigrants in the large Chinese and Japanese communities of Hawaii, the West Coast, and New York City. In these Asian American population centers, traditional Chinese medical practices and martial arts flourished. Following WWII, things began to change, however, when American servicemen stationed in Japan, then later, Korea, began to seriously study Asian martial arts. Saul Krotki, the Seattle teacher and artist who we first met in Part I, cites Ed Parker, a Japanese Kenpo Karate stylist, as the first real popularizer of the concept of *qi* in the United States in the early 1960s.<sup>115</sup> Parker founded a chain of schools that grew into one of the largest martial arts empires in the country, and, according to Krotki, his instructors often impressed their students with feats of strength that they attributed to the power of *qi*.<sup>116</sup>

In addition, students of the Uyeshiba system of Japanese aikido also actively taught about *qi* (“*ki*” in Japanese) as it was used in their system. Thus, the

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Saul Krotki, by telephone to Seattle, 26 April 1998.

earliest introduction to *qi* for many non-Asian Americans came through a Japanese form, rather than a Chinese one, though I should note that Kenpo stylists claim that their form descends from Chinese Shaolin Temple forms, and it has much in common with Shaolin styles. Parker was only the best known of the martial artists who disseminated information and ideas about *qi*, but he was probably the most significant one in the pre-Bruce Lee period.<sup>117</sup>

Bruce Lee's popularity, first as Cato on *The Green Hornet* television series, then as a masterful martial arts filmmaker in his own right, reflected a growing interest in Eastern esoteric practices among young Americans. As a student of philosophy at the University of Washington, Lee projected the image of a sensitive intellectual who could kick some ass when needed. But it was through the publication of his books and the popularity of his movies, combined with his own oft-demonstrated real-life fighting skill that Lee's special spin on *qi* entered into the American vocabulary.

At about the same time that Lee emigrated to the United States, the great popularizer of taijiquan in America, Professor Zheng Manjing — still referred to by many of his students as, simply, “the Professor” — came to New York City, along with several of his senior Chinese students from Taiwan. Again, American servicemen played a key role in this immigration. As members of the United States military or intelligence operations in Taiwan in the early sixties (and as passionate martial artists)), men such as Krotki and Robert W. Smith, learned as much about traditional Chinese practices as they could, and martial arts was at the

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<sup>116</sup> A childhood friend trained for a time in Parker's Kenpo method. The high point of receiving the rank of blank belt, my friend reported, was being personally punched by Ed Parker.

<sup>117</sup> At least two non-Chinese taijiquan practitioners studied in Shanghai before the Communist take over in 1949. According to Ma Yueliang, a wrestler named William or Williams graduated from Wu Jianquan's first public class. Ma and Wu Yinghua taught Sophia Delza in the 1940s. Delza was a modern dancer who lived in Shanghai. Upon her return to New York, Delza taught taijiquan in her dance studio and at the United Nations for several decades. She was very likely the first non-Chinese teacher in New York City, if not the whole United States. (Ma 1989:48).

top of their list.<sup>118</sup> Professor Zheng was not only purported to be one of the best martial artists in Taiwan at that time, he had acquired even greater fame in traditional painting, calligraphy, medicine and the bamboo flute. Thus, when the Professor emigrated to America in the mid-sixties, he arrived at a time when a burgeoning group of American young people, especially artists and intellectuals in San Francisco and New York City, were looking for the ideal, wispy-bearded old Mandarin. The Professor, by all counts, was the genuine article: a modern man who had an honest desire to transmit treasures of Chinese culture to the West. However, the Professor rarely mentioned *qi* explicitly, according to Krotki, a student of Zheng's for the last three years of his life. The dissemination of the concept came more as a result of the interest generated among the first generation of taiji instructors that Zheng and his cohorts trained. Krotki also emphasized that many students were intimidated by the Professor, so they chose instead to study with the more accessible William C.C. Chen, an All-Taiwan Chinese boxing champion who maintained a separate studio from the Professor. After Zheng's death in 1975, many of his students moved to William Chen's studio, including Michael Phillips, my first taijiquan teacher in Tucson.

Two other practitioners, as noted by Krotki, are of special importance. Benjamin Lo, a student of the Professor's and a teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area, was the chief disseminator of the Professor's "Yang Short Form" on the West Coast, and through his co-translations of the Professor's books and the Taiji Classics, he became an important figure in improving the quality of taijiquan literature available in English. These texts explain the relationship of *qi* not only to martial skill, but also to general health and spiritual development. Lo also continues to run annual week-long camps, where taijiquan players from all styles can come to hone their push hands skills and develop a deeper understanding of

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<sup>118</sup> While military and intelligence personnel stationed in China were not discouraged from learning something of the local culture, neither were they encouraged, either financially or through

taijiquan principles. In addition, Robert Smith, the man largely responsible for bringing the Professor to the United States, wrote several literate, often-humorous accounts of his experiences as a martial arts aficionado in Taiwan. His *Chinese Boxing: Masters and Methods* (Smith 1974) is one of the classics of modern martial arts storytelling.

By the late 1970s, many American practitioners had been practicing taijiquan for more than a decade and struck out on their own to become teachers. This was also the period when schools of traditional Chinese medicine began to open around the country, Bruce Lee's *gongfu* movies gained cult status, and David Carradine's *Kung Fu* TV series—originally slated to star Bruce Lee—exploded in popularity.

The most significant factor in the dissemination of Chinese culture into the United States during this period, however, was the end of the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976 and the eventual normalization of relations with China in 1979. In the intervening years, thousands of Americans have traveled to China to study taijiquan, Chinese medicine, and *qigong*. Thousands of Chinese students, many of them skilled in *qi*-related practices, have come to the United States, and the first big wave of American practitioners have benefited from this exchange, continuing to study, hone their skills, and develop increasingly sophisticated abilities.

### ***Teacher Fu***

It is November 2000.<sup>119</sup> I sit sipping tea in Teacher Fu's living room near Washington, DC. He has been in the states only a short time, successfully sponsored for an immigration visa by one of his American students, but he seems quite comfortable with his family in the small apartment they have rented adjacent

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the granting of special leave (personal correspondence with Robert W. Smith 1998).

<sup>119</sup> The following section excerpted from interview with Teacher Fu, November 2000, Washington, D.C. Tape-recorded.

to a private school. A well-known martial arts instructor from Shanghai, Fu finds himself in a community hungry for what he has to teach.

“Why did you come to the United States?” I ask him.

He considers for a moment, then replies, “Because I feel that teaching boxing....actually can contribute to a kind of people to people exchange and also cultural exchange. My central goal is to make everybody healthy. For example, if your health is not good, through the process of exercising with me, I can make you healthier. This is my goal. If everybody’s health is good, then I’m very happy. So if Chinese martial arts makes it into the Olympics, in that case your government would definitely want [in English] ‘very very Chinese de kung fu teacher.’ [laughs heartily]. You see? Right?”<sup>120</sup>

We talk a little bit about how much Shanghai has changed. I tell him I’ll be going there in a month to work with the Wu family style taijiquan association.

“Is tradition still important in Shanghai?” I ask.

“Important. Important. Still important,” he repeats. “This is not a good thing to throw away. Wait a minute, you’re an American. You won’t forget American history. We Chinese are also like this. We won’t forget our traditions.”

### ***Media Representations I***

In the martial arts world, film, television, products, and workshops have become increasingly influential in defining what “tradition” actually means. Products and practices, for example, constitute the signs through which we must read our own conception of what *qi* is and why we use the term “*qi*” and not some other more precise, more *American* term. I would argue that each of these signs, each of these actual products, is an attempt to engage in what Jameson refers to as “cognitive mapping” (Jameson 1984:92), an effort by the anomized underclass of

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<sup>120</sup> Except where noted, I am translating Lu’s conversation from the Chinese. Teacher Lu interjects the Chinese particle “*de*” here, which here functions roughly like the suffix “-ish” or “-esque” in English.

the postmodernist world to find “some new heightened sense of its place in the global system.” Neutralized by our spatial and social confusion—alienated—we reach out to “alien” concepts in alien languages to try to find our bearings. But, as discussion of the products below will show, *qi* is also much *less* than that. Sometimes it is simply *qi*, and, like the Shanghainese or the Beijingers, we accept it like a myth: something that never was, but always is (Mairs 1980).

The profusion of *qi*-related videos in the last fifteen years and the increasingly frequent references to *qi* in one form or another on TV and in film make tracking its diffusion challenging. I have decided, for the purposes of this chapter, to focus on a few examples, each of which represents a specific type. *Easy Rider* (1969), starring Peter Fonda, Jack Nicholson, and Dennis Hopper, contained not only signs of flower children, looking for America, and free love, but also the earliest cinematic reference to taijiquan in an American film. Hopper and Fonda are hanging out at a desert farming commune. A theatre group (the “Gorilla Theater”) has just finished performing for the community. Fleetingly, we see a man going through what appears to be the Professor’s taijiquan form on the stage, with some modifications or improvisations. No mention is made of what is happening in the scene. The characters watching the scene appear to either know what they are seeing or do not care. What we are left with is an indeterminate exoticizing of “the Chinese,” sandwiched in between images of sharing, free-spirited wandering, and nature. While the scene has no direct significance to the story line of *Easy Rider*, it is in retrospect the symbolic seed of an emerging New Age discourse

The exotic Chinese image is as old as Charlie Chan movies in Hollywood history, but *Easy Rider*’s use of that image stands apart because it is, first of all, a silent image, and, more importantly, it is an essentially positive representation of something Asian. *Easy Rider* also raises the question of whether or not we can read taijiquan as resistance to state control of the body. The communal setting of

the taijiquan scene in *Easy Rider*, combined with the overall message of resistance to competition and institutionalization, coalesce to associate taijiquan with resistance. Gramsci wrote, “Industrialism is a continual victory over man’s animality, an uninterrupted and painful process of subjugating the instincts to new and rigid habits of order, exactitude, precision” (Gramsci 1992:235). For the *Easy Rider* generation, cultivating *qi*, along with free love and war resistance, were equated with cultivating resistance to the domination of the body. In later American media representations, acts of resistance become closely equated with martial arts.

### **Peter**

November of 2001, Shanghai.<sup>121</sup> Peter and I sit in a coffee shop on the trendy Hengshan Road. A Canadian in his mid-thirties, we first met in the production office of *Flatland*. Like many so-called “*gongfu* bums,” Peter came here to find some martial arts and never left. As is often the case with people who live in Shanghai, we get on the subject of Shanghai.

“I have a hard time losing that first image of Shanghai,” I confide, drifting back to my first fog-enshrouded images of the decaying city in 1988.

“Well,” he says. “I say don’t lose it. I mean, to me, I’ve been involved with real estate and everything like that but—it’s kind of sad. It’s becoming generic. I mean this coffee shop could be anywhere. You know, it doesn’t have to be Shanghai.”

“What got you into martial arts in the first place?” I ask, digging in to my tuna melt.

“I think either I don’t know or I can’t remember but I will say the television show *Kung Fu* starring David Carradine was a major influence. I was

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<sup>121</sup> The following section excerpted from interview with Peter, 23 November 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded.

probably ten or eleven and I remember practicing my front snap kicks in my bedroom and wanting to be—not wanting to be so much—but admiring the Shaolin monks and the *gongfu*. So that was an input. And then Bruce Lee obviously was a very big part of martial arts culture, but at that time...he was...uh...sort of seen by me as not necessarily the best martial artist. I'm a bit...I'm a bit contrarian, so if everyone else is saying Bruce Lee is awesome, I was sort of saying yeah well he's o.k. I remember seeing *The 36 Chambers of Shaolin*, starring—yeah, It's *Master Killer*—sometimes called *Master Killer*—I also remember seeing uh *Shaolin Temple* 1981 with Li Lianjie [Jet Li]. Then the Beijing team came to Canada and did a show in Winnipeg, probably like '84, so I got this, I got the mainland influence fairly quick.”

### ***Media Representations II***

The American television series *Kung Fu*, starring David Carradine, is the classic example of resistance (Pilato 1993). *Kung Fu* follows the wanderings of a nineteenth-century, half-breed fugitive monk from a Shaolin Buddhist temple who has been forced to flee China to the Old West in search of his American brother. Kwai Chaing Caine is a strong, intelligent, and loving human being who speaks fluent, if simple English. As a “half-breed,” born of a white father and a Chinese mother, he symbolizes and embodies the mediation between East and West. True, Bruce Lee had been passed over in favor of Carradine because of the producers’ concern that Americans would not be able to understand Lee’s accent (despite the fact that Lee was an American citizen born in San Francisco, his films were drawing millions of American fans—and Caine never said much anyway). Nevertheless, with few exceptions, *Kung Fu* was the first attempt by American network television to honestly portray the Chinese American experience.<sup>122</sup> In

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<sup>122</sup> The assertion that *Kung Fu* portrayed a “positive” image should be contextualized within the uniformly negative imagery that appeared in film and television before. Hop Sing, the Cartwright’s butler on the long-running series *Bonanza*, was the only regular Chinese character on

*Kung Fu*, white Americans learned for the first time about the plight of the Chinese rail workers, about discrimination against Chinese immigrants by whites and repression of Chinese by organized crime. They also learned about Chinese history, albeit an exoticized and Hollywoodized Chinese history. Every time Caine's "fade to Shaolin Temple" memory music wafted forth, we geared ourselves up for a bit of ersatz Buddhist philosophy, a little demonstration of Shaolin fighting methods, or, occasionally, a little *qi* talk. In the final episodes of the series, unfortunately, the sponsors forced *Kung Fu* to become just another martial arts flick, and relatively complex conversations about race relations, Daoism and *qi* disappeared from the small screen.

*Kung Fu* has made comebacks in a variety of forms. In the 1980s, *Kung Fu: The Movie* (1986) appeared. A TV movie based on the series, it featured Brandon Lee, son of Bruce Lee, as Kwai Chaing Caine's son, who had been brainwashed to assassinate Caine. Among other heroic acts in the movie, Caine helps a widow whose husband was murdered in the course of his attempt to stamp out the opium trade in the town. Caine takes the widow to a warehouse to show her that the box meant to carry her husband's body to China is in fact filled with opium. The conversation between Caine and the attractive widow reveals not only the persistence of the fetish of Chineseness, but an underlying sexuality attached to it:

Widow: I find you wonderfully strange, Mr. Caine. Who...Who are you?

Caine: Many things. A man, a warehouse laborer, a Shaolin priest.

[*Kung Fu: The Movie* 1986]

In the 1990s, Carradine began producing *Kung Fu: the Legend Continues*,

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American television until until *Kung Fu* came along. In hindsight, as several scholars of Asian America have pointed out, the brand of Chineseness that *Kung Fu* portrayed was full of traps of its own.

which featured a twentieth-century descendant of the original Caine living in San Francisco's Chinatown. The new Caine, grandson of the old Caine, is also a Shaolin priest. He even wears the same nineteenth-century clothing style as the old Caine, and he has a son who is a cop. The new *Kung Fu* emphasizes the magical as opposed to the mystical. One episode, for example, featured an evil being who steals people's *qi*.

### ***Sifu Wong***

Back in San Francisco, Sifu Wong tells me about his love for martial arts novels as a child and about watching Chinese Opera.<sup>123</sup> And he compares this with the way a lot of non-Chinese got involved with martial arts in Chinatown in the 1970s.

“Remember in the old days,” Wong says, “in the seventies, the...the ‘*Kung Fu*’ series with David Carradine? They talk about *gongfu* philosophy? What is that *gongfu* philosophy, you see? That’s really hard for us, you know, that people come in to the –‘Oh, I like to want to learn *gongfu* cause I want to learn the philosophy.’ They didn’t know that most of the *gongfu* teacher don’t know how to teach *gongfu* philosophy. Because we never learn *gongfu*’s philosophy. That’s the movie they put together...well.... you know they basic use....they basically use some Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism philosophy, throw in to, quite a few *gongfu* philosophy. You know, so, but again that’s fascinating to a lot of people. They don’t really want to learn *gongfu*. They want to the learn *gongfu* philosophy.”

“They want to be like David Carradine,” I suggest.

“Yeah, but...uh....to us, we have to find a way to satisfy the students that give them some philosophy. Then...Then you have to dig into some traditional

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<sup>123</sup> The following section excerpted from interview with Teacher Wong, 21 November 2000, San Francisco. Tape-recorded.

Chinese philosophy to give to them. You know, and, I...even at one time said, ‘You know, you want to learn *gongfu* philosophy. Have you ever think about football philosophy? What is a football philosophy?’ And they said, ‘Football is a sport.’ I said *gongfu* also could be a sport too.’

### ***Media Representations III***

Exoticized representations of martial arts abound in dramatic forms, but few efforts have been made to capture such practices in a less sensationalized format. The first serious documentary treatment of *qi* came in the late 1980s when Bill Moyers’s *Healing and the Mind* series aired on PBS. The premier episode, entitled “The Mystery of *Qi*,” introduced Americans for the first time to the doctors, the old people, the martial artists, the calligraphers, and the just plain folks who lived (and, of course, breathed) *qi* everyday in Shanghai and Beijing. Moyers everyman persona appealed to the skeptics as well as to those who wanted to believe in something different and potentially beneficial to their health.

Viewers witnessed with Moyers a brain tumor operation where doctors used acupuncture as the primary anesthetic and where the patient remains fully awake during the operation; amazing feats of *qigong* power as an intelligent American martial arts practitioner swore to the authenticity of the old teacher who had just pushed him without touching him; and a brief interview with eighty-seven-year-old Ma Yueh Liang, patriarch of the JTA. Ma told Moyers, “I did not really understand taijiquan until I reached eighty.”

Despite the high quality of “The Mystery of *Qi*,” it is worth noting that Moyers could not resist offering us once again the picaresque, exotic China: obligatory traditional architecture, astonishingly beautiful gardens, traditional Chinese instrumental music playing underneath these images, and all the while, the skyscrapers, overpasses, and subways that make up modern Beijing and especially Shanghai are hidden from view, or at least minimized. Poetic images

are a regular feature in martial arts instructional videos.

Such videos comprise a thriving market for disseminating information about taijiquan and *qi*-related practices, and there is considerable variation between videos sold through martial arts suppliers or publications and those rented or sold in American video stores like Blockbuster or Hollywood Records and Tapes. In video stores, most of the tapes focus on taijiquan or *qigong* as a health practice and are found in the Health and Fitness section. *Taiji Intermediate Fitness and Health*, produced in 1993 by Video Treasures, Inc. features several performance martial arts (*wu shu*) champions demonstrating taijiquan forms and fighting applications. The front cover of the video box features a man and a woman dressed in well-pressed, high-quality *gongfu* suits practicing their taijiquan with a peaceful, yet powerful ocean scene in the background. Here, a health-related discourse is associated with the power and beauty of nature. The blurb on the back of the video box carries through this discourse:

Originating in China hundreds of years ago, taiji not only conditions physically and relieves stress, but ultimately leads you to a heightened sense of well being. It is a discipline based on principles of focus, balance and movements. Taiji requires a minimum of space and absolutely no equipment. This video, the Yang Short Form and Applications, Level One, is an intermediate level workout for those who have mastered the basics of Taiji. Learn the first steps of the Yang Short Form, a discipline of continuous motion which releases your inner energy (“Chi”) and tones muscles and burns fat. With continuous practice, you will see how much calmer and more fit you feel. [“Intermediate Taiji” 1993].

“Intermediate Taiji” presents a straightforward training method and clearly shows martial techniques, but, interestingly, it does not refer to the martial in marketing the tape, except for a brief reference to “applications.” On the other hand, it does equate the anaerobic practice of taijiquan with an aerobic practice that “tones muscles and burns fat.”

Other videos also privilege the health-related discourse over the martial.

“Taiji for Health,” produced by Terry Dunn, features the following blurb on its cover: “T’ai Chi harmonizes the energy processes within the body, Ch’i, and integrates mind and body to place man in the natural order of the universe, the Tao” (“Taiji for Health,” undated). And a companion tape offers snippets from health magazine reviews: “The Most Complete T’ai Chi video available!” (*Fitness Magazine*); “Good-Bye Stress! A Great Relaxing Workout!” (*Self Magazine*); and “The Best Beginning Video We’ve Ever Seen on T’ai Chi!” (*American Fitness*). The “Buns of Steel Mind/Body Series Taiji” features a male teacher clad in *gongfu* suit and two female assistants in brightly colored aerobics garb. Its cover blurb makes several attractive claims:

The ancient art of TAIJI is the perfect way to exercise the body while calming the mind. This BUNS OF STEEL video makes TAIJI easy to learn. Experience TAIJI’s health-giving properties as you move in a slow, balanced, fluid fashion. All the major muscle groups of the body plus the heart and lungs work in unison. Your energy becomes more focused, your limbs become more flexible, you feel completely relaxed. Enjoy how this feeling lasts and lasts. [“Buns of Steel,” undated].

In this case, no mention is made of either *qi* or martial application. The tape itself is a clearly presented teaching tape of the Wu style of taijiquan, but its creators are not concerned with teaching history and philosophy. In Adorno’s terms, “The consumer is really worshipping what he himself has paid for the ticket” (Strinati 1995:56). In other words, consumers of the Buns of Steel tape are *socialized* to value the price of the tape or the price of the spandex “necessary” to perform the exercise rather than the exercise itself. To take Adorno’s argument a step further, clothing is privileged over body.<sup>124</sup>

What each of these tapes shares in common is the attempt to fit the square

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<sup>124</sup> This fetishization is not limited to the United States. During my 2001 fieldwork in Shanghai, a non-practitioner of taijiquan admonished me in the park for not wearing “martial arts clothing.” He claimed the forms were not only better looking but could actually be performed more correctly with the hanging sleeves of the *gongfu* clothing. When pressed, this commentator admitted that he had never practiced taijiquan.

peg of a *qi*-related exercise into the round hole of American culture (while in Shanghai, equivalent tapes try to fit the square peg of *qi*-related exercises into the round hole of Party ideology and rampant flows of international capital). The tapes, through words and images, tie taijiquan to New Age practices and to American conceptions of physical fitness. Spandex-clad aerobics bunnies emphasize, in our minds, the importance of looking good over an esoteric Daoist quest for immortality. Images of the exotic Chinese also persist, though in somewhat jumbled form. The “Buns of Steel” tape, for example, is filmed in a Japanese Garden, evoking nature and “Orientalness,” with the implication that Japanese and Chinese gardens share the same aesthetic values.

The internet now dominates the marketing of *qi* products and practices. Lee Scheele’s “Online T’ai Chi Ch’uan Notebook” ([www.supply.com/lee/taichi.html](http://www.supply.com/lee/taichi.html)) provides an extensive list of *qi*-related internet links. Scheele lists hundreds of links to martial arts schools, resources on Daoism and other religious practices, publications, and mail order houses. Scheele is mainly concerned with providing access to representations, though he also offers his own spin on *qi* through his essay, “On the Existence of Ch’i” (click on “Notes on Ch’i”). Briefly, Scheele argues that normative and positive approaches to the existence of *qi* are two sides of the same coin and that an empirically established *qi* is unnecessary to successfully use the concept as a practice tool in martial arts training:

Whether one corrects a faulty posture in T'ai Chi Ch'uan by relieving blockages to the flow of ch'i or by bringing the body into alignment with the appropriate principles of physics/body mechanics, the results should be the same. An esoteric and a scientific paradigm of T'ai Chi Ch'uan will be complementary if one focuses on outcomes. [Scheele 1997].

Scheele succinctly outlines the various angles of the “existence of *qi*” debate, but also offers practical advice about health hazards associated with the cultivation of *qi*.

Unlike Scheele's site, *Qi Journal's* website ([www.qi-journal.com](http://www.qi-journal.com)) serves as a central clearing house for information on Daoist esoteric practices and maintains an extensive catalog of products. The *Qi Journal* site is divided roughly along medical, martial, and general cultural lines and includes extensive use of taijiquan animations; interactive models, including an interactive acupuncture model that trains the user in the location of key acupuncture points; a Jeopardy-style quiz on *qi*-related practices and history; a list of professional medical practitioners and martial arts instructors; an extensive calendar of events; and a catalog of available products. In addition, the journal publishes articles on all aspects of internal martial arts. While *Qi Journal* cannot be characterized as a scholarly journal, it does seem to gear itself toward a middle-class, educated audience that can afford to buy the thousands of products it warehouses. For example, the marketing text on the "Product Catalog" web page notes that the journal earned *Utne Reader's* "Gold Star" award for service (click on "Product Catalog" from homepage). *Utne Reader* is itself a magazine marketed toward a left-of-center middle-class.

One of the earliest and most successful marketers along the sexual, health-related and New Age lines of discourse is Mantak Chia. Chia's "Healing Tao" website (<http://www.healingtao.org>) advertises "Master Mantak Chia teaches the healing Tao Methods for Rejuvenating and the Secrets of Love. Chi Kung and Taiji. Tao Meditation. The Chinese View of Sex and Love. The Tao Way to health and Longevity. Sexual Energy and its Transformation into Spiritual Energy. Cosmic Chi Kung. Chinese Massage Chi Nei Tsang. Martial Arts" ("Healing Tao" 1998). As head of the International Healing Tao, based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Chia oversees an extensive network of teachers who he has personally trained and certified in his methods. The website maintains links with sites throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States.

From the high cost of Chia's workshops and the sexual nature of many of

the practices he teaches, it would seem he is marketing his books, videos, and workshops toward a fairly well-heeled middle-class clientele. What makes Chia's approach unique is that he has requisitioned practices shrouded in ritual and secrecy and transformed them into the product of a multinational corporation. This is not to say he is the first to profit from such practices. Chia, however, is dealing with an economy of scale, and, combined with a highly sophisticated use of technology, he has cashed in on Euro-American sexual angst and the middle- and upper-middle class obsession with maintaining health and sexual attractiveness. Chia does not market his products and services as roadways to immortality. However, he does market them with an underlying moral discourse that links the discipline of sexual control to moral discipline. Chia writes,

Sages of all times and places have found that conservation of the precious energies of the seminal fluid and ovarian energy deeply affects a man's life. Whoever holds his vital seed finds that he spontaneously seeks to preserve living things from waste, decay and harm. On the other hand, those who excessively spend the fluid and its vital force crave outer stimulation at any price, for they desperately need to replace their own lost energies. [Chia 1983:168].

Compare with Gramsci: "[W]ork demands a strict discipline of the sexual instincts, that is, a strengthening of the 'family' in a broad sense (not in any particular historical form), and of the regulation [and stability] of sexual relation" (Gramsci 1992:236). Gramsci is speaking here of the kind of sexual energy that was released at the end of World War I when thousands of men returned home. This suddenly released energy, in Gramsci's view, runs against the kind of bodily discipline and restriction required by the state to produce goods.

So do we have in Mantak Chia a personification of a hegemonic force bent on harnessing the sexual energy of the world to gain wealth and power? Probably not. Foucault might argue that Chia is simply part of the grand, institutionalized history of controlling labor through control of the body. We do get the sense that

Mantak Chia's relationship with *qi* is somehow more concerned with learning how to use the power of capitalism than in resisting it or remaining outside of it, as we saw in *Easy Rider*.

### ***Health Products***

Such interest in marketing *qi* is not restricted to a few teachers of esoteric arts, however. In a 1997 survey of several health food stores and supermarket health food sections in the Austin, Texas, area, I found several products that either explicitly used *qi* in the product name or indirectly referenced Traditional Chinese Medicine. Chi Energy, for example, is marketed under the "Medicine Wheel" line of herbal extracts produced by Natural Labs Corporation in Encinitas, California. By combining a picture of a generic Native-American medicine wheel and the word "chi," the manufacturer keys in to two dominant New Age discourses, the "exoticized Chinese" discourse and the "exoticized Native-American" discourse. Interestingly, the product is listed on the back of the bottle as "Sports Formula #2012," so it also keys in to the physical fitness discourse. Chi Energy contains a variety of herbs that contribute to "Tissue and Bone Building, following Injury." The label makes no further reference to "chi," nor even to the increased energy effects often associated with *qi* products. Retailing for \$11.59 at Wheatsville Coop, Chi Energy is part of an extensive line of pricey herbal products.

Ginseng Gold, a product produced by General Nutrition Centers (GNC), provides a contrast to Chi Energy. In Chinese medical discourse, ginseng is discussed in terms of how it affects the flow of *qi*. The GNC pamphlet makes a bold attempt to demystify ginseng by using scientific language and avoiding all mention of Asia, as reflected in the following passage:

Peak potency is determined by measuring ginsenoside and eleutheroside levels, which are naturally occurring phytochemicals endowing ginseng with their active properties. This is accomplished through a process known

as High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC). HPLC uses precise high-pressure pumps to separate compounds based on chemical properties. [GNC Pamphlet, undated].

The product itself is hybridic: a synthesis of American, Korean and Siberian ginsengs, and this synthesis is reflected in the marketing language. Scientific discourse is used to describe the efficacy of a plant shrouded in its own mystical folklore.

The contrast between Chi Energy and Ginseng Gold may underscore the nuances of the market. Most of the products in GNC are very much entrenched in Americanized ways of talking about the body. References abound to “energy,” “muscle building,” “weight loss,” and “weight gain.” But at GNC, no products directly referred to *qi*, nor did the store’s electronic product list mention *qi* (nor its alternative spelling, “chi”)

In addition to marketing these products directly through retail outlets, through publications and over the internet, New Age fairs provide an extremely important, highly visible venue for marketing internal martial arts and *qi* products. Hundreds of New Age practitioners and product makers maintained booths at Austin’s Whole Life Expo in the Fall of 1997, and at least a dozen of these booths were devoted to martial-oriented *qigong*, traditional Chinese medicinal products, *qi* massage, or new products that emphasized *qi* enhancement. The obvious advantage of this type of venue is that almost all of the consumers in the room have some knowledge about or interest in the product.

I am more even more interested, however, in the panoply of signs interacting and associating with one another in the atmosphere of a New Age expo. In such a setting, one cannot help but associate *qi* with aromatherapy, natural foods, Kitaro, and Birkenstocks. These associations, in turn, will naturally lead many of the fifty-something consumers in the room into misty-eyed reminiscences of Haight-Ashbury, etc. This despite the fact that many of the

actual *producers* of *qi* products at the Whole Life Expo were Chinese immigrants who had no direct memory of “the sixties” (their “sixties” was more likely spent doing forced labor in the countryside) nor the exoticization of the East that spawned the New Age industry. They are themselves signs to be exoticized, and many are aware of this status and use it to their advantage in marketing their products. Others obviously feel uncomfortable with the racialized images that become attached to their products.

### **Barry**

November 2000.<sup>125</sup> San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. It is Saturday and rollerbladers are out in force in this spring-like weather. Barry and I are sitting on a park bench. Barry is a second-generation Chinese-American. Now in his late forties, he discovered martial arts in his teens.

“I started around maybe when I was fifteen years old. I got into martial arts, again, because I was looking for some kind of heritage, some kind of roots, and I saw in this magazine *Kung Fu* and I didn’t know what kung fu was and I asked my parents: ‘Jeez, oh, you don’t know what kung fu is?’ And then they told me. That’s when I found out this time around in this lifetime I was more attracted to healing and health and promoting peace, spiritual evolution, things like that, so I got into taiji. And it was either taiji or Aikido. And it just so happens I met a taiji master, to this day, and I see him occasionally, I, this guy, he’s like an excellent example of the Dao.”

Barry tells me about how he and his friend Charlotte started taking students on trips to meet martial arts teachers and Daoist meditation teachers in the early nineties.

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<sup>125</sup> The following section excerpted from interview with Barry, 19 November 2000, San Francisco. Tape-recorded.

“The first couple of years we went to China in ‘92 and ‘93—they brought a large group of people over, the first group was sponsored by Noetic sciences and then the second time I think we brought our own group over and it was just too much to handle, so after that we made the groups a lot more intimate and small and we changed it from like just bringing people over to China we called it ‘Daoist Wandering.’ And that’s when I started to experience the Tantra of it all of learning through experience at the moment, you know, through action. My grandparents came over from China. And my parents were born—my mother was born in Sacramento and my father born here, in San Francisco. So San Francisco came—became home.”

“Why did your grandparents come over....any particular reason?” I ask Barry.

“I really don’t know. You see, that’s, that’s another reason I go to China because my parents really don’t fill us in on the past. Either there’s some embarrassment or there’s something you just don’t talk about...uh...I don’t know if that’s a cultural thing or if it’s just...just my family. But for my desire or intuitive sense of...of uh... finding roots that’s, when I went back to China, believing in reincarnation or past lives, when I go to certain places, there’s this one Daoist...uh...Daoist temple that ...uh...was the teacher of Charlotte so she brought us there and that was the first time I just started uncontrollably crying.”

### ***Publications***

Printed publications continue to be a major source of information about taijiquan and *qi* in the United States. In bookstores, *qi*-related titles are found in the martial arts section as well as in the alternative medicine section. Magazines such as *T'ai Chi* maintain extensive catalogues of books and videos.

I will concentrate here on class and racial differences as they are

manifested in magazines, journals, and other publications. Certain publications are obviously geared toward the community at large, and their treatment (or non-treatment) of *qi* as a topic indicates the homogeneity of the audience. In April of 1998, for example, the *Austin American-Statesman* printed a Newhouse News Service article entitled “Elderly Can Reduce Falls with Exercise” (Hansen 1998:F3). A color photo shows a group of senior citizens holding one of the more difficult taijiquan postures, and the caption reads, “Laura Knox leads her taiji class. Taiji is a slow and graceful exercise that originated as a martial arts routine in China.” Several pieces of information are conveyed through this article that one must either characterize as “inaccurate” or as “distinctly American.” The article discusses an Emory University study that showed marked improvement in balance and reduction in fall-related injuries among senior citizens who participated in the study. However, the article makes no mention of *qi* enhancement, which according to much of the Chinese health and fitness discourse would be the primary benefit of the exercise. In addition, the photo caption emphasizes that taijiquan *originated* as a martial art, but the article makes no mention of the martial aspect of the art today. Finally, the title of the article makes no mention of taijiquan, though it is an article not about exercise in general, but about taijiquan in particular. The uninitiated reader would come away from this article with the impression that taijiquan is a slow-motion dance meant to improve balance in old people. In many ways, this has become the dominant American truth about taijiquan (as well as the dominant Chinese truth about taijiquan).

A community publication geared toward University faculty and staff, the University of Texas at Austin’s Informal Classes prospectus for February through May 2003 offered classes on several *qi*-related practices. Under the “Mind and Body” section appear classes advertised for Feng Shui and “Ki” training. These are associated with yoga classes and other meditative practices. Taijiquan is placed in the “Sports and Recreation” section, along with other martial arts,

rowing, sailing and scuba diving. Both a Korean and a Chinese form of taijiquan were offered.

In the Austin yellow pages, *qi*-related ads are found in both the “Martial Arts” section and the “Acupuncture” section. Tom Gohring, an Austin taijiquan teacher, holds a business degree from the University of Texas and has done marketing research into yellow pages ads in order to improve the effectiveness of his own ads.<sup>126</sup> According to Gohring’s consultant on the matter, most martial arts ads spend too much space on telling the consumer about the instructor’s belt ranking, lineage or competition record and not enough on crucial information such as price structuring, location, and class schedule. Several yellow pages ads do mention *qi* in its various spellings, particularly in the context of *qigong* training.

Perhaps the clearest examples of class differentiation come in the wide range of magazines that publish articles on taijiquan. Magazines such as *Kung Fu*, *Inside Kung Fu*, and *Black Belt* tend to focus their articles almost exclusively on the martial applications of *qi*. Their ad space is devoted largely to marketing martial arts supplies. *Qi*-enhancing medicinal products are more or less treated as a subset of these supplies. *T'ai Chi* magazine and *Qi Journal* attract yet another clientele. They privilege study tools, such as books and tapes. They also maintain extensive event and training calendars. More importantly, their advertising is relatively understated, especially when compared with the flashy style of *Inside Kung Fu* magazine. Though it is owned by a private company, *The Journal of Asian Martial Arts* (JAMA) prides itself on offering a combination of scholarly and popular articles. The journal does minimize its advertising and rarely runs an ad that could be construed as glorifying violence or promoting questionable health products.

Finally, magazines such as *New Age*, *Alternative Medicine*, and *Yoga*

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with Tom Gohring, Austin, Texas, 8 May 1998.

*Journal* all mention taijiquan or *qi* in occasional articles or advertisements, but *qi* is de-emphasized in relation to the particular agendas that each of these magazines puts forward and the particular audiences at whom they are aimed. If we take as measures the average number of words per an article, the presence of book and film reviews, races and classes represented in ad and article photos, and the relative marketing of books compared to other products, it would appear that these magazines do cater to a primarily white, middle to upper-middle class audience. Recent issues of all three magazines showed white people in cover photos. The martial arts magazines mentioned above, during the same period, all used Asian teachers in their cover photos. A more precise cataloguing of such images along the lines of what Lutz' and Collins have done in *Reading National Geographic* (1993) would yield useful results.

All *qi*-related practices are ultimately concerned with cultivating health in the body. If, as Foucault argues, the modern state exerts control over our bodies, and it is in the interest of the state to keep them healthy (Foucault 1977), then the question arises whether the practice of taijiquan in America constitutes a moment of agency. The entrance of taijiquan into American society is a useful case study in the structure of hegemony precisely because so many of those hegemonic relationships are unwittingly incestuous: soldiers and flower children bowing to the Professor, survivors of the Cultural Revolution hawking their wares at the Whole Life Expo, a couple of North American kung fu bums sitting in a coffee shop on Hengshan Road in Shanghai discussing the martial arts TV series they are working on. In a globalized economy, hegemonies are difficult to trace. Corporate evildoers do not seem to have much to do with taijiquan, yet the processes involved are decidedly transnational. There are little empires at work here.

## *Conclusion*

As Stevens writes, “The river is moving. The blackbird must be flying.” As a transnational practice, martial arts become a conduit for not only the movement of people, but also the movement of identities. The localities that move from one space to another, through individuals, constitute and re-constitute many forms of Chineseness. For foreign martial artists who travel to China in search of the master, the little old Chinese man, participation in the transnation becomes an unveiling process, a process of peeling away preconceptions about race. Markus Schleisser, a Swiss visual anthropologist and martial arts practitioner, had this story to tell:<sup>127</sup>

The first time I went to China. In the streets of Shanghai one evening I saw an old man, healthy energetic expression, erect body, walking into Renmin Gongyuan [People’s Park]. I was sure that he was going to play Taijiquan so I followed him eager to see and learn. Maybe he is a real master. Long time I did not find out what he was doing. But finally I realized that he was just peeping on intimate kissing pairs. This was the first time I thought there might be something wrong about my views on China, especially the martial arts. [Correspondence with Markus Schleisser, August 4, 2002].

Like many foreign martial artists who traveled to China with a romantic image of what they might find, Schleisser experiences a moment of seeing through his pre-existing notions of race. At the same time, he seems to imply that the realization is still only partial.

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<sup>127</sup> These remarks came in response to an e-mail where I asked Schleisser, who was familiar with my research on racial formation and martial arts, whether or not he had any “little old Chinese man” stories to tell regarding martial arts.

Figure 25: Push hands competition, 1998 A Taste of China All-Taijiquan Championships, Winchester, Virginia. Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 26: Marketplace, 1998 A Taste of China All-Taijiquan Championships, Winchester, Virginia. Photo: Adam Frank.



Figure 27: Tennis court with *taijitu* and *bagua*, International Healing Tao Center, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Photo: Adam Frank.



## Conclusion

### From Transnation to Body

#### XIII

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar limbs.

–Wallace Stevens  
*From “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”*

An elderly taijiquan friend who I used to run into occasionally while practicing in Shanghai People’s Park, once called me a “Sinologist” to my face. He was a well-educated man, a fluent speaker of English, probably in his eighties. But he was a very angry man, and whenever I would pester him with questions about the old Shanghai, he would say to me in a very accusatory tone, in English, “You, sir, are a Sinologist!” And then he would proceed to broadcast to anyone who happened to be listening in on our conversation, also in English, “This man is a Sinologist!” As I will attempt to articulate below, he had a point.

In this dissertation I have used the martial art of taijiquan as a case study for arguing that “race moves.” I discussed taijiquan practice and race formation in the contexts of private and public rituals that included personal practice with teachers; public demonstrations in city parks; taijiquan as moving sculpture in the cityscape of new Shanghai; taijiquan as master symbol of the Chinese nation; martial arts in imaginative production; and martial arts in the transnational space of the global marketplace, which I treated as a marketplace of identity as much as objects and practice. Drawing on the work of Catherine Bell, I broadly defined ritualization as the exercise of power through the formal transmission or receipt of

knowledge. Focusing on the phenomenology of race, I looked at how identities (“Chineseness,” “Whiteness,” and combinations thereof) are socially constructed and sensually experienced through practice. By paying special attention in the opening chapter to the historical, “Daoist studies” basis for conceiving taijiquan as a Daoist and consequently “Chinese” art, I called attention to the deep roots of racial essentialization embedded in taijiquan, roots that feed contending conceptions of “Han-ness,” “Chineseness,” “Manchuness,” “Whiteness,” etc. Finally, I argued throughout the dissertation that we cannot claim even partial understanding of a practice—particularly when it is global in scope—without traveling through several different levels of analysis in a constantly moving hermeneutic process. In order to apply this approach to the present study, I adopted the *taiji tu* (“Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate,” or “yin yang symbol”) as a suitably transnational analytical tool appropriate not only for understanding taijiquan, but also for understanding social life in general. In the case of taijiquan, the *taiji tu* provided a model for looking at how body, city, nation, imagination, and transnation mutually constitute specific understandings of the practice and specific racial formations.

Ward Keeler has suggested that “interpretation is in itself a kind of interaction, one constrained by culturally given patterns and comparable therefore to other kinds of social behavior” (Keeler 1987:261). That is certainly the case in the present ethnography. Because I was a student of taijiquan before I ever decided to write an ethnography about it, my interpretations inevitably succumb to a personal desire to gain mastery in the art and to somehow understand it on its own terms, as if the social milieu of Shanghai, not to mention the linguistic milieu of Chinese and the historical context of Daoist studies, had nothing to do with the transmission of taijiquan. The assumption that “only Chinese people can really understand taijiquan” is one I have difficulty accepting as a practitioner but difficulty escaping as an anthropologist. Fortunately, after several post-Cultural

Revolution years of interacting with foreign students, my teachers refused to accept this pronouncement at face value when I brought it to their attention. A constant mantra I heard among taijiquan teachers in Shanghai was that *real* taijiquan had a better chance of thriving in America than in the PRC, that acquisition and understanding of the art was less about race than about practice. The embodiment of the art through practice was somehow seen as above or apart from the merely social. At least in the case of taijiquan, it seems that the ritual of practice provides a means of embodying knowledge and, therefore, of acquiring power over oneself. I am not arguing that the acquisition of knowledge is unmediated by individual experience, by how we see ourselves as well as how others see us, only that the aspects of the art that teachers consider most important—the developing of a feel for wielding particular energies (*jin*) in the body, the ability to use one’s mind to consciously direct energy, the use of imagination to train frames in the body—all of these my JTA teachers in Shanghai treat as forms of knowledge accessible to anyone who is willing to put in the work. They accept that certain skills will require generations rather than years to pass on, but this they see as inherent in the complexity of the art as opposed to a feature of race. Perhaps a useful analogy would be the rise of youth soccer in the United States. By the mid-1970s, most mid-size American cities had active soccer leagues with a large, enthusiastic membership, but not nearly enough knowledgeable coaches to teach the skills of the game. European soccer coaches became a much sought after commodity. They found enthusiastic but unskilled players who had not grown up in the cultural milieu of soccer. Certainly, they realized that it would require a generation or two before American players would reach the level of the Europeans, but there was never any question that Americans were somehow racially unfit for the task. In Shanghai, teacher Lu once commented to me that he expected Americans would eventually surpass Chinese from the PRC in taijiquan skills, but that for the present, Chinese would

usually win competitions. This comment was certainly borne out by the noticeably higher general level Chinese martial artists demonstrated in tournaments in Zhengzhou and Zhuhai. But the presence of highly skilled foreign performers was also difficult to ignore for the Chinese audiences. To a degree, then, there are *moments* when race *is* erased, when an audience sees skill rather than skin color. These are fleeting, but they constitute important moments in the phenomenology of race.

### ***Racial Formation as Chaos***

My analysis in this dissertation began with bodily experience, and then split the body into the sometimes chaotic, competing discourses of city, nation, imaginative production, and transnation. I conceived race as the often chaotic, collective translation of the individual, sensual experience of phenotypic difference. Throughout, my premise has been that once multiple contexts of analysis are split and tried out for a time, we must reconstitute this chaos in order to “read” such contexts in the taijiquan forms. The value of reconstitution becomes apparent, for example, when we compare the Wu style fast form (*kuai quan*) with the slow form (*man quan*). As I mentioned in previous chapters, JTA members and Ma/Wu family members frequently noted in interviews and in publications that the fast form is the “original” Wu style taijiquan as it was taught to Wu Jianquan’s father, Quan You, by the famous Yang style taijiquan founder, Yang Luchan (“Yang the Invincible”). The fast form is performed at a combination of slow and fast speeds, with clearly punctuated moments of issuing energy (*fajin*). In other words, a punch in the fast form is performed at full speed. On the other hand, the slow form is performed at a slow, steady pace. A punch in the slow form is slow enough to give non-practitioners pause about the martial efficacy of the art. Further, many of the fast form moves require a degree of

athletic skill absent from the slow form. Just about anyone, even the sick and infirm, can practice the slow form.

As I have tried to show, the transformation of style between slow and fast form occurred as a result of a set of circumstances that arose out of a combination of nineteenth-century colonialism, specifically the brand of quasi-colonialism that tied Shanghai into a circuit of international capital flows, and the erasure of Manchu identity. After 1911, the new Republican government encouraged teachers to go public with their arts. At the same time, Manchu families were subject to extreme violence, and Manchus who had long-since adopted Han ways found it easy enough to adopt Han names (as the Wu family did) and join the patriotic fervor. Unlike Hui people interviewed by Helena Hallenberg, for Manchu people, martial arts were less a tool of protecting minority identity and more a tool of assimilation. In the 1920s and 1930s, the presence of a wage-earning class in the Chinese section of Shanghai, a class that benefited directly from Shanghai's status as a center for international finance and trade, made it financially attractive for teachers of all backgrounds to go public. But, as a group, the people who could afford to study taijiquan at the YMCA and other exclusive venues had neither the physical constitution nor the time to practice the rigorous methods of fast taiji. Those teachers who were drawn to Shanghai by a combination of patriotism and financial interest modified forms to accommodate one type of student, but maintained the previous fast forms, push hands, weapons, etc. to preserve what they considered to be the essence of the art. Thus, economic, historical, and political conditions led directly to the creation of forms that were easier to learn and easier to perform. When a taijiquan practitioner performs the fast form of taijiquan, then performs the slow form, he or she is also performing changes in the historical, political, and economic conditions of China over the last hundred years. The embodiment of historical conditions is felt, if not made conscious. Conversely, awareness of how form embodies change does not imply a

full understanding of the art (for example, an understanding of its martial applications). In other words, I am not making a claim here that *I* understand taijiquan better than *they* understand taijiquan. In fact, anyone who has read the Wu style basic training manuals in English or Chinese is aware of how the forms have changed. Few, however, draw on that knowledge as an access point for reading social change.

### ***Stylistic Changes and the Reifying Power of Photography***

One way of acquiring such knowledge that was new to the twentieth century was photography. In the Wu style, for instance, photographs marked the beginning of a discourse about what precisely it looked like to be authentically “Chinese” that had previously been limited to oral and bodily transmission. Stylistic changes arising out of the social conditions of the early twentieth century held true for all of the major styles of taijiquan (which, at that time, were really only beginning to branch away from one another). To some degree, teachers cooperated in this venture even while they competed for students. They taught together at the YMCA. They practiced together from time to time. They agreed on a more or less standard sequence of movements with standard names, even if the movements themselves might be performed quite differently. Within each style, the publication of training manuals that included photographs and detailed descriptions of movement further solidified the standardizations (Xu 1927). For the first time in the history of taijiquan, a visual record of the movements existed. The natural changes that each teacher brought to their form could now be checked against the “*ur-text*” of photographic evidence (whereas the teachers themselves had been the *ur-texts* before). The traditional student-teacher relationship required the student to accept on faith that the transmission he or she received from the teacher was “authentic”; now the student had the means to question the teacher, and, perhaps more importantly, the teachers had the means to question

themselves, i.e. when changes crept into the forms, teachers could use photographs of themselves or of their own teachers as self-correctives. Suddenly, a metanarrative of form, a kind of noumenal taijiquan, modified the emphasis on trust in the relationship.<sup>128</sup>

### *The Folklorization of Taijiquan*

After the communist takeover in 1949, an intense *preservation* of martial arts forms accompanied the Party's project to folklorize minority groups and ostensibly "traditional" practices. Thus, family-based forms of taijiquan became "traditional folk sports," despite the fact that these very same forms were configured as exclusively Han. Those teachers who had not died in the war or fled to Taiwan were once again encouraged to teach as part of the project of building national consciousness. Despite the literati connection to many of the taijiquan forms extant in 1949, the Party requisitioned them as symbols of the triumph of the peasantry. Oddly, at the same time, the Party began a parallel project, or, more accurately, continued the project of Chiang Kaishek and his Guomindang government to develop taijiquan as an international sport. New, standardized competition forms like the "twenty-four" and the "forty-eight" began to overtake the family forms until they became the dominant forms. Competitions included the family forms, but even there, the Party exercised its hegemony through the process of standardization.

In the early 1980s, following the Cultural Revolution, the Party once again called on teachers to return to the parks and teach publicly. As one of the many

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<sup>128</sup> In recent times, photography has taken on another role as well: as a means of theft. Martial arts magazines in the United States often contain ads for videotapes of "masters" or "living treasures." On occasion, these videos were shot without the permission of the performers who are represented on film, or, if permission was given, the taijiquan performer did not grant licensure for the commercial sale of the image. Since many of these films are shot at public meetings very much like the JTA's public meetings, the taijiquan associations concerned have little recourse. When I suggested to the head of the JTA that they retain a lawyer to begin protecting their intellectual

“feudal” arts that had been attacked by Red Guards, taijiquan, along with *qigong*, became even more popular in the post-Cultural Revolution period. Again, the ruling ideology was preservation of family forms, but this time that preservation was a nail in the coffin of the ultra-left that had been associated with the Gang of Four and their anti-feudalism diatribes. For a population that had been subjected for ten years to criticism of long-held self-conceptions of Chineseness, it was reassuring that teachers like Wu Yinghua and Ma Yueliang performed their art *exactly as in the photographs* of the founder. Again, in Wu style, lack of change during this period itself reflected intense societal change. But the 1980s brought an economic revolution that created a “tradition marketplace” and, along with the “fever” (*re*) that spawned hundreds of new *qigong* styles, new taijiquan styles arose as well, often condensations of existing styles. When I left Shanghai in January 2002, for example, a new twelve-movement taijiquan style was quickly gaining popularity. Along with the new styles came “discoveries” of ancient styles, such as the Wudang Taijiquan that was supposed to date from the time of Zhang Sanfeng and which had recently gained popularity through a combination of martial arts-Daoist tourism to Wudang Mountain (a range of mountains that is one of the centers of Chinese Daoism) and the active participation of several state-ordained Daoist priests in the national and international tournament circuit. In 2002, the conflation of national identity with racial identity is stronger than ever. Taijiquan has become one of the master symbols for that conflation. At the same time, in the new, capital-driven China, both regional and ethno-linguistic identities have re-emerged, or, in some cases emerged for the first time. So far, for the people of Manchu descent who live all over the PRC, there is little indication of a re-emerging Manchu identity attached to practices like Wu style taijiquan. Still, it is not difficult to imagine that, like the Hui Hallenberg describes, urban

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property, he shrugged in resignation and said, “It’s no use. If people really want to sell videos, we can’t do anything about it.” (Interview with JTA head, February 2001, Shanghai. Tape-recorded).

Manchu people may lay claim to arts that are now firmly Han. While we must be careful of making projections, especially when the ethnographic evidence is lacking, we must be equally cautious about seeing martial arts like taijiquan purely in terms of national identity.

That caution is even more important in the transnational context of taijiquan. In the United States, taijiquan becomes even more “Chinese” than it is in China, and this holds true for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, as well as practitioners who do not consider themselves of Chinese descent but who nevertheless enjoy the racial empathy of practicing a “Chinese” art, the sensual experience of Chineseness. Likewise, especially among some teachers in the PRC who train foreign students, there is certainly a pleasure (and sometimes financial benefit) in assuming the role of the “little old Chinese man.” For Chinese and foreign practitioners alike, the problem with experience is that one begins to see through such ruses. As a renowned, relatively young teacher of Chen style taijiquan from a Beijing sports university put it to me in a tone of definite exasperation, “Where are the people like in the books? I don’t think they exist.”<sup>129</sup> This teacher and I shared a fantasy of finding the little old Chinese man who would fulfill our respective conceptions of the ultimate Chinese person, a romanticization, we both knew, but one to which long-time practitioners such as ourselves were inextricably beholden. In very different ways, the search determined our sense of self. For each of us, it also got in the way of fully understanding the art of taijiquan.

And therein lies a possible meaning behind my friend’s accusation that I was a “sinologist.” With his stinging tone, he seemed to be critiquing the whole orientaling project of “understanding” China and Chinese people. He was, after all, a real, living, old Chinese man. He immediately identified in my foreigner’s interest in taijiquan a fundamentally flawed conception of China. From our

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<sup>129</sup> Interview with Chen style teacher, December 2001, Beijing.

conversations, I could surmise that it was something he had dealt with before, perhaps as a youth in the colonized Shanghai of another era. While I will not claim to have freed myself of the intellectual traps that I took his comment to imply, perhaps, in a small way, I have peeled away at least some of the layers of self-deception. Perhaps my friend did me a kindness.

### ***Poetry in Motion***

In this dissertation, I have tried to capture the play of multiple discourses within the unity of a particular embodied practice. To what end? All this talk of racism, power, hegemony, deception, and marketplaces is not meant to give the impression that taijiquan is a painfully negative experience one should avoid at all costs. My goal has been the opposite: to highlight the obstacles to practice and understanding that teachers and fellow practitioners shared with me during the course of my fieldwork. Ultimately, all these negatives are meant to yield a positive. By understanding the *tendency* to conceive taijiquan in terms of race, those who practice the art might more easily cut through the obstacle of preconception to experience it in a new light. Those who do not practice, but who see people practicing taijiquan in a park or read a book or rent a videotape, might approach the art, as well as their conception of racial identity, in a more sophisticated way. To return to Schrempf's dichotomies by way of the phenomenology of race, perhaps transnational practices like taijiquan allow us to engage in an act of reduction about race, where comparison is no longer "cultural," but internal. It seems to me that practice can lead us to a moment when we are neither a particular racial category nor *not* that category, in other words, a moment when the perception of race is negated. It is at that moment when we can begin to understand taijiquan not as a complex collection of social relations, but as poetry. Understanding the social allows us to experience the poetry.

Wallace Stevens' blackbird has accompanied us throughout this journey. In referencing Stevens, my intention has been to draw a metaphor between the blackbird and identity. Like the blackbird, race moves. I believe this has been a useful tool for accessing an intellectual model through a non-intellectual form. But it is with taijiquan *as* poetry that I would like to conclude. If, as I have tried to do, we treat the very practical practice of taijiquan as simultaneously an enactment of identity and a search for it, then it is important to remember that most taijiquan practitioners above all practice for pleasure. While the anthropologist may be concerned with the blackbird flying between snowy peaks or sitting in the limb of a tree, most taijiquan practitioners, most of the time, are simply enjoying the falling snow.

## Appendix I: Wu Style Slow Taijiquan (Wu shi taiji man quan) Posture Names

Note: Translations of the Chinese names for taijiquan postures vary considerably among practitioners. Yang, Wu, Sun, Wu (Hao), and Chen styles share many posture names, but differ in others. In depth discussions with Ma/Wu family members in the course of my fieldwork led me to make modifications to some of the standard translations. I have also consulted Zee 2002 and Dyhr-Mikkelsen, McGiff, and Klüfer, translators, in Wagner and Klüfer 2000 for alternative perspectives. Several moves are repeated in the forms, as noted. Common alternative names used in everyday practice among JTA members appear in parentheses.

### Part I

1	Preparation	<i>Yubei shi</i>
2	Taiji beginning form	<i>Taiji qishi</i>
3	Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Lan que wei</i>
4	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
5	White Crane Spreads Its Wings	<i>Bai he liang chi</i>
7	Brush Knee Twist and Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
8	Hands Strum the Lute (Lute Hands)	<i>Shou hui pipa (pipa shou)</i>
9	Brush Knee Twist and Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
10	Brush Knee Twist and Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
11	Hands Strum the Lute	<i>Shou hui pipa</i>
12	Step Forward Parry and Punch	<i>Jinbu ban lan chui</i>
13	As If Closing Up	<i>Ru feng si bi</i>
14	Leopard and Tiger Push the Mountain	<i>Bao hu tui shan<sup>130</sup></i>
15	Cross hands	<i>Shi zi shou</i>
16	Diagonal Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Xie lou xi ao bu</i>
17	Turn Around and Diagonal Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Fan shen xie lou xi ao bu</i>
18	Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Lan que wei</i>
19	Single Whip at Diagonal	<i>Xie dan bian</i>

### Part II

20	Fist Appears Beneath Elbow	<i>Zhou di kan chui</i>
21	Like a Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou<sup>131</sup></i>
22	Like a Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
23	Like a Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>

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<sup>130</sup> The implication here is that one hand is the leopard and one hand is the tiger (Interview with Ma family member 2001).

<sup>131</sup> The usual translation for *dao nian hou* is "Repulse Monkey." According to one Ma family member, however, the sense is that the taijiquan player *is* the monkey stepping backwards.

24	Diagonal Flying Momentum	<i>Xie fei shi</i>
25	Raise Hands and Step Up	<i>Ti shou shang shi</i>
26	White Crane Spreads Its Wings	<i>Bai he liang chi</i>
27	Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
28	Needle at Sea Bottom	<i>Hai di zhen</i>
29	Fan through the Back	<i>Shan tong bei</i>
30	Left-Falling Stroke Body Blow	<i>Pie shen chui</i> <sup>132</sup>
31	Step Back, Parry, and Punch	<i>Xie bu ban lan chui</i>
32	Step Up and Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Shang bu lan que wei</i>
33	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
34	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
35	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
36	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
37	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
38	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
39	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>

### Part III

40	Left High Scout Horse	<i>Zuo gao tan ma</i>
41	Separate Right Foot	<i>You fen jiao</i>
42	Right High Scout Horse	<i>You gao tan ma</i>
43	Separate Left Foot	<i>Zuo fen jiao</i>
44	Turn Body, Pedal kick (Turn and Kick with Heel)	<i>Zhuan shen deng jiao</i>
45	Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
46	Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
47	Step Forward Planting Punch	<i>Jin bu zai chui</i>
48	Turn Body, Left-falling Stroke Body Blow	<i>Fan shen pie shen chui</i>
49	Step Forward Left High Scout Horse	<i>Shang bu zuo gao tan ma</i>
50	Separate Right Foot	<i>You fen jiao</i>
51	Step Back and Beat the Tiger	<i>Tui bu da hu</i>
52	Split body kick	<i>Pi shen jiao</i>
53	Twin Peaks Penetrate the Ears	<i>Shuang feng guan er</i>
54	First Rising Kick	<i>Yi qi jiao</i>
55	Turn Body, Second Rising Kick	<i>Fan shen er qi jiao</i>
56	Right High Scout Horse	<i>You gao tan ma</i>
57	Step Up, Parry, and Punch	<i>Shang bu ban lan chui</i>
58	As If Closing Up	<i>Ru feng si bi</i>
59	Leopard and Tiger Push the Mountain	<i>Bao hu tui shan</i>
60	Cross Hands	<i>Shi zi shou</i>
61	Diagonal Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Xie lou xi ao bu</i>
62	Turn Body and Diagonal Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Fang shen xie lou xi ao bu</i>
63	Grasping the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Lan que wei</i>
64	Diagonal Single Whip	<i>Xie dan bian</i>

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<sup>132</sup> “Pie” can be translated as skim, but also refers to the left-falling stroke in writing Chinese characters. A Ma family member pointed out that many of the movement names reference writing in this manner (as in the previous “*shizi shou*,” [cross hands]. The character for *shi* (ten) is a cross.

## Part IV

65	Wild Horse Shake's Its Mane	<i>Yie ma fen zong</i>
66	Wild Horse Shake's Its Mane	<i>Yie ma fen zong</i>
67	Wild Horse Shake's Its Mane	<i>Yie ma fen zong</i>
68	Hands Strum the Lute	<i>Shou hui pipa</i>
69	Cross Wild Horse Shake's Its Mane	<i>Shi zi yie ma fen zong</i>
70	Step Up, Left Fair Lady Shuttles Back and Forth	<i>Shang bu zuo yu nü chuan suo</i>
71	Turn, Right Fair Lady Shuttles Back and Forth	<i>Zhuan shen you yu nü chuan suo</i>
72	Cross Wild Horse Shakes Its Mane	<i>Shi zi yie ma fen zong</i>
73	Step Up, Left Fair Lady Shuttles Back and Forth	<i>Shang bu zuo yu nü chuan suo</i>
74	Turn, Right Fair Lady Shuttles Back and Forth	<i>Zhuan shen you yu nü chuansuo</i>
75	Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Lan que wei</i>
76	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
77	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
78	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
79	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
80	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
81	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</i>
82	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>

## Part V

83	Downward Posture (Low Posture, Snake Creeps Down)	<i>Xia shi</i>
84	Left Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg	<i>Zuo jin ji du li</i>
85	Right Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg	<i>You jin ji du li</i>
86	Like a Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
87	Like a Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
88	Like a Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
89	Diagonal Flying Momentum	<i>Xie fei shi</i>
90	Raise Hands and Step Up	<i>Ti shou shang shi</i>
91	White Crane Spreads Its Wings	<i>Bai he liang chi</i>
92	Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
93	Fan through the Back	<i>Shan tong bei</i>
94	Left-falling Stroke Body Blow	<i>Pie shen chui</i>
95	Step Up, Parry, and Punch	<i>Shang bu ban lan chui</i>
96	Forward Momentum Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Shang shi lan que wei</i>
97	Single Whip	<i>Dan Bian</i>
99	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun Shou</i>
100	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun Shou</i>
101	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun Shou</i>
102	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun Shou</i>
103	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun Shou</i>
104	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>

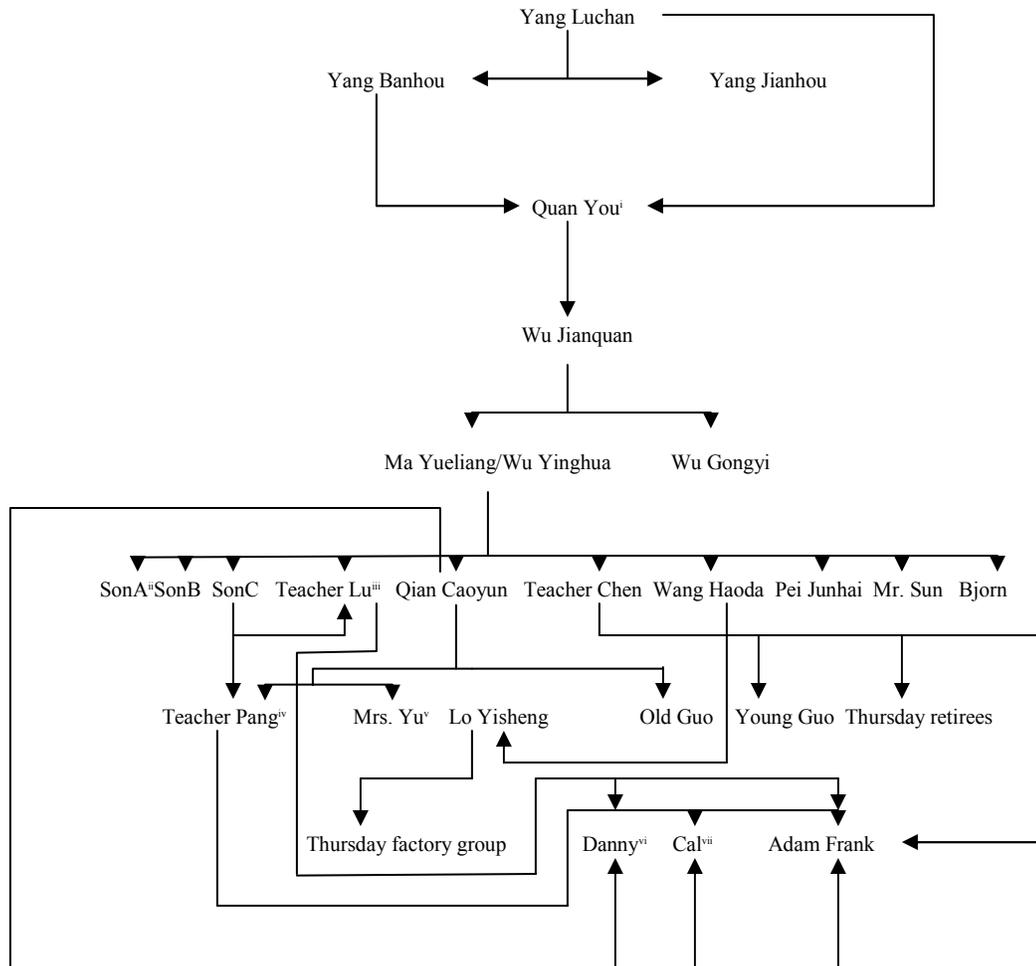
## Part VI

105	Left High Scout Horse	<i>Zuo gao tan ma</i>
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106	Palm to the Face	<i>Ying mian zhang</i>
107	Intersecting Waving Lotus [kick]	<i>Shi zi bai lian</i>
108	Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
109	Step Forward, Strike Crotch	<i>Jin bu zhi dang chui</i>
110	Step Up, Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Shang bu lan que wei</i>
111	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
112	Downward Posture	<i>Xia shi</i>
113	Step Up Seven Starts	<i>Shang bu qi xing</i>
114	Step Back and Ride the Tiger	<i>Tui bu kua hu</i>
115	Turn Body, Lunge at the Face with Palm	<i>Zhuan shen pu mian zhang</i>
116	Turn Body, Double Waving Lotus [kick]	<i>Fan shen shuang bai lian</i>
117	Bend the Bow and Shoot the Tiger	<i>Wan gong she hu</i>
118	Left High Scout Horse	<i>Zuo gao tan ma</i>
119	Palm to the Face	<i>Ying mian zhang</i>
120	Turn Body, Left-falling Body Blow	<i>Fan shen pie shen chui</i>
121	Step Up, Left High Scout Horse	<i>Shang bu zuo gao tan ma</i>
122	Step Forward, Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Jin bu lan que wei</i>
123	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
124	Close Taiji	<i>He taiji</i>

## Appendix II: JTA Lineage Chart

The purpose of this chart is to assist the reader in keeping track of relationships within the JTA. The arrows move in the direction of teacher to student. The reader should note, however, that graphic representations of lineage may be highly misleading. The chart, for example, fails to reflect the complexity of relationships, degrees of closeness, duration of relationship, and even mixed feelings that JTA members have about their allegiances to particular teachers. Nor does it differentiate between formal discipleship (*tudi*) and non-disciple status. I attempt to address some of these nuances in the footnotes below.



<sup>i</sup> Quan You studied first with Yang Luchan, but underwent the *baishi* ceremony with Luchan's son, Banhou, after Luchan's death. One explanation for this is that it would have been improper for Quan You to have been considered a lineage brother on equal status with Banhou. Ma/Wu family members, however, do speak of Quan You as an equal or better in terms of skill.

<sup>ii</sup> This chart does not reflect all of the sons and daughters of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. Nor do the designations of A, B, and C reflect the age order of the three sons I do mention. I have chosen the A-B-C designation as a means of protecting confidentiality, though I admit this is probably a futile gesture. Chinese government officials watched my movements closely during my 2001 fieldwork and could easily identify participants in the research, despite my efforts to hide their identities.

<sup>iii</sup> Teacher Lu was a formal disciple (*tudi*) of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, but credits their son with teaching him much of his push hands. He and the son were schoolmates, however, and he calls the son a friend rather than "teacher."

<sup>iv</sup> Teacher Pang was a disciple (*tudi*) of Qian Caoyun, but considers Ma Yueliang and his son, with whom he also studied regularly for more than a decade, to be his formative influences. His postures reflect the Ma Yueliang's rather than Qian's minor variations.

<sup>v</sup> Mrs. Yu's specific lineage is unclear. I know she studied with Qian Caoyun but am not sure of her other teachers.

<sup>vi</sup> Danny studied briefly with both Qian Caoyun and Teacher Lu. In 2001, he considered himself to be more of a *xingyiquan* practitioner than a Wu style taijiquan player.

<sup>vii</sup> Cal began his Wu style study with Qian Caoyun and later became Teacher Pang's student.

## Glossary

Note: I first give all terms in pinyin. If a term has a common, alternative romanization in American English, I give the alternative in parentheses.

<i>an</i>	push downward
<i>anjin</i>	push downward energy
<i>baguazhang</i>	eight trigrams palm (a style of martial art)
<i>baishi</i>	to formally take someone as one's master
<i>beifang</i>	Northern
<i>biaoyan</i>	performance
<i>bie qilai</i>	do not rise up
<i>bu diu, bu ding</i>	do not collapse, do not resist
<i>cai</i>	pull down (one of the "eight basic methods")
<i>chansijin</i>	silk winding strength
<i>chi ku</i>	eat bitterness (i.e. to suffer)
<i>chuangtongde</i>	traditional
<i>chui niu</i>	brag (lit. "blowing cow")
<i>dantian</i>	cinnabar field (a point near the navel)
<i>dao</i>	road, way
<i>fajin</i>	issue energy
<i>Falun Gong</i>	Dharma wheel exercise or "work out"
<i>fangsong</i>	relax
<i>fanyi</i>	translate, translator
<i>fazhan</i>	development
<i>feiyue shi kong</i>	Flying through time and space

<i>fengshui</i>	lit. “wind and water”; geomancy
<i>ganjue</i>	feeling, sense
<i>gongbu</i>	rear bow stance
<i>gongfu (kung fu)</i>	skill (in context of martial arts)
<i>guanxi</i>	ties, connections
<i>Guomindang (Kuomintang)</i>	Nationalist Party
<i>hen nuli</i>	very hardworking
<i>hexiangquan qigong</i>	soaring crane qigong
<i>Jianquan taijiquan she</i>	Jianquan Taijiquan Association (JTA)
<i>hu</i>	Shanghai
<i>hukou dengji</i>	household registration
<i>ji</i>	press
<i>jianxi xiushi</i>	novice monk
<i>jiben</i>	basic
<i>jiedao weiyuanhui</i>	neighborhood committee
<i>jijin</i>	press energy
<i>jin</i>	energy, strength
<i>jing</i>	semen; sexual energy
<i>jinshi</i>	successful candidate in the highest Imperial exam
<i>koutou</i>	kowtow
<i>laoshi</i>	teacher
<i>li</i>	strength
<i>ling</i>	nimble
<i>liuhebafa</i>	six harmonies, eight methods boxing
<i>Liujiazui kaifa chenlie shi</i>	Liujiazui Development Showroom

<i>lǜ</i>	divert, stroke
<i>lǜjīn</i>	diverting or stroking energy
<i>mianbaoche</i>	minivan taxi
<i>minzu chuanguotong tiyu</i>	traditional folk sports
<i>minzuxue</i>	ethnology
<i>minjian yinyuedui</i>	folk music troupe
<i>mulanquan</i>	martial dance inspired by the legend of Mulan
<i>neidan</i>	internal cultivation
<i>neigong</i>	exercises to build up internal organs
<i>neijia</i>	internal school
<i>Neijing</i>	Canon of Internal Medicine
<i>nian</i>	stick
<i>nianjin</i>	sticking energy
<i>ni hao</i>	“Are you well?” (hello)
<i>peng</i>	upward and outward
<i>pengjin</i>	upward and outward energy
<i>pifu ganjue</i>	skin feeling
<i>qi</i>	air, vital energy, life force
<i>qigong</i>	vital energy exercise or “work out”
<i>qigong re</i>	qigong craze
<i>Qingming</i>	Grave sweeping day in early April (Lit. “Pure Brightness”)
<i>qipao</i>	a split-thigh dress popular in the 1930s
<i>quan</i>	fist, boxing
<i>renleixue</i>	anthropology

<i>sanjiao</i>	the three religions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism)
<i>sanjiao wu liang jia</i>	the three religions are not divided
<i>Shanghai chengshi guihua zhanshiguan</i>	Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall
<i>Shanghai 1930 fengjing jie</i>	1930 Shanghai Street Scene
<i>shang shan xia xiang</i>	up to the mountains, down to the countryside
<i>Shaolinquan</i>	boxing style of the Shaolin Buddhist Temple
<i>shehuizhuyi</i>	socialism
<i>shi</i>	poetic form popularized in Eastern Han Period (A.D. 25-220)
<i>shifu</i>	teacher, master
<i>shisan shoufa</i>	thirteen hand methods
<i>taiji (t'ai chi)</i>	supreme ultimate, utmost extreme
<i>taijiquan (t'aichi chuan)</i>	utmost extreme boxing; supreme ultimate boxing
<i>taijitu</i>	diagram of the supreme ultimate (yin-yang symbol)
<i>tingjin</i>	listening energy
<i>tiyu</i>	physical training
<i>tudi</i>	disciple, apprentice
<i>tui shou</i>	push hands
<i>waidan</i>	external cultivation
<i>waigong</i>	exercises to build up the external body
<i>waijia</i>	external school
<i>wenhua</i>	culture
<i>wenhua da geming</i>	Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution
<i>wenwu quan cai</i>	accomplished in the literary and the martial
<i>wenren tui shou</i>	literati push hands

<i>wudapian</i>	martial arts TV soap operas
<i>wude</i>	martial virtue
<i>wuji</i>	cosmological state prior to polar opposites
<i>wushu</i>	martial arts
<i>wushuguan</i>	martial arts training hall
<i>wushuyuan</i>	martial arts academy
<i>wuxiapian</i>	martial arts movies (lit. “martial chivalry movies”)
<i>wuwei</i>	non-being, inaction
<i>wuxiaxiaoshuo</i>	martial arts novels (lit. “martial chivalry novels”)
<i>xiangang</i>	laid off; to be laid of
<i>xinyiquan</i>	“mind intent boxing” (precursor to <i>xingyiquan</i> )
<i>xingyiquan</i>	“Shape intent boxing”
<i>yang</i>	sunlit side of slope; hard, bright, masculine, full
<i>yi</i>	mind, intent
<i>yi wu hui you gongtong jinbu</i>	Using martial arts to become friends and progress together
<i>yijing (I Ching)</i>	Book of Changes
<i>yin</i>	shadow of slope; soft, dark, feminine, empty
<i>yiquan</i>	mind-intent boxing
<i>yongquan</i>	bubbling wellspring (a point on the ball of the foot)
<i>Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu</i>	The Legacy of Zhang Sanfeng
<i>zhanzhuang</i>	“standing like a stake”; “post holding” (form of standing meditation)
<i>zhen</i>	garrison post, town
<i>zhongding</i>	central equilibrium
<i>zhongxin</i>	center of gravity

*zibenzhuyi*

capitalism

*ziran*

natural

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## **Vita**

Adam Dean Frank was born on November 29, 1961, in Tucson, Arizona. He is the son of Milton and Eleanor Frank. He received a BA in Drama (1979) from the University of Arizona, Tucson, and an MA in International Affairs (1996) from The American University, Washington, DC. His teaching experience at the University of Texas at Austin includes Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Folklore and Expressive Culture, Culture and Communication, and Introduction to Theatre. He is an actor and playwright and a member of the Screen Actors Guild.

Permanent address: 2007 Alta Vista Avenue, Austin, TX 78704

This dissertation was typed by the author.