



Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man

Understanding Identity through Martial Arts

Adam D. Frank



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IDENTITY THROUGH MARTIAL ARTS

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*For Michael Phillips, Oscar Brockett,
and Deborah Kapchan, three
teachers who pointed the way*

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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 usage. 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 adopted 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 ch, sh	roughly the same as in English, 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 as 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 <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</i> -ah (quickly, as one syllable)
ian	<i>ee</i> -an (quickly)
iang	<i>ee</i> -ahng (quickly)
iao	<i>ee</i> -ow (quickly)
ie	<i>ee</i> -eh (quickly)
in	<i>een</i> as in <i>seen</i>
ing	ing as in <i>ring</i>
iong	<i>ee</i> -ōng (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>ew</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, “Thirteen Ways of
Looking at a Blackbird”

It was March 4, 2000, in Shanghai, and a forty-six-year-old teacher of the martial art of taijiquan named Pang Tianzhu had finally obtained his passport. At the American firm where he worked, one of Teacher Pang’s foreign taijiquan students shook his hand and wished him luck. Within a few minutes, Pang found himself on the subway speeding toward Shanghai’s American consulate, a letter of invitation to the United States ensconced in the pocket of his jacket. Like every other glistening subway car, this one sported advertisements for health formulas, real estate opportunities, and government-sponsored public education campaigns of one kind or another. Pang scanned these as he carefully buttoned his jacket, checked that his cell phone was fully charged, and anxiously attended to each station so that he would not 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 stiffies 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 that 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 his teacher, Master Ma Yueliang, effortlessly drifting 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 sound of one of the consulate's American staff speaking in heavily accented Chinese jerked Teacher Pang out of his reverie. The man led him 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 remains of a 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 with him 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 to teach taijiquan in the United States one day, 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. 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 Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS], now housed within the Department of Homeland Security) in 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 infamous 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, and even more so after September 11, 2001, visa applicants at consulates all over China have faced ever-higher hurdles in meeting the burden of proof. Decisions are made at the discretion of the officers who interview them. As a result, the standard for meeting the minimum burden of proof requirement is not uniform among consulate staff at a particular consulate 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. But Teacher Pang had no reason to believe that any of these concerns applied to him since he intended only to visit a friend and then return.

On this particular day, however, the visa officer took the unusual step of revealing at least part of her rationale for rejecting Teacher 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 spring afternoon.

This book is an attempt to understand identity as it is both sensually experienced and culturally constructed through martial arts practice in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States. Through the vehicle of taijiquan, a once-secret martial art that is primarily pursued as an exercise form and has mushroomed in worldwide popularity over the last twenty-five years, the book describes a personal journey toward an understanding of identity as a dialogue between space, history, economic relationships, collective forms of expression, and individual sensual experience. More succinctly, my fundamental proposition can be expressed in two words: identity moves. In its broadest terms, the book focuses on how human actions and interactions in the world are always in motion; 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. A major task of the project is to lay out the details of how martial arts, as conduits for the mutually constitutive construction and experience of identity, actually move transnationally through people, media, kung fu movies, novels, and 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.¹

Because the scope of such a project requires certain limits, 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, Australia, and Europe and the significantly different rules under which they cross borders. It is also important to state at the outset that I do not take Shanghai to be representative of all of the PRC. On the contrary, Shanghai is in the odd position of being both aberration and trendsetter. In places as widely separated 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, owing 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.

Taijiquan (pronounced “tai jee chuan,” popularly transliterated in English as “t’ai chi ch’uan” or simply “tai chi”) is the general term for a family of martial arts that include slow and fast solo sequences of postures; a self-defense training exercise called “push hands” (*tui shou*); solo and two-person weapons forms; yogalike 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 a comparable 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 wafting about in slow motion; badly dubbed Chinese movies; and tourist promos from the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that feature throngs of old people moving in harmonious unison through the morning mists.

Chinese practitioners in the PRC have their own stereotypes of taijiquan with which to contend, as well as their own stereotypes of the generic foreign martial arts aficionado, confronted as they have been in recent years with kung fu (*gongfu*)² bums, martial arts tourists, and anthropologists. During the course of my fieldwork in Shanghai, I began to see the everyday public and private rituals associated with taijiquan and other popular martial arts as opportunities for both *affirming* notions of Chineseness and *confirming* suspected differences attached to convenient dichotomies such as foreign person–Chinese (*waiguoren-Zhongguoren*), white person–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 space that embassies and consulates occupy, perceptions of identity sometimes took 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, relationships between teachers and students, consumers and producers, upper class and

lower class, masters and disciples simultaneously affirmed pre-conceived categories of identity and wedged open new spaces for imagining new categories. The contending histories of taijiquan which I will recount in detail in later chapters, contributed significantly to these shifting categories. For the moment, an extremely brief history of the art can show us where those perspectives came from.

Practitioners often make the claim that taijiquan has its origins in martial arts or esoteric Daoist practices dating back several thousand years. Historical evidence for the art—or a similar art—places it in Chenjiagou, Henan Province, in the seventeenth century. From there, it moved to Beijing and other cities across China, still a rather secretive, family-centered art. By the early twentieth century, famous taijiquan teachers had moved in large numbers to China's new economic centers, especially Nanjing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Beijing. With the fall of the last emperor in 1911 and the establishment of the Republic of China, teachers began to teach publicly, linking together and slowing down postures. Various families, including Chens, Wus, Suns, and Yangs, established their own distinctive forms. After the Communist victory in 1949, many taijiquan teachers fled to Taiwan with the Nationalist Army. Over the next twenty years, an increasing number of American military personnel learned the art there and eventually invited teachers to the United States. By the early 1970s, the art had begun to gain real popularity in the United States, primarily as an exercise and meditation form, but, for those who were interested, also as a martial art.

Following the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (ca. 1966–1976), China increasingly opened its doors to the West. By the year 2000, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of taijiquan teachers had emigrated to the United States, and thousands of Americans had traveled to China to study taijiquan from “real” teachers. By the early 2000s, virtually every mid-size town in the United States could claim a taijiquan class, if not a full-blown taijiquan school. Over the span of 150 years, therefore, 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, the vast majority of practitioners limit themselves to the practice

of a 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 prepares to make taijiquan a auxiliary sport at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. 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.

In this book, I emphasize the Wu Jianquan style of the art, commonly known as “Wu style,” but at one time or another, I also touch upon the myriad other taijiquan styles. The analysis is largely based on more than two years of fieldwork in China and the United States. 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, through the Ma/Wu family, the most famous PRC branch of the Wu style of taijiquan.³ Throughout, I have changed the details of key identifiers (name, profession, locations, etc.) to protect the privacy of participants in this project. The exception to the rule is that I have used the actual name of the JTA and 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 acknowledgment 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 Teacher Pang, the substance of his story is factual: during a visa interview, an American consular officer did indeed tell him that he appeared too young to be a real taijiquan teacher. I have fictionalized the details of Pang’s trip to the consulate to capture the sense of an experience that he shared with many other Shanghai Chinese ca. 2001. Where noted, I have made similar choices with other passages.⁴ To be fair to the international civil servants who work in visa offices, Teacher Pang eventually did receive a visa from a European consulate and has traveled to Europe several times to conduct taijiquan workshops there (returning to China, I should note, each time). Likewise, other JTA members have had greater success in their visa applications, and have either come to the United States for short trips or have successfully immigrated to this country.

The research for this project began in 1997. One day that summer, while conducting five weeks of preliminary fieldwork in Shanghai with the JTA, a Chinese friend and I practiced push hands in Shanghai's People's Park. As we concluded our practice, my friend offhandedly commented, "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, the self was the only thing moving.

After my return to Texas in 1997, I produced conference papers and journal articles on the concept of *qi* and taijiquan (Frank 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). The project soon expanded into a full-blown treatment of a subject that, as fellow taiji players constantly reminded me, would take more than one lifetime to understand. One Shanghai practitioner, a retired biochemist, admonished me at the start of my formal fieldwork in 2001, saying, "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."⁵

The formal thirteen-month fieldwork period spent in Shanghai between December 2000 and January 2002 involved daily push hands practice with teachers and classmates, corrections of forms that I had previously learned, and the acquisition of new empty-hand forms, weapons forms, and basic exercises.⁶ In 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 that 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, and regular push hands practice with groups in Texas and Maryland. Throughout the project, many students and teachers of taijiquan agreed to be interviewed 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 profession, 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 researching my master’s thesis on Chinese political theatre in the 1930s and, in my free time, regularly practicing taijiquan in the park with the JTA. The slowness of absorbing and understanding taijiquan is an oft-cited feature of the art, and for this 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.⁷ Nonetheless, pith helmet in hand, 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.

The details of *how* that fieldwork was conducted speak to my interest in combining traditional ethnographic methods with less orthodox techniques, and, indeed, in the ongoing project of developing specific methods for phenomenological ethnography. These methods grew out of my previous experience practicing taijiquan in the United States, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. In 1979, I began my taijiquan studies in Tucson, Arizona, spending about six months learning Yang style short form from Michael Phillips, and then learning some rudimentary push hands forms. Early on, I also learned several simple, basic stretches and occasionally did “standing like a stake” or “post holding” (*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. After my third year of training, I moved to the San Francisco 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 1987, I began studying Wu style taijiquan in Hong Kong and encountered the Shanghai JTA for the first time in 1988. When I returned to Shanghai for six months in 1995, Teacher Qian began to completely reconstruct and renovate the form I had learned over a period of three years in Hong Kong, but the process remained incomplete by the time I returned to the United States to finish my master's degree. A brief trip to Shanghai in 1997 helped lay the groundwork for the long-term fieldwork. In 2001, my daily research in Shanghai involved observation of and participation in morning taijiquan practice in parks, observation of martial arts tournaments, observation of and participation in the JTA's monthly demonstrations in alternating Shanghai parks, and discussion of taijiquan with practitioners. In both the United States and China, 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 (or perhaps did not feel comfortable with the way *I* spoke it), and I used interpreters when necessary. Participants in China did not generally wish to be tape recorded. Participants in the United States generally agreed to be taped.

Bookstores and the Shanghai Public Library proved to be primary archival resources in China. 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 reprints 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 and acquired from friends, on the street, through magazine catalogues, et cetera, 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, the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Asian American History Museum in San Francisco.

In regard to interpretation of the information I gathered from fieldwork, two somewhat unorthodox techniques proved particularly useful. 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 Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, and other American acting teachers who came out of the Group Theatre in the 1930s (Brockett and Hildy 2003; Stanislavski 1982; Meisner and Longwell 1987). Sense memory involves remembering in detail one's actions and environment in order to experience anew the emotions attached to the original event. 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 more and more came to understand identity 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 previous training as an actor, thus became a useful technique for disarticulating the moving structure of identity.

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 filming lessons with my teachers. Owing to a general reticence among my teachers to be filmed or tape

recorded, however, the degree to which I could rely on 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. I agree with Deborah Kapchan’s comment 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]

In terms of the broad projects of both understanding the specific processes involved in the formation of identity through martial arts and of 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.⁸ Likewise, Sklar (1994) makes a strong case for methodologies of embodiment that access certain kinds of cultural knowledge:

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 1994:11]

Sklar’s point is well taken, but there are other, more practical reasons for adopting such methodologies. One often-overlooked advantage of acquiring knowledge through practice is the place of practice as “safe ground” in politically sensitive circumstances. In the PRC, for example, while participants in the present project often expressed reticence about being tape recorded, they

enthusiastically shared movement. I conducted my fieldwork during an ongoing crackdown on the “heterodox” spiritual practice of Falun Gong (“cultivating the Dharma Wheel”). In that context, as I will discuss in later chapters, taijiquan became hyperlegitimized, but practitioners still occasionally expressed nervousness about discussing much beyond the details of the practice, at least in public. Relatively silent practice provided a means of 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 some taijiquan colleagues that the intangible feel of the person with whom I pushed hands offered a valuable means for imparting skills and transmitting knowledge. Teacher and student literally acquired a feel for each other, and that zone of feeling became a zone of knowing. This subject will also be treated in detail in the chapters that follow.

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.⁹ For me, this primarily centered on writing poetry and 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.

Jack Katz and Thomas Csordas (2003) have referred to anthropological approaches influenced by “phenomenological thinkers (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty)” but not generally referencing the key concepts of philosophical phenomenology (e.g., *epoché*, or “bracketing”; *lebenswelt*, or “lifeworld”; and intersubjectivity) as “paraphenomenological.” While my approach in this book lies within the realm of phenomenological anthropology outlined by Csordas (Katz and Csordas 2003, Csordas 1994), Katz (Katz and Csordas 2003), Michael Jackson

(1996), and other phenomenologically oriented ethnographers,¹⁰ my focus on motion and change nuances these approaches. That said, I certainly borrow from Csordas's notion of "cultural phenomenology" with its "emphasis on embodiment as the common ground for recognition of the other's humanity and the immediacy of intersubjectivity" (Katz and Csordas 2003:278). I also agree with Jackson's comment that phenomenology is concerned with "the fetishization of the products of intellectual reflection" and the implication that "one domain of experience is to be privileged as the way of truth, while others are disparaged and ignored" (Jackson 1996:1–2). Indeed, the concept of the lifeworld, the subjective world of lived experience irreducible to objective fact, is key to my argument that our constantly shifting identities are irreducible to the sort of singularization and compartmentalization to which they are subjected by a variety of "isms" currently popular in the discipline of anthropology.¹¹

This book attempts to contribute to the development of phenomenological ethnography by focusing on the twilight zone where theory meets methodology, taking a kind of quantum approach to culture that considers the contributions that Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, critical race theory, and poststructuralism have made to our attempt to understand who we are as individuals versus who we are in social context. At the same time, I make a modest effort to move beyond ideology-centered frameworks. The postmodernist moment in anthropology began quasi-officially in 1986 with the publication of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), a book that had the positive effect of demanding that anthropologists reflect upon their positionality in the writing of ethnography—in effect, that they treat ethnography as literature. This book opened a space for subaltern perspectives to move from the fringes to the center and, as Katz and Csordas (2003) note, created room for phenomenological ethnography. After *Writing Culture*, "culture" as a given, useful concept for anthropologists ceased to exist for a time, and dire predictions arose as to the imminent demise of the discipline. Well into the 1990s and early 2000s, this situation had the effect of creating a contentious atmosphere in which the various isms competed with one another in journals and within departments. It was not merely a fight between the old and the new, but also

a fight between contending pictures of the new. One largely unsatisfactory response to this state of affairs has been to pretend that those irritating isms never happened at all and return instead to a kind of modified, anachronistic empiricism.

The book is partly an outgrowth of my dissatisfaction with both the narrowness of the isms and the wholesale rejection of them that seems more attached to conservative victories in the culture wars than to the search for understanding that is still anthropology's disciplinary hallmark. Nor was I satisfied with unqualified deconstruction, the "I have no position" position, which, I believe, has grown out of narrow interpretations of French poststructuralists such as Derrida, Deleuze, and Lacan.¹² My response is a modest proposal for *reconstitution*, an approach that asks us not just to acknowledge multiple perspectives but also to apply these perspectives at appropriate moments to appropriate situations, then *reconstitute* them into an interpretation of sorts. My hope is that the method of understanding a particular practice in terms of constant shifts between multiple levels of analysis—in this case, in terms of the intersubjectivity of body, city, nation-state, imagination, and transnation—is applicable beyond the current work.¹³

One result of this approach to theory and practice—and perhaps a symptom of the "Californiaization"¹⁴ of Daoism—is that the chapter and section organization of the book models the *taiji tu*, the "diagram of the supreme ultimate," or, colloquially, the yin-yang symbol (Figure 0.1). My adoption of the *taiji tu* as a structuring device for the text is in keeping with the general notion that things, people, and relationships are mutually constituted in the world—an outgrowth of anthropology's long-time attraction to dialectical approaches to understanding human actions and beliefs.¹⁵ The *taiji tu* has arguably become one of the most visible transnational signifiers for the notions of "intersubjectivity" and things in the world as "mutually constituted..". Historically, the symbol has undergone several transformations. The version I adopt here is the most popular modern rendering of *taiji*, the first extant representation of which was found in the works of the Confucianist philosopher Zhou Dunyi (A.D. 1017–1073) (Kohn 1993). The *taiji tu* is also the symbol with which the art of taijiquan has come to be specifically identified. It is therefore no accident that it serves as the primary hermeneutic tool for this book. When I refer to the symbol at specific points in the pages

that follow, I do so to emphasize the flow of ideas, experiences, and ways of configuring identity that arise out of taijiquan practice in a transnational context. In drawing on the symbolic power of the *taiji tu*, I agree with Edward Bruner and Victor Turner that

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 important. [Turner and Bruner 1986:9–10]

Following this line of thought, the *taiji tu* is an “expression” that symbolically distills a core value associated with taijiquan. Where I differ from Turner and Bruner is in their minimization of the value of our “ever-shifting theoretical frames,” especially in the realm of expressive *practices* that cross borders like martial arts (Turner and Bruner 1986:9–10). My adoption here of an ostensibly “native” symbol as a hermeneutic tool also finds precedent in Max Weber’s use of “ideal types” as cross-cultural markers and Marshall Sahlins’ 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.). Along similar lines, Sahlins argues that “the historical process unfolds as a continuous and reciprocal movement between the practice of the structure and the structure of the practice” (Sahlins 1995:72). In looking at the transformation of Hawaiian myth after contact with Captain Cook’s expedition, Sahlins argues that Hawaiian culture did not just reproduce itself at the time of the initial contact, but that it actually transformed itself into a distinctly different structure through the contact itself (35). “Any comprehension of history as meaning,” Sahlins writes, “must recognize the distinctive role of the sign in action, as opposed to its position in structure” (68). Sahlins’s reference to “action,” or movement, is particularly salient to my use of the *taiji tu*.



Figure 0.1 Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (*Taiji tu*)

The *taiji tu*, therefore, provides a useful model for looking at the individual experience of both identity and social relations. According to the standard exegesis of 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 regard 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 unconsciously reinterpreting ourselves in relation to our environment and to others while being interpreted by others. In terms of a book on understanding identity through martial arts, it provides an abstract means of addressing key questions about “Chineseness”: What is a taijiquan teacher saying about being Chinese, for example, when he or she uses the word “*qi*” in a public lecture? At the beginning of the twenty-first century, how do both Chinese and non-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 tool 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)¹⁶ exist discretely and simultaneously, interacting continuously within the context of taijiquan.

Like the relationship between yin and yang—and like the blackbird described in the stanzas from Wallace Stevens’s poem that introduce each chapter—the interaction of the self with the world might be modeled as an ever-changing, yet changeless, process.¹⁷ I therefore reference the *taiji tu* throughout the book, linking it at key points to the enactment of particular identities. In using Stevens’s poem, I am emphasizing the process of repositioning that one must go through to understand concepts such as “culture,” “race,” and “Chineseness.” However, I am in the end claiming, as I believe Stevens is, that such things *can* be seen. In a response to Hi Simons’s questions about *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens wrote the following:

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 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]

Stevens’s view of poetry in many ways foreshadows the later poststructuralism of Derrida and Deleuze, particularly Derrida’s notion of *différance* (Coole 2000),¹⁸ but Stevens, like his contemporary Albert Einstein, does not reject the possibility of the knowable.¹⁹ In the sense, then, I am seeking the knowable in the abstract, I use the tools of poststructuralism to take an empirical turn.

The *taiji tu* plays out in the chapter divisions of this book as well. Chapter 1 provides historical context and then focuses on the bodily experience and social construction of *qi* (“vital energy”). Chapters 2 and 3 continue the focus on practice, but broaden the level of analysis to include the interaction between practitioner and practice spaces such as parks, alleyways, and factory buildings. Chapter 4 throws the analytical net still wider through a focus on taijiquan as public art in the context of the city of Shanghai itself. In Chapter 4, I also reflect on the interaction between body, practice space, and the city. Chapter 5 moves the analysis to the level of the nation-state, looking at how taijiquan becomes a kind of “master symbol” of Chineseness for national and transnational consumption. Chapter 6 focuses on

the realm of the imagination and looks at how body, city, and nation-state interact in the world of martial arts films, television, classical writings on taijiquan, and fiction. Chapter 7 describes a global marketplace for taijiquan, taijiquan teachers, and *qi*-related products and practices. Here, the levels of body, city, nation-state, and imagination interact in a kind of transnational Chinatown, a “Chinatown in space.” I conclude by returning to the body as a nexus of constant change, a kind of corporeal *taiji tu* where shifting perspectives temper and transform the individual taijiquan practitioner’s sense of self.

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CHAPTER 1

THE BODY: DAOISM, *QI*, AND THE MAKING OF SOCIAL-SENSUAL IDENTITIES

III

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

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

Summer 1997. On the first Sunday of every month, members of the Jianquan Taijiquan Association (JTA) host a monthly meeting at a different Shanghai park. These meetings afford an opportunity for the hundreds of Wu style taijiquan players from all over the city to gather in one place. Since the patriarch and the matriarch of the association, Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, taught for almost seventy years, many of their students and grand-students are highly accomplished teachers in their own right who rotate the responsibility of hosting the monthly meeting. Before Ma and Wu died, these senior students always invited the grandmasters to demonstrate various empty-hand and weapons forms, as well as push hands, the two-person self-defense exercise common to all taijiquan styles. The monthly meetings, then and now, provide a rare opportunity for the senior teachers and their students from the Shanghai JTA's many subbranches 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 in the association were measured (Figure 1.1).

The August gathering at Shanghai's Shangyang Park was typical of the monthly meetings. Several small open areas and squares dotted the park, and various exercise groups, consisting mostly of senior citizens, worked out regularly in its carefully cultivated gardens, on the wooded pathway that encircled the park, or in the makeshift grass amphitheater. By 7:45 a.m., late by taijiquan standards, I had not yet seen any members of the Shanghai Park group with whom I normally practiced, but after running through the slow and fast taijiquan a few times, I scouted around the park for a few minutes and finally found several of my classmates practicing push hands, including two of the senior students, Mr. Sun and Mr. Zhou, both of whom were 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 he normally shared emcee duties with his *gongfu* brother,¹ Teacher Chen. In 1995, Qian and Chen carefully shared monthly meeting duties. Their place in the push hands 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 200 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 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, the creator of the modern Wu style); 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 wore no special clothing or uniform to designate membership, so it was not always easy to distinguish association members from outsiders.²

Bjorn, a Swedish student of Ma's, also attended the JTA meeting that morning. We greeted each other and watched the proceedings from the edge of the performance space. At one end of the rectangular space, someone had set up tables, chairs, and a small banner bearing the association's name. Why had Ma not yet arrived? There was notable concern in the voices of those

who asked that question, an underlying fear that old age might have finally caught up with Ma, preventing him from coming. Nevertheless, various members of the “inner circle”—mostly Ma’s older students—sat at the table and 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 in boxes near the table, and announcing upcoming 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 push hands (*tui shou*) together or chatted. In this situation, where familiar faces were mixed with unfamiliar, taijiquan players exercised a certain degree of caution regarding whom they chose to push with, since an overaggressive partner might sprain a neck, wrench an elbow, or break a finger or two. The desire to push hands was expressed in several ways, ranging from a verbal request like “Push hands?” 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 backward and forward, 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” of *peng* (“upward and outward”), *lū* (“diverting”), *jī* (“press”), and *an*

(“press downward”) through push hands is fundamental to all taijiquan styles. Such patterns, executed in a noncompetitive manner, allow students to concentrate on loosening their joints, learning applications of certain movements from the solo form, and developing *tingjin*, or “listening energy.” 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. In the Wu style version of the exercise, punches, kicks, throws, and takedowns are all frowned upon, unless partners agree beforehand to include them. Of course, such techniques do occasionally make surprise appearances, and they are integral to the Chen family version.

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.

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 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 skill (*gongfu*), and, following solo, two-person, and group forms performances by a variety of lower-level players, it constitutes a show-stopping finale for every monthly meeting. On this particular summer morning in Shangyang Park, all of these variations of push hands were present.

As we waited for Ma to arrive, I spotted my mentor and one of the younger master-level players,³ Teacher Pang (whom we have already met during his trip to the American consulate). My use of the term “mentor” is meant to convey that Teacher 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. As a formal disciple of Qian’s, Pang remained somewhat beholden to his authority but often found ways to operate outside it. In fact, Pang more often identified himself as Ma’s student and as a student of Ma’s second-eldest son, using the term *xuesheng* (student) in these cases rather than *tudi* (disciple). 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 regarding a foreign student, this tenuous relationship was to erupt into full-fledged estrangement.

Teacher Pang greeted me with his usual ready smile. We were about to launch into a round of pushing when we suddenly noticed that the crowd had quieted down.

Ma Yueliang had arrived.

In this chapter, I am concerned with three kinds of stories and their manifestation in the lived context of individual and group practice.⁴ 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 many practitioners. The monthly meeting I introduced above is 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 China, I also call attention to the way modernist, urban interpretations of Daoism have kept taijiquan teetering between heterodoxy and orthodoxy over the last century. Third, I will take some initial steps toward exploring a personal lore of identity—the preconceptions and stereotypical associations about Chineseness 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. With these three emphases in mind, the multiple layers of analysis through which this book is structured—body, city, nation-state, imagination, and transnation—might be seen as way stations along the path of trying to understand how categories such as “Chineseness” and “whiteness” are sensually experienced through martial arts.⁵

In his account of romantic nationalism in the study of folklore, Roger Abrahams writes, “By recording and transcribing ‘actual words’ of an informant, we aver that we make a vital connection with some spiritually pure resource . . . 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 the 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 different lore to the occasion, it is not, in Weberian terms, a single, ideal-typical, little old Chinese man who is being sought, but many ideal types (Weber 1946). One common thread that ran throughout both the fieldwork and archival research for this book was the desire among both Chinese and non-Chinese 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” (Abrahams 1993:13), 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 on tape recorders or video cameras, and, perhaps more importantly for my purposes here, folklorists who have inherited, lived, and passed on contending sensual histories of the art, of China, and of the city of Shanghai. During the JTA’s monthly gatherings in Shanghai parks, concepts such as *qi* (“vital energy”) and *yi* (“mind-intent”) work as sensual-historical markers that allow taijiquan players to “make a vital connection with some spiritually pure resource” (Abrahams 1993:13). In other words, they evoke a *sense* of Chineseness by appealing to the imagination as well as the intellect. Moreover, they make a connection to specific, albeit nuanced, notions of Chineseness.

Storytelling about taijiquan offers a means of transmitting images of the past art into the everyday. Roland Barthes has written 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’s 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 thus constitute an important genre for performing subjectivities. As Deborah 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), visibility (film and television), literature, and, relatively recently, historical documentation.

Historical documents may, at first glance, provide the most tangible evidence for certain claims about the origins of taijiquan,

but it soon becomes apparent that history, myth, cinema, and literature are intertwined in the martial arts world. 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, and 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 (A.D. 960–1279) or early Yuan Period (A.D. 1279–1368).⁶ Zhang was born at midnight on April 9, 1247, a date that many taijiquan practitioners around the world now commemorate. According to legend, Zhang first mastered the Buddhist martial system of *shaolinquan*, and versions place him in the Buddhist Shaolin Temple, Henan Province, in his youth, as depicted in the popular Jet Li film *Taiji Zhang Sanfeng*. The film tells the tale of how Zhang and his best friend, upon being expelled from the temple and exposed to the temptations of the outside world, 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, he is inspired to create taijiquan, eventually defeating his now evil 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 mentioned 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, according to 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 over 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 it 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 that Wile (1996) has collected, the Chens taught the art to two outsiders, Yang Luchan, founder of the Yang style, and Wu Yuxiang, 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's taijiquan 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 will sometimes cast doubt that the illiterate Yang ever held any rank. To my knowledge, there is no documentary evidence that Yang ever 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. In that position, Yang Luchan is said to have 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. One question that is occasionally raised by Yang style practitioners regarding this story is why Yang Luchan, who would likely have considered himself a Han Chinese, would willingly teach family secrets to Quan You, a Manchu. While 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 remains unclear, but it is clear that Quan You became the official disciple of Luchan's eldest son after Luchan's death.⁷ According to interviews with the Ma/Wu family, Quan You was a high-ranking officer responsible for guarding the city walls. This would have placed him in the Imperial Guard, rather than in the Bodyguard.

Such seemingly minor details become quite significant in light of identity politics among nineteenth-century military elites. 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 were mixtures of Manchus and

Mongols. However, there was also a separate Chinese bodyguard corps (as well as separate Chinese banners). A particularly skillful fighter 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. By the mid-nineteenth century, Manchus and Chinese had discovered many reasons to connect at many different levels. During the late eighteenth century, many Manchu bannermen 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 the Chinese. When the Taiping Rebellion began ca. 1850, it was violently anti-Manchu. Manchu bannermen fought side by side with Chinese soldiers in Taiping-held areas (Crossley 1997:161), a situation that may have foreshadowed Wu Jianquan’s entrée into Shanghai society.

If the banner system provided limited opportunities for exchanges across ethnic lines, the demise of the Qing Dynasty provided even more. Together with Yang Chengfu (Yang Luchan’s grandson), Sun Lutang (a member of the Wu Yuxiang lineage and creator of Sun style taijiquan), and several other professional martial artists, Wu Jianquan began teaching modified taijiquan forms to the public in Beijing sometime after the overthrow of the last Qing emperor in 1911. 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. This change came about in tandem with the new Republican government's desire to become a player in the international community and a policy to encourage a sense of nation among a linguistically and geographically fragmented population.

In Shanghai, Wu Jianquan established the JTA in 1935 and taught classes on the tenth floor of the Shanghai YMCA to a clientele equally interested in martial arts, tennis, and swimming (Wu, Ma, and Shi 1987). This brand of taijiquan can be seen as 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. 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 (ca. 1937–1945), 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 (*wenhua da geming*) 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.⁸

In the years since the association reconstituted, several of the Ma children, as well as other branches of the Ma/Wu family and nonfamily 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 increased rapidly. 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 aficionados 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 is a reflection of the growing number of non-Chinese citizens who have journeyed to the PRC and then returned to teach in their home countries, following the lead of earlier pioneers who had studied in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, or Malaysia as far back as the 1950s.

A focus on place rather than practice yields a kind of sensual-historic context for the slow popularization of taijiquan over the last 150 years. Until the creation of treaty ports following the end of the Opium War in 1842, Shanghai was a small but thriving port city slightly inland from China's east coast. Following the war, it grew into a cosmopolitan city divided into foreign and Chinese sections. By 1863, the American settlement 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 (Spence 1990; Hsü 1995).

This was the beginning of Shanghai's reign as "the Paris of the East," a center for vice, drugs, and general shadiness. By the 1930s, the city had a greater number of 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 women and children, to fill factory jobs. The city's modernizing economy allowed for a certain degree of social mobility that produced a middle and an 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 as part of a continuing nationalist physical training discourse (*tiyu*; 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 attacked the city. By 1941, they had established full control, imprisoning foreign belligerents and terrorizing local Chinese. Despite the Japanese ban on martial arts

during this period, Japanese martial artists frequently sought out Chinese teachers for instruction. Chinese teachers thus either had to suffer the ire of their Japanese occupiers for refusing to teach or were ostracized from the Chinese community and branded as collaborators.⁹ Following World War II, Shanghai suffered serious famine and economic depression. A former navy man who sailed aboard the *USS Panamint* recounted setting ashore in Shanghai in 1945.¹⁰ He remembered a harbor filled with small merchant boats from which peasants hawked wares, prostitutes solicited endlessly, and starving children begged 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, identical versions 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, Shanghai 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 twenty-first century. 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 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 (VCDs) and DVDs, and taking a taxi had become commonplace for a burgeoning middle class by 2002. Built on what was pristine farmland only fifteen years ago, the "gem" of this change is Pudong, a conglomeration of dozens of skyscrapers, luxuriously wide streets, and modern housing across the river from Shanghai's old financial district.

For Shanghai people, these changes have meant not only new opportunities but a rebirth of class divisions and the emergence

of eerie ghosts of the Shanghai of the 1930s, including night-clubs that adopt the names of pre-1949 clubs, clothing and hair-styles 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). Things seen, heard, and smelled in the past rise like dormant insects from the upturned soils of "New Shanghai" (*xin Shanghai*), the phrase so often used in advertisements and official proclamations about Shanghai's progressive development policies. At the same time, ostensibly "traditional" cultural practices like taijiquan, which experienced something of a rebirth immediately after the Cultural Revolution, have found themselves increasingly marginalized. Many long-time practitioners have found themselves drawn away from the practice by business and educational opportunities, both in China and abroad.

* * *

It is not just the Shanghai of seventy-five years ago to which JTA members so often return in their imaginations and memories, but an imagined China of centuries ago. Underlying the creation legends and multivocal histories, the practice and performance of taijiquan that one encounters at monthly meetings in urban parks, and, ultimately, the experience of "being Chinese" is a persistent vision of taijiquan as essentially rooted in ancient Daoism. 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 (*daojiao*) that has seen a resurgence in China in recent years as a kind of modernist philosophical Daoism (*daojia*) that grew out of a Euro-American scholarly tradition of Daoist studies. The link to modernist conceptions of Daoism goes a long way toward explaining the continued immense popularity of taijiquan 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 antisuperstition 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 differences.

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. New traditions associated with these forms are “invented” and reinvented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), 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 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; “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; and the rise of a global New Age marketplace where quasi-Daoist, *qi*-related products and practices provide an arena for fetishizing Chineseness. I agree with Edward Said’s argument that a process of “Orientalism” is at work here that has its roots in nineteenth-century imperialism (Said 1978, 1994), but there is something else at play: a deep-rooted process of *internal* colonization that has occurred within China for many centuries and an accompanying romanticization of the past that intensifies with each generation.

Even without British, French, American, and, later, Japanese incursions into Chinese territory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the same fetishization of Chineseness *by* Chinese people would have continued. Taijiquan in its Daoist guise is a conduit for the fetishization of Chineseness. I would argue that

the popularity of taijiquan in China as a symbol of Chinese history and culture is attached to what is more properly called a kind of “self-aware,” self-orientalizing process—even a point of pride. The growing popularity of the art in the United States has as much to do with Chinese awareness of and willingness to capitalize on the American tendency to orientalize as it does with the tendency itself. This coproduced process of fetishization has its roots in the way Daoism, as a project of modernity, has seeped into the popular mind via Daoist studies, albeit in different ways and at different times, in China and the Euro-American world.¹¹

The history of Daoist studies, in one sense, is the history of taijiquan. 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). The same could certainly be argued for taijiquan as a subset of Daoism. Barrett 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. Girardot (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 1773.¹² As Girardot 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” (Girardot 1987:314), a position crystallized in Hegel’s idea of Confucianism’s “retarded spiritual development” (Girardot 1987:314). It was French scholarship, drawing on the work of the Jesuits that solidified Sinology (and thus Daoist studies) as a distinct field. Nineteenth-century Anglo-American scholarship was not professionalized to the degree the French scholarship had been, although the diplomat and

missionary scholars who made up the Sinological corps often engaged in creative and high-level work.¹³ Joseph 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-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" over the proper word to represent God in the Chinese version of the Bible (Girardot 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 undertook studies on the *Yijing* (I Ching), and Ernst Eitel produced papers on *feng shui* (geomancy) (Girardot 1987; see also Wong 1996). The Scottish Congregationalist James 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.

At the turn of the century and well into the twentieth century, French scholars dominated the Sinological tradition. Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918), Marcel Granet (1884–1940), and Henri Maspero (1883–1945) combined textual scholarship with anthropological theory and fieldwork (Girardot 1987). During the latter part of this period, popular literature on Daoism also mushroomed. Richard Wilhelm and Carl Jung combined forces on two such works: Wilhelm's somewhat free translation of the *Yijing* (*I Ching: The Book of Changes*) and his translation of the *Tai yi jin hua zongzhi* (*The Secret of the Golden Flower*). Jung provided commentary in both volumes. These works became extremely popular in the 1960s and 1970s, often among the same people who embraced Chinese martial arts in Europe and North America, and continue to 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 (Wilhelm and Jung 1938; Girardot 1987).

Wilhelm and Jung shared their concern about "primitive religious ideas" (Wilhelm and Jung 1938:77) with their counterparts

in the Chinese modernist intellectual elite, among whom Daoist studies had been an erratic affair since the beginning of the century. The May Fourth period (ca. 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 (Girardot 1987). In general, 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. 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* (“vital energy development”) 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, since martial practitioners of similar methods were already trickling into China’s major cities by the time Jiang published his book.

The appearance of Maspero’s writings in 1950 proved to be 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 scholars ensured that Paris would remain the center for Daoist studies in the Western world.

In China, Chen Guofu, a 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 twenty years has Daoist scholarship once again become an important subject in the Chinese academic world (Girardot 1983; Barrett 1987). In the United States, the significant expansion of China-related studies by the 1980s was 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 layperson. 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" (Girardot 1987), Schipper published *Le Corps Daoïste* in 1982, which appeared 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, 1990, 1995), he has been criticized for a "self-assured tone" (Girardot 1983:177) that reveals a certain tendency to proselytize. With the exception of Wile, Kohn, and a few others, this tendency reflects the one-way road that has been taijiquan's embrace of Daoism. Scholars of Daoism have rarely considered the modern practice of taijiquan and *qigong* to be legitimate topics of study.

For most practitioners of taijiquan, the claim to Daoism manifests itself in general ways more often than specific ones. Because the diagram of the supreme ultimate (*taiji tu*, or "yin-yang symbol") is the most famous symbol of Daoism, the name itself calls out to a mystical Daoist origin. Indeed, when push hands players engage in two-hand push hands, their hands, arms, and bodies physically combine to form the *taiji tu*, a fact that is not lost on participants at monthly meetings and other social events, where knowledge of such things lends support to both claims of skill and knowledge of the Dao. Likewise, yin and yang play key roles in daily practice. For example, in the Wu style, a palm facing down is a "yin palm" and a palm facing up is a "yang palm." Teachers admonish students if they are too yin (soft to the point of being collapsed) or too 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).

There is no more explicit link between taijiquan and popular conceptions of Daoism than the notion that taijiquan is a *qi* cultivation exercise. The concept of *qi* (“vital energy”) provides a bridge between taijiquan and Daoism, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), and many other aspects of daily life. While *qi* has many meanings (including “air”), in taijiquan it takes 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-alembic (*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. Discussion about *qi* at martial arts tournaments and workshops creates a space for the public fetishization 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 crucial to both the social and the sensual experience of Chineseness.¹⁴ It also constitutes an explicit bridge between the intellectual history of Daoist studies and everyday practice not only in taijiquan but also in TCM, *feng shui*, and other popular practices.

The *Concise English–Chinese Chinese–English Dictionary* (1980) 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 word¹⁵ and the even greater difficulties that an English speaker faces in borrowing a word that really has no English equivalent. One way around these difficulties is to look at the dynamic, ever-changing relationships between various *qi* discourses and how they play out in everyday life.

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 cultivation, manipulation, and issuing of *qi*.¹⁶ 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. 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 (*feng shui*, literally “wind and water”), *qi* is something to be read from the land to determine auspicious building locations and gravesites. In a social-sensual context, these contending discourses shift fluidly from one into the other, sometimes separate and sometimes existing simultaneously in the mind of the individual, creating a meaningful structure where socially and sensually constituted sign systems coexist at multiple levels.¹⁷ The *taiji tu*, and indeed the concept of *qi*, serve, in Clifford Geertz’s terms, as both “models of” and “models for” this interaction of discourses (Geertz 1973:87–125). 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. Taijiquan practice in a park becomes the physical manifestation of these models.

As is the case with virtually every aspect of martial arts, the emphasis on specific guiding principles varies considerably between teachers and 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 limit 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*.¹⁸ While harsh treatment at the hands of the Red Guards during the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (ca. 1966–1976) may have contributed to their reticence on the subject, they seem to have also genuinely believed

that dwelling on *qi* led one down the wrong road 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* are both principles that become 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 connotations non-Chinese speakers connect 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 concept, particularly when the discussion turns to martial arts and quasi-Daoist esoteric practices. In the context of push hands at monthly meetings of the JTA, the social-sensual 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, and 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 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 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 the Daoist worldview, permeates the universe and, within the microuniverse 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 “cinnabar field” (*dantian*), 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 martial arts circles (the banned practice of Falun Gong is the best-known example outside the 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 may claim 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 TCM and physical fitness. In the microlevel 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 specific meridians, containing several hundred acupuncture points, the TCM practitioner can alter the flow of the *qi* along these meridians 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 often 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.”¹⁹ Among all of these ways of seeing *qi*, for the nonpractitioner (or the nonpatient, 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, 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.²⁰ Through the 1990s, regular *qigong* programs appeared on Chinese television; large crowds gathered in sports stadiums

where *qigong* “masters” miraculously healed the ill and the lame; and provincial and nationwide *qigong* associations formed to promote physical fitness (Chen 2003; 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 “neo-Confucian” implies a return to traditional values (or values that are seen as traditional through modern eyes) combined with free-market economics. Like “neo-Confucian,” “neo-Daoist” also implies a response to the encroaching pressures of Western values, rapidly changing technologies, and economic reforms.

Yet for many taijiquan players, *qi* is not discursively constructed so much as bodily experienced, a position that has spawned a rich literature 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*). 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*. In letters written to the founder of the Crane *qigong* movement, Ots discovers “an emotional world unheard of in the *qigong* journals” (126):

I felt a stream of *qi* leaving the earth, lift me upwards and then turn me around in different directions . . . 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]

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 in which *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:

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 *qi* 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]

Like 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 belong to 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 *taijiquan jing*, the canon of classical writings on taijiquan. For Krotki “*qi*

builds very fine threads in the body,” akin to fiber-optic threads.²¹ 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 Manqing] school of thought.” In playing with the *qi* in his own body, Krotki does not think so much in terms of regulating 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 offtrack 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 that you were “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?”²² The *qi* travels in a wave through the body’s fluids. Here, Phillips’s modeling of the *qi* experience interweaves a modern technological discourse with a traditional Daoist conception of “an economy of fluids” interacting in the body (Brownell 1995). In terms based very much on his own bodily experience, Phillips is restating and recontextualizing an oft-quoted adage from the taijiquan classics: “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). Phillips is, of course, aware of the skepticism expressed by those who lack direct experience of *qi*. He relates a conversation with a friend who is an accomplished heart surgeon. Describing his daily experience of digging into the human body, Phillips’s surgeon friend remarked, “There are no fucking rivers of *qi* in there, Mike!”²³

In a sense, martial *qi* is *socially*, as well as individually, experienced—that is, there is a kind of collective experience of power when proofs are offered of taijiquan’s martial efficacy. Among Wu style players, the most famous example of socially experienced martial *qi* 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 then British 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*—not fake, but an entertainment of sorts—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 fared poorly when his own skills were tested against another Wu style teacher’s 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. Regardless of the gender emphasis, such tales of power form a bridge that both thrills the listener and strengthens social bonds within the JTA.

Edward Sapir writes 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 1994:33–34; 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 push hands player or the observer of push hands to relate the sensory and bodily experience of *qi* to the larger context of shared meanings and broadly shared social experiences. 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,

with a different sensual experience of *qi* or no sensual experience of *qi* at all. What that individual *then* observes or experiences in the push hands event becomes part of the master discourse through conversations and exchanges of information at events such as the JTA's monthly meetings.

Like *qi*, the principle of using *yi* ("mind-intent") rather than *li* ("strength") is also crucial to understanding how taijiquan and push hands practice within the JTA contribute to a sense of self. A central taijiquan precept that appears in various forms throughout the body of taijiquan classical writings (taijiquan *jing*) 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,"²⁴ including sticking, following, and listening energy, among others. In theory, the push hands player never attacks, but is 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 and then explosively release it as it uncoils (recall the buoyant ball in the pool of water from Jet Li's film *Taijiquan Zhang Sanfeng*). 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 equilibrium") and simultaneously learns to sense the opponent's *zhongxin* ("center of gravity"). This involves an active listening, where one is at all times ready and alert.

While all this talk of *qi* and *yi* 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, to understanding 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 push an opponent over with virtually 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 noted a

queasiness or disorientation, or even fear.²⁵ 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 issue energy (*fajin*) from a distance, and the “attacker” will hop backward, sometimes for dozens of meters. The would-be attacker may even fall over in the manner described above by Ma’s students. 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 backward in a centered, alert posture. Eventually, they incorporate this hopping into their push hands training. In a practical sense, the purpose 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 the *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 teaching method.

Some would swear by the method of pushing without touching, whereas others consider it a useless training device, reserved for what Shanghai television actor and martial artist Ren Nailong disparagingly referred to as “literati push hands” (*wenren tui shou*). A hulking fellow, Ren demonstrated his meaning to me 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 backward 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 that I was uninjured. Perhaps out of remorse, Ren later graciously secured me an audition for *Flatland*, a joint U.S.–China TV production filming in Shanghai.

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 not much 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.²⁶ Those who do follow it 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” (*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 or at monthly JTA meetings. 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 harmony that represents not only the best qualities of taijiquan but also modern notions of Daoism, as well as the best examples of what it means to be Chinese. Push hands thereby evokes an ideal type of martial skill, as well as an ideal type of person. The diagram of the Supreme Ultimate graphically symbolizes such harmony, while, as Roy Rappaport describes in regard 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 1994:13). 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 such an effect on JTA members as they watched him perform at monthly meetings and when they practiced with him is apparent in some of the comments that they made about Ma after his death in 1998. Teacher Pang, for example, would often remark about Ma’s level, “He wasn’t 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 his social equal, he often said, “Too bad you didn’t get to push with Ma more often. He was really something.”

Yet even pushing with the generation that Ma trained allows practitioners to take a slice of Ma's power away with them, albeit, some would argue, in a watered-down version. This held especially true for foreigners who studied with Ma's disciples. My own experience with Teacher Qian is illustrative (Figure 1.2). At a May 1995 gathering in People's Park, I pushed with Qian publicly for several minutes. 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 midsection. 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 backward in the usual Wu style hopping method, but this time I could not stop myself; it was 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 feet, legs, waist, and torso, eventually emerging 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. 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).

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, the crowd enjoys the demonstration of martial

skill, regardless of who is sent flying. On another level, there is the thrill of the exotic, since one does not see a foreigner engaging in push hands every day. Perhaps, to be highly speculative for a moment, the event offers a kind of symbolic throwing off of colonialism for some in the crowd. Regardless, 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 being seen as “not a human being,” of a tittering in the crowd, of the realization that whiteness is marked, suddenly experiencing what W. E. B. Du Bois referred to in *The Souls of Black Folk* as “double consciousness” (Du Bois 1969, 1986; Bernasconi 2000:182). The possibility that Ma’s skill can filter down to a foreigner presents special problems for the crowd at a monthly meeting, implicitly raising the question, “Can a foreigner be a Daoist?”

Ma’s symbolic power also manifests itself in more overtly social ways that, his students say, point to the true meaning of *Dao* (the “Way”), particularly in the passing on of martial virtue (*wude*). 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, for example, Teacher Qian had been pushing hands 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 martial artist who identified himself as a general practitioner in New Zealand and who frequently returned to Shanghai to work with Ma, Qian, and Chen. He 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 admonition among JTA members, “Use mind, don’t use strength” (*yong yi, bu yong li*), Bing often urged me in our encounters to “push harder!” and “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, Bing often pushed with tremendous force against all parts of Qian’s body, grabbing at his arms, legs, and the back of his neck; in short, he 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. On this occasion, Bing had been taking quite a beating from Qian, bouncing 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, Teacher Qian, and Teacher Chen regularly sent him flying through the air in an even more dramatic fashion and that he had witnessed Ma doing the same to lineage brothers 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 that day it was a clear show of strength at both a physical and a 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 a giant spring. Such displays served as important moments in establishing

community in the JTA. Perhaps more importantly, they served as direct instances where the social and the sensual met to coalesce into discrete, yet constantly moving, moments of identity for those who participated. Grabbing a human fire hose and pushing a human ball spoke volumes to city dwellers seeking a past.

To retrace the journey of this chapter for a moment, I began with the goal of finding the roots of Wu style taijiquan through a historical-sensual archeology of origin stories about the art; through an exploration of the links between Daoist studies as an intellectual enterprise and the configuration of taijiquan as Daoist in the twentieth century; and through a focus on the master ideas of *qi* and *yi* as conceptual Rosetta stones for understanding that configuration. Throughout, I have interwoven my own tales of power—events that happened during practice in Shanghai parks and that seemed to bolster the origin stories, to reify alleged links to ancient Daoist sages, and, very tangibly, to manifest the actuality of *qi* and *yi* for the practitioner. Regardless of the historical accuracy of the art's origin stories or the actuality of *qi*, for that matter, one can argue that taijiquan is more a product of modernity than of ancient Daoist sages.

Modernity, however, is not an ending point, but a starting point for the discussion of daily practice and urban images, of national pride and transnational flows, that follows. Or, in Stevens's words, it is "a small part of the pantomime." In the next chapter, I will focus on my separate interactions with three teachers—Teacher Lu, Teacher Pang, and Teacher Chen—to more deeply explore the dynamic construction of identity that arises out of daily practice and forces practitioners to alternately embrace and question taijiquan as ancient, Daoist art.

The crowd buzzed with excitement as Ma took his seat at the JTA table. His eldest son and adopted *gongfu* daughter took their places next to him. In Teacher Qian's absence, Teacher Chen now worked with several other senior teachers to arrange the performance lineup and conduct other business. Those who wanted to perform requested to be placed in the lineup, but the order remained in the hands of Chen. Within a few minutes, the demonstrations 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, we did not mind staying in the shadows.

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 and then gave a dramatic demonstration of push hands skills. In 1995, he gave similar demonstrations, though not every month. By 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 method, 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. 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, among 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 and social power, an opportunity to be reminded of what it really meant, at least for some of the onlookers and participants in the crowd, to be Chinese.



Figure 1.1 Master Ma Pushing Hands with Teacher Lu at the JTA Demonstration, Shanghai Institute of Chinese Medicine, 1995 (Photo: Adam Frank)



Figure 1.2 Teacher Qian Pushing Hands with Author at Monthly Meeting, Shanghai, 1995 (Photo: Anonymous JTA Member)

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CHAPTER 2

BODIES, LINEAGES, ALLEYS

IV

A man and a woman

Are one.

A man and a woman and a blackbird

Are one.

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

“Good morning,” I blearily managed to mumble to Lao Deng and several other seniors I had never met who happened to be standing within earshot. As usual, Lao Deng had been the first to arrive for Teacher Chen’s class in People’s Park that morning (Figure 2.1). As usual, I couldn’t seem to get my act together and arrived somewhere in the middle of the pack. On this particular morning, I had been a little less enthusiastic about coming to the park than I normally would have been: an American spy plane had been forced to land at a Chinese air base on Hainan Island after a nasty incident that resulted in the downing of a Chinese fighter jet and the death of its pilot. In response to the threatening query, “Are you American?” I had already lied to more than one curious stranger in the last couple of days, “No, I’m Australian.”

“Good morning,” said Lao Deng, cheery as always. With little small talk, we each began our morning stretches while waiting for the others. After a few minutes, Lao Deng ambled over to me and said in his usual friendly, but firm, voice, “We liked Bush Senior. We don’t like Bush Junior.” I expressed my own opinion about Bush Junior and muttered what was supposed to pass for a formal apology from the United States government, via a graduate student who happened to be the only American present, but which came out more like pandering to a hostile

crowd. A little uncomfortable with the conversation, we had resumed playing taijiquan—something we could all agree upon—when Chen arrived.

Every Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday morning, eighty-year-old Teacher Chen rode his motorcycle from Zhabei District to People's Park, the site of the old Shanghai racecourse in the foreign concession days, usually arriving between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. By that time, several of his students had already arrived and had begun practicing or at least chatting. It was a small group of five or six men and one woman (at times several), mostly retired. Lao Deng was the informal leader of the group. His daughter and son-in-law ran a blind person's massage center not far from the park that I occasionally frequented when practice had gotten the best of me.¹ Throughout my fieldwork period, Lao Deng was always willing to help me overcome one organizational difficulty or another. Aside from Lao 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, Uncle Ouyang, who was at the same time the most competitive and the most ebullient member of the group and who had a chronic bad knee. Uncle Ouyang and I began learning sword form with Teacher Chen at about the same time, so, *gongfu* brothers of sorts, we became fast friends.

Chen's practice always began with a ten-minute version of the one-hundred-move taijiquan slow form. He did not cut out any of the individual postures but did speed up the form 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, my other teachers in the JTA in 2001, but his movements were perhaps 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 had something to do with the era in which he had studied with Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. Having studied with them in the 1940s, his postures were probably very close to their version from that period. After Ma and Wu died in the late 1990s, followed soon after by Teacher Chen's

gongfu brother, Teacher Qian, Chen had assumed the mantle of senior teacher in the JTA. As such, he became an important link to the past, and it was Chen who now pushed last during the push hands demonstrations at the monthly meetings. He replaced Ma Yueliang in that role, despite the fact that the official head of the association was Ma's eldest son, not Chen. In general, the JTA thus remained a meritocracy. Teacher Chen did, in fact, hold an official position in the organizational structure of the JTA, which often placed him at the forefront of business matters. One could often find him collecting dues and distributing JTA newsletters at the monthly meetings. But he was respected both for his skills and his organizational abilities.

For the retirees in People's Park and for the younger players who interacted with him only on Saturdays and Sundays, there was a certain sense of stability and balance in Teacher Chen's presence, both in terms of the social hierarchy of the JTA and in terms of the accuracy of the art's transmission. It 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 handed down to him. Once a seeker of the Old Man, Teacher Chen had now become him.

In this chapter, I explore three Wu style teachers' attempts to impart *gongfu* (skill). My purpose is to use the intimate details of practice to address the question of how identity actually moves between the realm of the sensual and the realm, in linguistic anthropologist William Hanks's terms, where "situated experiences can be at once social and individual" (Hanks 1996:258). Can "thick description" of practice tell us about the fluidity or rigidity of categories such as "whiteness" and "Chineseness"? Is it possible that gulfs of identity—that is, gulfs between who I am and who you think I am—can be bridged in overpoweringly concentrated moments of practice, when awareness of the body supersedes all else and when, to paraphrase Stevens, the teacher, the student, and the blackbird are one? Must that awareness always be mediated through the lens of a lifetime of social

experiences? Or does practice lead to that ultimate Daoist goal: the letting go of self?

Let me address these questions first by reviewing the argument of the book thus far: that the art of taijiquan provides a medium for a social-sensual construction of identity that is heavily attached to modernist notions of Daoism and historically rooted in specific conceptions of ethnic identity (Han, Manchu, white, etc.). This argument, of course, has much in common with Bourdieu's notion of "habitus," but I am even more interested in Hanks's application of Bourdieu to "communicative practices" because I treat taijiquan in general and the two-person exercise of push hands in particular as habituated communicative practices. Describing the origins and nuances of habitus,² Hanks notes that several approaches to the term share "the concept that agents [i.e. people] bring to action an immense stock of sedimented social knowledge in the form of unreflective habits and commonsense perceptions" (Hanks 1996:238). As Hanks points out, "unreflective habits" does not translate to unmalleable "rules" for social interaction. At the same time, Hanks argues, selves are immanent in social interactions like language where meanings shift as a result of *corporeal* factors—for example, the physical space in which interactions occur. In a like manner, for some members of the JTA, the acquisition of taijiquan over many years is also the acquisition of corporeal spaces where fantasies of the past are played out side by side in the belief that taijiquan can enable one to directly experience the world. In their daily interactions in the park, practitioners sometimes note the interaction of yin and yang in the environment where they practice, in the movement of their limbs, in the internal movement of their organs—and, most importantly, between each of these levels. This internal-external conception of yin and yang is similar to anthropologist Thomas Csordas's description of the place of phenomena in his discussion of "somatic modes of attention": 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, the 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, and the unity of yin and yang, *taiji*. Thus, the *taiji tu*, the diagram of the

supreme ultimate (yin-yang symbol), represents both the separation and the intersubjectivity of subject and object. In terms of 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 understood only through practice. This state of knowing is the ideal in the ideal type of taijiquan (Dean 1998; Girardot 1983).

But Chineseness often finds itself in opposition to the sheer variety of minority identities in China.³ To some degree, taijiquan as it is practiced in Shanghai ignores these alternative, minority identities. For JTA members, 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 claimed as Manchu by the Ma/Wu family members, who are themselves of Manchu origin. A question arises, then, as to why Manchuness disappears in the JTA, whereas, for example, in the case of the Hui minority that anthropologist Helena Hallenberg has described, certain martial arts are configured as distinctly Hui.⁴

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 shares this invisible history with many families of Manchu origin in China. We can at least 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 considered a Manchu art.⁵

In terms of everyday practice in the China of the present, as Douglas Wile has noted, racial-ethnic invisibility versus visibility is a real issue, particularly for a white person who must deal with being an oddly marked category in China.⁶ I am not making an across-the-board generalization about JTA teachers 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 his personal conceptions of Han-foreigner difference in his own peculiar way and each of whom had a unique approach to passing on the art, even while they all remained true to the standards that Ma and Wu had set. Understanding the historical context of the methods to which I was subjected in the course of my training will help clarify my argument that training itself, as both a socially constructing moment and a sensually experienced one, is a key factor in the flow of identities that permeate the practice of taijiquan in Shanghai. As Hanks notes, social identities are discursively located (Hanks 1996). City person versus country person, old versus young, Chinese citizen versus Asian American, imagined little old man versus real senior citizen—all of these identities are at play within the structured genre of Wu style taijiquan. Taijiquan becomes a kind of language in possession of its own internally logical grammar, yet also its own malleability in terms of what Hanks calls “communicative practice” (Hanks 1996).

Having made the case that some sort of social mediation of identity does occur in the practice of taijiquan, I return to my first question: Can gulfs of identity be bridged in overpoweringly concentrated moments of practice, where awareness of the body supersedes all else? Much of the answer to this question depends on where and how the teacher leads the student and what pre-conceptions one brings to the table.

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 that night, which was fine, because my performance at our afternoon practice had been dismal—a proverbial step backward compared with several of our previous practices. Lu rarely criticized overtly, but his bitterness about a previous government’s treatment of his family had caused him considerable pain. His home—the very room in which we sat—served to remind him constantly 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. A young, Western-style boxer at that time, Lu had planned for a college education. As it had for many Chinese of his generation, the Cultural Revolution had taken its emotional toll on him as well.

Perhaps my own addictions and demons were 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 layoff (*xia gang*) from a 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 built 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 among internal martial artists in the United States and Hong Kong.

On this particular summer evening, we found ourselves 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 continued to live and teach there. When we walked through Teacher Lu's old neighborhood, he occasionally pointed out the villa where Yu Pengshi had lived. "His *gongfu* was just OK," said Lu. "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 usually refrained from criticizing other arts and teachers; Lu simply spoke his mind. While Lu's criticisms 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. 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 that 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.⁷

The circumstances of this arrangement were complex. I had had no formal discipleship with Teacher Qian before his death. He had asked me to *koutou* ("kowtow") 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 at a time. I had worked briefly 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. Among 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. 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 his past did not get in the way, Lu's teaching was all business. I discovered this 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, 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*. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Lu was a regular presence among the weekend push hands crowd. I had heard that he 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 amid 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 and 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 to Ma's, and he was fond of relating the story of how Wu Yinghua would tease her husband about his postural mistakes but later 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 taiji⁸ slow form, and I performed the first couple of sections. "You're doing old people's taijiquan," 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 founder Wu Jianquan in Ma's 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 when I should have been holding myself straight 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 with that of 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 Texas the previous year and that several of them had learned exceptionally well within a short period. He and the Texas 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 Texas teacher and even interviewed him in 2000. My previous relationship with the JTA and my relationships, albeit tenuous, with other people whom Lu knew seemed to put him at ease regarding my seriousness. 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 Shanghaiese businesspeople 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 were charged less. While I never received any sort of confirmation of this (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 revamping 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 reconstruction of the postures comes as no surprise to the long-term practitioner of taijiquan. Individual variations between teachers aside, practitioners experience 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. I agree with Edward Casey here that “habitual body memory involves ‘an active immanence of the past in the body’” (Casey 1987:149; see also Kapchan 1996, 2003; Stoller 1989).

In taijiquan, the teacher's goal is to teach history by teaching the standard frame (*jia*), that is, the set of postures 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). Still, as in 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 *taijiquan 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 be made. 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 to 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 of 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 the experience of 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 admonition as we practiced low postures was always “relax” (*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.

Attaining softness was not only a matter of developing a strong foundation through the legs. Proper alignment was 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 “listening energy” (*tingjin*) to “hear” the opponent’s force. Once heard, the force could be turned back on the opponent and amplified, but all this required a consummate understanding of the body that came from intensive, solo form practice. 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, Teacher 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 I heard from Michael Phillips, the teacher who first introduced me to taijiquan in 1979 and later became 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. I learned from Lu that 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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, initiated from the tips of the fingers. 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.¹¹

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, "Downward 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, Fair Lady Shuttles Back and Forth" (*shang bu yu nu 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 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 system that had to be mastered in

whole 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. If I asked to work on spear form or fast taijiquan, he would usually 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 his 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 share 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, which dead-ended near the doorway to Lu’s home. Since our practice generally occurred in late afternoons, the postwoman 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 bicycle around with its heavy load of mail. It became instinctual for us to pause in our practice when people walked 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 videos 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, just like “real” anthropologists. I knew of these things, but the neighbors did not, so I simply smiled and gently admonished them for exaggerating. Anyway, what they generally saw was simply the endless repetition that constituted the core of the training method.

My interactions with Teacher Lu’s neighbors and the postwoman sparked my earliest formulation of the notion that “identity moves,” for Lu and I often lost ourselves in the practice, both equally finding joy in the intensity of it (or so Lu indicated) or in the harmony of the movement when performed correctly or in the power of a well-executed push hands technique, only to be jerked back into the “reality” of viewing ourselves and one another through the lens of ethnic identity. This jarring moment often came in the form of a smile from a well-meaning neighbor, a smile that would have been absent, I imagined, or at least meant something else had I been Chinese. I am not whining or carping here about some overromanticized, lost moment of racial harmony, some lost “can’t we all get along” moment. Rather, I am arguing that the moment of identity negation that occurs in practice is a noticeable, liminal, agreed-upon one that fundamentally shifts our viewpoint of one another. We don’t deny difference, but the difference now is *different*.

Back in the alley, attaining a “sense” (*ganjue*) of the movement received 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.

This teaching method played an even greater role in our push hands practice. 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 his 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 four basic 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, and shoulder stroking). 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 the minimal force necessary 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 and 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 be nursing a 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 sensing 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 high-level skill or the kind of near-magical powers that we had all come to expect from old teachers like Ma Yueliang.

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 acquired 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, 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 were feelings of intense dejection that arose when, for a fleeting moment, I seemed to understand some elusive principle in push hands, and then lost it. 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.

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 in his sitting room. If his wife was present, she would join in. In 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: 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 U.S.–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 midair collision that led to the political crisis. Lu did not consider himself an educated man—in fact, he felt that life had cheated him somewhat in this regard—but, like many Shanghai people, he kept up with world events and with the domestic news. However, our conversation inevitably 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?” Lu asked.

“Just a little.”

“So what did you think?”

“He seems pretty good. Very relaxed.”

“He doesn't have much *gongfu*,” Lu said and then 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,” Lu said. “He wants me to show him push hands.”

Teacher Lu's interest in my relationship with Liu Jianwu could be interpreted as a comment on our own relationship as Chinese teacher–foreign student, for having a foreign student still held a certain cachet for men of Lu's and Liu's generation. On the

other hand, Lu may have reacted the same way if one of his Shanghainese students had worked out with a rival teacher. Within the context of our relationship, it was a sensitive issue, so I never attempted to explore it further with him.

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, I often cross-checked information with him that I had heard from other sources. My conversations with Teacher Lu often helped me sort through rumors that I heard about various teachers. At the same time, he was cross-checking with me rumors he had heard or impressions he had of other teachers. 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.¹² Generally, teachers and students from various styles respect one another's positions, but occasionally actual fights or intentional injuring arises out of these rivalries. The kind of checking that Teacher Lu and I engaged in, however, was of the milder sort.

Regarding matters of high culture, 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*)."¹³ 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 complemented the pottery.

Lu seldom directly addressed ethnic differences in our practice, but one incident brought home to me just how significant skin color was 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 Teacher Qian had overlooked my whiteness back in 1995. He had, after all, taught me some minor “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 that Qian had not 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 at the time 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.

My relationship with Teacher Pang differed markedly from my relationship 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 with Teacher Qian in Zhabei Park every weekday morning and with the group in People’s Park every weekend morning. 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 explicitly used specific postures from the solo 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 taijiquan, but as time went on, we worked almost exclusively on push hands. We usually practiced in my studio apartment 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 Pang and Cal to eschew park practice for indoor, private practice. Because Pang was working on different things with each of us, he preferred to teach us separately, and 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).

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 whom 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. Of course, nothing underscored our differences more immediately than my inability to read Chinese quickly enough to follow Teacher Pang's lesson. This hampered our textual analysis to the point where we finally put the enterprise aside.

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-cum-bedroom. In a manner similar 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 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 one had to practice each subsequent push hands method for several months 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* (he 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. My experience of 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 experienced 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; it was 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*.¹⁴ It was not unusual for Teacher Pang and I to push hands for two hours continuously without noticing the passage of time.

Intense, focused sessions such as these, conducted over many months, seemed to bear out the impression that push hands practice itself, as a moving social-sensual structure, led to erasures of difference that were themselves now part of the pantheon of identities that circulated between us.

Following practice, I would either cook a simple meal or, more often than not, Teacher Pang and I would take the elevator down from my twelfth-floor apartment to a noodle shop around the corner. There we usually each ordered a 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: Pang's son's performance in school, the rigors of travel associated with his job, my wife's teaching job in Thailand, Cal's wife's pregnancy, possibilities for traveling to America, and so on. The latter subject came up often. Teacher Pang had already experienced his share of unsuccessful attempts applying for visas at the U.S. consulate. 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.

Unable to help Teacher Pang with a visa, 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 secure a visa several times, but I had neither the material wealth nor the connections to properly compensate Pang for the treasure he dispensed. Since Pang would accept no money or gifts for his teaching, I finally suggested that tutoring his teenage son, Jin, in English might be beneficial for everyone. At first, Jin 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 midsummer, 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 shone brightly from a newly opened supermarket and a few vendors sold housewares, 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 that 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 whom 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 new 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, Jin 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. The molding had come from Shanghai's popular IKEA outlet or from one of the many family-run interior design shops that seem to have popped up in every corner of the city. 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,

boxlike 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 was the construction of a new subway line that would cut travel time to downtown Shanghai in half.

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.

"Sorry I'm late," I muttered sheepishly.

"It doesn't matter at all," said Teacher Pang, who was always forgiving.

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 had with Qian (Cal had recounted the story to me and Pang rarely brought it up himself). However, having studied with Qian myself, I knew all too well how withering his temper could be. I had heard that Qian and Chen had also had a problem with each other, 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's really not necessary to do the lesson. Jin has other things to do." I reminded Pang of our agreement. "All right," he said, "we can 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 compared to 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 had the educational opportunities of the current generation. In fact, he had graduated from a technical school with a diploma in machine repair. His precise nature made him the perfect choice for fine repair work, and this is eventually the direction in which he headed, working for several large American manufacturers in various capacities. Yet despite his level of skill as a technician 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 castelike belief that upper-class intellectual families like the Mas and the Wus could somehow better understand taijiquan. He also held the probably well-founded belief that the Ma sons had received secrets that nonfamily 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 and that in New Shanghai, one may not only reclaim lost rights to high status but also lost properties. Some nouveau riche Shanghainese have apparently taken to buying back properties that had been seized decades earlier. As a working-class person—at least in the reconfigured definition of that role in

post-Deng Xiaoping China—Teacher Pang considered certain kinds of knowledge inaccessible to him. Having grown up in a society where class difference is felt but carries relatively light historical weight, I never fully grasped the depth of class division in China. The willingness of Shanghai people to so readily return to it raised the question whether such differences had truly been mollified in any way by decades of socialist policy. Within the JTA, these differences were partly erased by the shared experience of practice, yet they remained. In my case, they were fairly obvious: to be “white” was to be “of a class,” and to be a “doctoral student” (*boshisheng*) was also, in a less historically charged way, to be of a recognized status.

Teacher Pang called Jin into the room, and we started our English lesson. Teacher Pang always participated in the lesson. The family was a close and loving one, so Jin’s occasional ribbing of his parents about their incorrect pronunciation of Mandarin was always met with good-natured smiles. His parents could not mask their pride in Jin, who worked hard during our English lessons and progressed rapidly. Teacher Pang, Jin, and I concentrated on pronunciation exercises and on 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 taijiquan 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 grew worried. I tried to assure him that the differences were too minor to affect his test scores on the off chance I gave him some “incorrect” American English, but I failed to convince him. Under the intense pressure of the secondary school examination system, the potential loss of even a point was almost too great to bear. Jin learned to use his own judgment in these matters, and, through hard work, he quickly overcame many of his language-learning obstacles. 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.¹⁵

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 of 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. That week, I received news that my father had gone through his fourth angioplasty, and I tried to explain the procedure to them. If the details got lost in my translation, they at least understood that 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 Texas apparently came off as a little inappropriate in Teacher Pang's house. Moments such as these forced me to pay attention to the wider context of my learning. I wasn't studying taijiquan in a vacuum. My focus had been so much on acquiring the feeling of the moves that I had begun to lose sight of other, equally important paths to knowledge. I had been placing so much emphasis on the sensual that the social had been passing me by. Understanding the art, I realized, also required understanding how to behave properly in my teacher's home. In a sense, this was a small part of the "martial virtue" (*wude*) that Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua had tried to pass on to disciples and senior students like Teacher Pang. And, in a probably unintentional way, it was what Teacher Pang tried to pass on to me.

After dinner, Pang wasted no time in launching back into a discussion of taijiquan principles. Tonight's main topic was

“sticking” (*nian*). 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 *taijiquan jing* and almost every modern taijiquan text mention the importance of sticking. But the actual training of “sticking energy” (*nianjin*) was another matter. The classics provided few clear guidelines for how to train this energy. Pang’s method was straightforward. We stood up from the table and moved it back to its place, and 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 as if 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 principle “Don’t let go and don’t harden up” (*bu diu, bu ding*). 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. 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 he 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. The ride through the night to catch the last subway at People’s Square was far too bumpy and dark for me 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 a flick of his tongue, in imitation of a snake's tongue, or he would pause for the moment and grab a nearby object, such as 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 worked on basics, practicing in silence. I had the impression that practice and silence comprised fluid shifts in how we defined ourselves and each other. In conversation, even when mistakes in my Chinese or his English pointed to our differences, our mutual enthusiasm for the art faded them out. In silence, the corporeal transmission and acquisition of knowledge through push hands constituted a literal embodiment of yin and yang (the *taiji tu* formed by our joined hands and elbows), a shared experience that neutralized difference in unique ways.

Back in People's Park, Teacher Chen continued to insist on maintaining the integrity of forms, a quality he shared with Teachers Pang and Lu. Forms are about tradition, preservation, respect, perfection. In taijiquan, 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 little interest in the form, and therefore taught it in a nonstandard 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, and 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 had studied once or twice weekly for more than ten years. With Chen, there were no questions about lineage or form, but he 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 experienced any animosity toward each other at that time, it was subdued, and, at least in the eyes of the public, they were simply *gongfu* brothers of roughly 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 a bit or practiced our individual forms. Most of the people in the group were working on sword form with Chen, but Uncle Ouyang and I, who were relatively new to the group, were starting with the somewhat 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. For 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, during my fieldwork in 2001, I more or less stayed on the edges of these demos. In the spring, when I formally asked Teacher Chen to teach me the saber form, I also joined in for form and push hands. Knowing that I was Qian's student in the past and 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 Ouyang and I began our saber practice, he would first ask us to run through the form together as far as we knew it, and 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 Ouyang and I then continued practicing while Chen turned his attention to the other members of the group. Because of his bad knee, Ouyang 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 on form practice, Chen played push hands for a few minutes if time permitted. 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 with other teachers had been. For Chen, taijiquan 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 superseded 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’s martial aspects, I came to appreciate it here as art, as a creative act that people practiced for the joy of it.

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 our experience of the world. For twenty minutes (or however long it took 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, whom both Lu and Pang considered to be still quite nimble (*ling*) at the age of eighty, it was really more about the art of the thing. Teacher Chen garnered respect because he seemed to embody more than just the technical aspects of the art. He seemed to embody martial virtue as well.

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 birthday 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. 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 the Ma family. At another table sat many of the other senior teachers in the JTA, including Teacher Lu. I sat at a table with the retirees and other invited students. I had asked a florist near my apartment building to put together a special bouquet for Chen, and they had done a particularly fine job. We joked lightly with Chen and took turns getting our pictures taken with him and his family. I had 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 reflected a hierarchy within the group, though it was notably not a hierarchy of social status outside the group; that is, doctors and professors sat with workers if they shared a level of status within the JTA. It was clear from my placement at the table, however, that I was in no way considered an “insider” in the JTA. My seat told me who I was not. Who I was remained unclear. 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,” suggested 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, and 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. Why did this small tale of power work in the way it did? And why did Teacher Lu request I tell it? What effect did both the content and my performance of the story have on our mutual perception of one another? In this case, I did not query them about it. My sense of the event, however, was that it served as a mild form of poking fun at the very differences that divided Euro-Americans from Chinese in Shanghai.¹⁶ My telling of the tale somewhat played up my friend’s angry reaction to the ever-present shoulder barge on Shanghai streets and his genuine surprise at literally running into someone from the JTA—and recognizing him as such purely by the feeling of the shoulder butt. My telling also emphasized Mr. Sun’s individual skill. It was a moment, in other words, of trying too hard to be an insider in the JTA.

Events like Teacher Chen’s birthday party seemed to bind the JTA members together. Especially after Ma’s 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 JTA 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 his grandson as a young child. The eldest son practiced the elder Wu's form. After his grandfather's death, the circumstances of war and revolution prevented him from studying with his parents as often as he would have wished. He devoted his time and attention to the study of biochemistry, though he continued to practice with his parents as time allowed. As with 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 the 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 was 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 who 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 and the younger *gongfu* brother of Qian, which, rumor had it, caused a rift in his relationship with 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 acknowledged patriarch or matriarch, such problems became increasingly pronounced.

While the relative uniformity of form among the high-level teachers in the JTA reflected a commonly held value in the association about the upholding of tradition through the “correct” transmission of postures, differences remained, especially in philosophies of teaching, and these differences spoke to the art of taijiquan *as* art, for in the realm of pedagogy, teachers could establish their own ways with much greater fluidity than in the realm of form, where genres are akin to languages. In form practice, one could be accused of incorrect grammar. My experience of simultaneously learning from Teacher Lu, Teacher Pang, and Teacher Chen in 2001 opened a window onto the differences between individual teaching styles, the politics of the teacher-student relationship in the JTA, and the way teaching and learning taijiquan entail fluid shifts between identity as sensually experienced and, in Hanks’s terms, discursively constituted social fields. Through taijiquan, practitioners sought to reharmonize yin and yang in the body and to reintegrate the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*). As high-level teachers within the JTA, Teacher Lu, Teacher Pang, and Teacher Chen emphasized martial application in their teaching of taijiquan, and yet their lives, each in its own way, were testaments to the therapeutic claims about the art. Following Ma Yueliang’s and Wu Yinghua’s example, they embodied the possibility of the integration of the physical and the emotional. Yet they would generally eschew speaking of such things explicitly or even making any claims about taijiquan as emotional tonic. For them, practice was practice.

On the other hand, in the context of the social, practice was also a means of establishing specific identities in a time and place when the lines between Han, Shanghainese, Chinese, foreigner, et cetera, were becoming increasingly blurred, or when class divisions reemerged along with the emergence of a free-market economy. Identity moves. For my “Chinese” teachers and for their “white” student, the sense of moving identities was a constant factor in our practice. And this movement through and between the social and the sensual contributed to the negation of identity, a negation that provided space for knowledge to be passed on. Because the self-conceptions of racial, national, linguistic, and class belonging created barriers in the student-teacher relationship, because the consciousness of self is mutually constituted and ephemeral, the very practice changed in the transmission—and the changing practice in turn changed the

experience of self. Identity moves in the sense that one moment it is there, and the next it is not. One moment my whiteness was preventing the teacher from passing along certain information, certain exercises, certain physical frames; the next moment the information flowed. One moment my search for the legendary little old Chinese man kept me from hearing what the actual Chinese person in front of me was saying; the next moment I was listening.



Figure 2.1 Thursday Sword Class, Shanghai, 2001 (Photo: Adam Frank)

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CHAPTER 3

PARK LIVES AND SECRET SPACES

V

*I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflexions
Or the beauty of innuendos,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.*

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

“We were just wondering if you work.”

It was one of the guys from Anhui Province who had spoken, jarring me out of my sword practice—one of the workers who maintained the grounds in People’s Park. I was just completing a three-hour-long morning practice session in the park, and the young Anhui laborer with whom I had a nodding acquaintance waved me over to join him and his five friends. Recently, I had been teaching English classes in the evenings, so I told him, “Yes, I work in the evening, but mostly I study.”

“You’re still in *school*?” he asked a little incredulously.

“I’m a research scholar,” I replied. “At Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.”

None of them showed much interest in that fact, and my friend just said, “You practice a lot.”

“I’m researching taijiquan. I’m writing a taijiquan dissertation.” This seemed to pique their interest, and they asked a few questions about the project. “How about you?” I asked. “Do you practice martial arts?”

My friend laughed. “Yeah,” he said. “I practice Shaolin.” I didn’t know whether to interpret the laugh as “Gee, I’m not very good” or “Yeah, I practice *real* martial arts.” A lot of people did not put much stock in taijiquan’s martial efficacy, especially in comparison with Shaolin.

I asked him about his life, 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’s common for city park bosses to look for workers on the street,” he said. “There are so many out-of-towners looking for work that it’s easy to find them.”

As a rule, with no residence permit (*hukou dengji*), they were illegals whom park officials had hired to complete short-term projects. Regular gardening and maintenance positions were reserved for local Shanghainese. Most Anhui workers were male, ex-military, young, and willing to work for low pay, seven days a week. The park workers seemed to feel that they were more comfortable than those who took some of the other jobs that drew on illegal labor around Shanghai. Park construction projects—such as laying garden stones, refurbishing bathrooms and kiosks, repairing plumbing—were generally less dangerous than high-rise construction projects, tunnel building, and road construction.

Their Shanghainese boss passed by. “See you later,” my friend said. I nodded a good-bye and headed for the Starbucks on the other side of the park.

If the teacher-student relationships described in the previous chapter constitute “structuring structures” of identity (Bourdieu 1991), then relationships that lie outside the teacher-student interaction, including our relationships with the physical environment, contribute to the formation of sometimes very different identities. Revisiting the path I laid out earlier, park, city, nation-state, imagination, and transnation all ultimately find their location in the body of the individual taijiquan player, who is both a recording medium of the art passed on to him or her and an actor upon the world that produces the art. Viewing ourselves through the lens of the art, the lens of practice, we discover different “selves” from each of these multiple viewpoints and, at the same time, a discrete “self” that is the coalescence of

viewpoints—the three-in-one quality of the *taiji tu* manifested in the everyday. My interaction with my Anhui friend brought home this point in full force. On the one hand, there is the limited vision we human beings have of one another. We structure, but we resist being structured. We don't know which to prefer: the beauty of ourselves or the beauty of the other. On the other hand, our conversation generated a much simpler insight as well—one that is key to the argument I put forward in this book and that structures this chapter: identity is inevitably a calibration of selves at any given moment—ourselves interacting *with* space (including social space) and ourselves *as* space. My Anhui friend and I momentarily measured ourselves against each other—my self-consciousness of whiteness and privilege versus his apparent poverty and lack of education, his momentary assessment of me as taijiquan guy or overage student. At the same time, in addition to our one-to-one relationship, we each had our own one-to-infinity relationships to contend with—our private, sensory interface with the people around us, the ground below us, the trees in the park, the ballroom dance music floating in the morning air, the scent of steamed corn wafting over from the snack stand, the blaring of taxi horns on the street just beyond the wall, our hearts pounding in our chests, et cetera. So our minor attempt to understand each other in that brief conversation contained not only a struggle over language, class, power, and ethnicity but the obstacle of our sense of self in the world at large—how we had actually been wired, through layer upon layer of experience, to place ourselves in the electric buzz of the world.

In this chapter, I continue to trace the path of my own practice, but now begin to layer in that “electric buzz,” focusing on the relationships I formed in several parks with an assortment of JTA members, taijiquan practitioners from other schools, self-taught *qigong* practitioners, and, ultimately, the parks themselves. I continue to call upon the metaphor of the body of the taijiquan practitioner as recorder, but the experiences recorded now become much more chaotic, more garbled, and considerably harder to interpret. There is static.

“Liu Jianwu should be here in a minute,” said Old Wang, one of the accomplished non-JTA taijiquan players I occasionally

ran into in Haiyang Park. Having already roused Teacher Lu's jealousies over my previous interactions with Liu Jianwu, I kept one eye cocked for any sign of Lu while concentrating on my push hands play with Old Wang. Since I kept getting lightly bounced back and forth by the seventy-year-old Wang, it was a little difficult to keep watch. "Anyway," I told myself, "Lu's going to find out, so don't worry about it." After all, Lu knew about my research and knew that I interviewed taijiquan players of all styles. He also knew, I hoped, that I would not purposely deceive him in any way.

"I look left," said Old Wang, citing an old taijiquan precept. "You go right." And sure enough I did. I begged off for a moment, took a breath, and suddenly noticed how pretty and full of life Haiyang Park was in the morning. The park had a vitality of its own, and it was an important place for the JTA, as well as countless other groups. For decades it had been one of the central meeting places in the old French Concession neighborhood for the JTA. Since a famous disciple 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. I knew that if I went there on my own and played with other teachers, there was always a chance that 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. But I was ignorant of the rivalries and the nuances of these decades-old relationships and therefore at a disadvantage.

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 the park rather than heading into it when the gates opened in the morning. Couples sometimes wandered out of the bushes late at night. On this particular spring morning, when the remnants of a winter chill still hung in the air, several small groups of old people stood huddled outside the gate, waiting to enter the park. I bought the last of the winter sweet potatoes from a vendor, who stood next to his hot coals to stay warm, and took in the beauty of the morning. Several cleaners in municipal government work-clothes and maintenance workers in army fatigues pulled out tools, 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. Here, however, even the rushing had its own 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's face registered surprise that I, a foreigner, held a monthly pass. The passes were not difficult to obtain, but few foreigners spent enough time in the parks to bother getting one. She smiled and said, "You'll need to get a new monthly pass in three days."

Inside the gates, a large, open space filled with freshly planted flowers in preparation for a government-sponsored flower festival greeted those of us who entered from the back gate. A snack shop, a small teahouse, and several newly renovated offices lined the walkway. A large statue of Karl Marx towered over us, terracotta warrior style. Several old men had already begun their stretching and warm-up exercises around the base of the statue. A little further on, a choral group 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 on small children, still sleepy from rising so early in the morning. Several old people had deposited themselves on benches that would remain their 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.

One of the seniors, a thin man in a long wool coat who appeared to be in his eighties, came close to me and whispered fiercely in my ear, "Be careful! There are police everywhere in this park!" I noticed something more than fear. "Don't be fooled," he continued. "It looks peaceful and beautiful here, sir, but there are police everywhere." Tears welled in his eyes, and he leaned in closer. "I was in prison for many years. Don't be fooled by the beauty!" I tried to speak with him, but he looked about furtively and walked away.

Had the encounter been anything unusual, I might have been more shaken. But the detritus of the Japanese occupation or the Civil War or the Cultural Revolution or the current

socialist-capitalist police state largely spent its day in the park, where it could watch and be watched. The old, the mentally ill, the marginalized disabled, out-of-work veterans, wayward foreigners, and, of course, people who wanted to exercise before work inhabited the park like hungry ghosts on a weekday morning, so the thin old man's story seemed all too normal here. That morning, I had gone 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 first come to Haiyang in search of Liu Jianwu because I had learned of him from a well-known taiji teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area. Liu Jianwu had become even better known after 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. One day, I had been watching Old Wang and one or two other men practicing push hands following my own practice with Teacher Lu. I introduced myself and discovered that Old Wang was a student of Liu Jianwu's. He alerted me that Liu usually practiced at Haiyang when he was not out of the country conducting workshops as part of his duties as head of an international *qigong* organization. I finally met Liu Jianwu that morning. When he found out that I was a student of Teacher Lu's, he turned reticent about participating in an interview. He seemed slightly uncomfortable, so I stood to the side and simply watched him push hands with Old Wang at first.

Liu first assumed a basic push hands posture with Old Wang. 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 Teacher Lu and was a staple of the Wu style system. Originally a Yang style player, Liu, however, really did not consider himself a taijiquan 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.

At Old Wang's invitation (not Liu's), I prepared to push hands with Liu. His energy was both full and soft. I tried to "hear" his intention, as he instructed me, and jump back according to the strength of what I heard, but failed to do so.

"You don't have the sensitivity yet," Old Wang said. "You don't have the sensitivity to hear energy properly." Apart from giving some simple instructions, Liu himself remained silent. We continued in this way for several minutes, pausing occasionally to let some rollerblading Japanese exchange students go by. While Liu would not engage in any sort of freestyle push hands with me, Old Wang sometimes would. Occasionally, Teacher Lu's actor friend joined this group as well. In fact, it was during one of these visits that the actor executed his famous full-belly strike against me, sending me flying several feet backward through the air.

Despite my strong desire to spend more time talking to Liu, nothing I said moved him. He politely but firmly refused.

It was still early, barely past eight, so I began to make my rounds. I briefly ran into my friend Danny, a young Shanghainese martial artist whom Cal had introduced to me several months earlier. Danny was practicing push hands with a small group I did not recognize. We chatted for a while, pushed for a few minutes, and made an appointment to meet up at his apartment at a later date.

Near the fishing pond, a middle-aged man we knew as Crazy Mao pushed hands with someone in his usual aggressive way, apparently with the intention of starting a fight. When Crazy Mao saw me, he ambled over and began to expound upon his many theories of taijiquan. I had found that agreeing with his theories seemed to calm him.¹ Still, I could not dissuade him from personally demonstrating his skills.

"Let's push hands! Let's push hands!" Crazy Mao urged. Not wanting to be impolite, I reluctantly complied. Crazy Mao's hands and nails were usually dirty and his movements wild and awkward, so my main concern when pushing with him was to avoid getting 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 was 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.

What does one make of the assault on the senses that was a single morning in Haiyang Park? In terms of learning the art of taijiquan, the kind of practice I encountered in Haiyang provided an important opportunity to test my skills and knowledge. As time went on, however, I began to heed my teachers' advice that these encounters could be counterproductive. The desire to win, the fear of losing face in front of taijiquan players from another school, and the usual spectacle of being watched as if I were a trained monkey made push hands with strangers or near-strangers a tricky proposition. I learned the value of losing, both as a means of progressing in my skills and as a means of strengthening relationships in the park. It was certainly counterintuitive, especially in a place where maintaining face is valued so highly, but losing in the park garnered respect from those I most wished to garner it from and served as a kind of deterrent against those I wished to avoid.

Beyond practice, however, the life of the park brought into focus the spatial relationship I noted at the beginning of this chapter: our selves interacting *with* space versus ourselves *as* space. My twice-weekly tour of Haiyang Park, usually before or after a meeting with Teacher Lu, certainly involved an interaction with space, that is, a person actually moving through the space of the park. In Haiyang Park, the self *as* space came through at odd, disconcerting moments, like the thin, terrified old man who warned me about the police. Though obviously social, our interaction went beyond the social. His fear was tangible and penetrated any veneer of professional detachment with which I might have entered the park that morning. His fear—and with it, perhaps a slice of Chinese history—actually penetrated my space. A taijiquan or *qigong* practitioner might have said that the thin old man had “issued” bad *qi* in my direction—not evil, but bad in the sense of a suffering ghost who seeks solace. Likewise, Crazy Mao issued another kind of bad *qi* that again penetrated whatever social shield I had put up. After these encounters, I began to understand something that my Swedish friend had described and even the claims that many Wu style players had made that Ma Yueliang could push them over with barely a touch or no touch at all. Some taijiquan players and other martial artists had described it as the development of “sensing,” an ability to sense

and instinctually size up the quality of a situation, dangerous or otherwise. I found myself consciously applying this principle on the street, on the bus, and even on the phone. Unlike paranoia, the sensing of danger that taijiquan players claim to develop actually has a calming effect.² My experiences in Haiyang and in other contexts corroborated the description of the feeling, if not its origins. I found it useful to equate it with the notion of the body, more precisely the self, as space that could be penetrated.

If only I could have understood the folk song that Old Lady Jian belted out at the top of her lungs from time to time in People's Park, I might have understood what lay beneath the "model-China" veneer that had turned the park into anything but a park for the common folk. Whatever she was singing, the Anhui workers found it amusing. They snickered among themselves as they worked on something by the men's bathroom.

"She's crazy," said Young Guo, one of my push hands partners that Sunday morning, shaking his head and smiling as he nodded in her direction. "Something must have happened to her."

"She's nice," I said. "Maybe she's crazy, but she seems like a good person."

Old Lady Jian drifted over to me and held out a hand. Like many of the characters who inhabited People's Park, I recognized her from several years earlier. I never knew if she remembered me or not, but she certainly came to know me now as someone who could be relied upon for a small handout. Barely pausing in my push hands, I gave her some change, and she moved off toward someone else. One or two others gave her money, too, but mostly they waived her off.

"You shouldn't encourage her," said Young Guo. I just shrugged.

Young Guo and I had been pushing for quite some time, ever since Teacher Chen finished his Sunday class with the retirees, in which I had participated, and sped off on his motorcycle for another round of teaching at Zhabei Park.

"I need to rest for a minute," I told Young Guo.

"You're not an old man," he admonished me.

"I've been here since seven!" I protested. It was almost ten by then, and most of the Sunday morning crowd was present: Old

Guo (Young Guo's brother), as well as Mr. Sun and several of the other regulars. Teacher Lu had mentioned that he might drop by, and even Teacher Pang had said he might come. He still joined the group now and then, usually on the way to meet with me for our afternoon practice. Mrs. Yu, one of the few women who joined the weekend practices these days, stood off by a tree, smoking a cigarette. And some of Teacher Qian's students from my time back in 1995 pushed together, though noticeably less seriously than they had in the Qian days.

It was turning into another incredibly hot and humid July day, and I nursed my bottle of water slowly, trying to make it last. I noticed Mr. Xu, another regular People's Park character—and a particularly skilled *qigong* practitioner—on the periphery of our practice space scolding people with his fan in his usual manner. With his traditional clothing style and uninhibited actions that seemed to mimic images Shanghai locals saw nightly in television serials about the old Daoist masters, Mr. Xu was probably the closest thing to the popular conception of a Daoist mystic that the park had to offer. Winter or summer, Xu wore a light, long-sleeved *gongfu* suit and carried the 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. 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 self-invented 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, and he studied taijiquan very seriously for its health benefits. He 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 rib cage. 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, the method we all saw in the park. Now in his fifties, he had acquired a small, but enthusiastic, following in

People's Park that mostly consisted of retired women. He accepted no money for his teaching, merely inviting people to walk along with him if they were so inclined.

Xu's movements were unusual and, coupled with his behavior, occasionally attracted unwanted attention from the police. During one conversation some weeks earlier, 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 in 1999, everyone in the park assumed that Big Brother was watching (my thin friend in Haiyang Park was not alone on this count). The added presence of a foreigner made the situation even more tense.

On this particular Sunday, however, Xu and I just smiled and briefly greeted each other. Walking in place and never pausing, Xu said hello, waved his fan at me once or twice, and moved on to someone else.

The sense of self as space, of personal space being penetrated, manifested itself in particularly interesting ways in People's Park. Knowing the history of the place, one could find shadows of successive layers of that history, like sedimentation on a cliff face reveals the fossil record. These layers drew a variety of emotional responses from park-goers, some nostalgic, some thankful for change. In many ways, People's Park had become the showpiece park for central Shanghai. In the late 1980s, the park had 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 station, which has several entrances outside the park's various gates, became the nexus for the system. 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 city's 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 artificial 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 park’s western edge, a small art gallery and the Starbucks I frequented from time to time.

The presence of Starbucks in the park presented some classic anthropological traps—indeed, it called attention to my own seemingly unshakeable paternalism. Initially, because I frequently took notes in the People’s Park Starbucks, I thought, “Malinowski had his tent; I have my Starbucks.” Like the famous anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, I fancied myself in search of—and sometimes in touch with—“the native’s point of view.” These days, Malinowski’s part-time residence in his beach tent, rather than, say, in the home of one of the Trobriand Islanders whom he was studying, is often pointed to as a wonderful instance of the fiction of fieldwork—a prime example of how the anthropologist is essentially removed from that “native” point of view. However, as time went on, and I learned that a good ninety percent of the customers in the Starbucks were locals, usually young professionals or students, I began to see my initial response as paternalistic. To claim that the members of Shanghai’s emerging middle class were mere victims of globalization—that they had been “Starbucked”—was to deny them their due. If anything, we shared equal status as both victims and perpetrators, since we all enjoyed our java on the same playing field of newly created markets and newly embodied tastes (i.e., gourmet coffee).

Of course, my nostalgia was someone else’s modernity. Outside the western gate, where Starbucks was located, what was once the main branch of the Shanghai Public Library had been completely transformed into a small but first-class contemporary art museum. At the northern edge of the park, one could either access the subway or spend an hour or two viewing the exhibits in the Shanghai Urban Planning 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. 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, semipermanent outdoor awning. There was always something going on in People’s Park.

As I sat sipping my bottled water this particular Sunday morning, however, it struck me that none of these changes had prevented 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. If anything, the greening of Shanghai that People's Parks symbolized made such things more possible. 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 that park officials had nailed high up on a tree read "Wu Style Taijiquan" (Figure 3.1). Sometime in the last ten years, however, that sign may have actually shifted to another location in the park. I cannot honestly say whether the JTA had been forced to relocate as part of the construction or the construction had simply continued around the practice site. The park had been so utterly transformed from its ca. 1988 configuration that not even the regulars knew for sure. The JTA sign thus constituted a minor symbol for the shifting identities that many Shanghai people sense in their own lives as change happens all around them.

Disruptions to group identity occurred as a result of subtler changes as well, 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 that push hands players had to be constantly aware of, lest they trip and fall. While no one ever received serious injury because of the tree wells, many people did stumble and stubbed a toe or turned an ankle. It was an accident waiting to happen. Perhaps having seen worse, no one complained. Social and economic change had a much greater impact than physical changes 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 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. Teacher Qian especially expected his students to show up early, and they 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 other parks 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. But, in general, the weekend sessions had become a place where middle-aged JTA members jockeyed for position within the organization, in at least a mildly competitive way. Some of the older students occasionally expressed a sense of loss about Qian's absence, but they continued to come.

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, the teacher whom Bjorn bumped into in the department store, was a disciple of Ma's. He was the officer in the JTA responsible for the production of the publications. 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 JTA push hands players in People's Park, 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. 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, he deeply regretted the loss of the association's best teachers.

Sun seldom gave away his secrets. He pushed opponents around readily, but rarely told them how he was doing it. I was fortunate on this particular Sunday to receive information about at least one technique that Sun had been using against me with

complete success. 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”). Still, such revelations were rare. For one thing, I was not his student, but our regular meetings at the park did allow for a certain bond to develop between us, possibly because I tried to hang in there against him.

After we practiced for a half hour or so, Sun and I both plopped down on a rock, wiped our faces with hand towels, and drank a little water. We talked awhile about Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. “I know I’m not that good in comparison,” Sun said wistfully. “I can’t wait to retire so I can spend more time practicing.”

As had been the case when Qian was alive, the weekend People’s Park group changed partners every few minutes. However, whereas Qian had often paired us up as he saw fit, we now simply looked around for a partner and offered a hand. A great deal of chatting went on during these sessions. Pushing with Sun, one had no time to chat, but for many others, push hands was more of a social occasion. This was exacerbated by the fact that many JTA members felt the need to take on the role of teacher when I pushed with them. Generally, I accepted this, 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, or perhaps, rarely, below my own level in the group. Generally, however, I accepted the teacher attitude as an essential part of both the project and the training. I was ashamed of my own inability to remain humble.

Like many of the more skilled players, the Guo brothers felt no need to take on the role of teacher. When they offered information, it was in a more matter of fact way. 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” (ward off, divert, push, and press) 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 Teacher 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 contrasted with that of 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 focused much of the time on learning to truly push from the *dantian*, or, more generally, the belly. In this method, one person would fold hands in front of his 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 with Qian and other top-level players. For Young Guo, mastery of this method was the foundation for everything, 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 he indicated that I was beginning to get some sense of what he was talking about.

Over by the tree, Mrs. Yu had finished smoking her cigarette and finally decided to push hands for a while. “How’s the research going?” she asked me.

“Coming along,” I answered. “I might not be intelligent enough to write a dissertation on taijiquan.”

“It’s a difficult subject,” she acknowledged.

The rarity of Mrs. Yu’s appearance in the park called attention to the relative lack of women players in the JTA. As I remembered it, 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. As a result, except for Auntie Wang in Teacher Chen’s Thursday class and Mrs. Yu, I had little regular 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.³ After a time, however, I came to feel that one explanation for the situation in People’s Park lay in the ratcheting up of machismo in the group that followed the passing of Teacher Qian. Push hands in the park was no longer the relaxing, recreational event it once had been. 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.

Not surprisingly, the place of women in the JTA reflected the place of women in the changing socialist state that China was in 2001. 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 Empress Dowager Cixi, who died just a few 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 (they were, by all counts, nothing alike in temperament). 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. But they also paid more than just lip service to lineage and Wu Yinghua's rightful place as the eldest Wu family member in Shanghai and, therefore, as lineage holder. In private, male disciples who had studied with Wu Yinghua often adopted the nuances of her forms over her husband's. Still, on 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.⁴

In the Shanghai of 2001–2002, however, the JTA men also faced shifting conceptions of masculinity. Nancy Chen (2002:317) describes this shifting in regard to new meanings attached to old terms. "In the contemporary Chinese context," Chen notes, "meanings of masculinities have shifted to reflect the growing engagement with a market economy and consumer culture." In this context, when young, gainfully employed male members are increasingly absent from the group, older male JTA members may feel emasculated. Taijiquan may somehow be seen as being too yin. As older members mourn the lack of young

people joining and learning Wu style, they are also noting a “weakening” of the art.

If such gender-centered conditions exist among JTA members practicing in the park, they are generally not spoken of. 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, nonsexual touching. Especially among elderly men and women, touching nonfamily members of the opposite sex is limited. In the context of martial arts, however, one is allowed a degree of human contact absent in most other social contexts.

Despite our present engagement in push hands, Mrs. Yu had managed to light another cigarette, so we moved from two-hand to one-hand. I had given Mrs. Yu my letter describing my research, my affiliation with Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and my plans for the project. “So,” I said to Mrs. Yu as we pushed, “could we sit down for an interview this afternoon?”

“Not interested,” Mrs. Yu replied, taking a final drag, and moving back to her belongings hanging from the tree.



Figure 3.1 Wu Style Taijiquan (JTA Space Marker), Shanghai People's Park, 2001 (Photo: Adam Frank)

The rotation of push hands players continued throughout the morning. Mr. Wu, for example, specialized in the martial art of six harmonies, eight methods (*liuhebafa*). More than most, he really embodied the old taijiquan adage of an “iron bar wrapped in cotton” and never spoke while pushing. Occasionally, I ran into Mr. Wu after my weekday practices with Teacher Chen, and he always politely 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, never strayed outside the four basic energies—quite a feat, considering the peer pressure to compete in the park.

The morning practice finally began to wind down around eleven. One by one, the JTA players left for home, to get some shopping done around Nanjing Road, or to enjoy the day in some other way. Late for my appointment with Teacher Pang, I quickly headed out of the park, bought my usual milk tea from a stand outside the gate, and began to descend into the subway. Pausing to look back through the fence before I headed beneath the city, I noticed an American acquaintance practicing a Shaolin method with another group and several people walking eight trigrams palm (*baguazhang*) circles and another man practicing his shape-intent boxing (*xingyiquan*), walking lines of joining attacks back and forth.⁵ Some old women practiced *mulanquan* (“Mulan boxing”), and, despite the 1999 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. And though I could not see them from where I stood, I knew that my Anhui friends were still plugging away at the pipe they had been working on all through the morning. Gazing through the bars at the park, the sedimented richness of the place became even clearer. Not merely a place to practice, the park was a sensual and historical festival of sorts that infiltrated the space of all who entered it and told them something about who they were in New Shanghai. The public space of the park met the private space of individual experience.

“That’s all right,” I said to my friend Danny, rubbing the spot on my head that he had just slammed into his apartment wall.

The stars had begun to clear. “Hey, you’ve really gotten *good*,” I told Danny. “I’d love to meet your teacher.”

Danny was too busy apologizing to hear my suggestion. “I’m so sorry!” he said in excellent English. At twenty-five, Danny had already attained surprising power in his *xingyiquan*. Danny had just invited 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 (i.e., 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 taijiquan with Teacher Qian in the JTA and later with Teacher Lu. He 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 he 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. We 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, and then continue our search. Danny felt that working with less than the best could only breed bad habits, a feeling 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, he had taught himself to speak English exceptionally well, but had never managed to get the grades or test scores to attend 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 with his university education eventually. 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, Mr. He, who worked as a janitor at a middle school.

Danny was one of the few practitioners I had 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 the year after I left Shanghai, I could only guess at what Danny had meant, 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. Again, ultimately, it depends on the penetration of one's internal space by a skilled teacher. The feel of the teacher's push is the lesson.

Danny led me over to his sofa and headed for the kitchen to brew tea. My head throbbing, I still had the presence of mind to note the warmth of this renovated apartment in the old French Concession neighborhood with its wood floors and high ceilings. Danny and his wife had decorated it simply. They were young and didn't have much money. Danny soon returned with the tea, and we launched into our usual mode of excitedly exchanging war stories. Since Danny knew just about everyone in the Shanghai martial arts community, I never had much of anything new to tell him, but I could at least catch him up on what one group or another was up to.

"Are you still meeting with Dr. Lo on occasion?" Danny was referring to an accomplished Yang and Wu style player, a disciple of the Wu style teacher Wang Haoda (one of the better-known disciples of Ma Yueliang), who had invited me to participate in a regular Thursday evening practice he oversaw in an office of a Shanghai factory building.

“Yeah, I meet with Lo. I still think he’s one of the best I’ve met in Shanghai.” I had first met the fortyish Lo Yisheng (Dr. Lo) in a park, where I joined an informal class he conducted for several “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 (i.e., the style of Wu Yuxiang, not of Wu Jianquan, that later passed through the Hao family). These were quite different taijiquan styles, each with its own unique emphases, but the glue that held them together was Lo’s focus on basic taijiquan principles. They rarely dealt with particular forms or postures, instead emphasizing the application of basic energies. An accomplished martial artist who had studied many other styles in his youth, Lo had some fighting skill and also knew the medical theory behind taijiquan. 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 traditional Chinese medicine, a constant interest in relating taijiquan to the *Yijing* (*I Ching*, “Book of Changes”), 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 several times to conduct seminars. He cultivated relationships with other foreigners in Shanghai, both through his own contacts and through the many foreigners who came to study with Wang Haoda. Thus, the Thursday night factory 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.

With some trepidation, I described these sessions to Danny. Lo indicated that these were “private” sessions, meant only for the invited participant. Still, Danny knew Lo and Wang Haoda well, and he even knew of the Thursday night sessions, so we occasionally spoke of them.

“We drink a lot of tea on Thursday night, too,” I said to Danny, as I silently blew on the tea he had just prepared. “Tea and polite conversation. We’ve been doing some interesting things in there. Lo always says he’s not the teacher but everyone

treats him as one anyway.” One other Thursday night participant commanded polite respect as well: 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 Qingming⁶ 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—for example, the application of *peng* (upward and outward) energy or the proper execution of *ji* (press) energy. For him, there was no difference between “techniques” and “energies” in taijiquan. One could not understand techniques, in other words, without understanding energies and the transformation of one energy into 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, as the elder, would begin his comments with profuse compliments for Lo, which Lo would deflect, always commenting that his senior, Ding, was the superior. Of course, we all knew this to be untrue. We knew that while Ding had good *tingjin* and decent skills, Lo was a real fighter.

Danny remained skeptical of Lo. “He’s OK,” Danny said. “But he’s not as good as he thinks he is. A *xingyiquan* teacher beat him badly at Wang Haoda’s park one day. He knocked him to the ground. Lo Yisheng couldn’t believe it and asked to try again, but the teacher just knocked him to the ground again.”

“Didn’t you say the same thing happened with your friend Phillip?” I was referring to another foreign friend of Danny’s, a Bruce Lee fan, who had done a lot of full-contact fighting in the States and was one of the few foreigners who actually taught martial arts in China.

“Yes. Phillip didn’t believe and asked my teacher to strike me. You should have seen the look on his face. Now he believes.”

To Danny, all this was proof enough of the poor state of taijiquan in Shanghai. He was more impressed with Wang Haoda himself, though he had never pushed hands with him to my knowledge. In 2001, Wang Haoda was frequently out of the country 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 Yueliang'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 rarely, if ever, participated in the JTA 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 linked 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." Neither Danny nor I had any idea then that Wang was terminally ill.

"I've been running into a lot of interesting people in other parks," I told Danny, who knew them all anyway. "You know Teacher Gan? Qian's old student?"

"He teaches at that park near Fudan University?"

"Yeah, that's right."

In fact, I had known Gan since 1995, 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 that, 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, a chemistry professor 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.

"I was a little worried about meeting with Gan," I told Danny. "Not because of Gan himself, but because of the chemistry professor. I don't trust his friends." In fact, it was the chemistry professor who had introduced me to my "spy guy," the person who called me occasionally throughout my fieldwork period in 2001 and frequently asked me what I thought of Falun Gong. The spy guy, who I assumed was part of the security apparatus that kept an eye on foreign scholars, often said that he wanted to work out, but the fact that he knew all sorts of things about me that he should not have known gave me enough pause to beg off each time he called. Still, my chemistry professor friend was also deeply interested in taijiquan and practiced regularly with Gan. Since I trusted Gan himself, I did not hesitate to accompany the chemistry professor to visit him in his park.

The man whom I had originally thought to be something of a grandstanding bully turned out to be a generous teacher with a unique method. But Gan tended to express his kindness in a larger-than-life way. At Gan's park, 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 unusual in its combination of martial realism, emphasis on total awareness, and requirements 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 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 backward. Gan did break the biomechanics down for me once: he particularly emphasized a lifting of the rib cage while the lower body sunk downward 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*-like style 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*, et cetera. 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 China who rarely study push hands to any advanced level.

“I don’t know Gan,” Danny admitted. I found this difficult to believe. “I was thinking of someone else. The guy I’m thinking of doesn’t sound anything like Gan.”

“How could you not know Gan? He used to come to People’s Park regularly.”

“I’ve probably seen him, but I don’t know him.” I urged Danny to pay Gan a visit at some point.

Martial arts had taken on unusual meaning in Danny’s life. Unlike many Shanghainese his age, Danny maintained a deep appreciation for things traditional: poetry, painting, martial arts, et cetera. People like Danny had become outsiders in their own city. Intelligent but without connections or degrees, they struggled to find a place in the aggressively capitalistic economy that characterized New Shanghai. Danny had been involved with several small businesses, but longed to return to school, preferably

in Shanghai, where he could continue to study with his *xingyi-quan* teacher. He was not sure what he wanted to study. He just wanted to learn. In the meantime, he spent all of his spare time caring for his mother and engaging in the most deeply satisfying activity he knew of: private practice.

* * *

Private practice is where the individual experience of taijiquan as a set of *forms* manifests itself. Private practice is where one's will is truly tested, for without the presence of teacher or coach, one's capacity to "eat bitterness" (*chi ku*) is tested in more subtle ways. In Shanghai especially, distractions abound. It's a simple matter 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. Whereas in a rural area like Chenjiagou (the Henan Province home of the Chen family taijiquan) the distractions are fewer, the city itself is the biggest obstacle to progress in Shanghai. Because I took so many classes and met with so many practitioners, finding time to practice individually sometimes became difficult. Real progress required a minimum of two hours' individual practice every 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. If I angled my body properly, 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. 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. She looked skeptical and continued folding her laundry in frigid silence.

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 yogalike 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 revamp the foundation that I had begun to build under Qian many years before, but that 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 and 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.⁷ 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 year-long 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 occasional light practice days allowed for this sinking in to happen.⁸

In addition to the many positives associated with intensive individual practice, there were consequences as well, hubris 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, 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 (the sensual) and partner exchanges (the social). One could not truly learn one without the other. Mastering the art, and thereby mastering the self, depended on developing a harmony between the yin of the sensual and the yang of the social.

What exactly does one “master” in 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 the “*gong*” in the term *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 wellspring” (*yongquan*) in the ball of the foot, and the rear heel turns slightly out, both feet flat on the ground. When the weight shifts backward, the focus shifts to the bubbling wellspring in the rear foot. Actually, 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 the feet. At first, these are fleeting and wispy sensations, as if a few strands of spiderweb connect the feet through the hands, through the center of the body. Eventually, these strands become somewhat thicker, perhaps like guitar strings, and 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 of the so-called internal martial systems 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, it is advanced training rather than basic training. Teacher Lu, as I mentioned earlier, differentiated between “young person’s” and “old person’s” taiji. Young people, in his view, possess the strength and stamina to actually transform the muscles and tendons of the body, but this takes 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 scene designer at the University of Texas at Austin who trained in a Beijing opera school in Taipei from childhood until his midteens 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, receiving regular beatings,

and, together with a cohort, changing into costume on a moving motorcycle while eating dinner.⁹

The development of a true spring action in the body, a structural transformation that results 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*."

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CHAPTER 4

BARBARIC GLASS AND INDECIPHERABLE CAUSES: TAIJIQUAN AS PUBLIC ART

VI

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

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

Dr. Chan, the rumpled city planner who sat in front of me at a cluttered desk in a messy office deep within the bowels of the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, seemed happy to finally have someone talk to him down here. “Have you gone upstairs yet?” he asked.

“No, I haven’t had a chance yet.”

“Well, you’ve got to see the exhibition hall. Shanghai 1930 Street, in the subway, that’s what old Shanghai was like. If you want to see New Shanghai, you have to go inside the exhibition hall.”

“I’ll go this afternoon,” I promised. I had come to Shanghai at the end of 2001 with the notion that construction in the city was actually pushing the art of taijiquan out, cutting into the park spaces and streetscapes. What I found was quite different: a city vying to become the greenest and most environmentally advanced in Asia. I had hoped that Dr. Chan could shed some

light on this phenomenon. He filled me in on some of the long-term plans for the city, but, in the end, reiterated with a somewhat mischievous smile, “Go upstairs!”

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 collage 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*; Figure 4.1). 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 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 postdates 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-size bronze statues. One particularly poignant statue depicts a shoeless peasant child shining the shoes of an unseen 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 a fedora, and a man dressed in a Western-style suit appear to pass by on the street behind the streetcar. A small display, written in Chinese and poorly rendered English, provides a romanticized description of Shanghai street life before the Japanese occupation (the Japanese are not mentioned explicitly, but the date of 1930 predates the Japanese military incursion into China in 1931–1932). 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 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 more a mythic representation of an ideal 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 multistory building that proudly displays Shanghai as not only “modern” but also 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 theater” 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 (Figure 4.2). 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, 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 reenter the 1930 street in the subway station from a slightly different direction—literally walking from the future into the past. A VCD available in the exhibition hall’s gift shop, titled *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.”

Taijiquan fits into the temporal journey that is modern Shanghai in sometimes subtle, sometimes startling ways. At the most basic level, taijiquan practitioners immerse themselves daily in a deep-breathing exercise that requires them, quite literally, to inhale the city. Of course, everyone who breathes within the

boundaries of the city also breathes the city air, but taijiquan practitioners and other meditators of various ilks do so in a conscious, methodical way. After all, they concentrate on *qi* (“breath”), the literal inculcation of the city into selves *as* space. Beyond the direct physiological input of breath, the city structures the practice in other ways. Practicing in People’s Park, for example, one finds oneself surrounded by a forest of glass and steel that contrasts sharply with memories of Shanghai’s recent and more distant pasts. Perhaps the most direct connection between the city and taijiquan, however, is the role that the history and economy of Shanghai has played in the sequence, quality, and appearance of the movements themselves. These movement qualities also have roots in the specific histories of the teachers who ventured into Shanghai in the early years of the twentieth century. Attuned to a new modernism, or, as was the case of a Manchu family like the Wus, escaping old identities, these teachers allowed the conditions of the cosmopolitan, economically divided city in which they found themselves to shape and modify the very form of their art.

Heidi Nast and Steve Pile have written,

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 history, particularly economic history. 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 cultural changes. I therefore 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 (positive) space, they inadvertently create unfilled (negative) spaces where taijiquan players enact simultaneous moments of tradition and modernity. In terms of the overall structure of my argument in this book about the sensual-social construction of identity,

treating taijiquan as public art, experienced from afar in as sensual a way as direct participation, marks a halfway point in the book. The “static” of social relations of which I wrote earlier increases here as we temporarily tuck away the phenomenology of how the individual experiences the art through practice to the phenomenology of the art as observed in the city streets and green spaces. How, in other words, does taijiquan feel to the outsider looking in? How does the city’s history and current structure shape the art, and how does the art shape the way the city conceives itself? We are of course still traveling along a moving, circular path of identities that leads from the city to the nation, to the world of imagination, to the globalization of taijiquan. Ultimately, the path will return to the body as a nexus for all of these levels of experience. For the present, however, we can use the history of the city as our starting point, step back from the nexus for a moment, and widen the angle of our lens.

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 this period, Yan Zhongmin’s brief history of urban growth in Shanghai begins with a 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 1985).¹

According to Yan’s account (1985:98–113), during the thirteenth century, Shanghai became the major port of Changjiang (the Yangzi River). In the third year of the Southern Song Dynasty (A.D. 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 (A.D. 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): 1950–1954, when expanded production, reconstruction, and lack of restrictions on freedom of movement increased the population by 2.69 million, many of whom were “encouraged” to move back home during this period; 1958–1960 (the Great Leap Forward), when famine drove the rural population into the cities, followed by the forced return of about 1 million people to the countryside; and 1968–1971, 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 account creates an image of a city that evolves but that is largely shaped by two forces: the city’s requisition by foreign powers as a treaty port and the communist takeover in 1949.²

John Logan (2002) and other urban studies scholars have taken a largely statistical approach to analyzing post-1949 Shanghai, focusing 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 (1937–1949), when the city virtually ceased to function as either a destination of foreign capital or a focal point of local entrepreneurial activity; Socialist Shanghai (1949–1979), when the city rebuilt and even expanded its industrial base but focused almost entirely on internal markets; and Postsocialist Shanghai (1979 to present), when 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 accounted for 2.1 percent of *global* FDI by the end of 2002. 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 percent urban in 1950 to 30 percent 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 deurbanization. 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 1 million, but the urban system “tilted toward small places, with 375 cities of less than 200,000 population” (Logan 2002:8).

Shanghai saw an overall increase in population between 1982 and 1990, but the core area of the city actually saw a decrease of 3 percent, while the suburban population increased by 40–60 percent. The increase in FDI paralleled (or perhaps drove) population growth and suburbanization of major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. By 1996, FDI had reached \$16 billion (Wu Fulong 2000; Logan 2002). Logan notes,

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. [Logan 2002:10]

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

The image of Shanghai as a powerful economic machine is further strengthened by focusing on the macrolevel 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 percent to 2.3 percent, secondary went from 75.7 percent to 52.2 percent, and tertiary went from 21.1 percent to 45.5 percent. 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 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-era science fiction images of crystal cities rising through the clouds have apparently become a dominant design paradigm among Pudong’s municipal planners.³

Yet change and expansion in Shanghai are not limited to Pudong. From 1990 to 1997, Shanghai's urban areas expanded from 748.71 to 2,643.06 square kilometers, and downtown went from 280.45 to 359.36 square kilometers—increases of 253 percent and 28 percent, respectively. The city's population in 1990 was 7.8 million; by 1997, 10.2 million. This figure did not include the floating population—those who had not obtained legal permission to transfer their residence permit (*hukou dengji*) 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 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 and 1997, for example, spending on infrastructure development went from RMB 4.722 billion yuan to RMB 41.285 billion yuan,⁴ an eightfold increase; there was also an increase in grassland because of 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, Jia, Li, 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 neighborhood committees (*jiedao weiyuanhui*). This reform laid the groundwork for the efficient demolition of slums. As a result of the Sixth 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 and 1997, housing area per capita increased from 6.6 to 9.3 square meters. Construction and urban renewal shifted the population to the outskirts of the city (Wu and Li 2002:26–29).

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 new villages (more or less equivalent to public housing projects in the United States) were built in Shanghai and 115 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 was, at first, geared toward foreigners (Wu and Li 2002:29). Wu and Li contend,

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 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, 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. [Wu and Li 2002:35]

In another time, such critical statements might be seen as revolutionary signs of real dissent, and certainly their appearance in

the context of the international conference out of which Wu and Li's essay grew lends 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.⁵ In many ways, this dissent is merely the natural result of Deng Xiaoping's now legendary statement that "it doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice" and his post-Tiananmen reaffirmation of this principle during his famous "trip to the south" in late 1992.

At the entrance to Old People's Park in Hangzhou, the ancient capital of China that lies a short train ride from Shanghai, stands a larger-than-life bronze statue of an old man in the Yang style taijiquan version of the posture "White Crane Spreads Its Wings." 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. Those who visit the park sometimes congregate around the statue, or simply note it as they pass in and out of the park's main gate. There is probably no more explicit example of taijiquan and the search for the little old Chinese man (or big bronze Chinese man, in this case) than the Hangzhou statue. This statue, after all, cries out that taijiquan is about modernity, wisdom, health, and longevity. For many seniors, it is also a symbol of the importance of remembering.

The fact that a large number of taijiquan practitioners actually lived through and clearly remember many of the dramatic changes that have taken place in China shapes their practice in significant ways. As a group, Shanghai taijiquan practitioners over seventy years old share memories, both painful and triumphant. Associations like the JTA are more than clubs for them. They function almost like veterans groups, where people who have shared trauma can congregate, commiserate, play, and remember. For the few remaining JTA members who actually began their practice in the mid to late 1930s, the kind of taijiquan they present to the world is a cut above most of the stuff they see on the street. As public art, they see the Wu style as the traditional Vermeer in comparison to the postmodern Warhol that, in their view, most others practice. Those who remember

pre-1949 conditions in Shanghai often feel it necessary to differentiate *chuantongde* (literally, “traditional,” but, in this sense, connoting “authentic”) taijiquan from *biaoyan* (“performance”), a fitting term for what the city itself, the new showpiece of modern China, has become: a place that inscribes itself on the people who inhabit it, altering them, and is in turn inscribed, or altered, by them, a place where the square footage of the apartments increases while, as fewer young people embrace the old ways, the square footage of tradition decreases.

Something Teacher Lu said to me during our practice one day in Haiyang Park stands out as an example of the JTA’s concern with the “traditional” and brought home this point. Like People’s Park, the JTA had its own special place in Haiyang Park, marked by a Wu Style Taijiquan sign nailed to a tree. Teacher Lu and I rarely practiced in this section of the park, but on one occasion, he expressed a preference for it. Pointing to the sign, Lu said, “Pei Junhai used to practice all the time here.” Pei had been one of Ma Yueliang’s most famous disciples.

“This used to be his park,” Lu continued. “Teacher Qian thought his own push hands was the best, but Pei Junhai’s was even better. Wu Jianquan used to come here, too. The Mas live near by.”

Teacher Lu had chosen this spot that day at least partly because of its historical significance for the JTA. The spot called forth memories of past JTA greats, and even though Lu was a youngish fifty-five, the place itself tied him in to claims of authenticity that the JTA held dear. The JTA and Wu stylists in particular prided themselves on their push hands. Wu stylists were sometimes referred to as “push hands men” rather than tough fighters, which could be taken as either a jab or a compliment. Generally, they took it as a compliment, because Wu style push hands emphasized some of the subtler qualities of the art. Practicing here in the JTA glade in Haiyang Park tied us in not only to a memory but also to an aesthetic of what taijiquan as art was supposed to be. Pei Junhai, who used to be the head push hands man in this park, symbolized that aesthetic for Wu style players.

As Teacher Lu and I began to push hands under the sign, an elderly taijiquan player who I had not seen for many years wandered by. In 1995, Mr. Tang had often challenged my motivations for studying taijiquan, declaring in his fluent, loud English,

"You, sir, are a Sinologist!" Mr. Tang remembered me now and seemed pleased to see me back in the park.

"Pei Junhai used to practice here," he said to Lu and me as he wandered off to find a bench. We all looked up at the sign for a moment. It seemed a bit lonely and deserted up there.

For each such instance of loneliness, however, there is an opportunity for practitioners to experience what Victor Turner calls *communitas* (Turner 1969). Once each year the city sponsors "Taijiquan Day" at the huge outdoor expanse of Shanghai Stadium. Originally instituted as a way of occupying outdoor space previously occupied by the banned Falun Gong practitioners in 1999, Taijiquan Day involved hundreds of taijiquan groups, as well as folk music and dance groups, including thousands of practitioners and spectators. Walking into the stadium complex at the hour when every group is asked to simultaneously perform, one is immediately struck by the power of thousands of bodies moving in slow motion. This half-square-mile section of the city literally becomes an animated sculpture, a cacophonous statement of not only who Chinese people are in the early twenty-first century but who they are supposed to be (i.e., not Falun Gong practitioners). Like sand paintings, these moving bodies are ephemeral artworks that inscribe themselves momentarily on the city, only to pass away and reappear at other times. For both participants in and observers of this event, there is supposed to be a sense of cultural continuity, of *communitas*.

Some of the styles that appear at Taijiquan Day have been actively encouraged by the Party as a means of filling park space with "legitimate" practices (i.e., practices that are *not* Falun Gong or other "heterodox" practices). *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 Falun Gong 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.

In light of all the fanfare a public festival like Taijiquan Day entails, an interesting question presents itself: If taijiquan were to disappear tomorrow, would it have any effect on the city of Shanghai? In Shanghai alone, tens 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 2004; Ownby 2001). Needless to say, because taijiquan looks a little like Falun Gong, this turn of events made taijiquan practitioners nervous. “Disappearing” a practice that seems so essential—indeed, one that essentializes Chineseness as both a racial category and an expression of nation—is a very real possibility. Why, then, has the city built taijiquan so firmly into itself? Cities, of course, do not build themselves. They are planned and built. As my conversation with Dr. Chan made clear, city planners explicitly include the memory of Old Shanghai in the design of New Shanghai. While leaving space for an ostensibly traditional practice like taijiquan may not be a conscious act of planning, it is certainly a result of increasing green space within the city. Taijiquan becomes a kind of service to be provided, like other public art works, in the city planners’ conception of Shanghai as “public city.”

Sophie Watson notes that public cities are spaces 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. [Watson 2002:49]

The reconfiguration and greening of public space in Shanghai inadvertently highlights taijiquan as a kind of moving sculpture that exists within the larger moving sculpture of the city itself. As

simultaneously public city and public artwork, therefore, Shanghai serves as both a crossroads of complex social relations between shifting classes, ethnicities, and groupings of all sorts and a vast source of sensual input for each of the individuals who inhabit these social categories. Identity moves through city and individual, and taijiquan provides one lens for understanding the constantly shifting nature of identity. Taijiquan becomes a public artwork embedded in public artwork.

Yet taijiquan is only one among many examples of public art in New Shanghai, some of which speak to tradition and some of which speak to modernity. 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 structured identity for the people who lived there. All over the city, I stumbled upon images of Chineseness: 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 or dramatic reliefs. On 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, and 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). On one sign, a message from the Shanghai Municipal Housing Development Bureau superimposed on a background photograph of Pudong states,⁶

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 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 statement of Party hegemony all in one.

The performance spreads across the river to the Pudong side, to the neighborhood 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, “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-size, realistic bronze statues of Chinese executives, two male and one female. One man holds a briefcase, the other a cell phone. Both are dressed in fashionable suits. The woman wears a stylish miniskirt. 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.

Similar life-size bronzes, abstract sculptures, or realistic murals seem to inhabit every neighborhood in Shanghai, each commenting in some way on the past, present, or future. In front of a small Ericsson Telecommunications office stands a bronze of a young miniskirted woman with a bare midriff. She is talking on her cell phone (Figure 4.3). Perhaps the most impressive of these life-size 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 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 white purse hangs on one elbow as she appears to lean against the wall with one hand while taking off a shoe with the other. Not far off, a

bronze boy and girl, also dressed in real clothing, sit on a bench. The boy is playing an accordion, while the girl looks on.

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 appears 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, and another shows a smiling, top-hatted Uncle Tom advertising a toothpaste that was called “Darkie” until just a few years ago.⁷ On the other side of the actual restaurant entrance, the mural continues. A painted entrance is guarded by a painted, 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 postmodernist 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; 1997). On the other hand, the sheer boldness of this mural tinges it with irony. Perhaps both interpretations can exist side by side. 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 it. The mural could serve as resistance even as it fulfilled an official artistic plan to make the city more sophisticated.

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 raises the art’s visibility, whether it is parkland or greenbelts that run along waterways or simply large, open areas between buildings or adjacent to housing estates.

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 outsidersness. 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 reestablished class divisions (and, on the other side of the coin, reestablished economic opportunities) breed alterity. Granted, the JTA participates in the annual, orchestrated mass gathering, but compared with monthly meetings, their participation seems somewhat artificial. In 2001, Wu style players from the various sublineages within the JTA all donned gray JTA sweatshirts and JTA baseball caps and practiced taijiquan in 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 a kind of spectacle, 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 facial expressions were any indication, that the older members of the group saw only shadows of taijiquan in the fan dances, drum teams, and group taijiquan performances spread out before them.

While the inscription of the practice upon the city is of fairly recent vintage, 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 book, 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 national body" but also 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. 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 higher postures that could be taught to the general public, the old, and the infirm. The original fast-slow explosive forms, as well as intensive push hands, weapons, and boxing training, would be reserved for serious students, and the secret energy training would be reserved for disciples (Wu and Ma 1988, 1999, 2001; 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.

Memories of the early twentieth-century teachers lived on among the staff who still worked in the old YMCA. In 2002, I visited the tenth floor of the building, which is now a hotel and restaurant. The elevator opened onto a busy kitchen. I had arrived in the middle of lunchtime rush.

Accosting a passing cook and waiter, I hurriedly asked, "Do you know that this place was once a famous martial arts school?"

"Oh, yeah," the cook said. "Everyone knows that story."

"Sorry to bother you," I said. "You're busy."

"Come back later when it's not so busy," the waiter called over his shoulder as he disappeared through a set of double doors.

Back in the lobby of the hotel, I phoned a manager to request an interview.

"Yes, I'm doing research on taijiquan. Did you know that a famous martial arts school was located here? I'm a research scholar with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences."

Almost as soon as I had launched into my now-pat, abbreviated explanation of my research, the manager cut me off. “This is a hotel, not a museum,” he snapped 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, now called the Youth Hotel (*Qingnian Binguan*). The current manager of the facility arranged an interview with Mr. Chu, the YMCA membership manager from the 1930s, a man who saw the comings and goings of the martial arts crowd daily.

Dressed in a pressed suit and tie and joined by his wife of many years, Mr. Chu appeared to be in his late eighties. We sipped tea in his small sitting room, and I handed him the usual fruit or box of cookies that a first-time visitor is expected to bring if he or she wishes to be polite. “Yes, I remember Wu Jianquan back in the 1930s,” Mr. Chu recalled. “He used to teach classes on the tenth floor. Anybody could come there.”

“Were martial arts popular at that time?”

“Tennis and swimming were more popular at the YMCA at that time.”

Mr. Chu’s recollection revealed something important about the types of people who actually learned Wu style taijiquan in Shanghai, at least through the YMCA: relatively affluent, attuned to ostensibly “Western” popular culture, and cosmopolitan—fertile ground for the propagation of tradition in the midst of modernity.

Today, 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 but had minimal work and recreational activities to distract them. By the early 2000s, those who were not yet retired 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. As Mr. Sun expressed to me during a break from one of our push hands bouts in People’s 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’s young people. 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, DVDs, rollerblading, hip-hop, 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 *chuantongde* taijiquan, at least in Shanghai. It would be an exaggeration to say that membership in the JTA is the chief component in the construction and experience of who they are, but the fear that the association and, therefore, the experience of practice itself might fade away is a reflection of greater fears that something essential about being Chinese that was readily apparent in Old Shanghai will be pushed out by New Shanghai—perhaps the “indecipherable cause” that Stevens writes of in the stanza that opens this chapter. Yes, identity moves, but in this case, it moves in a direction toward which many members of the JTA feel only ambivalence, an ambivalence that becomes ever more acute as local, provincial, and national governments requisition taijiquan as a “master symbol.”



Figure 4.1 Shanghai 1930 Street Scene: Neon Sign, 2001
(Photo: Adam Frank)



Figure 4.2 Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall City Model, 2001 (Photo: Adam Frank)



Figure 4.3 Bronze Girl, Ericsson Telecommunications Building, Shanghai, 2001 (Photo: Adam Frank)

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CHAPTER 5

“THROUGH MARTIAL ARTS WE WILL BECOME FRIENDS”: TAIJIQUAN AS MASTER SYMBOL OF MODERNITY

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, “Thirteen Ways of
Looking at a Blackbird”

Outside the basketball stadium in the city of Zhengzhou, capital of Henan Province, the Seventh Annual International Shaolin Wushu Festival was about to begin. Surrounded by a small crowd, an old man hunched low to the ground. At his feet lay several small bundles of old martial arts magazines that would be of interest only to serious collectors. Those of us who thumbed through his selections commented to one another about styles or about particular famous martial artists we recognized. Bruce Lee figured prominently in some of the magazines from the seventies, even though

he had never been very popular in the mainland. I bargained a little and finally paid him for a handful of magazines that feature articles on taijiquan or other internal martial arts. Soon, a policeman strolled by and told the man to move on: he was not one of the official hawkers and was therefore not allowed within the stadium gates. Nor, for that matter, did I have any official status. I had briefly spoken to one of the tournament organizers, a Mr. Xu, on the phone before heading to Henan, but I had so far failed to track him down. 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 (of Terracotta Warrior fame), 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 informed me on my trip from the train station to a midrange businessmen's hotel across town. "The economy's not bad."

"It seems to me there's a lot to do," I said, noting a new shopping district full of department stores and one or two foreign-style coffee houses that had sprung up.

"If you have time and money, no problem," the driver countered. "What's it like in Shanghai?"

"You've never been there?"

"No. I've never been out of Henan."

I gave him my standard summary of Shanghai. Lots of KFCs. People cared more about money now than they did before.

At the stadium, I finally managed to find one of the assistants, Mr. Guo. Guo went out of his way to get me a visitor's badge and a day's worth of rather expensive entrance tickets. I explained the project to him and told him that I hoped to shoot pictures and video from ground level, where I could get a much better view of the full-contact fighting and the forms competition. Again, Guo waved me through, led me down some stairs to the polished wooden floor of the stadium, and introduced me to the official cameramen and local TV crewmembers with whom I would share the floor. Such enthusiasm for anthropological research on taijiquan, though none of us know exactly what that meant, 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, there was a great deal of pressure on the organizers of the Zhengzhou festival and other festivals of its kind to broadcast community spirit (Figure 5.1). Throughout the city, but especially in the vicinity of the stadium, banners proclaimed unity in Chinese and English: "To make progress together" declared one banner in English, while a Chinese rendition said "Using martial arts to become friends and make progress together" (*yi wu hui you gong-tong jinbu*). As one of the largest comprehensive martial arts tournaments in China, the Zhengzhou tournament attracted participants from dozens of countries. Of paramount importance, it was also closely linked with the annual celebration of Shaolin style held in Dengfeng, down the mountain from the world-famous Shaolin Temple, and foreign visitors inevitably traveled on organized tours to Dengfeng for the celebration, paying a visit to the temple before or after the tournament in Zhengzhou. Zhengzhou stadium was new and not much different from the sort of stadium one might find at a midsize university in the United States. Fans first mounted a broad set of stairs and then entered through the main doors on the level of the second tier of seats. An airy, circular hallway wound around the inside of the building like a running track, and in one section of the track a small marketplace had materialized. On table after table, merchants sold swords, spears, cudgels, and other formidable weapons; shoes and *wushu* clothing; books and VCDs; and souvenirs that seemed to have little or nothing to do with martial arts but had much to do with martial arts tourists fulfilling a dream by traveling to China for the first time. Many of these merchants went to regional and national tournaments throughout the year. They were entrepreneurs who owned shops in their home cities. Business, they said, was not great, because there were not enough tournaments throughout the year to cover expenses. Nevertheless, at a big tournament like the International Shaolin Wushu Festival, they could expect to do well. *Gongfu*-suited foreigners and Chinese alike perused the tables, tested the balance and flexibility of sword blades, and chatted with old friends in the space just inside the entrance. Neatly dressed ticket takers and security guards carefully checked for badges and tickets on the first day. Since the tournament

charged admission separately for each day, the guards needed to watch out for cheaters. After each major event on the program, they would clear the stadium of all but authorized visitors and the process would begin again in a few hours.

The tournament itself adhered to international rules, rules that had largely been developed as part of a transnational effort 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 focused on elimination rounds in all events, including full-contact fighting. Solo form events included 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. For the most part, forms competitors were serious *wushu* competitors (i.e., performance-oriented martial artists) who, depending on their level of skill and financial support, competed both nationally and internationally. Many of them came prepared to do several Shaolin forms, taijiquan forms, a variety of weapons forms, and perhaps some two-person routines. This group was generally quite distinct from and sometimes disdained by the full-contact fighters. A few excelled in both forms and fighting, but this was rare. In the preliminary rounds of the tournament, the crowd saw a large number of amateur competitors as well, especially among the foreigners, who had come for the thrill and experience of competing in China. Not a few small-town martial arts halls back home in places like Ajo, Arizona, or Amarillo, Texas, were adorned with photos of the local sifu (Cantonese for "teacher") cavorting with one famous master or another. Likewise, Chinese martial arts instructors could score a few points with their locals by pasting up pictures of themselves standing next to a foreigner.

I was about to request an interview with one such pair when the recorded tournament trumpets blared. The games were about to begin.

At the level of the nation, taijiquan has become not only the single most popular exercise in China but also one of the most

visible symbols of Chineseness that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) projects to the world. If taijiquan styles are somewhat homogenized at the level of the city, as I argued in the previous chapter, this process occurs to an even greater degree at the level of the state. My travels to the Zhengzhou tournament, to the Shaolin Temple, and to the Chen family village of Chenjiagou, where modern taijiquan was often said to have originated, placed my previous experiences of personal practice in Shanghai, my focus on the sensual and social aspects of the art, and my understanding of taijiquan as Shanghaiese in a different light. I found myself forced to interpret many of the things I experienced and stories I heard in terms of national identity. The old Shanghai YMCA, for example, was not just a symbol of the JTA's identity, a sliver of one group's historical memory. It was also part of the construction of a whole national discourse about "strengthening the national body" that arose in China in the 1920s, and taijiquan had emerged from that discourse as a kind of "master symbol." The national adoption of taijiquan as master symbol (a term I adopt from the cultural-historical study of the Alamo by Richard Flores [2002]) of Chineseness is sometimes at odds with family styles that encourage development of martial *gongfu*. Martial arts tournaments, martial arts tourist sites, and research produced in Chinese sports science and history journals contribute to a picture of how a nationalist discourse has developed in regard to martial arts in general and taijiquan in particular. It is through this discourse that the social features of the nation-state modify a certain rhythm of identity. Returning to Wallace Stevens, these rhythms of national identity are both "lucid" and "inescapable." 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 experience who they are, or who they are supposed to be, in the present. Taijiquan, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, produces both a "feeling of" and a "feeling for" Chineseness.

In *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* (2002), Richard Flores writes,

In effect, re-membling [*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.” [Flores 2002:xviii]

In a similar way, I am interested in taking “taijiquan as given” and working my way back through the social and historical conditions that have led to and influenced its practice in and outside China. 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). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, taijiquan in the increasingly capital-heavy Shanghai of the 1920s reflected just such a moment of eruption: emerging class divisions between a wage-earning working class and newly monied elites and between a consumption-oriented middle class and a capitalist, entrepreneurial upper class that was 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.

As master symbol, taijiquan also contributes to the creation of “imagined communities”—Benedict Anderson’s classic argument 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. Thus, according to Anderson’s argument, language represents a specific power structure and cultivates nationalism. He notes, for example, that the Thai government (ca. 1980) discouraged foreign missionaries from helping hill tribes to develop distinct writing systems for their languages but made no attempt to control the speaking of such languages (Anderson 1993:45–46). Anderson’s work compels us to consider the possibility that national consciousness, as a kind of skill passed from the Americas to Europe, is adopted by imperialist powers and

eventually is readopted 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 am extending his argument here to include taijiquan as a kind of *kinesthetic* vernacular language of state. Regardless of whether the language we are talking about is print or architecture or movement, 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 ignored or subsumed within the nationalist discourse, if not banned outright. What goes on in park practice or sequestered, secret practice in family homes is often in tension with standardization. For the individual practitioner who might dabble in a family-based, "traditional" form and something like the forty-eight-movement form developed for national and international competition, the contradiction between state and teacher, between interpretations of Daoism and socialism, between a family's history and a nation's history, may occur within a single body.

The story of taijiquan as master symbol in China parallels 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 Dynasty, one faction of court officials, reformers 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 and the abolition of foot binding.¹ 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, the foremost of which 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

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 of Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, often had family stories to tell that kept memories of China's shame alive. Along the way, high court officials cultivated fear of popular uprising in their ceaseless negotiations with the foreigners who controlled the country's ports in post-Opium War China, while fanning the flames of antiforeign sentiment among the peasantry as a means of maintaining popular support for an increasingly corrupt regime. Indeed, the Boxer Uprising of 1900 could not have gained the momentum it did without the support of Empress Dowager Cixi (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 allow it to wrest foreign concessions and "leased" territories such as 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; Zhang 1998). Several key modernist reformers had attended American missionary schools in China and had gained an introduction to the Euro-American, internationalist conception of athletic competition through that experience. A second significant influence was the strong presence of the YWCA and YMCA movements 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 comparatively 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 on Mao and other CCP leaders in the early years of their ideological war against Chiang Kaishek and the Guomindang.² 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, Zhang, and Zhang 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. Jigorō Kanō, "a Japanese reformer steeped in the lore of Western physical education" (Clark 1992:138; Long 1997:65; Kanō 1937). Several years earlier, the Japanese had already instituted a nationwide 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 Japan. No less a public figure than Theodore Roosevelt regularly invited a Japanese embassy 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 urban landscape for decades, 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, and, to a degree, martial arts training seemed to be an open and accepted activity among the rural, landed gentry, who at any time might find themselves 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. Douglas Wile has documented this transmission of the art in the nineteenth century from the Chen family to the educated members of the Wu³ and Hao families (Wile 1996).

As I have already described in previous chapters, in the emerging 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 emigration to Beijing, and later, to 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 Xiangzhai, touted the relative merits of his system in comparison with 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. Among 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 with 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, "Wang Xiangzhai *chui niu*" (literally, "to blow like a cow"; to brag). This teacher went on to say that Wang was basically hounded 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 ca. 1920 clearly shows several famous teachers of quite divergent styles slotted in to teach on the same day (Shanghai shi guoshuguan 1917). Recall Mr. Chu, the membership manager of the YMCA in the 1930s who described the tenth floor of the building as a place where people studied martial arts. "Mostly, it was wealthy people who belonged to the YMCA," Chu noted. "The teachers could make money there."⁴

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. When asked why his grandfather, Wu Jianquan, moved to Shanghai, a Ma family member simply said, "There was opportunity in Shanghai."⁵ In the tenuous economy of early twentieth-century China, opportunity was not something to be taken lightly. The presence of a wealthy, entrepreneurial class that was 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; Zhang 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 (e.g., Wile 1996) suggest that before coming to Beijing, Yang Luchan actually made several forays from his adopted Chen village back to his home village in 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 guardsmen, 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 only just beginning to be uncovered about the Yang family (Wile 1996, 1999), they remain 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 and often caused severe, permanent injuries to participants. “Strengthening the national body” had degenerated into pulverizing the national body. 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-weapon sparring conducted with blunt sticks. In terms of national identity, tournaments were precursors for the international competition that was supposed to be instituted through the Olympic movement.

The year 1936, when 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 seminal for early Chinese attempts to make taijiquan an Olympic event. Participating nations were given an opportunity to show off their national athletic arts.⁶ The Chinese fielded both men’s and women’s martial arts teams that performed short, modified taijiquan sets created by several teachers just for the occasion (Zhang 1998:17,78; Li Jie 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, arguably, the center of Western scientific and technological knowledge. Many of the symbolic expressions of modernity in Shanghai—symbols with which Shanghai people were confronted almost daily—were German. Rich Westerners and Chinese drew on the Bauhaus movement, for example, in constructing new homes and buying furnishings. The influence of Walter Gropius is still 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 way—and in keeping with my previous argument that taijiquan is a sensually grounded public art—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 planned, 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 been killed or 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 offered any for many centuries), 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 while they were still alive. 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 imagination.

The Party’s glorification of martial arts and the ongoing push to popularize taijiquan were 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”; Zhang 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).⁷ Meanwhile, national support for traditional folk sports provided space for urban martial arts organizations such as the JTA to experience 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. Again, the Cultural Revolution disrupted and almost destroyed organizations like the JTA, which were branded by Red Guards as examples of feudalism. Not until the early 1980s, as I previously described, did the JTA have both the legal permission and proper conditions to formally reconstitute. By that time, the Party became even more energetic about promoting the tournament system, and local, provincial, and national-level professional martial arts teachers found opportunities to link with their foreign counterparts as the door to cultural exchange opened wider. The International Shaolin Festival at Zhengzhou became one of the most visible manifestations of this combination of local interests and state-level cultural policies. It also served as a kind of sensual festival of identity construction, where audiences and performers could exchange notions of nationalism and internationalism through the structured world of the tournament.

A string of young, glamorously dressed women marched in single file onto the basketball court in Zhengzhou stadium as the band music bounced into the stratosphere of the stadium’s

rafters. These women would handle the tournament's various ceremonial and procedural duties. The basketball court itself was divided into three spaces, each of which featured a separate category (e.g., "women's double-edged sword" or "men's Chen style taijiquan"). The emcee announced male and female judges, many of them famous martial artists in their own right. Like the beauty queens, they marched out in single file. The national anthem played and we all stood. As the music crescendoed, the first competitors streamed out from the side and middle entrances at ground level, most of them dressed in colorful *gongfu* suits, some sporting the names of their respective schools from their home countries. The program listed competitors by both country and school affiliation, but once the competition got under way it became clear that, like the Olympics and other international athletic events, this tournament was largely about national pride.

The loudspeaker announced a member of one of the Italian teams in ring three, a man who must have been in his fifties. He began his set, a taiji sword form, and even from my vantage point in the stands, I could see him shaking with nerves: He had forgotten his routine. Under such circumstances, a competitor is usually allowed to restart with some reduction in points. The Italian man began again but almost immediately lost his place. Visibly disappointed with his performance, almost to the point of tears, he began the long journey to the sidelines. He had embarrassed himself and his country in front of a crowd of hundreds (it would have been thousands had he made it to the final rounds). Suddenly, unexpectedly, the crowd erupted in loud, sincere cheers and applause. Many in the crowd were locals, but many were fellow competitors enjoying the competition from the stands. This seemed to raise the Italian's spirits as he exited the space. In a sense, this was martial virtue manifested at the social level. Graciousness in victory was both part of the national image that Chinese officials wished to project and part of the ethos that had developed in international martial arts competitions.

On day two, I again moved back and forth between filming from ground level and watching the tournament from the stands. After several rounds, I found myself sitting in the middle of one of three Mexican teams present at the tournament and tried to communicate with them in my dismal Spanish, but Chinese or a weird combination of Chinese and Spanish kept coming out of

my mouth. With great effort, I finally managed some basic Spanish sentences. Fortunately, one of the young Mexicans, Marco, spoke some English.

"I'm a little worried," he said, pointing down to the full-contact fighting 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 entered the ring and prepared to go up against a much larger member of one of the Chinese teams. They fought in the same weight class but seemed to be at opposite extremes. I joined the Mexicans in cheering on their teammate. It quickly became apparent that he was seriously out-classed. When the larger, stronger Chinese fighter knocked him off his feet several times, the referees momentarily stopped the fight. The Mexican team coach used smelling salts and wet towels and lots of massage to revive his fighter, who seemed OK. He headed back out into the ring and almost immediately was once again knocked off his feet with a long, powerful roundhouse kick to the head. This time, from the ground, he waved his hands in defeat. Finally, the referee stopped the fight for good. The mostly Chinese audience went wild, as it did each time a Chinese fighter defeated a foreigner. Martial virtue had momentarily left the building. This is not to say that the Chinese audience gloated or in any way insulted the foreign losers, but one could almost hear "Remember the Opium War!" reverberating beneath the cheers.

The Mexican coach retrieved his battered fighter. Next to me, Marco looked a little worried. He had to fight later on that day.

Chenjiagou, the Chen family village, is the purported birthplace of modern taijiquan, and an important symbol in the construction of national identity through martial arts. Before arriving, I had already called a member of the Chen⁸ family, an accomplished teacher who had not yet traveled outside of China to conduct workshops (many other family members had). Chen ran one of the several dozen Chen style taijiquan schools in Wenxian County, Henan Province. The village itself was only a couple of miles away from the county seat, so it was simple enough for villagers, most of whom are farmers, to work in the



Figure 5.1 Banner, 2001 Zhengzhou International Shaolin Festival, the English Version of Which Reads “To Promote Chinese Martial Arts to Widen Opening and Accelerate Economic Development” (Photo: Adam Frank)

town. On this day, the Chen style Teacher, the school secretary, and another friend gave me a short tour of the school. Outside, a Frenchman practiced by himself, and another foreigner showed me the simple room he rented as part of his tuition at the school. For the most part, however, the students at the school were Henan kids, the poor sons and daughters of farmers, who had been given the opportunity to study Chen style. Unlike urban settings the relatively sparsely populated Wenxian County provided enough space to have actual training halls, a necessity in northern Chinese winters. This particular hall sported a well-equipped gym with heavy punching bags and protective equipment of apparently high quality. It was in this room that Chen stylists practiced boxing as part of their training. Chen stylists had a reputation in China for being formidable fighters.⁹ Wu and Yang stylists sometimes complained that the Chen people lacked sensitivity in their push hands, or turned push hands into wrestling. For their part, Chen stylists, when they remarked on it at all, simply stated that in Henan people practiced “original”

taijiquan. Such generalizations were all part of the rivalries inherent in the martial arts world and were just as likely to be encountered within particular styles as among them.

Though I was curious about these Chen stylists' push hands, it would have been impolite to ask the teacher to push with me or to challenge one of his students without his blessing, so I simply hoped that he would invite me to do so, which, as it turned out, he never did. After a pleasant lunch at one of the few local restaurants, Teacher Chen suggested that we pay a visit to the village. We caught a *mianbaoche* (literally, "bread car"; a minivan taxi) and made the trip on the well-paved road to the village in a quarter of an hour. As we entered the village proper, Chen pointed out a brand-new, modern-looking building.

"That's a new school," he said. "They just built it."

The newness of the school was suddenly not so surprising. Even with the preliminary information I gathered on the village, I had been mildly astonished by the apparent wealth of the place. Though small (around 5,000 inhabitants) Chenjiagou had obviously benefited from its martial arts reputation. For international taijiquan enthusiasts, as well as for Chinese with the financial means to pursue their interests outside their hometowns, the village had become a kind of Mecca. The martial arts schools inside the village, as well as the many schools in Wenxian County, provided a healthy income to several skilled teachers who had chosen to carry on the family tradition. Those who had the right combination of skill, shrewdness, and connections obtained invitations to teach in foreign countries. Several had emigrated.

The style itself was quite different from Yang and Wu taijiquan, which are closely linked to each other. 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. Similarly, 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 the Wu style emphasizes mastery of *tingjin* ("listening energy") and the ability to neutralize force, Chen emphasizes silk winding strength.

As we strolled through the village toward Teacher Chen's home, various villagers greeted Chen and smiled toward me. It was now, apparently, routine for foreigners to make their way through these streets, so the appearance of another foreigner went barely noticed. The simple brick homes we passed all seemed to be undergoing remodeling of one kind or another—a new wall here, a new chicken coop there. And the bricks seemed to be either new or recently cleaned. The whole village gleamed with energy and color. Freshly planted flowers lined walkways, and everywhere there was evidence of a good corn harvest. The people seemed relaxed on first impression. Finally, we arrived at Teacher Chen's home, entering into an outer courtyard where a young man shucked rich, yellow corn. Another grain dried in the sun. Chen only wanted to stay a moment to make a phone call. He invited me to sit down in the courtyard. The young man and I chatted for a few moments. A longtime student and disciple of Chen's, he had good things to say about his teacher, yet did not seem worshipful of him. Chen came out a moment later and showed off his corn (Figure 5.2).

"The corn's good this year," he said, obviously proud of the harvest. Noticing the bad cough I had acquired that day, he said, "Hey, why don't you stay here tonight?" Other obligations prevented me from accepting.

Chen led me down another path, and a few minutes later we ended up at a small shrine, garden, and museum display. This was the wall, Chen told me, 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, but because of his talent and diligence, the master agreed to teach him openly. We tried to enter a small room, but a young boy stopped us and demanded that I buy a ticket. Chen tried to negotiate with the boy, but he would have none of it. Tourists paid. Period. Around the room, a life-size diorama depicted the passing on of the true taijiquan from the Chen family to Yang Luchan. In one diorama, Yang knelt before his Chen master, Chen Changxing, accepting the secret training manual from him. In the background, the walls were painted with a kind of comic book version of the proceedings, complete with dialogue. The story and diorama combined to create a powerful image of martial virtue (*wude*).

All this struck me as very odd. “What,” I asked, “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,” replied Teacher Chen. I read part of the description, which included a recounting of the Yang Luchan story, a brief biography of the benefactor, and a thank-you note to the Chen village residents.

As in the case of the Alamo in Texans’ construction of Texas nationalism, the monument at Chenjiagou combined private voices of power, wealthy people who could control historical discourse by paying for the story that would be told, with public discourses that created a certain generalized identity. The village layered in several competing, sometimes contradictory, stories of what taijiquan is, who owns it, and who controls it in modern China. As a focal point for so much interest about taijiquan in recent years, Chenjiagou appeared to have coped well with the many challenges that faced small tourist destinations in China. It benefited directly from martial arts tourism and from the operation of martial arts schools. It was clear that Chenjiagou had 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 was a highly symbiotic one. Rapid development of Chenjiagou’s tourist industry occurred as a direct result of national-level encouragement of foreign participation in a small, local economy combined with entrepreneurship at the village level. The cooperation from the village level all the way up through the national sports bureaucracy created a space for taijiquan, inscribed as it was with all the twists and turns of Chinese history, to inscribe itself even more firmly on the national mind. The irony lay in the fact that even though Chen style had undergone a certain amount of standardization in *wushu* academies and in the martial arts departments of the major sports universities,¹⁰ the negotiation between a village-level, family-based art and a state-requisitioned national symbol broke down in the realm of secrets. Like other family arts, Chen style reserved key information for disciples only, although there are famous Chen teachers on the international workshop circuit who claimed to tell all. The importance attached in taijiquan to individual attainment in *neigong* (“internal skill”) versus *waigong* (“external skill”) ultimately precludes rigid standardization, at least if family

members wish to preserve the art in a form that they consider "authentic." According to Teacher Chen and others, this does seem to be the case in Chenjiagou, where attainment of individual mastery and deep understanding of the art is still highly valued. 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 Edward Sapir referred to as the importance "of bending form to one's will, not a manufacture of form *ex nihilo*" (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 martial virtue on the one hand, and the ability to bring martial arts tourists to the village and to spread teachers beyond the village on the other.

At the conclusion of the Zhengzhou tournament, a few days remained to visit the Shaolin Temple and to attend one of the largest martial-arts-oriented performances in the world: the Shaolin Festival in Dengfeng, a key conduit for both the national and transnational transmission of Chinese identity as it is conceived through martial arts. Considering the steady flow of tourists to the nearby Shaolin Temple throughout the year, one would expect a thriving economy in Dengfeng, but the town gives the impression of endemic poverty. "Nonetheless," a shopkeeper commented, "the Shaolin Festival is good for the economy. Look at all the tourists!"¹¹ I joined the throngs that milled toward the town's central amphitheater, an enormous enclosed space that holds several thousand people. At the ornate front gate that led into the open-air amphitheater, air-conditioned tour buses and sleek black cadre sedans rolled through the gates as a women's folk music team (*minjian yinyuedui*) beat out a tune on their drums. While there was a certain atmosphere of carnival here, most in the crowd were townspeople who had no chance of actually getting in to see the spectacle inside the stadium and could not have cared less about the actual Shaolin Temple a couple of miles up the mountain road. Those lucky enough to secure tickets were trying to squeeze their way



Figure 5.2 Chen Family Teacher with Corn, Chenjiagou, Henan Province, 2001 (Photo: Adam Frank)

through a side gate, where a squad of soldiers and policemen had set up a human barricade.

Conspicuously overflowing with cameras and tape recorders, I accosted a young motorcycle taxi driver and asked him what he thought of the tourists. He seemed content enough to get some good business during the Shaolin Festival but had some reservations about the quality of life.

“I don’t like them,” he finally declared. “I liked it better before. Life was more peaceful.” One sensed an edge in this town, a resentment of the ostentatious wealth that surrounded the festival and was therefore associated with the brand of

Buddhism practiced at the Shaolin Temple. My new friend had already decided that I might be just the ticket, literally, to get in to see the festival. He agreed to help me find a decent price on a ticket from one of the many scalpers. By that time, only an hour before the performance, tickets were going for about US\$12 a piece, but I refused these offers, even though the price did not seem to have anything to do with the usual racism. Today my skin color was not of particular importance in regard to the price. Everyone wanted to get in, and in this atmosphere of capitalism (*zibenzhuji*), scalpers were having a field day. Finally, I managed to find someone who was selling for a slightly lower price, and I bought a ticket. I did not have enough cash to buy two tickets and still take the bus back home, so my friend and I hatched a plan. As we reached the gate to the walled performance arena, I flashed my ticket and pulled my friend close, pointing at him and shouting out, "*Fanyi! Fanyi!*" ("Translator! Translator!"). Realizing the futility of trying to communicate in this mess, one of the policemen guarding the gate made a snap decision and waved us in. Inside, a second tier of guards confronted us, but we deftly avoided them, finally penetrating through into the vast open space of the amphitheater.

It was another world inside, a world of thousands of straight rows of folding chairs, red carpets, bottled water, and complimentary baseball caps with the name of the festival emblazoned above the bill. On the high walls that enclosed the space were various scenes from the Shaolin arts, including the image of the elephant-headed god Ganesh associated with the Shaolin order.¹² My friend and I found some seats in one of the back rows. The day, fortunately, was cool. I took out the equipment and began a panoramic sweep. The stage itself was a huge, raised affair, full of wires and lights, not unlike a typical rock concert set up, and it quickly became apparent that a rock concert was probably the best way to describe the pop celebration of Shaolin boxing that was about to unfold. Two pop singers served as emcees. When they gave the signal, an amazing succession of thousands of colorful helium balloons shot into the sky, followed by white doves, and the emcees announced, "Let the festival begin!" They then proceeded to guide us through the myth of the temple. One of the crack Shaolin performance teams that travel nationally and internationally enacted the story before our eyes. Martial arts performances in the Shaolin style were sandwiched between

performances by pop stars from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The famous Shaolin children's team came out and expertly executed their cute acrobatic shtick. Having gotten in the door, my motorcycle taxi friend had pretty much lost interest in me and was now even somewhat disdainful of all the gadgetry I was lugging around, which kept blocking his sight lines, but he did seem to feel that he was at least getting his due.

The performance lasted for about an hour, an endless stream of jazzed up feats of martial strength of the sort that had been popular in Chinese urban marketplaces and temple god processions for centuries (Boretz 1995): bending swords with one's throat, catching arrows, and so on. The performance ended without much fanfare. The presence of cameramen from the national TV networks made clear that news about the festival would be broadcast throughout China in the coming days. To return to Benedict Anderson's notion of vernacular languages of state, the sensual language of the Shaolin Festival in Dengfeng would, within a matter of hours, be communicated nationwide, and even internationally, through the foreign martial arts media present. The color, the music, the presence of Ganesh, and the unified, martial movement of dozens or hundreds of bodies combined to make a powerful statement about an ideal typic Chineseness.

I waited until the crowd dispersed somewhat so I could shoot some video closer to the stage and thus make my own contribution to the vernacular language of state. Finally, I too left the amphitheater and returned to the real world. From the town, which locals said was rather sedate the rest of the year, a steady stream of spillover tourists from Zhengzhou hopped taxis to the top of Songshan, where the venerable old temple sat, waiting to declare, "We are Shaolin, we are China!"

I managed to share a cab with an Australian and a Greek, both of whom had been studying at one of the martial arts schools adjacent to the temple for the last several weeks. The Greek planned to spend months there, but his agenda was atypical. Already accomplished in the Korean martial art of tae kwon do, he had actually come to this Buddhist temple to study Buddhism—only the fifth foreigner ever to do so, he had been told. The Australian adopted a more typical program of working with a teacher on a regular basis. He was a serious practitioner back home, but had chosen to learn the routines in the children's

class, which he found challenging enough. He had, after all, come here to learn basics.

At the top of the mountain, we disembarked from our taxi and walked 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 had found a steady, if not earth-shaking, source of income (Jakes 2001). The short- and long-term foreign students at the temple schools numbered in the thousands. Single-day tourists like me added thousands more. And the Chinese students who passed through the hundreds of large and small martial arts schools that surrounded the temple and spilled out into the countryside numbered in the tens of thousands. Like the boys who learned Chen style taijiquan in Wenxian County, many of the students in these Shaolin schools were poor peasant children fulfilling a dream come true.

Very few of the Chinese students and none of the foreigners ever actually participated in the religious life of the temple. Foreigners lived in a hotel built specifically for the purpose of housing martial arts tourists, most of whom also ate in the hotel's canteen. The system for obtaining a teacher was somewhat haphazard. Teachers who were actually monks negotiated a price for martial arts training. The tiny number of foreigners who studied Buddhism, like my Greek friend, paid nothing for tuition but had to provide for their own room and board in the hotel. Donations to the temple were, of course, accepted. And they came readily, for among the clientele were a number of Hollywood stars, led here by "the kung fu teacher to the stars," Shi Yanming. Shi Yanming had grown up in the temple but defected to the United States while on tour with one of the Shaolin performance troops (Jakes 2001). He had since settled in New York City, where he ran a Shaolin school and taught both Buddhist meditation techniques and martial arts. He had also begun to make a name for himself in the film world. Among the Chinese film luminaries who called him "teacher" were Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh, John Wu, and Chow Yun-fat (Jakes 2001).

In comparison with the foreigners, life was considerably harsher for the Chinese students. For the privilege of studying with "the best," they lived in cramped quarters, ate bad food, and trained long hours. Most of them apprenticed themselves to

former monks who had left the order or to former novices (*xinshou heshang*) who had decided not to join the order but who had attained a moderately advanced level of skill in the martial arts. Therefore, they were being trained in a martial arts system associated with Buddhism rather than being trained as Buddhists. In contrast, a certain number of young men currently held novice status and did actually live inside the temple. They, too, studied martial arts, but also participated in the daily religious life of the temple. Some of them had been sent to the temple by their parents and had no intention of staying. Others hoped to continue in the temple rather than return to a difficult farm life. Some came from relatively wealthy homes, so their decision to stay would be based on different criteria. In any case, by their late teens, the novices were forced to decide whether or not they wished to stay, at which point a decision was made, if it had not already been made, whether or not to accept them. Depending on aptitude and interest, the novices then chose to specialize either in religious studies or in martial arts. Few did both, which would have been tantamount to acquiring simultaneous Ph.D.'s.

After bidding good-bye to my foreign friends, who had just reported another Hollywood movie star prowling about the temple grounds, I decided to take a tour of the temple proper before it closed. At the entrance, police officers manned several tables. The policemen could barely conceal their animosity as I purchased a ticket. I had no idea whether they were just sick of tourists or if something else had happened to put them in a bad mood. Reports of other visitors to the temple whom I had met made me suspect that it was the former. I moved toward the entrance gate, noting a CCP office just to the right of the temple. The prominent location of the office and the presence of the policemen certainly gave one a visceral impression of Party hegemony in religious matters, despite the recently much-touted movement toward rebuilding religious shrines destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The temple had seen its share of trouble, so the governmental support was crucial, even if the price was a certain shift in identity from religious order to national symbol. In 1928, when warlords had divided up Henan, the temple had been severely damaged or destroyed (Jakes 2001). In recent times, the battle had been fought on even more treacherous ground: Abbot Shi Yongxin had been engaged in intellectual

property lawsuits in recent years to protect the Shaolin Temple name, which regularly popped up on products in China and overseas (Xinhua News Agency 2002). Shi Yongxin's close relationship with the Party had resulted in both protection and resources.

Entering the temple grounds, I noticed several monuments from international donors, similar to the monuments I had encountered at Chenjiagou. Monks tried their best to go about their business but appeared to maintain an attitude of studied steeliness in response to the steady stream of cameras clicking and whirring on the grounds. I had seen these expressions before—well fed but resigned to imprisonment—on the faces of zoo animals. I met a young monk at the top of the stairs, and despite my worries that he had had enough of the gawking tourists, I asked him a few questions about his life there.

"What do you do every day?" I asked him, curious about the daily routine of a mythic-figure-in-training.

"I light incense, pick up litter left by the tourists, and sweep." In fact, he lit incense as we spoke.

"Do you have a specialty?" I asked. "Are you more interested in Buddhism or martial arts?"

"My specialization is martial arts," he answered, and then, perhaps because the sun was setting or perhaps he was just tired of being bothered that busy weekend, begged off and continued with his duties.

Finally, I met up with an old man sweeping up in the gardens. He was not a monk but a layperson paid by the temple to do landscaping. Friendly and happy to talk about his life, he revealed that he had been laid off from a job in the town and found the temple work soon after.

"Do you like working here?" I asked him.

"Yes," he replied. "The monks treat me pretty well." He suggested I take a look at the inner courtyard before the temple closed in a few minutes. He warned me that the last bus down the hill to the village would leave in less than half an hour. I wended my way through an ornately carved passageway and into the inner courtyard. It appeared to have once been a barnyard of sorts, with open, covered stalls on all four sides of the yard, but instead of animals there stood another life-size diorama, like the one in Chenjiagou, though this one was much more elaborate and depicted key moments in the history of the Shaolin order.

Two teenagers, apparently Chinese tourists, playfully reenacted the scene depicted in one of the stalls.

By now, the sun had already dropped low in the sky, and I realized I had better head back. I walked out of a gate and started looking for the bus stop. Everywhere, buildings were under construction. On the other side of the road, I saw a small stadium, which belonged to one of the largest Shaolin schools in the vicinity, a school that trained thousands of students each year.

"This place is pretty chaotic," I commented to a construction worker who was resting nearby.

"They're moving everything," he said. "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 noticed people heading for a minivan and hopped in, moving to the back next to three teenage boys who were students at one of the martial arts schools. Their ringleader, not more than fourteen years old, lit up a cigarette and eyed me for a moment.

"Where you from?" he asked. "American?"

"Right. You study Shaolin?"

"Yeah. I'm going to be a movie star, like Li Lijian. You study martial arts?"

"I do a little taijiquan," I replied.

"We should have a boxing match in town tonight. We could make a lot of money."

The passengers around us who overheard this challenge/offer chuckled a little. I declined.

We passed dozens of martial arts schools along the way, and I could see small groups of kids engaged in evening practice. It struck me that Chenjiagou was geographically so close to Shaolin—only a couple of hours away by car—that the old story of taijiquan creator Zhang Sanfeng first training at Shaolin actually rang true. Many of the great internal martial arts people seemed to have come out of Henan Province or Hebei Province. There were many stylistic similarities, and the Shaolin people claimed that theirs was also an internal system at the highest levels, as my Greek friend had attested. The Chinese government had been very astute in understanding that martial arts in China are simultaneously separate and of a piece. In the nationalist project, Shaolin and taijiquan were not only easily lumped together

but actually lumped together in the public imagination through movies and television. Therefore, it was no surprise that the tournament in Zhengzhou, ostensibly devoted to Shaolin, included taijiquan events, or that Shaolin people competed in full-contact fighting and push hands at taijiquan events. Images of the nation thus became inextricably tied to images of martial arts.

While practitioners of both Shaolinquan and taijiquan would argue the relative superiority of their styles, the nationalization of martial arts through sports universities (*tiyu daxue*) and martial arts training halls or training institutes (*wushuguan* or *wushuyuan*) and their glorification as “folk arts” or “folk sports” contribute to the kind of shared iconography found at both the Zhengzhou tournament and in the village surrounding the Shaolin Temple—*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 rather than as combat arts subsumes and transforms the latter (Donohue 1994; Brownell 1995). The subjugation of the martial, that is, “the real,” is no more readily apparent than in the substantial Chinese 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 PRC, a substantial literature has been generated through the sports universities’ 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. 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 a typical example of this literature in that it trades on the language of modern science to validate and reify the “traditional” (taijiquan) as an essential feature of Chinese identity. Few such articles attempt to refute

the health claims made by taijiquan practitioners (in contrast, for example, to the scholarly assault on the health claims made by Falun Gong practitioners; Frank 2004). Wang's article is no exception. The "effects" he speaks of are all positive ones.

Journal articles in the humanities and social sciences 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 Students' 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" (2000) focuses on the place of "martial virtue" (*wude*) in "traditional folk morality." Xu's essay accepts the Herderian notion of *das Volk* without question, adapting Herder's position of a single-class society where "the folk" are on equal footing with elites. Xu's discussion of martial arts in the article treats such arts as uniformly ancient, as if they are neither modern inventions nor 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.

Scholarly literature on martial arts in Chinese journals also legitimizes tourist sites as master symbols of the nation-state. Historical and scientific articles often repeat taijiquan origin stories, for example, and thereby lend them the weight of authority. The state has thus been able to requisition martial arts in general and taijiquan in particular as *wu*-symbols of Chinese culture. The production of this image can be quite precise: for example, the symbol that the Chinese Olympic Committee adopted in its successful bid for the 2008 Olympics is an abstracted depiction of the taijiquan move "Downward Posture" (*xia shi*). This symbol appears everywhere in reference to the upcoming Olympics (Figure 5.3). The tourist industry and the Olympic movement often involve the same players as the tournament world, but, in more abstract ways, they also

refer to fundamentally "Chinese" cosmological notions about yin and yang and thereby draw on Buddhist and Daoist symbols as marketing devices, while still forefronting symbols of modernity and cosmopolitanism. For example, at an international taijiquan tournament in Zhuhai, a tourist city near the Hong Kong border, the story the tournament events and the associated nonmartial performances told about being Chinese drew on popular conceptions of Daoism as individual cultivation. For the most part, Zhengzhou had been a young person's tournament 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 senior men and women who are the heads of their respective family lineages. The competition, which conforms to rules set down by the state, 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 dozens of people who embody "the little old man" for whom they have been searching, massed in once place. Skill has little to do with who performs in masters demos. One teacher who is a lineage holder in his style revealed to me his trepidation about participating in 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 in China "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.¹³ 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 drive the construction of identity, particularly in a setting where dissent must generally come only in subtle forms. 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 predates 1949 replaces the “real” (i.e., martial, individualistic, family-based practice) taijiquan with the “imaginary” (i.e., performative, competitive taijiquan). Further, the state uses the real to strengthen its displacement by the imaginary.¹⁴

I do not wish to imply that this social-political arrangement actually causes much conflict between family-based taijiquan associations and the formalized structures of sports universities or martial arts institutes. Rather, according to some JTA members, the problem lies at the opposite end of the spectrum, where there is a distinct lack of interest in the martial. True, one teacher lamented Ma Yueliang’s exclusion from the Shanghai *wushuyuan*, where standardized forms are taught, as a violation of tradition. A second disparaged the abilities of the 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. To practice “real” taijiquan would spell the death knell for real taijiquan.



Figure 5.3 2008 Olympic Logo: Abstracted Version of “Downward Posture” or “Serpent Creeps Downward” (Photo: Adam Frank)

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CHAPTER 6

KUNG FU FANTASIES AND IMAGINED IDENTITIES

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, “Thirteen Ways of
Looking at a Blackbird”

We were already starting to melt at seven o'clock on a July morning in Shanghai. On the Pudong side of the river, in and around a metal warehouse complex adjacent to the ferry pier, the day's filming was about to begin on *Flatland*, a kung fu television series set in Shanghai in the year 2010. Crewmembers sipped coffee and slowly set up. Everyone tried to preserve his or her energy as the blistering heat of Shanghai summer overtook the coolness of the morning air. Stanley Tong and I pushed hands a little next to one of the vans. Tong was a coproducer on this joint Chinese–Hong Kong–U.S. project. He was 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 United States, *Rumble in the Bronx*.

“So what are you doing on the production?” Tong asked.

“I’m playing the part of Ori in this week’s episode,” I told him. In the series, Ori was a gangster who unwittingly assisted a human manifestation of Satan.¹ “But I am mainly doing research in China as an anthropologist. I’m doing a project on taijiquan.” This got Tong’s attention, because he was a long-time taijiquan practitioner. I started to ask him about the director’s role in producing the image of Chineseness, but it was much too early in the morning for such lofty topics, so we ended up talking martial arts and doing push hands instead. I pushed on Tong with some force and found that he demonstrated a good level of the same kind of springiness I encountered in many of the skilled taijiquan players I had met in the park over the last year.

“When I was young,” Tong explained, “I didn’t think taijiquan was very practical for fighting, so I started kickboxing. Eventually, after practicing for many years, I finally started to understand what my taijiquan teacher had taught me all those years before. Until recently, I had been out of contact with this teacher. Because I had gotten pretty well known in the Hong Kong film industry, I had been reluctant to make contact again. I was warned the teacher might think I was showing off, but once I contacted him, my teacher seemed pleased with my progress in the martial arts.” After pushing for a few minutes, Tong was called away by one of the crew. The main cast members, who were young, up-and-coming American or Canadian television actors, with an American film icon thrown in, trickled in as Shanghai’s summer sun came out in full force. A van pulled up. I felt a knot of anticipation in my stomach. The doors slid open. *Is that Hopper?* I wondered aloud. *Is that Dennis Hopper?*

The world of imagination offers an alternative means for understanding identity as something that is both socially and sensually constructed. Imagined identities, like imagined communities, can rise and fall through textual vernaculars. Again, I extend Benedict Anderson’s notion of vernaculars here to include more than just print. In the realm of martial arts, they also include film, television, and poetry that is written in classical forms but intended to be recited aloud. Imbued with histories that precede the modern Chinese socialist state, these vernaculars

are imaginative banquets that evoke sensual experiences no longer defined and confined by the state. On the contrary, they eventually spill over temporal, ethnic, political, and geographical boundaries, moving from nation to transnation and back again. In this chapter, I am interested in tracing a history of how martial arts texts, including visual texts, have contributed to the imagining of self in China. Treated as a kind of text, *Flatland*, for example, is the descendant of martial arts novels such as *Water Margin* and *Journey to the West*, as well as of taijiquan poetry and museum displays, and shares with them a world of martial power and strength that references both the earthly and the heavenly realms.² I begin here with a discussion of these novels and poems, focusing on the development of a vernacular language of identity that will be repeated and reconfigured in film, museum displays, and television series like *Flatland*.

Originally part of a long oral tradition of martial arts storytelling, these tales also made their appearance on the stage in various local drama forms, including Beijing-style opera. For the most part, however, they constituted a popular subculture that was at times supportive of the status quo and at times resistant to state hegemony. In the latter days of Emperor Qianlong's reign, to cite one instance of this resistance, operas based on *Water Margin*, a tale often compared to the story of Robin Hood in its depiction of socially conscious bandits who defend the peasantry against ruthless gentry and noblemen, were banned outright. The Qing Dynasty official Hu Ding appealed successfully to Qianlong for censorship in 1754, writing, "[*Water Margin*] regards . . . rebels as remarkable and able people; those who revolt escape punishment, which is belittled." Hu went 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). Despite Hu Ding's successful attempt to banish the story from the stage, *The Water Margin* endured as underground literature.³

Parallel to vernacular novels, a second type of "underground," lesser-known martial arts literature also flourished: pedagogically oriented verses that drew on classical Chinese poetic forms to make subtextual claims to "ancientness" and "authenticity." The English novelist L.P. Hartley once wrote, "The past is a foreign country: They do things differently there" (Hartley 2002). That

the past is not only temporally remote but culturally exotic makes us willing to believe in the magic and timelessness of martial arts like taijiquan. But the past is also “home,” a place to which we return through the nostalgic gateway of poetry. Ranging from fairly straightforward rhyming verses that serve as mnemonic devices for learning movement or understanding the function of certain moves to verses devoid of practical information but full of images about the origins of and philosophical basis for taijiquan, the classical writings on taijiquan (*taijiquan jing*) fall within this category. Many of these writings are bolstered structurally by borrowing specific forms, images, and tonal patterns from classical poetry. Poetry thus served martial arts instructors as an implicit (and sometimes explicit) marketing tool. This is especially the case with the five- and seven-character-line *shi* form (Watson 1971:15–16).⁴ These lines—the actual structures of the poetry—evoked the past, even as they continued to be used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to discuss the minutiae of boxing methods, *qi* circulation, and body alignment.

Douglas Wile’s translation of the taijiquan verse “The Legacy of Zhang Sanfeng” (*Zhang Sanfeng zhengliu*) provides a case in point (Wile 1996:86). According to Wile’s ordering of the texts, the verse is number thirty-eight in the Yang family’s “secret” *Forty Chapters*, which Wile translates in full in his groundbreaking *Lost T’ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch’ing Dynasty*. The last three of these chapters are attributed to Zhang Sanfeng, the legendary Daoist adept and inventor of taijiquan. Written in Zhang’s voice, they make explicit connections between martial arts and Daoism (Wile 1996:64–65). Like many of the taijiquan writings, “The Legacy of Zhang Sanfeng” is part mnemonic device, intended for the student of martial arts, and part myth-building narrative. It traces a descent that begins with Fu Xi, a prehistoric hero, and 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 verse, Zhang seems to reject imbibing elixirs of life, instead pointing out that “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 recirculate 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, which declares that “the Three Teachings [*sanjiao*] are not separate schools.” Any true path, in other words, must inevitably lead to truth.

For a taijiquan player reading this poem, the connection between actual practice and Zhang Sanfeng could not be clearer. I often asked 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 this particular version of the story is difficult to determine, but the story, told through film, passed on orally, and passed on through the “ancient” *Forty Chapters* evokes, in Frederic Jameson’s terms, conflicting modes of production that coexist and struggle within the same artistic process (Jameson 1981). Among JTA members, it is not uncommon for a taijiquan practitioner to cite a passage from one of the classics to underscore a point. Similarly, non-Chinese practitioners in the United States come in contact with the classics through a variety of formats and strategically use the classics as pedagogical tools. Douglas Wile’s books sell not only through bookstores but also through martial arts catalogs. English-language taijiquan magazines feature articles that quote profusely from the classics. As they did in the past, taijiquan verses serve as teaching devices in the present. But because they are *of* the past, they also transmit experiences of Chineseness for both Chinese and non-Chinese people. They offer a framework for imagining the past that has been superseded only relatively recently in China by video games, comic books, and especially film and television.

Back on the set of *Flatland*, I am disappointed to discover that it wasn’t Dennis Hopper after all, just a crewmember who looked like him. I felt frustrated, since Hopper had signed on to play the

archangel Michael in the series, but I had yet to actually meet him.

The world *Flatland* depicted seemed to have little to do with the China I knew. The series took place in the Shanghai of 2010. Hopper's Michael had been sent on a mission from God to catch the Devil and his colleagues. As *Flatland* coproducer Andre Morgan described 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). Morgan had been Bruce Lee's producer at Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong and more recently a producer of the American television series *Walker: Texas Ranger*, featuring action star Chuck Norris, and *Martial Law*, which introduced Hong Kong martial arts icon Sammo Hung to American audiences. Morgan was one half of the Ruddy Morgan production team (his partner, Albert Ruddy, produced and won an Oscar for *The Godfather*). Steve Feke, of *Beastmaster* fame, and Beijing businessman Ren Naichang were the remaining coproducers of *Flatland*. The coproducers were intent on making this first-ever joint Chinese-American production of a television series a technical tour de force. The first series to film entirely in high-definition video (HDV), a format popularized by George Lucas through his latest *Star Wars* films and later used by Robert Rodriguez in his *Spy Kids* films, *Flatland* had hired one of the best crews in the world, mostly Australians. The plan was 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 was a lot of talk among both crews and cast about how chaotic (*luan*) everything was. Overworked and underpaid, most of the translators were learning the film lingo for the first time. From accounting to office management, the management styles of the Chinese, Hong Kong, and American producers contrasted sharply. The Chinese crew and production staff were generally more used to a state-run mode of production, whereas many of the foreign crew had spent their lives working with big film studios like Miramax, Twentieth Century Fox, and Paramount. Ren Naichang ran the money end of things and did so in a typical Beijing-cadre, smoke-filled-room fashion. I found myself tiptoeing around Ren because 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 had no desire to put him in a bad light with a big producer through some linguistic or cultural gaffe.

Through my connection with Teacher Lu's actor friend, 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, skirting "the edge of one of many circles," to draw again upon Stevens's blackbird. Within one circle lay the sensual-social construction of identity through practice in the park and the transmission of knowledge; within a second lay the mutual inscription of the public arts of the city and taijiquan; within a third lay the embodiment of a nation-state through martial arts festivals and tournaments; and within the current circle, lay the world of martial arts texts—poetry, novels, comic books, television, and films, through which taijiquan as fantasy moved inside and outside of China. Here, even Dennis Hopper could be the little old Chinese man—in this case, in the guise of the archangel Michael looking over his charges in Flatland, China—one more variation on a long history of martial-arts-inspired films, television programs, and even museum displays.

"Ori! Go to the second unit!" It was one of the assistant directors for the episode ordering me to prepare for my shot. The second unit was the production unit that focused on action sequences like car chases and flying from wires. When I arrived at the second unit location on the other side of the warehouse complex, I noticed that an elaborate system of cranes, pulleys, and wires had already been put in place for the next shot. These would allow Gina, a Canadian journalist and martial artist, to fly across a twenty-foot gap between two warehouse buildings. The plan was to get her running at full speed and then lift her off her feet and across the chasm. Her instructions were to continue running in the air, even as pencil-thin cables carried her across the gap. Gina had been hired to do a few fighting scenes. In fact, she admitted, she was afraid of heights, but because she was similar in build to costar Francoise Yip, the producers put a wig on her and recruited her as a stunt double (Figure 6.1). On the other end of the wire, the flying crew carefully rehearsed their task. Even under the safest conditions (and these were not among them), flying on wires is dangerous and extremely strenuous business. Director 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). One almost had to have the strength and endurance of a Shaolin monk to pull wire on a kung fu movie set. As it turned out, one of the wire handlers on *Flatland* was a Shaolin monk, or at least a novice monk. Like many of the monks I had met during my trip to the Shaolin Temple a few months earlier, he had left the monastery to pursue a stunt career in the movies. The novice monk's job on this set, however, was to pull wire for a novice stuntwoman from Canada.

Situated as I was in the proverbial belly of the whale, a vantage point from which I could see the guts of how certain images of Chineseness were actually produced, a visual vernacular began to take shape. *Flatland* depicted a world where an international squad of martial arts experts, with the help of the archangel Michael, battled Satan interdimensionally, traveling back into China's ancient past and then moving forward again into the Shanghai of the future. *Flatland* had set a unique mission for itself, for the visual vernacular that it produced about who Chinese people were, particularly Shanghai people (because it was set in Shanghai), included cosmopolitanism, martial virtue, technological savvy, and an unbreakable connection to a past, a past that had to be understood in order to live freely in the present. The period costumes juxtaposed with slightly futuristic clothing styles, the ancient martial arts juxtaposed with gunfights between gangsters and good guys, and flying on wires juxtaposed with fast escapes in fast cars—all of these images coalesced on *Flatland* to form a particular sensibility of Chineseness that not only drew on past cinematic language but also tried to set the stage for a new language.⁵

Specific cinematic histories came into play in order for *Flatland* to have actually made it into production in the Shanghai of 2001. These histories are also histories of how Chinese selves have been, and often still are, imagined. Unlike practicing taijiquan in the park, however, the act of imagination involved in watching a film creates a world removed from direct experience of martial arts. Like reading *Water Margin* and even taijiquan verses, watching a film is not direct experience of the world it depicts, but it may inspire a martial arts practitioner to reconstruct that world. Depending on political conditions,

this may be a good thing or a bad thing. The ca. 1937 film *The Legend of Mulan*, for example, depicts the famous tale of a devoted daughter who takes the place of her aged father when troops are called to arms to fight invading barbarians. Within the context of 1937 China, *The Legend of Mulan* may be read both as a resistance to the incursions of the Imperial Japanese Army and as a modernist representation of Chinese womanhood. To echo Douglas Wile's sentiment about the popularity of taijiquan among nineteenth-century elites as a re-masculating process, Mulan might represent a call for social action to men who had become politically and militarily impotent under the double weight of colonization and Japanese militarism (Wile 1996).⁶ For the modern Shanghai person, however, neither the film nor the legend on which it is based is allowed to inspire resistance. Instead, in the midst of the anti-Falun Gong crackdown of 1999, the story of Mulan inspired the creation of a state-sponsored set of sword-and-fan dances, called *mulanquan*, practiced primarily by women. *Mulanquan* became the very symbol of legitimacy. A VCD of the 1937 *The Legend of Mulan* appeared in Shanghai video stores about the same time as one title in a series of releases of classic Shanghai cinema.

Other films play on other notions of identity. 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 significant contribution of Bruce Lee (Li Xiaolong) and his producers at Shaw Brothers was to set the martial arts film in the contemporary world. This was also a 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 had already 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 Andre 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 made before his death.

In Hong Kong, fans could not get enough of Lee. While he never quite attained the same iconic status in the 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 (recall the magazine seller at Zhengzhou stadium). 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* chronicled the efforts of a failed scholar in the late Ming Dynasty to fulfill his mother’s dream of her son passing the civil service exam. The scholar whiles away his hours imagining himself to be a great general and devising innovative military strategy. By chance, he is caught up in the intrigues of the exiled, kung fu fightin’ daughter of a high-ranking official and is pursued by an evil officer of the court. The poor scholar falls in love with the daughter, and tragedy ensues. All fairly standard stuff for kung fu films—except for the rather shocking “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’s or women’s 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 guy, but even in death, his love shines above the scenes of bloody mayhem: he bleeds gold. Aside from the exceptional cinematography, the film offers the first sophisticated treatment of war and peace to appear in the genre.

Ang Lee cites Hu’s influence in the making of the later, Oscar-winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. In fact, 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 consequences of a taijiquan master’s immigration to New York City to live with his 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 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 him to make *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. That *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was not nearly as popular in the 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 complaint I heard most often in Shanghai about the

film was that “the fight scenes were not very good.” The film did find an audience, however, 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 novels (*wuxia xiaoshuo*) for film and television. Jin Yong, a well-known muckraking journalist who owned and edited Hong Kong’s *Ming Pao Daily News*, 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). Although firmly melodramatic in their representations of good and evil, his novels introduce aspects of Daoism, Chinese mythology, and Chinese history to modern, urban readers, many of whom are teenagers. The novels have also been rendered in graphic form by Hong Kong comic book artist Tony Wong and others. Jin Yong’s novels have become the focus of considerable academic attention in recent years, but it is in the popular realm where they continue to exert the most influence. The novels are also the first detailed introduction many Chinese-literate teenagers have to “traditional China.” They provide symbolic maps for the viewing of *wuxiapian* and even inform their readers about the various gods and ghosts they might see depicted in store windows, on street signs, or in television commercials.

The 1980s also saw the rise of Jet Li (Li Lianjie) and Jackie Chan (Chen Long). Early on, Chan 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* 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 knock-offs, Chan made his mark with *Drunken Master* and *Drunken Master II*, two films that placed him 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,” *Hong jia*) *gongfu*, and all-around folk hero, Huang Feihong. 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. Chan's popularity peaked in Asia in the late 1980s, but, except for an appearance as a stereotypical kung fu fighter in the American-made film *Cannonball Run*, he still had not cracked the coveted U.S. market and would not do so until he began to collaborate with director 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 skills after his father's death, and, through his family, had good contacts in Hong Kong. He contracted to make a series of films intended to give him exposure in both the United States and Hong Kong. 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.⁷

On the mainland, it was Jet Li who began to take the world by storm, first with the groundbreaking 1980 film *Shaolin Temple*, which inspired countless young Chinese to take up martial arts. Later, like Jackie 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 that Hollywoodizes the taijiquan creation myth.

Why have Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li all portrayed Huang Feihong? The origins of the "cult of Huang Feihong" are sketchy, but most PRC sources (Li Jie 1998; Zhang 1998) paint Huang's life in anticolonialist shades, emphasizing his personification of martial virtue (*wude*). He is usually depicted as defender of the average Joe against bad men everywhere. Few details are known of Huang's life, although 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, as is the case with many martial arts greats, the legend 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. It 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 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; it contains family photos and a renovation of Huang's actual home and medical office (which is adjacent to the museum) and depicts the spread of Hung Gar *gongfu* around the world. In the courtyard outside the museum, a troupe of performers reenact aspects of Huang's life in an hourly performance.

More recently, cinematic treatments of martial virtue have taken new and highly creative turns. Hong Kong actor and director Stephen Chow has borrowed elements from all of the above films to create a revolutionary and unique genre of kung fu comedy with martial virtue at its core. In *Shaolin Soccer* (2001), Chow portrays Sing, a laborer who is recruited by a washed-up soccer player to anchor a team of Shaolin-trained fighters to compete in an all-Hong Kong soccer tournament. Both kung fu brothers possess a special skill that they learn to apply to the game of soccer. Pitted against steroid-injecting bad guys, they eventually triumph—with the help of Mui, a lonely bun maker who adeptly applies her taijiquan skills to help win the championship game and win Sing's heart. While much of Chow's comedy involves wordplay in Cantonese, his physical comedy, imaginative cinematography, and fast-paced direction translate well for foreign audiences. *Shaolin Soccer* and the subsequent *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) became international hits. At the core of Chow's films is a keen awareness of the romantic images that his audience members carry into the theater about martial arts and about China in general. In *Shaolin Soccer*, Chow assumes that his audiences possesses a high level of cinematic literacy, and the film is filled with references to other films, both inside and outside the kung fu genre. The character of Sing, whom Chow has portrayed in most of his films, is also ultimately a kind of twisted version of the virtuous knight we have seen in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Enter the Dragon*, and the Huang Feihong films.

Through imagination, modern cinematic depictions of martial virtue provide one kind of visceral experience of Chineseness. But, as JTA members in Shanghai have lamented, they no longer seem to translate into popularization of the martial arts themselves—a situation quite different from the immediate post-Cultural Revolution period of the early 1980s when the JTA was only one of hundreds or thousands of martial arts organizations that experienced a golden age, largely inspired by films like Jet Li's *Shaolin Temple* and Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon*. Such films presented the argument to their post-Cultural Revolution audience that not only were Chinese martial arts not remnants of feudalism that must be stamped out, but they were among the highest achievements of Chinese culture.

For the JTA of the early 2000s, lack of new students was a significant issue. While members saw an explosion of martial arts popular culture all around them, few young students were inspired to actually seek training. Older JTA members cited opera, novels, and performances in the park as key reasons for their own entrance into the martial arts world. For twenty-somethings in Shanghai, however, the space of imagination that *gongfu* pop culture occupied was also crowded with hip-hop, high fashion, and, perhaps most importantly, economic opportunities that had nothing to do with martial arts. My friend Danny, the twenty-five-year-old Chinese tutor who bounced me off of his apartment wall and shared tales of local masters with me deep into the evening, was something of an aberration for a Shanghai young person. There was little prestige associated with taijiquan, after all, but a great deal associated with other endeavors that served the transformation of China into a capitalist economy. For the younger generation, the new China translates into a transformed sense of self, one deeply steeped in the kind of nationalism only money can buy. JTA members cited the ups and downs the association had undergone over the years, but their very real concern now was that Ma Yueliang's and Wu Yinghua's passing, combined with the relatively few students that their sons had taken on, could mean the end of the association. Already, older members had noted some factionalization within the association. The one Ma son generally acknowledged to have acquired the skills now lived and taught in Europe. In fact, several Ma/Wu family members and other JTA members reported greater enthusiasm among foreign students than among the majority of their Shanghai students.

“Your data is skewed,” I pointed out when I heard these comments. The foreigners they saw were the exceptions: they had the right combination of time, money, and commitment to study in China. My teachers were not entirely convinced. There was a sense among them that the essence of Chinese martial arts, embodied in the teachings of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, had been lost, and with their passing, what was best about China was also in danger of being lost.⁸ There was a sense that the little old Chinese man of yore, a symbol that appeared in novels and in films, a symbol of what was wisest and best in Chinese martial arts, had perhaps emigrated to America. Ma Yueliang had apparently noted the change earlier than most, perhaps because he understood both the orientalizing and the self-orientalizing quality of the little old man image all too well through firsthand experience: foreigners venerated him through racialized lenses, and Chinese people venerated him as some sort of unfrozen mammoth from an idealized past. Yet, in the JTA, it was Ma who frequently commented that overmystification of the art detracted from teaching it and learning it. Now, in the face of what they considered the new reality of Chinese martial arts, the caretakers of the JTA saw that Ma was right, for the former easy opposition of Chinese and foreigner melted away before their eyes as a new category of “transnational taijiquan practitioner” emerged. In the face of such change, was it possible that taijiquan was no longer Chinese at all?



Figure 6.1 Stuntwoman Flying on Wire on the Set of *Flatland*, Shanghai, 2001 (Photo: Adam Frank)

CHAPTER 7

GLOBAL CHINATOWN

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, “Thirteen Ways of
Looking at a Blackbird”

November 2001, Shanghai.¹ Peter and I sat in a coffee shop on the trendy Hengshan Road. A Canadian martial artist in his midthirties, Peter worked in the production office of *Flatland*, where I first met him. Like many “kung fu bums,” Peter came here to find some martial arts and never left.

“I have a hard time losing that first image of Shanghai,” I confided to Peter, drifting back to my first memories of the fog-enshrouded, decaying city in the winter of 1988.

“Well,” he said. “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 asked, 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 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 sort of seen by me as not necessarily the best martial artist. I'm a bit contrarian, so if everyone else is saying Bruce Lee is awesome, I was sort of saying yeah well he's OK. I remember seeing *The 36 Chambers of Shaolin*, starring—yeah, it's *Master Killer*, sometimes called *Master Killer*—I also remember seeing *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."

A few days later, at an American-style bar and grill, I met with Phillip, a former business partner of Peter's and also a Canadian martial artist. Phillip was the architect who had taught my friend Danny some jujitsu and who had been impressed with Danny's *xingyiquan* teacher.² Phillip was a rare commodity: a foreigner who ran a martial arts school in China, located in the Gold's Gym across the street, and he was about to marry one of his students, a Shanghai girl.

"I'm thirty-two years old," Phillip began as we dug into our burgers and fries. "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 American Indian—and because of my British accent. My dad is about five foot nothing and 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 I 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 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 . . . I was six or seven years old. And at that time there were very few people who trained with Bruce Lee."

A skilled martial artist with long-time experience in full-contact fighting, Phillip expressed his disappointment at what he considered the generally poor level of skill he had encountered in China. He had come to China with the expectation of finding

people who could match his own skills; instead, he found a lot of elderly people doing taijiquan in the park, but, with the exception of Danny's teacher, very few "martial artists" who could actually fight.

Wallace 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 film, through products, through practices, and through individuals, constitute and reconstitute many forms of Chineseness. Phillip's and Peter's experiences are typical of many foreigners who fell under the spell of Chinese martial arts at an early age. For foreign martial artists who travel to China in search of not just skills but wisdom, acquired from not just a teacher but a master, participation in the back-and-forth flows of the transnation becomes an unveiling process, a process of peeling away preconceptions. Some find, or believe they have found, what they are looking for. Others, especially long-time practitioners like Phillip, initially meet with disappointment at the general level of martial arts they encounter. For those who stay long enough, however, disappointment is often replaced by self-realization. "Don't lose it," Peter said, referring to the nostalgic memory of the Shanghai of fifteen years before. But Peter, by his own admission, had himself become a player in the construction of New Shanghai.

I have thus far moved freely between the different subspaces of 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, et cetera. In this chapter, by beginning with the personal stories of two foreign martial artists living in Shanghai, I move beyond Shanghai, beyond the political borders of China to the global space where all of these elements coalesce to create images and experiences of Chinese identity. As has been the case throughout, my concern is with the construction and experience of identity as both social and sensual, a position that requires moving beyond the macrolevel discourse through which globalization is usually theorized and instead maneuvering fluidly between history, political economy, and the personal stories of people who are both globalized and conduits of globalizations. Thus, the globalization of a practice like taijiquan,

that is, the actual movement of the art across borders through real human beings, involves a mutually constitutive dialogue between transnational images of Chineseness and the actual experience of practice.

San Francisco, November 2000.³ Sifu Wong, one of the famous taijiquan teachers of San Francisco Chinatown and a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine, talked to me in his office. He told me that he had acquired American citizenship because his grandfather was originally a citizen of the kingdom of Hawaii. 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 told 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 . . . But anyway that’s the old days you know.”

“Did they let you speak Chinese in school?” I asked.

“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.”

The office parrot started squawking loudly as Wong took a short phone call.

“At that time they don’t have ESL classes,” Wong told me as he hung up the phone, as if there had been no break in the conversation at all. “It was very difficult for us to learn English. Especially we live in Chinatown, you know, and with the family or friends or buddies, we always speak Cantonese. And when we practice *gongfu* also speak Cantonese.”

Sifu Wong's story of combating racism in San Francisco's public schools in the early 1960s, his search for an American identity through the English language, and his subsequent success as a taijiquan teacher form a small, but telling, chapter in the often bloody history of Chinese immigration to the United States, a history that requires some unpacking to at least partially understand the alleyways of imagination through which notions of Chineseness are produced in the United States. The first recorded arrival of Chinese people in America 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 and 1869, the Central Pacific and Northwest Pacific Railways employed approximately 15,000 immigrant Chinese laborers. In 1854, the California Supreme Court ruled that laws prohibiting testimony of blacks and Indians in cases involving whites also applied to Chinese (Asian American Arts and Media 1991:12). By 1885, hate crimes against Chinese immigrants had become commonplace. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, to provide a particularly heinous example, twenty-eight Chinese were killed and fifteen wounded in anti-Chinese riots.

The U.S. government took action to resolve this problem not by punishing the wrongdoers but by punishing the Chinese. In 1882, the U.S. 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 and 1924, fourteen separate anti-Chinese laws were passed: in 1888, Chinese laborers were prohibited; in 1892, 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

that their birth certificates had been destroyed in the ensuing fire. U.S. immigration officials implemented a rigorous interrogation and detainment system. Between 1910 and 1940, most of the 175,000 Chinese 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. The following poem is typical of the many written by detainees at Angel Island:

Detained in this wooden house for
several tens of days
because of the exclusion laws.
It's a pity heroes have no place
to exercise their prowess.

Waiting for news of my release,
I am ready to snap my whip and gallop.
All my kinsmen and housemates
will be happy for me.

But don't deny this Western grandeur,
this imposing facade
For behind the jade carvings,
there lies a cage.

Portfolio Project 1989:31

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, and 82 percent of Chinese immigrants were women between 1944 and 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 American Arts and Media 1991; Lai, Huang, and Wong 1980; Lee 1976; Ling 1998; Lyman 1974, 1976; Miller 1969; Siu 1987).

The history of taijiquan's dissemination into the United States is both embedded in the history of Chinese immigration

and intimately related to post-World War II geopolitics, the blossoming of Hong Kong and Taiwan cinema, and relatively recent changes in U.S. policy toward China. With the widespread discrimination that followed the first waves of Chinese immigration in the mid-nineteenth century came protective “benevolent associations,” or Triads, which were also martial arts brotherhoods. The Triads consolidated power and further insulated Chinese communities from the white majority (Gyory 1998; Lai, Huang, and Wong 1980; Lee 1976). The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 contributed further to the violence perpetrated against Chinese immigrants, so that many immigrants were suffering violence from both ends of the spectrum. What little money they were able to extract from a racist white majority often ended up as “protection money” paid to local Chinese gangs.

Thus isolated from the American mainstream by prejudice, segregation, and misunderstanding, Asian immigrants of several nationalities brought martial arts into American society through a variety of novel means. In 1902, for example, President Teddy Roosevelt regularly held practice sessions with a Japanese jujitsu expert associated with the Japanese Embassy (Clark 1992; Long 1997). By 1945, U.S. military and civilian personnel stationed in China, Japan, and Korea gained increasing exposure to Asian martial arts, medicine, philosophy, and religion. Japanese judo and Okinawan-style karate grew in popularity in the United States. By the late 1940s, Sophia Delza, an American modern dancer who had lived in Shanghai and become a student of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua during their leadership of the original JTA, began teaching taijiquan in New York City (Delza 1961, 1996).⁴

By 1949, the Communists had achieved victory on the mainland, and the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan, which resulted in the withdrawal of all U.S. military personnel from the mainland and a massive increase in personnel stationed in Taiwan. The first major exposure of Americans to Chinese martial arts began at this time. In the early 1960s, Ed Parker, an ex-soldier who had learned Kenpo Karate in Okinawa (an Okinawan style of Shaolin-style boxing), pioneered the commercialization of Asian martial arts in the United States. The repeal of quotas on Asian immigrant visas to the United States opened the door for influential taijiquan teachers such as Guo Lianying and

Zheng Manqing to emigrate from Taiwan. Zheng did this with the assistance of the former CIA analyst Robert Smith. Guo settled in San Francisco, and Zheng in New York City. Bruce Lee, a U.S.-born, Hong Kong-raised martial artist, arrived about this time as well and ultimately starred as Cato in *The Green Hornet* television series before moving on to superstardom with his own martial arts films. Guo, Zheng, and Lee opened martial arts schools to non-Chinese students and were among the earliest Chinese teachers to invite non-Chinese into their studios (in California, Marshall Ho and Abraham Liu were perhaps the earliest, in the 1950s).

By 1969, the story of Chinese martial arts in the United States had begun to take yet another turn. Young people looking for peace, love, and answers were exposed in ever-greater numbers to taijiquan, yoga, and many other “energy development” practices. The classic hippie road film *Easy Rider* (1969) even included a brief taijiquan sequence: a young, white male practicing taijiquan with his vagabonding commune. This growth trend continued into the 1970s. The 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, whereby Richard Nixon took the first steps toward reestablishing diplomatic relations with the PRC, stimulated a national interest in China. By 1973, Bruce Lee’s kung fu films had made him a star, and David Carradine starred as a Buddhist Shaolin priest on the run in the American West in the television series *Kung Fu*. When Jimmy Carter normalized relations with the PRC and severed formal diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) in 1979, the “open door” finally opened for good, sparking widespread educational, scientific, and cultural exchanges in both directions. By this time, Guo’s San Francisco students and Zheng’s New York students had begun establishing taijiquan schools throughout the United States. As of 2006, almost every midsize city in America offered taijiquan classes in one form or another.

To return to my earlier discussion of taijiquan in the context of Daoist studies, what this brief history shows us is that the popularization of taijiquan as a product of Daoism has been closely linked with larger historical and geopolitical forces that have had a special resonance for particular generations. In the Europe and America of the 1920s and 1930s, Jung’s and Wilhelm’s work reached a large audience of intellectuals and artists. A teenage Woody Guthrie, for example, sat for hours in

the Pampa, Texas, local library poring over mystical texts about Asian religion and philosophy (Guthrie 1943). 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 and various Maharajisms, spread in the United States. Taijiquan was very much a part of this resurgent interest in spiritual practices. For the first time in American history, a critical mass of enthusiastic "native" teachers coalesced to support existing interest, as well as generate new interest among a well-educated middle class. Daoism was one among several exotic philosophies that offered alternatives to existing paradigms, and thus it made an important contribution to counterculture ideology. Popular presses like Shambala Books heavily weighted their catalogs toward Eastern mysticism. Editors at Shambala, *Yoga Journal*, *Tricycle*, and *New Age* magazine not only published on the basis of what they thought their public wanted to read, but often led the way in explicitly or implicitly linking practices like taijiquan to Daoism. It is not that the link between Daoism and taijiquan was "invented" during this period. Douglas Wile (1996) argues convincingly that the Chinese literati made the link as early as the mid-nineteenth century. But the hunger for alternative spiritual paths, combined 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. Together with the powerful, iconic image of Charlie Chan, the popularity of Confucian sayings in fortune cookies (which were invented in California), folkloric iconography in Chinese restaurants (e.g., Chinese zodiac placemats), and the actual increase of elderly Chinese in the United States that resulted from relaxed immigration laws, the racialized image of the wizened old Chinese man firmly attached itself to the American imagination. True, some of the knowledgeable teachers who came to America at this time were in fact elderly and male. Zheng Manqing, the first great popularizer of taijiquan in the United States, embodied this image for many American practitioners, and that in turn fed the social-sensual construction of Chineseness for many Americans who studied taijiquan.

Sifu Wong's story of his struggle with assimilation makes sense in light of the preceding historical portrait. 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, corralled into "Chinatowns" across the United States—if not by force, then 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 occupied a space where they were not allowed to assimilate in certain ways, even if they wished to do so. While immigrant Chinese teachers have their own reasons for entering the world of martial arts, they have to constantly contend with preconceptions non-Chinese students hold about them. As I sat with him in his office in San Francisco, watching through the window as several students practiced push hands, Sifu Wong told me about his love for martial arts novels as a child and about watching Chinese Opera.⁵ He compared that with the way a lot of non-Chinese got involved with martial arts in Chinatown in the 1970s.

"Remember in the old days," Wong said, "in the seventies? 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 basically use some Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism philosophy thrown in too—quite a few

gongfu philosophy . . . But again that's fascinating to a lot of people. They don't really want to learn *gongfu*. They want to learn *gongfu* philosophy."

"They want to be like David Carradine," I ventured.

"Yeah, but to us, we have to find a way to satisfy the students that give them some philosophy. Then you have to dig into some traditional Chinese philosophy to give to them. You know, and, I even at one time said, 'You know, you want to learn *gongfu* philosophy . . . 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."

Non-Chinese students come to Wong's studio to experience Chineseness through taijiquan or other martial arts, to *actually become* Chinese for a few hours during their day. They expect Wong to enact a certain brand of Chineseness. 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, but he and other teachers who suffer similar instances of orientalization often feel that "resistance is futile." After all, taijiquan and *qi*-related media have become readily recognizable features in American popular culture over the last twenty years. *Easy Rider*, 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 Theatre) has just finished performing for the community. Fleetinglly, we see a man going through what appears to be a half-improvised version of Professor Zheng Manqing's taijiquan form on the stage. No mention is made of what is happening in the scene. The characters watching the scene appear to know what they are seeing, and the taijiquan all seems very normal to them. What we are left with is an indeterminate exoticization of "the Chinese," sandwiched 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. As a counterculture symbol, *Easy Rider* also raises the question of whether or not we can read American taijiquan as resistance to state control of the body.

The communal setting of the taijiquan scene in *Easy Rider* and the overall message of resistance to capitalism and of a return to nature coalesce to associate taijiquan with that resistance. Antonio Gramsci once 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" (1992:235). For the *Easy Rider* generation, cultivating *qi*, along with free love and war protests, was equated with cultivating resistance to the domination of the body. In short, the 1960s in America can be seen as a return to good old-fashioned Daoist resistance to authority. In later American media representations, acts of resistance became closely equated with martial arts.

The American television series *Kung Fu*, starring David Carradine, which began both martial arts fantasy and martial arts reality for so many American martial artists, remains a supremely important example of just this sort of resistance (Pilato 1993). The series follows the wanderings of a nineteenth-century, half-breed fugitive monk from the Shaolin 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 compassionate 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 (although 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.⁶ In *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 about 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, relatively complex conversations about race relations, Daoism, and *qi* disappeared from the small screen. On the other hand, the series also resulted in some positive spillover in the depiction of the Chinese American experience in later shows such as *Little House on the Prairie*.

Kung Fu and Carradine have made comebacks in a variety of forms. In the 1980s, *Kung Fu: The Movie* (1986) appeared. A made-for-television film 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 an Anglo 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*, 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-style clothing 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*.

Carradine himself continues to be an American martial arts icon. Largely because of *Kung Fu*, director Quentin Tarantino cast Carradine as Bill in his *Kill Bill* films, and Carradine regularly writes articles for or appears in martial arts magazines. He, however, does not see his participation in *Kung Fu* so much in terms of producing images of Chineseness as addressing the kinds of spiritual issues that were concerns for many of his generation—the sixties generation.⁷

Some Chinese immigrant and Chinese American teachers from Carradine's generation share with him a genuine interest in spiritual concerns and seem comparatively comfortable with the role of "wise Chinese teacher," into which they are often thrust, readily embracing it as part of a personal search for wisdom. On a bright Saturday morning in November 2000, I sat on a park bench with Larry, a second-generation Chinese American taijiquan and *qigong* teacher, in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.⁸ Rollerbladers were out in force in the springlike weather. Now in his late forties, Larry 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 . . . I see him occasionally . . . This guy, he's like an excellent example of the Dao."

Larry went on to describe taking students on trips in the early nineties with his friend Charlotte to meet martial arts teachers and Daoist meditation teachers. "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 too 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 . . . My mother was born in Sacramento and my father born here, in San Francisco. So San Francisco became home."

"Why did your grandparents come over? Any particular reason?" I asked Larry.

"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. I don't know if that's a cultural thing

or if it's just . . . my family. But for my desire or intuitive sense of 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 temple. That was the teacher of Charlotte, so she brought us there and that was the first time I just started uncontrollably crying."

As a second-generation Asian American, Larry is one of many of his cohort who treat martial arts partly as a heritage experience. In Larry's case, the arts of taijiquan and *qigong* provided him with a conduit for crossing not only borders of imagination in his search for identity but also real, political borders. Larry invites others to accompany him on this search and then reinserts what he learns into the context of Bay Area martial arts and New Age culture. In that sense, Larry travels to China for a particular social-sensual experience of Chineseness, returns home to reinterpret that experience, and then returns to China to reinterpret home.

While Ma Yueliang and teachers in the Shanghai JTA generally avoided lengthy discussions of *qi*, the cultivation, development, and manipulation of *qi* is often the central topic of discussion and focus of fascination for American practitioners. As I have mentioned previously, Shanghai practitioners avoided the topic of *qi* after the crackdown on mass *qigong* movements that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Certainly, even then it was not by any means illegal to talk about *qi*, and various *qigong* styles were still quite popular in China. However, the crackdown had a chilling effect. Recall my experience with Mr. Xu, the man who scolded people with his fan in People's Park. When our conversation turned to moving the *qi*, a policeman took an uncomfortable interest in us. No such chill exists in the American context, where the concept of *qi* has followed an interesting globalization path of its own that leads directly to a specifically American experience of China and Chineseness, a path that often leads through language itself. Harking back to my earlier discussion in the previous chapter of contemporary taijiquan teachers citing classically structured taijiquan verses, some taijiquan teachers in the United States also strategically used the word *qi* in their teaching to communicate their depth of understanding of the art.

When a speaker “borrows” a word, that act may involve specific strategies to communicate social messages beyond the meaning of the word.⁹ 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 this community in which it appears, it is the very act of using the word that produces social solidarity, enhances the speaker’s status, and evokes a shared image of an exoticized Chinese Other that supports a larger transnational discourse about *qi*.¹⁰ Both bilingual and monolingual speakers use *qi* as a borrowing when they are speaking to an audience of primarily monolingual English speakers. 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. In context, *qi* becomes a linguistic tool for communicating social and trans-global messages that transcend the definition of the word itself—providing opportunities, in effect, not only for performing specific identities but also for 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 code switching 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’s concepts of speech economies and verbal repertoires. In her 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 constitute its rules. [Heller 1992:125]

Of course, “the game” need not be as overtly political as 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.

Henry Look is a taijiquan teacher who led a workshop 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 (Figure 7.1).¹¹ Look is an eighty-year-old internal martial arts instructor from the Bay Area who grew up in southern China. He is particularly well known in taijiquan circles for his workshops on the art of *yiquan* (“mind-intent boxing”). In the following excerpt from his lecture, he is discussing an experiment conducted by Herbert Benson of Harvard on one of Look’s *yiquan* instructors, Yu Pengshi (the same Yu Pengshi who lived next to Teacher Lu’s childhood home in Shanghai). Look did not witness the experiment himself, but he did see the film negatives that Benson produced:¹²

I wish to explain a little bit more on *qi*. In my own experience, when I first started with Professor Yu and Madam Yu, come over from Shanghai in San Francisco, [to work with] Dr. Lloyd Benson¹³ in Harvard. They went up and tried to measure the *qi*. Well, 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. [They] said, “All right, Dr. Yu. Just relax, just relax.” The screen was pitch black. “Measure your *qi*.” 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, I’ll guarantee you your arms and hands and everything will be warm. Eventually, the heat goes all the way to your fingertips . . . Another thing that, whether you believe it 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 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? I say there's something more than that. So whether this is true or not, 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. And anyone of you wish to get in touch with her, I'm her agent. You have to talk to me first. [Look 1998]

The audience laughed and applauded loudly at Look's joke. 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). 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 the term *qi* in everyday speech and the ambiguity of definition that I mentioned earlier. In other words, I am more concerned here 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. He 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 TCM (“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*”).

Most of the people in the audience at A Taste of China had 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 nonnative speakers, as borrowers, we therefore rely on higher-status members of our peculiar speech community (the community of taijiquan and *qigong* practitioners) 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.

During a seminar on the topic of taijiquan and physiology, naturopathic physician and martial artist Dr. John Painter emphasized avoidance of the word *qi*. Painter, a native English speaker, was addressing the same group of mostly non-Chinese English speakers that Look had a few minutes earlier:

In using your posture, when you hear all this talk, you know, about sink your *qi* to your *dantian*, lift your *bai hui*,¹⁴ people don’t have a clue what they’re talkin’ about. OK. One of the things that developed that health and helped that spinal cord that we talked about 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? OK, well, forget the idea about *qi* right now. We’ll talk about that later. Let’s just look at the physiological, OK? [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). To develop solidarity with his audience, Painter invokes an informal storytelling style that draws attention to his Texas origins, and he

disarms his audience with verbal art (Bauman 1986; Sherzer 2002).¹⁵ Painter knew that he was contending with somewhat touchy-feely preconceptions about *qi*'s magicality and that his discourse set 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.

As instances of transglobal cultural exchange, borrowed words can 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 identity,¹⁶ an instance of borrowing that goes well beyond language.

The JTA in Shanghai has been, perhaps unwittingly, involved with similar communications of identity surrounding the concept of *qi*. In the 1980s, Ma Yueliang appeared in one of the first American documentary treatment of *qi*, Bill Moyers's *Healing and the Mind* series aired on PBS. The premier episode, titled "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* every day in Shanghai and Beijing. Moyers's 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 remained fully awake during the operation; amazing feats of *qigong* power as a young American martial arts practitioner swore to the authenticity of the old Chinese man who had just pushed him without touching him; and a brief interview with eighty-seven-year-old Ma, patriarch of the JTA. Ma told Moyers, "I did not really understand taijiquan until I reached eighty" (Moyers 1989).

Despite the high production 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, subways, KFCs, and McDonalds that make up modern Beijing and especially Shanghai are hidden from view, or at least minimized.

In the United States, the “sublime, exotic Orient” aesthetic is a regular feature in martial arts instructional videos that address *qi*. In video stores, most tapes and DVDs 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 discursive emphasis:

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. [*Tai Chi Intermediate Fitness and Health* 1993]

Tai Chi Intermediate 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.” In the globalized,

Chinatown-in-space image-making factory, taijiquan finds little room to broadcast its practical efficacy as a martial art.

Other videos also privilege the health-related discourse over the martial. *Taiji for Health*, an excellent training tape 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*).

Finally, 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. [Stefano 2001]

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 Theodor 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 asked, through advertising images, to value the price of the spandex "necessary" to perform the exercise rather than the exercise itself. Clothing is privileged over body.¹⁷ However, Adorno falls short here in that the consumer is also sensualized in the act of worshipping. The line between social and sensual blurs for those who adopt the practice, and the result is not only the acquisition of a skill but the reification of Chineseness in the midst of a peculiarly 1990s America notion of the ideal body.

What each of these tapes shares in common is the attempt to fit the square 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 a 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 precisely the same aesthetic values.

Many of these videos and DVDs are available on the Internet, which now dominates the marketing of *qi* products and practices, so to a large degree, Chinatown in Space exists in cyberspace. Lee Scheele’s “Online T’ai Chi Ch’uan Notebook” 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.” 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 (Scheele 2005). 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 Web site (www.qi-journal.com) serves as a central clearinghouse 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 per se, 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. *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” Web site advertises thus: “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” (Chia 1998; 1984). As head of the International Healing Tao, based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Chia oversees an extensive network of teachers whom he has personally trained and certified in his methods (Figure 7.2). The Web site maintains links with sites throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States. From the high cost of Chia’s workshops, it would seem that 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 purportedly Daoist sexual 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. 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]

Chia espouses an almost Marxist model of sexuality. Compare Chia with Antonio Gramsci, the early twentieth-century Italian activist and Marxist author: “[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? Of course not. Michel 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 it. That is not to say that Chia’s *qigong* form is somehow “inauthentic,” only that his purpose in teaching it includes goals more worldly than most Americans feel comfortable associating with our notions of Daoism. In fact, Chia’s success is that he turns our expectations on their head by successfully blending the modern and the traditional.

The globalization of *qi* is even more apparent in the marketing of medicinal products. In a 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 referred to as TCM. 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,” or even to the increased energy effects often associated with *qi* products. Retailing for \$11.59 at Austin’s Wheatsville Coop, Chi Energy was 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:

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 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.”

In addition to marketing medicinal products directly through retail outlets or on the Internet, New Age fairs provide an extremely important, highly visible venue for marketing internal martial arts and *qi* products. Hundreds of practitioners and product makers maintain booths at Austin’s annual Whole Life Expo. At expos in the late 1990s, 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. In such a setting, one cannot help but associate *qi* with aromatherapy, natural foods, Kitaro, and Birkenstocks. These associations, in turn, may lead some of the fifty-something consumers in the room into misty-eyed reminiscences of Haight-Ashbury, et cetera—this despite the fact that many of the actual producers of *qi* products at the Whole Life Expo were Chinese immigrants whose memories of “the sixties” probably included being forcibly removed to the countryside to pick rice or thrash wheat during the Cultural Revolution. They are themselves signs to be exoticized, and some use this status to their advantage in marketing their products. As one Chinese graduate student remarked to me in Austin, “These days Chinese things are cool.” Others obviously feel uncomfortable with racialized images.

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 beyond state control. 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 Professor Zheng Manqing; survivors of the Cultural Revolution hawking their wares at the Whole Life Expo in Austin, Texas; a couple of North American kung fu bums sitting in a coffee shop on Hengshan Road in Shanghai discussing *Flatland*. 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 intertwined with the flow of global capital and the flow of entrepreneurs in both directions. There are little empires at work here.

Theories of globalization have tended to couch the world in synchronic, dehistoricized terms. Despite their often-insightful analyses, for example, anthropologists such as Aihwa Ong (1996, 1999), Ong and Donald Nonini (1997a, 1997b), Ulf Hannerz (1997, 1998), and Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996) generally emphasize 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 the local as a site of resistance to such

forces (Harvey 1990; Castells 2002). In response to the global-local dichotomy, I find much value in Doreen Massey's tracing individual paths from, to, and within a place, focusing on what gives them meaning and where. Massey looks at connections people make by phone, by post, and in imagination (Smith 2002:123). Her approach is particularly useful, for example, in tracking the globalization of taijiquan and the specific interactions between the global and the local that occur through the movement of JTA teachers to the United States, several of whom have managed to either immigrate or come for short-term teaching stints since the early 2000s.

From that perspective, the global is always an imaginary. We are always residing in the local.

In November 2000, I sat sipping tea in Teacher Fu's living room near Washington, DC. A well-known martial arts instructor from Shanghai and a friend of many of my JTA acquaintances and teachers, Fu found in the nation's capitol a community hungry for what he had to teach. He had been in the States only a short time, successfully sponsored for an immigration visa by one of his American students, but he seemed quite comfortable with his family in the small apartment they had rented adjacent to a private school.

"Why did you come to the United States?" I asked him.

He considered for a moment, and then replied, "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 a very, very Chinese kung fu teacher." Fu laughed heartily at the image. "You see? Right?"



Figure 7.1 Push Hands Competition, 1998: A Taste of China All-Taijiquan Championships, Winchester, Virginia (Photo: Adam Frank)



Figure 7.2 Tennis Court with *Taiji tu* and *Bagua*, International Healing Tao Center, Chiang Mai, Thailand (Photo: Adam Frank)

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CHAPTER 8

BODY REDUX

XIII

*It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.*

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

Markus Schiesser, a Swiss visual anthropologist and martial arts practitioner, had this story to tell about his search for a martial arts teacher in Shanghai:¹

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. [For a] 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 Schiesser, August 4, 2002].

Like many foreign martial artists who traveled to China with a romantic image of what they might find, Schiesser experienced a moment of seeing through his preexisting notions, similar to my own experiences with the JTA. Moving back and forth between a classic, Edward Said style orientalism and moments of penetration to truth or near-truth, we sometimes found ourselves fooling ourselves, directly or indirectly confronted by those we orientalized.

Recall my friend Mr. Tang, the elderly taijiquan player who once accused me of being a “Sinologist.”

In this book I have used the martial art of taijiquan as a case study for arguing that “identity moves.” I discussed taijiquan practice and identity formation in the contexts of 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 martial arts tournaments, media, and practitioners in the United States. Focusing on the phenomenology of identity, I looked at how “Chineseness,” “whiteness,” and combinations thereof are socially constructed and sensually experienced through practice. By paying special attention to the historical, Daoist studies basis for conceiving taijiquan as a Daoist and consequently “Chinese” art, I called attention to the deep, essentializing roots embedded in taijiquan, roots that feed contending conceptions of “Han-ness,” “Chineseness,” “Manchuness,” “whiteness,” et cetera. Finally, I argued throughout the book that we cannot claim to understand taijiquan—or any other globalized, border-crossing practice for that matter—without traveling through several different levels of analysis in a constantly moving hermeneutic process. 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 identities.

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, 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. 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 frequent comment I heard from taijiquan teachers in Shanghai was that *real* taijiquan had a better chance of thriving in foreign lands 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 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. Rather, I am arguing that the aspects of the art that my JTA teachers considered most important—the development of a feel for wielding particular energies (*jin*) in the body, the ability to use one's mind to consciously direct that energy, and the use of imagination to train frames in the body—were treated as forms of knowledge accessible to anyone who was willing to put in the work. They accepted that certain skills would require generations rather than years to pass on and that language barriers did present some limitations, but this they saw as inherent in the complexity of the art rather than a feature of race, ethnicity, citizenship, et cetera. Perhaps a useful analogy would be the rise of youth soccer in the United States. By the mid-1970s, most midsize 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 few coaches ever suggested that Americans were somehow inherently unfit for the task. In Shanghai, Teacher Lu once commented to me that he expected Americans to eventually surpass Chinese from the PRC in taijiquan skills, but that for the present, Chinese would usually win competitions. This comment was borne out by the noticeably higher general level that 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 identity is erased, when an audience sees skill rather than skin color. These are fleeting, but they constitute important moments in the phenomenology of identity.

My analysis began with bodily experience and then split the body into the sometimes chaotic, competing discourses of city, nation, imaginative production, and transnation. I conceived identity as the often chaotic, collective translation of the sensual experience in social contexts. Throughout, my premise has been that once multiple contexts of analysis are split and tried out for a time, we must reconstitute this chaos to “read” such contexts in the taijiquan forms. As I have tried to show, transformation in taijiquan styles or, for example, between the Wu style 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), the erasure of Manchu identity (in the case of the Wu style), and the desire of martial arts instructors to participate in the construction of a national 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 in the patriotic fervor. 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. 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, et cetera, to preserve what they considered to be the essence of the art. Economic, historical, and political conditions led directly to the creation of forms that were easier to learn and easier to perform.

Thus, when a JTA member first performs the fast form of taijiquan and then 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 (e.g., an understanding of its martial applications). In other words, I am not making a claim here that I understand taijiquan better than they do. In fact, anyone who has read the Wu style basic training manuals in English or Chinese is aware of how the forms have changed. 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." 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 connection to elites that many of the extant taijiquan forms had 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 such as 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 "feudal" arts that had been attacked by Red Guards, taijiquan, along with *qigong*, became even more popular in the post-Cultural Revolution period. For a population that had been subjected for ten years to criticism of long-held self-conceptions, it was reassuring that teachers like Wu Yinghua and Ma Yueliang performed their art exactly as in the photographs of the founder. The late 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. These were 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 that had recently gained popularity through a combination of martial arts and Daoist tourism to Wudang Mountain (a range of mountains that is one of the centers of Chinese Daoism) and through the active participation of several state-ordained Daoist priests in the national and international tournament circuit. By 2002, the conflation of national identity with racial or ethnic identity was stronger than ever. Taijiquan had become one of the master symbols for that conflation. At the same time, in the new, capital-driven China, both regional and ethnolinguistic identities had reemerged or, in some cases, emerged for the first time.

Taijiquan did not function purely in terms of national identity. In the United States, taijiquan became even more “Chinese” than it was in China, and this change held true for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, as well as practitioners who did not consider themselves of Chinese descent but who nevertheless enjoyed what they took to be the sensual experience of Chineseness. Likewise, especially among some teachers in the PRC who trained foreign students, there was 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 extensive experience is that one begins to see through such ruses. As a renowned and relatively young teacher of Chen style taijiquan from a Beijing sports university once put it to me in a tone of definite exasperation, “Where are the people like in the books? I don’t think they exist.”² 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 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 orientalizing project of “understanding” China and Chinese people. He was, after all, a real, living, elderly Chinese man. He immediately identified in my foreigner’s interest in taijiquan a fundamentally flawed conception of China. From our 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 the process of learning the art from the JTA began to peel away at least some of the layers of self-deception. Perhaps my friend did me a kindness.

In this book, 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 racisms, power, hegemony, deception, and capitalism run amok is not meant to give the impression that taijiquan is a painfully negative experience that 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 China and Chinese people, in a more sophisticated way. Perhaps transnational practices like taijiquan allow us to engage in an act of reduction about identity, where comparison is no longer “cultural,” but internal.³ Practice can lead us to a moment when we are neither a particular self nor *not* that self—in other words, a moment when socially structured identities are negated through direct experience. It is at that moment when we begin to understand taijiquan not as a complex collection of social relations, but as poetry.

Wallace Stevens’s 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, identity moves. Poetry has thus provided an ideal tool for accessing an intellectual model through a nonintellectual form. 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.



NOTES

Introduction

1. One immediately encounters a “term problem” in discussing a phenomenology of race. Terms such as “Chinese” and “white” suddenly become woefully inadequate (as if they were not so 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,” et cetera. When I momentarily ask that the reader accept these categories, for example, in my discussion of Chinese history and Chinese American immigration, I refrain from using quotation marks.
2. *Gongfu*, commonly written in English as “kung fu,” also refers to “skill,” “work,” or “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 more often used this way in Chinese, 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 acquired a complicated association with performance-oriented martial arts that have little or nothing to do with combat training. Practitioners will usually refer to a particular art by its style name or family association.
3. The style is properly referred to as “Wu style taijiquan” (*Wu shi taijiquan*). When I conflate “Wu” and “Ma” family names, my purpose is to specify the lineage that has developed through the married couple of Ma Yuehliang 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.
4. 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), and Hurston (1970, 1995).

5. Anonymous interview, February 2001, Shanghai. Tape recorded.
6. Practitioners of Chinese martial arts refer to individual movements as “forms,” “postures (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, for example, “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.
7. On the process and pitfalls of conducting fieldwork, see Powdermaker (1966), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Clifford (1988), and Foley (1995).
8. 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 regard 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). Likewise, because many of Carlos Castañeda’s claims to authenticity have not held up under scrutiny, his work continues to be discredited 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 (1994), Chen (1995), Csordas (1993, 1994), and Kapchan (2003) have written detailed ethnographies and theoretical statements that significantly legitimize phenomenological anthropology.
9. See Handler (1983, 1986, 1990), Clifford (1988), and Geertz (1988) for discussions of the relationship between ethnography and art.
10. Thanks to Neill Hadder at the University of Texas at Austin for ongoing dialogue regarding these connections.
11. Jackson (1996:19–20) notes Alfred Shutz’s comment: “The Life-world is the quintessence of a reality that is lived, experienced, and endured. It is, however, also a reality that is mastered by action and the reality in which—and on which—our action fails . . . Everyday life is that province of reality in which we encounter directly, as the condition of our life, natural and social givens as pregiven realities with which we must try to cope.”

12. I would suggest that Derrida's project has much in common with an earlier deconstructionist's famous dictum that "the unexamined life is not worth living."
13. I take John Nelson's *A Year in the Life of a Shinto Shrine* (1996) as my inspiration for this approach to theory.
14. My best guess is that this term was coined by Peter Leyden (Michalski 2003).
15. 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 view of Greek and Maori cosmological dialectics, is essentially the argument that Kant develops in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Schrempf 1992:5). Schrempf begins his book with a discussion of Zeno's paradoxes that is particularly relevant to the discussion of how identity is constantly divided and redivided. "Zeno's paradoxes," Schrempf writes, "all revolve around portrayals of some kind of basic mental activity of 'dividing up' . . . As portrayed by Zeno, dividing is something that takes place within, or produces, a consciousness of dividing or an *idea* dividing" (Schrempf 1992:8). For a representative application to the construction of identity and phenomenology of race, see Du Bois (1969) on "double consciousness."
16. The term "transnation" replaces bulkier terms such as "trans-global processes" and "diasporic community." 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 this term has come to denote ethnicity rather than practice. In this book, for example, one of the diasporas that inhabit the transnation is the diaspora of taijiquan players.
17. While my recognition of Stevens's resonance in regard to this project came independently, it is not surprising that other scholars have made similar links between poetry and phenomenology in their own work. Jackson (1996:41–42) points out the historical attraction of poetry to phenomenologists, citing Bachelard's comment that "the origins of the poetic image . . . cannot be determined." Jackson himself connects William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" with Husserl's dictum "back to things themselves."

18. Regarding Derrida's notion of *différance*, Coole (2000:77) notes two definitions that echo Stevens: "the temporalization of deferral and spatial distribution of differences." As Coole phrases it, there is no "coming-to-meaning." I am arguing here that Stevens's poetry reflects the technique of deconstruction, but rejects its outcome.
19. Edmund Blair Bolles argues that Einstein's position on "the real" isolated him from many of his fellow physicists in the midst of the revolution occurring in physics during his time (Bolles 2004). In my view, it is no accident that Stevens and Einstein, coming from obviously very different perspectives, nevertheless shared certain viewpoints. Another near-contemporary, William James, may also have been an influence on Stevens's thought. Jackson (1996:4) notes James's statement that "the truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process."

Chapter 1: The Body: Daoism, *Qi*, and the Making of Social-Sensual Identities

1. 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.
2. By 2001, the JTA did have association sweatshirts 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 because 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.
3. Unlike Japanese karate and judo or Korean tae kwon do, most Chinese martial arts 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 bringing any loss of face to the older brother. For some, the fiction might even continue in private practice sessions. Note that in the JTA, members avoided kinship terms. Except in the case of the teacher, whom they referred to as either *shifu* or *laoshi*, members generally used names to refer to one another.
4. Some of the material covered in this chapter has appeared in previous papers and articles 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, then 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.
 5. Exploring the meaning of “Chineseness” is a relatively recent trend in scholarly treatments of China and Chinese culture. An extensive literature has developed in the past decade, for example, around the construction of ethnicity in the 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. However, I see family-based forms as spaces that open the possibility of individual expression and individual physical and spiritual cultivation. See Hallenberg (2002) for an alternative perspective.
 6. I have drawn this version of the Zhang Sanfeng legend from a synthesis of written accounts in Jou’s *The Tao of Tai-Chi Chuan* (1980), from cinematic versions of the story, and from interviews.
 7. Despite the formal relationship, the Ma/Wu family makes the claim that Quan You was at least the equal of Yang Luchan’s sons.
 8. 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.

9. For a detailed description of the suffering that the occupation produced for Shanghai artists and intellectuals, see Fu (1993).
10. Correspondence with Milton Frank, 2001.
11. See Wolf (1982) for arguments that inspired this line of thought.
12. Girardot (1987) 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* (*tian*, “heaven”) could be considered genuinely theistic, an argument tied into the larger Euro-American debate regarding Deism as the natural religion of reason.
13. My intent here is not to conflate “Sinology” and “Daoist studies.” Sinologists took interest in aspects of Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism as well, but the philosophical Daoism (*Daojia*) passed on to the early Jesuits by court scholars garnered special attention, perhaps because the ideas found in Zhuangzi and Laozi resonated with contemporary theological debates.
14. Conceiving the social and the sensual as mutually constitutive is key to my argument. Lavie and Swedenburg (1996) critique the anthropologist’s propensity for essentializing social construction, arguing that “even their construction of the social was often indeed an essence” (12). Lavie and Swedenburg are indirectly responding to Berger and Luckman’s landmark 1967 treatise on the sociology of knowledge, *The Social Construction of Reality*, the basic argument of which 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). They consider their attention to the reality of everyday life to be their primary contribution to this line of thought. The paradigm has become so pervasive in anthropology that Berger and Luckman are seldom cited at all. While the Lavie-Swedenburg critique is a useful one, it is important to mention that Berger and Luckman do in fact provide space for phenomenology in their work. They differentiate between “objective reality” and “subjective reality” and are perhaps not as strict in their definition of social construction as many of the anthropologists who have used their work. For my purposes here, social construction is one component of a dialectic that must also include reported experience, or what Varela and Shear (1999) refer to as “first-person” approaches to understanding consciousness. Practices that focus on the direct experience of *qi*, therefore, provide an experiential field for understanding the social-sensual dialectic.

15. Briefly, a discourse-centered approach comprises a focus on the varying contexts in which communication occurs, the strategies behind styles of communication, the performance of identity or identities, and the place the researcher has in affecting and interpreting all of the above (Sherzer 1987; Briggs 1986; Urban 1991). An emphasis on discourse does not imply any sort of value judgment on the “reality” of concepts such as *qi*.
16. 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.
17. See Hawkes (1977) and Saussure (1966) for more on semiotics and the social constitution of sign systems.
18. That is not to say that Ma did not discuss *qi* more deeply with his intimates.
19. Interview with anonymous practitioner, summer 1997, Shanghai.
20. See Frank (2004), Barmé (1999), and Dutton (1998) for discussion of the New Age from a Chinese perspective.
21. Interview with Saul Krotki, by telephone to Seattle, Washington, 26 April 1998.
22. Interview with Michael Phillips, by telephone to Tucson, Arizona, 2 May 1998.
23. Conversation with Michael Phillips, by telephone to Tucson, Arizona, July 2005.
24. *Jin* might also be translated simply as “strength.” While I use the translation “energy,” I acknowledge that in English this has a somewhat mystical connotation and that it may contribute to a kind of “search for the little old Chinese man” complex among non-Chinese practitioners.
25. Interview with Johnny Lee, Dallas, Texas, November 2000.
26. 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.

Chapter 2: Bodies, Lineages, Alleys

1. Large, well-equipped blind person massage centers (*mangren anmo zhongxin*) were extremely popular throughout China in 2001.
2. Paraphrasing Pierre Bourdieu, Hanks defines “habitus” as “the embodied inclination of agents to evaluate and act on the

- world in typical ways. Grounded in past experience and yet affecting the way that agents act, habitus is both a product of history and part of what produces history” (Hanks 1996:239).
3. Fifty-six official nationalities at present.
 4. 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). 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. In the course of her fieldwork, she notes that the Hui frequently made claims about the Hui origins of certain arts, or, at the very least, considered their transformations of what they called “Han” arts as making their *wushu* (martial arts) distinctly Hui. 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 certain common origin stories with Han arts. 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 is *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 *Huibuidao* (“Hui broadsword”) is actually the same weapon that Wu style taijiquan practitioners call *dao* (“broadsword”). Hallenberg is careful to question convenient divisions between “Hui” and “Muslim.” She sees certain aspects of the martial arts as more about establishing Muslim identity (i.e., explicitly demonstrating some link to religious custom), while others are 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).
 5. As I will discuss later, Manchu people’s own sense of “Manchuness” had been in a state of decay and transformation for decades by the time Yang Luchan taught taijiquan to Quan You. For Manchu bannermen, the erasure of identity had begun with their own quiet assimilation into the wider Han society.

6. Telephone conversation with Douglas Wile, July 2005.
7. 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 (Schneider 1984; 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 seeking higher levels of skill as their task in taijiquan, which justified working with other teachers inside or outside 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, 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.
8. Throughout this account, I will, from time to time, use “taiji” in place of “taijiquan”; “taiji” (or “tai chi”) is the colloquial English version. “Taijiquan” is the proper term in Chinese.
9. Interview with Michael Phillips, by telephone to Tucson, Arizona, 2 May 1998.
10. I adopt this graphic description from Peter Ralston, an accomplished taijiquan teacher and champion fighter who taught for many years in the Bay Area and now teaches outside San Antonio.
11. 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 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. While the definitions are not always consistent in practice, they do provide a guideline for practice.
12. 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 most members of nonprofessional martial arts associations like the JTA are usually unable to practice full-time until their retirement or, as in the case of Lu, layoffs from a job.

13. 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*).
14. 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. 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 that my status as a Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences research scholar had put the eye of Big Brother upon them.
15. After I left Shanghai in 2002, Teacher Pang became yet another member of the *xiagang* class, one of the many thousands of Shanghai workers who became a victim of layoffs. Pang had been laid off from an American corporation where he had been hired less than a year earlier. After this, at the insistence of his students who remained in Shanghai, he began to receive some compensation.
16. Even moments of mildly poking fun could occasionally result in violence between foreigners and locals in Shanghai in 2001, something that would have been unheard of only a few years earlier. I knew of one foreign businessman who had had several run-ins with hawkers at an outdoor clothing market that catered to foreigners.

Chapter 3: Park Lives and Secret Spaces

1. For purely comparative purposes, I should point out that I have achieved similar results with professional anthropologists.
2. I am not making the claim here that sensing danger (or paranoia for that matter) is somehow exclusive to taijiquan practitioners. On the contrary, foreign scholars in China often develop such a sense to a high degree, since they are regularly monitored, quite openly, by members of the security apparatus. My own "friend" appeared at odd moments throughout the year or called late at night, always making sure to ask me what I thought of the banned practice of Falun Gong. He was apparently convinced that my taijiquan research was a cover for something more sinister. Several other scholars I knew in China described similar experiences.
3. See Yang (1997, 1999) for a discussion of Shanghai women in the public sphere and the transnation.

4. 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 (1993:105,110).
5. *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.
6. *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.
7. 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 taekwon do, for example, the black belt is awarded as an acknowledgement not of mastery of the art, but mastery of the fundamentals.
8. For a brief period in the 1980s, I studied with one of the most accomplished American taijiquan teachers and martial artists, Peter Ralston, who often described with some fondness practicing up to eight hours per day during his most intense period of learning. However, he also attributed certain persistent injuries to his unwillingness to allow his body to heal during that period. Interview with Peter Ralston, Pipe Creek, Texas, 2003.
9. Public lecture by Phil Lin, Austin, Texas, 1999.

Chapter 4: Barbaric Glass and Indecipherable Causes: Taijiquan as Public Art

1. 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 1985).
2. 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 arising out of postmodernist critiques. 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 of Logan (2002) lie uncomfortably next to approaches to the city that incorporate body theory (Nast and Pile 1998; Pile 1996; Grosz 1995; Bordo, Klein, and Silverman 1998), queer theory (Gibson-Graham 1998), and philosophy/literature/cultural studies (Harvey 1990; Hebdige 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1987; Lyotard 1984; de Certeau 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.

3. 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.
4. The Renminbi (RMB), or *yuan*, is the Chinese dollar. Pegged to the U.S. dollar until early 2005, the rate of exchange has historically hovered around US\$1 = RMB 7.8.
5. “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.
6. All signs in the exhibition hall are in English or Chinese.
7. Several protests by U.S. civil rights groups in the 1990s led Colgate, which had acquired Darkie Toothpaste from Hazel and Hawley Chemical Co., to change the name to “Darlie” and to change the top-hatted figure to a man of indeterminate ethnicity (Toothpasteworld 2006).

Chapter 5: “Through Martial Arts We Will Become Friends”: Taijiquan as Master Symbol of Modernity

1. Kang Youwei’s notion of modernity went far beyond education reforms. Influenced by the utopian novelist Edward Bellamy and 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 Yat-sen and other revolutionaries who formed the Guomindang (“Nationalist Party,” which eventually split into

- the fascism of Chiang Kaishek and the Chinese Communist Party) (Hsü 1995, Spence 1981).
2. Interview with retired YMCA official, 2001, Shanghai. Tape recorded.
 3. Wu Yuxiang was no relation to Quan You and his son Wu Jianquan. The character for “Wu” in Wu Yuxiang is the same as the “wu” (武) in *wushu* (martial arts). The character for “Wu” in Wu Jianquan (吳) is almost exclusively used as a proper noun.
 4. Interview with retired YMCA official, 2001, Shanghai. Tape recorded.
 5. Interview with Ma family member, 2001, Shanghai. Tape recorded.
 6. In Republican China, the state-sponsored martial arts movement was referred to as *guoshu* (national art). This term carried over to post-1949 China.
 7. 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 fees that the staff person attempted to charge (US\$500 per minute of film viewed) made viewing the footage impossible.
 8. Teacher Chen of the JTA was no relation to the Chens of Chenjiagou.
 9. 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.”
 10. 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 fairly strict adherence to the state forms. Generally, other countries have gone along with this standardization process, reserving competition among other styles for domestic tournaments.
 11. Interview with shopkeeper, 2001, Dengfeng. Tape recorded.
 12. Bodhisattvas are sometimes depicted riding elephants. The origin of the Shaolin version of the elephant symbol remains unclear.
 13. One could make the case that the body is not the same as a shrine. Whereas the Alamo is essentially immobile, though by no means static in appearance, taijiquan moves through individual bodies. Casey (1987) 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.
 14. Brow (1996) discusses a similar process in his study of development and spirit possession in the village of Kukulewa in Sri

Lanka. My notion of “real” versus “imaginary” here also has features in common with Michel Foucault’s notion of “heterotopia.” Acknowledgments to Howard Choy (2005), whose essay on Shanghai and nostalgia led me to this connection.

Chapter 6: Kung Fu Fantasies and Imagined Identities

1. I received a B.A. in theatre, acted professionally, and dubbed over a hundred films in Hong Kong before my graduate training in anthropology, so this shift from anthropologist to kung fu TV actor was not as jarring in reality as it may seem.
2. In the case of novels, my use of the term “vernacular” is quite literal. 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. *Outlaws of the Marshes*) takes place during the Northern Song (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 Monkey 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.
3. See Hebdige (1991) for a fuller treatment of subcultures.
4. Watson (1971) places the origins of the *shi* in the Latter or Eastern Han (A.D. 25–220). An earlier form, loosely known as *shi*, appeared in *Shijing* (*The Book of Songs*), an anthology completed around 600 B.C. But these songs 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 the first century B.C. suggests that 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).

5. Admittedly, it is difficult from the perspective of performing in a film or television series to know how the final product will actually look. The claim I make here about the production of certain images of Chineseness is, therefore, a somewhat tenuous one—and a difficult one to test since the producers had failed to sell the series for syndication, although, as of summer 2006, short clips of the series had become available by subscription for cell phone users.
6. 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's play *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), for example, Florrie pushes her fiancé, Sid, to stand up to corrupt taxi company bosses.
7. Bruce Lee died of an apparent aneurysm in his early thirties.
8. Douglas Wile has commented that as China gains power on the world stage, there may be less need for compensatory practices that affirm or confirm notions of Chineseness. Telephone conversation with Douglas Wile, summer 2005.

Chapter 7: Global Chinatown

1. The following section is excerpted from an interview with Peter, 23 November 2001, Shanghai. Tape recorded.
2. The following section is excerpted from an interview with Phillip, 17 and 24 August, 2001, Shanghai. Tape recorded.
3. The following section is excerpted from an interview with Sifu Wong, 21 November 2000, San Francisco. Tape recorded.
4. 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 on taijiquan in English (see Delza 1961).
5. The following section is excerpted from an interview with Teacher Wong, 21 November 2000, San Francisco. Tape recorded.
6. 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 Cartwrights’ butler on the long-running series *Bonanza*, was the only regular Chinese character on American television until *Kung Fu* came along. In hindsight, the brand of Chineseness that *Kung Fu* portrayed was full of traps of its own.

7. According to Carradine (2006), Tarantino hired him more for his acting than for his history as the star of *Kung Fu*. But he also indicates a self-awareness about his own complicity in the production of images of Chineseness: “My big fight is not in the movie and I don’t understand that decision, but I know he’s right about it, whatever it is. Quentin did not hire me because I’m a kung fu expert; he hired me because he liked to listen to me talk. And that’s what I feel is better for me to stress at this point. I don’t need to convince anybody that I know kung fu, but maybe somebody needs to know that I really can act, without doing a Chinese accent or a funny walk.”
8. The following section is excerpted from an interview with Larry, 19 November 2000, San Francisco. Tape recorded.
9. Here I am drawing on Garland Cannon’s “four-stage scale of naturalization” (Cannon 1994:386). In Stage 1, the borrowed term 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.
10. In the last decade, several scholars have addressed the fundamental processes of borrowing and code switching and have consequently problematized the definitions for these terms. Fabian, in Gysels (1992), for example, argues that borrowings of French in Lubumbashi Swahili are part of a communicative praxis that fulfils an expressive, performative function. Gysels (1992) adopts this view in her own work on Lubumbashi Swahili. Myers-Scotton (1992, 1998) 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. 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 that give rise to borrowings (1992:32). 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 1992:54). In the specific case of *qi*, I find Gysels’s argument the more convincing one.
11. A Taste of China had discontinued its All-Taijiquan Championships as of 2006. Its training programs and seminars continue.

12. In all transcribed speeches, I have removed pauses and nonlexical utterances.
13. Look is referring to Herbert Benson here. On reviewing this quote, he noted that he had probably been thinking of Lloyd Bentsen, a former democratic vice presidential candidate.
14. The *bai hui*, sometimes referred to in English as “the crown point,” is located at the top and toward the back of the head.
15. Painter is not only a native-born Texan with a talent for storytelling, he is also a trained actor steeped in Shakespeare.
16. I avoid the term “diaspora” here. As a conceptual framework, “diaspora” 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).
17. This fetishization is not limited to the United States. During my 2001 fieldwork in Shanghai, a nonpractitioner 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.

Chapter 8: Body Redux

1. These remarks came in response to an e-mail in which I asked Schiesser, who was familiar with my research on identity formation and martial arts, whether or not he had any “little old Chinese man” stories to tell regarding martial arts.
2. Interview with Chen style teacher, December 2001, Beijing.
3. For a variation on this notion of reduction, see Schrempf (1992).

Appendix I : Wu Style Slow Taijiquan (Wu shi taiji man quan) Posture Names

1. The implication here is that one hand is the leopard and one hand is the tiger. Interview with Ma family member, 2001.
2. 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 backward and is therefore repulsing someone or something.
3. “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.



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 translators Dyhr-Mikkelsen, McGiff, and Klüfer, in Wagner and Klüfer (2000:339), 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 shan¹</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	Oblique Single Whip	<i>Xie dan bian</i>

Part II

20	Fist Appears Beneath Elbow	<i>Zhou di kan chui</i>
21	Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i> ²
22	Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
23	Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
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> ³
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 Scout on Horseback	<i>Zuo gao tan ma</i>
41	Separate Right Foot	<i>You fen jiao</i>
42	Right Scout on Horseback	<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 Scout on Horseback	<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 Scout on Horseback	<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	Oblique Single Whip	<i>Xie dan bian</i>

Part IV

65	Wild Horse Shakes Its Mane	<i>Yie ma fen zong</i>
66	Wild Horse Shakes Its Mane	<i>Yie ma fen zong</i>
67	Wild Horse Shakes Its Mane	<i>Yie ma fen zong</i>
68	Hands Strum the Lute	<i>Shou hui pipa</i>
69	Cross Wild Horse Shakes 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	Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>

87	Repulsing Monkey	<i>Dao nian hou</i>
88	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>
98	Cloud Hands	<i>Yun shou</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	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>

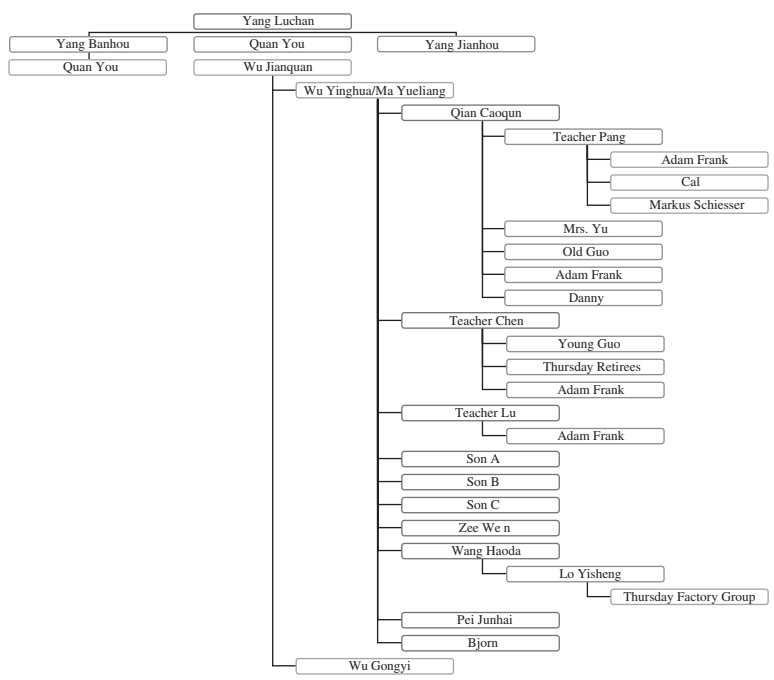
Part VI

104	Left Scout on Horseback	<i>Zuo gao tan ma</i>
105	Palm to the Face	<i>Ying mian zhang</i>
106	Intersecting Waving Lotus [kick]	<i>Shi zi bai lian</i>
107	Brush Knee Twist Step	<i>Lou xi ao bu</i>
108	Step Forward, Strike Crotch	<i>Jin bu zhi dang chui</i>
109	Step Up, Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Shang bu lan que wei</i>
110	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
111	Downward Posture	<i>Xia shi</i>
112	Step Up Seven Stars	<i>Shang bu qi xing</i>
113	Step Back and Ride the Tiger	<i>Tui bu kua hu</i>
114	Turn Body, Lunge at the Face with Palm	<i>Zhuan shen pu mian zhang</i>
115	Turn Body, Double Waving Lotus [kick]	<i>Fan shen shuang bai lian</i>
116	Bend the Bow and Shoot the Tiger	<i>Wan gong she hu</i>
117	Left Scout on Horseback	<i>Zuo gao tan ma</i>
118	Palm to the Face	<i>Ying mian zhang</i>
119	Turn Body, Left-Falling Body Blow	<i>Fan shen pie shen chui</i>
120	Step Up, Left Scout on Horseback	<i>Shang bu zuo gao tan ma</i>
121	Step Forward, Grasp the Sparrow's Tail	<i>Jin bu lan que wei</i>
122	Single Whip	<i>Dan bian</i>
123	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 as set out in this book. 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 nondisciple status. I attempt to address some of these nuances below.



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.

This chart does not reflect all of the sons and daughters of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. Nor do the designations 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.

Teacher Lu was a formal disciple (*tudi*) of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua, but he 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 a "teacher."

Teacher Pang was a disciple (*tudi*) of Qian Caoqun, but considers Ma Yueliang and his second eldest son, with whom he also studied regularly for more than a decade, to be his formative influences. His postures reflect Ma Yueliang's rather than Qian's minor variations.

Aside from her studies with Qian Caoqun, Mrs. Yu's lineage is unclear.

Danny studied briefly with both Qian Caoqun and Teacher Lu. In 2001, he considered himself to be more of a *xingyiquan* practitioner than a Wu style taijiquan player.

Cal began his Wu style study with Qian Caoqun and later became Teacher Pang's student.

The author first studied with Qian Caoqun, and then with Teacher Chen, Teacher Pang, and Teacher Lu.



APPENDIX III: LITERATURE OF INTEREST ON MARTIAL ARTS AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The academic study of Asian 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. Many of them offer highly personal and moving accounts of powerful life experiences and go well beyond basic 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 World War II. 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 *Chinese Boxing: Masters and Methods* (1974), an account of his experience learning martial arts in the Taiwan of the early 1960s. After several decades of publishing among the best of the “how-to” books on martial arts and writing book reviews for *The Washington Post*, he wrote an exceptionally detailed and literate memoir, *Martial Musings: A Portrayal of Martial Arts in the 20th Century* (1999). Smith has little interest in debating social theory (other than taking 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 nonpractitioners. 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. Smith’s writing has inspired countless martial artists to travel to China in search of high-level teachers.

More recently, there have been several ethnographies published on South and Southeast Asian martial arts, including Joseph Alter's *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (1992), Phillip Zarrilli'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 Samurai Martial Culture* (1997) is a detailed history of the methods and social milieu of Japanese swordsmanship written by a practitioner. John Donohue, an anthropologist, has written two books that primarily focus on the practice of Japanese 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 offers detailed ethnography (this is not Donohue's purpose in either case), but each offers useful conceptual frameworks and typologies from which to begin a 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 works are Douglas Wile's *Lost T'ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty* (1996) and *Tai Chi's Ancestors: The Making of An Internal Martial Art* (1999), both translations and interpretations of older writings on taijiquan. Wile's work is noteworthy not only for the skill with which he translates many of the "classic" writings on taijiquan, but also for his creative, well-grounded discussions of authenticity, masculinity, and other aspects of culture and social relations.

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 provides 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 actual washing

cans used for absolutions in Hui mosques. The transformation makes the form uniquely Hui. As I have already noted, Hallenberg's work has special import in my 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, both in China and the United States. The *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* (JAMA) reserves a section for peer-reviewed articles, and many of the above scholars publish regularly in the journal. 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. While most of these articles deal with exercise science topics, in recent years, authors have addressed cultural topics as well. A nonacademic 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 weapons, artworks, and other objects 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 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 that the association sponsored in Shanghai. These are valuable resources for understanding the structure and regular activities of the organization (JTA 1982–2001, 2000).

My attempts to understand where certain specific notions of identity come from and why they persist, as well as my attempt to understand identity as a constantly moving interaction between the social and the sensual, draw upon critical race theory, including subaltern literatures, recent philosophical writings on the phenomenology of race, and treatments of race from a biological standpoint that grow out of or complement critical race theory. 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); and Jeremy Weate's critical look at Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, and the phenomenology of race (2001). Critical race theory has a long tradition in this country, starting with the pioneering works of W. E. B. Du Bois (1969, 1986) and becoming more recently a strong voice in legal philosophy, educational research, and cultural studies through the work of Derrick A. Bell, Jr., Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Mari Matsuda, among others. Critical race theory begins with the supposition that racism is *normal* in American society and that, therefore, paying attention to only the most overt kinds of racism, through court decisions and legislation, will not only fail to alleviate but actually reinforce it in society (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Critical race theory, therefore, is concerned with how, when, and where racism is socially constructed; how power differentials in society contribute to conceptions of race; and how changes in society happen through the conversion of cross-racial interests. While it is arguable how effectively critical race theory can be applied outside the context of the United States, its emphases on the discursive nature of identity and the relationship of power and economics to the daily, lived experience of race are necessary starting points for understanding how gender, class, kinship, and other aspects of identity coexist in the multiple discursive spaces with which I am concerned in this book.

Among scholars of China, critical race theory has had a relatively recent influence. 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; he argues that

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. [2001:18]

My previous discussion of the modern Chinese state’s requisition of martial arts to further privilege “Han-ness” draws on Harrell’s notion of “collectivities as subordinate to the state” (2001:18).

Dikötter (1992; 1997) takes us 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 onward). While Dikötter is mainly concerned with Chinese perceptions of whiteness, he also deals with anti-Manchu and other antiminority sentiments, as well as the same questions of Han-ness in which Harrell is interested. Like Dikötter, David Yen-ho Wu (1994) looks at the critical issue of how one group can consider itself fully “Chinese,” while another group denies it its 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. [1994:165]

Wu thus approaches the question of racial and ethnic identities as discursive dialogue. I find value in both Dikötter’s and Wu’s works in attempting to understand how taijiquan practice contributes to particular experiences of identity.

Schein (1997), while acknowledging the importance of the state in the production of Chinese minority identities, argues that a male-driven “internal orientalizing” 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. Following this line of argument, Wu style taijiquan thus becomes both a symbol of Han-ness and a cross-generational means of setting aside Han-ness.



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	按
<i>anjin</i>	push downward energy	按劲
<i>baguazhang</i>	eight trigrams palm (a style of martial art)	八卦掌
<i>baishi</i>	to formally take someone as one's master	拜师
<i>beifang</i>	northern	北方
<i>biaoyan</i>	performance	表演
<i>bie qilai</i>	do not rise up	别起来
<i>bu diu, bu ding</i>	do not collapse, do not resist	不丢 不顶
<i>cai</i>	pluck, pull down	采
<i>chansijin</i>	silk winding strength	缠丝劲
<i>chi ku</i>	eat bitterness (i.e., to suffer)	吃苦
<i>chuantongde</i>	traditional	传统的
<i>chuiniu</i>	brag (lit. "blowing cow")	吹牛
<i>dantian</i>	cinnabar field (a point near the navel)	丹田
<i>dao</i>	road, way	道

<i>fajin</i>	issue energy	发劲
<i>Falun Gong</i>	Dharma wheel exercise or “work out”	法轮功
<i>fangsong</i>	relax	放松
<i>fanyi</i>	translate, translator	翻译
<i>fazhan</i>	development	发展
<i>feiyue shi kong</i>	flying through time and space	飞跃时空
<i>feng shui</i>	lit. “wind and water”; geomancy	风水
<i>ganjue</i>	feeling, sense	感觉
<i>gongbu</i>	rear bow stance	弓步
<i>gongfu</i>	skill (in context of martial arts; kung fu)	功夫
<i>guanxi</i>	ties, connections	关系
<i>Guomindang</i>	Nationalist Party (<i>Kuomintang</i>)	国民党
<i>hen nuli</i>	very hardworking	很努力
<i>hexiangzhuang qigong</i>	soaring crane qigong	鹤翔桩气功
<i>Jianquan taijiquan she</i>	Jianquan Taijiquan Association (JTA)	鉴泉太极拳社
<i>hu</i>	another name for Shanghai	沪
<i>hukou dengji</i>	household registration, residence permit	户口登记
<i>ji</i>	press	挤

<i>jiben</i>	basic	基本
<i>jiedao weiyuanhui</i>	neighborhood committee	街道委员会
<i>jijin</i>	press energy	挤劲
<i>jin</i>	energy, strength	劲
<i>jing</i>	semen; sexual energy	精
<i>jinsbi</i>	successful candidate in the highest Imperial exam	进士
<i>koutou</i>	kowtow	叩头
<i>laoshi</i>	teacher	老师
<i>li</i>	strength	力
<i>ling</i>	nimble	灵
<i>liuhebafa</i>	six harmonies, eight methods boxing	六和八法
<i>Liujiazui kaifa chenlie shi</i>	Liujiazui Development Showroom	陆家嘴开发陈列室
<i>lǐ</i>	divert, stroke	捋
<i>lǚjin</i>	diverting or stroking energy	捋劲
<i>mianbao che</i>	minivan taxi	面包车
<i>minzu chuantong tiyu</i>	traditional folk sports	民族传统体育
<i>minzuxue</i>	ethnology	民族学
<i>minjian yinyuedui</i>	folk music troupe	民间音乐队

<i>mulanquan</i>	martial dance inspired by the legend of Mulan	木兰拳
<i>neidan</i>	internal cultivation	内丹
<i>neigong</i>	exercises to build up internal organs	内功
<i>neijia</i>	internal school	内家
<i>Neijing</i>	Canon of Internal Medicine	内经
<i>nian</i>	sticky	粘
<i>nianjin</i>	sticking energy	粘劲
<i>ni hao</i>	“Are you well?” (hello)	你好
<i>peng</i>	upward and outward; inflate; expand	膨
<i>pengjin</i>	upward and outward energy	膨劲
<i>pifu ganjue</i>	skin feeling	皮肤感觉
<i>qi</i>	air, vital energy, life force	气
<i>qigong</i>	vital energy exercise “skill” or “work out”	气功
<i>qigong re</i>	qigong craze	气功热
<i>Qingming</i>	grave sweeping day in early April	清明
<i>qipao</i>	a split-thigh dress popular in the 1930s	旗袍
<i>quan</i>	fist, boxing	拳
<i>renleixue</i>	anthropology	人类学

<i>sanjiao</i>	three religions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism)	三教
<i>Shanghai chengshi guihua zhanshiguan</i>	Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall	上海城市规划展示馆
<i>Shanghai 1930 fengjing jie</i>	Shanghai 1930 Street Scene	上海 1930 风景街
<i>shang shan xia xiang</i> side	up to the mountains, down to the country-	上山下乡
<i>Shaolinquan</i>	boxing style of the Shaolin Buddhist Temple	少林拳
<i>shehuizhuyi</i>	socialism	社会主义
<i>shi</i>	poetic form popularized in Eastern Han Period	诗
<i>shifu</i>	teacher, master	师傅
<i>shisan shoufa</i>	thirteen hand methods	十三手法
<i>taiji (t'ai chi)</i>	supreme ultimate, utmost extreme	太极
<i>taijiquan</i> (t'ai chi chuan) ing	utmost extreme boxing; supreme ultimate box-	太极拳
<i>taijitu</i>	diagram of the supreme ultimate (yin-yang symbol)	太极图
<i>tingjin</i>	listening energy	听劲
<i>tiyu</i>	physical training	体育
<i>tudi</i>	disciple, apprentice	徒弟

<i>tui shou</i>	push hands	推手
<i>waidan</i>	external cultivation	外丹
<i>waigong</i>	exercises to build up the external body	外功
<i>waijia</i>	external school	外家
<i>wenhua</i>	culture	文化
<i>wenhua da geming</i>	Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution	文化大革命
<i>wenwu quan cai</i>	accomplished in the literary and the martial	文武全才
<i>wenren tui shou</i>	literati push hands	文人推手
<i>wudapian</i>	martial arts TV soap operas	武打片
<i>wude</i>	martial virtue	武德
<i>wuji</i>	cosmological state prior to polar opposites	无极
<i>wushu</i>	martial arts	武术
<i>wushuguan</i>	martial arts training hall	武术馆
<i>wushuyuan</i>	martial arts academy	武术院
<i>wuxiapian</i>	martial arts movies (lit. “martial chivalry movies”)	武俠片
<i>wuwei</i>	nonbeing, inaction	无为
<i>wuxiaxiaoshuo</i>	martial arts novels (lit. “martial chivalry novels”)	武俠小说
<i>xiagang</i>	laid off; to be laid off	下岗

<i>xinshou heshang</i>	novice monk	心手和尚
<i>xinyiquan</i>	“mind-intent boxing” (precursor to <i>xingyiquan</i>)	心意拳
<i>xingyiquan</i>	“shape-intent boxing”	形意拳
<i>yang</i>	sunlit side of slope; hard, bright, masculine, full	阳
<i>yi</i>	mind, intent	意
<i>yi wu hui you gongtong jinbu</i>	using martial arts to become friends and progress together	以武会友共同进步
<i>yijing (I Ching)</i>	<i>Book of Changes</i>	易经
<i>yin</i>	shadow of slope; soft, dark, feminine, empty	阴
<i>yiquan</i>	mind-intent boxing	意拳
<i>yongquan</i>	bubbling wellspring (a point on the ball of the foot)	涌泉
<i>Zhang Sanfeng</i>	legendary creator of taijiquan	张三峰
<i>Zhanzhuang</i>	standing like a stake (form of standing meditation)	站桩
<i>zhen</i>	garrison post, town	镇
<i>zhongding</i>	central equilibrium	中顶
<i>zhongxin</i>	center of gravity	重心
<i>zibenzhuyi</i>	capitalism	资本主义
<i>ziran</i>	natural	自然

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