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Strength From Within: the Chinese Internal Martial Arts as Discourse, Aesthetics, and Cultural Trope
(1850-1940)

By

Pei-San Ng

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Chinese Language

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Andrew F. Jones, Chair

Professor Mark Csikszentmihalyi

Professor Thomas W. Laqueur

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Abstract

Strength From Within: the Chinese Internal Martial Arts as Discourse, Aesthetics, and Cultural Trope
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Professor Andrew F. Jones, Chair

My dissertation explores a cultural history of the body as reflected in meditative and therapeutic forms of the Chinese martial arts in nineteenth and early twentieth-century China. Precursors of the more familiar present-day *taijiquan* 太極拳 and *qigong* 氣功, these forms of martial arts techniques focus on the inward cultivation of *qi* 氣 and other apparently ineffable energies of the body. They revolve around the harnessing of “internal strength” or *neigong* 內功. These notions of a strength derived from an invisible, intangible, yet embodied *qi* came to represent a significant counterweight to sports, exercise science, the Physical Culture movement, physiology, and other Western ideas of muscularity and the body that were being imported into China at the time.

What role would such competing discourses of the body play in shaping contemporary ideas of embodiment? How would it raise the stakes in an era already ideologically charged with the intertwined issues of nationalism and imperialism, and so-called scientific modernity and indigenous tradition? This study is an inquiry into the epistemological and ontological ramifications of the idea of *neigong* internal strength, tracing the popular spread of the idea and its impact in late Qing and Republican China vernacular discourse. I pay particular attention to how the notion of “internal strength” might shed light on thinking about the body in the period. Using the notion of *neigong* as a lens, this project examines the claims of the internal forms of Chinese martial arts, and the cultural work that these claims perform in the context of late Qing and Republican China. I locate the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the key formative period when the idea first found popular conceptual purchase, and explore how the notion of *neigong* internal strength became increasingly steeped in the cultural politics of the time.

Considering the Chinese internal martial arts not only as a form of bodily practice but also as a mode of cultural production, in which a particular way of regarding 'the body' came to be established in Chinese vernacular culture, may additionally yield rich theoretical fodder. How might such claims about a different kind of “internal strength” revisit or disrupt modernist assumptions about the body? The project highlights the neglected significance of the internal martial arts as a narrative of the Chinese body. More broadly, it suggests fresh avenues for scholarship on the body, in showing how these other-bodily "ways of knowing" took on meaning in the period and beyond.

Dedication

To Sherry/Mom,
who never wavered in her enthusiasm and support for this project, all through to the end.
I dearly wish you could be here to see its completion.

In Memoriam (1939 - 2014)
“It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.”

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Figure 1. Article on a young Chinese woman who challenged a Russian strongman to a duel, *Shenbao* 1934.11.24.

Chapter One Introduction

“Miss Yang Jianxia Invites Russian Strongman to a Duel,” reads the headline of an article that appeared in a 1934 issue of *Shenbao*, Shanghai's leading newspaper in the period. The sub-headline summarizes the circumstances of the invitation to the duel: “Russian strongman makes public boasts in Beiping [today's Beijing]. The martial arts community of Beiping rises in indignation to defend national honor. Miss Yang is the daughter of a Form-Intent [*Xingyi* 形意] martial arts instructor. [She] speaks freely of internal and external skills [*nei wai gong* 內外功] and the special characteristics of Chinese martial arts.”¹ The story ends in victory for Miss Yang. The kicker to the story is in 17-year-old Yang's own remarks when interviewed at the end of the account: “My success is due to 'internal skill [*neigong* 內功]'... [One] can perceive that a metaphysical dimension is the special characteristic of Chinese martial arts, and is completely opposite to the Westerners' sense of physical strength and [the Western] focus on the physicality of wrestling as the primary form of martial strength. Not only do the Chinese not celebrate great strength, they consider great strength a problem.” (See Figure 1).

What do we make of such an account? Certainly it presents problems in terms of historical factuality. Scholarship would likely regard such a narrative as folk history, part of the myth-making apparatus perpetuating the figure of the legendary martial arts masters that has been a hallmark of Chinese martial arts.² It can also be interpreted as part of the nationalistic clamor of the period. Such a claim of outmatching a Western strongman provided indigenous symbolic capital for the enfeebled China in the period, a semi-colonized nation suffering repeated military defeats at the hands of imperialist powers. It would be easy to relegate this narrative to the enterprise of redeeming autochthonous pride, as a way in which the Chinese responded to the novelty of Western sports and calisthenics (called “physical education [*tiyu* 體育]”) introduced to China in the period.³

Less often noticed is the perspective on the body that the narrative offers: how two contrasting notions of strength are presented in a physical and ideational contest. Embodied in the figures of the two dueling contestants, Yang Jianxia's narrative posits a pair of different—and opposing—ideas about human capability. One of them should be familiar to our modernist perspective. The sight of rippling muscles, exposed in the strongman's bared torso, telegraphs the idea of strength.⁴ This is clearly “physical strength,” to use Yang's phrase. It should be noted that this is strength that is visible to the

1 *Shenbao*, “Yang Jianxia nvshi yue E lishi biwu” 楊劍霞女士約俄力士比武 [Miss Yang Jianxia invites Russian strongman to a Duel],” 1934.11.24.

2 See for instance Thomas A. Green, “Sense in Nonsense: The Role of Folk History in the Martial Arts,” in Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth eds., *Martial Arts in the Modern World* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 1-11; and Sixt Wetzler, “Myths of the Martial Arts,” in *JOMEC Journal of Journalism, Media, and Cultural Studies* 5(2014), accessed December 1, 2016, <https://publications.cardiffuniversitypress.org/index.php/JOMEC/article/view/332>. Also see Benjamin Judkin's post “The Problem of Doubt in the Traditional Martial Arts,” *Kungfu Tea* blog, May 19, 2014.

3 See Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1964); Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Lin Xiaomei. *Qingmo minchu Zhongguo wushu wenhua fazhan yanjiu* 清末民初中國武術文化發展研究 [Research on the development of Chinese martial arts culture in late Qing and early Republican China] (Zhejiang: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe 2012).

4 For a history of bodybuilding from the Euro-American perspective, see Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: the Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1995). Also see Christopher Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

eye, and tangible to the touch.

The other notion of strength that Yang Jianxia supposedly possesses may not be as familiar, or even discernible in the slight stature of the young woman. In the words of Yang Jianxia, this second notion of strength is “opposite” to Western physiological strength, and is not the product of physical training in the gymnasium. For Yang Jianxia and the Republican Chinese readership of *Shenbao* whom she was addressing, this is one of the many differences between strength derived from “internal [*nei*]” skills as opposed to “external [*wai*]” training. The account extolled the virtue of the internal kind of skills, that supposedly engender a strength *other* than physiological biomechanics and muscle—a strength derived from an invisible, intangible “metaphysical” interiority of the body. This strength, according to Yang Jianxia, is called *neigong*, “internal skill or strength.”

This account of *neigong* internal strength pitted against Western muscularity turns out to have been widely circulated in the period, reprinted from the *Shenbao* in a major martial arts periodical, and recounted in several other regional newspapers. Other sources in Republican Chinese martial arts print culture reveal that the idea of *neigong* internal strength became adopted as a foundational tenet of the internal forms of Chinese martial arts, such as *taijiquan* (or “tai chi” in the Wade-Giles phonetic system) and *xingyiquan*, the Form-Intent style that Yang Jianxia championed in her account. Today, *neigong* continues to be widely practiced among Chinese-speaking communities for therapeutic health benefits, as the basis of modern *qigong* (or “chi gong”). The word *neigong* has also become something of a commonplace idiom in modern Chinese vernacular culture, most popularly known as a mainstay trope in martial arts film and fiction. In recent years, depictions of *neigong* have found their way into Hollywood, such as in Lee Ang's *Pushing Hands* (1992) and Keanu Reeves' *Man of Tai Chi* (2013).

More than mere nationalistic wishful thinking or ideological posturing, then, the account of Yang Jianxia may be read as representing an articulation of a different perspective on the body. “Internal strength” does not seem to be associated with moral character or virtue, as might be assumed from the English idiom “inner strength,” but appears to be regarded as a source of martial ability, a kind of skill that might come with a tinge of the fabulous and the “metaphysical.” It certainly appears to be considered more than capable of holding its own against physical muscle and sinew, as the report on the duel suggests.

What do we make of these competing claims for efficacy and thinking about the body? In what ways can the contestant figures of a muscular Western strongman and a Chinese martial arts warrior speak to variant conceptualizations of strength and human capability, as reflected in Republican Chinese vernacular print culture? And what significance might this so-called “internal strength” hold in the Chinese cultural imaginary, in the period and into the present day?

This study is an inquiry into the epistemological and ontological ramifications of the idea of *neigong* internal strength, tracing the popular spread of the idea and its impact in late Qing and Republican China vernacular discourse. I pay particular attention to how the notion of “internal strength” might shed light on thinking about the body in the period. Using the notion of *neigong* as a lens, this project examines the claims of the “metaphysical” forms of Chinese martial arts, and the cultural work that these claims perform in the context of late Qing and Republican China. I locate the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the key formative period when the idea first found popular conceptual purchase, and explore how this “metaphysical dimension” of the body became increasingly steeped in the cultural politics of the time.

Tempest in a Teacup: Problems about the Chinese Internal Martial Arts

The “metaphysical dimension” that Yang Jianxia spoke of in fact represents one of the most controversial issues in Chinese martial arts discourse, in the period in question and into the present day. There is plenty of healthy skepticism as to whether *neigong* internal strength exists at all, and whether the internal martial arts can even be considered to represent a set of practical martial skills. As martial arts historian David Lorge observed in a remark akin to calling out the emperor's lack of clothing, “internal strength in the martial arts was a challenging notion because its most basic proof was an external demonstration of power.” Such an external demonstration of any actual power from *neigong* could not be easily obtained, as the heart of *neigong* lies in apprehending its “true essence.” A master of *neigong* would supposedly have an understanding “at a level deeper than ordinary people could perceive. This sort of knowledge was a frequent point of discussion in the Daoist philosophical tradition... This also opened up the possibility that someone who did not obviously manifest martial power through his or her physique or strength could nonetheless be a true master.”⁵

Others point out the historical problems surrounding the conceptual origins of *neigong* internal strength. It is an idea rooted in a widespread, and likely erroneous, assumption that the Chinese martial arts are traditionally categorized by way of a dichotomy: the internal forms are linked with the legendary Daoist master Zhang Sanfeng (dates uncertain) and Mount Wudang in the south, versus the external forms, which are associated with the Buddhist figure the Bodhidharma (ca 400s CE) and Shaolin Monastery in the north. As their labels conveniently indicate, the “internal forms” [*neijia*] focus on the cultivation and harnessing of one's internal energy—producing *neigong* internal skills—while the “external forms” [*waijia*] emphasize training the movement of the physical body and limbs.

In the next chapter, I will probe more fully into the problematic historical background to this division of internal and external skills. For the moment, it is important to note that this assumption about the internal-external dichotomy has been and continues to be popularly accepted in vernacular Chinese culture, ever since it was featured in China's first official history of *tiyu* sports in 1919. Modern Chinese martial arts film and fiction have contributed to the mythologized internal-external structure, adding fabulous figures, embellishing alleged feats of power from either internal or external skills, and—such as in the case of Keanu Reeves' 2013 film—deepening the connection of the Chinese martial arts with ideas borrowed from Daoist tradition. The result is that into the present day, both within China and abroad, the Chinese martial arts in general remain closely associated with Daoist practices of internal cultivation. The Orientalized impression that thought of Chinese martial arts as a form of Daoist practice was perhaps most notably exemplified in Joseph Needham's magisterial *Science and Civilization in China*, which described Daoist practices of inner alchemy [*neidan*] as “Taoist martial arts.”⁶

The relationship with Daoism has engendered a profound impact on modern scholarly perspectives on *neigong* and the internal Chinese martial arts. Since the 1930s, martial arts scholars

5 Peter Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 196.

6 Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), Vol. 5, 170ff. Also see independent martial arts scholar Stanley Henning's essay, which criticizes Needham, among other scholars, for his interpretation of “martial arts” as Daoist. Stanley, E. Henning. “Academia Encounters the Chinese Martial Arts.” *China Review International*. 6. 2 (Fall 1999), 319-332.

have attempted to debunk the popular myth of the internal-external dichotomy, showing how the dichotomization and its Daoist connection are based on scant historical evidence.⁷ To complicate matters further, many practices of the internal martial arts have also been linked to sectarian activity—notably the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), the Boxer uprising (1899-1901), and the present-day ongoing situation of political tension between the Chinese authorities and the Falungong. This potential for heterodoxy has rendered the internal martial arts even more suspect, particularly among mainland Chinese scholars.⁸

Perhaps in order to categorically distance the 'actual' Chinese martial arts from these heterodox internal forms, some historians have extended the argument to state that the arbitrary internal-external divide “hinder[s] a true understanding of martial arts in history and their place in Chinese culture, and has resulted in misperceptions as to their association with religion and spirituality.”⁹ Those who take this view consider *neigong* practices as “not directly associated with Chinese martial culture but were complementary to it... Individuals throughout [Republican Chinese] society, including Buddhist monks and Taoist recluses, practiced these methods of psychophysiological discipline.”¹⁰ This perspective suggests that there was a mainstream “Chinese martial culture” in the period, and *neigong* practices were marginal to it, practiced only by a few esoteric individuals. Indeed, according to this view, to perpetuate the idea that there are internal forms of Chinese martial arts, along with their dubious elements of “religion and spirituality,” is to misunderstand the very nature of Chinese martial arts. Such a perspective makes the assumption that the internal forms have no place among the 'martial arts' proper, and that the scope of martial arts studies should be delimited to the actual physicality of combat skills.¹¹

7 Tang Hao's essays in the 1930s represent the earliest scholarly efforts to dispense with the popular myths of Zhang Sanfeng and Bodhidharma: “Shaolin Wudang kao 少林武當考 [Shaolin and Wudang research]” (1930); “Taijiquan yu neijia quan 太極拳與內家拳 [Taijiquan and the internal school of martial arts]” (1935); and “Neijia quan 內家拳 [Internal school of martial arts] (1935).” Photographic reprints in one volume, Taiyuan: Shanxi kexue jishu chubanshe, 2008.

8 For a history of the Taiping Rebellion, see Jonathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996). For a history of the Boxer Rebellion, see Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Paul Cohen, *History In Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). For a study in the modern context of *qigong*, see Nancy Chen, *Breathing Spaces: Qigong, Psychiatry, and Healing in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

9 Stanley E. Henning, “Chinese Martial Arts,” in *Demystifying China: New Understandings of Chinese History*, ed. Naomi Standen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 96.

10 Henning, “The Martial Arts in Chinese Physical Culture,” in *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, eds. Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 14.

11 In *Marrow of the Nation*, for instance, Andrew Morris excluded any reference to the internal martial arts, despite devoting a whole chapter to the Chinese martial arts in the Republican era. In his foreword to Morris' book, Joseph Alter pointed out this oversight as a problem, drawing attention to the significance of what he calls “metaphysical fitness.” See “Foreword,” in *Marrow of the Nation*, xix.

Wading into Deeper Waters: Problems of Language and Context

Let me be clear. This study is not about the Chinese internal martial arts per se, and is not intended to contribute to the debate on whether *neigong* skills exist. It is a study of an *idea* that underpins many forms of the internal martial arts, including *qigong* and *taijiquan* (to mention the two forms that are currently most globally known). It is a cultural history of how a mode of thinking about the body came to be shaped in a particular milieu. I consider the Chinese internal martial arts not in terms of their status as combat skills, but as a cultural trope, using *neigong* internal strength as a focal lens with which to explore its rich implications for understanding a form of bodily thinking.

This study proceeds from the premise that the elements of “religion and spirituality” cannot, and perhaps should not, be summarily extracted from scholarship on Chinese martial arts. This is not to endorse the distorted perspective that the Chinese martial arts is all about spirituality and self-cultivation, nor to deny the martial nature of actual fighting skills. Nor is it to make an argument, in the name of “strategic essentialism,” for the uniqueness of the Chinese *neigong* body or that of the internal martial arts.¹²

I intend, however, to focus on the cultural import of the Chinese internal martial arts through the lens of *neigong* internal strength, and what it can tell us about indigenous embodied knowledge. Do the internal martial arts hold any significance in the Chinese cultural imaginary? If so, what kind of significance and why would that matter? We will find that Chinese internal martial arts discourse is ineluctably bound up with practices of meditative breathing, a kinesthetic self-awareness, and the perception of some form of metaphysical or other-physical internal strength. This kind of language—explicating other-physical senses, explaining how to use meditative breathing to cultivate strength—became increasingly resonant amidst the scientific voices promoting the importance of sports training in the period. I will show how this kind of thinking on internal strength permeated cultural discourse in the Chinese nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lending a particular register to indigenous bodily thinking and aesthetic imagination. Exploring these aspects of so-called “religion and spirituality” leads the way towards recognizing the important cultural reach of this idea in the late Qing and Republican periods and into the present day, towards understanding how the introduction of *tiyu* sports and the rise of *neigong* internal strength came to share the same historical moment and discursive horizon at the time.

Indeed, the overall theoretical thrust of this study is predicated upon the often unstable epistemic terrain of what could be meant by words such as “body,” “strength,” and “metaphysical.” I use such words here as placeholder terms pointing towards the complex and contested articulations of corporeality in this period—articulations that relate to what Yang Jianxia called “a metaphysical dimension” in the practice of Chinese internal martial arts, linked to what are commonly denoted as “religion and spirituality” in the English language.

This study navigates with caution these minefields of problematic language and context. Take, for instance, the Chinese concept of *qi* 氣, a central notion around which the practice of *neigong* revolves. I follow Nathan Sivin and other scholars in ultimately leaving the term untranslated.¹³ A

12 Gayatri Spivak, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge 1995), 214.

13 Sivin, *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan,

primary vitality or energy of the body in the Chinese sense of physiology, “*qi* designates a dynamic force and quality in constant flux and flow. It is comparable to *pneuma* in Greek or *prana* in Indian philosophy. English renderings such as ‘pneumatic stuff’, ‘air’, ‘vapour’, and ‘breath’ all approximate its meaning, but unsatisfactorily.”¹⁴ *Qi* is central to Chinese concepts of the body and also Chinese cosmology, being at the same time that which makes up the universe and which also energizes or enervates, or “makes things happen in stuff.”¹⁵ At times associated with air and breath, it permeates the earth, and flows through the human body in a network of *mai* or circulation tracts. As such, *qi* could be said to constitute “the shared substrate” between the world of humans and the physical world.¹⁶

Perhaps one of the most difficult areas pertinent to this study of the notion of *neigong* internal strength is the problem of understanding the element of the “spiritual” that is embodied in the practices of *qi* in the context of the Chinese internal martial arts. If one were sitting in quiet meditation in one's home, visualizing the movement of *qi* in a prescribed route through one's body for the purpose of achieving better overall health, does this constitute a religious practice? What if one were to perform stretching and bending exercises, all the while instructed to “empty one's mind and focus attention” on certain pressure points or simply upon one's palm, would this be considered to contain aspects of spirituality? If one were trying to sense a *jin* energy that is “heard” upon the skin, how does such a kinesthetic and synesthetic practice work as part of the body and non-physical perception? As shown in Yang Jianxia's pragmatic comments on “the metaphysical,” in the account of her encounter with the Russian strongman, martial arts practitioners do not necessarily regard these aspects as “religious” practices in the Western sense of the word.

The question of what “religion and spirituality” might themselves represent in the Chinese context poses even larger problems.¹⁷ As a category of knowledge, Western and Christian religion—and even the Chinese word for “religion [*zongjiao*]”—spread to China from Japan in the latter half of the nineteenth century, during the gradual adoption of the modern social sciences.¹⁸ For this reason, throughout the study, I avoid the words “religion” or “religious.” While I am obliged to use words such as “spirituality,” “meditation,” “self-cultivation,” and “metaphysical,” I am well aware that these words carry their own separate, and constructed, meanings across various disciplines in the English-language context. Indeed, because *qi* is considered as much grounded in the corporeal body as it is in the air, being the “shared substrate” between the world of humans and the physical world, I am disinclined to use the words “metaphysical” or “spiritual,” which imply something beyond the corporeal, unconnected with or removed from the physical. I therefore occasionally use the neologistic phrase “other-physical” in this study, when speaking to these aspects of the not-quite or not merely physical.

On the subject of the problems of language and context, it should be borne in mind that the

1987). Classic discussions on *qi* in the field of Chinese medicine include Paul Unschuld, *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); and Manfred Porkert, *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine: Systems of Correspondence* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974).

14 Elisabeth Hsu, *Transmissions of Chinese Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9, fn 11.

15 Sivin, *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China*, 47.

16 Mark E. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 213, quoted in Hsu, *Transmission of Chinese Medicine*, 80.

17 For more on the problem of religion in the Chinese context, see Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Paul R. Katz, *Religion in China and Its Modern Fate* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis, 2014).

18 Paul Katz, *Religion in China and Its Modern Fate*, 10. For more on the Japanese experience, see Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012).

English phrase “martial arts,” with its root definition of being “about skill with violence,” is a challenging one with which to denote the practices of the internal martial arts.¹⁹ We will see later in the next chapter on the historical development of the Chinese internal martial arts, that “the very adjective ‘martial’” can be misleading, or at best a rather limiting word, especially when one looks at a certain point in time such as the seventeenth-century Ming-Qing transition period.²⁰

Body Issues: the Other-Physical and an Inner Body

The question of what “strength” and “body” can conceptually represent thus underpins the entire project. What can *neigong* tell us about the ways in which the Chinese body was imagined, narrativized, and thought about in the period?²¹ If we are to define “embodiment” as “an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience,” how are we to understand these practices of *qi* as a part of 'being-in-the-world,' as forms of embodied knowledge?²²

A key notion that this study proposes to examine is the idea of an inner kind of body that takes conceptual shape in Chinese vernacular print culture in the period. The rise of the internal martial arts as a phenomenon heralds the popular spread of this notion of an inner body that can produce its own kind of strength, through the practice of *neigong*. This inner body can channel *qi* through visualized meridians, and can be trained with its own set of methods. This is not to say this inner body is separate from the physical body—quite the opposite. These internal practices of *qi* can apparently produce well-documented experiences of externally (i.e. physiologically) felt sensations of cold or heat.

I pause here to reflect on the various theoretical issues involved in thinking with this idea of the inner body. The question of whether these can or should be classified as “psychosomatic” effects lies outside the scope of this study; because of the modern-day ideological baggage that the word brings along with it, I consider it an anachronistic description for these late Qing and early Republican

19 The definition is from David Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*, 5. Lorge makes the observation, parallel to my argument here, that while Chinese physical education histories have always included the martial arts, the category of martial arts “is a modern Western import.” See Lorge, *ibid.*, 255, fn. 2 to chapter 10.

20 Meir Shahaar, *Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 148.

21 There have been many studies on the question of “embodiment” in the broader field of Chinese studies. See for instance Angela Zito and Tani Barlow eds., *Body, Subject, and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich eds., *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, And Chinese Cultures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2006); Francois Jullien, *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness* (New York: Zone Books, 2007); and Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing* (New York: Zone Books, 2012). On studies of embodiment in the classical context, see for instance Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004). On studies of embodiment in the Daoist context, see Henri Maspero's classic *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981).

22 Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology,” in *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture*, eds. Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 143. Also see John Whalen-Bridge and D.S.Farrer, eds., *Martial Arts As Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

Chinese accounts of *neigong*.²³ From the work of historians of the body such as Caroline Walker Bynum, Barbara Duden, and Shigehisa Kuriyama, there is little question that human beings in different periods and cultural milieus have reported bodily experiences that differ significantly from modernist experience.²⁴ Such a conclusion underpins the recent methodological turn towards sensory history or an anthropology of the senses that would explore culturally and historically specific modes of sensibilities.²⁵ In many ways, although the accounts of *qi* and *neigong* do not entirely relate to the five senses as they are generally understood, this cultural history of *neigong* nevertheless finds intellectual resonance within this methodological turn.²⁶ I show how texts and images about *neigong* mediate the internal martial arts as a conduit between the other-physical aspects of practice and the biological realities of flesh and blood.²⁷ These contribute towards “descriptions of the sensory apprehension of the inner body,” which Vivienne Lo and Michael Stanley-Baker suggest may be “China’s most notable contribution to the mapping of the human body.”²⁸

This study of *neigong* as a form of bodily thinking underscores that the fabric of a martial arts cultural imaginary came to be woven at a time of profound shifts in the ways in which the human body was understood, both within China and without. The contest between Yang Jianxia and the Western strongman played out against the triumphal scientific tide of the times, when sports and physical education were becoming synonymous with improving martial prowess for the beleaguered 'Sick Man of the East.' New imaging technologies of X-rays and photography profoundly changed the ways in which the body could be seen and imagined. The introduction of ideas of anatomy and physiology, and their concomitant impact on views of Chinese medicine in the period, too, cast their own lengthy shadows over discourses of the body in the Chinese martial arts. Against such a discursive backdrop, the study shows how the internal martial arts constituted a site of hotly contested issues over defining,

23 For a history of the rise of “psychosomatic illness” as a medical concept, see Edward Shorter, *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era* (New York; Toronto: The Free Press, 1992). For another perspective that looks at the growth of psychology as a field alongside changing formulations of religiosity and spirituality, see Lisa Miller, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

24 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books, 1992); Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

25 For some examples of scholarship on sensory history and anthropology of the senses, see Alain Corbin’s classic *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Mark M. Smith, “Making Sense of Social History,” *Journal of Social History*, 37 (2003), 165-86; Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011); and David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

26 While works that attempt to consider narratives and experience outside of the so-called 'five senses' have proven intellectually very rich, I often find their conceptual tools not fully applicable to the task of trying to conceptualize accounts of *qi*. See David Howes ed., *The Sixth Sense Reader* (Oxford; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), or Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2012). For a fascinating account of the formulation of the five senses in the first place, see W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter, *Medicine and the Five Senses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

27 The rise of Indian yoga in the same period, for instance, might represent another way in which a sense of an 'inner body' was apprehended and described, as is the contemporaneous development of the concepts of proprioception or kinesthesia or muscle awareness in the field of psychology in the West. These intriguing parallel developments lie outside the scope of my study. For an account of the modern history of Indian yoga, see for instance Joseph Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body Between Science and Philosophy* (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2010). For more on the story of kinesthesia, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2009).

28 Vivienne Lo and Michael Stanley-Baker, “Chinese Medicine,” in *Oxford Handbook of History of Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 162.

visualizing, and practicing the Chinese body in the period.

Fact or Fiction: Narratives, Stories, and Discourse

To probe more deeply into the question of how to regard *neigong* as embodied knowledge, I need to also address the complex nature of the source material. As we will see in the ensuing chapters, Chinese martial arts discourse is rife with forgery, myth, anecdote, distortion, and exaggeration. The stories around *neigong* are particularly susceptible to such discursive refraction, as the fabulous narratives of Zhang Sanfeng and the Bodhidharma already attest. How, then, does one approach such outsized myths, or embellished claims of the capabilities of *neigong*?

In this wise, I take methodological inspiration from Anne Harrington, who in her study of mind-body medicine in the modern West notes that “mind-body medicine is a deeply storied world.” She makes a distinction between “stories” and “narratives.” For her, stories are “living, local, and specific,” the stuff of dinner table conversations, things heard or read about all around us, while narratives are “templates,” that provide tropes and plotlines to help us make sense of the larger import of specific stories. They help us construct narratives of our own, that others can recognize and affirm. Most importantly, “[w]e learn these narrative templates from our culture, not in the way we might formally learn the rules of grammar in school, but in the way we might unconsciously learn the rules of grammar at home—by being exposed to multiple individual examples of living stories that rely on them.” Pointing to the significance of how such stories “do not merely describe experience and behaviors that are given in the world; they also help create behaviors and experiences that had not previously been there,” Harrington's conclusion is that one needs to embrace these stories, “as part of [the map of mind-body medicine,] and part of its territory alike.”²⁹

In this sense, then, it behooves us to situate these stories and lore firmly within the context of late Qing and Republican Chinese vernacular print culture, to understand more fully the processes by which these stories came to be “reproduced, recycled, and refashioned,” in turn becoming narratives through which practitioners made sense of their experiences of *qi* through the multiple individual examples of the living stories that populate their discursive environment.³⁰ I do not mean to draw a direct line of comparison between present-day Americans struggling to make sense of mind-body medicine and nineteenth-century Chinese with *neigong*, but to point to how one might enrich a cultural reading of the period with an understanding of how stories function as discursive vehicles and active makers of meaning, and how it is that such stories can contribute to establishing emergent behaviors and experiences.

Focusing on the role that the internal martial arts play as part of the Chinese cultural imaginary serves to conceptualize the rhetorical work that these discourses actually perform: how they shape a modality of visualizing and understanding the inner body, a common language in which the sensation and practice of harnessing *qi* becomes intelligible, an aesthetics in which text and image mediate a sense of what can only be kinesthetically felt from somewhere within the body. This study is about the

²⁹ Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 24-25, 254-55.

³⁰ The quote is from Andrew F. Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 67.

formation of these discourses, and how they offer insight into the wider realm of different cultural approaches towards understanding the human body. Tracing the spread of *neigong* as a concept in vernacular culture allows us to see how these notions of the intangible were communicated and understood, and how they ultimately were familiarized as a household and popular idiom by the 1930s in Chinese vernacular culture.

Considering the Chinese internal martial arts not only as a form of bodily practice but also as a mode of cultural production, in which a particular way of regarding 'the body' came to be established in Chinese vernacular culture, both as a means of aesthetic imagining and a politicized instrument of nationalistic suasion, may thus yield rich theoretical fodder. How might such claims about a different kind of "internal strength" revisit or disrupt modernist assumptions about the body?³¹ How do these accounts offer a perspective into a modality of knowledge integral to judgment and belief-making, that may lie, as Michel de Certeau writes in another context, "between the imagination and the understanding"³²?

What Lies Ahead: Methods, Sources, and Outline of Chapters

The following chapters explore those questions across a range of print sources in the period, including newspaper reports, textbooks, handbooks on health, anecdotes, pictorial narratives, biographies, figure drawings, photographs, and martial arts periodicals. These sources were in constant intertextual conversation with each other, underscoring the point that martial arts as practice and as popular cultural phenomenon were very much intertwined in the period. They paint a more complete picture of how the martial arts cultural imaginary was wrought.³³ As Christopher Reed has pointed out, books were becoming at least as important as periodicals in shaping popular opinion and knowledge in the period, particularly textbooks and reference books.³⁴ The range of sources used here reflects how the Chinese internal martial arts spoke to a broad audience in the period, spanning the curious gawking

31 By "modernist" assumptions of the body, I am referring to the largely Western-influenced ways in which we understand our bodies in the present day—in terms of medical and surgical interventions and clinical practice, for instance, or in terms of sports and physical fitness. For studies on the shaping of modern understandings of the body, see Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, eds., *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Ivan Crozier, ed., *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Modern Age, Volume 6* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2010); and Richard Cooter, "Medicine and Modernity," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine*, ed. Mark Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 100-117. On the modern culture of physical fitness, see Brian Pronger, *Body Fascism: Salvation in the Technology of Physical Fitness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

32 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 74.

33 Most modern scholarship on Chinese martial arts tend to study the practice (called "wushu") separately from martial arts film and fiction (called "wuxia"). Yet this academic divide only came about in the latter half of the Chinese twentieth century, and does not necessarily characterize how the Chinese martial arts were perceived in earlier periods. To my knowledge, Xu Sinian 徐斯年 has been the first scholar to point out the significance of intertextuality [*huwen* 互文] between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' at least in Xiang Kairan's martial arts writings. See Xu Sinian, "Xiandai chuanqi huayu de shengcheng ji qi texing" "現代傳奇話語"的生成及其特徵 [The formation of contemporary *chuanqi* discourse and its special characteristics]," in *Pingjiang Buxiaosheng Yanjiu Zhuanji* 平江不肖生研究專輯 [Research collection on Pingjiang Buxiaosheng], ed. Ceng Pingyuan and He Linfu (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe), 1-18.

34 Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 11.

at a street performance, intellectuals outraged at the mystical allure of *qi* practices, general layman practitioners, and professional military instructors. We will see how the debates, controversies, and popular reception surrounding the notion of *neigong* internal strength serve as a useful heuristic guide with which to navigate a wide spectrum of social and aesthetic discourses at the time. My enterprise is to map the promiscuous circulation of such stories among different genres, media, and discursive registers, as they coalesce into narratives in vernacular discourse.

The study begins with a historical prologue in Chapter Two, laying some of the groundwork to show how the notion of *neigong* came about, beginning with the early linkage of *qi* practices with Daoism. I trace with greater depth the complex background to the internal-external divide, and how the seventeenth century turned out to be a watershed moment for the history of the Chinese martial arts. It is at this seventeenth-century point that one of the most foundational texts of the internal martial arts, the manual *Transforming Sinews Classic* [*Yijinjing*], came into popular circulation.

The ensuing chapters turn to focusing on the late Qing and Republican periods. Each chapter thematically explores a different aspect of the conceptual significance of the idea of *neigong* internal strength—the discourse it created, the aesthetics and stories it shaped, and the eventual social narratives it established—at the intersections of identity politics, vernacular imagining, and thinking about the body. Throughout, the *Yijinjing* will surface time and again, in various forms as how-to manual, cultural reference point, and popular idiom. The multiple pathways that the *Yijinjing* traversed are suggestive of how the rise of the idea of *neigong* paralleled the spread of Chinese vernacular print culture in the period.³⁵

Chapter Three tells the story of how a combination of forgery and textual emendations first made the *Yijinjing* famous, and how it added fodder to the extant Shaolin-external/Wudang-internal myth. Setting the text within a context of a proliferation of illustrations in *yangsheng* “nourishing life” texts, I look at how a set of twelve images in the *Yijinjing* literally became the face of the internal martial arts. I then examine some of the subsequent iterations of the *Yijinjing* in vernacular print culture: an English-language translation at the cusp of the twentieth century, which first labeled these techniques as *kung-fu*, and then a Republican Chinese reinvention.

Chapter Four turns to the ways in which *neigong* informed the tropes and ideas of bodily strength in the wider realm beyond the martial arts community, and how the local idiom of a putative “inner” body became more clearly defined when outlined against the Western-derived notions of sports, physical fitness, and muscularity. In particular, I look at the so-called Debate between Indigenous vs Western Physical Education [*Tu yang tiyu zhi zheng* 土洋體育之爭] controversy, where members of the Chinese martial arts community wrote in indignation to defend the applicability—read, legitimacy—of the martial arts as a valid practice of the body, while others scoffed at the idea. Critical to the debate was the questionable existence of *neigong*, and the kind of internal energy and strength it was supposed to cultivate. I examine the different stances of the several writers who participated on all sides of the conversation, including physicians, intellectuals, and the father of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun (1881-1936). This discussion draws attention to how the multiple strands of *neigong* discourse had become intricately interwoven, by the 1930s, with the broader narratives of state formation, nationalism, gender, and identity and colonial politics. It sheds light on how, through the

35 On the Chinese publishing and book culture in the period, see Cynthia Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Cynthia Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

processes of story-making and narrativizing, the figure of an 'inner' *neigong* body became a cultural trope, wrought into a widely recognized form of indigenous embodied knowledge. The Chinese internal martial arts, it appears, can be in turn celebrated as a treasured heritage of “national essence” [*guocui*], decried for promoting superstition, and viewed with suspicion for its potential for heterodoxy. And *neigong* apparently constituted a litmus test that determined in large part the kind of reaction the internal martial arts received in the period, and into the present day.

The significance of the vernacular continues into Chapter Five, which looks at the aesthetic and cultural imagining that this figure of an inner body can engender. I explore the entangled genres of biography [*zhuàn* 傳], transmissions of what would otherwise be forgotten or lost [*yishi* 軼事 or 逸事], the recording of some famous master's sayings or deeds [*lu* 錄], and the collection of past exploits [*wangshi* 往事]. These accounts comprise the very fabric of martial arts discourse, operating somewhere along the precipice of 'real-life' historical account and embellished exaggeration. I argue that these stories of legendary masters and alleged exploits, much overlooked in current scholarship, in fact served as inspirational bedrock to the genre of martial arts as fiction, or *wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說, a genre that emerged in the period. This can be seen particularly clearly in the work of Xiang Kairan (1889-1957), widely hailed as the progenitor of the modern *wuxia* martial arts novel. A close reading of some examples of Xiang's writings will show that his ground-breaking literary visualization of *qi* did contribute greatly to the popularization of the internal martial arts, but far from having invented the genre as he has generally been credited, Xiang was in fact drawing from a discursive environment that was already richly fertile with martial arts figures and stories. Examining these stories offers insight into the richly complex nature of Chinese vernacular print culture, revealing how martial arts discourse is inextricably woven into the tangled seams between official history [*zhengshi* 正史 or *jingshi* 經史] and apocryphal history [*yeshi* 野史 or *baiguan* 稗官]. We will see how these storied tributaries ultimately flow into the estuary of social narratives of *neigong*.

Chapter Two

The Art of Breathing: A Brief History of the Chinese Internal Martial Arts

The association of the Chinese martial arts with elements of cultivating *qi* and other aspects of esoteric Daoism can be traced back to the classical period. These various discourses linking *qi* with martial strength circulated in various spheres and shifted meanings through the centuries, but it is not until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that these discursive resources were drawn upon to establish a uniquely modern constellation of meanings in the Chinese vernacular culture. This chapter will serve as a prologue to set out the historical framework for these ideas, before the study turns to focus on the formative period of the late Qing and Republican eras.

One of the earliest accounts of cultivating *qi* for martial strength comes from the *Annals of the States of Wu and Yue* [*Wu-Yue Chunqiu* 吳越春秋], compiled during the Han (206 BCE-221 CE). It records a dialogue between the King of Yue and a woman warrior named only as the Maiden of Yue. Responding to the King's request for advice on augmenting martial strength, she reveals the principles of her skill:

The art of [swordsmanship] is extremely subtle and elusive, and its principles are most secret and profound. The Dao has its gate and door, and its *yin* and *yang*. Open the gate and close the door; *yin* declines and *yang* rises. When practicing the art of hand-to-hand combat, concentrate your *shen* essence [精神] internally, and manifest relaxation externally.¹ You should appear like a virtuous woman, and strike like a ferocious tiger. As you assume various postures, regulate your *qi*, moving always with the *shen*. Your skill should be as remote as the sun, fleet as the leaping hare. [Your opponent attempts to] pursue your form and chase your shadow, yet your image hovers as though in an ambivalent state. The breath moves in and out, and should not be held in. [Whether you confront the opponent] horizontally or vertically, with or against the flow, do not attack frontally. Those who master this art will each be as [powerful as] a hundred fighters, and a hundred can match ten thousand. If Your Majesty would like to test it, I can demonstrate for your edification.²

The flowing movement of the “breath [moving] in and out,” not being held in, is thus paralleled with the martial arts movement of combat. These breathing techniques for cultivating *qi* as a form of martial arts practice are closely related to “guiding and pulling” [*daoyin* 導引] exercises, also often called “Chinese gymnastics” in English-language academia.³ *Daoyin* exercises are intended to achieve the goal of longevity, explained as a method “to guide the *qi* to make it more harmonious and to stretch [pull] the body to make it supple.”⁴ These appear first in the *Zhuangzi* [莊子·刻意] (ca 200 BCE), which discuss the importance of “expelling stale breath, and drawing in fresh air [*tugu naxin* 吐故納新]. These exercises were considered beneficial for “nourishing life” [*yangsheng* 養生], and were practiced in conjunction with other methods—dietary, pharmacological, hygienic, and sexual—that were

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- 1 In Daoist cosmological theory, *shen* is considered one of the three fundamental aspects of life, along with *qi* and *jing* essences [精气神]. See Hu Fuchen 胡浮琛, “Daojia he Dao jiao xing, qi, shen san chong jiegou de renti guan 道家和道教形、氣、神三重結構的人體觀 [The view of the human body from the unity of *xing*, *qi*, and *shen* in Daoist philosophy],” in *Zhongguo gudai sixiang zhong de qilun ji shenti guan* 中國古代思想中的氣論及身體觀 [Qi theory and perception of the body in early Chinese thought], ed. Yang Rubin 楊儒賓 (Taipei: Juliu tushu gongsi, 1993), 171-176; and Louis Komjathy, “Mapping the Daoist Body: The *Neijing tu* in History, Part One,” *Journal of Daoist Studies* 1(2008): 67-92.
 - 2 Translation based on Douglas Wile, *T'ai Chi's Ancestors: The Making of an Internal Art* (New York: Sweet Ch'i Press, 1999), 3-4.
 - 3 Shahaar, *The Shaolin Monastery*, 140.
 - 4 Livia Kohn, *Daoism Handbook I* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 101.

intended to protect and increase vitality:

To pant, to puff, to hail, to sip, to expel the stale [breath] and draw in the fresh, practicing bear-hangings and bird-stretchings, longevity his only concern—such is the life favored by the scholar who practices gymnastics [*daoyin*], the man who nourishes his body, who hopes to live to be as old as Pengzu, for more than eight hundred years.⁵

These descriptions were further illustrated in two manuals of these therapeutic gymnastics, the *Pulling Book* [*Yinshu* 引書] and the *Images of Guiding and Pulling* [*Daoyin tu* 導引圖], discovered among the Mawangdui tomb medical manuscripts (168 BCE, excavated 1973).⁶ The manuals show the basic concept of using stretching and bending poses as breathing exercises, with highly specific instructions on what to do for curing all kinds of different afflictions, such as for stiff shoulders. This suggests that these ideas of gymnastics for therapeutic health had become highly developed as early as the Western Han (206 BCE-8 CE).

Beginning in the Song, slowly increasing in the Yuan, and reaching an apogee in the late Ming period, *daoyin* exercises and *yangsheng* notions began to overlap with Daoist practices of spiritual cultivation, particularly those of internal alchemy [*neidan* 內丹], in which the adept joins elaborate meditation with methods of controlling the internal flow of bodily substances: breath, saliva, and semen, concocting within his body an inner elixir. One of the most common regimes was to “guide” the breath, through meditation, to circulate around prescribed internal routes. An important destination was the so-called “cinnabar field” [*dantian* 丹田], supposedly an imaginary point a few inches under the navel, considered a major collecting point for *qi* in Daoist theories of the body.

Particularly in the late Ming, these ideas that merged spiritual cultivation with *daoyin* and *yangsheng* therapeutics began proliferating in vernacular cultural discourse. Among extant texts on the subject in China, scholar Chen Hsiu-fen counted ten recorded publications in the Song, and eight in the Yuan. During the Ming, this rose to 66, of which 70 per cent were published between 1550-1644. If books on *daoyin*, *qi* techniques [*qigong* 氣功], and the practice of inner alchemy [*liandan* 煉丹] were included in the count, the number would be even greater.⁷ Increasingly, these therapeutics manuals came into wider circulation beyond Daoist adept practice, becoming incorporated into the essays, notes, and letters of the educated, as well as into household encyclopedia, general handbooks of healthcare, and so on. One notable example would be the late-Ming volume, *Eight Folios for Honoring Life* [*Zunsheng Bajian* 遵生八箋].⁸

It was also in the late Ming and early Qing that *daoyin* was integrated into newly emerging methods of hand combat, creating a synthesis of fighting, healing, and self-cultivation. Martial arts training was meant not only for combat, but was also intended to cure and prevent illness. The impact of *daoyin* on the martial arts in this period was transformative, according to Meir Shahaar, “the very adjective 'martial' is misleading, or limiting, when applied to the new synthesis. Fighting is only one

5 Translation from Shahaar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 140, based on Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 15.167-168.

6 For a detailed study of the Mawangdui manuscripts, see Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul International; New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

7 Chen Hsiu-fen, “Visual Representation and Oral Transmission of *Yangsheng* Techniques in Ming China,” *Asian Medicine* 7 (2012) 128-163.

8 For more detail on *yangsheng* in the late Ming, also see Chen Hsiu-fen, “Nourishing Life, Cultivation and Material Culture in the Late Ming: Some Thoughts on *Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八箋 (Eight Discourses on Respecting Life, 1591),” *Asian Medicine* 4 (2008): 29-45.

aspect of the bare-handed styles that emerged during the seventeenth-century Ming-Qing transition.”⁹

Internal Affairs: the Ming-Qing Transition Era

We now come to the story of the Chinese internal martial arts proper, which has its origins in the seventeenth-century Ming-Qing transition era. Before proceeding further, let me caution that the recent history of the Chinese martial arts in general—and that of the internal forms in particular—represents highly contentious territory, rendered more difficult by methodological problems on several fronts. Since the nineteenth century, the Chinese martial arts in general were regarded with disdain by the authorities and members of the educated classes for its associations with banditry and uncouthness. Until the early twentieth century, practices of the martial arts had been transmitted orally, and often kept secret within a particular school or clan. The amount of extant source material has also suffered due to the upheavals of war, and print artifacts were further suppressed or concealed during the KMT-led anti-superstition campaigns during the 1930s and then later during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

On top of those problems, historicizing the internal forms of the martial arts is an enterprise that faces its own set of challenges. There is the aforementioned connection of the internal martial arts with anti-state sectarian activity, which has fostered distrust and suspicion against those practices. Separately, since the mid-twentieth century, state-sponsored interests have staked a claim on the internal martial arts as a form of national heritage, in turn generating their own narratives on the subject. Because of its current popularity worldwide, the origins story of *taijiquan* has been especially prized territory, the subject of heated argument into the present day.¹⁰ The rise of interest in Daoist and Buddhist studies in Euro-America in the early twentieth century has produced its own impact on the internal Chinese martial arts as viewed in the West, entrenching the popular impression of its allegedly ancient philosophical roots.¹¹

The upshot is to clarify that this section is intended to provide a brief historical background to the notion of *neigong*, not to offer a complete or (impossibly) unbiased history of the internal martial arts. It is also to remind us that the story of *neigong* is inherently complex and unstable, refracted through the lens of the vernacular and popular press, and the shifting sands of contemporaneous cultural politics.

The phrase *neigong* can be reliably traced to a mid-17th-century text, the *Four Classics on Internal Skill* [*Neigong Sijing* 內功四經], which describes a conceptual division between “external” and “internal” sets of therapeutic skills. It designates “internal” skills as techniques for channeling the passage of *qi* through circulation tracts, and gathering *qi* in certain focal points located in the body. Qing physician Xu Wenbi's (dates unknown) *Transmissions for True-perfection for an Age of Longevity*

9 Shaha, *Shaolin Monastery*, 148.

10 For a general sense of how contentious the origins story of *taijiquan* is, see for instance *Zhongguo wushu baike quanshu* 中國武術百科全書 [Encyclopedia on Chinese martial arts] (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaik quanshu chubanshe, 1998), 71, that lists four different alleged founders, and this is an abbreviated list. For other interpretations of the origins story, see for instance Qi Jianhai 戚建海, *Taijiquan yu Dao jia neidan shu jiemi* 太極拳與道家內丹術揭秘 [Revealing the secrets of taijiquan and the arts of Daoist inner alchemy] (Taipei: Yiwen wushu wenhua, 2011).

11 J.J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

[*Shoushi chuanzhen* 壽世傳真]” (1771) followed suit, using *neigong* to refer to adjusting the breath, internal visualization, gargling the saliva, clenching the teeth, and other Daoist meditative techniques drawn from *neidan* [inner alchemy] practices for longevity.¹²

These techniques for practicing *qi* were to become integral to the mythologized school of internal martial arts. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the long-standing internal/external Shaolin/Wudang division of styles carries more than an element of the arbitrary. As martial arts historian Matsuda Ryuchi has written: “Most people believe that Taiji Quan and Shaolin Quan are completely different forms of hand combat. Actually, in their basic postures, hand methods, leg methods, and other fighting aspects, the two styles are entirely alike.”¹³

The provenance of this division between internal and external martial arts tracks back to two seventeenth-century documents. The first is an epitaph for a certain Wang Zhengnan (1617-1669), written by the prominent Qing intellectual Huang Zongxi (1610-1695). The second is a manifesto on *Neijia quanfa* 內家拳法 [*The Internal School Method*], written by Huang's son, Huang Baijia (1643-?). These earliest records of an “internal school” of martial arts contrasted Wang Zhengnan's style of “internal skills” with the Shaolin method, which the Huangs called the “external” school of martial arts.

The first lines of the Wang Zhengnan epitaph are particularly well-known in martial arts discourse, and set out the basic story for the internal-external divide:

Shaolin is famous for its hand combat. However, its techniques are chiefly offensive, which creates opportunities for an opponent to exploit. Now there is another school that is called 'internal,' that uses stillness to overcome movement [以靜制動]. Attackers are effortlessly repulsed. Thus Shaolin is differentiated as 'external.'¹⁴

Huang Baijia's manifesto on the Internal School would go on to expand upon this definition, with the evocation of Daoist master Zhang Sanfeng:

The external school of martial arts reached its highest development with Shaolin. Zhang San-feng, having mastered Shaolin, reversed its principles, and this is called the Internal School of martial arts. Acquiring even a smattering of this art is sufficient to overcome Shaolin.

Very little is known of the historical figure Zhang Sanfeng, other than he had been active during the early Ming in the Daoist monastic complex on Mount Wudang in Hubei, and that he had no connection with the Chinese martial arts.¹⁵ Present-day scholarship have posited different motivations for why the two Huangs would create the myth. Both Huangs were leading figures among the Ming

12 Lin Boyuan, 林伯原 “Neigong xue: Dongfang tiyu wenhua zhong de guibao” 內功學：東方體育文化中的瑰寶 [*Neigong studies: A treasure in Eastern physical education culture*], *Journal of Beijing Institute of Physical Education* 16.3 (1993): 5-9.

13 Ryuchi, *Zhongguo wushu shilue* 中國武術史略 [A brief history of Chinese martial arts] (Sichuan: Sichuan kexue jishu chubanshe, 1984), 88.

14 Translation adapted from Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 176.

15 On Zhang Sanfeng's non-involvement with martial arts, see Anna Seidel, “A Taoist Immortal of the Ming Dynasty: Chang San-feng,” in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 504; and John Lagerwey, “The Pilgrimage to Wu-tang Shan,” in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chun-fang Yü (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 305. On the historical Zhang Sanfeng, see Huang Zhaohan 黃兆漢, *Mingdai daoshi Zhang Sanfeng kao* 明代道士張三丰考 [Research on the Ming Daoist Zhang Sanfeng] (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1988), 36-37. On the cult of Zhang Sanfeng, see Livia Kohn, *Daoism Handbook I*, 614-15.

loyalists, well-known for their anti-Qing stances. It is possible they established the internal-external structuring as a veiled political statement in an atmosphere of strict censorship, “a spiritual rallying cry against alien aggression.” Douglas Wile further suggests that the Internal School associated with the indigenous Daoist religion might have represented China, while the External School was affiliated with the foreign Buddhist faith, and might have stood for the Manchu invaders—an idea that Meir Shahar also thought plausible.¹⁶

Whatever the motivation of the Huangs in formulating the dichotomy, the idea of the internal-external divide slowly grew in influence over the centuries. By the 18th century, the actual Internal School as represented by Wang Zhengnan had faded away into oblivion. The idea of “using stillness to overcome movement” became instead closely associated with a distinctive theory of training “internal strength” [*neili* 內力], and using the so-called “soft-style” strategy of turning the opponent's exertion of force against him. The appearance of *taijiquan* in the last decades of the Ming and the early Qing helped to reinforce these techniques, and to spur on the further integration of *daoyin* gymnastics, breathing and *qi* techniques, and combat training skills. Besides *taijiquan*, another important form that emerged in the Qing period was the Form-Intent Method [*Xingyi quan*], also known as Mind-Intent Six-Harmonies Method [*Xinyi liuhe quan* 心意六合拳]. This method of harnessing *qi* for internal strength was supposedly created by Ji Jike (fl. 1650). A third bare-handed style that evoked using *qi* was the Plum Flower style, later called the Eight-Trigrams Method [*Bagua quan* 八卦拳], used in the Eight-Trigrams sectarian uprising in Hebei and northern Henan in 1786 and again in 1813.¹⁷

The full story of *taijiquan* falls outside the scope of this study, as my focus here is on *neigong*, an idea central to several different forms of the Chinese internal martial arts, including but not limited to *taijiquan*. I will merely note in passing that the relationship of the Internal School with the emergence of *taijiquan* has long been a matter of controversy among scholars, with camps equally firmly entrenched on either side of accepting or denying a linear genealogy. The one observable conclusion, however, is that there does appear to be conceptual overlaps between the two.¹⁸

What is pertinent here is the growing prevalence of the idea of *neili* “internal strength” in Qing martial arts and *yangsheng* literature, which one attains through the *neigong* “internal techniques” of breathing, meditation, and *qi* energy circulation as part of daily practice.¹⁹ The term used to refer to this was frequently “sitting techniques circulating *qi*” [*zuogong yunqi* 坐功運氣].²⁰ Qing documents record the names of several masters who taught techniques of “circulating *qi* [*yunqi* 運氣]” as part of their martial arts training. Gan Fengchi, a well-known early Qing figure in martial arts literature, was “skilled in the arts of *daoyin* and can use these [skills] to heal illness in others.” Another early Qing

16 Wile, *T'ai Chi's Ancestors*, 39; Wile, *Lost T'ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 110; Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 178.

17 Zhou Weiliang 周偉良, *Zhongguo wushu shi* 中國武術史 [Chinese martial arts history] (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 88-90. See also Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 31, 88, 313.

18 Douglas Wile may have struck the right note in concluding that “Huang [Zongxi], Wang [Zhengnan] and the Internal School had the right patriotic pedigrees to serve as t'ai-chi's ancestors... The Internal School may or may not have been the biological parent of t'ai-chi, but t'ai-chi reached out to embrace the Internal School as an adopted parent.” The quote is from *T'ai Chi's Ancestors*, 50.

19 Martial arts historian Yang Xiangquan 楊祥全 notes that prior to the Qing, it was rare to see writings on practicing *qi* in martial arts works. See *Zhongguo wushu sixiang shi gangyao* 中國武術思想史綱要 [An outline of Chinese martial arts intellectual history] (Taipei: Yiwen wushu wenhua, 2010), 158 fn 9.

20 See Lin Boyuan, “Neigong xue,” 6.

martial arts figure, Jiang Zhitong, was skilled in the techniques of the blade and the spear, and also performed “quiet sitting [*mo zuo* 默坐], so as to gather his *shen* essences, night and day without interruption.”²¹ In a preface to the manual *Hand Combat Classic* (1784), Cao Huandou wrote that “the subtlety of the method's application depends entirely on 'internal strength' [*neili* 內力].”²² The phrase *neigong* appeared in the titles of manuals, such as in Wang Zuyuan's (ca. 1820-after 1882) reprint *Picture Expositions of Internal Strength* [*Neigong Tushuo*] (1881), which I will examine more fully in the next chapter.

The connection with Daoist ideas deepened through the Qing period as well. One of the putative founders of *taijiquan*, Chen Wangting (1580-1660), referred to the Daoist text *Scripture of the Yellow Court* [*Huangting jing* 黃庭經] (ca 200 CE) as one of his sources of inspiration.²³ Another key figure in the formative story of the internal martial arts, Chang Naizhou (1724-1783), focused his martial arts treatises upon the phrase “central *qi*” [*zhong qi* 中氣]. He wrote on the centrality of *qi* practices to the practice of martial arts, invoking the Daoist canon: “Central *qi* is what is called the primal *yang* in the *Immortals' Classic*, what in medicine is called primal *qi*. Because it resides in the very center of the human body, martial preparedness calls it 'central *qi*.'” Calling these practices of *qi* “the method of knowing the proper pathways in hand-to-hand fighting,” Chang described the sensation of the flowing of *qi* as an epiphany, linking aspects of the other-physical with the physical body of muscle and bone:

It is like being startled in a dream, suddenly realizing the Dao, experiencing an unexpected burning sensation on the skin, cold creeping up and causing a shiver, or suddenly thinking of a certain scene. The true *qi*, so turbulent and dense, is like thunder and lightning suddenly striking or smoke and flames from a fire... When the muscles and skin are affected, they become unequalled in strength and hardness. Taking form, it penetrates deeply into the bones and marrow... The *qi* issues like the discharge of a cannon or a bolt from a crossbow, striking with a sudden impact.²⁴

What could Chang Naizhou mean by how “muscles and skin” can become “unequaled in strength and hardness” through gathering *qi*? Chang's text cited a popular seventeenth-century manual titled *Transforming Sinews Classic* [*Yijinjing* 易筋經], which described a systematic method of *qi* circulation that results in a body resilient to injury, involving massaging, and pounding of the body with increasingly harder objects that progress from a wooden pestle and a wooden mallet to a bag filled with pebbles.²⁵ This manual, long a subject of polemic contention among scholars, practitioners, and layman, will form something of a leitmotif in this developing story of how *neigong* internal strength finds a sure foothold in the Chinese cultural imaginary. It forms the centerpiece of the next chapter, and we will see how it came to speak to a broad audience in the period, including a transnational journey into the Euro-American world of “medical gymnastics.”

21 “Gan Fengchi zhuan 甘風池傳 [Biography of Gan Fengchi]” and “Jiang Zhitong zhuan 江之桐傳 [Biography of Jiang Zhitong],” in Zhao Erxun (1844-1927) et al eds. *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 [Draft history of the Qing] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 13922-13924.

22 *Quan jing, Quan fa beiyao*, preface, 1b. Meir Shahr translates the complete preface, in *Shaolin Monastery*, 125-6.

23 Quoted in Tang Hao 唐豪 and Gu Liuxin 顧留馨 eds., *Taijiquan yanjiu* 太極拳研究 [Research on *taijiquan*] (Beijing: Renmin tiyu chubanshe, repr. 1992), 180.

24 Chang Naizhou 萇乃周, *Chang-shi wuji shu* 萇氏武技術 [Master Chang's book on martial techniques], ed. Xu Zhen (Taipei: Yiwen wushu wenhua youxian gongsi, repr. 2008). Translation based on Wile, *T'ai Chi's Ancestors*, 100-101.

25 Marnix Wells, *Scholar Boxer: Chang Naizhou's Theory of Internal Martial Arts and the Evolution of Taijiquan* (Berkeley: Blue Snake Books, 2005), 18.

Chapter Three

Transforming Sinews: 'Internal Strength' Goes Vernacular

Towards the turn of the Chinese nineteenth century, a Qing bureaucrat named Wang Zuyuan 王祖源 (ca. 1820-after 1882) received a book sent as a gift from an acquaintance.¹ He was startled to recognize the book as similar to a manuscript he had first seen some forty years earlier—a self-instructional manual that combined Daoist-Buddhist techniques of meditative breathing with external movements, which he had found during a youthful sojourn at the Shaolin Monastery, a well-known bastion of Chinese martial arts. Now in his sixties, he had hardly forgotten that manual since his trip, citing his faithful practice of the exercises as the reason for his continued spryness: “Whenever I chase after my superior officials, my steps are still fleet and light as a young man’s. Hurrying to kneel for the rites, I have yet to lapse in propriety. From this [evidence], one can know the source of strength.” The physical reality of seeing this book again after so many years stirred an outburst of memory; that trip to Shaolin felt “like a dream, like it was yesterday.” The emotion, together with a desire to preserve for posterity what this manual had done for his health, motivated Wang to sponsor a reprint in 1881.²

The confiding tone of confession and affect—the humorous vignette of a sexagenarian scurrying after his superiors at court, the nostalgia for an old remembered book—sets this narrative apart from the testimonial rhetoric for efficacy which usually preface such training manuals.³ That Wang encountered the same manuscript forty years later beyond the bounds of Shaolin Monastery also suggests the popular circulation of these manuals across lay and monastic settings. Indeed, the circulation of the manual and Wang’s ties to it seem to extend beyond that youthful trip to Shaolin Monastery. In his preface to the manual, Wang describes how he had been weak and sickly as a child, and had begun learning martial arts for the sake of his health. His martial arts teacher at the time was practicing from a manual called the *Transforming Sinews Classic* [*Yijinjing* 易筋經]. Within a year of practice, Wang claims, he had become strong enough to lift some ten *jun* or three hundred pounds of weight.

After lauding the *Yijinjing* (henceforth abbreviated as *Yjj*) as a boyhood influence, however, Wang makes no further mention to it in the preface. It may then come as somewhat of a surprise for the reader to discover the *Yjj* itself featured as part of Wang’s reprinted manual, without any information as to whether these were the very exercises Wang had practiced as a boy

1 This acquaintance is a fellow official, Pan Shangshu 潘尚書, whose relative Pan Weiru 潘霽如 had produced the book that Wang received, *Weisheng Yaoshu* 衛生要術 [Essential techniques for protecting life] (Taipei: Yiwen wushu wenhua chuban, repr. 2009). Wang Zuyuan was a minor scholar who had some essays published. See Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 138. Wang’s essays are listed in the *Qing shi gao*, 145.4262; 147.4334; 148.4417.

2 The extant edition of Wang’s reprint is part of the 1882 collectanea *Tian rang ge congshu* 天壤閣叢書 [Collectanea of the heaven earth studio] edited by Wang Zuyuan’s son, Wang Yirong 王懿榮 (1845-1900), a noted Qing scholar of oracle bone script. References throughout this chapter will be to this edition. See Wang Yirong, *Tian rang ge congshu* (n.p.), originally engraved between 1855-1884.

3 One such typical example can be found in Wang’s manual itself, in the form of Pan Weiru’s own preface. See Wang, *Tian rang ge congshu*, 4.

with his teacher or as a youth at Shaolin Monastery. Nor does Wang explain how the *Yjj* found its way into his acquaintance's separate edition. Nevertheless, we now realize that, in one form or another, here is a “source of strength” Wang Zuyuan had in fact encountered at three different stages of his life.

The pertinacious way in which this manual resurfaced time and again in Wang's personal trajectory is indicative of how widespread the presence of the *Yjj* was in Chinese vernacular cultural life by the nineteenth century. As Wang's preface told us, it was used as a form of physical training for the young, adopted as part of martial arts practice at Shaolin, and served as a regimen of therapeutic health for the old. By the time of Wang's reprint, it seems, the fundamental principle of *neigong*—namely, the idea of becoming “strong from within and powerful from without” through harnessing one's *qi*—had become firmly entrenched in the Chinese cultural imaginary.

What makes the *Yjj* particularly intriguing is that, according to the text, these experiences of the body can only be internally felt or sensed, or apprehended. It cannot be externally represented in the strictest sense of the word. Text and image can suggest the methods, but the actual kinesthetic process of the practice—the heart of its praxis—has to be intuited by the practitioner, such as the sensation of *qi* flowing through one's visualized meridians, or the movement of heat-energy through the body.

In other words, the *Yjj* is propagating a certain *modality* of thinking about the body, a mode of thinking about the body that requires a particular cultural context. Its transmission is predicated on the basis of the claims for the efficacy of *qi*. Practitioners like Wang Zuyuan must first apprehend the potential possibilities of *qi*, and find a means by which to communicate these possibilities and experiences. Only through its practice can the potential strength of *qi* be realized.

The manual, then, functions not only as an instructional guide of avowed practical benefit—it also illuminates the processual nature of such knowledge about the body. In this chapter, I explore the *Yjj* as a case study through which we can understand how this modality of thinking about the body proliferated throughout different registers of Chinese vernacular culture in the period. Pivotal to this story of the *Yjj* is how its larger-than-life elements of myth interweave with its significance as a set of embodied practices. The *Yjj* is a manual that holds a central place in the formative story of *neigong*. Yet, its name also bears a great deal of notoriety. As we will see later, its background is deeply nebulous, filled with audacious sweeps of forgery and fiction. It is perhaps most well-known for having engendered the enduring myth of the Bodhidharma having trained Shaolin Monastery monks in martial arts. The curious question is how this notoriety contributes towards the practical role of the *Yjj* as a self-instructional manual, or how these fabulous stories play into the narrative of *neigong*.

This chapter takes on a close examination of this manual and its place in cultural history. I begin by looking at how its convoluted textual history suggests a close relation between the

emergence of *neigong* as a cultural idea and the rise of Chinese vernacular print culture. Among the plethora of *Yjj* reprints and iterations beginning in the Chinese nineteenth century, Wang Zuyuan's version proves an important milestone in its textual emendations and use of images, which would become iconic aspects of the *Yjj*. We see how its text and images contributed towards establishing a discourse of an inner body in the period, enabling a visualization and vernacular language with which to apprehend such an inner body. The final sections of the chapter turn to later examples of reinventions of the *Yjj*, to trace the transmission of this knowledge through the filters of nationalism or so-called modernity.

Stranger than Fiction: the Early Textual History of the Yjj

How the *Yjj* came to take form offers a glimpse into the processual, fractured nature of knowledge production in Chinese vernacular culture. Despite its pervasive presence in Chinese popular culture and the role it plays in the formative story of the internal martial arts, the *Yjj* has typically been disdained in the scholarly literature for its association with fabulous invulnerability, and its dubious background of forgery and fiction. Its provenance is certainly murky. While scholars generally agree that the *Yjj* likely dates from the early seventeenth century, the original authorship and exact date of composition of the *Yjj* remain unknown. In the 1950s, martial arts historian Tang Hao dated the *Yjj* to 1624, a date widely accepted in the field until recently, when Zhou Weiliang rightly pointed out that Tang's assertion lacked textual evidence.⁴ The earliest known edition, lately discovered in 2007-2008 in the holdings of the National Library of China, contains the seal of the notable bibliophile and scholar Liang Qingbiao (1620-1691), which places the *Yjj* as being in circulation at least in the late Ming.⁵

The figures and stories popularly associated with the *Yjj* has gained the text its most derisive critiques.⁶ Scholars since the Qing have noted that the prefaces of the *Yjj* are patently forged, given its putative seventeenth-century origins.⁷ The preface-writer was attributed to the

4 See Tang Hao 唐豪, "Jiu Zhongguo tiyushi shang fuhui de Damo 舊中國體育史上附會的達摩 [The unfounded association of Bodhidharma with the ancient history of Chinese physical education], in *Zhongguo tiyushi cankao ziliao* 中國體育史參考資料 [Research materials on the history of Chinese physical education] (Beijing: Renmin tiyu, 1958), vol. 4, 23-31. See also Zhou Weiliang 周偉良, *Yijin jing sizhenben jiaoshi* 《易筋經》四珍本校釋 [Annotated commentary to four important editions of *Yijin jing*] (Beijing: Renmin tiyu chubanshe, 2011), especially 7-11.

5 This edition is held today in the National Library of China. See Zhou, *Sizhenben*, 13-14, 46-58.

6 For a partial English translation, see Meir Shahaar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 165-7. Zhou Weiliang's volume gives the full Chinese texts with annotations, for each of the four most significant editions. See Zhou, *Sizhenben*.

7 As Meir Shahaar notes, "forgery played a significant role in the sinicization of Buddhism." Early medieval Chinese authors often attributed their Buddhist writings to historical or fictional Indian monks, who supposedly first penned them in Sanskrit. See *Shaolin Monastery*, 165. Indeed, works of forgery have their own role in

famous Tang general Li Jing (571-649), who wrote of how he had received the manual from the fictional protagonist of a Tang *chuanqi* tale, the Bushy-Bearded Hero [*Qiuran ke*].⁸ The prefaces are also ridden with anachronistic errors. The reign period mentioned was assigned to the wrong emperor, for instance. The original Sanskrit text was supposedly translated by the Indian translator Pramiti (fl. 705), who was not yet born at the time the preface had him rendering the manual into Chinese. Most notoriously, the preface tells of the legendary fifth-century Buddhist monk Bodhidharma as the original progenitor of the *Yjj*, and the monks of Shaolin as the original beneficiaries of the skills taught in the manual. These outlandish claims led Qing scholar Ling Tingkan (1757-1809) to scorn this text as the work of an “ignorant village master.”⁹

Dubious prefatory material notwithstanding, the *Yjj* marks one of the earliest moments of synthesis between goals of spiritual self-cultivation, physical training, and therapeutic health—the synthesis discussed in the previous chapter as emergent since the Ming-Qing transition era.¹⁰ By the late Ming, “nourishing life [*yangsheng*]” culture had matured into an integral part of the literati lifestyle, grown out of the rich material culture of Ming Jiangnan that emphasized refinement in every aspect of daily life, from the design of the living space to the detailed care taken with what one eats and drinks. *Yangsheng* embodied the concern with maintaining a healthy, virile body.¹¹ These arts of nourishing the body's *jing* essence, *qi*, and *shen* energy increasingly merged with ideas from Daoist practices of “inner alchemy [*neidan*],” becoming “a multidimensional aspect of upper class philosophical eclecticism and religious syncretism.”¹²

At the same time as these cultures of connoisseurship developed, China underwent a publishing boom that expanded the market for print culture, and resulted in the vernacularization of print and the proliferation of esoteric knowledge in new forms. From the late Ming onwards, the expanding national economy propelled the wide distribution of commercially printed commodities throughout the Chinese empire, made by traditional woodblock printing (xylography). Recent scholarship has uncovered much evidence pointing to the existence of a national market in books long before the Gutenberg revolution introduced moveable metal type

constructing cultural history. See Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

- 8 The preface mentioned the “Northern Wei Emperor Xiaomingdi's Taihe reign period,” confusing the Emperor Xiaoming (reigned 516-528) with Emperor Xiaowen (reigned 471-499), who proclaimed the Taihe period. The story of The Bushy-Bearded Hero has been attributed to Du Guangting (850-933). See Cyril Birch, trans. “The Curly-Bearded Hero,” in *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*. Vol. 1, *From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, ed. John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- 9 See Zhou Zhongfu 周中孚 (1768-1831) *Zheng tang dushu ji* 鄭堂讀書記 [Bibliographic records from the hall of Zheng] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, repr. 1993), 68.335; Ling Tingkan 凌廷堪 (1757-1809), *Jiaolitang wenji* 校禮堂文集 [Collected prose from the hall of investigating the rites] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, repr. 1998), 25.17a; and Tang Hao, “Jiu Zhongguo tiyushi.”
- 10 See Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 148. Also see Livia Kohn, *Chinese Healing Exercises: the Tradition of Daoyin* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 195-7.
- 11 See T.J. Hinrichs and Linda Barnes eds, *Chinese Medicine and Healing: An Illustrated History* (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 153-5.
- 12 Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History: 960-1665* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 191.

and the printing press to China in the nineteenth century.¹³ While highly commercial, the print economy remained non-capitalistic in nature at least up until the nineteenth century, with the anti-commercial values of the Chinese literati balanced against the economic realities of the marketplace.¹⁴ This would reflect the emotive aspect of Wang Zuyuan's wish to sponsor a reprint of his beloved manual—an important driver behind the transmission and circulation of the *Yjj*.

The national readership for printed texts in late imperial China was also by no means limited to literary and official elite such as Wang Zuyuan. Evelyn Rawski estimated between 30 and 45 percent of China's total male population and as much as 10 percent of its female population were functionally literate in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁵ This estimate implies that out of a nineteenth-century population of 450 million, perhaps half could read with some degree of ease. Other estimates place late Qing China's literacy rate at between 20 and 25 percent overall, which still produces a reading audience of between 90 and 110 million.¹⁶

With its tales of the Bodhidharma and bushy-bearded heroes, the *Yjj* presents a notably more vernacular facet of this active print environment. It may be precisely this linkage with the fabulous that helped to establish the mythos of the *Yjj*. Numerous extant editions survive—some sixteen iterations since its seventeenth-century inception, most of them in the nineteenth century—that point to its wide circulation in Chinese vernacular knowledge and influence on practices of the body.¹⁷

In the context of the parallel rise of vernacular print culture in the Ming period and an increasing readership of simplified illustrated texts among less or partially educated classes, the *Yjj* joined a growing body of popular self-instructional therapeutic texts based on *yangsheng* practices.¹⁸ These many iterations of the *Yjj* reflected the processes of extraction, recompilation, and reinvention, that are key to the vernacularization of bodily knowledge in such therapeutics manuals, which would appeal to the intended mass readership. Pantheons of body-deities and lavishly visualized internal landscapes originally inhabited the canonical Daoist and Buddhist bodies, and the early *yangsheng* texts usually presented a morass of regulations on dietetics,

13 Studies on print culture in late imperial China include Evelyn S. Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979); Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, "Paper and Printing," in *Science and Civilization in China*, ed. Joseph Needham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 5:1; Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology, Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1990), esp. Chapter 4; and Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: "Shibao" and the Culture of Reform in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

14 Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 7.

15 Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy*, 23.

16 See Wilt Idema's review of Rawski's work in *T'oung Pao* 66:4-5 (1980): 314-24. Also see David Johnson, "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, Johnson et al. eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 59.

17 Zhou, *Sizhenben*, 12-26.

18 On the history of the book in the period, see Brokaw and Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture*. On the growth of *yangsheng* texts in the Ming, see Chen, "Nourishing Life, Cultivation and Material Culture in the Late Ming."

materia medica, sleep, and other details of bodily practices that accord with seasonal harmony and even times of day. Drawing from these *yangsheng* materials, the earliest editions of the *Yjj* consisted of a collection of short treatises and essays on techniques of the body such as massage, rubbing, and kneading, that underwent minor textual modifications with each appearance. Training involved pounding the body with increasingly harder objects that progress from a wooden pestle and a wooden mallet to a bag filled with pebbles. Through such hardening techniques, “transforming sinews” would become synonymous with the idea of “internal strengthening [*neizhuang* 內壯],” with “producing strength from within the bones... using the force of the will, to harden as though [becoming] steel and stone, and with such fingers, able to pierce the intestines of an ox; with lateral palm, able to sever an ox's head.”

The methods propagated in the *Yjj* can be traced back to the influence of Indian Tantric Buddhism, and the Tantric quest for the ultimate “diamond body” (Sanskrit: *vajra-deha*; Chinese: *jingangshen* 金剛身).¹⁹ By the 18th century, such methods of hardening the body had become known by the generic labels of Golden Bell Armor [*Jinzhong zhao* 金鐘罩] and Iron Cloth Shirt [*Tiebu shan* 鐵布衫], implying that the practitioner could manipulate his *qi* into an impenetrable shield. The labels, along with their association with the *Yjj*, became commonplace enough to be referenced in vernacular literature in the period. Pu Songling (c. 1640-1715) featured an account of the “Iron Cloth Shirt” in his *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* [*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異], telling of a Muslim practitioner Sha Huizi, whose “bunched fingers can pierce an ox's stomach; lateral palm can sever an ox's head.”²⁰ The *Unofficial History of the Scholars* [*Rulin waishi* 儒林外史] by Wu Jingzi (1701-1754) describes a character who uses *qi* circulation to withstand torture at a magistrate's court, and alludes to the *Yjj* in describing the practice of such techniques.²¹

Many, including members of the bureaucratic elite, recorded the practice of cultivating one's internal *qi* for invulnerability not only from bare-hand blows but also from weapons. An early Qing martial arts figure, Tang Jieyuan, was described as being able to “cultivate his *qi*” to the point where “blades and rocks cannot harm [him].”²² A government official, Ruan Zutang (fl. 1890), who served as circuit attendant of Xuzhou, Jiangsu, wrote about the Golden Bell Armor: “where the *qi* moves, even a fierce chop cannot penetrate. But if one loses concentration, then the blade will enter.”²³ A Daoist priest who became involved in the 1813 Eight Trigrams uprising was said to have practiced the Golden Bell Armor by “swallowing charms and circulating his

19 Meir Shahar, “Diamond Body: The Origins of Invulnerability in the Chinese Martial Arts,” in *Perfect Bodies: Sports, Medicine and Immortality Ancient and Modern*, ed. Vivienne Lo (London: British Museum Press, 2012), 119.

20 Translation from Wells, *Scholar Boxer*, 18. Also see John Minford trans., “Steel Shirt,” in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (Cambridge: Penguin, repr. 2011), 364.

21 Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓, *Rulin Waishi* 儒林外史 [Unofficial history of the scholars] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, repr. 1985), 51.492. The reference to *qi* and to the *Yijinjing* is in 49.475-476.

22 Xu Ke 徐珂 ed., *Qing bai lei chao* 清稗類鈔 [Classified anthology of Qing anecdotes] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 2894.

23 Quoted in Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 105.

qi.”²⁴ Late 19th-century members of the Big Swords militia practiced similar breathing techniques and pounded their bodies with bricks, while swallowing charms burnt and mixed into water.²⁵ These techniques were later incorporated into street performances during the 1920s and 1930s at the Tianqiao entertainment district in Beijing (today's Beijing), that featured martial arts performers using internal strength to produce or withstand dramatic blows.²⁶

One can see how narratives of *neigong* internal strength span a wide spectrum, from martial arts techniques to street performances, and appear in a variety of sources ranging from self-instruction manuals to anecdotal and vernacular accounts. The name of *Yjj* became synonymous with these invulnerability and body-hardening techniques, with the aim of becoming “strong from within, and powerful from without [*neizhuang waiqiang*].” As I will go on to argue, these different fronts in aggregate establish a particular mode of thinking about the body—an *inner* kind of body, capable of engendering internal strength.

Qi and Sinew: Visualizing Internal Strength

How exactly can this idea of “internal strength” be transmitted via the printed page? Let us take a closer look at the text of the *Yjj*. As implied in its title, the *Yjj* presents an unusual emphasis on the interiority of the body—on tendons and sinews [*jin* 筋], and also the membrane [*mo* 膜].²⁷ True strength resides not in the muscle, but in training the suppleness of the tendons and sinews, in the fascial membrane, and in the cultivation of one's *qi* and essences. In another essay entitled “Treatise on Membrane,” its description of this interiority offers an insight into how the figure of an inner body might be visualized:

24 The name of the priest was Zhang Luojiao. See Naquin, *Millenarian Uprising*, 30; Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 96-98; and Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 151.

25 Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 104-5.

26 See Wang Lixing 王立行 et al. eds., *Beijing Lao Tianqiao* 北京老天橋 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1993). Popular Republican Chinese novelist Zhang Henshui 張恨水 (1895-1967) evoked the Lao Tianqiao scene in his novel *Tixiao Yinyuan* 啼笑因緣 [Weeping and laughing at destiny] (Taiyuan: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 3-5.

27 I use these terms “sinew,” “tendon,” and “membrane” as somewhat awkward placeholders, as they do not translate exactly to the Chinese sense of *jin* and *mo*. Determining a modern clinical equivalence (that may or may not exist) falls outside the scope of this study, and so I choose to use the modern translation of “membrane” for *mo*. But to my mind, *mo* may very well align with fascia, the band or sheet of connective tissue, primarily collagen, beneath the skin that attaches, stabilizes, and encloses muscles and other internal organs. There have been attempts to map ideas from so-called traditional Chinese medicine onto Western anatomical models. See for instance Helene Langevin and Jason Yandow, “Relationship of acupuncture points and meridians to connective tissue planes,” *The Anatomical Record* 269.6 (2002): 257–265, accessed April 15, 2016, doi: 10.1002/ar.10185.

The body of a human being has internally the five organs and six viscera, and externally the four limbs and hundred bones. Internal are the *jing* essence, *qi*, and *shen*. External are the sinews, bones, and flesh. Together they form the unified body-person of the human.²⁸

Thus, the exterior of the organs and viscera is the domain of the sinews and bones; the exterior of the sinews and bones is the domain of the muscles; inside of the muscles is the domain of the qi-Blood vessels. Furthermore, the entire body, above and below, movement and animation—these are controlled by *qi*. Thus, the most important aspect of the skill of cultivation is in nurturing the qi-Blood.²⁹

Furthermore, while *jing* essence, *qi*, and *shen* spirit are formless entities, tendons, bones and flesh are bodies with form. [To practice] this method, [one] must first cultivate that which has form as a support for the formless, and nurture the formless as assistance to the form—one [method] with two [aspects], and two [techniques] with one [goal]. If [one were] to solely nurture the formless and neglect the form, that is not permissible; to solely cultivate the form and neglect the formless, that is even more forbidden. Therefore, the body with form needs the *qi* of the formless, the two depend on each other and cannot go against each other, and in this way achieve the indestructible body.

This idea of the inner body is thus one that is fairly abstract in nature—it is “formless,” in contrast with the *xing* form of the physical body. In a process akin to a series of mirrors, the “internal” and “external” are continually reflected and redefined off of each other. Sinews, tendons, and bones are technically within the physical body, yet are described as “external” to the *qi*-Blood that truly animates the “internal.” To learn to nurture the *qi*-Blood represents the pinnacle of *neigong*, but what is also reiterated in the text is that the techniques of the “form-body” and the “formless-body” must go hand in hand.

This abstract description of how form-and-formless techniques can be performed came to find visual purchase in the groundbreaking appearance of an illustrated *Yjj*. In the early nineteenth century, an edition of the *Yjj* appeared that featured a set of twelve images, each showing a pose and with accompanying titles and captions in mnemonic verse. This nineteenth-century edition is now called the “Master Laizhang [*Laizhangshi* 來章氏]” version after the name of the collector inscribed on the text.³⁰ Besides the images, the *Laizhangshi* edition still contained information on *materia medica*, massage, rubbing, and so on. But the images were to pave the way to coalescing the story of “transforming one's sinews” into a narrative of using static poses to focus the mind—providing visual fodder to the discourse about an inner body.

28 Because *shen* 身 as used in the Chinese nineteenth century does not necessarily denote simply the physical “body” of the person, I follow Mark Elvin in translating *shen* as “body-person.” See Elvin, “Tales of *Shen* and *Xin*: Body-Person and Heart-Mind in China during the Last 150 Years,” in *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, eds. Thomas P. Kasulis, et al. (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 213-277.

29 I follow Charlotte Furth in using the capitalized “Blood” for translating *xue* 血, to indicate that this is not blood as might be generally understood in the Western medical sense, but one of the two primary body vitalities *xue* and *qi*. See Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 47.

30 The “*Laizhangshi*” edition is dated as belonging to the the Emperor Minning’s Daoguang reign period (1821-1850), and is so called because the name “Master Laizhang” appears on part two of the appendix to the text. See Shahar’s appendix, *Shaolin Monastery*, 203; and Zhou Weiliang, *Sizhenben*, 18-19. Tang Hao gives a useful comparison of the “*Laizhangshi*” edition and the *Yjj* version found in *Neigong Tushuo*. See Tang, “Jiu Zhongguo tiyushi.”

Wang Zuyuan's manual proves significant to the textual evolution of the *Yjj* in several ways. It is the only extant edition we know of that extracted these twelve poses from the *Laizhangshi* edition, leaving behind much of the other information on *materia medica*, massage, kneading and so forth. This extraction in Wang's manual effectively foregrounded these *Laizhangshi* images as the iconic face of the *Yjj*.³¹ Alongside the *Yjj*, the other source of significance that Wang's manual extracts from is the “Twelve brocade sections [*Shier duan jin* 十二段錦]” (henceforth abbreviated as Brocades), a much earlier set of exercises dating from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, and which also consists of twelve images illustrating twelve poses.³² These two sets of twelve exercises effectively bookend Wang's manual. The manual thus presents one of the earliest known pairings of the Brocades with the *Yjj*, a partnership that will resonate throughout the Republican and modern periods.³³

Another major contribution that Wang would make to the textual history of the *Yjj* is to change the title for the reprint of his treasured manual. The version his acquaintance had sent him bore the generic title of *Weisheng Yaoshu* 衛生要術 [Essential techniques for protecting life].³⁴ In his preface, Wang Zuyuan explained that he wished to “*fu* 復 [restore]” what he deemed as the original title of the manuscript he had first found at Shaolin Monastery: “*Neigong Tushuo* 內功圖說 [Internal skill image-expositions].”³⁵

The titular emendation remarks the presence of “images,” or *tu* 圖, on an equal instructional footing with textual “exposition,” a move unusual in the period.³⁶ My translation of

31 For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Wang's manual as having made these textual changes. Technically, Wang's acquaintance's edition, the *Weisheng yaoshu*, is dated earlier than Wang's reprint, so these changes likely made their first appearance in the *Weisheng yaoshu*. See Zhou, *Sizhenben*, 222-223. However, I choose to focus on Wang's reprint for other reasons—the titular emendation seems to me important, as I will argue.

32 The original Brocades exercises were eight in number, and were called the *Baduanjin* 八段錦 [Eight brocade sections].

33 Other than the *Yjj* and the “Twelve Brocade Sections” which is taken from the “nourishing life” text, the “*Shoushi chuanzhen* 壽世傳真 [Transmissions for true-perfection for an age of longevity]” (1771), by Qing physician Xu Wenbi 徐文弼 (dates unknown), Wang's manual also contains “*Fen xing wai gong jue* 分行外功訣 [Verses for separate divisions of external skills],” two “*Neigong tushuo* 內功圖說 [Internal skill image-expositions],” an untitled section that Tang Hao calls the “*Wu zang bing yin* 五臟病因 [Factors for illness in the five organs],” a quotation in its entirety from a famous piece “*Shenxian qiju fa* 神仙起居法 [Methods from the daily life of immortals]” by Five Dynasties calligrapher Yang Ningshi (873-954), and a final pair of drawings from the “*Fangxian yannian fa* 方仙延年法 [Methods of immortals to prolong life].” For a schematic discussion of the composition of the *Neigong tushuo*, see Tang Hao, writing in his style-name Fansheng 範生, “*Woguo tiyu ziliao jieti* 我國體育資料解題 [Exposition of sources on our nation's physical education],” in Vol. 5 of *Zhongguo tiyushi cankao ziliao*, 64-69.

34 *Weisheng* was closely associated with “*yangsheng* [nourishing life]” practices, but would later become adopted as the modern Chinese word for “hygiene.” See Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

35 See Wang, *Tian rang ge congshu*, 3.

36 Craig Clunas notes that by the Ming era, illustrations abound in texts, yet relatively few titles actually contain the word “*tu* [image]” or “*tushuo* [image-exposition].” See Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 34.

tushuo as “image-exposition” reflects this equality of image with text, which seems to me preferable to the ancillary sense of “illustration.” As Francesca Bray et al have argued, *tu* (often accompanied by the word *shuo* or exposition) should be considered a specialist term denoting a graphic image that encode technical knowledge. Describing them as “templates for action,” Bray points out that *tu* function differently than “*hua* 畫 [paintings or pictures]” and “*xiang* 象 [image or icon], and cannot be studied independently from the text with which they are paired or from which they are constructed.³⁷

Indeed, for Wang Zuyuan, *tu* seems very much associated with the practice of *neigong*. He describes the first manual he had found in Shaolin Monastery as “*Neigong tu* 內功圖 [internal skill images], hence his decision to “restore the original title of the source book.”³⁸ The element of images is additionally significant here because as previously discussed, prior to the nineteenth century, the early editions of *Yjj* contained no images. Beginning in the Ming, however, images were becoming proliferate in “nourishing life” literature, largely to accommodate a growing readership among less or partially educated classes.³⁹ *Tu* increasingly came to serve as an important means of conveying technical and practical knowledge, as a pedagogical tool.⁴⁰ With the explosion of the printing industry, the visual appeal of images also made including *tu* a commercial decision in order to increase sales of books.⁴¹ A combination of all these factors was probably at play in the late Qing introduction of figure drawings into the *Laizhangshi* edition, from which Wang's manual will extract and quote some fifty years later.

The convoluted journey by which the *Yjj* in the *Neigong tushuo* came to assume its textual form of “image-exposition” demonstrates the processes of extraction, reinvention, and refashioning by which a discourse of the inner body came to be constructed. The manual established a foundational conceptual scaffolding upon which claims for an indigenous embodied knowledge were built, and the images and fabled connection with Bodhidharma and Shaolin Monastery found particular resonance in the Chinese vernacular culture. Today, in the sphere of Chinese vernacular therapeutic exercise, the umbrella title of “transforming sinews” usually applies to this basic set of twelve poses still widely practiced throughout Sinophone communities, multiple variations of which are readily found in self-help handbooks, DVDs, and as videos on Youtube and its Chinese equivalent Youku.⁴²

37 Bray, “Introduction,” in *The Warp and the Weft: Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China*, Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Metailie, eds., (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2-3, 73.

38 Wang, *Tian rang ge congshu*, 2.

39 See Chen , “Visual Representation and Oral Transmission of *Yangsheng* Techniques in Ming China,” 128-163. See also Anne E. McLaren, “Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China,” in *Printing and Book Culture*, eds. Brokaw and Chow, 152-176.

40 Bray, *The Warp and the Weft*, 29.

41 Bray, *The Warp and the Weft*, 44-45.

42 For instance, see “Shaolin Monastery *Neigong* Method (Transforming Sinew and Cleansing Marrow Method) [*Shaolin si neigong xinfa (Yijin xisui gong)* 少林寺內功心法 (易筋洗髓功),” uploaded October 20, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQIEG5xpOqk>. Accessed May 2 2016.

Yet, intended to teach one “internal skills,” to render visible upon the surface of the printed page these techniques of an invisible inner body, these image-expositions seem presented with an already inherently paradoxical task. How does the manual go about the task of actually conveying a sense of an inner body?

Figure 2: The twelve images of the *Yijing* as it appeared in Wang Zuyuan's *Tian rang ge congshu* (n.p.), 47-59. C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.



韋馱獻杵第三勢

內功圖說 易筋經

舌可生津將脬抵
兩拳緩緩收回處
鼻能調息覺心安
用力還將扶重看



掌托天門目上觀
力周腰脇渾如植
足尖著地立身端
咬緊牙關不放寬

四九

摘星換斗勢

內功圖說 易筋經

鼻端吸氣頻調息
用力收回左右俾



隻手攀天掌覆頭
更從掌內注雙眸

五〇

勢尾牛九拽倒

內功圖說 易筋經

用力在於兩膀

觀拳須注雙瞳



兩髀後伸前屈

小腹運氣空鬆

五二

勢翅亮爪出

內功圖說 易筋經

用力收回處

功須七次全



挺身兼怒目

推手向當前

五二

勢刀馬拔鬼九

內功圖說 易筋經

弗嫌力猛 左右相輪 身直氣靜



側首灣肱 抱頂及頸 自頭收回

五三

勢地落盤三

內功圖說 易筋經



上脛堅撐舌 張眸意注牙 足開蹲似踞 手按猛如拏 兩掌翻齊起 千筋重有加 瞪睛兼閉口 起立足無斜

五四

青龍探爪勢

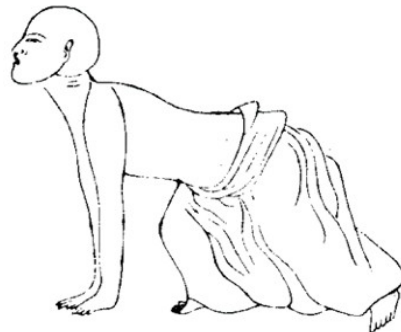


青龍探爪
左從右出
修士效之
掌平氣實
力周肩背
圍收過膝
兩目注平
息調心謚

內功圖說 易筋經

五五

卧虎撲食勢



兩足分蹲身似傾
屈伸左右腰相更
昂頭胸作探前勢
偃背腰還似砥平
鼻息調元均出入
指尖著地賴支撐
降龍伏虎神仙事
學得真形也衛生

內功圖說 易筋經

五六

打躬勢



兩手齊持腦
 垂腰至膝間
 頭惟探胯下
 口更齧牙關
 掩耳聰教塞
 調元氣自閑
 舌尖還抵腭
 力在肘雙彎

內功圖說 易筋經

五七

掉尾勢



內功圖說 易筋經

五八

膝直膀伸	推手自地	瞪目昂頭
凝神壹志	起而頓足	二十一次
左右伸肱	以七為誌	更作坐功
盤膝垂背	口注於心	息調於鼻
定靜乃起	厥功維備	總攷其法
圖成十二	誰實貽諸	五代之季
達摩西來	傳少林寺	有宋岳侯
更為鑒識	却病延年	功無與類



Figure 3: “The Middle of the Fourth Month, termed ‘Small Full.’” Reprint of a pose in *Zunsheng Bajian*, from John Dudgeon, *Notes on China* (Washington: Department of the War Office, 1900), 161. C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Figure 4: Reproductions of poses from *Zunsheng Bajian*. Joseph Marie Amiot et al, “*Notice du Cong-fou des Boznes Tao-sse* [On the Cong-fou of the Taoists],” in *Mémoires concernant l’histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages, &c. des chinois*, 1776-1814 (Paris: Chez Nyon, Libraire), Vol. 2, 450. Fig. 16 of the above corresponds to the same pose shown in Figure 1. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Transforming Sinews as Image-Text-Praxis

We now turn to an analysis of the *Yjj* itself, as a case study of how a discourse of the inner body could be produced in lay therapeutic practice. See Figure 2 for the manual as it was included in Wang Zuyuan's text. Entitled “*Yijin jing shier tujue* 易筋經十二圖 [Twelve images of *Yjj*],” the version of *Yjj* as represented in Wang's *Neigong Tushuo* consists of twelve figure drawings, illustrating various standing and bending poses. Each is accompanied by a title and a set of related instructions written often in mnemonic verse (I include a full translation in an appendix).

The figures in the drawings, often shown bare-bodied with legs hidden from view in loose flowing robes, appears somewhat corpulent with a distinct paunch—a stark contrast to the images of athletic muscularity that will characterize the reinvention of the *Yjj* a few decades later in Republican Chinese vernacular print culture, reflecting the influence of notions of sports and physical education in the period, as will be more fully discussed. Perhaps to emphasize its vaunted Shaolin Monastery connections, the *Yjj* figure is dressed in “monastic clothing [*sengzhuang* 僧裝].” It is in contrast to the coiffed and more conventionally garbed figures in “layman clothing [*suzhuang* 俗裝]” usually seen in *yangsheng* material, such as those in Dudgeon's compilation.⁴³ The contrast seems even more stark when compared with the eighteenth-century reproductions made by Jesuits based on the Brocades, which portray an almost rich luxuriance of detail in dress, and whose greater physiological accuracy lends the figures an almost haptic quality absent from Wang's manual. Figures 3 and 4 show corresponding reproductions from Dudgeon's work and the Jesuits' text, that depict the same pose drawn from the late Ming *yangsheng* text *Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八箋 [Eight folios for honoring life].

In the *Yjj*, the visual simplicity of the figure drawings matches the vernacular quality of the instructions, which is also strongly evocative of the Daoist and Buddhist language that it quotes from. The first three poses, all of them titled “Wei-tuo Presents the [Vajra] Club,” refer to a popular divinity of Chinese Buddhism, an originally Hindu warrior that became incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon as a guardian of monasteries (Figure 2).⁴⁴ Yet the exercises themselves feature activities more commonly associated with Daoist inner-chemical ritual and *daoyin* [pulling and guiding *qi*] healing—certain types of breathing, swallowing the saliva, circulating the *qi*, and gathering the body's internal spirits.⁴⁵

43 Zhou makes a similar observation, albeit without considering the Shaolin connection. *Sizhenben*, 227.

44 Shahr, *Shaolin Monastery*, 161.

45 For more details on breathing and the gathering of the body's internal spirits, see Catherine Despeux, “The Six Healing Breaths,” in *Daoist Body Cultivation*, ed. Livia Kohn (Magdalena, N.M.: Three Pines Press, 2006), 37-67. For a useful overview of the deep linkage of the early *daoyin* exercises to the formation of *neijiaquan* [internal martial arts], also see Zhang Chunben 張純本 and Cui Lequan 崔樂泉. *Zhongguo wushu shi* 中國武術史 [A history of Chinese martial arts]. (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1993), especially 80-89, and 194-9.

One of the key ideas in the manual is, perhaps ironically, the word “strength [*li* 力],” which recurs throughout the Twelve Images. It comes to bear increasingly complex multiple valences that make a far cry from our usual conception of the word today which are more likely associated with weight-lifting and muscular physique. In its simplest form, practicing strength in the *Yjj* involves what we would call “isometric static exercises” in physiology today, tightening the muscles in pressing, pushing, or holding poses, such as in the Fourth and Fifth Poses where one is exhorted to “use strength” in returning the body to the original position. This sense of “strength” extends to denoting a powerful muscular stretch, such as in the admonishment in the Seventh Pose to “not protest the strong force [*li*] [being exerted],” where the force here stems from the angular stretching of one’s arms across one’s back.

Yet “strength” in the *Yjj* seems also imbued with an abstract agency, involving the intuitive imagination as a bridge towards a different kind of sensate experience. More than once, the practitioner is exhorted to imagine himself “about to lift something heavy” (Third Pose). In the Eighth Pose, one’s “hands press strongly as though about to seize [something]. / Both palms upturned at the same time. / As though adding a weight of more than a thousand *jin*.” In some poses, the language of the *Yjj* goes so far as to suggest that strength should be thought of as an entity in and of itself, almost alive, capable of gathering energy from its surroundings and extending its reach around certain areas of the body—strongly suggestive of how *qi* is considered to envelop the body and also the cosmos. Thus, the line “*li zhou jian bei* 力周肩背” describes “strength” as actually “encompassing [*zhou*] the shoulders and the back.” Strength then “surrounds” the body, and then “passes the knee” (Ninth Pose). In the Third Pose, strength not only “encompasses the legs and torso [*li zhou tui xie* 力周髀脇],” the awareness of being surrounded [*zhou* 周] by one’s internal strength also aids in holding “the entire body [firm] like a plant [*hun ru zhi* 渾如植].”

Strength is not only exerted in the muscles and limbs, it is also contained in subtle, invisible ways. Much of this praxis of strength focuses upon the internal orifice of the mouth: the clenching of the jaw, the tongue kept in contact with the palate, the generation and gargling of saliva. Perhaps the most surprising axis of strength, however, is in the use of the eyes. Multiple words for “eyes” recur in the text, such as *mou* 眸, *mu* 目, *tong* 瞳, and *jing* 睛, as the text precisely delineates where and how the eyes should be used in the pose. Strength is contained in the forcefulness of the gaze, in the Second Pose, for instance, where one is instructed to “stare [*mu deng* 目瞪]”; in the Fifth Pose, one “gazes upon the fist, focusing both eyes [*guan quan xu zhu shuangtong* 觀拳須注雙瞳]”; in the Sixth Pose, one “straightens the body, together with ferocious eyes [*nu mu* 怒目].”

A borrowing of meditational technique from Buddhist and Daoist practices, the use of the physiological eye is paired with a directing of perceptual attention and focus.⁴⁶ As it does in

46 For more detail on how visualization techniques are used in religious practice, see Isabelle Robinet, “Taoist Insight Meditation: the Tang Practice of *Neiguan*,” in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 196; also see Robert H. Sharf, “Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism,” in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, Robert Sharf and

Buddhist and Daoist contemplative practices, the notion of the “insightful gaze” effectively collapses the boundaries between psychic and somatic, between an inner non-physical body and its outer muscles and sinews, establishing a particular kind of sensory perception that traverses mind-body relationships.⁴⁷ Thus, the word *zhu* 注 [focus] which repeats several times throughout along with *guan*, seems also especially evocative, suggesting as well a dual focusing of optical vision and perceptual attention.⁴⁸ At times this *zhu* also summons the will or an intention [*yi* 意], as in the Eighth Pose, where the instruction is to “widen the eyes and focus the will on the teeth [*zhang mou yi zhu ya* 張眸意注牙].”⁴⁹

These notions of other-physical strength are interwoven with the internalized practices of *qi* that combine with the physical act of breathing. Along with the directed sense of perceptual attention and focus, as in *guan* and *zhu*, the poses combine instructions on breathing. “Breathing in and out, the breath from the nose adjusts the ‘original *qi*’” (Tenth Pose); “Press the ears, as though stuffing [something] to block the sense of hearing, / Adjust the ‘original *qi*’ to its natural state” (Eleventh Pose). The language becomes increasingly shaded with Daoist elements, culminating in the Ninth and Tenth Poses, whose titles evoke the “azure dragon” and the “tiger” which respectively represent *yang* and *yin* energy in Daoist tradition, and whose instructions speak of the practitioner as a sort of “adept [*xiu shi* 修士],” and how he should aspire towards the “true form [*zhen xing* 真形]” that will “protect life [*weisheng* 衛生].”

It should now be clear that the notion of strength in the *Yjj* is not entirely derived from a physical basis, although it still involves bodily movement and a sense of muscular stretch and fatigue. It combines the sensory data of a very subtle tactility—in the tautness of muscle, pressure in the mouth, or force in the gaze—with extra-sensory aspects of imaginative visualization. One is not so much practicing in order to achieve greater physical strength, as practicing *with* strength, albeit a different kind of strength, in order to achieve the rather different goal of activating one's *neigong*.

Here, then, is the discourse of the inner body writ large, in plain vernacular language, that manages to blend simple movements with more than a tinge of the other-physical and on directing perceptual attentiveness. The latter aspect will come into a even greater focus in the

Elizabeth Sharf, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Sharf translates *guan* as “discernment,” pointing out the problems of assuming a “phenomenological model” of thinking of “visualization” in the context of using mandalas in meditation. For a very useful chapter tracing the history of our modern-day concept of “visualization,” see Eric Greene, “Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 139-199.

47 I use “the gaze” in a very different sense than Foucault’s “medical gaze” or Lacan’s notion in psychoanalysis, to invoke two of the most famous “gazes” in Western critical theory. See for instance Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (repr. New York: Vintage, 1994); and Jacques Lacan, “The Split between the Eye and the Gaze,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 67-78.

48 For an excellent discussion of the word *guan* in the area of Ming art history, see Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality*, 117-133. For a study of perception and attention in the period albeit in the Western context, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

49 The concept of “will or intent [*yi* 意]” will become an important one in *taijiquan* theory.

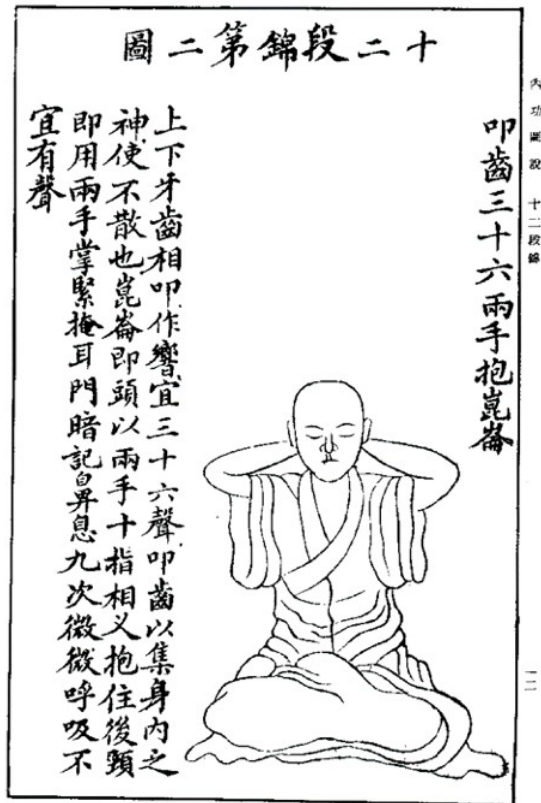
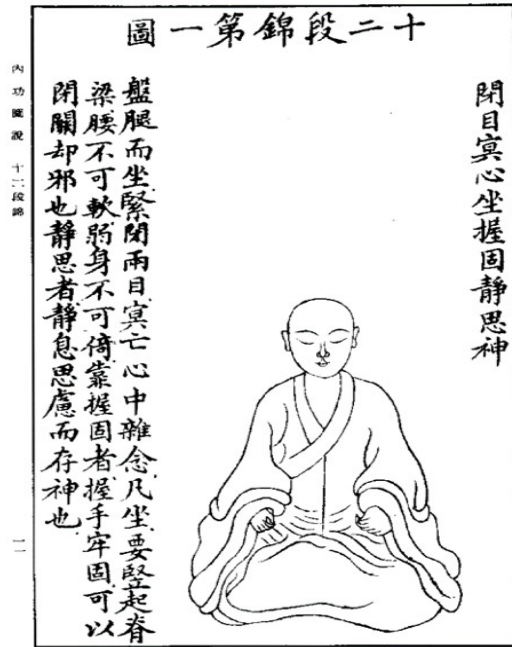
Brocades, the other set of twelve exercises in Wang Zuyuan's manual that has become a frequent companion with the *Yjj* since its nineteenth-century pairing.

Burning the Self: An Inner Awareness of the Body

Let us now take a look at the Brocades. Dating from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, it originally consisted of eight exercises. The number had grown to encompass twelve movements by the time of Wang Zuyuan's version.⁵⁰ These exercises constitute a sequence of seated practices based on “a mixture of internal *qi*-guiding and simple physical movements executed on the basis of deep concentrative meditation and serving the purpose of “burning the self [*fenshen* 焚身],” an important practice in [Daoist] inner alchemy. Figure 5 shows the Brocades, as they appeared in Wang Zuyuan's manual.

50 As Livia Kohn notes, the text appeared first in the *Xiuzhen Shishu* 修珍十書 [Ten books on cultivating perfection], a 10-*juan* work that dates from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. It would reappear in works such as the 1578 *Chifeng sui* 赤鳳髓 [Red phoenix marrow], and the late-Ming *Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八箋 [Eight folios on honoring life]. See Kohn, *Chinese Healing Exercises*, 180.

Figure 5: The twelve images of the *Brocades* as it appeared in Wang Zuyuan's *Tian rang ge congshu* (n.p.), 11-22. C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.



圖三第錦段二十

左右鳴天鼓二十四度聞



記算鼻息出入各九次畢即放所叉之手移兩手掌擦耳以第二指疊在中指上作力放下第二指重彈腦後要如擊鼓之聲左右各二十四度兩手同彈共四十八聲仍放手握固

內功圖說 十二段錦

一三

圖四第錦段二十

微擺撼天柱



天柱即後頸低頭紐頸向左右側視肩亦隨之左右招擺各二十四次

內功圖說 十二段錦

一四

圖五第錦段二十

赤龍攪水津鼓漱三十六神水滿口勻
一口分三嚙龍行虎自奔



赤龍即舌以舌頂上腭又攪滿口內上下兩旁使水
津自生鼓漱於口中三十六次神水即津液分作三
次要汨汨有聲吞下心暗想目暗看所吞津液直送
至臍下丹田龍即津虎即氣津下去氣自隨之

內功圖說 十二段錦

一五

圖六第錦段二十

閉氣搓手熱背摩後精門



以鼻吸氣閉之用兩掌相搓擦極熱急分兩手磨後
腰上兩邊一面徐徐放氣從鼻出精門即後腰兩邊
軟處以兩手磨二十六遍仍收手握固

內功圖說 十二段錦

一六

圖七第錦段二十

盡此一口氣想火燒臍輪

閉口鼻之氣以心暗想運心頭之火下燒丹田覺似
有熱仍放氣從鼻出臍輪即臍丹田



內功圖說 十二段錦

一七

圖八第錦段二十

左右轆轤轉

曲灣兩手先以左手連肩圓轉三十六次如絞車一
般右手亦如之此單轉轆轤法



內功圖說 十二段錦

一八

圖九第錦段二十

兩脚放舒伸又手雙虛托



放所盤兩脚平伸向前兩手指相又反掌向上先安
所又之手於頭頂作力上托要如重石在手托上腰
身俱著力上撐手托上一次又放下安手頭頂又托
上共九次

內功圖說 十二段錦

九

圖十第錦段二十

低頭攀足頻



以兩手向所伸兩脚底作力扳之頭低如禮拜狀十
二次仍收足盤坐收手握固

內功圖說 十二段錦

十

圖士第錦段二十

內功圖說 十二段總

再用舌攪口內以候神水滿口再鼓漱三十六連前
一度此再兩度共三度畢前一度作三次吞此兩度
作六次吞共九次吞如前嚥下要汨汨響聲嚥津三
度百脉自週過調勻



以候神水至再漱再吞津如此三度畢
神水九次吞嚥下汨汨響百脉自調勻

三

圖士第錦段二十

內功圖說 十二段總

心想臍下丹田中似有熱氣如火閉氣如忍大便狀
將熱氣運至穀道即大便處升上腰間背脊後頸腦
後頭項止又閉氣從額上兩太陽耳根前兩面頰降
至喉下心窩肚臍下丹田止想是發火燒通身皆熱



河車搬運畢想發火燒身舊名八段錦
子後午前行勤行無間斷萬疾化為塵

三

Seated cross-legged in most of the poses, eyes closed, the figure in the Brocades projects an impression of serenity quite different from the glaring-eyed figure of the *Yjj*. Yet, its inner body practices are no less intense, presenting the same paradox of an invisibility of the actual body-mind practices that we have already seen in the *Yjj*, with a heavier use of Daoist language here, such as references to “gathering spirit [*cun shen* 存神],” “clapping of teeth [*kou chi* 叩齒]” in order to summon the spirits within, and “the red dragon [*chi long* 赤龍]” which refers to the tongue.

The “burning of self” begins with the first instruction to use massage to generate a haptic sensation of heat in the Sixth *Tu*: “Hold the breath and massage the hands till warm, massage the back and the ‘gates of essence’ [*jingmen* 精門 i.e. the kidney area].” This represents the initial step of rubbing hands and massaging to generate a physical sensation of frictional heat on skin, which will translate to a somatic-psychical experience of *qi*. The detailed commentary continues, “Use the nose to inhale air, and hold [the breath]. Use both palms to rub against each other. When [they get] very warm, separate the two hands immediately.” (16) Here, only the physical breath is mentioned, as is the physical sensation of friction generated by rubbing the hands.

The experience becomes increasingly complex in the Seventh *Tu*, whose inscription invokes Buddhist terminology: “To the very end of this mouthful of breath, think of flames burning the *qilun* 臍輪 [i.e. *Mañipūra* in Sanskrit, a meditative focal point in the region of the navel].”⁵¹ An in-text note later defines the *Mañipūra* as the same meditative point on the navel as the Daoist “cinnabar field [*dantian* 丹田].” The instructions continue: “Hold the breath in the mouth and nose. Use the heart-mind to think silently. Channel the flame that is within the heart-mind downwards to burn the *dantian*. When [there is] a sense as though of heat [似有熱氣], only then [can] the air be let out from the nose.” (17; emphasis added).

After a series of four isometric holding poses, during which the practitioner repeatedly generates and gargles saliva in the mouth, the “burning of self” culminates in the Twelfth *Tu*. Interestingly, the figure at the final Twelfth *Tu* parallels how the First *Tu* began—with his body entirely wrapped in his robes, in contrast with the waist-down bare-bodied stance in the poses in between, and which we also saw in the *Yjj*. The Twelfth *Tu*, however, shows a more detailed etching in the representation of the robes, evoking an external sense of energy-flow and *qi* movement that should be taking place within the body at this stage of the exercise:

With the journey of the saliva complete, think of setting fire to burn one’s self... The heart-mind thinks of the navel, where in the midst of the *dantian* [cinnabar field] there seems to be a hot *qi*-air like fire. Hold the breath as though in a state of withholding defecation, and channel the hot *qi*-air to the anus which is also where one defecates. Raise [the *qi*-air] up the torso, the spine, and then the head, and back of the brain, and the top of the head, and stop. Again hold the breath, [send the *qi*-air] from the top of the forehead, [to] the two *tai-yang* [acupressure points], [to] the front of the ears, to the two cheeks down to below the throat, the

51 See Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, entry on *qilun*: <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E8%87%8D%E8%BC%AA> (Accessed June 23, 2014).

cavity of the pericardium, below the navel, [to] the *dantian*, and stop. Think of setting a flame alight. The entire body is hot throughout.

“Burning the self” becomes explicated here as a metaphorical process that overlaps with the literal and physical.⁵² The line “a sense as though of heat [似有熱氣]” is key to the relationship between mind and body here, with the word “as though [*si* 似]” forming the crux of the relationship. It would seem to indicate the metaphorical nature of this evocation of heat—one is to use the heart-mind to think of a flame burning down towards the *dantian*. And yet, the text also relates this sensation of heat with the earlier phenomenal sense of friction on skin, very much connected with the breath (“hold the breath”), tracing a journey through physical points of the body—a suggestion that this sense of heat may *not* be entirely metaphorical.

The seeds for a discourse of the inner body have thus been sown. What began life as sets of Daoist exercises intended to cleanse the body and mind in preparation for entering a spiritual realm thus become something rather different in these vernacularized versions of the *Yjj* and the Brocades. Rendered vernacular, they generate a rich symbolic language of the body that suggestively provides more leeway for individual interpretation than prescribed action for the layman practitioner. The constant use of various means of sensory perception that link with perceptual attention in sometimes unexpected ways seems to characterize this vernacularized figure of an inner body, distilling language and practices from arcane Daoist inner-chemical rituals into sets of easily accessible and practicable exercises.

Transforming Sinews as Therapeutic Kung-fu

A rather different kind of vernacularization awaited Wang Zuyuan’s manual in English translation, as the *Neigong Tushuo* would find its way two decades later into a 1900 English-language translation by Scottish missionary-surgeon John Hepburn Dudgeon (1837-1901).⁵³ Dudgeon had first arrived in China nearly forty years earlier in 1863, sent by the London Missionary Society. Among his many contributions towards establishing Western medicine in China, he had founded the Peking Hospital, one of the earliest public Western hospitals in China, and in 1872 had become the first professor of medicine and physiology at the Western-operated institute *Tongwen Guan* 同文館 [Peking College].⁵⁴ He is perhaps best known for transmitting

52 Other than as a visualization in practices of Daoist inner alchemy, there is also some evidence that *fenshen* (or *shaoshen*) may also refer to a literal self-immolation as a means of earning religious merit, a practice of Indian Buddhist origin that became Sinicized. See James A. Benn, “Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 37.4 (May, 1998): 295-322.

53 Dudgeon uses the *Weisheng Yaoshu* version, which as we have seen is virtually the same as Wang Zuyuan’s manual except with the new title and Wang’s preface.

54 Gao Xi 高晞, *De Zhen zhuan: Yige Yingguo chuanjiaoshi yu wanqing yixue jindaihua* 德貞傳：一個英國傳教士與晚清醫學近代化 [A biography of Dudgeon: an English missionary and the advancement of late Qing

ideas of Western medical science in his Chinese-language writings, such as the *Quanti Tongkao* 全體通考 (1884), based on the 1866 *Gray's Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical*.⁵⁵ For a man steeped in teaching anatomy and physiology, he remained sympathetic to certain of Chinese medical ideas even while deploring their apparent lack of scientific basis. Ruth Rogaski notes the paradox in Dudgeon's perspective, which "marked one of the last moments that a European would condemn Chinese 'lack of sanitary science' yet simultaneously praise Chinese approaches to healthful living."⁵⁶

It may seem an extension of this underlying paradox that Dudgeon's final work, published shortly before his death in 1901, would be a lengthy 250-page translation of selections from the Daoist "yangsheng [nourishing life]" tradition. Dudgeon had also apparently practiced with a local instructor while teaching at the Imperial College.⁵⁷ What seems even more curious is that Dudgeon had spent thirty years—nearly the entire duration of his life in China—on this book, of which some preliminary notes were first published in 1870 in *The Chinese Recorder*.⁵⁸ However, it was not until 1895 that the resultant volume, *Kung-fu, or Taoist Medical Gymnastics*, appeared first in the Tientsin Press, then as a supplementary monograph to *Notes On China*, a 1900 collection prepared by the American War Department.⁵⁹ Overshadowed by the importance of his other writings on anatomy and physiology, this last of Dudgeon's works has usually flown under the radar of scholarship, yet has its own contribution to make in the annals of the history of medicine and human sciences.

As Dudgeon described it, his early interest in the subject had been first piqued by the Hungarian émigré physician, Mathias Roth (1818-1891), a fellow sinologist and an adherent of the Swedish "movement cure," a system of bodily movements designed to prevent and cure ailments.⁶⁰ Through a mutual friend, Roth had written to Dudgeon asking if the latter knew anything about a particular Chinese mode of treating diseases "by various ways of breathing while the patients are placed in previously determined positions, which vary according to the nature of the disease. The treatment is called Cong-fu [sic]." Roth cited the work of eighteenth-century Jesuits, in particular a 1779 essay called "*Notice du Cong-fou des Boznes Tao-sse* [On the *Cong-fou* of the Taoists]," included in a massive 16-volume compilation of Jesuit reports on

medicine] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 221, 257.

55 Gao Xi, *De Zhen zhuan*, 297-379.

56 Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*, 103. See also Li Shang-jen's article which analyzes in detail Dudgeon's contradictory attitudes towards European and Chinese lifestyles and hygiene. "Discovering 'The Secrets of Long and Healthy Life': John Dudgeon on Chinese Hygiene," *Social History of Medicine* 23.1 (2010), 21-37. Gao Xi's pioneering book-length biography of the missionary, however, overlooks the paradox entirely, giving extensive coverage to *Quanti Tongkao* and its impact on late Qing medical history, but hardly mentioning Dudgeon's writings on Chinese medicine and *kung-fu*. See Gao Xi, *De Zhen zhuan*.

57 This note on the local instructor is from Shahaar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 138. It is based on Shahaar's reading of Dudgeon's writings. Shahaar, e-mail message to author, October 19, 2014.

58 See Gao Xi, *De Zhen zhuan*, 487, which records this in a glossary without any comment.

59 The edition of *Kung-fu, or Taoist Medical Gymnastics* I refer to throughout this chapter is collected in *Notes On China* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 67-291, which notes its initial publication date on its frontispiece. Mathias Roth apparently suggested its publication. See Dudgeon, 84.

60 Dudgeon, 84-5. The two men later become close friends, with Dudgeon visiting Roth's establishments in England on more than one occasion.

the Chinese, *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages, &c. des chinois*, 1776-1814.

Taking the Jesuits' French word *cong-fou* and following the then-newly established Wade-Giles system of Chinese romanization, Dudgeon gives us perhaps the earliest Western invocation of the word “kung-fu.”⁶¹ Giving the literal definition of the word *kung-fu* 功夫 as “labour, or work,” Dudgeon gives an introduction that draws largely from the work of Père Amiot (1718-1793), the writer Dudgeon credits with writing the *Notice du Cong-fou*. It is worth noting, however, that Dudgeon may be in error here; Joseph Needham and several others consider the *Notice du Cong-fou* to be the work of Amiot's fellow Jesuit, Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727-1780).⁶² As Dudgeon is not the only source to confuse the names of Amiot and Cibot, I will give the citation as Amiot/Cibot for the sake of clarity.

Dudgeon's other major source is French physician Nicolas Dally's (1795-1862) work *Cinésiologie, ou, Science du mouvement dans ses rapports avec l'éducation, l'hygiène et la thérapie : études historiques, théoriques et pratiques* (1857), which reviews extensively the *Notice du Cong-fou*. Amiot/Cibot and Dally will come to feature largely along with Dudgeon in our story of practicing the Chinese therapeutics manual in nineteenth-century Europe and America, forming another chapter in the vernacularizing of the Chinese inner body.

Here, then, is an European interpretation of the discourse of the inner body. For these post-Enlightenment medical men, the chief value of the Taoists' activities lies not so much in the inner-chemical enterprise for immortality, but in their promising medicinal efficacy as a “movement cure” or “medical gymnastics”—the use of physical movement as exercise for curative and therapeutic purposes, often in combination with other remedies such as massage, baths, and dietetics. The nineteenth-century term is otherwise known as *Kinesiologie* [science of movement] in French, and *Heil Gymnastik* [curative gymnastics] in German.⁶³ Through the writings of Amiot/Cibot, Dally, and Dudgeon, Wang Zuyuan's *Neigong Tushuo* would find itself inserted into the Western framework of medical gymnastics.

Quoting Dally, Dudgeon traces how medical gymnastics has its roots in early Greek and Roman antiquity, as well as “Hindu [Indian]” history. Dudgeon's account agrees with contemporary historians of the Western tradition of medical gymnastics, who usually consider

61 For more detail especially on the contemporary modern-day Western usage of the word *kung-fu*, see Benjamin Judkin, “Inventing *Kung Fu*,” *JOMEC Journal of Journalism, Media, and Cultural Studies* (2014): 1-23.

On the historical beginnings of the Wade-Giles system, Thomas Wade had published the first English-language textbook on the Beijing dialect in 1867, which would become the basis for the Wade-Giles phonetics. See Elisabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education: 1895-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

62 See Needham, *Science and Civilization*, Vol 5, 170, fn (a). Needham acknowledges his own error in following the common credit of the *Notice* to Amiot in Volume 2 of *Science and Civilization*. Cibot and Amiot, along with three others, are listed as the co-authors of the 16-volume *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages, &c. des chinois* (Paris: Chez Nyon Libraire, 1776-1814), which contains the *Notice* in Volume 4.

63 Dudgeon, 73.

famed Greek physician Herodicus (ca. 480-? BCE) as the first to study “therapeutic gymnastics” or “gymnastic medicine.” Herodicus allegedly introduced fever cures through walking and wrestling, and, as a wrestling and boxing instructor, found that many of his weakest students could be strengthened through exercise.⁶⁴ Nineteenth-century historian of physical education, J.W.F. Blundell, notes that Herodicus believed in the fundamental principle of medical gymnastics, that “it was just as important to provide against diseases in the healthy man as to cure him who was already attacked.”⁶⁵

Echoing the commonplace nineteenth-century lament that this bodily wisdom of antiquity has been lost in modern times, Dudgeon points to how “our present mode of warfare has done much to put an end to gymnastics as a part of education and a means conducive to robust health,” but that, encouragingly, “[p]reventive medicine is coming every year more and more to the front... The present age seems to be more alive to the importance of gymnastics than any preceding age of modern times” (70).⁶⁶ For Dudgeon, as for many of his peers, the resurgence of modern Western interest in medical gymnastics can be dated from the preeminent Italian physician Hieronymus Mercurialis (1530-1606), whose 1569 treatise *De arte Gymnastica* provided much inspiration for later writers on the subject. Sports historian Jack Berryman notes the preeminence of Mercurialis, who had once been called to Vienna to attend Emperor Maximilian II in 1573, and who used nearly two hundred references from Greek and Roman authors in what appears to be the first illustrated book on exercise and medicine—all of which would make *De arte Gymnastica* deeply influential in establishing the field of “medical gymnastics.” Three notable eighteenth-century successors would be Francis Fuller’s (1670-1706) *Medicina Gymnastica: or, a Treatise concerning the Power of Exercise*, published in London in 1704, which became a bestseller at the time and had gone into nine editions by 1777; Joseph Clement Tissot’s (1747-1826) *Medicinal and Surgical Gymnastics*, first published in Paris in 1780 and translated into several languages by the 1790s; and the anatomist John Pugh’s (dates unknown) *A Physiological, Thereotic and Practical Treatise on the Utility of the Science of Muscular Action for Restoring the Power of the Limbs* (1794).⁶⁷ Antebellum America too was becoming deeply interested in these ideas of general hygiene and exercise, through American editions of Western European medical treatises or through books on hygiene written by American physicians.⁶⁸ By the nineteenth century, the idea of the importance of physical exercise had become widespread, observable in the popularity of famous strongmen such as Eugen Sandow

64 Dudgeon, 69; Jack W. Berryman, “Exercise and the Medical Tradition from Hippocrates through Antebellum America: A Review Essay,” in Jack W. Berryman and Roberta J. Park, *Sport and Exercise Science: Essays in the History of Sports Medicine* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 12.

65 Blundell, *The Muscles and their Story, from the Earliest Times; Including the Whole Text of Mercurialis, and the Opinions of Other Writers Ancient and Modern, on Mental and Bodily Development* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1864), 32.

66 Christopher E. Forth notes a similar narrative decrying a state of civilizational degeneration in the present age, in his study on gender and the ‘crisis of masculinity’ arising from the rise of modern civilization since 1700. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*.

67 Dudgeon, 77-78; Berryman, “Exercise and the Medical Tradition,” 29-30.

68 Berryman, “Exercise and the Medical Tradition,” 35; Roberta J. Park, “Athletes and their Training in Britain and America, 1800-1914,” *Sport and Exercise Science*, 57-107.

and others in the Physical Culture movement that flaunt images of male muscularity, the popular British novels *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Thomas Hughes (1822-1896) and their endorsement of Muscular Christianity and an ethos of competitive sports and physical exercise, and pedagogical concerns such as the Young Men's Christian Associations and the playground movement throughout Europe and America.⁶⁹

Dudgeon's work on *Kung-fu* thus fed into the *fin-de-siècle* interest of Europe and America in the "organic" development of mind and body through movement, that also includes "massage, friction, pressure, percussion, vibration, and many other passive movements."⁷⁰ Even before the publication of Dudgeon's translation, contemporary references to the Jesuits and *cong-fou* appeared in several publications on therapeutics, indicating an Euro-American awareness of Chinese knowledge in the area. Nicolas Dally's work is one of the most widely cited, such as in a two-part lecture series given in Paris by French physician Georges Dujardin-Beaumetz (1833-1895), which was later reprinted as "Hygienic Therapeutics: A lecture on Kinesitherapy", in the American journals *The Therapeutic Gazette* (June 1887, 3:5, 362-369) and *The Sanitarian* (April 1888, no. 221, 317-334). In an 1887 issue of the *Popular Science Monthly*, an article on massage by Lady Janetta Manners includes the mention that "[t]he Chinese are supposed to have learnt the use of gymnastic exercises from the Indians, and the subject mentioned in the most ancient of their books is called Cong-fou, or Science of Living."⁷¹ George Taylor cites Amiot/Cibot, defining *cong-fou* as "the art of exercising the body, and its application to the treatment of disease."⁷² In a mid-twentieth century development, Joseph Needham will later draw on the writings of Dally and Dudgeon for his chapters on inner alchemy and "Taoist martial arts" in his magisterial *Science and Civilization in China*.⁷³

Perhaps the most controversial legacy of the nineteenth-century Western rediscovery of "medical gymnastics"—and most interesting link to our narrative on the *Yjj*—is the apparent influence of *cong-fou* upon the system of gymnastics founded by the Swede, Per Henrik Ling

69 On Physical Culture, Muscular Christianity, and other historical aspects to the notion of muscularity in the period, see Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*; Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*; Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire* (New York: NYU Press, 1997); and Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). For more on the YMCA and the playground movement, see Fred Eugene Leonard, *A Guide to the History of Physical Education* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1947).

70 Dudgeon, 73.

71 *Popular Science Monthly*, 30 (February 1887); Dudgeon also cites this, 75.

72 George Taylor, *An Exposition of the Swedish Movement-Cure* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1860).

73 Needham, *Science and Civilization*, Vol. 5, 170 ff. Also see independent martial arts scholar Stanley Henning's essay, which criticizes Needham, among other scholars, for his interpretation of "martial arts" as Daoist. Stanley Henning. "Academia Encounters the Chinese Martial Arts," *China Review International* 6.2 (Fall 1999), 319-332. Henning's critique, while germane in some cases, is also born of his perspective that the primary role of the "martial arts" should be *martial*, which neglects the many other important aspects of the Chinese martial arts as spiritual, therapeutic, and imaginative practices and ideas. I incline towards Benjamin Judkins' proposal for "martial arts studies." See for instance Judkins' analysis on Henning, "On the Need for Theory in Martial Arts Studies; or: Deconstructing Stanley Henning," *Chinese Martial Studies*, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://martialartsstudies.blogspot.com/2014/01/on-need-for-theory-in-martial-arts.html>.

(1776-1839), and first practiced in Stockholm in 1813 before becoming widespread throughout Europe. The same system that Dudgeon's friend Mathias Roth propagated in England, these movements incorporated Ling's inventions of wall bars, beams, and the box horse, and will contribute greatly towards modern gymnastics as we know it today.⁷⁴

Ling's idea, Dudgeon reports using Roth's words, was based on "an harmonious organic development of the body and of its powers and capabilities by exercises, considered in relation to the organic and intellectual faculties."⁷⁵ Noting the striking resemblance between this idea, and many of Ling's exercises, to the *Kung-fu* of the Taoists (Ling's use of principles of anatomy and physiology notwithstanding), Dally argues that Ling had in fact used Amiot/Cibot's *Notice du Cong-fou* as a basis for his gymnastics. Dudgeon agrees: "The doctrine of Ling in its entirety, theoretical and practical, is only a sort of counter-drawn daguereotype [sic] of the Kung-fu of the Tauists. It is the royal vase of Dresden, the splendid Chinese vase with its Chinese figures overlaid with European paint."⁷⁶ Concurring, Needham declares, "This work [*Notice du Cong-fou*] has long been regarded as of cardinal importance in the history of physiotherapy because it almost certainly influenced the Swedish founder of the modern phase of the art, Per Hendrik Ling. Cibot had studied at least one Chinese book, but also got much from a Christian neophyte who had become expert in the subject before his conversion."⁷⁷ Although he does not explicitly state his reasons, Mathias Roth's initial interest in the Tauists too has its probable origins in this apparent overlap between the work of Ling and Amiot/Cibot.

This textual background to Dudgeon's translation marks the renewed interest in the Jesuits' report on Chinese *Cong-fou* in nineteenth-century European discourses of "medical gymnastics." It also shows how a parallel discourse of the inner body was developing at the same time in the West, though in a different way than we have seen earlier in the case of Wang Zuyuan's manual. Thinking on the importance of therapeutics, along the lines of a "movement cure," massage, kneading, and what will become modern-day physiotherapy, was developing in the context of growing awareness of the importance of "physical education," along with the development of the physiological sciences. In this context, the *Kung-fu* of the Tauists seems to have made its mark in more ways than one in Western discourses of medical gymnastics. Might the favor be returned, and how? In a curious turn of events, in as much as early Jesuit reports of *cong-fou* may have influenced Ling's gymnastics, nineteenth-century French and English

74 Ling's system is not the only basis for modern gymnastics. For a fuller story of modern gymnastics, particularly the influences of the German F.L. Jahn and the *Gymnasium* in Germany, see Leonard, *History of Physical Education*, 67 ff; and *ibid.*, 148 ff on Ling and Swedish gymnastics.

75 Dudgeon, 80.

76 Dudgeon, 82. Ling left very little actual documentation on his system of movement, compounding the historical debate on what his antecedents and influences might have been. For more on the controversial legacy of Ling's gymnastics system and impact on kinesiology, see Anders Ottosson, "The First Historical Movements of Kinesiology: Scientification in the Borderline between Physical Culture and Medicine around 1850," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27.11 (2010): 1892-1919.

77 Needham, *Science and Civilization*, Vol 5: 170. The element of in-person practice is intriguingly parallel with Dudgeon's own experience, if we accept Meir Shahar's argument that Dudgeon also apparently practiced with a Chinese practitioner. My thanks to Pat Berger for this observation.

interpretations too will refashion *kung-fu* and the *Yjj* in their cross-cultural versions of a vernacularized discourse of the inner body.

The Figure of the Inner Body Redefined

As Dudgeon saw it through Amiot/Cibot's eyes, *kung-fu* consists of two principles—the posture of the body, and the manner of respiration:

The different modes, in the three principal positions, of stretching, folding, raising, lowering, bending, extending, abducting, adducting the arms and legs, form a variety of numerous attitudes. The head, the eyes, and the tongue, have each their movements and positions. The tongue is charged to make in the mouth such operations as balancing, pulsating, rubbing, shooting, etc., in order to excite salivation. The eyes close, open, turn, fix, and wink. The Tauists pretend, when they have gazed for a long time, first on one side then on the other, in regarding the root of the nose, that the torrent of thought is suspended, that a profound calm envelopes the soul, and a preparation for a doing-nothing inertia which is the beginning of the communication with spirits.⁷⁸

The summation fits well with what we have seen earlier in Wang Zuyuan's manual. This attempt at balancing between an open awareness of what he may not yet understand and a skeptical resistance against the improbable underlines Dudgeon's overall approach to the material, making *Kung-fu* a fascinating ethnographic study as much of a nineteenth-century Scottish sinologist's interlocution with his sources as of the Chinese *yangsheng* tradition.

For his compilation of *Kung-fu*—in a process of excerpting and quotation similar to the fashioning of Wang Zuyuan's manual—Dudgeon selected a series of passages from the *daoyin* and *yangsheng* traditions, featuring exercises such as the “Eight Ornamental Sections,” the predecessor to our Twelve Sections Brocades in the *Neigong Tushuo*, and the classic Five Animals [*Wu qin xi* 五禽戲] that allegedly originate from the legendary healer Hua-tuo in the Han era (200 BCE). These passages are drawn from a number of works, including the famous Ming-dynasty *yangsheng* work that Wang Zuyuan's manual also references, Gao Lian's *Eight Folios for Honoring Life* [*Zunsheng Bajian*] (1591) and the *Precepts for Life* [*Xingming Guizhi* 性命圭旨] (first printed 1615) by a Song writer known as Yin Zhen-ren 尹真人 (dates unknown), and the *Book of the Immortal Celestials* [*Wanshou Xianshu* 萬壽仙書] (c. 1560).

In the ranks of such company, the inclusion of the *Yjj* may come as a curiosity perhaps even to Dudgeon himself, who calls the *Yjj* “one of the smallest and cheapest” of such *yangsheng* texts, and “supposed to be spurious by scholars”—and yet, he also begrudgingly recognizes that it is one of the “most popular” of such works.⁷⁹ Characteristic of his care with his material, despite his skepticism, Dudgeon translates this supposedly spurious text of the *Yjj*

78 Dudgeon, 85.

79 Dudgeon, 229.

largely in full, along with our familiar Twelve Image-Expositions. While his language does not take into account nuances such as “heart-mind,” the translation is largely faithful, complete with the same illustrations as in Wang Zuyuan’s manual.⁸⁰

What is more revealing of Dudgeon’s perspective is not so much in the translation, but in his prefatory remarks to the exercises. Offering a sample of what was to come, Dudgeon quotes Dally in inviting his nineteenth-century readers to try a simple exercise—drawn from the Brocades—for themselves, which is worth quoting in full for a sense of how *neigong* translates across time and historical context:

Stretch forth the arms forcibly, while friction is made in a concentric curve over the abdominal region. What do you feel? An increase of heat in the intestines, at the same time also a diminution of the heat in the anterior side of the abdomen. Therefore, there is an augmentation of the circulation in the arteries of the intestines, and a diminution of the blood in the abdominal veins. Would you like that the friction cause an effect altogether the contrary? Lower the arms, and hold them hanging. In this position, the same friction produces a diminution of the blood in the intestinal veins, and an augmentation of the circulation in the arteries and in the anterior abdominal walls. Then, in the one case and in the other, *there has been, at will, an exchange of arteriosity and absorptivity between the walls of the abdomen and the intestines*. Then again, in the one case and in the other, the *conditions of vitality* which preside over the functions of all the organs of the abdominal region are powerfully active, and one conceives that *it is possible to produce the same effects on the entire economy, in assisting by general friction the tension or dissension of the whole muscular system, the tension or dissension which the reserve of the breath or the simple ordinary respiration can again notably modify*. Thus, of the different attitudes, they can produce physiological phenomena exactly alike or variously modified; and what is of great importance in the application to the treatment of disease is this, that we can isolate a portion of the body, by acting on some other parts.⁸¹
[Emphases added]

The massaging of the abdominal region with one’s hands produces, in a nutshell, the same sensation of kinesthetic heat that we have seen earlier in the Brocades, though the framework of perspective and interpretation diverges widely.⁸² The frictional sense of “heat” is explained in terms of movement of blood (“arteriosity and absorptivity”), between the outer walls of the abdomen and the intestines within. Where the Brocades would use *qi* to explain the power of the *dan-tian* as the driving force of these exercises, Dudgeon and Dally consider the overarching agency as the particularly active “conditions of vitality” of the abdominal region. For them, the efficacy of *kung-fu* can be analyzed as various combinations of three separate components—the phenomenal sensation of friction on the skin, the breath or “simple ordinary respiration,” and “the tension or dissension of the whole muscular system.” In this way, *kung-fu* can be brought to bear upon an isolated “portion of the body.”⁸³ This would suggest an awareness

80 Dudgeon, 255-267.

81 Dudgeon, 92-93.

82 This echoes Shigehisa Kuriyama’s findings in early Greek and Chinese medical traditions, where he shows fundamental differences in ways of seeing, touching, and being. See Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body*.

83 These points of analysis—separating into components, of isolation of parts from systems—is symptomatic of a mode of thinking emergent in the West since the Renaissance, becoming most pronounced in the Enlightenment and into the nineteenth century. The classic study of this in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is Barbara

of the body based on breathing and muscular tension—albeit an awareness of the body rather different than the elements of spiritual self-cultivation and nuances of *qi* that we have seen earlier in Wang Zuyuan’s manual.

In fact, Dudgeon’s translation relegates *qi* to a mere footnote much later in the text:

The expression *yunqi* 運氣 [harnessing *qi*] occurs in almost every exercise. In fact, without this there is properly speaking no *kung* 功. It is the very essence of the art, and the greatest stress is laid upon it. Its impossibility, absurdity, and uselessness, even if possible, do not require to be demonstrated. The benefit which is derived is from the exercise in attempting the impossible.⁸⁴

We see again the pivotal question of what role the allegedly fabulous and mythical might play in the processes of knowledge production. For Dudgeon, the absurd must be excised even acknowledging that the heart of the practice might be lost without using *qi*. In his rendition, the sensory modality of the inner body becomes something rather different than the one of *qi* that we have seen earlier. Of particular note, there seems a shift of attention from the interior towards the exterior, as the amorphous and formless take on substantiation and tangibility. The movement of *qi* becomes “simple ordinary respiration,” while the multiplicity of “focus [*zhu*]” or perceptual attention that we saw previously coalesces into a “tension or dissension of the whole muscular system.”

Yet, the figure of the inner body remains discernible in the awareness of a synesthetic connection between tactile sensations of skin and those of an intuited inward depth, in the language that signals an uncannily familiar traversing between the interiority of abdomen and intestines, and the exteriority of arms and limbs. Dudgeon’s perspective on breathing offers another example of how *Kung-fu* propagates and reinvents the figure of the inner body. Quoting Amiot/Cibot, Dudgeon notes the six different kinds of breath, acknowledging that these different modes of breathing are the most key and also the most difficult to show in images: “In order to better appreciate the power of Kung-fu, it would be necessary to make a special study of the thousand different modes of respiration; for this is the essential point, and, according to the observation of Amiot, the most difficult of this method.” Even though Dudgeon adds a rejoinder agreeing with Dally that this difficulty of learning the modes of respiration “can be overcome by special physiological and anatomical study, and by the stern experience obtained by the effects,” there remains the understanding of an other-awareness of breath, of kinesthetic inwardness.⁸⁵

In recognizing the “impossibility, absurdity, and uselessness” of *qi* and certain aspects of these *kung-fu* exercises, Dudgeon finds a kindred spirit in Amiot/Cibot. Both note carefully that *kung-fu* “is a real exercise of religion, which, in curing the body of its infirmities, frees the soul

Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). For a sense of how this has shaped literary thought and form in Asian contexts, see Gregory Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See: Realism, Science, and Ecology in Japanese Literary Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

84 Dudgeon, 117.

85 Dudgeon, 93.

from the servitude of the senses,” and yet both offer alongside an overall register of skepticism: “The reader will, therefore, not be astonished to find in Kung-fu, as in their medicine generally, much that is puerile and sublimely ridiculous, with here and there grains of wise observation and practical remark.”⁸⁶

In this process of having to “thresh” through a pile of “puerile” material in order to extract these precious few grains of wisdom, Dudgeon’s enterprise entirely matches Amiot/Cibot’s, who expressed a similar caution and skepticism in treating his oftentimes “bizarre” material. Amiot/Cibot’s report *Notice du Cong-Fou* noted how it was necessary to focus on “the physical and medicinal part,” so that he attempted to excise the religious objectives from the physical movements, relocating *cong-fou* in ancient medical theory and practice, independent of the Daoist immortality rites and goals. Accordingly, he proposed that European doctors “examine whether the medical part of *cong-fou* is really a practice of medicine of which one might make use, for the relief and cure of some illnesses.” He would then feel the effort of his work worthwhile, with a subject otherwise “so tiresome for person of my state, and so foreign to my studies and occupations.”⁸⁷ Dudgeon notes how Amiot/Cibot gives “just twenty figures to illustrate the text. Amiot [sic] says it would be necessary to add many more to give all the attitudes and positions which are blended with the posture, ‘but in truth we have not had the courage to copy out a larger number... The account which we have under our eyes is in a manner so obscure and in terms so bizarre that we have not ventured to risk a translation of it.’”⁸⁸

This comment is a curious parallel with Dudgeon’s own seemingly conflicted feelings on the subject of *kung-fu*. Towards the conclusion of his own tome on *Kung-fu*, Dudgeon confesses how he “fears there will hardly be found a grain of truth and common sense in the whole subject to reward the labour and expense—by no means small—expended upon it. It required, too, a considerable amount of courage to undertake the publication of such a mass of rubbish. The reader, to whom the writer [Dudgeon] owes an apology, has no idea how much matter, only worthy of such a designation, has been discarded. ... The growing interest and importance of medical gymnastic exercises at the present day is one of the chief excuses for the preparations and publication of this paper...”⁸⁹ Indeed, this cautionary note comes after an earlier presentation at a meeting of the Peking Oriental Society, where Dudgeon’s hour-long presentation met with some derision and challenge, though also with respect from other more scholarly quarters.⁹⁰

86 Dudgeon, 97, 101.

87 Translations taken from Linda Barnes, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts: China Healing and the West to 1848* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 202-203. Barnes attributes the *Notice* to Amiot. Barnes notes that Amiot would later change his mind about Chinese *cong-fou*, enthusing about what he saw as its parallels with Mesmer’s theory of animal magnetism. Instead of equating *yin* and *yang* with humoral theory, as European observers had usually done, Barnes considers Amiot to be the first to propose magnetic theory as a parallel. However, Amiot appears to have been the only one to speculate on this, and the increasing undermining of Mesmer’s credibility in much of Europe seems to have ended any further development on this point. See Barnes, *ibid.*, 204-7.

88 Dudgeon, 87.

89 Dudgeon, 291.

Both writers, then, appear to be struggling with a predicament that will become familiar a few years later to May Fourth and Republican Chinese intellectuals in the early 1900s similarly searching to reconcile European-inflected notions of enlightened rationalism with an apparently non-scientific indigenous medical tradition.⁹¹ While interested enough to devote much time and effort to delving into the potential of this Chinese version of the “movement cure,” both writers seem also perplexed about what to do with the sheer strangeness of their source material. Their response seems similar: to excise what they deemed unnecessary, leaving what appeared usable or reasonable—in other words, a process of distillation, excerption, and recompilation, that uncannily echoes the *modus operandi* of Wang Zuyuan and others who contributed to the recycling and refashioning of the *Yjj* and Brocades in earlier phases of its vernacularization. In threshing through what is deemed 'puerile,' in the search for a few grains of 'wisdom,' Dudgeon and his French forerunners have then created their own figure of an inner *kung-fu* body, a figure that marks the role of their maintained belief in the promised efficacy of *kung-fu*, a belief that fueled their decades-long enterprise.

The Republican Chinese Phase

The *Yjj* would receive a new and different lease on life in the Republican Chinese era. Wang Huaiqi, a prolific early Republican writer on physical education with nearly 60 other works to his name, would insert the *Yjj* and the Brocades into the register of *tiyu* sports and physical education. In a preface to his 1916 version, entitled *Expository Drawings of the Yijinjing Twenty-Four Stances* [*Yijinjing ershisi shi tushuo* 易筋經二十四式圖說], Wang notes that these types of exercises ought to be considered part of the “national essence” *guocui tiyu* 國粹體育. But he insists that his version is different than “the original Eight Brocades” associated with the Bodhidharma, explaining that having practiced them, he grew dissatisfied with many of the poses because they emphasized moving the upper body, and “neglected the lower limbs and the torso.” This, he thought, was not suitable for those without beginning training. Thus, he

90 Report on Peking Oriental Society meeting, in *The North - China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870-1941)*; Apr 6, 1887; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection (1832-1953), 382.

91 In the area of medical history, see Zhou Donghao 周東浩, *Zhongyi: Qumei yu fanmei* 中醫：祛魅與返魅 [Chinese medicine: disenchantment and reenchantment] (Guangxi: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008). For a more general account of Chinese intellectual history and scientism in the period, the classic account remains D.W.Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought: 1900-1950* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1965). Such enterprises at remaking indigenous ideas are certainly not limited to either May Fourth intellectuals or China. Elisabeth Hsu traces how state-sponsored institutions in the 1950s have attempted to schematize “Traditional Chinese Medicine.” See Hsu, *Transmissions of Chinese Medicine*. In other cultural contexts, see for instance Mark Harrison, *Medicine in an Age of Commerce and Empire: Britain and its Tropical Colonies 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) on the complex relationship between imperial and colonial medicines.

integrated methods from calisthenics [*ticao* 體操] to redress that problem, though he took care to say that “the original methods have not changed.”⁹²

Clearly, there is a nationalistic agenda here in the midst of the upheavals in the period, which I will discuss in a later chapter. The interesting point here is to note the impact that sports and physical education may have already engendered in Chinese thinking about the body: the idea that one needs to exercise in physical movement, and to exercise the upper and lower halves of the body. This is rather different than the interiorized view of sinews and tendons and *qi*-Blood that we have seen earlier in the original *Yjj*.

Yet, the figure of the inner body continues to hold its own. He opens his volume with a separate treatise on “breathing,” for instance, recalling the emphasis of *daoyin* exercises on “spitting out stale air and inhaling the new”:

The method of breathing is to first spit out the turbid air [*zhuo qi* 濁氣] in the lungs in two or three mouthfuls. Then slowly take in the external fresh air through the nostrils. After about ten seconds, again expel the air in the lungs through the nostrils. (Study the illustration on the breathing stance).

The accompanying photograph (Figure 6) that displays the bared torso of Wang himself, clad in shorts and a pair of sandals, is intended to show the pronounced diaphragm while in the breathing stance. It demonstrates the level of importance Wang assigns to breathing.

Despite his aims to “scientize [*kexuehua*] the *Yjj*, Wang still evokes the *dantian* [cinnabar field] and the “swallowing of *qi* 吞氣.” The instruction for the Fifth Pose, for instance is to “think of the *qi*/air all through the fingertips.” The exhortation to “Use strength [*yong li* 用力]” parallels the language of the *Yjj* earlier. With all the muscularity of the practitioners shown, this strength is still not used to physically lift something heavy, but to be imagined as though one is *about* to lift something heavy. The text relies on similar directing of the eyes and perceptual attention, to “turn the eyes slightly upwards” for instance (First Pose).

92 Wang Huaiqi 王懷琪, *Expository Drawings of the Yijing Twenty-Four Stances* [*Yijing ershisi shi tushuo* 易筋經二十四式圖說] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1916).



Figure 6: Wang Huaiqi demonstrating the “breathing stance,” *Expository Drawings of the Yijinjing Twenty-Four Stances* [*Yijinjing ershisi shi tushuo* 易筋經二十四式圖說] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1916), 2. C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

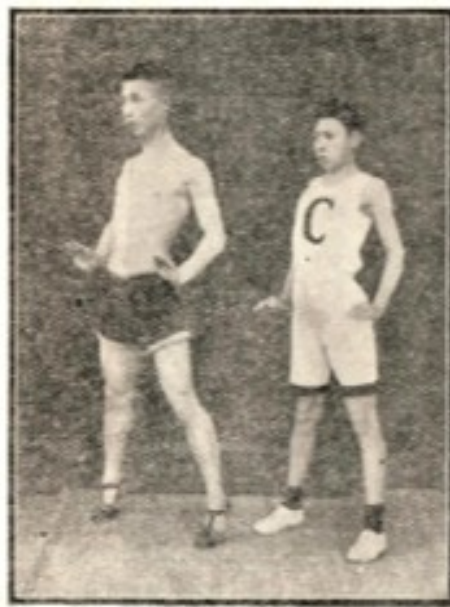


Figure 7: Wang Huaiqi (left) and an unidentified co-participant demonstrating the first pose, *ibid.*, 3. C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Throughout his manual, Wang adopts the *tushuo* format with photography. There has been a lot of theoretical work on the visuality of the photographic surface, which I will not go into for lack of space.⁹³ What I want to point out here though is the ironic contrast between how much photography reveals, and how much it does *not* reveal of the internal praxis. Far from revealing more of the inner body, the clothing and the athleticism of the practitioners seem to be moving the emphasis away from practicing the inner body, and towards positioning of the outer limbs.

Figure 7, for instance, shows the staged pose of Wang and an unidentified co-participant whose contrasting clothes and statures help to illustrate the pose. We can see the muscles straining in holding the pose, the traces of isometric pressure in the outward physical body, the facial expression of concentration—certainly greater visual detail than the figure drawings from the *Yjj*. Yet ironically, this added clarity of the photographs still meets the difficulty of showing how to channel *qi* through the meridians, nor of heat traveling through the body. It recalls Dudgeon's turning back to using descriptive language to exhort his readers to try it for themselves. Once again, we see how the heart of the praxis of the inner body might reside in a modality of bodily thinking—a necessary cultural context of *qi*—that text and image can only suggest.

Epilogue: The Afterlife of the Figure of the Inner Body

Ramifications of Wang Zuyuan's manual and Dudgeon's work can be seen in many later developments of the figure of the inner body. In a 1980s reinvention, *The Chinese Way to a Long and Healthy Life* (1984), for instance, the *Yjj* and the Brocades are presented together as a single reinvented set of exercises, prefaced with the following instructions: "When doing this series of exercises, it is necessary to keep calm and concentrate the mind on the navel. Breathe naturally in concert with the movements, preferably through the nose. The breathing can also be done in such a way that the practitioner licks the roof of the mouth when inhaling and releases the tongue when exhaling, causing increased salivation which can increase vital energy. At the end of the exercises, the saliva must be swallowed."⁹⁴ Along with the familiar use of tongue, palate, and saliva, there is the repeated emphasis on breathing alongside a mental state of being ("to keep calm and concentrate the mind on the navel"). While the terms *qi* and *dantian* have become excised, "vital energy" and "navel" remain unchanged.

93 See for instance Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Paris: Hill and Wang, 1980); the many works of W.J.T. Mitchell, especially *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

94 *Chinese Way*, ed. the People's Medical Publishing House of Beijing (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984), 22.

As for Dudgeon's 1900 translation, it would go on to take on a new lease on life in a 1979 reprint, edited with an additional appendix by William R. Berk, and reprinted under the title of *Chinese Healing Arts: Internal Kung-fu*.⁹⁵ In an echo of Wang Zuyuan's titular emendation, Berk's new title of "internal *kung-fu*" would prove significant in invoking the "inner skill" associated with *Yjj*, and which would become influential in later martial arts discourse, particularly *taijiquan* theory. The addition of the word "internal" would also gesture towards the later popularity of the Chinese martial arts as a transnational product of Hollywood—by the 1970s, *kung-fu* would become better known in the personification of Bruce Lee, and "internal *kung-fu*" would be a way to differentiate the figure of the inner body from that of the Chinese martial arts fighter in popular culture.⁹⁶

Tracking how the *Yjj* grew to become influential, following the myriad pathways of the discourse it established, is thus to understand how a discourse of the inner body came to be constructed in Chinese vernacular culture across this period. This chapter has offered insight into the complex processes through which ideas from arcane Daoist source material on "inner alchemy [*neidan*]" gradually became popularly intelligible, widely accessible forms of embodied knowledge. In the later Republican Chinese era, this form of embodied knowledge would come to reflect a form of local resistance or adaptation to an increasingly global sense of modernity. We saw how the language of the *Yjj* became inserted into the register of sports and *tiyu* physical education, and made possible the visualization and praxis of an inner body alongside the newer ideas of training muscles. The notion of *neigong* and the figure of the inner body would continue to fuel Chinese vernacular discourse, becoming a topic of deeply divisive controversy across many different strata of society, as we will see in the next chapter.

95 William R. Berk ed., *Chinese Healing Arts: Internal Kung-fu* (Burbank, California: Beckett Publications, 1986). A note on the author introduces Berk as having been a long-time practitioner of the "Chinese Internal Kung-fu and Medical Arts" in both China and the States, though little else is known about him.

96 On Bruce Lee, see Paul Bowman, *Theorizing Bruce Lee: Film-Fighting-Fantasy-Philosophy* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi Books, 2009). On the genre of *kung-fu* cinema in general, see David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Chapter Four

“What is Strength?”: The Internal Martial Arts in Controversy

We saw earlier how a framework for training and experiencing the inner body was beginning to find widespread conceptual purchase in late nineteenth-century Chinese vernacular culture. By the early years of the twentieth century, however, *neigong* and the Chinese martial arts would become mired in a critical watershed. New concepts of Western medical knowledge—such as physiology, anatomy, and sports—were making profound inroads in Chinese discourse. In their wake, traditional Chinese ideas of the body were beginning to come under heavy criticism, including the Chinese martial arts which “seemed as destined for the garbage bin of history as *tiyu* sports were for everlasting prominence,” as a historian of Republican Chinese sports put it.¹ The physical combat skills of the martial arts could at least make a claim to be accepted as a form of sports or exercise, or self-defense. The *internal* martial arts—with its basis in harnessing *neigong* and the “internal strength” of *qi*—had less ground on which to stand. In the scientific register of the period, such practices of *qi* were increasingly regarded as empirically suspect. Intellectuals and reformers ridiculed the belief that practicing from manuals such as the *Yijinjing* could harden the body to blows and weapons.

The Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the nineteenth century (1898-1900) should have supplied the proverbial nail in the coffin for the internal martial arts. In the harsh famine-ridden years of 1898-1900, the Boxer movement rapidly spread first in northwestern Shandong and then increasingly among Boxer groups in Zhili, Manchuria, Shanxi and elsewhere in the North China countryside. One of the most visible aspects of the Boxers was the performance of spirit possession rituals combined with demonstrations of martial arts that allegedly allowed the practitioner to attain improved fighting skills and invulnerability to sword and bullet. Though the Boxers had come from a wide array of social and occupational backgrounds, and had a great diversity of motives in joining the mass movement, the disastrous end of the Rebellion in 1900 led to a widespread impression that linked the martial arts with peasant ignorance and lawlessness, an impression particularly cultivated among later May Fourth intellectuals.² While not directly referenced among the Boxers, the idea of “internal strength” for practicing invulnerability to weapons became tainted by association. Labeled as representing “superstition” and “feudalistic backwardness,” the validity of *neigong* was becoming controversial even among Chinese martial arts practitioners of the day.

Yet, *neigong* and the internal martial arts did not end up being discarded into 'the garbage bin of history.' How did the notion of cultivating *qi* for internal strength, which had seemed a laughable proposition at the beginning of the twentieth century, become generally accepted as a legitimate mode of indigenous embodied knowledge by the end of the period? In other words, how did *neigong* become reinstated from the depths of post-Boxer shame? Even more intriguing is that the early 1900s was the same historical moment when *tiyu* sports and physiology were becoming the accepted predominant frameworks of understanding the human body—as well they should, according to modernist perspectives. How then did variant perceptual paradigms of the body not only hold their own but flourish at the same time?

1 Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 185.

2 See Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 104-118; and Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects: Chinese Martial Arts Literature and Postcolonial History* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia program, 2011), 31-32.

This chapter takes up the story of the figure of the inner body in early twentieth-century China, and traces how it became a cultural and discursive trope in Chinese vernacular print culture in the period. It tells the forgotten story of how *neigong* survived the scientific clamor of the Republican era—a conceptual history hinted at in modern accounts of the rise of *taijiquan* and *qigong*, but not often told against the backdrop of the contemporaneous entry of sports in Republican China, much less examined as a product of the Chinese popular imaginary in the period. The story complicates the picture of the Republican era that has usually focused on the introduction of science, medicine, anatomy, physiology, sports, and other areas of biological knowledge into China.³ Here, we see how, intertwined alongside the notions of sports and physical education, *neigong* as a concept was beginning to recover from the debacle of the Boxers and find acceptance in vernacular Chinese discourse.

The chapter begins by exploring the discursive environment in which the concept of *neigong* was circulating in early twentieth-century China. By that time, *neigong* seemed to be a term at least of passing familiarity to many Republican Chinese urbanites, enough to be identified critically by intellectuals such as Lu Xun (1881-1936) in the early 1900s. We will see how, at the same time as it was being criticized in some quarters, *neigong* was beginning to gain conceptual currency in vernacular cultural discourse, within the martial arts world and beyond. It was (and perhaps still is) a term greatly in definitional flux. Various writers from different backgrounds—government officials, literary reformers, layman practitioners—were formulating their own interpretations of what this *neigong* was and what it could accomplish. Previous scholars have tended to argue that Republican China urbanites had to be persuaded to accept a repackaged martial arts rendered “safe for a new China.”⁴ Instead, judging from the numerous publications on the subject, urban Republican China seemed receptive to an array of suggestions on what could be achieved with these forms of indigenous bodily knowledge.

3 See for instance Zito and Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject, and Power*; Martin and Heinrich, eds., *Embodied Modernities*; and Frank Dikotter, *Imperfect Conceptions: Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects and Eugenics in China* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1998).

4 This narrative informs Andrew Morris' chapter on the story of Republican Chinese martial arts. For the quote, see Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 185.



Figure 8: Eugen Sandow (1867-1925), one of the first strongmen to popularize body-building and spectacular shows of strength as performance, shown here wearing an animal pelt. He toured China in 1903.

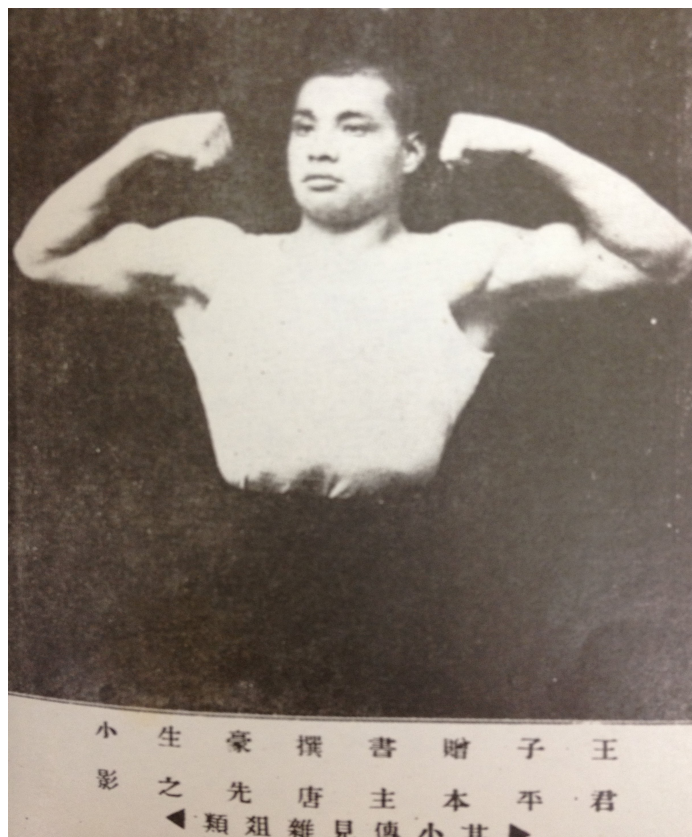


Figure 9: An example of a strongman pose often adopted among Republican Chinese martial arts practitioners. This shows Wang Ziping (1881-1973), whose biography includes a narrative of him challenging foreign strongmen.

Guoji Daguan, [Survey of the martial arts], eds. Xiang Kairan et al., *Minguo congshu* 民國叢書 [Republican collectanea] (4th edition), volume 47. (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, repr. 1992, orig. 1923), prefatory material.

C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

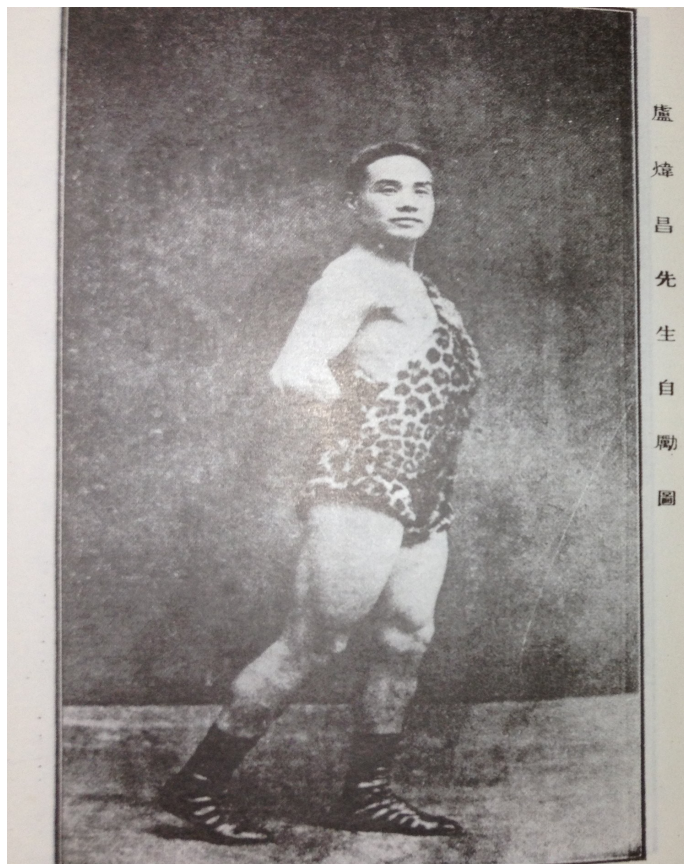


Figure 10: Another example of a strongman pose. This shows one of the founders of the Jingwu Tiyuhui, Lu Weichang (1883-1943). The animal pelt that he is wearing pays homage to the famous strongman Eugen Sandow.

Ibid., prefatory material.
C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Strength for the Sick Man of the East: Indigenous vs Western sports

The discursive environment of early twentieth-century China, in which *neigong* was circulated as a term, was one that was painfully aware of the label of the “Sick Man of the East,” a figure which represented a China deeply embattled without and within.⁵ As many scholars have shown, the quest for strength was undertaken on many levels—the actual bodies of the individual citizen becoming figuratively entangled with that of the body politic and the importance of regaining political and military strength for a China in the throes of early nationhood.⁶ In such a moment, Republican China was largely receptive to the resurgence of public interest in physical exercise and sports across the West. Images of the rippling muscles of showmen such as Eugen Sandow (1867-1925), advertised as the epitome of strength and manliness, found their way into Chinese popular print culture (Figure 8). Many well-known martial arts practitioners began emulating Western strongman poses and donning similar costumes (Figures 9 and 10), and Republican Chinese martial arts communities also integrated calisthenics, drills, track and field, and other sports into their training regimens.⁷

Yet this did not necessarily mean that the indigenous notions of strength were becoming obsolescent—on the contrary, the topic of how the Chinese martial arts could (or could not) represent a source of national health and strength became a highly charged discursive battlefield, giving rise to what Chinese sports historians have dubbed the “Indigenous versus Western *tiyu* conflict [*Tuyang tiyu zhi zheng* 土洋体育之争].”⁸ Lasting several decades, the debate drew heated exchange among layman and professional practitioners alike, illustrating the wide circulation of variant perceptions of strength and the body in the Chinese early twentieth century.

The controversy over the Chinese martial arts was first sparked off in 1911, when noted military officer Ma Liang (1878-1947) compiled a volume entitled *New Chinese Martial Arts* [*Zhonghua xin wushu* 中華新武術].⁹ Widely acclaimed as a form of indigenous *tiyu*, the volume served as a template for turning the Chinese martial arts into a form of calisthenics, and was adopted in various schools.

In a 1918 issue of the leading reform-oriented journal *La Jeunesse* [New Youth, or *Xin Qingnian*], the leading intellectual and novelist of the period Lu Xun (1881-1936) published a stinging critique of the enterprise to repackage the Chinese martial arts as “Chinese-style sports exercise [*ticao*].” Lu Xun questioned the whole point of this enterprise to rehabilitate the martial arts, criticizing the uselessness of the martial arts in the two areas that were supposed to be their *raison d'être*—namely as a sport and as a form of self-defense. As a sport, he asked, why would the Chinese martial arts be better than foreigners' *ticao*?

Apparently Chinese people who learn foreign sports cannot achieve any efficacy [*xiaoyan* 效驗]. So they need to

5 For an in-depth look into how the metaphor of “Sick Man of the East” came to be attached to a stereotype of China, in the discursive void left by the old Ottoman Empire, see Ari Larissa Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008).

6 See Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power*; and Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*.

7 Morris, Chapter 7, “From Martial Arts to National Skills: The Construction of a Modern Indigenous Physical Culture, 1912-37,” *Marrow of the Nation*, 185-229.

8 See Lin Xiaomei, *Qingmo minchu Zhongguo wushu wenhua fazhan yanjiu*, 37-9, 75-7.

9 Ma Liang 馬良, *Zhonghua xin wushu* 中華新武術 [New Chinese martial arts] (Shanghai: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1930).

switch to practicing local-style *ticao* (which is martial arts). In my view, with two hands holding foreigners' brass weight-plates or wooden poles, extending the limbs left and right—in terms of developing the muscles [*jinrou fada shang* 肌肉發達上], there should likely be a bit of 'efficacy.' Yet, apparently there is still no efficacy! Then naturally there is no choice but to switch to practicing tricks like “Wu Song Escaping the Manacles.”¹⁰ Maybe this is due to Chinese physiology being different than that of foreigners.

As for self-defense, Lu Xun reminded readers of how the Boxers exemplified the usefulness of the martial arts on the battlefield, and included a barbed remark about the infamy of *neigong* as part of their invulnerability rites:

Warfare today uses guns and cannons. Although China 'in the old days' used to have such things as guns and cannons, at this moment it has none. Refusing to even practice the Straw-shield Drill, how can they make use of guns and cannons?¹¹ I think (because they have never made clear, this is my 'guesswork'): that if one continues practicing the martial arts, one can attain the level of 'invulnerability to guns and cannons' (and might this be the so-called “internal skill [*neigong*]?). This has been tried before once, in the year 1900 [the Boxer Rebellion]. Unfortunately that attempt famously, and utterly, failed. Let us see what happens this time.¹²

Lu Xun's essay met with a spirited rebuttal in the next issue of *La Jeunesse*, from Chen Tiesheng (1873-1940), a former member of the revolutionary Southern Society, one of the founders of the Jingwu Tiyuhui martial arts association in Shanghai, and the association's journal editor.¹³ “Who is this Mr Lu Xun, I have never heard of him,” he began sarcastically. Chen went on to argue that Lu Xun has mistakenly conflated the martial arts with the Boxers. “Mr Lu is an outsider [to the martial arts world], so this [confusion] is understandable... The Boxers belong to the category of the Spiritualists, and have nothing to do with martial arts practice.¹⁴ The Boxers are the doctrine of demonism [*guidao zhuyi* 鬼道主義], the martial arts are the doctrine of humanism [*rendao zhuyi* 人道主義].”

Chen Tiesheng was thus putting a careful distance between the Boxers and what he considered the *real* martial arts—a differentiation unsurprisingly often made in martial arts writing at the time, given the mostly critical reception among intellectuals towards the Boxer debacle.¹⁵ In a rhetorical move typical of such narratives, Chen then offered his own experience to make a case for the efficacy of the non-Boxer-related martial arts. He told of how he had suffered from chronic physical ailments in middle age, and how his doctor finally said that they had exhausted medical remedies, and advised him to “learn calisthenics exercise [*rouruan ticao*].” Yet, his health problems persisted:

10 “Wu Song Escaping the Manacles” is a story from the Ming novel *The Water Margin* [*Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳], and is also the name given to an actual sequence of movements in modern-day *taijiquan*.

11 A drill attributed to the famous Ming general Qi Jiguang (1528-1588), originated in Zhejiang province, now performed in the form of a dance.

12 Lu Xun 魯迅, writing under the pseudonym Tang Si 唐俟 that he often adopted at the time, “Suigan lu di 37 tiao” 隨感錄第三十七條 [Random jotting number 37], *La Jeunesse*, 5.5 (1918), 82-87. These jottings were later reprinted in the collection *Refeng* 熱風 [Hot wind], in *Lu Xun Quanjī* 魯迅全集 [The complete works of Lu Xun], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981).

13 Together with his three co-founders of the Jingwu Association, Chen was popularly known as one of “The Four Outstanding Men of Jingwu [*Jingwu sijie* 精武四傑].”

14 The Spiritualists were a label for the many groups dedicated to the study of spiritualism [*lingxue* 靈學] in China, inspired partly by similar groups in late-Victorian Europe and North America.

15 Lu Xun's critique of the Boxers was representative of most late Qing and Republican intellectuals' disdain for the Boxer Rebellion, a reaction that endures in present-day mainland China. For a comprehensive survey of late Qing scholars' reactions to the Boxers, see Zhitian Luo, trans. Lane J. Harris and Mei Chun, *Inheritance Within Rupture: Culture and Scholarship in Early Twentieth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-69.

[A]fter two years [of learning calisthenics exercise], just as my legs improved, my arms suffered pain; once the arms felt better, the pain in the legs recurred. At this point, one of those that Mr Lu Xun most detests—a martial arts practitioner—told me that this is because of my focus on the physical aspect of training: if one used martial arts, the limbs move in unison, strength and *qi* used together [力與氣同用], this problem of harming either the legs or arms will be entirely gone. Because my body was in pain, I thought to just give it a try. Unexpectedly, after trying it for three months, I actually recovered. Today, I practice daily what Mr Lu calls the skill of the Boxers, and I drink well, eat well, move well, walk well. The gift of the martial arts was truly not small. I think if a half-paralyzed man could be cured, one can see from this that the well-qualified foreign medical professor has actually lost to the martial arts—strange, very strange.¹⁶

We can observe here the complexity of the symbolic quagmire that the Chinese martial arts were in at the time—even for the advocates, the martial arts were still at once an embarrassment of Boxer “demonism” and a national “humanist” treasure in need of conceptual cleansing from superstition and backwardness. Yet, as in Chen's argument, there remains a claim of inherent efficacy in the therapeutic potential of the martial arts, pitched as different than that of Western sports and calisthenics. As we shall see, this will become a primary narrative arc in discourse on the martial arts in the period.

The exchange reveals a few pointed contrasts in how the body was conceptualized in the period.¹⁷ For Lu Xun, the body should be regarded as a muscular entity, trainable with “foreigners' brass weight-plates or wooden poles,” and efficacy should be observable “in terms of muscles [*jirou fada shang* 筋肉發達上].” Yet for Chen Tiesheng, this emphasis on externally muscular movement was precisely where “foreign medicine” proved inferior to the Chinese martial arts. Focusing on muscular development produced an imbalance for him. Instead, he found health through “[using] strength and *qi* together [*li yu qi tongyong* 力與氣同用].” The starting point for Lu Xun was that physiology should be considered a universal structural understanding of the human body, applicable to all, and he mocked Chinese martial arts practitioners on this basis.¹⁸ The starting point for Chen, on the other hand, was the exact opposite—he upheld the specificity of his own passage of ill health and its cure, and the highly subjective, psycho-physiological experience of using *qi* along with strength. The theoretical basis of physiology itself was not in question, so much as the commensurate validity of subjective experience of failure with one therapeutic method and success with another. Efficaciousness for Lu Xun was based on the tangibly quantifiable, understood through a general theoretical approach. Efficaciousness for Chen Tiesheng was based on the intangibility of *qi* balanced with *li* strength, framed through the practical and experiential.

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- 16 Chen Tiesheng 陳鐵生, “Bo Xinqingnian wujuan wuhao Suigan lu di sanshiqi tiao” 駁《新青年》五卷五號《隨感錄》第三十七條 [Rebuttal to *La Jeunesse* issue 5.5 “Random jotting number 37”], *La Jeunesse* 6.2 (1919), 138-139. In the interest of space, I will mention only briefly here the denouement to this polemical exchange, which was Lu Xun's response to Chen Tiesheng, published in the same issue of *La Jeunesse* and printed directly after Chen's letter. Lu Xun's conclusion was mild in tone, rightly correcting Chen on the use of the English term “boxing,” but overall agreeing to disagree on the issue of preserving the Chinese martial arts. See Lu Xun, “Quanshu yu Quanfei” 拳術與拳匪 [Martial arts and the Boxers] *La Jeunesse* 6.2 (1919), 140-1.
- 17 Also see Paul Cohen's treatment of the polemic exchange in *History in Three Keys*, 230-234, which analyzes the issue from the point of view of the two men's differing perspectives on the Boxers. Cohen's account describes Chen Tiesheng simply as “older than Lu Xun and apparently with some military background,” and argues that the Boxers were the “crux of the problem” (233). Here I present a different argument that the crux of the problem might also be the divergent lenses through which the two men were considering the question of strength and the workings of the human body. In this otherwise brilliant and in-depth study, Cohen also erroneously describes the martial arts as “Chinese boxing,” explaining *neigong* as “a regimen of breathing exercises (*qigong*) closely associated with Chinese boxing” (231). This is perhaps a perpetuation of Needham's error on “Taoist boxing” in *Science and Civilization*, already discussed in the previous chapter in this study.
- 18 This standpoint is hardly surprising, given Lu Xun's former medical background.

As for *neigong*, after signing off his letter, Chen Tiesheng added a sharp postscript about Lu Xun's invocation of “internal skill [*neigong*]”: “*Neigong* does not refer to invulnerability to guns and cannon. Do not pretend to insider language [*neihang yu* 内行语].” Both Lu Xun and Chen demonstrate some familiarity with the term *neigong*, albeit on completely different registers. Lu Xun was referring ironically to the association with the Boxers' self-proclaimed “invulnerability to guns and cannons.” Chen Tiesheng, however, seemed to consider *neigong* integral to martial arts. By dismissively informing Lu Xun that this term was better understood by its “insider” practitioners, Chen was making a defense for *neigong* as a particular skill of the martial arts. He did not explicate here what he thought *neigong* would be, though his earlier invocation of “using *qi* with strength” was suggestive.¹⁹

Getting Physical: the Internal Martial Arts as a “Sport”

This question of how the Chinese martial arts—especially the internal forms based on *qi*—can compare with Western sports became a trope much echoed in the period, taken up in various ways. There were certainly efforts to “hybridize” the martial arts with sports, as Andrew Morris has documented, with calisthenics movements such as push-ups, jump-rope, lunges, and dumbbell exercises being incorporated into training regimes. Yet, the story may not seem as straightforward as one of martial arts scrambling to modernize or reformulate itself to fit in with sports.

Let us take a look for instance at how the martial arts were presented as a type of “sports” in the first *Chinese History of Sports* [*Zhongguo tiyushi* 中國體育史] in 1919, compiled by Guo Xifen (1893-1984).²⁰ This presentation has been largely adopted into the modern day, with many Chinese histories of sports and martial arts following Guo's historiography in locating the origins story of Chinese 'sports' in the Bodhidharma and Zhang Sanfeng myths.²¹ We see the enduring appeal of the mythos of the *Yijinjing* at play here. Guo devoted a whole chapter to the *Yijinjing*, entitling it “The Invention of *Yijinjing* [*Yijinjing zhi faming* 易筋經之發明],” and unproblematically asserting that it originated from the Bodhidharma.

Here, I am not so much interested in critiquing Guo's use of these myths, than in noting the manner in which the internal martial arts were inserted into the conversation of sports and physiology in the period. Almost the entirety of Guo's volume on “sports” is taken up with discussing ideas such as

19 Interestingly, neither Cohen nor Morris mention Chen's parting shot to Lu Xun on *neigong*, in their respective accounts of the exchange—an easy albeit significant point to miss. See *History in Three Keys*, 230-4, and *Marrow of the Nation*, 193-4.

20 Guo Xifen 郭希汾, *Zhongguo tiyushi* 中國體育史 [Chinese history of sports] (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, repr. 1960). Guo was a professor of *tiyu* history at Shanghai's East Asia Physical Education Training Institute. Under the name of Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, he worked in the study of folksongs, pioneered the study of ancient Chinese proverbs, and later founded (with Zhou Zuoren) the Literary Research Society at Beijing University. See Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 43-44. Gunsun Hoh (He Gengsheng 赫更生)'s English-language book based on his dissertation at Columbia University, *Physical Education in China* (1926), brought the same story of the martial arts as the original “Chinese sports” to an American audience. See Gunsun Hoh, *Physical Education in China* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1926).

21 See for instance the bilingual *Zhonghua tiyu wenhua shi tuxuanji* or *Selections of Historical Literatures and Illustrations of Physical Activities in Chinese Culture*, 1975, published on the occasion of the Asian and Pacific Congress on Health, Physical Education and Recreation, August 11-15, 1975, Taipei, Republic of China.

daoyin breathing exercises and the many techniques of *yangsheng* and *qi* therapy, tracing them carefully through extensive quotations of the original texts and then interpreting them through the lens of sports.²² For instance, the book opens with a discussion of Zhuangzi's classic line, "To pant, to puff, to hail, to sip, to spit out the old breath and draw in the new, practicing bear-hangings and bird-stretchings," and Guo offers his interpretation of the line, classifying the breath techniques as "breathing exercises [*huxi zhi yundong* 呼吸之運動]," and the "bear-hangings and bird-stretchings" as "exercise of the limbs [*zhiti zhi yundong* 肢體之運動]."²³ In places, Guo took pains to clarify what he considered were popularly erroneous interpretations. For instance, while quoting the *Records of the Grand Historian* [*Shiji* 史記] story of how a certain marquis of Liu named Zhang Liang "learned to avoid grain [*bigu* 辟穀] and to practice *daoyin* exercises, and thus became light of body [*qingshen* 輕身]," Guo was quick to explain that *qingshen* did not mean "becoming immortal," but a literal "lightening of the body" due to *daoyin* having achieved the "flourishing of one's *jing* essence and blood [*jing xue chong wang* 精血充旺]." Other than these occasional notes, Guo repeatedly argued that these methods of *daoyin* and *yangsheng* were "in full accordance with the physiological principles [*shengli* 生理] of the methods of sports [*ticao shu* 體操術]."²⁴

In a fascinating conclusion entitled "Chinese *tiyu* research and the connection with religion [*zongjiao* 宗教]," Guo noted the Western Cartesian divide between physical body [*routi* 肉體] and the spirit [*jingshen* 精神], and how Chinese *yangsheng* practices do not quite belong to one or the other.²⁵ There were two key differences between Chinese *ticao* and those of the Western nations, he wrote. "One is breathing exercises, the other is the exercise of the lower limbs." He devoted a section to each of these differences. In the section on breathing exercises, he wrote:

In the study of 'principles of life [*shengli* 生理],' Westerners emphasize anatomy, while China primarily focuses on the nature of *qi*. Emphasizing anatomy results in correct conceptualization, and means that in its [way of] curing illness, its advantage is in healing the external [body]. Focusing on the nature of *qi* results in profound understanding, and in its [way of] curing illness, its advantage is in healing the internal [body]. Thus, the subtle mysteries of 'principles of life' cannot be strictly contained within the parameters of what anatomy previously [knew] of the body.

Guo's notion of an internal-external dichotomy in Chinese and Western ways of thinking about the body will become significant in the later discourses of *neigong* in the period.²⁶ Guo went on to describe how the ancient Chinese *yangsheng* and *daoyin* breathing exercises were used to channel *qi* through the cinnabar field [*dantian*], techniques very different than "Western deep breathing exercises." Guo classified these techniques as *neigong*: "Before [practicing] striking with the sword, one must first learn *neigong*, in order to practice breathing. Thus, although 'adjusting the breath' is called 'breathing

22 Morris rightly observes that "only seven pages of Guo Xifen's 1919 outline of the history of Chinese *tiyu* covered post-Ming martial arts" (195), but does not address the extensive pre-Ming coverage that does represent the real substance of Guo's work.

23 Guo, *Zhongguo tiyushi*, 7. Translation taken from Burton Watson, *The Complete Zhuangzi*, 119.

24 Guo, *Zhongguo tiyushi*, 10, 15. My translations of Guo's text take into account that *shengli* here may refer either to the original meaning of the phrase as "principles of life or fundamental basis of how life works," as well as to the early twentieth-century adoption of the phrase to denote the technical field of "physiological science." See for instance my next quotation and translation of Guo's writing, in which he is clearly using the older meaning of the phrase *shengli*.

25 Guo, *Zhongguo tiyushi*, 137. I translate *zongjiao* as "religion" because Guo referred to Daoism and Buddhism as such, but I do so bearing in mind that *zongjiao* was a neologism in the period, imported along with Western ideas of "religion." For an excellent study on the background to the problem of religion in China, see Goosaert and Palmer, *The Question of Religion*.

26 Guo's point parallels Shigehisa Kuriyama's study on early Chinese medicine, and its divergence from its Greek counterpart. See Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body*.

exercises,' they are different from the various deep breathing methods of Westerners.” Indeed, these subtleties of breathing and *qi* are what makes “Westerners' methods direct and easy to practice, whereas Chinese methods are complex and difficult to learn. This is why there are differences in the study of 'principles of life' or physiology [*shengli*].”²⁷

Guo's conclusion, then, turns Lu Xun's point on its head. The word *shengli* originally referred to “principles of life or fundamental basis of how life works,” and was adopted in the early twentieth century to denote the technical field of “physiological science.”²⁸ The dual meanings of *shengli* were often used interchangeably in the period, often to argue the validity of the idea being discussed at hand, rather than to referring to “physiology” per se. While Lu Xun was mocking the Chinese for thinking that they had a physiology different than Westerners', Guo was arguing that indeed, there may be different cultural paradigms for understanding how the body functions.

Rather than challenging the validity of the martial arts as Lu Xun had done, Guo's history of sports seems to be attempting to *explain* the martial arts in terms of contemporaneous theories of sports and the body. His extensive attention on the internal forms of the martial arts suggests a stance similar to that of Chen Tiesheng: that there is something of a particular inherent value to the other-physical *qi* aspects of the martial arts, that is worth preserving against the tide of popularity of Western sports. The emphasis here seems less on trying to “write [the martial arts] out of existence,” as has been previously assumed, and more on explaining indigenous bodily knowledge in the modernist language of physiology, sports, and biological science. Guo's work does not seem to me to be one of “actively denying or forgetting” the martial arts in a brave new world of Western physical culture—quite the opposite.²⁹

This enterprise becomes even more apparent on the other end of the spectrum in the debate on martial arts versus sports. Instead of arguing that the martial arts can share the spotlight with sports, as Guo did, proponents like Chen Tiesheng argued outright for the specific and often superior efficacy of the Chinese martial arts—though one must first understand the “true” form of the martial arts. Pioneering martial arts scholar Tang Hao (1896-1959) wrote in a similar fashion, addressing the complaints from many of his comrades in track and field that trying out martial arts apparently slowed down their running speeds, “because of the muscles [being under-developed].” In response, Tang cited cases of how martial arts practitioners outran their track and field compatriots, or of his own brother whose time for the 100-yard dash was always around 11 seconds. In an echo of what Chen Tiesheng wrote, Tang blamed “ignorant village teachers” as the ones at fault for teaching people to fling sandbags and lift rocks, “training muscles to become like steel... It is this kind of low-down skill that those researching new *tiyu* should object to, as do the truly advanced of the martial arts practitioners.” Here, once again, we see the pointed difference being made about how 'true' martial arts skills do not train external muscles “to become like steel”—they train something else *internally*.

Interestingly, Tang then invoked the famous name of Charles Harold McCloy (Mai Kele 麥克樂 in Chinese), the then-Secretary of the Department of Physical Education in the National Council of the

27 Guo, *Zhongguo tiyushi*, 138-9

28 See *Handian* for details of the etymology of the word, <http://www.zdic.net/c/f/a2/189665.htm>. Accessed May 2 2016. Modern Chinese accounts of “physiology” pay little heed to the original meaning of the word, usually focusing instead on the narrative of how the field of physiological science (and its accompanying field, anatomy) emerged in China. See for instance Wang Zhijun and Chen Mengqin, eds., *Zhongguo shenglixue shi* 中國生理學史 [A history of physiology in China] (Beijing: Beijing yike daxue Zhongguo xiehe yike daxue lianhe chubanshe, 1993).

29 Both quotes are from Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, 195.

YMCA of China. As Tang described it, McCloy initially had his own suspicions about exactly that kind of “low-down” skill of training only to harden the external muscles: “But after practicing a few techniques of [martial arts luminary] Mr Chen Zizheng, [McCloy] changed his suspicious attitude into one of approval. If he could be trained a few years, I know [he will] agree entirely with what I said [about the efficacy of 'true' martial arts].”³⁰ Whether this anecdote has any historical basis is beside the point. Rather, it is that Tang was using the name of one of the key figures in the Republican Chinese sports scene, to lend credence to the 'true' internal skills of the Chinese martial arts. Personified in the figure of McCloy, Western sports had to literally step up to the podium with Chinese martial arts—with the latter clearly placed in the superior position.

The debate continued into the 1930s, with the first Chinese participation in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. The lone Chinese representative was Liu Changchun (1909-1983), in the 100 and 200-meter sprints. Liu, a national champion runner in China, was quickly eliminated in the Olympic heats. That he made the trip at all, despite the lack of funding and the great distance by steamer, made Liu a celebrity after he returned home, but his lackluster performance on the international stage also drew criticism, and a backlash against succumbing to the glamor of foreign sports. The influential newspaper *Takungpao* [*Dagong bao*] declared in an editorial piece:

The games and exercises that are currently fashionable in Europe, America, and Japan are, upon closer examination, still the games of the leisurely. Their most unique feature is in making the youth spend their extra energy and time on these competitive sports, and avoiding the struggle of politics... Yet what kind of era is it today, when the country is being invaded and the people lose their livelihoods... Thus [as for] Western-style sports [*xi shi zhi yundong*], China has no time to learn, no need to learn, and indeed must not learn... Please abandon Western sports from now onwards, and promote indigenous *tiyu*!³¹

Wu Yunrui, the director of Nanjing Central University *tiyu* department, analyzed the debate in terms of “the open-minded” versus advocates for “the closed-door policy.” Should China's *tiyu* aim to protect “national essence, and maintain the national soul,” or aim to “not distinguish between Western or indigenous, and generalize thinking about the human body”?³² This strikes a note not dissimilar to Lu Xun's barbed remark about the folly of the Chinese in thinking that they possess a different kind of physiology. Is there something unusual about the Chinese conceptualization of “the body,” that the martial arts somehow embody?

This was the question that troubled Chinese martial arts practitioners, who were themselves concerned about the ramifications of turning the martial arts into a mere “sport.” Among the initial debates on how to teach the martial arts en masse, novelist Xiang Kairan (1889-1957) cautioned that while “the outer movements of the limbs” can be easily taught to the masses, the “inner” cultivation and generation of *qi*, or *jing* or *shen* essences are much more esoteric arts, that need to be reserved for

30 Tang Hao, “Wushu de yanjiu” 武術的研究 [Research on the martial arts], in *Guoji Daguan* 國技大觀 [Survey of the martial arts], eds. Xiang Kairan et al., Part 2, “Zhuanzhu lei” 專著類 [Specialist writings section], *Minguo congshu* 民國叢書 [Republican collectanea] (4th edition), volume 47. (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, repr. 1992, orig. 1923), 6. Chen Zizheng 陳子正 (1878-1933), nicknamed “The King of the Eagle's Talon,” was an instructor at the Jingwu Tiyuhui. One of the most famous accounts about him told of how he visited the Jingwu branch in Singapore in 1922, where he defeated a British martial arts fighter on stage, and received as a prize an Indonesian kris inscribed with the words, “Chinese Fighting King.”

31 “Jinhou zhi guomin tiyu wenti” 今後之國民體育問題 [The problem of national *tiyu* now and into the future], in *Dagong bao*, August 7, 1932.

32 Wu Yunrui, “Jinhou zhi guomin tiyu wenti zhi wojian” 今後之國民體育問題之我見 [My view on the problem of national *tiyu* now and into the future], in *Tiyu zhoubao*, 1932.

the advanced practitioner.³³ In one of the earliest manuals on Chinese martial arts, he returned to this problem:

Martial arts are divided into two schools, the internal and the external. Today among practitioners, the majority are capable in the external skills. Those capable in the internal skills are few. Yet if one were to focus on overcoming an enemy, there is no distinguishing internal from external. And the principles are clear, it is not difficult to integrate both. Today, talking about the external school, though there are many types of movements, it is difficult to teach thoroughly at the beginner's level.

He goes on to explain this in terms of (external) *jin* 勁 energy:

The external school distinguishes between *yin* and *yang* types of *jin* energy. *Yin* type of *jin* energy is akin to “concealing the brush tip” in practicing writing—one does not reveal sharp angles, in a state analogous to performing calligraphy.³⁴ The foolish may exert too much tension in such a state, and find it difficult to understand the places where one uses force [*li* 力]. This is rather unsuitable for beginners. The *yang* type of *jin* energy, on the other hand, is akin to [the style of Tang-dynasty calligraphers] Yan Zhenqing and Liu Gongquan.³⁵ Every stroke must use the “centered tip,” in quest of the technique to pierce the white space. With long practice, [the two forms of *jin* energy] naturally come together. Once the practice of *yang* form of *jin* energy is attained, then one goes in quest of *yin* energy.³⁶

Xiang Kairan's mapping of one form of haptic practice (calligraphy) onto another (martial arts) underscores the aesthetic-kinetic nature of these practices of *qi*.³⁷ They are highly subjective experiences, rendering them difficult to teach en masse, let alone young children in schools. To echo the words of John Dudgeon, which we saw earlier in Chapter Three, these practices have to be experienced for oneself.

Jingwu Tiyu Association founder Lu Weichang expressed a similar opinion about the complexity of the martial arts, asserting that it needs to be experienced to be understood. In an essay structured as a question and answer format, counterposing controversial issues about the martial arts against his own response to the issue, he wrote:

Issue: What people call the martial arts is nothing but a form of *ticao*. There are many methods of *ticao*, and they all need careful research.

Response: There are indeed many methods to what I call *ticao*. Yet, to find one method that requires the flow of *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* essences throughout [the body] while in exercise, and that requires the use of these essences spontaneously upon the arms, eyes, body, and footwork—other than the martial arts, I cannot name another. For ten years, the wonder of having used the martial arts to prevent illness, to eliminate illness—if one has not experienced it, how can one understand or speak of it? Looking all around me, I wish to say more but must repeatedly contain myself for fear of being thought crazy.³⁸

33 Xiang Kairan, *Guoji daguan*, Part 1, 26.

34 Xiang is referring here specifically to the Han-era official script called *hanli* 漢隸. Xiang Kairan, *Quanshu* [Martial arts], 11.

35 Tang-dynasty master calligraphers Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 and Liu Gongquan 柳公權, known for the *qi* flow of their characters.

36 Xiang Kairan, *Quanshu* 拳術 [Martial arts] (Taipei: Hualian chubanshe, repr. 1983).

37 Calligraphy and martial arts are closely linked, with many legendary masters apparently skilled in both areas. See for instance samples of Sun Lutang's calligraphy in Tim Cartmell, *A Study of Taijiquan by Sun Lutang* (Berkeley: Blue Snake Books, 2003), 42. Zheng Manqing was particularly known for his mastery of the “five arts” (calligraphy, traditional Chinese medicine, painting, poetry, and *taijiquan*). See Barbara Davis, “In Search of a Unified Dao: Zheng Manqing's Life and Contributions to *Taijiquan*,” *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 5/2, 1996.

38 Lu, Weichang 盧煒昌 “Cizhong renyu” 此中人語 [Speaking to insiders], in Chen Tiesheng et al. eds., *Jingwu Benji* 精

An Inner Logic: the “Science” of the Internal Martial Arts

It was in such a discursive environment—already sharply divided on the question of efficacy between Chinese martial arts and Western gymnasium training, with divergent frameworks in conceptualizing the human body—that *neigong* as a term began to gain conceptual foothold in vernacular discourse. What might *neigong* actually refer to, if not to “invulnerability to guns and cannon”? By the early twentieth century, various Republican Chinese writers had begun to identify *neigong* as a key form of indigenous bodily knowledge in vernacular discourse, though they had varying definitions of the term that crossed the spheres of *yangsheng* therapeutic practice, martial arts, and spiritual cultivation. At the same time, it also became important for these writers to frame the conversation around *neigong* internal strength against the backdrop of science and sports, to give it a semblance of “scientific” basis. This attempt could easily be passed off as simply belonging to the scientific register in a period already rife with “scientizing [*kexuehua*]” efforts in many quarters. But as we shall see, the enterprise among Republican Chinese writers to “scientize” the internal martial arts reflects a more complex picture.

One such writer was Jiang Weiqiao (1873-1958), a philosopher who became the minister of education in Jiangsu province in the 1920s. His manual, *Master Yinshizi's Method of Quiet Sitting* [*Yinshizi Jingzuo fa* 因是子靜坐法], published in 1914, went through multiple editions.³⁹ For Jiang, *neigong* described a method of meditation that can be traced back to Daoist, Buddhist, or neo-Confucian thought:⁴⁰

The method of quiet sitting [*jingzuo fa* 靜坐法] is what the ancients called *neigong*. In the olden times, the art of 'nourishing life [*yangsheng*]' originally had 'external skill [*waigong* 外功]' and 'internal skill [*neigong* 內功].' The herbs and tonics of the healing arts cured those who were already sick. The *waigong* and *neigong* of 'nourishing life' healed those that are not yet sick.

Jiang claimed that *neigong* had since become unfairly relegated to the *yin-yang*, *wuxing*, mercury-swallowing and other such disdainfully “arcane [*shenmi* 神秘]” practices of Daoist *fangshi*, and suffered for lack of serious research. Echoing the narrative arc of personal testimony that Chen Tiesheng had used, Jiang described how he had suffered ill health all his life, and none of the remedies he tried had worked. Finally, an old physician showed him books on “nourishing life,” leading him to discover the techniques of meditative sitting that he identified as *neigong*. Now that he had cured himself of lifelong ailments using *neigong*, Jiang declared himself ready to use “scientific methods to explain the efficacy of these techniques.”⁴¹ He included a photograph of himself in the meditative lotus position (Figure 10).⁴²

武本紀 [Records of the 'pure martial school'] (Shanghai: n.p., 1919), 137.

39 Jiang Weiqiao 蔣維喬 has been credited as “founding father” of the modern *qigong* movement. See Livia Kohn, “Quiet Sitting with Master Yinshi,” *Living with the Dao* (Magdalena, N.M.: Three Pines Press, 2015), 167. As this chapter shows, however, Jiang's text was but one of many in discursive circulation in the early 1910s on *qi* and *neigong* practices, all of which might have contributed towards setting the stage for the later developments in *qigong*.

40 For a historical account of meditative practices and ideas of cultivating *qi* in early China, see Yang Rubin, ed., *Zhongguo gudai sixiang zhong de qilun ji shenti guan*.

41 Interestingly, Jiang wrote that he had observed these methods from two Japanese practitioners, Okata and Fujida, who (Jiang claimed) in turn had learned them originally from ancient Chinese tradition. With the high volume of traffic of people and ideas between China and Japan, this seems highly likely. Further research into this subject, however, falls outside the scope of this study.

42 Jiang Weiqiao 蔣維喬, *Yinshizi jingzuo fa* 因是子靜坐法 [The quiet sitting method of Yinshizi] (Shanghai: Shangwu



Figure 11: Jiang Weiqiao (1873-1958), demonstrating the “meditative sitting stance of Yinshizi.”
Yinshizi jingzuo fa 因是子靜坐法 [The quiet sitting method of Yinshizi] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1915),
 prefatory material.

C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Jiang's “scientific” explanatory model of *neigong* was framed in the physiological language of the period—how *qi* is carried in blood circulation, for instance, or how breathing exercises strengthen the diaphragm. Yet notably, that mechanistic language failed to explain Jiang's own experiences of *qi*. In three separate accounts of how he traversed what he called a “wondrous realm [*qijing* 奇景],” he adopts a confessional, anecdotal tone: “Every time I sat down to meditate, I would focus my awareness on the cinnabar field in the lower abdomen. I could feel a cloud of hot power there. It came and went, rose and ebbed. I was quite amazed by it.” This process went on until one night, he felt “an intense rumbling movement in the cinnabar field... I had been sitting in quiet meditation as usual, but this was something I really could not control. I was shaken back and forth helplessly. Then an incredibly hot energy began to rise at the bottom of my spine and climbed up further and further until it reached the very top of my head. I was startled and alarmed.”⁴³ Such sojourns into the “wondrous realm” were integral to his journey towards recovering his health.

Jiang did not comment further on the disjuncture between physiological explanation and these experiences of what Xiang Kairan had called “the unexplainable in terms of physiology.” Lu Xun would later critique Jiang's approach as an attempt to revive “the language of ghosts” through a pretense to so-called science: “[People like Jiang] tweak and twist science mixing it with the language of ghosts. The result is the lack of a clear division between right and wrong; and science gives off a demon stench.”⁴⁴

The scientific clamor of the period, of course, cannot be denied.⁴⁵ The ideological tug-of-war in the martial arts realm suggests a parallel with a larger controversy known as the “Science and Outlook on Life” [*kexue yu rensheng guan* 科學與人生觀] or “Science and Metaphysics” [*kexue yu xuanxue* 科學與玄學] debate. This was sparked off with an essay in Liang Qichao's book, *Impressions of a European Journey*, written after a visit with a group of Chinese delegates to the Paris Peace Conference and to war-torn Europe in 1918-19. The essay, entitled “The Dream of the Omnipotence of Science,” presented a pessimistic rumination on the destructiveness of modern technology and the decline of Western civilization. Liang's essay triggered a polemical debate in 1923, with the main anti-science camp led by Beijing University professor Zhang Junmai [Carsun Chang], and the pro-science group headed by geologist Ding Wenjiang [V.K. Ting]. The debate extended over a year and a half, involving leading intellectuals of disparate ideologies who published more than forty essays in influential periodicals. The reverberations from that debate lingered into the later decades.

What is significant to my discussion of the internal martial arts—and often overlooked in studies of the “Science and Metaphysics” debate—is that other than fanning the authority of “science” [*kexue* 科學], the debate also engendered many efforts in the vernacular cultural sphere at “philosophies of life” that attempted reconciling or synthesizing a conception of life with the explanatory frameworks of science. One count in the 1930s recorded nearly 300 such “philosophies of life” published and sold in bookstores.⁴⁶ Throughout the debate on whether the Chinese martial arts can be rendered a sport, one of the critical points appeared to be the practices of the somehow

43 Translation from Kohn, *Living with the Dao*, 165.

44 Lu Xun, “Suigan lu sanshisan” 隨感錄三十三 Random jottings no. 33 (15 October 1918) in *Refeng* 熱風 in *Lu Xun quanji* 1: 298-302. Translation from Zhitian Luo, *Inheritance within Rupture: Culture and Scholarship in Early Twentieth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 29.

45 On science and scientism, the most-cited study remains Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought*.

46 Huang Ching-wan and Hsu Wan-ch'eng, *Ko-chung jen sheng kuan* 各種人生觀 [Varieties of philosophies of life], Shanghai, n.d. Cited in Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought 1900-1950*, 17.

unquantifiable or other-physical in the martial arts. Akin to the difficulty of conceptualizing “life,” this involved the sensing of *jing qi shen* essences, for instance, or the control of one's central *qi* energy.

There was then an apparently sizable current of opinion in support of the esoteric “metaphysics” side of the “Science and Metaphysics” debate. In the case of the Chinese martial arts, it is especially notable how incomplete the “scientization” process turned out. The words “science [*kexue*],” “physiology [*shengli* 生理],” and “sports [*tiyu* 體育, *ticao* 體操, or *yundong* 運動]” were borrowed for their associated overtones of authority, in arguments that, intentionally or not, ultimately overturned those very sources of authority. The end-result of the “scientizing” effort in *neigong* discourse ironically often achieved precisely the opposite goal—calling attention instead to the epistemic limits of physiology and sports, and affirming the curative potential of something beyond the ken of biomedical science.

Such was the argument made by another writer in the period, Zhang Naiqi (1897-1977).⁴⁷ His book, *The Scientific Neigong Martial Arts* [*Kexue de neigong quan* 科學的內功拳], was first published in 1917, and caused something of a stir with its radically new interpretations of *neigong* practices.⁴⁸ Written plainly in the vernacular, Zhang set out expressly to demystify *neigong* and to explain its allegedly true “scientific” nature. Like Chen Tiesheng before him, Zhang considered the martial arts needlessly obfuscated by “superstitious” Daoist elements, which needed to be filtered out:

Today, progressive youths all object to so-called 'martial arts [*guoshu*].' Indeed, in the case of those 'martial arts' that are promoted as beyond science, those are worth objecting against... [Because] what are they advocating? *Wuji, taiji, yinyang, bagua*... This is what they use to explain 'martial arts.' These are simply nothing but mysticism—an anti-scientific mysticism [*xuanxue*].

When cleared of this alleged mysticism, Zhang argued, the residual efficacy of Chinese martial arts can be found crystallized in *neigong*. His account of how he discovered this *neigong* in order to cure himself of his debilitating illnesses paralleled those of Jiang and Chen. As he described it, under the strain of life and work, his already poor health had begun to sink into neurasthenia [*jingshen shuairuo*] and he began experiencing memory loss, hallucinations, violent irritability, and other psychological issues, to the point where he once collapsed in his office, and began to have suicidal thoughts. After a friend introduced him to the Shanghai Association for Research into Martial Arts, Zhang began practicing martial arts: “In about three months, I dragged my life from the road to certain death back towards the path of life.”⁴⁹

It is significant that he identifies his neurasthenia as such, a condition that only entered China in

47 Zhang was one of the “seven gentlemen” patriots imprisoned in 1936 by the Shanghai municipal police for anti-Japanese activities. These “seven gentlemen [*qijunzi*]” were so-called because they were actually acting in the supposed interests of China, in sabotaging Japanese factories amidst tension before the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. They were imprisoned by the Chinese authorities in Shanghai for political reasons, stirring enough public sympathy and outrage domestically and abroad to finally gain their release. Zhang went on to become an economist who contributed to Nationalist government fiscal policy and held a few fairly important public offices, before being censured and condemned as a rightist in the 1950s anti-rightist campaigns. He died in a prison hospital while still under suspicion, though his name was finally posthumously reinstated in the 1980s. See Howard Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, (Columbia University Press, 1971), Vol. 3: 87-90.

48 Martial arts historian and publisher Liu Kangyi described the book as having caused “shock waves” in its time. See his preface to Zhang Naiqi 章乃器, *Kexue de neigong quan* 科學的內功拳 [The scientific *neigong* martial arts], (Taipei: Yiwen chubanshe, repr. 1998), 1.

49 Zhang, *Kexue de neigong*, 6. All citations of Zhang henceforth will refer to this text.

the early twentieth century from the West.⁵⁰ Zhang's use of contemporary theories from the emerging fields of psychology and psychiatry would extend to his interpretation of *neigong* and its efficacy, in his invocation of concepts such as chronic fatigue and stress, both of which were diagnoses introduced in the early twentieth century and closely connected to neurasthenia.⁵¹ “The best way to explain *neigong* is through fatigue [*pilao*].”⁵² Zhang describes different kinds of fatigue, and identifies the most common and most “unnecessary” type of fatigue being the toxic result of tension and stress [*jinzhang*]. Different from the necessary kind of muscular fatigue that results from exertion and labor or even from emotional states, chronic fatigue results from constant stress and is primarily symptomatic in a continual sensation of tightness in the chest.⁵³

While Zhang may have drawn from the newer ideas of psychology and psychiatry in the period, he was using them in the very different scenario of how martial arts can help these newly diagnosed conditions: “There are two ways to reduce this tightening of the chest [from stress and fatigue]. One method is based on quietness, which is to meditate. The other method is based on movement, and those are *neigong* martial arts methods.” For Zhang, the favored method is certainly *neigong* rather than meditation, which has added merits in being a form of physical and mental exercise: “With its foundations on removing unwarranted stress, *neigong* additionally goes a step further in building up the body, developing strength, reinforcing the will, strengthening courage, and developing the intellect. Most people think that the essence of *neigong* is a technique for the battlefield—that is only a fraction of how *neigong* can be used.”⁵⁴

Zhang's definition of *neigong* thus differed from Jiang's model of quiet sitting. For him, *neigong* should be practiced with activity and movement that accompany the meditative channeling of *qi*. He argued that *yunqi* [circulating *qi*] must go along with the focused practicing of “intentional, driven movement” that constitutes the true strength of *neigong*: “The weakness of the average person is not really the lack of strength, but because of the dissipation of strength into various quarters and the lack of its focus.”⁵⁵ This argument is similar to one that Tang Hao had also made, pointing out that the martial arts need to be practiced everyday, not simply to train the muscles, but to train oneself to move “according to will [*ruyi* 如意].” This is an awareness of movement and timing, of reflexes that accompany the generating, directing, and focusing of *qi*. Indeed, Zhang considered quiet meditation by itself to be in fact potentially dangerous, possibly leading to the psychopathological condition of “treading fire and entering the demonic realm [*zouhuo rumo* 走火入魔].” If *neigong* were performed

50 George M. Beard came up with the name of “neurasthenia” in 1869, but the concept and language of nervous weakness had been in circulation for decades prior to his publication. Beard, “Neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 3 (1869): 217-221. Also see Charles E. Rosenberg, “The place of George M. Beard in nineteenth-century psychiatry,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 36 (1962): 245-259. For a study of neurasthenia in China from the first millennia to the twentieth century, see Hugh Shapiro, “How different are Western and Chinese medicines? The case of nerves,” in *Medicine Across Cultures: History and Practice of Medicine in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. Helaine Selin (The Netherlands: Kulwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 351-68.

51 For a discussion of how chronic fatigue originated with an eruption of “bed cases” among middle-class women in nineteenth-century Europe, see Shorter, E. “Chronic fatigue in historical perspective,” in Ciba Foundation symposium, 173:6, 1993, 16-22. Walter B. Cannon is credited with the concept and the term “stress,” although like in the case of Beard and neurasthenia, similar ideas and language have been in circulation in the years prior to his publication. See Cannon, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear, and Rage: An Account of Recent Researches into the Function of Emotional Excitement*, New York: D. Appleton and Co. First pub. 1915.

52 Zhang, 21.

53 Zhang, 12-14.

54 Zhang, 22.

55 Zhang, 56.

correctly as Zhang thought it should be—as active movements in tandem with meditative channeling of *qi*—he claimed that practitioners would experience “the efficacy of Chinese *neigong quan* in training the spirit and body. Their results surpass those of other kinds of sports [*yundong*], this is undeniable fact.”⁵⁶

Dead or Alive: Two Kinds of Strength

We can now see that the story of the Chinese martial arts, particularly its internal forms, may be more complex than previously assumed. Beneath the self-proclaimed efforts to “scientize” or otherwise “modernize” the martial arts, what is interesting is how these projects of alleged modernization then uncover a 'true' underlying efficacy of the martial arts, that practitioners argue can produce health and wellbeing of an inherently *different* kind than that produced by training in Western sports and physical education. As these different writers argued, in harnessing methods such as “using *qi* along with strength,” the Chinese martial arts trains the body in a different way than Western *tiyu*. And therein lies the particular claim for an efficacy of an *internal* kind, the kind based on *qi* and developing “internal strength.”

Renowned martial arts master Wan Laisheng (1903-1992) combined both perspectives of *neigong* as meditative quiet sitting and *neigong* as a focused movement. In his *Martial Arts Collection* [*Wushu huizong* 武術匯總] (1928), he included quiet sitting methods, complete with photographs of a meditator sitting cross-legged, very much as Jiang did, and described these as belonging to the “internal school of skills [*neijia gongfu* 內家功夫],” and closely related to martial arts [*wugong* 武功]. Wan restated Zhang Naiqi's claim that the strongest virtue of the internal skills was to “steady one's nature and nourish the *shen* [*ding xing yang shen* 定性養神],” and that they can also revitalize the fatigued: “Practicing the skill of martial arts uses *jing* essence, *qi*, and *shen* spirit as the base, and the hands, legs and eyes as the root, to cultivate one's noble spirit, not to be shaken by external things and move, but to use all the skill one learned, to begin to counter one's opponent and control the outcome.”⁵⁷

Developing from the twinned notions of external muscular strength and an internally derived strength from cultivating one's *qi* through breathing or meditative movement, Wan explained the necessity of differentiating between “animate or live energy [*huojin* 活勁]” versus “inanimate or dead energy [*sijin* 死勁]”:

The *jin* power that martial arts uses is not an unrestrained *jin*, but is the channeling of *jin* using one's awareness [*yi* 意]. The five elements sink, and *qi* returns to the cinnabar field [*dantian*], the firm and the yielding in mutual support of each other. This is the *jin* of the martial arts. It is not the brute strength of common folk like farmers, which is worthless. This kind of common strength, once past one's prime in life, will gradually dissipate. Their kind of energy can only carry things, lift rocks, and brawl with vulgar people. This is called “strength [*li*]” as well, because that which cannot be circulated is called *li*, while that which flows throughout the four limbs is called *jin* power. [That kind of *li* strength] absolutely cannot be compared with that of martial arts practitioners. Martial arts practitioners may be able to strike a person who can lift a hundred *jin* of weight, but not necessarily be able to lift

⁵⁶ Zhang, 1, 4.

⁵⁷ Wan Laisheng 萬籟聲 *Wushu huizong* 武術匯總 [Martial arts collection] (Beijing: Beijing shi Zhongguo shudian, repr. 1984, orig. 1928), 6-7.

things of a hundred *jun*. This then is the difference between inanimate or dead *jin* and animate or live *jin*.⁵⁸

Xiang Kairan wrote of a similar difference between *jin* 勁 and mere brute strength as *li* 力, in his 1912 manual “Martial Arts” [*Quanshu* 拳術], often credited as one of the earliest instructional texts to bring methods of the Chinese martial arts to the public:

That which is located between the shoulders and back is *li*. That which can spread throughout the four limbs is *jin*. For use in martial arts, the emphasis is not on *li* but on *jin*. *Jin* cannot be wielded for long. Yet when one is capable, it can be used without exhaustion. Although *li* can endure, it cannot traverse the four limbs, and is not suitable for combat. For instance, a farmer carrying a heavy load and walking uncovered in the sun can do so without fatigue, and has great strength and stamina. Yet, when using his hands to hit an object, his force may be weak. Martial arts practitioners may mostly not possess such strength to carry burdens. Yet when in combat, he can throw his opponent a fair distance. This is the difference between *li* and *jin*.⁵⁹

Xiang Kairan records his own martial arts teacher, Wang Zhiqun (1878-c.1950s), as making the same point about the essential role of 'live' *jin*: “What technique in Chinese martial arts does not make use of the pathways of 'live' *jin*?”⁶⁰ Using 'live *jin*' energy would become important in *taijiquan* theory, a key notion in the work of Sun Lutang (1860-1933), one of the most famous Republican Chinese masters of *taijiquan* and *xingyiquan*, who spearheaded the rise of *taijiquan*, *xingyiquan*, and other forms of the internal martial arts [*neijia quan*] in the period. Martial arts historian Lin Xiaomei credits Sun with having established “a philosophy of movement” [*xing de zhexue* 行的哲學].⁶¹ As an example, Sun's treatise on *taijiquan* begins directly with a discussion of “original *qi*” [*yuan qi*] and its functioning in the idea of *taiji*:

From the moment of conception, there is an Original Qi contained within that nurtures the body... There is no place in the body that it does not reach, no point in time in which it is absent. The internal and external are unified in a single *Qi*. It flows ceaselessly without break... *Taiji* is this one *qi*. The one *qi* is *Taiji*.⁶²

Repeatedly, as in Sun's groundbreaking manual *Taijiquan* 太極拳 (1923), the emphasis is “to accomplish [the movement] with intent, and not with brute force [*li* 力].”⁶³ One must learn how to control one's *qi* into a focused *jin* energy, so that mere “brute force” can be easily overcome. Where Zhang Naiqi was dismissive of the mystical Daoist language of *wuji* 無極, *yinyang* 陰陽, *taiji* 太極, and so on, Sun Lutang wholly embraced the cosmological aspects of these internal martial arts, offering his own definitions of *wuji* and *taiji*. Yet, the common ground for these writers was an argument for the possibility of a focused, internal kind of strength, as opposed to an external kind of physiological *yundong* or *li* exertion.

Without going further into the historical development of *taijiquan* which falls outside the scope of this study, I want to outline the formation of a certain perceptual framework of understanding the

58 Wan, *Wushu huizong*, 11.

59 Xiang, *Quanshu*, 33.

60 Xiang, “Quanshu chuanxin lu” 拳術傳薪錄 [Records of teacher-disciple transmissions in martial arts] (Taipei: Yiwen wushu wenhu, repr. 2009), 14.

61 Lin, *Qingmo minchu Zhongguo wushu wenhua fazhan yanjiu* 135.

62 Based on Tim Cartmell's translation, *Sun Lutang*, 57.

63 Translation from Tim Cartmell, *Sun Lutang*, 75.

body in Republican Chinese vernacular culture. We can now see that ideas of strength and the body spanned a wide spectrum in the period: from mocking the Chinese for thinking that Westerners' barbell training might not work for everyone, to the “(re)discovery” of quiet sitting as a form of therapeutic exercise, to the claim that breathing exercises to channel one's *qi* should be considered equally valid as a form of strength. From within such a discursive space divided in opinions on the efficacy of Chinese martial arts versus that of Western sports, the notion of two different perceptions of strength—as 'dead' *li* muscular exertion, or a 'live' focus of *jin* energy from within—was emerging as an increasingly common idea in Chinese vernacular thinking about the body. Far from being rendered obsolescent in an age of technologized warfare, as Lu Xun had argued, the Chinese internal martial arts were instead becoming an increasingly circulated discursive trope, an idea that encompassed the use of *qi* as a form of internal strength and a 'live' *jin* energy.

Conclusion

We have seen how various notions of strength were discussed in the period, ranging from the new Western *tiyu* to the reinvention of the old Chinese ideas of *qi* and *yangsheng*. While there were undeniable nationalistic agendas and cultural politics at play, the epistemic shifts in the period in how the body was understood were equally present. This chapter attended to how the discourses of practicing *qi* surmounted the aftermath of the Boxer uprising and the scientific mood of the era to become a predominant cultural signifier in the early 1900s. The growing authority of science, physiology, anatomy, and sports was invoked in projects to “scientize” the martial arts, but equally interestingly, these projects ultimately achieved distinctly counter-scientific goals, in affirming instead things beyond the parameters of scientific knowledge, such as the experiences of *qi*, harnessing one's breath to activate internal strength, and how one can discern the difference between 'dead' *li* strength and 'live' *jin* power. Falling somewhere between “religious” and “metaphysical” or “cosmological” categories, these notions were deeply problematic for skeptical critics such as Lu Xun, but proved equally deeply relevant to others in the period, to practitioners, historians, soldiers, and novelists alike. These epistemic shifts perhaps reflect what Janet Gyatso calls in another context “the disjunctions—and conjunctions—between scientific approaches to knowledge and religious ones.”⁶⁴

This chapter thus revisits the usual modernist narrative of how the rise of sports and physical education, along with clinical and laboratory medicine, dominated Republican China. In this study of how practitioners understood *qi* and discussed the ways in which internal strength and *jin* power could be used, I have shown how ideas of *neigong* were incorporated into the historiography of “sports,” as well as martial arts and *yangsheng* practices alike. The chapter locates a clear relationship between practices of internal *qi* and Republican Chinese martial arts culture, thus disproving the argument that these ideas of internal strength were “marginal” and esoteric. Indeed, it can be seen that these variant understandings of what “strength” could mean had a direct and significant impact on discourse and cultural politics in the period.

Ultimately, examining these discourses of the internal martial arts demonstrates how Republican China was not only embracing the novel ideas of weight-training and gymnasiums, it was

⁶⁴ Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 1.

also situating indigenous notions of the body against this new framework. Understanding that these developments took place in tandem—rather than focusing on the triumphal rise of *tiyu* sports in isolation—might then account for how confidently *taijiquan* master Zheng Manqing (1902-1975) can assert the validity of Chinese ways of practicing *qi* for health and strength by the 1940s. Instead of defending or scientizing the internal martial arts, Zheng based his argument on the very limits of biomedical knowledge. His remarks, in a book published for an American readership, represented a far cry from Lu Xun's barbed comment only two decades earlier that the Chinese martial arts and its *neigong* had nothing to offer:

Modern medicine knows only about respiration, but nothing about *qi*; it knows of the diaphragm, but nothing about the *dantian* [lit. cinnabar field, a meditative focal point around the navel]; it knows of the contraction and relaxation of the muscles and about stretching, but nothing about the efficacy of the dynamic potential of *qi*; it knows of bones and joints, and about training to strengthen them, but nothing about the transformations within [when one] fills the *jing* essence and replenishes the marrow; it knows of the interplay of the nerves, and of applying the conscious perception, but nothing of the subtle marvel of the resonance of the spirit... Not only do I hope to use *taiji* to strengthen the Chinese race and nation, [I also hope to] spread its benefit to the whole world.



Figure 12: Photograph commemorating Wang Ziping's apparent victory over a "Russian boxer" named Cantel 康泰爾 in 1925. The same account was repeated in his biography. *Tuhua shibao* 圖畫時報 [Pictorial newspaper] 398 (1927): 3. China Periodicals Full-text database, www.cnbkxy.com.



Figure 13: Pictorial showing an unknown Chinese soldier defeating a Russian strongman. That the strongman's name was Cantel in both pictorials suggests the highly repetitive and ideological nature of this cultural trope.

Shi shi hua 時事畫 [Pictures of current events] 8.10 (1918): 2.

China Periodicals Full-text database, www.cnbkssy.com.

Chapter Five

A Rhetoric of Marvel: Hyperbole, Biography, and the *Xia* Warrior

In this final chapter in the story of *neigong* internal strength, let us return to the opening narrative of the first chapter, which gave us the 1934 *Shen Bao* newspaper report of a young woman named Yang Jianxia challenging a Russian strongman to a duel. As the story goes, the Russian caught wind of her skills and backed out of the contest. She then held forth on the merits of *neigong* internal skill, and how “we Chinese” viewed “great strength” as not so much a virtue as a potential problem.

The gender and youthfulness of the Chinese challenger renders this account somewhat unusual, but its narrative arc turns out to have been widely circulated in Republican vernacular print culture. The progenitor of this narrative is the folk hero Huo Yuanjia (1868-1910), whose biography tells of how he threw down the gauntlet to an arrogant Russian strongman in 1901. Other stories followed in his wake, featuring well-known names among Republican Chinese martial arts practitioners, such as Wang Ziping (1881-1973), Sun Lutang (1860-1933), and Han Muxia (1877-1947)—all of whom had apparently challenged and defeated foreigners.

Such narratives became something of a commonplace cultural trope in the period, with images and multiple variations (such as those of the gender and age of Miss Yang) playing off the central thematic of indigenous challenges to displays of Western strength. We find photographs of a muscular Wang Ziping in a strongman pose, labeled “Chinese Strongman” or “Shandong Strongman,” that serve to commemorate his duel (see Figure 12). Another pictorial depicts an unidentified Chinese soldier bursting in upon a strongman's performance on stage, casually twirling the spectacularly heavy “ten thousand-*jin* metal balls [barbells]” that the strongman had been using for his performance, and then throwing the strongman onto the floor (see Figure 13). As reported in the *Shenbao* and other regional newspapers, a contest was held in Shanghai in 1943 that pitted Chinese martial arts against Western fighting styles, with the resulting score of 5-2 in favor of the Chinese.¹

What do we make of these accounts, and how proliferate they seem to be across Chinese vernacular print culture in the period? To begin with, there is the indubitable element of embellishment in such narratives, signaled in their repetitive nature and ideological language. Do we relegate these stories of Chinese-Western duels as simply wishful expressions of nationalistic pride, nothing more than the background noise of how Republican China reacted to *tiyu* sports? Certainly these stories could easily be pigeonholed into the framework of nationalism and modernity. This has been the perspective assumed in Chinese martial arts histories, which typically chronicle how the martial arts were transformed into a *tiyu* sport in the Republican Chinese era. As we have seen, the language of *tiyu* sports did permeate Republican Chinese cultural discourse on how one attains health and strength, and wrought a definite impact on how the body was imagined and conceptualized. Martial prowess and *tiyu* were often linked in public discourse, when considering the challenging question of how to achieve better strength for individual Chinese, the citizenry at large, and the nation.

Certainly, such narratives served as symbolic capital for an enfeebled Republican China facing imperialist threats at the time, and I will be looking into how discourse about the internal martial arts provided a richly fertile conceptual terrain for writers trying to develop a cultural resource of warrior

1 *Shenbao*, “國術與西洋拳舉行對抗賽,” 1943.11.09.

strength for an embattled nation. But what else can such narratives tell us about the period? What kind of rhetorical and cultural work might such narratives achieve, in their active circulation in the public sphere?

When examined more closely, the source material suggests something more complex than mere ideological posturing. These accounts identify themselves as standard biographies [*zhuan* 傳] of old martial arts masters, and are regarded as an integral part of Chinese martial arts history. Some of these figures have become modern-day household names, their stories widely familiar in Sinophone popular culture. Among them, Huo Yuanjia is perhaps the most famous, with his story having been described as “defining martial arts cinema.”² His narrative has been retold in countless film and television depictions into the present day, such as Bruce Lee’s *Fist of Fury* (1972) and more recently *Fearless* (2006) and *Huo Yuanjia* (2008). These biographies are incorporated into various genres in martial arts discourse: the anecdotal story that would otherwise be lost or forgotten [*yishi* 軼事 or 逸事], the recording of some famous master’s sayings or deeds [*lu* 錄], or the collection of past exploits [*wang shi* 往事]. These figures are recorded as having written poems, and their names or deeds adopted as commonplace Chinese idioms.

Such accounts—including those of Chinese-Western duels—would appear to be widely circulated in Chinese vernacular print culture in the period. Indeed, they comprise the very fabric of Chinese martial arts discourse. They are instrumental in establishing the figure of the legendary martial arts master, a construct that hearkens as much to the Orientalized figure of the “old man of *t'ai ch'i*” in the West, as to the lineage stories that preoccupy many a Chinese martial arts scholar into the present day.³ Operating somewhere along the precipice of ‘real-life’ historical account and embellished exaggeration, the hyperbolic nature of the trope of the Chinese-Western duel suggests a dimension that extends beyond mere refashioned claims for nationalistic pride. Instead, it reveals how martial arts discourse is inextricably woven into the tangled seams between official history [*zheng shi* 正史 or *jing shi* 經史], apocryphal history [*yeshi* 野史 or *baiguan* 稗官], and the modern martial arts novel [*wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說].

My interest here is not so much to call the historicist bluff on this trope, but to look deeper into the significance of its proliferation across genres and its blurring of the lines between historical biographical account and fictionalized embellishment. This chapter probes into how hyperbole functions in such accounts, and what it can tell us about how the body can be imagined, visualized, and aestheticized. The word “hyperbole” is usually assumed to mean that what is being said is clearly an outrageous falsehood, an outsized comparison or analogy. Yet it can also promise a rhetorical transition, effecting an enlargement of perspective: “It is the reception of the exaggeration upon which hyperbole succeeds or fails... More than descriptors of one’s given reality, these expressions tropologically signify complex worldviews, perspectives, ideologies, and institutional frameworks.”⁴ In other words, hyperbole can elucidate the conceptual framework with which a particular culture perceives and makes

2 Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects*, 26.

3 This evocative phrase is from the title of anthropologist Adam D. Frank’s work, *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man: Understanding Identity through Martial Arts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Also see J.J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West*. On the relevance and symbolic meaning of lineage clans and ancestry stories among martial arts communities, see the conversation among martial arts scholars including Paul Bowman, David Brown, and Benjamin Judkins, “On Knowing Your Lineage.” Accessed October 12, 2016. <http://chinesemartialstudies.com/2015/09/17/on-knowing-your-lineage-by-paul-bowman/>

4 Joshua R. Ritter, “Recovering Hyperbole: Re-Imagining the Limits of Rhetoric for an Age of Excess” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010), 5-6.

sense of the world. It functions as a rhetorical transition, by shifting from normative to outsized description. And in performing such a shift, it leaves telling traces of what 'normative' might look like from a certain collective standpoint.

Using the cultural trope of the Chinese-Western duel as a springboard, this chapter looks at how the element of hyperbolic exaggeration in Republican Chinese martial arts narratives can be understood as just such a rhetorical transition. Other than making a claim for indigenous nationalistic pride, these martial arts narratives offer a glimpse into a very different kind of worldview. This is a worldview premised upon the accepted idea that one's inner *qi* can be activated as a source of martial power and strength—what Bourdieu would call a *doxa*, that denotes ideas and conceptual frameworks of understanding widely taken for granted in a particular society, the socialized experience by which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident.”⁵

This worldview premised on *qi* proves critical in order to fully understand how deeply the internal martial arts informed the Republican Chinese vernacular cultural imaginary. The primary form it took in the cultural imaginary was in the genre of martial arts fiction that emerged in the period. Known as *wuxia* 武俠 fiction, the genre revolves around the figure of the martial arts warrior, also called the *xia* 俠 or *xiake* 俠客. As we will see later, the construct of the “old man of *t'ai chi*” in martial arts discourse and the *xia* warrior in martial arts fiction drew from the same lodestone of embodied imagining, the same *doxa* based on the workings of *qi*. From these beginnings in martial arts discourse, writers of *wuxia* fiction would go on to discover the power of filmic media, yoking the visuality of film to the task of making *qi* visible.

The crossing between biographical record and embellished fiction thus engendered an outsized language, that represents the attempt to convey a certain ineffability, a rhetorical means of making *qi* (nearly) visible. Hyperbolic embellishment in martial arts discourse became a particular mode of writing, dedicated to showing what is otherwise invisible, and a stance assumed in order to describe claims of the efficacy of *qi*. Martial arts writing and fiction established, in other words, a language for expressing the ineffable, an ineffability that forms the very basis of the internal martial arts.

Huo Yuanjia's story proves to be a case in point. In the latter half of this chapter, I examine the famous *wuxia* martial arts novel that first made the name of Huo Yuanjia famous, *Tales of Recent Gallant Heroes* [*Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan* 近代俠義英雄傳] (1923). This is a novel that scholarship has typically regarded as a foundational text of the *wuxia* genre, and usually interpreted as a narrative celebrating nationalistic identity. I offer an alternative interpretation of the novel, focusing instead on how the narrative reflects many important notions of the body in discursive circulation at the time. The novel can be seen to draw from various martial arts discursive sources, including—once again—the *Yijinjing*. The narrative shaped a vernacular lexicon to articulate, aestheticize, and explain the otherwise invisible, internalized *qi* practices of the Chinese internal martial arts. The figure of the “formless” inner body becomes personified in the narrative, circumscribed by the body of the Chinese martial arts warrior, and held up in contrast to that of a brawny Russian strongman. This cultural trope of the martial arts warrior versus Western strongman takes the notion of practicing *qi* and developing internal strength to new levels of prominence in social discourse, illustrating the process of how the Chinese martial arts became a fount of cultural symbolic capital in the period and into the present day.

Examining the rhetorical work of hyperbole in Chinese martial arts discourse thus sheds much

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 164.

light on the Chinese conceptualization of the body. As Susan Stewart has written on the use of exaggeration in relation to embodiment: “Under a use-value economy, exaggeration takes place in relation to the scale of proportion offered by the body.” What is intriguing about Stewart's argument is that a sense of scale or measurement—the means of identifying where the normative ends and exaggeration begins—is based on the inherently unstable epistemic grounds of “the body.” This is a body that is necessarily culturally delimited, as we acknowledge along with Marx that “the senses and the very notion of 'lived experience' are the products of social history.” Yet, we have little recourse but to accept the body as the instrument through which we come to know the world, a mediated place that “remains irreducible beyond the already-structured reductions of the sensory,” the place that affords and defines the perspective from which we apprehend the world.⁶

Perspective, point of view, a scale for measurement, and hence a scale of values—all these form the basis from which to explore the meaning of exaggeration. And this basis must stem from the irrevocably subjective, culturally inflected framework of sensory experience, through which one lives one's own body, or forms a perception of “the body” at large, or a sense of proportion and human capability. What if there are entirely different cultural frameworks at play for understanding “the body,” as Yang's remarks suggest? Philippe Descola remarks on a similar problem of “the body” as a key constraint in extending a cultural understanding beyond one's perceptual paradigms, as in his example of attempting to understand animism:

The tranquil certainty that things are indeed as we perceive them to be does not, here, stem from the apodictic power of a well-constructed demonstration, nor even from the persuasive effect of a rhetorical argument that one may come round to believing oneself. Rather, it stems from the conviction, anchored in a definite perceptive apparatus ethos, and situation, that the world conforms with the way that we use it: it is a perceptible extension of the body, not a representation.⁷

Strongmen themselves, and the theatrical weightlifting feats they perform—such as balancing crowds of people on their torsos, or lifting an automobile—represent an exaggeration of the body of a different kind. The rise of photography, along with the awakening of interest in physical exercise in the second half of the nineteenth century, fueled an “emerging fascination with the visual appearance of the actual human body, as distinct from the idealized and conventionalized bodies of traditional art.”⁸ Through the worldwide fame of strongmen such as Eugen Sandow (1867-1925), who toured China in 1903, Republican China too saw an explosion of interest in the visual appeal of muscularity, reflected in its print and film culture. How would these forms of exaggeration compare with and against indigenous ways of performing the body? What can these contrastive modes of displaying the potentiality of “the body” tell us about the variant “ways of using the world,” to paraphrase Descola?

This chapter on hyperbole in the Chinese martial arts narrative, then, underscores how the trope of the Chinese-Western duel can be seen to navigate the competing claims of two potentially differential forms of bodily capabilities. The hyperbolic nature of this cultural trope mediates two different frameworks of seeing the human body, literally writ large. It becomes a means of understanding how the body was conceptualized in the Chinese martial arts narrative, framed against the backlighting of Western muscle.

⁶ Stewart, “Preface / Hyperbole,” in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xiii.

⁷ Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2013), 283.

⁸ Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*. 101

Saving the Day: Internal Martial Arts as Cultural Resource

Let us begin by looking more closely at the narrative on Yang Jianxia. The *Shen Bao* newspaper article introduced her humble origins with a rumination on how the lower classes of Beiping [Beijing] society at the time was characterized by superstitious and feudalistic practices, and yet held the potential for using martial arts for acts of “warrior [*xia* 俠]” nobility and righting of wrongs. According to the article, since the lawless period of late Qing, martial arts practitioners had become thugs (called *hun hun* 混混 in Tianjin, and *bashi jiang* 把式匠 or *wushu jia* 武術家 in Beiping) who modeled themselves on *gongan* 公案 novels. They conducted themselves with an ethos of fraternal loyalty and righteousness, yet they also broke the law with a great deal of brutality.⁹ The heroine who symbolically rescued the pride of the Chinese nation, then, turns out to have emerged from the underbelly of Beiping society, part of the murky Chinese “rivers and lakes” [*jianghu*] social substratum. Many of these Chinese challengers to Western fighters were street performers, policemen, armed escorts or bodyguards—all archetypal types of *jianghu* work.

The spotlight trained on these humble *jianghu* characters bespeaks once again the significance of vernacular culture in providing a wellspring of ideas and symbolic capital for China in the period.¹⁰ Despite their lack of education and lowly backgrounds, *jianghu* figures such as Miss Yang were assuming a voice in the public sphere, becoming key players concerned with and actively shaping a distinct sense of Chinese cultural identity. Embodied in the gesture of challenging Western strongmen, Chinese martial arts were becoming an important notion not simply as the Chinese version of *tiyu*, but a bold assertion of national identity.

These martial arts figures were also furthering the claims of indigenous embodied knowledge, as expressed in Yang Jianxia's confidence in the importance of “internal skill [*neigong* 內功],” and her declamation on the problem of “great strength [*dali* 大力]” which she thought the Westerners prized too highly. In Yang's formulation, the Chinese-Western duel appeared to represent competing claims of efficacy between the framework of *neigong* versus the framework of *tiyu*. This indicates how the Chinese internal martial arts had extended their conceptual reach beyond the spheres of a nationalistic agenda or martial arts practice, entering popular cultural discourse. More than simply a form of martial training, these practices had become a mode of indigenous embodied knowledge—a way of visualizing, training, and thinking about the body—that took its place alongside *tiyu* as a worthy adversary. Muscularity may emblemize strength, but Yang's remarks suggest a bold rhetorical stance that made claims for another kind of ability, posited as distinctly different from mere muscular exertion. These accounts of Chinese fighters stepping up to challenge foreigners herald the rise of the internal Chinese martial arts as a widely accepted marker of ethnocentric identity—from out of the sidelines of *jianghu* brawling, then, emerged a strong sense of Chinese-ness, embodied in something described as ineffably “internal” as opposed to the “external” physicality of *tiyu* muscle.

9 The term *hun hun* remains part of the Chinese vernacular idiom today, to denote “hooligans.”

10 For more detail on the vernacular print industry in Shanghai in the period, see Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai*; for more at least on the literary side of vernacular print culture, see *Literary Societies of Republican China*, ed. Kirk Denton and Michel Hockx (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

A Warrior Ethos: Xia in Martial Arts Discourse

In the account of Yang Jianxia, too, the figure of the *jianghu* street fighter has become elevated into a *xia* warrior. *Xia* has been rendered (incorrectly) in English as a knight-errant, a swordsman, or been related to qualities of chivalry and gallantry. I follow the lead of many recent scholars in leaving the word untranslated. *Xia* in Chinese denotes both the warrior person and the ethos s/he carries.¹¹ In one of the first English-language studies of the martial arts narrative, James Liu lists eight basic tenets of *xia*: altruism, justice, individual freedom, personal loyalty, courage, truthfulness and mutual faith, honor and fame, and generosity and contempt for wealth.¹² The earliest records of *xiake* [a person with the *xia* ethos] date from the early historiography *Records of the Historian* [*Shiji*] by Sima Qian (145-86 BCE), which contained the chapters “Biographies of Assassins” [*Cike liezhuan* 刺客列傳] and “Biographies of Wandering *Xia* Warriors” [*Youxia liezhuan* 遊俠列傳].¹³ The figure of the *xia* became widely popular in Chinese vernacular literature and opera, in works such as the Ming novels *The Water Margin* [*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳] and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* [*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義].

This traditional figure of the *xia* warrior came to hold a deep cultural resonance in the late Qing and Republican periods in a different register. Many late Qing reformers and intellectuals evoked the poetics of *xia* heroism in their writings and use of pseudonyms, such as Zhang Taiyan's 1897 piece, “Essay on a Confucian *Xia*” [*Ruxia pian* 儒俠篇], and Tan Sitong's famous use of sword imagery.¹⁴ In an atmosphere when assassination was very much a topic of debate and used as a political tool, the frequent evocation of *xia* in the period often harkened back to the historical connection of *xia* with the biographies of noble and self-sacrificing assassins from the *Shiji*.¹⁵

As leading martial arts advocate and practitioner Chen Tiesheng wrote, the practice of the internal martial arts was very much linked with a sense of the *xia* ethos, and drew on notions of *qi* and the indigenous body as a fount of national identity underpinned by the *xia* tradition:

All nations under heaven and on earth must have their foundational principles. What the Chinese people value most highly is the *qi* that is [about] the nobility of self-sacrifice to preserve one's chastity, the greatness of *xia*, dying for a righteous cause and in the name of achieving justice... The attainment of this *qi* is nurtured in daily practice, in the immersion of *de* virtue, in the guidance of the *zhi* intellect, and in the training of martiality. Thus, cultivation, courage, and martiality—these three aspects are in accord, and support each other. In recent times, *tiju* has come to the fore. Various countries in the East and West all chorus the same refrain, and the trend has been entirely in that direction. The Chinese martial arts, long buried in obscurity, has suddenly found a resonance, and begun to spread its influence... May the humiliating label of “Sick Man [of the East]” be extinguished through this.¹⁶

Here, the *xia* warrior ethos is being evoked to promote the Chinese martial arts as a national rallying call. For practitioners such as Chen, the *xia* ethos provided a powerful motivation to practice the martial arts. The claim is that this *xia* ethos of nobility, sacrifice, and righteousness is integral to the

11 Petrus Liu has an interesting argument on the philological aspects of *xia*, in an analysis based on Zhang Taiyan's 1897 essay “The Confucian and *xia* [*Ruxia pian*].” See Liu, *Stateless Subjects*, 44-49.

12 Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 4-6.

13 Sima Qian, *Shiji*, vol. 86, pp. 2515-2538; vol. 124, pp. 3181-3190.

14 See Gong Pengcheng 龔鵬程, *Xiagu rouqing* 俠骨柔情 [Bones of *xia* and the romance of passion] (Taipei: Shehui daxue chubanshe, 1990).

15 On assassination as a political tool in the period, see Jonathan Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and their Revolution, 1895-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 78, 86.

16 Chen Tiesheng, “Xu San” 序三 [Third preface], *Guoji Daguan*, 4.

practice of martial arts—and is framed as moving in a different direction than *tiyu* sports. The enterprise is clearly to elevate the Chinese martial arts away from its previous association with banditry, lawlessness, low-brow street performance, and the superstitious folly of the Boxers. It also establishes this as a cultural trope, a resource of symbolic capital for Republican China.

Similarly, prominent military officer Ma Liang (1875-1947) described the widespread contemporaneous perspective that the decline of China's fortunes was linked to the past emphasis on belle-lettres, and the way forward was to reclaim the past glory of the Chinese martial arts:

The winds from the West and the rain from the East [i.e. Japan] have shaken and stunned China. The Chinese people have responded with timid cowardice, and suffered humiliation for a long time... Back in the time of the Qin and Han eras, wandering *xia* [*youxia* 游俠] warriors could still revive a glorious history with their amazing skills and special abilities [*qiji yineng* 奇技異能]. Since the Tang and the Song, however, things have declined, and the literati grew decadent and weak. The emphasis on the belle-lettres and the disdain of martial ability became deeply ingrained... Advocating *tiyu* is the means to remedying the situation. But the techniques of picking up ball clubs and dumbbells have caused people to abandon the delicacies of Cook Pao, and go begging for scraps off other people.¹⁷ We have left behind the real treasures of our heritage, and donned the robes of impostors. What a pity this is... A casual examination [into the martial arts] will suffice to see that this supplements the merits of *tiyu*, and can be a thousand times more effective than the skills of wielding ball clubs and dumbbells from East [Japan] and West.

Yet, this very efficacy of the martial arts, he claimed, is also very hard to understand. In an echo of Chen Tiesheng's rejoinder to Lu Xun that we saw in the previous chapter—the claim that outsiders will not understand *neigong* internal skill—Ma Liang concluded: “Especially for outsiders, it is not worth one's while talking to them about it.”¹⁸

The martial arts were thus considered in this way to relate to “national essence [*guo cui*]” or Chinese-ness. Much of this “essence” is grounded in the ephemeral notions of *qi* that inform the philosophical scaffolding of the martial arts, as we have seen in earlier chapters. That is the very element that does not translate well or easily into becoming a *tiyu* sport, and which forms the basis for claims of the efficacy of the Chinese martial arts. Parallel to the modernizing efforts to introduce Western *tiyu* or integrate calisthenics into martial arts, there were other rhetorical claims made for the inherent superiority of the martial arts—either as a form of Chinese *tiyu*, or in a different category altogether. As important as the introduction of *tiyu* was in awakening renewed interest in the martial arts as a means of redeeming the “Sick Man of the East,” then, there was also a sense in which the Chinese martial arts were evoked with the rhetorical stance of asserting a different set of ideas about the body—a rhetoric asserting an ineffability posited to stem from a distinctly non-Western tradition.

17 The reference to Cook Pao is from the famous Zhuangzi story “Pao Ding Dismembers an Ox [*Pao Ding jie niu* 庖丁解牛],” in which a cook demonstrates his knowledge of the Dao through his remarkable skill with the cleaver in slicing an ox apart.

18 Ma Liang, “Xu Yi” 序一 [First preface], *Guoji Dagan*, 1.

A Warrior of Fabulous Skill: Hyperbole and the Language of Ineffability

Ma Liang's evocation of the idiomatic phrase “amazing skills and special abilities [*qiji yineng* 奇技異能]” in describing the capability of the traditional *xia* warrior is significant. Such hyperbolic language is often used in describing the feats that these *xia* martial arts warriors were supposed to be able to perform. Hyperbolic language is integral to biographical narratives of such masters, forming part of the language of internal martial arts discourse. One of the most common practices in *taijiquan* techniques, for instance, is the “pushing hands [*tuishou*]” duel, where the opponents lean slightly forward, touch hands, and “push” at each other. Their internal *qi* strength can be felt right through the hands, and provides the force for determining the victor. Here is a typical Republican Chinese account of *tuishou*, featuring well-known *taijiquan* Yang family master Yang Shaohou (1862-1930) who defeats a contemporaneous master Song Shuming (fl. 1920s):

When the hands of Song and Shaohou made contact, it was as though they were empty with no substance, and it was clear [to Song] that the other was a worthy opponent. Shaohou also felt that Song's entire body had no solidity to it. The two men seemed at rest, and there was little movement. Shaohou could be seen to be practicing *qi* skill: his head bent, his body straight, *qi* sunk, body relaxed. Song was the opposite: he was harnessing his skill, lifting *qi*, not daring to relax anywhere. Suddenly, Shaohou raised his hand, and there was a push and a letting go. It was as though Song Shuming had been thrown by a gust of wind, for he was hurled backwards a distance of three *zhang*, and backed up ten steps, before he was slowly able to come to a halt. After a while, he repeatedly said, “Most mighty '*lingkong jin* 凌空勁' technique, I have learned my lesson.” And he proceeded to make some poetic verses for the occasion.¹⁹

This narrative appeared in a collection of “past exploits [*wangshi* 往事], a genre of martial arts writing. The language it employs is based on conventional clichés—“being hurled back three *zhang*” is a standard phrase, for instance, and the duel itself follows a predictable pattern. The inclusion of poetic verses commemorating the story of the duel that had just been told, as though to anchor the veracity of the narrative, is also commonplace. Very much a part of martial arts discourse, the “past exploits” account draws from the genre of apocryphal history [*baiguan* or *yeshi*] and the recording of “what was seen and heard [*jianwen* 見聞].” These genres in turn hail from the earlier traditions of “accounts of anomalies [*zhiguai* 志怪],” “accounts of amazing people [*zhiren* 志人], and “transmissions of the marvelous [*chuanqi* 傳奇]” writings, which Lu Xun (following Qing literary historian Hu Yinglin) has identified as forerunners of the fiction [*xiaoshuo* 小說] genre.²⁰ All these genres—often revolving around biographical records of historical figures [*zhuan* 傳]—walk a fine line between factuality and embellishment. They are rooted in the unstable ground between fictionality, historicity, and orality, providing martial arts writers a discursive space in which to develop the fabulous figure of the *xia* warrior. They also afford a language with which to describe martial arts feats, a language founded upon the power of “internal strength.”

To further explore such language, generic crossings, and the rhetoric of ineffability, let us examine the story of one of the most famous personages in Republican Chinese martial arts discourse, who will reappear later in the novel of Huo Yuanjia. This is Great Blade Wang the Fifth [*Da dao Wang Wu* 大刀王五]. Great Blade's real name is Wang Zhengyi (1844-1900), style name Wang Zibin. Wang

19 Ji Peigang 季培剛 ed., *Taijiquan wangshi: wan Qing yi lai taiji qianbeimen de feifan rensheng* 太極拳往事：晚清以來太極前輩們的非凡人生, 21.

20 For a useful survey of the controversies and difficulties of this literary history, see Rania Huntington's chapter, “Species History, Genre History,” in *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

hails from the same birthplace of Hebei province as Huo Yuanjia. Along with Huo Yuanjia, Huang Feihong, and other luminaries of the martial arts world in the period, Wang is ranked among the group of “Ten Greatest Pugilists of Late Qing.”

Here is his biography, as written by Xiang Kairan and titled “Narrative of Great Blade the Fifth [*Shu Da dao Wang Wu* 述大刀王五].” Wang is described as “naturally gifted with a powerful physique, born with great strength [*sheng you qiang li* 生有強力],” a conventional phrase in martial arts narrative. Named Wang the Fifth because of birth order, Wang became known for his skill with a pair of hooked blades, so he is also called Double Hook Wang the Fifth [*Shuang gou Wang Wu* 雙鉤王五]. He became well-known in the world of martial arts as an armed escort.

One day, Wang encountered a man named Dong, “a man of about forty, tall, eagle-eyed, and with a slender physique.” Among the retainers that Wang worked with, Dong alone withheld his name and stood aloof. Wang challenged Dong to a duel to test his skills. Dong repeatedly declined, but under Wang's persistence was finally persuaded. Dong chose to pick up a short length of bamboo as his choice of weapon, saying that he would not want anyone to be hurt:

Wang said, 'If that is the case, then please attack first. If there should be some unfortunate injury, the fault is not mine.' Dong replied, 'One should indeed be cautious. I will use my Middling Skill spear technique.' As he finished speaking, the bamboo had thrust towards Wang. Wang's left hook blocked the rod, and used the right hook to return the attack. Barely had the hook encountered the bamboo, when it received a tremendous shock [*zhen* 震], and twisted Wang's wrist. The hook became entrapped [by the bamboo] and could not break free. The bamboo was at an advantage. Wang's right hook also could not touch Dong. Dong slowly extended his bamboo and tapped Wang's chest. In a fury, Wang abandoned his hook, and attempted to snatch the bamboo. Dong had already dropped the bamboo, saying 'If this had not been bamboo, your chest would have been gravely injured and in great pain.' Wu was still in doubt about whether he had truly exerted his best, and requested another duel. Dong replied, 'The Middling Skill spear technique is in fact the king of spear techniques. It is not that you cannot handle it. Rarely can anyone handle it. This time, be warned that I will use a more ferocious technique aimed at your lower torso. I have never used hidden weapons to hurt anyone.'

Acceding, Wang charged Dong's bamboo again. [The bamboo] thrust at Wang's knee. Wang used his hook to counter the blow, and once again felt a great shock that shot through from his elbow to his back. His body was prostrated, and he was unable to use his left hook. Wang was forced to abandon his hook yet again.²¹

Wang stubbornly persisted with a third attack, this time in bare-handed combat, and lost once more, finally admitting defeat and asking to be Dong's disciple. Dong tells him, “All techniques are easy to know of but difficult to master—this is especially true of the martial arts.” He goes on to warn Wang of the lethal potential of martial arts when truly mastered, and the responsibility that comes with it.

We can see some similarity to the *wangshi* account of the “pushing hands” duel: the use of great “internal strength,” that reverberates as a “shock [*zhen*],” akin to sending a shock wave through the opponent's body. This account of the battle between Wang and Dong also reveals other aspects of the martial arts master as a cultural trope. Often a secretive figure who prefers to conceal his skill, he often declines or has to be persuaded to a fight. When the fight does transpire, his actual skill can be read in the subtext of his casualness, or in the choice of a non-lethal weapon.

21 Xiang Kairan, “Shu Da Dao Wang Wu” 述大刀王五 [Narrative on Great Blade Wang the fifth], in *Quanshi yanxing lu* 拳師言行錄 [Records of the sayings and deeds of martial arts masters], ed. Jiang Xiahun (Taipei: Yiwen chuban youxian gongsi, repr. 2003), 1-5.

In such a context, hyperbolic outsized language performs several rhetorical functions. On one level, hyperbolic embellishment simply works to heighten the marvel in the narrative. Marvel is needed to romanticize the martial arts, to broaden its appeal. This is part of the appeal of *xia* culture, and of its mythology.

On another level, such outsized language frames a construct of ineffability—a construct that was already foregrounded in earlier texts such as the *Yijinjing*. It serves as a means of rendering visible the otherwise invisible workings of *qi*, describing what can otherwise only be internally felt or apprehended. It enlarges upon what can barely be observed in the practice of the internal martial arts—offering a microscope in rhetorical form, so to speak. As though in compensation for the very elusiveness of the workings of *qi*, hyperbole insists upon its materiality in writing. This is the language that describes the figure of the martial arts master, that shapes martial arts discourse. Accounts of such duels establish a form of “case knowledge,” in which a body of knowledge is conceptualized through the collection of examples, and the exemplars demonstrate mastery of particular kinds of values and skills.²² This material represents a foundational keystone in the construction of discourse on the martial arts, and its transmission of values and ideals.

Even more interesting, it represents a mode of transmitting the potential capabilities and techniques of the Chinese internal martial arts. The martial arts body is shown as one which can inflict “tremendous shock” through the use of internal energy, and serious injury can be wrought from within, not necessarily from without. As can be seen in the contrast between Dong and Wang, a slender physique can conceal superb martial ability, and need not be muscular or even particularly youthful. This rhetoric of the body will find resonance throughout the Republican era and beyond.

The drama of this account fleshes out the historical events in Wang Wu's life-story. He did become the disciple of Dong, who turned out to be a famous master of the *xingyi* internal martial arts school and later became known as “Shanxi Dong” after the province. After that encounter, Wang Wu changed his choice of weapon from the double hook to the single blade, taking on the moniker Great Blade Wang the Fifth from then on. The account is also accurate in its biographical conclusion of how Wang would later join the Boxer rebellion, and meet his end executed by the German imperialist troops.

The postscript commentary to Xiang's account, written by Zhang Mingfei, however, represents a commingling of mythology and biography. It quotes the martyr revolutionary Tan Sitong's (1865-1898) famous last poem written on the eve of his execution, “Poem upon the Prison Wall [獄中題壁]”:

23

望門投止思張儉，忍死須臾待杜根。
我自橫刀向天笑，去留肝膽兩崑崙

22 See *Thinking with Cases: Specialist Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History*, eds. Charlotte Furth, Judith T. Zeitlin, and Ping-chen Hsiung (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

23 There has been some controversy over this famous poem. According to historian Huang Zhangjian 黃彰健, Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei changed the last two lines of the poem. This has been challenged by fellow historian Kong Xiangji 孔祥吉, with a response from Huang Zhangjian. See Huang Zhangjian, “Lun Tan Sitong Yuzhong Si: yu Kong Xiangji xiansheng shangque” 論譚嗣同獄中詩—與孔祥吉先生商榷 [Debating Tan Sitong's 'Poem upon the Prison Wall': A discussion with Mr Kong Xiangji,] in *Dalu Zazhi* 大陸雜誌 [Journal from the mainland], 90.2 (1995): 1-5. This poem is also sometimes known as “Poem upon the End of Life [絕命詩].”

Gazing towards the gate, shall I attempt to seek refuge, thinking of Zhang Jian?²⁴
 Enduring death, I must await the moment of [return for] Du Gen,²⁵
 I thrust my sword towards the sky and laugh,
 Departing, leaving behind loyalty and courage, the twin Kun-luns.

As Zhang Mingfei wrote in his commentary, “At first, I did not know what the 'twin Kun-luns' could refer to. Now we know one refers to Kang Nanhai [Kang Youwei], and the other to Great Blade Wang the Fifth.” Zhang was in fact reproducing Liang Qichao's (1873-1929) interpretation of the poem, in Liang's biography of Tan Sitong, where Liang quoted the poem and explained that Tan Sitong and Wang were longtime friends and Wang had taught Tan swordplay skills.²⁶ Much controversy remains as to whom these “twin Kun-luns” might represent, though most seem to agree upon at least Great Blade Wang Wu as one of the two to whom Tan Sitong was referring. In some accounts, Tan Sitong was said to have long been a sympathizer with vagrant bandits and martial arts outlaws because of his childhood friend Wang, and had supposedly enlisted Wang's help to liberate the captive Emperor Guangxu after the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform (1898). This claim is cemented by the fact that Tan did write critically of the Qing authorities for having used and then demobilized military men.²⁷ Alluding to the name of “Yan-zhao” for Wang's birthplace of Hebei province, Liang Qichao gave him the title of “The Great *Xia* Warrior of You-yan [*youyan daxia* 幽燕大俠].”²⁸

Wang's story exemplifies how embellishment and hyperbole work to shape martial arts discourse. Neither a straightforward work of fiction nor a record of history, this form of narrative nevertheless becomes central to martial arts discourse. Such narratives are informed by a language of ineffability, that describes a certain kind of “internal strength,” imbuing the figure of the *xia* warrior with extraordinary martial ability derived from this source of strength. These embellished biographies form a pool of shared “case knowledge,” affording a language to express the intangibility of *qi* practices, and demonstrating the value of the martial arts as a cultural and conceptual resource for an embattled Republican China.

Enter the Dragon: Xiang Kairan and the Emergence of Martial Arts Wuxia Fiction

It was in such a discursive environment that novelist Xiang Kairan (1890-1957) began writing his groundbreaking martial arts *wuxia* fiction. That he was also a skilled martial arts instructor and practitioner, besides being a writer on the subject, is significant, as it marks his participation across

24 Zhang Jian (115-198), from the Eastern Han era, was well-known as a hero who gained refuge from multiple families while in hiding from the authorities.

25 Du Gen (n.d.), another figure from the Eastern Han period, protested against the Empress Deng (81-121) in support of the youthful Emperor Andi, and was ordered to be executed. Taking pity on his nobility, the executors helped him escape death instead. He lived 15 years in obscurity, before being summoned back to court and returned to officialdom. *Hou Hanshu* 57. There are clear parallels here for Tan Sitong's position taking the side of the young Emperor Guangxu against the Empress Cixi in the late Qing.

26 Liang Qichao 梁其超, “Tan Sitong zhuan” 谭嗣同传 [Biography of Tan Sitong], in *Yinbingshi heji* 饮冰室合集 [Collected works from the studio of sipping ice], Vol. 6 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 6.

27 See *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter Zarrow (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 102-3.

28 Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi heji*, vol. 5.

many spheres of social and political discourse in the period.²⁹ A native of Hunan province and Pingjiang county, Xiang had begun practicing martial arts at the early age of 14, learning from the well-known master Wang Zhiqun. This teacher-disciple pair were to spend time later studying overseas in Japan.³⁰ Xiang's first published writing would be a manual based on his teacher's methods, *Martial Arts* [*Quanshu* 拳術 also known as *Quanshu jiangyi* 拳術講義] in 1912. Its publisher, Zhonghua Books, was to produce some twelve reprints by 1917, an indication of its popularity at the time.³¹

Upon returning to mainland China in 1913, Xiang and Wang together established a Martial Arts Society in the city of Changsha in Hunan, teaching Form-Intent Technique [*xingyi quan*] and Eight Trigrams Technique [*bagua quan*]. The following year in 1914, under the pseudonym “Unworthy Son of Pingjiang County” [*Pingjiang Buxiaosheng* 平江不肖生], Xiang began serializing *An Unofficial History of Living in Japan* [*Liudong Waishi* 留東外史] (1914), which followed the genre of “the exposé novel” [*heimu xiaoshuo* 黑幕小說]” in critiquing the decadent philandering ways of overseas Chinese students in Japan.³² The novel, based on his own experiences in Japan, became an instant hit, leading to several sequels. With its success, Xiang began spending time in Shanghai, the city that was “unquestionably the single most important center of publishing” in China at the time.³³ Thus poised at

29 Many critics also consider this aspect of Xiang's background to have lent an additional note of “realism” to his writings.

30 Xiang had been forced to travel to Japan for studies, after being expelled from the Hunan Vocational Academy for his involvement in the controversial public commemorative burial of Chen Tianhua (1875-1905), a martyr who had committed suicide in protest of the state. Xiang was 14 years old at the time. This early biographical evidence of Xiang's own inclination for patriotic feeling has been linked to the nationalistic register of the novel *Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan*. See Fan Boqun 范伯群, “Minguo wuxia xiaoshuo dianji daibiaozuo—Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan” 民國武俠小說奠基代表作—近代俠義英雄傳 [The foundational martial arts novel of Republican China—Tales of recent gallant heroes],” in Ceng Pingyuan and He Linfu eds., *Pingjiang Buxiaosheng yanjiu zhuanji*, 226-227.

For a full study of Xiang's life in chronological order, see Xu Sinian and Xiang Xiaoguang, “Xiang Kairan (Pingjiang Buxiaosheng) Nian biao (Buding gao) 年表 (補訂稿) [Xiang Kairan (Pingjiang Buxiaosheng) Chronology (Amended draft),” in *ibid.*, 325-55.

31 1912 was the inaugural year that Zhonghua Books was founded. It would go on to become the oldest publishing firm in mainland China today.

32 The pseudonym “Pingjiang Buxiaosheng” has had a few interpretations. There is little question that Pingjiang refers to Xiang's home county. As for “*buxiaosheng*,” I am inclined to agree with scholar Guo Mei in interpreting this as “unworthy son,” based on Xiang's account of his life in Japan, in the opening chapter of *Unofficial History of Living in Japan*, in which Xiang lamented his youthful wasting of his family's money and how little he had to show for his time in Japan.

A second interpretation has been offered in a memoir of Xiang written by his son Xiang Yixue, which alleged that the pseudonym was from Chapter 67 of Laozi's *Daodejing*. See “*Xiang Yixue: huiyi fuqin Xiang Kairan de yisheng* 向一学：回憶父親向愷然的一生 [Xiang Yixue: Remembering the life of my father Xiang Kairan],” <https://www.douban.com/note/537580920/>. Accessed May 7 2016. However, the quote is in error, rendered as “天下皆謂我道大；夫惟其大，故似不肖”。The correct quote in full should be 天下皆謂我道大，似不肖。夫唯大，故似不肖。若肖，久矣其細也夫 [All the world says my Dao is great, but that does not seem quite so. But it is just because my Dao is great that it is like nothing on earth. If it were like anything on earth, how small it would have been from the very beginning.] Translation based on John C. H. Wu, *Tao Teh Ching* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989), 137. Here, 肖 would be glossed as “seeming.”

I agree with Guo Mei's thinking that this second interpretation is likely a belated attempt to “dress up” Xiang's biography. See Guo Mei, “*Cong 'gushi li de ren' dao 'ren de gushi'--xiandai wuxia xiaoshuo de kaishan bizu Pingjiang Buxiaosheng ji qi gongxian he yingxiang* 從「故事里的人」到「人的故事」--現代武俠小說的開山鼻祖平江不肖生及其貢獻和影響 [From the 'character in the story' to the 'story of the character': on the contribution and influence of the progenitor of the modern martial arts novel, Pingjiang Buxiaosheng],” in Ceng Pingyuan and He Linfu eds., *Pingjiang Buxiaosheng yanjiu zhuanji*, 132.

33 Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai*, 10. With the presence of the foreign concessions, access to cutting-edge print technologies, and an increasingly affluent population, Shanghai has been well-documented as an important birthplace of a new urban culture in Republican China. See for instance Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The*

the heart of a booming Republican Chinese vernacular print culture, he wrote several short martial arts narratives, most of them in a hybrid language of classical or literary [*wen*] and vernacular or colloquial [*bai*] Chinese, and disseminated widely through newspapers and magazines.

This marked Xiang's entry into the burgeoning world of the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” [*yuanyang hudie pai* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派] school of urban fiction and vernacular entertainment. The so-called “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” group of authors, screenwriters, translators, and publishers gained its name for its highly sentimental content—the phrase refers to a symbol of devoted lovers typically found in classical Chinese literature, bestowed as a term of disparagement from the nationalists and radical reformers of the era who disdained it as low-brow escapism. Publication figures for these Butterfly writers, however, showed that they were extremely popular with the emergent “petty urbanite” class [*xiao shimin* 小市民], the target audience of these mass-produced print and film products in the period. Scholarship has since shown the cultural significance of this mainstay of Republican Chinese vernacular culture, and how it was able to constitute an urban Chinese perspective upon incipient modernity.³⁴

Xiang was to contribute significantly to the impact of the Butterfly school. His early martial arts narratives drew the attention of prominent Butterfly novelist, screenwriter, and publisher Bao Tianxiao (1876-1973), who introduced him to the editors at the influential World Books publishing firm, including the well-known newspaper publisher and writer Yan Duhe (1889-1968).³⁵ In 1922, Xiang began serializing two different martial arts novels in popular journals published by World Books—two novels that are now often hailed (if somewhat erroneously) as the twin pioneers of the Chinese genre of *wuxia* martial arts fiction.³⁶

The first was the novel *Tales of Marvelous Warriors in Their World of 'Rivers and Lakes'* [*Jianghu Qixia Zhuan* 江湖奇俠傳] that began to be serialized in January in the journal *Red Magazine* [*Hong zazhi* 紅雜誌].³⁷ Based on the tale of a feud between two counties in Hunan, it featured accounts

Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

34 See Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth Century Chinese Cities*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); and David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

35 Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 is the pseudonym of Bao Gongyi 包公毅 (1876-11973), one of the most prominent writers in the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school.

36 For instance, almost every essay in a recently published critical volume on Xiang Kairan's works make this claim for Xiang's novels as the “forerunners” or “founders [*kaishan bizu* 開山鼻祖]” of the genre. See Zeng Pingyuan and He Linfu eds., *Pingjiang Buxiaosheng yanjiu zhuanji*.

While Xiang's novels were hugely important in popularizing the genre, the assumption that Xiang's works founded the genre needs some qualification. The term *wuxia* was coined by Japanese novelists in the nineteenth century, and was subsequently borrowed by Chinese writers living in Japan. By the time of Xiang's novel serialization, the term *wuxia* was already in discursive circulation. See Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects*, 48. Also see Ye Hongsheng 葉洪生, *Wuxia xiaoshuo tanyilu—Ye Hongsheng lun jian* 武俠小說談藝錄——葉洪生論劍 [The art of *wuxia* fiction] (Taipei: Lianjing publishing, 1994), 11. The first *wuxia* novel has been attributed to “*Fu mei shi* 傅眉史,” written by prolific writer and translator Lin Shu (1852-1924) and published under the category *wuxia xiaoshuo* in a journal edited by Bao Tianxiao, *Xiaoshuo Dagan* 小說大觀 [Fiction panorama] in 1915.

37 The journal *Red* [*Hong zazhi*] was to change its name to *Red Rose* [*Hong Meigui*] in 1924. The phrase *jianghu*, which I render here in its literal sense as 'rivers and lakes' for the sake of clarity in translation, “traditionally signifies both the

of fantastical martial powers, such as the ability to send killer swords flying across thousands of miles, and characters such as beggars and monks with secretive alter-ego identities. The novel's great popularity led to World Books reissuing it in a sprawling nine-volume set. Mingxing Film Company, one of the leading Shanghai film production companies of the time, adapted it into a film, *Burning Down the Red Lotus Monastery* [*Huoshao Hongliansi* 火燒紅蓮寺] in 1928. The film was so successful that it generated three sequels in the same year, and another fourteen over the following three years. Serial illustrated books [*lianhuan tu* 連環圖] based on the film(s) swiftly appeared on street corners, satisfying the cravings of children and the poor who could not afford to see the movie. A throng of imitations would fill the cinemas of Republican China, many of them containing the word *burning* [*huoshao* 火燒]. Some fifty studios produced about 240 martial arts films and hybrid “martial arts supernatural” films [*wuxia shenguai pian* 武俠神怪片]. Eighty-five films were released in 1929 alone, the pinnacle of the craze for martial arts film. If it did not exactly begin the fad, *Burning* certainly ushered in the era of the so-called martial arts supernatural film genre.³⁸

Xiang's second novel began serializing six months later in another popular journal published by World Books, *Detective World* [*Zhentan shijie* 偵探世界]. This was to be *Tales of Recent Gallant Heroes* [*Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan* 近代俠義英雄傳]. Unlike the fantastical flying swords and mysterious monks in *Jianghu Qixia Zhuan*, this second novel revolved around actual historical figures of the previous twenty years, such as Tan Sitong (1865-1898), one of the Six Martyrs of the failed reform movement in 1898 [*wuxu liujunzi* 戊戌六君子]. Huo Yuanjia (1868-1910), already well-known as the founder of one of the earliest schools of martial arts in Shanghai, was the key protagonist in the novel. An epic tale spanning some 84 chapters and a word count of more than a million characters, the central narrative focused on the tale of how Huo challenged three different foreigners in turn to contests of strength, ending with Huo's collapse from his severe self-inflicted internal injuries.

The twin successes of these two novels, and the subsequent popularity of *wuxia* films that *Burning* introduced, would fuel a widespread fervor for the *wuxia* genre in the period. It would also draw an equally fervent backlash from May Fourth reformers and intellectuals who disdained the genre as belonging to a feudal ideology, and posing a cultural threat to a nation striving to rewrite itself as 'modern.' As Mao Dun (1896-1981) wrote in a scathing 1933 essay: “This *wuxia* fever is not accidental. On the one hand, this is a reflection of the need for an escapist fantasy among feudal China's petty bourgeoisie class. On the other hand, this is a potent drug feudal China gave to the petty bourgeoisie in tumultuous times.”³⁹

The attack on the *wuxia* genre was launched in the wake of two anti-superstition campaigns—the

geographical and imaginary habitat for the 'world of martial arts' and the liminal social space inhabited by the outcasts and outlaws.” Zhang Zhen, *Amorous History*, 225. It denotes “the domain of the martial arts... a subculture, at once a part of the real world but also apart from it.” Sam Ho, “From Page to Screen: A Brief History of *Wuxia* Fiction,” in *Heroic Grace: The Chinese Martial Arts Film*, eds. David Chute and Cheng-Sim Lim (Los Angeles: UCLA Film and Television Archive, 2003), 14.

38 As Zhang Zhen notes, given the intertextual and intermediatized nature of the Republican print and media culture at the time, “the commonly accepted view that *Burning* marks the first martial arts-magic spirit film in Chinese film history requires some qualification.” She argues that the beginnings of the martial arts film genre may more accurately be traced back to a series of experiments in the preceding years. See Zhang Zhen, *Amorous History*, 208-9. Sam Ho considers the first *wuxia* film to be *Wuxia Li Feifei* [Swordswoman Li Feifei] released in 1925. See Sam Ho, “From Page to Screen,” 14.

39 Translation from Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects*, 43. Mao Dun's 茅盾 original essay appeared as “Fengjian de xiao shimin wenyi” 封建的小市民文藝 [The arts of the feudalistic petty urbanites], *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 [Eastern journal], 30.3 (1933), 17-18.

first during the Republican revolution (1900-15) and the second after the inauguration of the Nanjing government (1927-30)—carried out to crush the real and imagined idols of the feudal past. The violence against temple gods and folk religion went hand in hand with the enterprise to enlighten the masses in their ignorance of class ideology, and this carried over to an onslaught against popular cinema in general and the *wuxia* genre in particular. In 1931, the newly established National Film Censorship Committee (NFCC) of the Nationalist government officially banned the showing of many films, of which the vast majority were in the *wuxia* genre. Censorship quickly extended to printed *wuxia* fiction as well. *Jianghu Qixia Zhuan* was deemed “absurd in content” and ideologically “counter to the Party doctrines” by the NFCC. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs joined the NFCC in banning the publication and adaptation of such fiction.⁴⁰

The very success of Xiang's writing, then, became its own worst enemy. The hostility of the May Fourth literary reformers was to leave a lasting impact on *wuxia* scholarship, which was virtually non-existent until the late twentieth century.⁴¹ Xiang Kairan's work has thus seldom received analytical attention, despite its indubitable significance in Republican Chinese vernacular print and film culture. The first full studies of Xiang Kairan's work in both English and Chinese academies only emerged in recent years.⁴²

Fighting on Both Sides: *Wuxia* and Martial Arts Discourse

Despite the backlash against *wuxia* from the intellectuals and the authorities, many in the martial arts community acknowledged, and even approved of, the surging popularity of the genre of *wuxia* in promoting public awareness of martial arts practice. The connection between the *xia* warrior figure and martial arts discourse deepened with the active involvement of *wuxia* writers in the work of promoting the Chinese martial arts. Popular writers such as Xiang Kairan and Jiang Xiahun (1884-1964) worked on both sides of martial arts print culture—writing bestselling *wuxia* fiction and also working on collecting and editing practical martial arts manuals.

Xiang Kairan is widely credited today as “the forefather of the *wuxia* genre,” but the role of Jiang Xiahun is also significant. Jiang co-edited two of the earliest martial arts encyclopedias, the 1918 *Wuxia Daguan* and the 1923 *Guoji Daguan*, as well as the highly successful *Twenty-Four Xia of Jianghu* [*Jianghu Ershi si Xia* 江湖二十四俠] together with well-known editor of the Shanghai

40 Zhang Zhen, *Amorous History*, 235-6. The original source of this information is NFCC, “Dianying jiancha gongzuo zong baogao [A general report on the work on film censorship],” in *Zhongguo dianying nianjian* [The cinematographic yearbook of China] 1934.

41 The first book-length study of the *wuxia* genre was published in English in 1967, and even then it drew the line at looking at *wuxia* fiction of the early twentieth century, declaring those works “pure escapism” and unworthy of academic attention. See James J.Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-errant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). For more detail on how the May Fourth literary discourse shaped attitudes towards the genre, see Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects*, 35-44. For more on *wuxia* scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century, see the introductory chapters of John Christopher Hamm's study of the extremely popular *wuxia* writer Jin Yong (b. 1924-), *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); and Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Qianqu wenren xiake meng* 千古文人俠客夢—武俠小說類型研究 [Literati dreams of *xia* warriors through the ages: a study into the genre of martial arts fiction] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1992).

42 I am referring to Zeng Pingyuan and He Linfu eds., *Pingjiang Buxiaosheng yanjiu zhuanji*, and Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects* although Liu devotes half of the latter to other *wuxia* writers as well.

Zhonghua Ribao newspaper, Yang Chenyin. Let us take a closer look at Jiang's role in the formation of the martial arts *wuxia* genre, and how it grew from the “apocryphal history [*baiguan*]” type of narrative and the “biography.”

One eager fan of the genre wrote on how he was won over by the quality of Jiang's writing. Prominent journalist and newspaper editor Wu Yidie (1894-1965) was initially disdainful of the widespread popularity of the “apocryphal history [*baiguan*]” in the popular books market of the period. Upon a relative's persistent request, he began reading the work of Jiang Xiahun. He discovered that Jiang's works turned out to be “writings on the ethos of *xia*” [*xia yi shu* 俠義書]” and the emotive quality of the prose swept him away:

It was akin to seeing the greatness of 'the heroes of Yanzhao, their loftiness and tragic song' writ large upon the page, etched out in every word and every line. For someone not usually fond of *baiguan* writers, with my hands on such a work, I could barely sleep or eat. That demonstrates the depth of emotions [it stirred]. Our generation has unfortunately chosen the path of the Confucians, and suffered under its incompetent brush and useless inkstone, its endless monotonous recital. The atmosphere of decay makes one retch. And so its culture has become limp and lifeless [*yan yan wu sheng qi* 奄奄無生氣], and fully in need of a remedy such as the work of Master Jiang.⁴³

The evocation of the idiomatic phrase “the heroes of Yanzhao, their loftiness and tragic song [燕趙之士 慷慨悲歌]” is notable. As we saw earlier in the story of Great Blade Wang the Fifth, Yanzhao refers to the storied province of Hebei, which Song-dynasty poet Su Shi described as “famous since ancient times for its many outstanding heroes,” birthplace of Three Kingdoms-era protagonists Liu Bei (161-223) and Zhang Fei (167?-221), and Huo Yuanjia. This idiom sums up the heart of *xia* culture, and which Jiang Xiahun successfully revived in Republican prose—a certain aura of sweeping grandeur and romance, that appealed even to those who did not enjoy *baiguan* fiction, as Wu Yidie confirmed.

There is also a certain nationalistic appeal at play. For readers like Wu Yidie, the inspirational grandeur of *wuxia* can remedy the “limp lifelessness” that characterized China at the time. The sentiment is echoed by *baiguan* novelist Zhuang Yumei [style name Zhuang Binghai] (1885-1970): “Since the publication of the *wuxia* writings of Jiang Xiahun, the Shanghai book market has seen a phenomenal boom in books about *wuxia*... The China that was in the last gasp of life has suddenly become a world of live dragons and real tigers.” Lamenting the presence of “the fictitious [*zi xu* 子虛],” such as invisible slayings and the fabled “flying over rooftops and walking on walls,” he still acknowledged that Jiang's writings represented a different brand of *wuxia*. “Before Jiang, *wuxia* books were few. Jiang himself did not realize in the beginning how profitable this could be. After the appearance of Jiang's work and its popularity, prices soared and imitators abounded.”⁴⁴

Jiang Xiahun's own remarks record his personal enterprise to rescue the martial arts by wielding the pen of *wuxia*. Referring to himself in the third person, he wrote:

Xiahun admires the *xia* but is unable practice the art itself. He thus had to employ empty words to perpetuate the famous works of *wuxia* past and present, such as in [his novels] *Fengchen Qixia zhuan* and *Wuxia Dagan*... It is but borrowing the wine cups of others as a libation over his own grave, and inappropriately receive the praise of many. [I am] much ashamed. The ancient idea of *guoji* was the ordinary *tiju* of our people. It originated with the Yellow Emperor [Huangdi] quelling the barbarians and came down from the Qin and Han. Every generation had their specialists.

43 Wu Yidie 烏一蝶, “Xu qi” [Seventh preface], *Guoji Dagan*, 8-9.

44 Zhuang Binghai 莊病骸, “Xu ba” [Eighth preface], *Guoji Dagan*, 9-10.

Repeating the lament that the martial arts have since degenerated into “*jianghu* acrobatic stunts,” he then invoked some contemporary names in the martial arts world: “In the last ten years, fortunately we have Huo Yuanjia of Tianjin, General Ma Zizhen [Ma Liang] of Shandong, Master Xiang Kairan of Hunan, and so on.” For Jiang, these names represent the equivalent greatness of *xia* for the Republican Chinese era. As he saw it, *wuxia* writing served an important role by reminding people of the former glory of *xia* and the Chinese martial arts.⁴⁵

We can see how closely the emergence of *wuxia* fiction in the period was linked to the contemporaneous development of the Chinese internal martial arts. The *xia* figure, along with the practice of internal martial arts, had become a rallying cry for the Republican Chinese. As can be seen in stories of *xia* figures such as Miss Yang and Great Blade Wu the Fifth, biographical narratives became woven into apocryphal history, and formed an important wellspring of inspiration for the emerging *wuxia* genre. Notions such as using one's *qi* for internal strength had passed from the sphere of *yangsheng* therapeutic health practices into the sphere of *wuxia* vernacular cultural discourse, and along with it a particular register of rhetorical language and visual imagining of the body that was projected as directly opposite to wielding dumbbells or lifting weights.

Martial Arts versus Western Sports: the Body Reimagined

Nowhere is this twinned development of *xia* martial arts and *tiyu* sports more clearly embodied than in the story of Huo Yuanjia and his challenge to a boastful Western strongman, which was to spawn spin-off versions such as that of Miss Yang Jianxia issuing similar challenges. Huo Yuanjia's biographies record that his opponent was named Hercules O'Brien, an Englishman.⁴⁶ The latter becomes daunted by how strong Huo appeared, and how there were clauses in the contract allowing for physical harm, and ultimately backs down from the contest.

It is in one of these biographies that the by-now popular story of Huo Yuanjia being poisoned by the jealous Japanese first came to be circulated. Lu Weichang's version recounts that after the Japanese were defeated, they hear of how Huo is suffering from a “fever illness,” and sends over a doctor who treats him with a slow-acting poison that kills Huo barely two months after Jingwu Association was founded.⁴⁷ This story of Huo's demise at the hands of the Japanese has persisted into the present day, retold in *wuxia* film and fiction. That version is markedly different from the one Xiang Kairan recorded in an appendix of *jianwen* accounts attached to the manual *Quanshu*, and in his novel. These accounts tell of Huo suffering from an imbalance of internal and external strengths, and Huo inadvertently causing himself a fatal internal injury by exerting too much external strength.⁴⁸

45 Jiang Xiaohun 姜俠魂, “Xu shiwu” [Fifteenth preface], *Guoji Daguan*, 17-8.

46 Also see John Christopher Hamm's article tracking the “fact or fiction” behind the story of Huo Yuanjia. He writes as Han Yisong 韓倚松, “Wei 'Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan' zhong Huo Yuanjia zhi shi zhuigen” 為《近代俠義英雄傳》中霍元甲之事追根 [In search of the facts in the Huo Yuanjia story in *Tales of Recent Gallant Heroes*], in *Pingjiang Buxiaosheng yanjiu zhuanji*, 249-261.

47 Lu Weichang, “Huo gong Yuanjia yishi bing Jingwu Tiyuhui zhi genggai” 霍公元甲遺事並精武體育會之梗概 [The past deeds of Master Huo Yuanjia, attached with a broad outline about the Jingwu Tiyuhui], in *Guoji Daguan, Za zu lei* [Miscellany category], 15-17.

48 Xiang, *Quanshu*, 98-108.

Despite donning the officious label of *zhuan*, these accounts would seem to take on an element of embellishment from the very beginning. They are also revealing of how the martial arts body is visualized. Lu Weichang's biography describes Huo as possessing “a body soft as cotton, his bones hard as iron,” language reminiscent of the *Yijinjing* and its description of transforming sinews and bones. As we had seen earlier in the description of Dong's slender physique, muscularity does not play a role in considering strength and martial skill.

This motif of the martial arts body as not necessarily physically powerful is repeated in the image of the old martial arts master. In an encyclopedia of Republican Chinese martial arts, historian Tang Hao lists the biographies of eighteen masters of the martial arts—all of them aged between fifty and ninety years old, whose images adorn the front of the encyclopedia. The biography of one of these, Gao Fengling, offers a sample of how the figure of the Chinese martial arts master is represented:

[Gao] is famous for his mastery of the Monkey Form Technique, and is even more skilled with the Ground Lying Fist. His limbs are soft and supple, his steps light and airy. He is already sixty-eight years of age, a man of few words. Other than practicing martial arts all day, he had little else on his mind. The picture shows him standing on one foot with upraised arms, which is one of the techniques of the Monkey Form. With such power in old age, this is indeed a rare sight.⁴⁹

Tang adds an addendum at the end of these eighteen brief notes, comparing the strongman [*dalishi*] of *tiyu* with practitioners of the martial arts. He noted that there were some who thought that because of the danger of over-exercising, *tiyu* was detrimental to attaining old age, and included the Chinese martial arts with such *tiyu*. He considered this a serious obstacle to promoting the martial arts:

Among those martial arts experts who participated in this sports meet [*yundong dahui*], there were white-haired seniors whose limbs and body were light and swift as the young and the strong. From this one can prove that Chinese martial arts can train not only for self-defense, but also, when it comes to one's health, it can surpass European and American *tiyu*. In those Western countries that self-proclaim *tiyu* to be very developed, I have yet to see seventy or eighty-year-old seniors take to the stage to demonstrate their skills. But at this martial arts sports meet, we see them everywhere.⁵⁰

And indeed, the element of “seeing” and the inclusion of images are often invoked as a means of augmenting the claims of veracity of these accounts, deepening the entanglement of historical persona with its mythos. As we can see in Figure 14, the softness and suppleness of the body of the old Chinese martial arts master, hidden under traditional dress but revealed in his martial stance, is presented in sharp contrast to the externally observable muscles of the *tiyu* body that Wang Ziping, Tang Hao himself, Lu Weichang, and other younger martial arts practitioners displayed in their own photographs that we have previously seen in earlier chapters.

Xiang Kairan's novel about Huo Yuanjia would take this to a deeper level, establishing an aesthetics and visual language for the “formless” inner body of the martial arts warrior. Let us turn next to a close reading of this trope in Xiang's novel, *Tales of Recent Gallant Heroes*, to see how the hyperbolic language of *wuxia* can speak to a Chinese vernacular conceptualization of the body.

49 Tang Hao, “Ji shiba wushu zhuanjia” 記十八武術專家 [Records of eighteen martial arts specialists], in *Guoji Daguan, Za zu lei* [Miscellany category], 17.

50 Tang Hao, *ibid.*, 18-19.

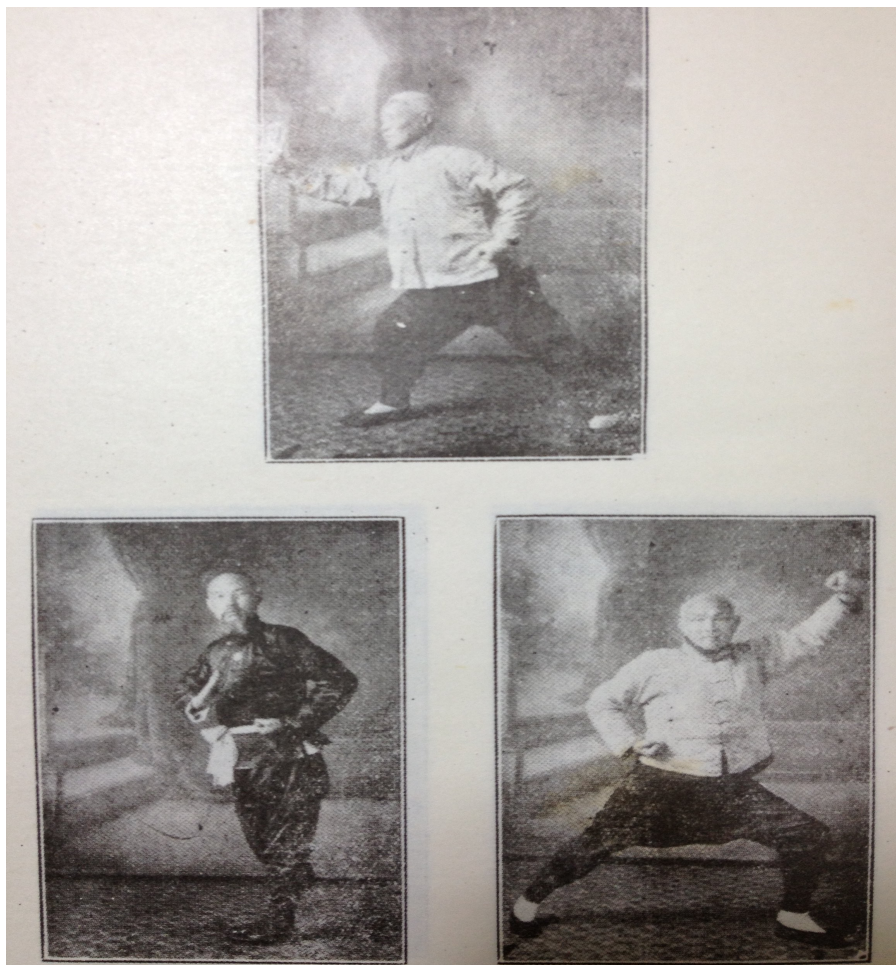


Figure 14: Three of the masters hailed as luminaries in the Republican Chinese martial arts world.
 Top: He Yushan 何玉山 (1842-1927). Bottom left: Yang Jitang 楊吉堂 (n.d.). Bottom right: Yang Deqing 楊德卿 (n.d.).
 The two Yangs are father and son. *Guoji Dajuan*, prefatory material.
 C.V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Seeing Qi in Action: Huo Yuanjia and the X-Ray

In one of the most intriguing scenes in the novel, the protagonist Huo Yuanjia seeks treatment from a Japanese doctor in a hospital, complaining of excruciating chest pains despite his superb martial arts skills and strength. After first examining Huo with a stethoscope, the doctor puts the great warrior through an X-ray machine, and finally declares, with some perplexity: “There is something strange within the skin, which ordinary people do not have—a kind of entity that is seemingly membranous but not a membrane, seemingly gaseous but not a gas [一種似膜非膜、似氣體非氣體的物質]... This seems unexplainable in terms of physiology [這於生理學上似乎說不過去].”⁵¹

The light-hearted vignette of a mystified doctor peering into the innards of a martial arts warrior is reminiscent of other literary and aesthetic encounters with new Western technologies in the Republican Chinese popular imaginary.⁵² What is interesting here is how the narrative makes use of the X-ray to confirm the existence of precisely something that technology cannot grasp or represent. Representing a marvelous furthering of the limits of human vision, Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen’s 1895 invention of the X-ray machine has rendered Huo Yuanjia’s body translucent, observable through to bone and marrow. Yet in this narrative, the unexpected findings on the X-ray plate—an image of something physiologically unidentifiable—becomes another marvel in its own right, an image adumbrating the barely discernible.

It falls to Huo’s fellow martial arts practitioners to explain for the reader that what the doctor is (not) seeing in the X-ray is likely a manifestation of *qi*, a product of *neigong* internal strength. Indeed, *neigong* will become a central idea in the story of Huo Yuanjia (1868-1910), an historical figure who founded one of the earliest schools of martial arts in Shanghai. Based on Huo’s biography, the novel’s central narrative arc tells of how Huo challenged three different foreigners in turn to contests of strength.

According to the novel, despite being a famous martial arts warrior, Huo Yuanjia had failed to practice enough *neigong* internal skills, leading to a disproportionate weakness in his internal strength relative to his “external strength [*waili*].” This oversight leads to him fatally injuring himself while testing out some German gymnasium equipment, triggering those increasingly serious bouts of chest pain that prompt him to seek medical attention. In the novel’s denouement, this injury will eventually kill him. What the doctor is seeing on the X-ray plate is then also a premonitory herald of Huo Yuanjia’s fate—his deficiency in internal strength will ultimately destroy the great warrior.

In this debut appearance in a Republican Chinese vernacular novel, rendered *almost* visible in an X-ray plate, *neigong* internal strength enters into a lively dialogue with and against Western physiology and biomedical knowledge—an East-West conversation that underpins the entire novel. Much as the amorphousness of *qi* could be rendered almost visible against the backlighting of an X-ray plate, *neigong* as a form of cultural bodily practice found effective communication *vis-à-vis* Western

51 *Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan* [Tales of recent gallant heroes] (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 2004), Book 6, 54-55. All references throughout the chapter will be to this edition of the novel, abbreviated as *Xiayi*. All translations mine, unless otherwise specified.

52 On the “science fantasy” genre in late Qing fiction, see David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, Chapter 5, “Confused Horizons: Science Fantasy,” 252-312. Also see Shih Shu-mei, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History*; and Pang Laikwan, *The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

sports and fitness. Its idea of “internal strength” came to be perceived as a strength that is *not* purely physiological—something “unexplainable in terms of physiology,” as Huo's doctor put it—a form of strength posited as *other* than muscular exertion.

The question of “What is strength?” underpins the entire narrative arc of Huo Yuanjia's story. What happens if the “internal strength” of Chinese martial arts encounters the product of hours of gymnasium training? The novel can thus be read as very much a sign of its times, emblemizing how the question of strength was framed against this backdrop of an enthusiasm for building muscle [*jirou*] and sports identified as “Western,” and how “indigenous” concepts of the body can fit in with these new notions.⁵³ Can the “internal strength” of *neigong* be shown to others to see, if at all?

Xiang Kairan and the Question of Strength

The question of what strength is, and how strength can be made visible and “shown to others to see,” can now be seen to echo from out of the dialogic world of Chinese martial arts discourse, discussed and debated in various print sources, instructed upon in how-to manuals, and inserted into history textbooks. This same question constitutes a leitmotif throughout the novel *Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan*. The rambling structure of the novel is premised upon various displays of human marvel, as different martial arts characters continually enter and exit the novel's center stage—they heal by using *qi* energy emanating through their hands; they are able to perform surgery by using *neigong*; they leap over walls and roofs; they can punch through the rib cage of an ox and remove its heart with bare hands.⁵⁴

The question “What is strength?” assumes personification in the form of the protagonist Huo Yuanjia, presiding over the revolving door of these characters. It is a question that becomes most apparent in the novel's central narrative of the famous strongman performance. Significantly, it is here that the first mention of *tiyu* sports or physical education occurs in the novel, associating *tiyu* with the West and its discourses of the body. In a pre-performance speech, the strongman holds forth on how China, the Sick Man of the East, cannot afford to neglect *tiyu*: “The matter of *tiyu* affects the strength or weakness of a people and the rise or decline of a country. How could it be that the entire country does not have an agency in charge of investigating and researching the subject?” This is the boastful challenge that Huo Yuanjia later responds to, in his claim that the Chinese martial arts can more than take on *tiyu* sports.

Given what we now know about the discourses of Chinese martial arts in the period, it should be no surprise that Huo Yuanjia declaims in the narrative that the difference between Western and

53 Huo Yuanjia's story ushered in a series of accounts that claim similar challenges between Chinese martial arts warrior and Western or non-Chinese fighter in the period. Andrew Morris noted the parallel story of Liu Baichuan, in *Marrow of the Nation*, 187-188. Other accounts that Morris did not mention feature names such as Wang Ziping (1881-1873), Chen Zizheng (1878-1933), Xiang Kairan's teacher Wang Zhiqun (1878-c.1950s), Zheng Manqing (1902-1975), and Miss Yang Jianxia, whose story opened this study. See for instance Tang Hao, “Wang Ziping zhuan 王子平傳 [Biography of Wang Ziping],” in *Guoji Daguan, Za zu lei* [Miscellany category], 14-15.

54 The phrase “leaping over roofs and walking on walls [*feiyao zoubi* 飛檐走壁]” has become a catchphrase in the modern Chinese vernacular, a byword for “amazing ability.” The spectacle of “punching through the ribcage of an ox and removing its heart” is, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, a familiar trope in the *Yijinjing*.

Chinese martial arts training is grounded in their different ideas of strength—Xiang Kairan is clearly drawing from those ideas in circulation at the time. Training for strength alone, which Western *tiyu* seems to emphasize, creates “dead strength [*sili* 死力],” as opposed to the “live strength” of Chinese martial arts.

This can be observed in the ways in which feats of strength are performed and depicted. In the world of the Chinese martial arts, superlative martial arts strength is described by underscoring nonchalance and absence of effort, to the point of effacement of all outward display. For instance, Huo Yuanjia is described as having “lightly [輕輕]” lifted the bags weighing eight hundred *jin*, and after carrying to the warehouse and unloading them, his poise remains unruffled, “not out of breath, unchanged in mien [氣不喘，色不變].” It is a parallel with the description of the masterly casualness that Dong demonstrated, in the account of his duel with Great Blade Wang the Fifth that we saw earlier. Effortlessness is the hallmark of true internal strength, in such accounts.

This motif of effortless strength does not belong only to the realm of martial arts 'fiction'—in the intertextual nature of Chinese martial arts discourse, it is a commonplace goal in the practice of the internal martial arts, and a marker of mastery of internal *neigong* strength. Tang Hao and Gu Liuxin claimed this as a trainable ability in their *taijiquan* manual (originally published in the 1920s), for instance:

After Taijiquan combined the arts of *daoyin* and *tuna* breathing, one can then not only move one's joints and muscles, one can also harmonize movement with breathing, and thus strengthen the internal body. Thus, no matter how one increases physical activity [*jia da yundong liang*] to the point of explosive power, one would still perspire but not be out of breath. Once the techniques are mastered, one can then 'remain unchanged in mien [神色不變], 'facial color unchanged, and not out of breath [面不改色氣不喘].'⁵⁵

By contrast, the demonstration of visible muscular exertion is key in the Western strongman's spectacle. This is highlighted throughout by the announcement of precise measurements, stage props, even costumes. The strongman's body is the center of attention, beginning with his disrobing to reveal a “dark and hairy chest and two arms rippling with muscle.” The flexing of muscles itself becomes a haptic, almost sensual part of the performance, as the interpreter announces:

“The strongman's bodyweight is three hundred and eighty pounds. The width of his arms at rest measure eighteen inches. When in exertion, they will measure twenty-two inches, an increase of four inches from normal. In exertion, his waist and torso will also be larger than normal by four inches. This scene will be a demonstration *especially of the expansion and contraction of muscles and elasticity of skin for all to see* [這一幕專演筋肉的縮脹和皮膚的伸縮給諸君看].

The strongman stood with his legs apart on the stage, facing the audience, and stretched out his arms with palms facing skywards, as though flexing his strength. After a minute, the interpreter pointed to the strongman's shoulders and arms, and said to the audience: “Everyone please take note. The muscles are slowly swelling up.” Huo and his friends sat the closest and *could see clearly* [看得分明]. They saw the skin [rippling] as though with many tiny rodents moving about within, and the shoulders and torso indeed seemed larger than before.⁵⁶ [Emphasis mine]

The marvel of the strongman's body turns upon an external quantifiability. What we “can see clearly” are the outward signs of exertion, the movement of muscles under the skin like “many tiny rodents.” The careful use of statistics to underscore the drama of the strongman's performance reminds

55 *Taijiquan yanjiu*, 5-6.

56 *Xiayi*, Book 1, 180.

us of the defining basis of Western *tiyu* sports and physical culture—being able to measure in exact terms the capability of the body, the emphasis on the quantifiable, that renders what is going on within the body into an outward spectacle. It presents a marked contrast from the Chinese descriptions of non-effort, the emphasis on the lack of exertion in displaying remarkable strength, that renders what is going on within the body into something that actually eludes outward observation. There is literally nothing to see, in their performance of strength—and therein lies *their* marvel.

The narrative of the strongman's boast and Huo's challenge sets up the most obvious parallel discourse of the martial arts body to that of *tiyu* sports, but another, even more interesting parallel to the strongman's performance occurs later in the novel, when Huo Yuanjia meets the character Cheng Youming and discusses the practice of the *Sinews Transformation Classic* [*Yijinjing* 易筋經], which we examined in the preceding chapter. A landmark in the theory and practice of *neigong*, the *Yijinjing* seems to underpin a different kind of strength as Cheng demonstrates:

Qin Heqi pointed to Cheng Youming and said to Huo Yuanjia, “He has another skill [of *Yijinjing*] which the average martial arts practitioner finds hard to achieve. The muscles of his entire body can be made to move, so that if a fly lands on whichever part of his body, one movement of his skin can make the insect unable to stand firm and have to fly off. I can have him demonstrate for you both to see.”...

Cheng Youming raised his hands in a fist salute to Huo and [his friend] Nong, saying, “Pardon my boldness.” Then he took off his loose leather robes, revealing his upper body.

Huo Yuanjia noticed that although the muscles on his body were not as powerfully developed as a strong young man's might be, the skin looked pale and soft, so that it could be mistaken for a fourteen or fifteen-year-old maiden's complexion. His entire body bore no wrinkles of age. Huo could not help nodding his head and saying in admiration to Nong Jingsun, “No need to see what kind of demonstration of skill he will make. Simply seeing the muscles of his body, one can tell that this is superb *neigong* [只專看他這一身肌肉，便可知道是了不得的內功了]. What average old man would have muscles this soft and pale?”

Cheng then undid his belt, and sat cross-legged on the *kang*, revealing his calves, and placed his hands on his knees, not speaking and not moving, as though adjusting his breathing. In less than a minute, Huo Yuanjia could see that within the muscles of his upper body, there was what looked like the darting movement of countless tiny creatures, even in the skin on his head and the tips of his ears.

Qin Heqi pointed this out to Huo and Nong, saying, “This is the most important skill in *Yijinjing*. The flow of *qi* and Blood in the meridians are entirely under his control. I have used soybeans before as an experiment, placing a soybean randomly on a part of his body, and that soybean was immediately tossed off, as though bounced off something within the skin. Unfortunately there are no soybeans here, but we can use a crumpled ball of paper as a substitute.”

Saying this, he tore an old page from a book and crumpled it into a ball. Holding it with two fingertips, he lightly placed it in between Cheng Youming's shoulders. Qin Heqi had not even retracted his hand when that ball of paper was sent leaping about a foot high, and rolled down off the *kang*. Huo and Nong were both very impressed. Cheng Youming was already off the *kang* and put on his clothes, laughing, “Playing around like this does have several benefits for one's body, though it frankly holds little entertainment value for others to see...”⁵⁷

This is arguably the scene where *neigong* makes its 'real' appearance, when it could not be revealed upon an X-ray plate. There are many patent contrasts with the strongman's performance—the casualness of the domestic setting for Qin Heqi's demonstration as opposed to the theatricality of the strongman onstage, the delicate nuance of using a soybean and wad of paper for stage props as opposed to the dramatic thunder of hurling weight-plates to the ground. The parallel descriptions of the kind of body revealed are particularly suggestive. Where the strongman's skin was dark and hairy, the Chinese *neigong* body—a signifier of great internal skill, immediately recognized by those knowledgeable in the martial arts—is described in effeminate terms. In this gendered discourse, as in the case of yogic male body in colonial India in the same period, the seemingly “unmasculine” *neigong* body becomes

57 *Xiayi*, Book 3, 245, 247-8.

but “another form of masculinity, articulated in opposition to colonial hegemonies of the hyper-masculine male body.”⁵⁸

In both cases, the fine control of muscles is on display. The comparison of Qin Heqi's body to the “darting movement of countless tiny creatures” recalls immediately the parallel description of the movement of strongman's muscles as appearing like “many tiny rodents” under the skin. The strongman's muscular control is described as the “expansion and contraction of muscles and elasticity of skin”—a categorically physiological explanation. The transformation of sinews in Qin Heqi's case, on other hand, is to a greater and finer extreme, with movement “even in the top of his head and the tips of his ears.” This transformation is, according to the narrative, due to Qin Heqi's control of the flow of his *qi* and Blood in the meridians of his body—a decidedly non-physiological explanation.

On a more complex level, in contrasting this quiet marvel against the spectacular display of Western *tiyu* muscle, the narrative is in fact making the workings of *neigong* more visible. This, then, may be what 'live *jin* energy' can look like, as opposed to the 'dead *li* force' of the strongman's performance. In the visual presentation of something as essentially invisible as the inner workings of *qi*, Xiang's achievement in *Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan* is in rendering *neigong* an easily accessible concept in the popular imaginary. Much as the X-ray machine was used as a framing device for *qi*, this visualization of *neigong* was accomplished through the use of Western sports and muscle as a conceptual foil. The true significance of Qin Heqi's quiet demonstration is projected through the lens of the strongman's dramatic performance—it is as a contrast to the brawny, measurable muscles of the latter, that we apprehend the claims for the potential *qi* capability of the former.

As recent *wuxia* researchers have rightly pointed out, Xiang Kairan takes *neigong* to a new level of aesthetics, adding many elements of narrative detail to flesh out what had previously been a flat representation of martial stances and moves.⁵⁹ What is also important here, and unnoticed in scholarship, is that this narrative of a strongman showing off his muscles and a hermit revealing his *neigong* parallels the hotly contested discourses of different kinds of strength in the period. Xiang Kairan's novel reflects a historical moment when the internal Chinese martial arts were regaining powerful discursive currency in Chinese vernacular culture, even while intellectuals continued to bewail the debacle of the Boxers, the backwardness of *wuxia*, and promote the efficacy of Western sports. Drawing from a fount of discourses on *neigong* circulating in the period, Xiang's narrative demonstrates how the idea of an indigenous form of strength could be imagined, eventually catapulting it into the spotlight of Republican Chinese vernacular culture.

58 Sugata Ray, “The 'Effeminate' Buddha, the Yogic Male Body, and the Ecologies of Art History in Colonial India,” unpublished MS, e-mail message to author, 11/9/15, 16. A fuller discussion of gender theory, however, falls outside the scope of this study.

59 See for instance Chen Tianle 陳天樂, “Xiandai xing de tuxian: lun Pingjiang Buxiaosheng Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan” 現代性的凸顯：論平江不肖生《近代俠義英雄傳》 [The manifestation of modernity: discussing Pingjiang Buxiaosheng's *Tales of Recent Gallant Heroes*], *Xinan Daxue Xuebao* [Journal of Southwest University] 37 (January 2011): 1-6.

Chapter Six

Coda

力是什麼東西，可以拿給人看嗎？我通身是力，你如何能看得見呢？

What is strength? Can it be shown to others to see? I am full of strength, but how would you be able to see that?¹

The above quote, spoken by a character in the novel *Jindai Xiayi Yingxiong Zhuan*, encapsulates the heart of the chapter, as well as the entirety of this project to trace the conceptual history of a particular idea of the body. Set against the backdrop of Chinese martial arts versus Western sports that I have outlined earlier, the tale of Huo Yuanjia throwing down the gauntlet to a boastful Russian strongman might now be read more accurately as an interactive dialogue between Western-imported ideas and Chinese perspectives on the body, rather than unproblematically as a triumphal celebration of either *tiyu* sports or the Chinese martial arts. The commingling of different genres of narrative, historical figures, and embellished detail also demonstrate how the highly intertextual sources of Chinese vernacular print culture spoke in conversation with each other, shaping *wuxia* martial arts culture. The story of Miss Yang Jianxia challenging a brawny Russian strongman can be read in a similar context. Not simply a rhetorical question, the query of “What is strength?” reveals a great deal about the changing perspectives on the human body in the period, and the role that the Chinese internal martial arts and *tiyu* sports play in shaping those perspectives.

As we saw in the previous chapters, the debate between “Indigenous vs Western *tiyu*” drew from a much earlier history of *yangsheng* “nourishing life” practices, from which notions about an inner body and cultivating *neigong* internal strength arose. These ideas would gain currency in nineteenth-century Chinese vernacular culture, transmitted through popular layman manuals such as the *Yijinjing*. They would later find conceptual purchase as a cultural resource in early twentieth-century Republican China, forming a badly needed ideational lodestone invoking martial glory and *xia* warrior ethos. That also heralds a transformative moment for the Chinese martial arts in general—and the internal forms, in particular—as they emerged into the Chinese *wuxia* cultural imaginary. Shedding the last embarrassing vestiges of their association with the Boxers, the Chinese martial arts, complete with the ineffability of *qi*, were upheld as an indigenous response to Western *tiyu* as a form of bodily training, drawn upon as an important form of cultural identity. The language of texts such as the *Yijinjing*, once derided in some quarters as nothing but myth and forgery, has proven instrumental in providing a lexicon to describe the workings of an “inner body” posited as rather different than the body seen in physiological or anatomical terms.

In turn mocked at and warmly endorsed, the notion of *neigong* internal strength can be seen to engage a thickly complex discursive reception in the late Qing and early Republican period. That discursive complexity has lingered on into the present day. Many of the modernist assumptions and attitudes outlined earlier in the opening chapter of this project—the desire to extract the aspects of “religion and spirituality” from Chinese martial arts discourse, the tendency to ignore the internal forms in a discussion of the Chinese martial arts—might be seen to stem from this period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The larger enterprise of the project is ultimately to demonstrate the cultural significance of *neigong* internal strength, and how it needs to be considered in its own right as a concept, away from

¹ *Xiayi*, Book 2, 180.

the ideologically inflected crossfire that too often surrounds the phenomenon. Here, I return to Anne Harrington's work on thinking about the stories that populate the world of mind-body medicine, and how such stories "do not merely describe experience and behaviors that are given in the world; they also help create behaviors and experiences that had not previously been there."² These stories, in their wide circulation in the public sphere, perform a role in establishing a rich cultural imaginary, communicating ideas of intangibility that would otherwise be inexpressible, foregrounding a certain *doxa* of the body. They form an integral part of Chinese martial arts discourse, and have become an important cultural trope for the period in question and beyond. Chinese martial arts today represent a particular modality of thinking about the body, and the internal forms in particular have engendered their own ways of bodily sensation, movement, and breathing, centered on the idea of fostering *neigong* internal strength. In showing how pervasive the discourses of *neigong* were in the late Qing and Republican Chinese culture, I have also carefully tracked the controversies and debate that raged around this idea, and how necessary it is to contextualize such narratives, to understand the framework of apprehending 'the body' that underpins these narratives. This necessity alone points to why this idea is so extraordinarily rich to think with. It underscores how resonant the idea of *neigong* internal strength has been, and continues to be, in Chinese cultural life.

2 Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 254-55.

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Appendix
Translation of the *Yijinjing*
as it appeared in Wang Zuyuan's *Neigong Tushuo* (1881)

The Twelve Images of the Yijinjing

First Pose: Wei-tuo Presents the Staff

Stand upright, facing straight ahead.

Encircle the arms, and press to the chest.

The breath is calm, and the spirit entirely collected.

The heart-mind is clear, and the mien is also reverent.

Second Pose: Wei-tuo Presents the Staff

The tips of the feet [i.e. toes] grip the ground, both arms open wide.

The heart-mind is peaceful, the breath quiet.

The eyes stare, the mouth is relaxed.

Third Pose: Wei-tuo Presents the Staff

The palms support the Gates of Heaven, the eyes gaze upwards.

The tips of the toes touch the ground, the body stands upright.

Strength encompasses the legs and torso, the entire body [firm] like a plant.

Clench the jaw tightly closed, do not let [the jaw] slacken.

The tongue can produce saliva when in touch with the palate.

When the nose can equalize the breath, the heart attains peace.

Let both fists slowly return to position.

Exert strength as though about to lift something heavy.

Fourth Pose: Plucking a Star and Switching to the Dipper

One hand supports the heavens, the palm covers the head.

From within the palm, focus both eyes.¹

¹ This is an interesting line: 更從掌內注雙眸. Dudgeon's translation takes perhaps the most logical route, "Fix the eyes and look through the palms," but there may also be an additional suggestion albeit not so logical, that this reads "from within the palm," suggesting the possibility that the mind attempt an disembodied perspective. Even taking into account

The tip of the nose inhales air, gradually adjust the breath.
Exert strength, return [the arms] to position, [and repeat] left and right alike.

Fifth Pose: Dragging Backwards the Tails of the Nine Oxen

[For] both legs, [one] stretches backward, [the other] leans forward.
The small abdomen [i.e. below the navel] relaxes [as though] empty and harnesses the breath.
Exert strength within the two shoulders.
Look at the fist, focus both eyes.

Sixth Pose: Extending Talons and Spreading Wings

Straighten the body, together with a glare in the eyes.
Push the hands forward.
Exert strength and return [hands] to position.
This skill should be completed seven times.

Seventh Pose: Nine Demons Drawing a Dagger

Tilt the head and bend the upper arms.
Embrace the head and the neck.
Turn the head back to position.
Do not protest at the strong force [of the stretch].
Rotate left and right in turn.
[Keep] body upright and breath peaceful.

Eighth Pose: Three Dishes Falling to the Ground

The upper palate firmly holds the tongue.
Open the eyes wide and focus attention on the teeth.
Spread the feet in squatting position.
Hands press strongly as though about to seize [something].
Both palms upturned at the same time.
As though adding a weight of more than a thousand *jin*.
Eyes staring, together with mouth closed.
Stand upright, feet not askew.

the possibility that this could be a scribal error, it remains an intriguing line.

Ninth Pose: The Azure Dragon Extends Its Claws

The azure dragon extends its claws.
 [Starting] from the left and exiting from the right.
 The practitioner imitates [the movement].
 The palms are level, the breath is full.
 Strength encompasses the shoulders and the back.
 Surrounding, it passes the knee.
 Both eyes focused levelly.
 Calm the breath, quiet the heart-mind.

Tenth Pose: The Crouching Tiger Pounces on Prey

Both feet apart in a squat, the body leaning as though toppling forward.
 Bend and stretch left and right legs in turn.
 Raise the head, and the chest adopts a forward pose.
 Flatten the back, and make the torso flat as a whetstone.
 Breathing in and out, the breath from the nose adjusts the “original *qi*”.
 The tips of the fingers touch the ground, supporting [the body].
 To [cause] the dragon to surrender, and the tiger to submit—the doings of immortals.
 Learning to attain one's “true form” is also to protect life.²

Eleventh Pose: To Bend the Bow

Both hands together holding the head,
 Bend the torso to between the knees.
 The head alone extends below the pelvis.
 The mouth clenches the teeth.
 Press the ears, as though stuffing [something to] block the sense of hearing,
 Adjust the “original *qi*” to its natural state.
 The tip of the tongue still in touch with the palate,
 Exert strength in the two bending elbows.

² The “true form” here refers to an aspect of Daoist visuality, the idea that one's “original form” contains within it aspects of the true Dao.

Twelfth Pose: Wagging the Tail

Knees straight and arms extended,

Push hands out to the ground.

Eyes staring and head raised,

Collect the mind and be of one will.

Arise and set the feet.

Twenty-one times,

Stretch the arms left and right

[Perform] seven [sets].

Switch to sitting posture,

Bend knees [sitting cross-legged], and droop the eyes in their sockets,

The mouth focuses upon the heart-mind.

The breath adjusts from the nose,

Entering [a state of] quiet, arise,

The exercises are then complete.

When these methods are examined overall,

The pictures form twelve [poses].

Indeed, who transmitted these [methods]?

In the period of the Five Kingdoms,

The Bodhidharma came from the West

And taught the Shaolin Monastery.

Yue-fei of the Song period

May serve as evidence

That for eliminating illness and prolonging life

There is no other skill such as this.