

Globalisation and the ‘Internal Alchemy’ in Chinese Martial Arts: The Transmission of Taijiquan to Britain

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Received: 20 June 2008 / Accepted: 10 March 2009 / Published online: 2 April 2009
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Abstract *Taijiquan* (*t'ai chi ch'uan*) is a Chinese martial art that has grown substantially in popularity and global reach since the mid-twentieth century. Known as an ‘internal’ martial art that combines combat techniques with meditation and longevity practices, it has influenced, and been influenced by, the global dissemination of Chinese medical and therapeutic techniques. Like other martial arts, its pedagogy and techniques were changed significantly in early twentieth century China and later during the Cultural Revolution, in line with ideals of physical fitness as a tool for social reform and nation building. In the mid-twentieth century, *taijiquan* migrated West, becoming aligned in the 1960s and 1970s with Western interest in holistic health, Asian meditative systems and Chinese martial arts, but its martial techniques were little known until the 1980s and 1990s. British *taijiquan* illustrates the complex outcomes of globalisation processes, resulting in the establishment of different hybrids. There is evidence of the transmission of simplified systems promoted by the Chinese government; of innovative adaptations, developed to suit Western needs; and practices that appear to have survived suppression in mainland China, to be reconfigured in the West. These varied outcomes have been enabled by diverse channels of transmission and by colonial relationships, for example between Britain and Hong Kong, whilst the opening of mainland China in the 1980s has added further exchanges and complexities. In Britain (as in China), at the start of the twenty-first century, *taijiquan* is mostly

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practiced with therapeutic and meditative aims, and its naturalistic perspective on human well-being and ageing resonates with current debates in preventative medicine and public health. As a ‘traditional’ martial art, *taijiquan* has a less predictable future, which will be influenced by the degree to which it engages with the competitive sporting arena of official Chinese *wushu* (martial arts) and the extent to which martial arts become subject to formal regulation. The future identity of *taijiquan* will depend on the ways that technical and cultural control is negotiated between continents and on the interest shown by the global scientific community in the value of *taijiquan* for understanding health and well-being.

Keywords Taijiquan · T’ai chi ch’uan · Martial arts · Globalisation · Tradition · Internal alchemy · Qigong · Ch’i kung

1 Introduction: Taijiquan, Traditions and Globalisation

*Taijiquan*¹ has become increasingly popular worldwide as a Chinese ‘internal’ martial art where ‘internal’ signals its emphasis on combat techniques blended with the practice of meditation and longevity exercises. The practice is associated with Confucian self-cultivation motifs and with Daoist ‘internal alchemy’ practices (*neidan*), including the type of calisthenic exercises known in their contemporary forms as *qigong*.² *Taiji* is commonly translated as ‘supreme ultimate’; the term has great significance in Chinese culture, as in the globally recognisable visual icon of the *Taiji Diagram (Taiji Tu)* of Neo-Confucian Zhou Dunyi (1017–73) that represents the polar principles of *yin* and *yang* (Graham 1989; Robinet 1990). *Quan* is usually rendered ‘fist’ and is the term commonly used in Chinese to denote a distinct system or style of martial art. The term *taijiquan* is used in this article for different practices that have become established in Britain during the twentieth century. However, the relative balance of martial and therapeutic emphasis varies widely among these systems; some lack a distinct combat focus and could arguably be named *qigong*, having ‘lost’ their martial traditions.

It has often been argued that under ‘modern’ conditions, earlier ‘traditions’ become disaggregated, and value judgements are invariably part of any analysis of ‘modernisation’ and ‘globalisation’, particularly where colonial histories are implicated. Commentaries on eradication and preservation of earlier practices, and on the use of ‘traditions’ to meet contemporary needs, tend to be underwritten by cultural values, historical bias and political orientation. This point is well illustrated in martial arts

¹ Pinyin romanisation is used throughout this article, although *taijiquan* and *qigong* are better known in the West in their Wade–Giles: *t’ai chi ch’uan* and *ch’i kung*.

² Contemporary use of the term *qigong* was formalised under communism; *qi* is commonly translated in English as ‘energy’ and *gong* as ‘effort’ or ‘work’. The ancestors of modern *qigong* systems were multiple; some originated in martial arts, others in therapeutic, ritualistic and shamanistic practices (Despeux 1989; Hsu 1999). Many current *qigong* routines derive primarily from the twentieth century, having been amalgamated and simplified at various points, with new routines invented and reincorporated in both martial and medical spheres. Analysis of twentieth century developments in *qigong* and the connections to ‘traditional Chinese medicine’ and to religious groups (such as Falun Gong) can be found in Xu (1999) and Palmer (2007).

where matters of loss, recovery and integrity of traditions are highly complex, and the practices have often been politically marked. For martial arts, the effects of modernising or globalising processes tend to be understood in terms of the loss of meditative or religious dimensions, with the result that contemporary practices are less integrated and more readily harnessed to medical or sporting purposes. Holcombe (1990) argues that this type of differentiation has affected Chinese martial arts, eclipsing their religious heritage in ways that follow Western trends (although he notes that similar splits may have occurred in earlier periods of China's history).

The example of 'globalised' *taijiquan* in the present case study is instructive; its twentieth century manifestations in China and in Britain appear to provide evidence of such disaggregated traditions and modernised practices geared towards medicine and sport. However, there are indications of more complex historical foundations and hints at an underlying integration in *taijiquan* 'traditions' that may be resurfacing in its globalised contemporary forms. It is not possible to demonstrate technical continuities prior to the nineteenth century for *taijiquan*; like other martial arts, it was developed primarily by oral transmission, so historical reconstruction is thwarted by many problems of evidence and method. This analysis therefore proceeds from the later nineteenth century on the basis of available understanding about the technical dimensions and socio-political setting of *taijiquan* in relation to European imperialism and exchange. The transmission of *taijiquan* to Britain shows the creative interplay and the various tensions between forces of globalisation and tradition and between its martial and therapeutic aspects, suggesting the need for careful analysis.

The aim is to explore changes in *taijiquan* in the twentieth century that can be examined under the banner of globalisation, considering developments in mainland China and the transmission of the art to Britain. An initial sketch is provided of the emergence of *taijiquan* from rural north China into Beijing and the urban context and its place in the nationalist drive to develop physical prowess for cultural revival. The Cultural Revolution was a significant prompt for its global dispersal, and this period is examined in terms of the promotion of simplified martial art systems for sporting purposes and the removal of the ritual structure for transmission of these arts. The migration of *taijiquan* to the West and the role played by Taiwan is presented as prelude to the extended discussion of its uptake in Britain, facilitated by the relationship with Hong Kong. The absorption of *taijiquan* into British culture is analysed with attention to the roles played by intellectual exchange, travel and migration, artistic and spiritual movements, martial arts subcultures and scientific interest.

When documenting the changes in Chinese martial arts practices, five technical components can be isolated for analysis across different systems and lineages. First is the practice of interconnected solo movement sequences known as 'hand forms' (*tao quan/tao lu*). Second is training in the use of weapons (*qixie*), which includes 'weapon forms' as practice routines. The third component is training in particular combat applications, collectively known as 'scattering hands' (*san shou*). The fourth element is methods to develop skill at close range contact (in *taijiquan*, this is known as *tui shou* or 'pushing hands'). Finally, all martial arts include 'qi-based' exercises (*qigong*) and certain conditioning exercises to develop strength (in contemporary *taijiquan*, some styles also include *neigong* 'internal strength' exercises which have varied martial, meditative and longevity aims). Overall trends in these technical

spheres are evaluated for British *taijiquan*, taking into account the changes of pedagogy and syllabus that characterise it in its twentieth century global contexts.

The term ‘globalisation’ is generally used to mark the acceleration and deepening of interdependence between societies at all levels, resulting from increasing industrialisation (Held et al. 1999). By highlighting how previous obstacles of distance have been overcome, for example by communications technologies, globalisation theorists have challenged certain tenets of classical social theory (including the idea of ‘society’ itself). Critics have pointed to the need for stronger theoretical foundations for the concept of ‘globalisation’, which is a descriptive motif for the process, but is also used as causal explanation for social change. To apply globalisation theories comprehensively to *taijiquan* would suppose a different agenda for the present volume; instead, first hand ethnographic materials and oral history are presented here without the imposition of theoretical interpretation³. However, one point will be emphasised for this analysis, which is the role and centrality of physical interaction and person-to-person contact in transmission of the art.

As a descriptor for our present condition, ‘globalisation’ encompasses a series of processes operating at different levels—economic, political, religious, technological, cultural and practical. For *taijiquan*, many levels of culture contact are implicated, but the practical and physical level is fundamental. This is particularly important when considering transmission of the art outside officially sanctioned channels, which has been a frequent factor in the history of Chinese martial arts. The reasons for the successful transfer of nineteenth century Chinese *taijiquan* to its newer twentieth century global settings can be framed at physiological and cultural levels (and the explanations ultimately involve both aspects). However, practical efficacy is an essential driver in its appeal; this concerns both its martial and its therapeutic dimensions, and the ‘internal’ motif that has assisted its successful adaptation onto the global stage from earlier origins in popular practice in rural China.

2 Taijiquan Traditions: Chinese Martial Arts and Internal Alchemy

To understand changes in twentieth century *taijiquan*, some contextualisation is needed regarding the ‘internal’ martial arts and the ‘internal alchemy’ (*neidan*) associations in *taijiquan*. In popular usage, Chinese martial arts tend to be categorised into two streams: ‘internal’ (*neijia*) and ‘external’ (*waijia*), also associated with ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ combat techniques, respectively. However, the foundations for this demarcation are questioned by scholars who query the historical evidence for the division,⁴ and by practitioners who claim that all combat systems

³ This article is based on qualitative research carried out in the UK since 1998, which informed my doctoral thesis (Ryan 2002). I am extremely grateful to Dan Docherty, Chair of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain and Taijiquan and Qigong Federation for Europe who provided invaluable discussion and information on developments in *taijiquan* and Chinese martial arts. Inevitably, many significant figures and events in British *taijiquan* are not included in this article; only certain details are selected to illustrate key themes and issues.

⁴ Most notably, the seventeenth century tombstone of a family of Ming patriots, referring to *neijiaquan* (internal school boxing) and suggesting resistance to the ‘external’ imposition of Manchu rule (Henning 1981; Wile 1996).

contain both 'soft' and 'hard' technical elements. In fact, the division is relative; it is more accurately understood as an indication of skill rather than any strict syllabus demarcation. 'Soft' technique refers to the enhanced efficacy resulting from techniques that use minimal force and that maximise choices in response to an opponent, such as an 'open hand' guard rather than a fist. Meditative practice is implicated in the use of such efficacious techniques, and there are religious dimensions to the 'internal' and 'external' labels in martial arts, which are associated with Daoism and Buddhism, respectively.⁵

The oral traditions, philosophical motifs and certain practical elements of internal martial arts such as *taijiquan* suggest links to Daoist meditation and 'internal alchemy' (*neidan*) practices;⁶ however, claims for pre-Qing connections between *neidan* and martial arts practices are controversial (Despeux 1976; Holcombe 1990; Wile 1996). In *taijiquan*, the *neidan* heritage appears in the etymology and in *neigong* 'internal strength' exercises; *neidan* allusions are also found in the texts known as the *Taijiquan Classics* that were 'discovered' in the nineteenth century⁷ (Despeux 1976). Their production is often viewed as part of the conscious promotion of an internal martial arts ideology, developed in the late Qing to express resistance to external threat (Wile 1996). The 'Internal School of Boxing' (*Neijia Quanfa*) was formed in 1894 to promote the arts of *taijiquan*, *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang*, with the involvement of *taijiquan* master Sun Lutang. Sun went on to produce books on all three arts after the dissolution of the Qing empire, linking them in published format for the first time (Henning 1997; Wile 1996).

Chinese martial arts had developed significantly during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, but many masters were not literate and techniques were often kept hidden. Only limited reconstruction is possible for *taijiquan* traditions prior to the seventeenth century, but the Chen family village (*Chenjiagou*) in Henan is a focal point as a known source for the two most prominent lineages in contemporary Chinese *taijiquan* in the eighteenth century. In terms of continuous transmission by teachers of recognisable systems, *taijiquan* is directly traceable without any breaks to Chen Changxing (1771–1853). 'Chen style' is identified with his legacy, whilst Yang Luchan (1799–1872), the figurehead of 'Yang style', was known to have trained in *taijiquan* at Chen village with Chen Changxing. Prior to Chen Changxing and Yang Luchan, there are gaps and confusions between

⁵ The terms may have been used in martial arts to indicate traditions of monastic seclusion in Buddhism where 'external' involved existence outside the mainstream, as opposed to Daoist 'indigenous' traditions where male adepts remained 'internal' to their communities. In the global *taijiquan* community, there has been considerable debate about the degree to which the prominent 'Chen style' contains 'external' influences (in its *pao chui* 'cannon fist' technique) that link it to the Buddhist-influenced boxing systems of the famous Shaolin temple.

⁶ *Neidan* ritual techniques, characterised by Joseph Needham as 'physiological alchemy', included massage, meditation, breath control and therapeutic exercise, informed by the concept of *taiji* (supreme ultimate) in the philosophical scheme of the *Yijing* appendices (Despeux 1989; Needham 1954; Robinet 1990).

⁷ The main texts are attributed to late eighteenth century martial artist Wang Zongyue and to the internal martial arts figurehead, fourteenth century Daoist hermit Zhang Sanfeng (Seidel 1970 discusses historical evidence for Zhang).

practitioners and styles at various points, not least in the interactions between the internal martial arts of *taijiquan*, *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang*.⁸ In 1852, Yang Luchan moved to Beijing and was appointed to teach his boxing to the Imperial Guard and members of the Qing Court. In taking the practice out of the village context, Yang played a defining role in triggering the wider dissemination of *taijiquan* through the major Chinese cities.

The impact of European incursions from the eighteenth century onwards had prompted further developments in Chinese martial arts and infused the political climate in which *taijiquan* evolved (Wile 1996). Events in the nineteenth century, such as the Opium War of 1839–1842, the Treaty of Nanking and cession of Hong Kong in 1842, triggered economic hardships and affiliations between martial artists and secret societies. The human casualties of subsequent events, such as the Taiping (1850–1864), Nien (1852–1868) and Boxer rebellions (1898–1900), resulted in a shared sense of the loss of Chinese military power and the need to protect and recover indigenous cultural foundations. In this respect, the emergence of *taijiquan* in early twentieth century China is deeply connected with the attempt to reinvent and defend the crumbling ‘semi-colonialised’ empire.

Historical narratives regarding the blending of techniques for combat efficacy, meditation and healing are complex and contested, suffering from the problems of evidence that afflict the scholarly study of martial arts practices more generally. Reconstructions of the development of Chinese martial arts rely heavily on oral history,⁹ problematic textual sources and narratives of wandering ‘knight-errants’ (*youxia*).¹⁰ Hagiography and secrecy have played a significant role in confounding the available materials (which include many competing and contradictory accounts) and official prohibitions contributed to the legacy of sparse, confusing evidence. Politically motivated suppression and control would then continue to affect *taijiquan* and other martial arts in the twentieth century under nationalist and communist influences, undermining their religious and ritual dimensions whilst maximising their therapeutic profile and health benefits.

3 The Standardisation and Promotion of Chinese Taijiquan

One of the first public martial arts schools, the Chin Woo Athletic Association, was founded in Shanghai in 1910 with an intention to preserve martial arts by removing their secrecy and using instructors from different styles (including *taijiquan* master

⁸ Continuous traces for *xingyiquan* (form and intent boxing) and *baguazhang* (eight trigrams palm) are to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. Other systems with the ‘internal’ label have more recent origins: *liuhebafa* (six harmonies eight methods) and *yiquan* (mind/intent boxing) both emerged in the early twentieth century.

⁹ Despite their growth in an era of textual production, the practical instruction mode and lack of literacy among most masters means that martial arts are best understood as the product of ‘secondary orality’ (Ong 1982).

¹⁰ Biographies of *youxia* blended fact and fiction to create the *wuxia* (martial arts heroes) narrative tradition, exemplified in the fourteenth century *Water Margin* (*Shui Hu Zhuan*), which was influential by the nineteenth century and an inspiration for the use of martial arts within sectarian groups (Holcombe 1990).

Wu Jianquan). Following the Xinhai revolution of 1911 and the abdication of Emperor Puyi in 1912, attempts to improve health in the early republic included the militarisation of educational culture in the warlord period (1917–1927). This was informed by Western trends in physical exercise for national vitality and linked to the failure of the Chinese 'Self-Strengthening' reform movement (*Ziqiang*; 1861–1894) and the perceived superiority of the Meiji modernisation process (*Meiji Ishin*) in Japan¹¹ (Wile 1996). The emergent nationalist agenda promoted martial arts via mass instruction and aimed to eradicate their potency and 'feudal' characteristics. In the 1920s and 1930s, public sporting events were developed and new Western sports were introduced; this was supported by prohibition of the private duels and 'bare knuckle' *lei tai* (fighting platform) contests that were common in the Qing era (Draeger and Smith 1969). In 1928, the Central Martial Arts Academy (*Zhongyang Guoshuguan*) was established to promote martial arts as *guoshu* (national arts), and the first sporting competition was held in Nanjing¹².

In *taijiquan*, the increase in teaching and diversification in the early decades of the twentieth century prompted the appearance of lineages or 'styles' marked by family names; the Chen and Yang styles were soon followed by other popular contemporary styles such as Wu, Hao and Sun.¹³ Family names were often assigned for pragmatic rather than technical reasons; for example, the emergence of Wu style from Yang was prompted by the need to distinguish Wu Jianquan and Yang Chengfu, as both were teaching in Shanghai during the same period. Adaptations were made to the pedagogy and syllabus of *taijiquan* to enable easier assimilation by large groups of students; in particular, repetitions and difficult movements were removed from the longer 'classical' hand forms. The first self-contained 'short' form was created by Zheng Manjing (1902–1975) who simplified the 108 postures of Yang style into a '37-step' routine. Prior to 1949, major changes had been made to simplify the classical hand forms in four of the main lineages, by Chen Fake (Chen style), Yang Chengfu (Yang style), Wu Gongyi (Wu style) and Hao Yueru (Hao style). New training aids were introduced, such as the '*taiji ruler*', a short wooden stick held in both hands and used in circular movements, as an alternative or supplement to the practice of the hand form.

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), *taijiquan* was supported by Mao Zedong as part of his initiative to develop *wushu* (martial arts) as exhibition sports. All martial arts were standardised, and in 1956, the PRC government tasked a team of experts with the creation of the first 'modernised' *taijiquan* form, the 'simplified 24-step Taijiquan' (based on Yang style). The official face of *taijiquan* changed

¹¹ Tan (2004) has described a similar process in Japan during the same era, following the Meiji restoration (1868–1912), with the inclusion of *karate* into education for the purpose of character building. Parallels might also be drawn with the emergence of the modern Olympic Games and its nationalist aspirations.

¹² It was recorded that some martial artists refused to take part, since the tradition of serious duels meant non-participation in sporting events and that no protective gear was worn and two deaths occurred, resulting in the competition being stopped and votes being cast to decide the winners (see further in Draeger and Smith 1969).

¹³ Hao style (also known as Wu Hao) was a variant within the Wu lineages, which informed the Sun style of Sun Lutang (Sun style also contains distinct influences from the martial arts *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang*).

during the Cultural Revolution; practice was particularly difficult due to persecution of martial artists.¹⁴ As a result, many martial artists retreated to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek and to other Asian countries where there was greater freedom of practice. However, as Deng Xiaoping's rectification programme progressed in the late 1970s and 1980s, there was significant uptake of *taijiquan* in China. A '48-step' routine was developed in 1976, composed of elements from the Yang, Chen, Wu and Sun styles. In 1989, this became the '42-step Taijiquan competition routine', which was promoted at the 11th Asian Games in 1990 and became the standard global competition style. Sports instructors were trained in a standard *wushu* syllabus (including standardised *taijiquan*) and appointed to posts in the provinces to expand the teaching of government-sanctioned *wushu*.¹⁵

Thoroughgoing alterations had been made to *taijiquan* as a result of the Cultural Revolution, including the loss of cultural connotations embedded in the names of particular techniques. Perhaps the most significant change was the anti-Confucian drive to eradicate *bai shi*, the initiation ritual to become an 'inside the door' student or 'disciple' (*men ren*) to learn martial arts. *Bai shi* had not been part of the Chin Woo movement during the nationalist era due to the desire to avoid secrecy and to preserve technical knowledge. The PRC government took further steps to eradicate the *bai shi* tradition, adopting the term *jiao lian* (coach) for the instructor role instead of the traditional address *shifu* (master). The practical result was that certain elements of *taijiquan*, usually taught only to *bai shi* students, such as certain *neigong* 'internal strength' exercises and combat techniques, seemed to have almost entirely disappeared from mainland China by the end of the twentieth century.¹⁶

The political environment in early and mid-twentieth century China had decisively influenced *taijiquan*, changing its ritual structure, syllabus and pedagogy. However, as these changes were being consolidated in the mid-twentieth century in martial arts (and similar processes were changing the shape of Chinese medical practices and *qigong*), other conduits for the dissemination of *taijiquan* opened up, and it began to migrate, often via other Asian countries, to Europe and America. Two significant channels, where Britain is concerned, were Taiwan and Hong Kong. One martial artist who had relocated to Taiwan, Zheng Man-jing, had a profound and lasting impact on Western *taijiquan* in general, stimulating mass uptake in the USA and Europe. The colonial relationship with Hong Kong between 1842 and 1997 also generated a significant conduit for the transmission of *taijiquan* to Britain, enabling many important twentieth century exchanges through travel and economic migration.

¹⁴ It is known among practitioners that in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, many *taijiquan* masters were under surveillance, others were victimized and some were sent to forced labour camps (*laogai*).

¹⁵ During the 1970s, the syllabus for *wushu* students at the Peking Physical Culture Institute included Chen style *taijiquan*, the composite *taijiquan* 24-step and 48-step forms, plus *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang*.

¹⁶ Commenting on the reconfiguration of *qigong* as part of modernised 'Traditional Chinese Medicine', Xu (1999) has also noted the disappearance of 'sexual alchemy' aspects of *neidan* during the twentieth century.

4 Taijiquan Transplanted: Global Exchanges and British Pioneers

Two broader histories of cultural exchange served as platforms for the migration of *taijiquan* to the West (and the *qigong* systems that accompanied it¹⁷): previous Western engagement with Asian philosophical traditions and with Asian martial arts. Intellectual exchanges and 'Orientalist' interests during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had laid foundations for the popular dissemination of Chinese traditions in the mid-twentieth century. Hegel, Weber, Heidegger and Mauss had shown interest in Daoism, although European thought was dismissive of it and had generally favoured Confucianism as a rational moral and social system (Clarke 2000). The transfer of Asian martial arts techniques to the West was also enabled by political events, as with the American military personnel who learned *karate* whilst stationed in Okinawa after the Second World War. Selected enclaves of Asian martial arts practice had gradually become established in the West through travel and intercultural exchange; for example, in the UK, Japanese martial arts were taught from 1918 at the influential London 'Budokwai' club¹⁸.

Chinese migration does not appear to have played a major role prior to the 1960s; in the case of *taijiquan*, it seems that any existing expertise tended to remain within Chinese communities until the 1960s, when Zheng Manjing was one of the first masters to open his classes to white Americans. American martial arts historian Robert Smith had been posted to Taiwan in 1959 as CIA intelligence link to the Kuomintang, through which he met Zheng and learned *taijiquan* from him. Zheng then migrated to America where Smith helped to establish his reputation; his short '37-step' form is still the best known hand form throughout the West. Zheng had trained with various *taijiquan* teachers and his popularity was aided by his expertise in other traditional Chinese arts, such as calligraphy. Western interest in Asian philosophies and meditative systems in the mid-twentieth century was connected with artistic experimentation, the holistic health movement and the growth of body-oriented psychotherapy. Many opportunities for exchange and collaboration arose, particularly in the USA from 1968 onwards when increased migration was allowed from China. One example was the Esalen Institute in California, established with the support of British philosopher Alan Watts, which frequently hosted Chinese dancer and *taijiquan* teacher Ai Huang Chungliang.¹⁹

The complex patterns of interaction between minority ethnic communities and their broader societal contexts make it difficult to pinpoint first points of contact and transplantation for *taijiquan* in Britain. The case of Chee Soo (1919–1994) and 'Li

¹⁷ It was noted earlier that Chinese martial arts include *qigong* exercises and were therefore a significant mode of transfer, in addition to the transmission of *qigong* as part of 'traditional Chinese medicine' practice.

¹⁸ The Budokwai club was established in London's South Kensington district as the first public membership club for *judo* in Europe. It played a significant role in the development of Asian martial arts practice in the UK, offering training in the Japanese systems of *jiujutsu* and *kenjutsu* (Goodger 1982).

¹⁹ Watts learned some *taijiquan* from Huang who had migrated to the USA seeking exile and to study; the two later produced the iconic book *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, published in 1975 after Watts' death. Watts also became involved, through the American Academy of Asian Studies, with Gia-Fu Feng whose influential translations of the *Lao Tzu—Tao Te Ching* (1972) and *Chuang Tzu—Inner Chapters* (1974) he promoted.

style' *taijiquan* illustrates this point, as well as the problems of distinguishing *taijiquan* practice within the broader context of Asian martial arts. British born of mixed English and Chinese parentage, Chee Soo (also known as Clifford Gibbs) was a founder member of the British Kung Fu Council, who taught Japanese martial arts in London from the late 1940s and assisted with stunt sequences for the popular television show *'The Avengers'*. In later decades, as the popularity of *taijiquan* increased, he reverted to teaching the 'Daoist martial arts' he had learned from a Chinese migrant in London in the 1930s. Chee Soo's practice has not always been accepted in the UK as *taijiquan*²⁰, but his case underlines the fact that some practices apparently linked to *taijiquan* had taken root in the UK prior to the 1960s.

Gerda 'Pytt' Geddes (1917–2006) is generally acknowledged as the first person to teach a recognised style of *taijiquan* in Britain. Her teaching also pre-dated the excitement about Chinese martial arts generated by the television series *'Kung Fu'* (1972–1975) and the Bruce Lee film *'Enter the Dragon'* (1973). Geddes was a dancer and Reichian therapist who had moved to Shanghai in the late 1940s, where she first encountered *taijiquan*. As a woman, her desire to learn the art had been viewed with perplexity, and customs regarding physical contact meant that she was only instructed in solo practice. She learned 'classical' Yang form in Hong Kong in the 1950s, and after returning to the UK in 1959, she started to teach *taijiquan* at 'The Place' (part of the London Contemporary Dance School) in the early 1960s. Geddes taught until close to her death, leaving a substantial legacy of teachers who trained with her. Her work underlines the role played by performance arts subcultures in disseminating the art; interestingly, this was mirrored in the USA in the work of dancer Sophia Delza Glassgold (1904–1996) who opened a *taijiquan* school in New York in 1954.²¹

Other early UK pioneers included white British men with experience in other Asian martial arts who also facilitated the circulation of books and materials on *taijiquan*. Paul Crompton first saw *taijiquan* performed by Gerda Geddes in 1967 and went on to study Yang and Wu styles, which he taught in London and demonstrated at the London Budokwai *judo* club. Crompton had a background in *karate* and published the influential magazine *Karate and Oriental Arts*. Another prominent figure in the 1970s was Danny Connor (1944–2000) who was also trained in *karate*. Connor encountered *taijiquan* in Japan in the 1960s and learned the Zheng Manjing '37-step' form in Singapore from a *wing chun* master. Returning to the UK in 1972, he began teaching and opened the shop 'Oriental World' in Manchester. Connor was the first British citizen to attend the Peking Physical Culture Institute in the 1970s where he learned the standardised 24-step, 48-step and *taijiquan* sword forms and became one of the first to teach these forms in Britain.

There were significant inputs during this early period from Chinese teachers with experience in the range of internal martial arts. Chu King-Hong was born in China and raised in Hong Kong; during the 1970s, his 'International Tai Chi Chuan

²⁰ His daughter, Lavinia Soo-Warr, gained recognition from the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain (TCUGB) for his 'Li style', but the practice of other former students of Chee Soo has not been accepted as *taijiquan*.

²¹ Delza had trained in Chinese theatrical dance in Shanghai in the 1940s where she also learned Wu style *taijiquan*. She is credited as the first Western author of an English language book on the art in 1961.

Association' in London was the first contact for a number of British students who became *taijiquan* teachers. He taught Yang style *taijiquan*, *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang* and, unusually for this period, weapons training in sword and sabre. A second notable presence was Rose Shao-Chiang Li (1914–2001), an upper middle class Anglican from Beijing with a background in missionary and educational work.²² From 1975 onwards, she taught *taijiquan*, *xingyiquan* and *baguazhang* in Durham, in Manchester (at the invitation of Danny Connor) and in London. She was also said to have de-emphasised martial aspects to focus on the artistic and philosophical dimensions, urging her students to understand *taijiquan* as a way to access Chinese culture. At these early stages, *taijiquan* was only available in small enclaves, and the general orientation appears to have been more towards self-cultivation than martial expertise.

5 The Diversification and Consolidation of British Taijiquan

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, British *taijiquan* became more diverse; new teachers emerged and opened schools, making teaching available from a wider range of styles. One example was Dan Docherty who established the 'Practical Tai Chi Chuan' school in London in 1984, teaching a comprehensive syllabus with *san shou* training, *bai shi* initiation and *neigong* exercises.²³ Docherty trained in 'Wudang' style *taijiquan* in Hong Kong in the 1970s under Cheng Tin-Hung whilst serving in the Royal Hong Kong Police. Unlike most British teachers, he had competition experience, having won the open weight category at the 5th South-East Asian Martial Arts Championship in Malaysia in 1980. He also introduced various innovations in the training methods and syllabus of his school in both hand forms and the use of weapons, at times drawing on Western martial traditions. The Wudang presence was indicative of growth in the martial dimensions of British *taijiquan*, and gradually, styles with a stronger martial focus were also introduced from the Yang, Wu, Chen, Sun and Hao lineages, particularly as China opened up during the 1980s.

Specialist seminars and workshops developed, providing supplementary training to the regular class format and facilitating the input of renowned teachers from across Asia. This became an important mechanism for development of the art, creating opportunities for exchange outside individual clubs and lineage divisions, from greater numbers and outside the major UK cities. The fact that *taijiquan* appealed to those with martial, spiritual and therapeutic interests meant that it was absorbed in varied contexts and with different inputs; perhaps inevitably, a degree of fission appeared. A 'softer', health-oriented trajectory (more closely connected to artistic and spiritual subcultures) seemed to contrast with 'harder', martially oriented styles (whose practitioners were often connected to existing martial arts subcultures).

²² Rose Li had learned martial arts before the revolution, and as communism overtook China, she migrated to the USA and later to the UK where she taught Chinese at Durham University.

²³ Cheng Tin-Hung was known for teaching effective martial *taijiquan*; the Wudang style had links to both Wu and Yang lineages. In 1976, he was charged with implementing a government initiative to bring *taijiquan* to Hong Kong's housing estates to improve public health. Despite his martial reputation, he also left a legacy of health-oriented *taijiquan* through this programme and a strong cohort of female teachers in Hong Kong.

Dan Docherty organised the first British competition in London in 1989, which was anathema to those who viewed *taijiquan* primarily as a meditative art and saw competitions as the corrupt influence of secular sporting culture.²⁴

Since the 1960s and 1970s, British practitioners had continued to explore potential synergies between *taijiquan* and other artistic, therapeutic and meditative practices. This type of innovation was demonstrated in the work of Linda Chase Broda who had trained in various styles and ran a *taijiquan* school in Manchester. Broda worked with *taijiquan* in the geriatric and psychiatric units of her local hospital using adapted movement sequences to harness the meditative and longevity benefits of the art for those with particular conditions. The visibility of *qigong* also increased in the UK in the 1990s, particularly as acupuncture and ‘Traditional Chinese Medicine’ became more prominent within the ‘Complementary and Alternative Medicine’ (CAM) movement. Growing numbers of British practitioners were exploring the potential therapeutic applications of *taijiquan* and *qigong* and some research had been carried out in Britain, in tandem with growing scientific interest.²⁵

The apparent division between martial and health *taijiquan* was in fact often superficial; *qigong* and meditation featured in both spheres and most Western students were drawn by the integration of these dimensions. There were permeable boundaries between the interests and audiences for martial arts, spiritual practices and alternative health techniques, which is illustrated in the examples of Michael Tse and Jason Chan. Tse, a policeman from Hong Kong who had trained in Daoist ‘Wild Goose’ *qigong*, Chen style *taijiquan* and *wing chun*, was supported by Danny Connor to establish himself as a teacher in Manchester. He opened the ‘Tse Qigong Centre’ in 1991 and launched *Qi* magazine, going on to become one of the most prominent *qigong* teachers in the UK in the 1990s. Chan had learned *wing chun* from his father in Hong Kong and taught Chinese martial arts after arriving in the UK, then added the ‘Daoist arts’ he had learned in Holland to his martial arts practice, creating his own system of ‘Infinite Tai Chi’, underwritten by the universalist approach to spirituality associated with the ‘New Age’ movement.

Britain has no professional recognition framework for martial artists and practitioners can promote themselves as instructors, whether they represent a known lineage or one of their own design and regardless of their level of expertise.²⁶ The British Council for Chinese Martial Arts (BCCMA), which evolved in 1973 from the British Kung Fu Council, is the sole association with UK Sports Council recognition to represent Chinese martial arts practitioners. However, it emphasises sporting aspects of martial arts, and in 1991, the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain (TCUGB)

²⁴ The ‘British Open Tai Chi Championships’ have continued each subsequent year, attracting around 150–200 competitors in hand and weapon forms, pushing hands and ‘full contact’ *san shou*.

²⁵ The scientific community showed interest in the value of *taijiquan* for balance training and falls prevention in elderly people after research in the USA indicated significant benefits, prompting a wave of further trials and investigations (Province et al 1995; Sandlund & Norlander 2000). Exploratory British studies on physiological and psychological topics include Channer et al., (1996), Mills and Whiting (1997) and Mills et al (2000).

²⁶ The main issues and constraints that affect them concern risk and safety legislation; for example, to gain a BCCMA licence requires private indemnity insurance, and in 2008, the making, selling, hiring and importing of samurai swords was made illegal under the Criminal Justice Act, a ruling that includes curved *taijiquan* sabres.

was formed as an alternative, with an inclusive vision to represent all styles and aspects of the art. In its autonomy from the BCCMA, the TCUGB functions as a semi-professional association and provides a separate representative body, which is unusual among Asian martial arts in the UK. Notably, both BCCMA and the TCUGB have explored possibilities for professional qualifications, but existing educational frameworks have proved difficult to reconcile with the task of assessing diverse styles, training purposes and technical elements. In a climate where formal regulation is not yet in place, martial artists can still avoid the pressure to 'professionalise', which is increasingly unavoidable for alternative therapists, but there are unresolved issues of professional expertise, particularly in the relationship between *taijiquan* and conventional medical practice.

In 2000, a network of UK instructors established the 'Tai Chi and Chi Kung Forum for Health' (TCCKF) to address training needs arising from their work in the biomedical arena and to increase the profile of this work and the acceptability of their training in these contexts. Initiated by Linda Chase Broda, the TCCKF began to design workshops on anatomy and physiology, biomedical models of diagnosis and care and ways to adapt *taijiquan* for use in medical and social care. The TCUGB instructors register remains the sole recognition system for *taijiquan* teachers in Britain, although in its early years, many practitioners, particularly those working primarily with therapeutic aims, had hesitated to join as they perceived it as martially biased (whilst others had avoided collective representation in principle). However, instructor listings grew from around 55 in 1993 to 520 in 2008, and the growing climate of state regulation in Europe has arguably made recognition via the TCUGB more desirable. The autonomy of the TCUGB provides freedom to mediate the state regulatory contexts for sports and medicine and some protection against the disaggregation of the practice that might occur with enforced regulation. The emergence of the TCUGB and the TCCKF highlights the challenge of creating modes of formal association in the West to support the diversity of *taijiquan* as both 'martial art' and 'therapeutic art' (and to bridge the division of 'internal' and 'external' martial arts).²⁷

6 'Modern' British Taijiquan and the Effects of Globalisation

Taijiquan in Britain at the start of the twenty-first century can be viewed in terms of a core-periphery model in both the technical emphasis and the respective numbers of practitioners. The majority of practice in the 'periphery' is geared towards therapeutic and meditative aims, with mass uptake but less martial content and often a narrower range of elements in the syllabus. At the 'core' are the minority, oriented towards comprehensive martial arts training; this includes therapeutic, meditative and artistic aspects and involves the wider syllabus. There are permeable boundaries between core and periphery, as practitioners often shift emphasis in their practice. As with all arts, individuals develop certain interests, exchange practice

²⁷ One response to these tensions has been the recent collaborative initiative between the TCUGB and the BCCMA to produce a new magazine entitled *Tai Chi Chuan and Oriental Arts* covering all the Chinese martial arts ('internal' and 'external') as well as the range of *qigong* exercises and related practices.

with others and are influenced by political and economic circumstances; the cases of Jason Chan and Michael Tse are interesting examples of such overlaps and changes. The result is variation arising within lineage styles, and lineages tend to be viewed in certain ways by practitioners; for example, Yang Chengfu styles are perceived to be health-oriented, whilst Wudang style is held to be martially oriented, although such characterisations can be misleading. Loosely gathered around the ‘internal’ motif, and now organised within an increasingly diverse range of ‘lineages’, *taijiquan* continues to shift and blend in response to individual priorities and external contexts. This complexity allows practitioners to frame their connections to *taijiquan* ‘traditions’ in different ways despite their different orientations towards therapeutic or martial dimensions of the art.

Consideration of the five technical components of martial arts helps to clarify this evaluation of British *taijiquan* and the overall picture of these diverse inputs and interests. Hand forms (*tao quan/tao lu*) are now taught in all the main lineages, but shortened, composite ‘modern’ forms are most prevalent. The Zheng Manjing form is significant in the UK and throughout the West, whereas it is little known in China, and the Wudang style from Cheng Tin-Hung now has a strong UK base under Dan Docherty, but would be considered a minority strand within China. Yang styles have the strongest overall presence in the UK, although others such as Chen are increasingly well known (in China, Yang and Chen are the two most influential styles). New hand forms have also been created in Britain; some of these innovations have been for pedagogic efficiency, whilst others have been aimed at particular therapeutic needs and physical capabilities. ‘Pushing hands’ (*tui shou*) partnered training is relatively common, but the degree of martial emphasis varies widely. In the majority of classes, there is comparatively little focus on weapons training (*qixie*), combat applications (*san shou*) and the conditioning exercises found in other martial arts (such as punching with weights). *Qigong* exercises are popular and systems vary, but very few ‘internal strength’ (*neigong*) routines are in evidence.²⁸ Only two of the main styles include these exercises: the Wudang style under Dan Docherty and Wu style under Gary Wragg, both of whom teach them in a *bai shi* ritual context.

The rapid uptake of the art since the 1960s for meditative and therapeutic purposes is probably its most distinctive feature, and this is also reflected in the demographic picture. The demographics for British *taijiquan* appear to differ slightly from other Asian martial arts in the West in that women are a significant presence and there are high numbers of older participants (aged 40 plus).²⁹ This distinctiveness in age and gender is indicative of public awareness of *taijiquan* as

²⁸ The practice of ‘sexual alchemy’ techniques that claim association with the *neidan* tradition is also rare in the UK; one example is the teaching of Mantak Chia from Thailand, who has trained a number of British students.

²⁹ These demographic characterisations are based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 1998 and 2002 in particular, with more recent updates, based on surveys at events and classes, and teachers’ views of their student groups (Ryan 2002). The presence of women as a whole is noticeable, but detailed and specific research would be required to assess proportions of martially oriented women in *taijiquan* compared to other martial arts. An increase in sporting and *wushu* dimensions would clearly alter the current demographic trend towards older practitioners, encouraging the participation of greater numbers of young people.

a system of Chinese longevity exercise more than a martial art, but there are no easily discernible trends in occupation or income bracket, and the participation of ethnic minority groups appears to reflect the general proportions of the British population. In China, *taijiquan* has also been promoted for its therapeutic benefits during the twentieth century, in line with *qigong*, resulting in large-scale uptake. In both societies, it could be claimed that there has been overall decrease in the intensity and range of the martial art due to the promotion of the practice for well-being. Equally, it could be argued that those training comprehensively in martial arts for combat efficacy will always be a minority interest, and *taijiquan* hybrids oriented more towards health and meditation simply draw a wider audience than any martial art could hope to appeal to.

In China, *taijiquan* is still known historically as martial art, unlike the UK where public perception is focused more on its meditative and therapeutic aspects. This highlights interesting issues about globalisation processes and the dynamics of cultural and technical ownership of *taijiquan*. The initial appeal of *taijiquan* in the West was greatly enhanced by the links to Daoist 'internal alchemy' and meditative practice, as well as the explicit integration of martial and artistic dimensions. Uptake of the internal martial arts to access Chinese aesthetics was actively promoted by Rose Li and Zheng Manjing (the latter was popularly known as 'master of five excellences' due to his skill in other arts). This type of 'cultural capital' is reflected in the influence of Asian practitioners in the West and the fact that migrant economic successes have been possible due to the respect given to those with direct access to the *taijiquan* heritage. In Britain for example, the 'Chen Style Tai Chi Centre' was established in 1997 in Manchester under Yue Liming and has quickly become the highest profile UK dissemination point for Chen style *taijiquan*. Ongoing interest in *taijiquan* has led to the transfer of economic benefits back to China, as the numbers of Western practitioners making training visits have increased since the 1990s. Sites connected to the internal martial arts heritage have been commercialised accordingly; new training facilities and a museum have been created at the Chen family village in Henan, whilst development of the Wudang temple complex in Hubei has included the establishment of many new martial arts schools.³⁰

Ownership of the *taijiquan* heritage also involves management of its technical dimensions, which is visible in the sporting context and the standardisation of practice required for competitions. The work of the International Wushu Federation (IWUF) since its establishment in 1990 is fundamental in this respect due to its affiliation with the International Olympic Committee (IOC).³¹ *Taijiquan* is a distinct event in global *wushu* competitions, although the degree to which *wushu* systems will follow *judo* and *taekwondo* in becoming competitive sports is uncertain since the petition for *wushu* to become an official event in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games

³⁰ The Wudang site is linked to the internal martial arts figurehead Zhang Sanfeng and commercial initiatives around it mirror those generated at the Shaolin temple in response to earlier interest in 'external' martial arts.

³¹ The IWUF was established in Beijing and admitted to the IOC in 1999. It has member federations worldwide, including the BCCMA in the UK, which forms part of the European Wushu Federation (EWUF).

was rejected.³² The IWUF role also raises issues of categorisation and recognition for global *taijiquan*, touching on the diversity of styles and matters of status (for example regarding inclusion of the Zheng Manjing style, which has little presence in China). The *duan* (dan) grading system for *wushu* adopted by the IWUF has also been accepted in principle by its European branch (EWUF) despite the fact that *taijiquan* has never formerly operated with a *duan* system.³³ At European level, a number of national *taijiquan* organisations formed the Taijiquan and Qigong Federation for Europe (TCFE) in 1997, creating an alternative continental forum to the official *wushu* organisations in the same way that TCUGB exists as an alternative to BCCMA at the national level in Britain.

The migration of *taijiquan* to Britain has enabled different practices to become established, and this evaluation points to three important varieties as outcomes or effects of globalisation. First, there is evidence of the transmission of state-sanctioned systems that were simplified for pedagogic and political reasons during the twentieth century as part of ‘official’ Chinese *wushu*. Second, there are clear examples of the emergence of *taijiquan* and *qigong* practices adapted for the British context and guided by Western priorities to serve spiritual, health and social needs. Third, there are signs of the apparent retention, in limited ways, of relatively marginal practices, such as the ‘internal alchemy’ (*neigong*) exercises taught after ritual initiation (*bai shi*), despite the suppression of such traditions in China. These varieties cut across the ‘therapeutic’ and ‘martial’ spheres in the core–periphery model, and all have been touched by ‘modernisation’ in the form of pedagogic innovation in both British and Chinese contexts and the search for efficacy in contemporary techniques and practices.

7 Conclusion: Taijiquan and Intercultural Dynamics

Historical events, colonial relationships, earlier conflicts and present concerns all inform the value judgements applied to the migration of people and practices, and in *taijiquan*, disapproval of ‘globalisation’ has often turned on notions of ‘loss’ and ‘appropriation’ of traditions. As has been shown, the loss of some aspects of *taijiquan* (e.g. classical hand forms) resulted from the pedagogic shifts required for mass dissemination and aimed at the preservation of knowledge in early twentieth century China. In Britain in the later twentieth century, conscious pedagogic innovation has changed the art in both its therapeutic and its martial uses, as the examples of Broda and Docherty show. Clearly, the dominant trend is towards its uptake for therapeutic reasons, in resonance with the global distribution of Chinese

³² Debates persist over whether the IOC decision was guided by concern over the increasingly unmanageable size of the Olympics or whether it revealed Western bias or views that *wushu* systems are insufficiently ‘secular’ (echoing earlier debates over the Buddhist dimensions of *judo* before it was included in 1964).

³³ Unsurprisingly, points of contestation arise over the award of *duans* to individuals with IWUF allegiances. Kano Jigoro, founder of modern *judo*, promoted the dan grading system for martial arts, using the system that originated for recognition of other cultural attributes and skills in the Tokugawa shogunate period (1603–1868).

medical practices and *qigong* systems discussed elsewhere in this volume. Claims about the loss of religious aspects (e.g. meditative techniques or ritual initiation) need careful articulation, as most *taijiquan* systems in Britain are strongly geared to meditative practice, and despite the liberal educational context, there is some continuity of the traditional discipleship mode of instruction. Claims about the loss of martial dimensions are also difficult to prove, given the problems of historical evidence in martial arts and the changing social contexts that influence the need for efficacy in physical combat. Differentiation is evident in the use of contemporary *taijiquan* in medical and sports arenas (and as part of official Chinese *wushu*), but the core of British practice still strives towards the integration of martial and therapeutic dimensions and continuity of its meditative ethos³⁴.

Nuanced analysis is also necessary regarding 'appropriation' and the issues of power and influence in global *taijiquan*, as these dynamics are complex and often bidirectional. European incursions in the nineteenth century certainly influenced *taijiquan*, and prior political and intellectual engagement between the West and China set the scene for its global dispersal in the mid-twentieth century. The Cultural Revolution was the key prompt for transmission of a practice almost entirely unknown to the West, and its resonance with Western cultural concerns ensured the success of this transfer. The British case shows clearly that the colonial relationship with Hong Kong enabled significant exchanges, in the contributions of Gerda Geddes, Chu King Hong, Dan Docherty and Michael Tse. Additional catalysts in recent decades have nourished and expanded the globalisation of *taijiquan*: economic migration, the 1970s 'kung fu' craze, media dissemination, the increasing affordability of global travel and, more recently, the rapid expansion of electronic communications. As *taijiquan* increases in popularity, ownership of its heritage and management of its techniques (and the ability to generate the associated economic benefits) is crucial to the analysis of 'globalisation' processes.

The West has made its mark on *taijiquan*, adapting it to suit its priorities and purposes: therapeutic, martial, scientific and spiritual; but China has also responded by reasserting control. The globalisation of *taijiquan* can be understood as an illustration of the process of 'Easternisation of the West' (Campbell 1999). It demonstrates the pragmatic outcomes, at individual and interpersonal levels, of ongoing Western interest in Asian martial and meditative practices for their spiritual, therapeutic and self-defence benefits. This appeal is not simply 'aesthetic' or 'ideological'; concerns with practical efficacy have driven this process as part of the move towards effective self-directed healthcare. One of the most interesting arenas for future intercultural exchange around *taijiquan* will be scientific due to shifts in the twentieth century towards enhanced (and demonstrable) efficacy in health and medicine. The scientific literature for *taijiquan* has expanded rapidly since the 1990s, touched by agendas in both 'evidence-based' and 'alternative' medical practice and the need to address systemic problems and challenges in autoimmune and chronic illness in preventative medicine and public health. It is notable that

³⁴ One of the most interesting and well-researched forthcoming publications on *taijiquan* from the practitioner community (Docherty 2009) explores the technical expressions of its proposed roots in both *neidan* 'internal alchemy' practice and the type of boxing technique evidenced in the *Classic of Boxing* (*Quan Jing*) text on military practices compiled by sixteenth century General Qi Jiguang (1528–1587).

whilst the documented effects of globalisation include both widening health inequalities and rising social violence, the scientific gaze appears less focused on investigating the use of Asian martial arts to manage violence. Understanding the dynamics of efficacy and appeal will depend on the ways in which control of global *taijiquan*, culturally and scientifically, practically and conceptually, is negotiated in future decades. The British case will be an interesting indicator, as its present diversity suggests an impulse towards reintegration and greater coherence within the practice of *taijiquan* and in its relationship to other Chinese therapeutic practices and martial arts.

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