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Chapter Eight

Qigong in America*

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Qigong 氣功 (Ch'i-kung) most basically refers to exercises (*gong*) that involve the circulation of *qi*, a term which may refer to physical breath and a more subtle pneuma, vapor, or vital energy. In a wider cultural context, Qigong is a modern Chinese health and longevity movement with its own particular history. Only emerging in the early twentieth century and coming to prominence from the 1950s onwards, it developed as a Chinese nativist response to the challenges of a Western scientific paradigm, modernization, and colonialism.¹ Originally a syncretic and secularist phenomenon, in recent years it has come to lay more spiritual claims and has made inroads in religious organizations, both in China and the West.

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¹ In her study of modern millennial movements, Catherine Wessinger provides the following definition: "A *nativist millennial movement* consists of individuals who feel oppressed by a foreign colonizing government, believing that the government is removing the natives [*sic*] from their land and eradicating their traditional way of life" (2000, 159). If one accepts that such forms of colonization and oppression may also occur in mental spaces, and that the "foreign government" may be ideological as well as ethnic, then Qigong may be understood as an indigenous Chinese response to the ideological challenge of Communism with its secularist and materialistic worldview. That is, Communism, especially as implemented by Mao Zedong, represented a challenge to traditional Chinese culture, which culminated in the Cultural Revolution.

Qigong incorporates facets of traditional Chinese cosmological theories (yin-yang, five phases, etc.), Chinese medicine, long life pursuits, healing exercises, Daoist and Buddhist aspects, as well as Western medical and scientific paradigms. Its history resembles that of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the modern form of Chinese healing systematized by the Communist government under the influence of Western biomedicine. Like TCM, Taiji quan and Fengshui, Qigong is not Daoist in origin or essence. On the most general level, Qigong emphasizes personal health and well-being, and one could argue that this is one defining characteristic that stands in contrast to the historical contours of the Daoist tradition (see Cohen 1997; Kohn 2000; Palmer 2005; 2006).

Following the Communist revolution that resulted in the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the unleashing of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Qigong spread throughout the world and is now a transnational movement. In America, Chinese immigrants first introduced it in the 1950s, with a sharp increase in practitioners when immigration laws were liberalized in 1965. The first publication solely dedicated to Qigong appeared in 1973. This period was followed by a second generation of teachers, mostly Euro-Americans who studied under Chinese immigrants or traveled to China or Taiwan for their training.

Today there are as many Qigong forms as there are Qigong teachers and organizations. As in China, Qigong in America as much as in Europe, Japan, and elsewhere is primarily a health and fitness movement that is increasingly picked up by quasi-religious groups and used for more spiritual purposes. It has become widespread mainly because of its health-enhancement and healing properties, and in the West has joined the alternative spirituality and complementary health care movements. Its popularity is thus the result of complex historical and cultural factors, including mainland Chinese politics, American immigration rules, as well as the American counter-culture, the New Age movement, and the increasing dissatisfaction with conventional health care.

Categories of Qigong

Like any large-scale cultural development, Qigong is complex and multidimensional. Four major categories may be identified: martial, medical, Buddhist, and Daoist (Miura 1989, 341-53; Liang and Wu 1997; Reid 1998, 43-63). They are somewhat problematic, since many Qigong systems are syncretic and innovative, often intentionally combining aspects from different Chinese traditions as well as utilizing the rhetoric of tradition and lineage to generate increased cultural capital. One must also distinguish emic (insider) accounts, which are often mythological ("This form originated with Hua Tuo," "Qigong is over 5,000 years old"), from a historically nuanced understanding of the actual origins of and motivations behind such constructions (see Kohn 2001; Miller 2003).

Martial Qigong is usually associated with martial arts, Gongfu, and the so-called internal styles of Bagua zhang 八卦掌 (Eight Trigram Palm), Taiji quan 太極拳 (Great Ultimate Boxing), and Xingyi quan 形意拳 (Form Intent Boxing). It develops internal power and martial prowess, hardening the body by condensing *qi* in its external layers. One example is Iron Shirt Qigong, which involves hitting oneself with fists, paraphernalia (e.g., rice-filled socks), or external objects (e.g., trees) (see Chia 1986; Liang and Wu 1997, 237-77). Martial Qigong is frequently used as a supplement to formal martial arts training.

Medical Qigong is associated with TCM and sometimes prescribed as part of a treatment. It may be preventative or curative, maintaining health or working as a remedy. It enhances health, understood as the smooth flow of *qi* throughout the organ-meridian system, and eliminates disease, seen as excess, stagnation, or obstruction. There are innumerable preventative medical Qigong methods; they form the majority of exercises currently in circulation and advocated by practitioners (see Cohen 1997). With its key emphasis on health, vitality, and longevity, medical Qigong is a secular or at least transreligious practice, so that people of any religious or cultural background can benefit from it. Representative examples of curative medical Qigong include exercises aimed at specific medical conditions, such as spleen-*qi* deficiency, eye problems, and so forth (see Liang and Wu 1997, 23-75; J. A. Johnson 2000).

There are also martial and medical forms of Qigong that involve "issuing" or "emitting *qi*" (*faqi* 發氣). Martial practitioners use their in-

ner power to defeat an opponent, often through dramatic demonstrations wherein the person in question is thrown across a room or open space. Medical adepts often practice external *qi*-healing, most commonly using intention and the Labor Palace (Laogong 勞宮; PC-8) point in the center of the palm to send *qi* into another person (Cohen 1997, 242-64). This may be considered a form of therapeutic touch. There are important precautions that must be taken when engaging in external *qi*-healing to avoid transmitting toxins into the patient or absorbing the patient's diseased *qi*.

The other two categories of Qigong, Buddhist and Daoist, are slightly more problematic. Should one merely accept practitioners' self-identification of the practices, or should one adopt a more skeptical set of evaluative criteria? Should one define such forms of Qigong as limited to those that originate in the respective traditions and are practiced and advocated by adherents, or should one also include those that merely claim affinities with certain religious worldviews?

Today few Qigong systems originate in Buddhist or Daoist contexts. Some forms have mythological associations, Daoists and Buddhists practice certain exercises, and Qigong groups are on occasion affiliated with religious communities, but in general religious links are highly dubious. That is, few practitioners of Huashan Qigong (L. Johnson 2001; 2002) or Wudang Qigong (Liu 1999) have trained at these Daoist mountain monasteries or studied with their affiliates. They have no lineage standing in a Daoist school and no formal training in these systems. In addition, the religious goals and ideals of Daoism play little or no role in the practice, the main concern of Daoists often being on ritual and devotion rather than the physical component of the teachings. Thus, Min Zhiting 閔智亭 (1924-2004), former Chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association, in his manual on Daoist monastic life makes no mention of Qigong (Min 1990). Similarly, in the recent *Taoism* (2002), published by the Chinese Daoist Association, there are only two photographs of physical practice. This English-language publication, written by Daoists, depicts Daoism as a monastic, ritualistic, and meditative tradition.

Nevertheless, some Qigong systems are associated with Buddhist or Daoist lineages, such as the Buddhist Shaolin Temple in Henan and Mount Emei in Sichuan, as well as the Daoist Mount Hua in Shaanxi and Mount Wudang in Hubei. From what we know today, most of these exercises emerged in a secular, lay context and were later legitimized through association with a well-known saint or famous sacred site. Buddhists thus have "Bodhidharma's Muscle Changing and

Marrow Cleansing Exercises" (see Yang 1989b; Cohen 1997, 194-99), linked with the first Chinese patriarch of Chan Buddhism, with Shaolin Temple, and with some *mūdras* (sacred gestures), but otherwise not particularly religious or Buddhist in nature.

There is, however, also Buddhist Qigong in the narrower sense. It utilizes Tantric views of the body together with *mūdras* and *mantras* (sacred sounds) and locates the practitioner within a context of *samsāra* and the search for liberation. It bears the influence of Indian Yogic and Tibetan Buddhist views and practices, as well as the belief in the sacred and magical power of Sanskrit seed syllables.² It can be described as a popular modification of more esoteric Buddhist practices, but its history is still unclear.³

Daoist Qigong is complex. There are many parallels between earlier longevity practices and modern Qigong forms. Breathing, healing exercises, and *qi*-absorption have played an important role in Daoist cultivation since the Highest Clarity movement of the fourth century. The main difference to modern forms is that traditional Daoist training used physical exercises mainly as a preparatory measure and in addition required dietary transformation, the taking of herbal and mineral drugs, prolonged periods of meditation, as well as a profound sense of devotion to the gods, skilled ritual performance, and a goal of complete transcendence.

Daoist Qigong as a form of practice that expresses specifically Daoist views and goals appears in certain systems, such as Healing Tao, that represent a simplification and popularization of inner alchemy (*nei-dan* 內丹) with its focus on the Three Treasures of vital essence (*jing* 精), *qi*, and spirit (*shen* 神); the three elixir fields (*dantian* 丹田); as well as activating the Daoist subtle body (see Liang and Wu 1997, 77-126; Chia 1993; Yang 2003). However, like the so-called Buddhist practices, it is unclear how many practitioners of such forms embrace a Daoist worldview or focus on Daoist goals, and often there is little evidence of the goal of rarification and self-divinization traditionally part of Daoist alchemical systems.

Moreover, it is not entirely clear what the referents for "immortality" are within Qigong communities. In many cases it seems that immortality becomes a code word for enlightenment, spiritual abilities,

² See Liang and Wu 1997, 127-73; also L. Johnson 1998; Newton 2001.

³ Perhaps the most well-known form of contemporary Buddhist Qigong is Falun gong (Dharma Wheel Exercises). For emic presentations of this system, see www.falundafa.org; www.faluninfo.net.

and/or higher levels of consciousness. The same may be said concerning the concept of Dao. More often than not, contemporary Qigong practitioners place tradition-specific systems under the broader rubric of spiritual Qigong, creating their own mix of ideas and concepts in the process.

In addition to these four types, there are many modern forms that fall between the categories and show different characteristics. Some such Qigong systems, rooted in earlier longevity practices with comparatively old pedigrees, include the Five Animal Frolics (*wuqin xi* 五禽戲), Six Healing Sounds (*liuzi jue* 六字訣), and Eight Brocades (*baduan jin* 八段錦). However, in the context of Qigong discourse, such historical details are often manipulated, intentionally or not, to create legitimacy and authority, and thus power and increased economic prosperity. For example, in his book *The Way of Qigong*, Ken Cohen explains,

Baduan jin means literally “Eight Pieces of Silk Brocade.” These eight exercises are elegant, graceful, and essential methods of *qi*-cultivation. They were first described in an eighth-century Daoist text, *Xiuzhen shishu* (Ten Treatises on Restoring the Original Vitality) in the Daoist Canon. Daoist tradition attributes the exercises to one of the Eight Immortals of Chinese folklore, Chong Li-quan [Zhongli Quan]. (Cohen 1997, 186)

The form he refers to has two variants. The standing Eight Brocades, which are highly popular today, are nowhere to be found in traditional literature, either Daoist or Buddhist (see Fig. 1). They may well be very recent. The seated Eight Brocades is a set of exorcistic and cleansing practices that involves stretches, devotional activation of body gods, and meditations that serve to prepare practitioners for inner alchemy practice. It is known today but not frequently done (see Olson 1997). The sequence indeed appears first in the *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (DZ 263, 19.4a-5b) and is linked with Zhongli Quan 鐘離權, but does not go back to the 700s. Rather, the text is an anonymous anthology compiled around 1300. This is just one example of many where modern practitioners latch on to bits and pieces of historical information and then replace accuracy with wishful thinking.

Beyond the four major types of Qigong, other classifications include distinctions between moving or active Qigong (*donggong* 動功) and tranquil or passive Qigong (*jingong* 靜功), exercises that involve external movements of the body versus methods that involve keeping the body still (Cohen 1997, 4; Reid 1998, 55-56). Active Qigong re-

sembles exercise as conventionally understood, while tranquil Qigong is meditation.

A yet different way of categorizing is according to postures: walking/moving, standing, sitting, and lying down. Most modern forms fall into the walking and standing groups, while seated and lying down exercises are often described as Daoyin 導引 or traditional healing exercises and stillness practices are called meditation or “quiet sitting” (*jingzuo* 靜坐). However, as the Qigong movement unfolds, these practices find increasing integration into the larger spectrum. Their inclusion may well be an effective marketing strategy to increase appeal to wider segments of the population (see Palmer 2005; 2006).⁴

Finally, one may also categorize Qigong according to goals and levels of practice. Goals may include healing and preservation of health, stress relief and relaxation, longevity and youthfulness, strength building and martial prowess, spiritual cultivation and cosmological attunement, energetic awareness and mystical communion, and even immortality.

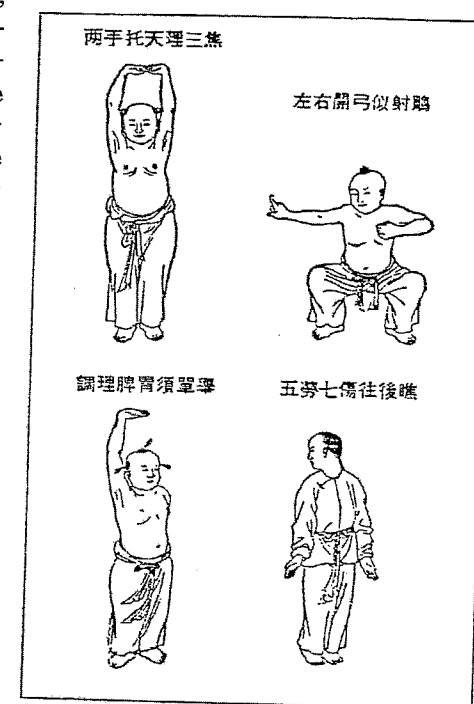


Fig. 1: Standing Eight Brocades

⁴ Another aspect of the market-oriented nature of Qigong and other American spiritual practices is the increased emergence of proprietorship, the culmination of commodification. For example, Dahn Yoga/Holistic Tao, a Korean syncretic spiritual system, like Bikram Yoga™, has trademarked its practices, which include Dahnhak® and Brain Respiration®™. Like the relationship of the Pepsi™ corporation to the Coca Cola™ corporation, this may represent an attempt to profit from the Healing Tao (Mantak Chia's system) brand name. Holistic Tao currently has over 360 centers in Korea, the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Brazil, and Japan. See www.holistic tao.com; www.dahnyoga.com.

From an anthropological and cultural studies perspective, these goals are more complex than they first appear and it is not entirely clear how various Qigong practitioners and communities understand concepts of health, disease, spirituality, and so forth (see Kleinman 1980; Unschuld 1985). Clearly the most influential presentations and the majority of Qigong practitioners focus on health and healing, but some see them as preliminary to more spiritual aspirations. These, however, are context-specific and the result of a wide variety of cultural influences that are all the more complex in contemporary American society characterized by globalization, multiculturalism, and religious pluralism.

Orientalist Legacies

Orientalism was brought to prominence as a critical category by Edward Said (1979). Although conventionally associated with the Western study of the Middle East, it may refer to any Western or European representation of Asian culture, in which artificial and wishful constructions come to hold primacy or interpretative authority. That is to say, in an Orientalist mode, the primary frame of reference is a radical dualism or bifurcation between the West and the East, the Occident and the Orient. As a pejorative or critical category, Orientalism may refer to Western discourse strategies that rely on a domination paradigm, in which Western representations are given priority over indigenous cultural realities, i.e., ethnic or national groups as well as religious and cultural traditions.⁵

Orientalism is first and foremost characterized by Western fantasies and is intimately bound to Western colonialism, whether political, military, or intellectual. Early Orientalist accounts of Asian cultures included seeing Asians as irrational, undeveloped, dangerous, exotic, sexualized, and so forth. Although these views are obviously outdated and inaccurate, various Orientalist legacies continue to frame discussions, appropriations, and transformations of Asian beliefs and prac-

tices as well as relationships and interactions with people of Asian descent.

While earlier presentations of Asians most frequently depicted them as villains, one of the most prominent contemporary Orientalist constructs is that of the Oriental Monk (see Iwamura 2000; Siegler 2003). He is perceived by Westerners as an embodiment of spirituality and the hope for an alternative future, in which materialism is abandoned and spirituality retrieved. The Oriental Monk represents the ancient wisdom of the East and transmits it to a new cultural context, found in an idealized vision of "America" as a storehouse and safe haven for allegedly dying Eastern spiritual traditions. Some prominent examples include Kwai Chang Caine, Deepak Chopra, the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mr. Migayi, and D. T. Suzuki (see Iwamura 2000). In terms of Chinese cultural traditions in America, one finds the Oriental Monk as "Daoist Master," "Qigong Master," or "Taiji Master," sometimes even self-described as "Grand Master" (J. A. Johnson 2000, 1029).

Qigong practitioners and self-identified Daoists in America tend to rely on this enduring Orientalist legacy to establish and increase their cultural capital. Especially in terms of Daoism, they appropriate popular (and often faulty) representations and use psychological sensitivity to create spiritualist businesses. Even a cursory perusal of popular American publications, an internet search of "Taoism" and "Daoism," or conversations with leading representatives reveal that the Daoism of the popular Western imagination has very little in common with the historical contours of the Chinese Daoist tradition (see Kirkland 1997; Siegler 2003).

For example, almost any issue of *The Empty Vessel*, a popular quarterly journal on "contemporary American Taoism," shows Daoism in the United States to be closer to a form of New Age spirituality or perennial philosophy than the complex religious tradition of China.⁶ American Daoism centers on the ideas of the *Daode jing*, translated

⁵ The corresponding phenomenon of "Occidentalism" (e.g., how Americans are represented in Chinese or Saudi Arabian culture) has yet to be adequately considered. The tendency toward vilification and demonization is a global phenomenon. As a counter-point to Iwamura's research on the Oriental monk (2000), an entire paper could be written on "the Occidental villain" in the context of various Asian or Middle Eastern cultures.

⁶ "Perennial philosophy" is a term originally coined by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz and conceptually developed by Aldous Huxley (1946). It claims that all the major mystical systems of the world share the same "perennial" worldview: that the phenomenal world is partially real, being a secondary manifestation of an underlying Ground; that human beings can know the Ground by direct intuition; that they are divided into a conscious ego and an eternal true self; and that it is the chief end of human existence to discover and become one with the true self as Ground. See Happold 1970, 20.

in popularized versions that have increasingly less to do with the original and are interpreted to fit the modern American mind (see LaFargue and Pas 1998). Daoism is packaged in a form that conforms to dominant cultural assumptions and desires and is thus more easily appropriated and marketed. As Solala Towler says:

[Daoism] goes back thousands of years, to a time before organized religion, before ideologies overcame philosophy. It goes back to a time when humankind was not disconnected from the natural world, when humans learned from both the animal and the vegetable kingdom. . . . True Taoism is not an ideology or a New Age movement, it is a living philosophy. It is a way of thinking, a way of looking at life, a way of being; being *with* change rather than against it. It is a way of utilizing the natural energy of our bodies and minds in a healthy and graceful way. (Towler 1996, vii; 1998; also Blofeld 1973, 13)

Daoism in the American mind has therefore become a philosophy that predates organized religion, an ancient, universal wellspring for each and every Chinese health and spiritual tradition. It is responsible for numerous practices, such as TCM, Fengshui, *Yijing* divination, Taiji quan, and Qigong that are not Daoist in origin or essence, but appropriated for a greater mystique and enhanced marketing potential. Daoism also ceases to be “a foreign path” and Americans do not need to become “Pseudo-Asians” (Towler 1996, viii)—yet every teacher mentioned in Towler’s subsequent presentation is a Chinese immigrant or Chinese American. That is, on one level Daoism is a universal wisdom tradition that transcends culture, while on another only people of Chinese descent represent “true Daoism”: once again, as per the Orientalist discourse, Chineseness is a requirement for authenticity.

Orientalism pervades the way Daoism is seen in the Qigong community. Within the American Qigong movement there are a variety of misconceptions, with some of the most prominent and influential being the following:

- There is an original, pure Daoism, often called “philosophical Daoism.”
- The hoary sage of antiquity named Laozi founded it.
- The *Daode jing* is the “Daoist bible.”
- Daoism is non-theistic and means going with the flow.
- Daoist identity is something that one wears on the outside.

- All Daoists are nature-lovers.
- Chineseness is equivalent to authenticity.

In addition, there is a conflation of Fengshui, Qigong, Taiji quan, and TCM with Daoism. Daoism—thoroughly colonized and domesticated—is thereby easily adapted to Western and New Age sensibilities and, of course, becomes highly marketable to American consumers.⁷

Early American Masters

The Communist take-over of China in 1949 and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) caused the migration and forced exile of Chinese cultural elites, many of whom came to the United States, aided by the liberalization of American immigration laws in 1965. Many of them were trained in martial arts, Taiji quan, or Daoism and began to teach their practices in *dōjōs* and medical establishments, contributing to the budding Qigong movement.

DA LIU (1904-2000) began his study of Taiji quan under Sun Lutang 孫祿堂 (1861-1932),⁸ the founder of the Sun style. Later he traveled to China’s southwest provinces, where he trained with a number of teachers and became a practitioner of the Yang style. In 1955 he came to America and began teaching Taiji quan classes in New York City. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, he made several television appearances and his story, together with information about Taiji quan, appeared in many newspapers and magazines.

He also became president of the T’ai Chi Society of New York (www.chutaichi.com) and wrote a number of books on Taiji quan and other longevity practices (1972; 1974; 1978; 1979). The books present an integrated training program for health and long life with Taiji quan identified as primary. They include some of the earliest English-language accounts of classic Qigong forms, such as the Eight Brocades and the Five Animal Frolics. They also exerted some influence

⁷ For more details on the role and history of Daoism in America, see Komjathy 2003a; 2003b; 2004; Siegler 2003. For reliable introductions to Daoism see Kohn 2001; Miller 2003; Kirkland 2004. For guidance on accurate electronic resources see www.daoistcenter.org.

⁸ Whenever known, Chinese characters are included in the first appearance of a given teacher’s name.

on the later publications of Stuart Olson (1997; 2002a) and Yang Jwing-ming (1989a; 1989b), two central figures in American Qigong.

T. T. LIANG (Tung-tsai Liang; 1900-2002), a former customs official, moved to the United States in 1963. A senior disciple of Zheng Man-qing 鄭曼青 (Cheng Man-ch'ing; 1901-1975), a leader of the Yang school of Taiji quan, he became an independent teacher, living first in Boston and later in Minnesota and teaching mainly in parks rather than in an organized studio. He popularized Taiji quan (Liang 1977) and taught some prominent teachers, including Stuart Olson (www.valleytaichi.com; Olson 2002b) and Paul Gallagher (www.totaitaichi.com).

LILY SIOU (a.k.a. Chang Yi Hsiang; b. 1945?), unlike Da Liu and T. T. Liang who were first and foremost Taiji quan instructors, specifically taught Qigong and published the first English book on the subject (1973). Allegedly a direct successor of the Celestial Master, a major leader of traditional, ritual Daoism, she founded the School of the Six Chinese Arts in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1970. The school was formally registered in 1972, received state accreditation as a Chinese medical school in 1976, was nationally accredited in 1991, and is now called the World Medicine Institute (acupuncture-hi.com).

As she says in the preface of her book, which was popular enough to go through four reprints: "Through it [this book], I hope to show the way to better health and well-being through the natural movements of Ch'i Kung," which is "an ancient but profound body and mind discipline, embodying much of Chinese philosophy." The work is quite eclectic, covering Chinese cosmology, Chinese medical theories and herbology, as well as some aspects of Daoism and the martial arts.

From Siou's perspective, Qigong predates Daoism and is best defined as "an ancient art of breath control based on the early Tao philosophy but predating the Taoists. Ch'i Kung is practiced in its pure form by the Taoists and in its secondary forms of T'ai Ch'i Ch'uan and Kung Fu Boxing by martial arts" (1973, 33). She goes on to discuss various aspects of Qigong practice, including principles, general sensations, personal experiences, and organ function. The third section of the book contains illustrated instruction on two exercise systems identified as the seated and standing Eight Brocades. The book concludes with archival photographs of the School of the Six Chinese Arts, including its members and activities.

The "Six Chinese/Taoist arts" in the name of Siou's school are ritual, music, archery, chariotteering, writing, and mathematics—the classical arts of the Confucian gentleman in ancient China ([\[hi.com/6arts.shtml\]\(http://hi.com/6arts.shtml\); Siou 1973, 31\).⁹ According to Siou, Zhang Enpu 張恩溥, the 63rd Celestial Master, transmitted his lineage to her at Mount Longhu 龍虎山 in 1969, and the "Heavenly Masters and Taoists of Lunghu shan are renowned throughout China for their expertise in the Six Taoist Arts of the Chou Dynasty" \(\[acupuncture-hi.com/history.shtml\]\(http://acupuncture-hi.com/history.shtml\)\).¹⁰ At the present time, it is unclear how this construction of Daoism functions in the curriculum and community of her school, a major Chinese medical college in Hawaii. Like Yosan University \(\[www.yosan.edu\]\(http://www.yosan.edu\)\), which was founded by Ni Hua-ching and his sons in Los Angeles, it represents a conflation of TCM with Daoism, typical for the United States. One of her senior disciples, Roger Jahnke of the Health Action Clinic in Santa Barbara, moreover, is both a Chinese medical practitioner and a central figure in American Qigong.](http://acupuncture-</p>
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B. P. CHAN (Bun Piac Chan; 1922-2002) arrived in New York City in 1974. He originally came as a visiting instructor to the William C. C. Chen School of T'ai Chi (www.williamcccchen.com), where he first taught Bagua zhang and later Xingyi quan and Chen-style Taiji quan.

⁹ In Siou's construction, these "six arts" are not understood literally but metaphorically. For example, "chariotteering" is said to symbolize the discipline and cultivation of the mind, body, and spirit, and to relate to the ability to harness, control, and direct *qi* (acupuncture-hi.com/chariotteering.shtml).

¹⁰ This is unlikely for a wide variety of reasons. First, no female priest has ever held the position of Celestial Master (it is a patriarchal and patrilineal position). Second, Siou's timeline contradicts historical facts: Zhang Enpu died before Siou claims the transmission occurred. Finally, the Celestial Masters lineage, in fact, passed from Zhang Enpu to Zhang Yuanxian 張源先 (64th Celestial Master) and then to Zhang Jiyu 張繼禹 (65th), the current lineage holder. The latter two have published histories of the Celestial Masters movement (Ding 2000, 775).

Other equally questionable characters on the American Daoist scene are Kwan Sai-hung and Liu Ming. Kwan Sai-hung, the central figure in the "Wandering Taoist" trilogy (see Deng 1993), which is possibly the first American Daoist hagiography, claims to be a Chinese immigrant and to have received extensive training at Huashan. However, preliminary research suggests that he was actually born in New York City and that *Chronicles of Tao* was largely based on various other sources, including Morrison's *Hua Shan* (1974; Anderson 1989). Likewise, Liu Ming, the founder of Orthodox Daoism in America, most often appears in public in full Daoist robes and a top-knot, while making frequent claims about "Daoist orthodoxy." And yet, there is no evidence that he was ordained, and, in fact, the recent disbandment of his ODA Seattle parish centered on his inability to produce the ordination certificate or the texts upon which his authority as a self-identified Daoist priest rest.

Within a year, he decided to remain in the United States and continued to teach in William Chen's community for the next twenty-seven years (see Cohen 2002a). He is significant as one of the first to teach Taiji chi 太極尺 (Taiji Ruler), a Qigong form that utilizes an hourglass shaped wooden stick.¹¹ He learned this form from Zhao Zhongdao 趙中道 (1844-1962), the founder of the Supple Art of Taiji Health Society in Beijing and the first to teach Taiji Ruler publicly (Cohen 2002b). Chan is also important as one of the main teachers of Ken Cohen, an important figure in American Qigong today.

MANTAK CHIA (Xie Mingde 謝明德; b. 1944) has exerted perhaps the greatest influence through his enduring institution of Healing Tao/Dao. Born in Thailand to Chinese parents, he practiced Buddhist meditation from the age of six and soon after met his first Taiji quan teacher, a certain Master Lu. Later, when he was a student in Hong Kong, a classmate named Cheng Sue-sue introduced him to his first Daoist teacher, Yi Eng 一雲 (One Cloud). At this point, he began serious Daoist training and learned various cultivation methods, such as the Microcosmic Orbit, Fusion of the Five Elements, and inner alchemy. "It was Yi Eng who authorized Master Chia to teach and heal" (Chia 1993, xiii).

After training with other teachers, including Mui Yimwattana, Cheng Yao-lun, and Pan Yu, Chia combined his knowledge of Daoism and the other disciplines to formulate the Healing Tao system. In 1974 he established the Natural Healing Center in Thailand, and five years later moved to New York City. Since then, Healing Tao centers have opened in many other locations throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. It is an international organization and a global Qigong practice. In addition, Mantak Chia has published numerous books (e.g., 1983; 1985; 1986; 1993) (www.healingtaousa.com). Chia's system is

¹¹ An earlier Qigong system called "Tai Chi Chih" and created by Justin Stone (1996) has certain characteristics that resemble Taiji Ruler, but there are major deviations and the distinctive wooden ruler is not mentioned. Stone created this series of twenty exercises in 1974, based on "several little-known movements [learned] from an old Chinese man" (1996, 12). He explains that the "Tai Chi Chih" of the title means "knowledge of the supreme ultimate." This may be a confusion of *chih* 知 ("knowledge") for *ch'ih* 尺 ("ruler"). Stone's system has a large following in the United States; by 1996, he had accredited about 1,100 instructors (1996, 13; Cohen 2002b).

sometimes also called "Tao Yoga," "Taoist Yoga," or "Taoist Esoteric Yoga" (Chia 1983).¹²

At some point, Chia moved back to Thailand, where he currently lives and teaches at the Tao Garden Health Resort (www.tao-garden.com) and runs a new variation of the Healing Tao System called Universal Tao (www.universal-tao.com). He has trained a large number of senior instructors (www.taoinstructors.org), and Healing Tao USA has continued to thrive and expand under the leadership of Michael Winn (b. 1951), also at one time president of the National Qigong Association. Healing Tao USA is now a private educational trust in the process of filing for non-profit status. It operates Healing Tao University at the Jeronimo Center (New York), a set of summer workshops and seminars, as well as the website and fulfillment center.

The practice system of Healing Tao contains a structured set of inner alchemy practices, which may represent a distinctively American form, and involves a wide range of certifications (www.healingtaousa.com; www.healingdao.com). It combines practices according to a version developed by Michael Winn and includes seven alchemy formulas of immortality as transmitted from Yi Eng to Mantak Chia. After practicing the foundational practice of the Inner Smile, one progresses through the following stages: (1) Open the Orbit, Five Phases of Spirit and Eight Extraordinary Vessels; (2) Lesser Enlightenment of Water and Fire; (3) Greater Enlightenment of Water and Fire; (4) Greatest Enlightenment of Water and Fire; (5) Sealing the Senses; (6) Congress of Heaven and Earth; and (7) Union of Man and Dao.¹³

T. K. SHIH (Shih Tzu-kuo 施祖果; b. 1929), a doctor of Chinese medicine, immigrated to New York City in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, he founded the Chinese Healing Arts Center (www.qihealer.com) and the Wu Tang Ch'uan Association in Kingston, which identifies some of its practices as originating at the Daoist sacred site of Mount

¹² This is, of course, historically inaccurate. Yoga is a Sanskrit term meaning "to yoke" and by extension "to unite;" it refers to a diverse set of Indian spiritual systems with divergent goals. While Daoist inner alchemy has certain similarities with Kundalini and Tantric Yoga (which both Chia and Winn have practiced), and while Chinese long life practices find parallels in Hatha Yoga, there is no such thing as "Daoist Yoga." How these practices came to be so identified remains unknown, but one of the earliest occurrences is Lu K'uan-yü's *Taoist Yoga* (1970), the translation of a Qing-dynasty manual of inner alchemy.

¹³ For more information on Healing Tao see Belamide 2000; Komjathy 2003a; 2003b; 2004; Siegler 2003.

Wudang. T. K. Shih has published two books on Qigong (1989; 1994), the former of which is the earliest English-language publication on the Swimming Dragon, an exercise for opening the spine and moistening the connective tissue. It is also praised as "the unique Chinese way to fitness, beautiful skin, weight loss, and high energy." Beyond its medical benefits, Qigong here for the first time is lauded as having the power to facilitate weight loss and increase beauty.

Like Michael Winn, T. K. Shih frequently takes out full-page advertisements in the opening pages of *The Empty Vessel*. In a recent issue (Spring 2005), Shih offers workshops and seminars on seasonal cooking, Swimming Dragon practice, as well as Qi Healer and Qigong Therapist training at various levels. In terms of contemporary developments, this advertisement is representative of a larger trend in contemporary American Qigong: professionalization. Under this logic, to be an authentic Qigong teacher requires certification and accreditation, which is, of course, a way of maintaining and strengthening personal authority as well as an excellent marketing strategy.

YANG JWING-MING 楊俊敏 (b. 1946) came to the United States from Taiwan in 1974 to pursue an engineering degree at Purdue University. Having trained in the martial arts from the age of fifteen, and despite his successful conclusion of the Ph. D., he decided to become a martial arts teacher. In 1982, he established Yang's Martial Arts Association (YMAA) in Boston, where he teaches everything from Shaolin Long Fist and White Crane Gongfu to Yang-style Taiji quan, Xingyi quan, and Bagua zhang (www.ymaa.com).

He has also become a prolific author of over fifty videos and thirty books, including nine on Qigong (1985; 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 2003). While there is a great deal of repetition throughout these publications, he generally makes a distinction among different types of Qigong, including martial, medical, Daoist, and Buddhist. In addition to covering Qigong theory, Yang's books provide illustrated instruction on specific practices, including the standing Eight Brocades and tendon-changing and marrow-washing exercises. Like the earlier publications of Da Liu, Stephan Chang (1978), and others, Yang Jwing-ming also provides illustrations of the organ-meridian networks often utilized in both medical and Daoist forms of Qigong (Yang 1989a, 200-41). Here one may identify an "alternative" understanding of the body and embodiment, at least partially based on subtle energetic networks.

CHEN HUI-XIAN (b. 1933) represents the final stage of the early transmission of Qigong to the United States. An interpreter for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade and later a university English teacher,

Chen developed lymphatic cancer in 1982, when she was forty-nine years old. Doctors gave her a twenty-five percent chance of recovery. While waiting for chemotherapy and radiation treatment in a Beijing clinic, a fellow patient told her about a Qigong form that had helped cure him of cancer. This was Soaring Crane Qigong (Hexiang zhuang 鶴翔狀), developed and taught by Zhao Jinxiang 趙金香 (b. 1934) in Beijing parks. After three months of intensive daily practice under the direction of Zhao, Chen regained her health (Towler 1996, 4-7). Following her recovery, she decided that her life mission was to spread Soaring Crane Qigong throughout the world.

Around 1985, Chen moved to Portland and began teaching Qigong at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine (www.ocom.edu). She also initiated a teacher-certification program, which has gained increasing standing in contemporary American Qigong. In addition to writing a number of self-published manuals on Soaring Crane (Chen and Alswel 1995; Chen 1996), Chen founded the Wu Dao Jing She International Society of Qigong in 1996 with Charles Wu, through which she has trained and certified many prominent American Qigong teachers, including Solala Towler (www.wudaojingshe.com). Aside from being the main representative of Soaring Crane Qigong in America, Chen Hui-xian is also representative of another major trend in the Qigong movement, namely the effort at self-healing, especially of serious medical conditions. In this she is like other major figures who healed themselves through Qigong: Jiang Weiqiao of tuberculosis, Liu Guizhen of a stomach ulcer, Guo Lin of cancer, T. K. Shih of tuberculosis, and Solala Towler of chronic fatigue syndrome (see Miura 1989; Palmer 2005; 2006). That is, many of the originators of Qigong systems and major proponents of certain Qigong exercises turned personal journeys toward health into life-missions.

The relationship among disease, healing, and health comes into sharper focus from such personal testimonials. One prominent Qigong ideal is enduring health, a life free from disease. One might assume that followers interpret disease as failure or deficiency. While this is the case *after* one has practiced Qigong, it is not true *before* one has begun such training. Instead, disease becomes a sign that one's life is out of balance; disease is a call to change. In short, for many, illness initiates a conversion process that results in becoming practitioners, teachers, and advocates.

Key Characteristics

From these brief biographical sketches certain characteristics of the early phase of Qigong in America become clear. The American Qigong movement emerged through the lives and teachings of Chinese immigrants. Most began teaching in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. Tentatively speaking, one may identify the demographics of the early American Qigong movement as follows: an individual Chinese immigrant teacher surrounded by mainly white middle-class students, many of whom became second-generation teachers. In this way, Qigong in America parallels similar American appropriations of "Eastern spiritual technologies" (e.g., Buddhist meditation, Tibetan Tantra, Yoga, etc.) as well as developments in the New Age movement more generally.

As a secular Chinese health and longevity practice, Qigong was also easily assimilated into the American health and fitness movement, so much so that T. K. Shih speaks of the Swimming Dragon as a method for weight loss and beauty enhancement. Similarly, because of its emphasis on health and healing, Qigong also joined the emerging American interest in "alternative medicine." As we have seen, many of the early teachers and proponents of Qigong began practicing Qigong to heal themselves and in response to the failure of allopathic medicine. One might, in turn, read Qigong practice as an implicit critique of modernization and industrialization, even though many Qigong teachers speak of the practice in modern medical and scientific terms.

In addition, the early American Qigong movement revolved around a relatively small repertoire of exercises: Eight Brocades, Five Animal Frolics, Soaring Crane, Swimming Dragon, and Taiji Ruler. Often teachers only taught one of these forms. Nonetheless, they all had a certain amount of cultural capital because they originated in China and since students had very little previous knowledge. Some teachers had older pedigrees, while others emerged during the Qigong boom that swept through China in the 1980s. The early history of Qigong in America, moreover, also corresponds to the early history of Westernized "Daoism," Taiji quan, and TCM. In these years, there were few or no practice centers specifically dedicated to Qigong. Instead, it was taught at martial *dōjōs*, Taiji quan academies, and TCM colleges. It was and is also one of the primary ways that self-identified American Daoists make a living in the context of American capitalism.

The present account of the early history of Qigong in America has certain omissions that should be recognized. First, there is a heavy emphasis on the lives of specific teachers. At the present time, it is unclear how the early communities were organized, how many people participated, and what their motivations were. One also could reasonably argue that the popularity of Qigong derived as much from the early publications as the early practitioners. Similarly, while I have mentioned certain historical events that played some role in the early transmission of Qigong in America, there are, of course, many other factors involved, including the loosening of restrictions on Chinese immigration following the Immigration Act of 1965 and a growing interest in complementary medicine and alternative spirituality.

In terms of bringing Chinese medicine and other Chinese health practices to American attention, one key event was President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1971, during which *New York Times* columnist James Reston recovered from an appendectomy with the help of acupuncture anesthesia. The present account also leaves out the personal histories of those who became the second-generation of American Qigong teachers. While some of these individuals studied with the teachers mentioned above, others, such as B. K. Frantzis (www.energyarts.com), Mark Johnson (www.chi-kung.com), and Daniel Reid (Taiwan), went to China or Taiwan in search of teachers and to deepen their understanding and practice. That is, in addition to early Chinese immigrant teachers, the early history of Qigong in America is also the story of pilgrimages to the East. For example, Mark Johnson when living and studying in Taiwan met Ni Hua-ching, one of the most influential early self-identified Daoist teachers in America, and arranged for him to teach at the Taoist Sanctuary (then in Los Angeles) (Siegler 2003; Komjathy 2004).

Contemporary American Qigong

Since the late 1980s, Qigong in America has become increasingly popular. With each passing year, more books are published, more teachers emerge, more centers are being established, and more people have become practitioners.¹⁴ Today, Qigong is so much a part of popu-

¹⁴ The recent explosion of Qigong teachers proves challenging for older and more established teachers. As expressed by Yang Jwing-ming, "So many students in America are going around calling themselves Master. Many of them don't even practice themselves, how can they call themselves Master?"

lar American culture that one can find teachers and centers in most urban areas. A recent Internet search on a major search-engine under "Chi Kung" resulted in over 440,000 hits, while the same search under "Qigong" resulted in over 650,000 hits. A similar search of books in print yields between 500 and 8,000 titles under "Chi Kung" and about 200 titles under "Qigong," including several specifically for women (Ferraro 2000; Y. L. Johnson 2001). Granted, these are less than scientific findings, but they, like similar searches through local telephone directories (e.g., Douglas 2002, 285-312), reveal just how widespread and how well-established Qigong practice is in the U.S.

A systematic account of American Qigong, composed of a diverse group of teachers, students, practices, and communities, would require a book-length study. Unlike the previous section on the early history of Qigong in America, which focused on early immigrant Chinese teachers, this section discusses the contemporary situation, the most prominent and influential organizations as well as some of its general characteristics.

First of all, the increasing popularity of Qigong in America has led to major shifts in the composition and focus of the movement. While Chinese immigrant teachers, especially those who have come to the United States more recently, continue to play a role, the majority of teachers and students are now Euro-Americans. In addition, market factors of supply and demand have created certain unforeseen opportunities: it is now possible to make a living as a Qigong instructor. This, in turn, has resulted in a new stratification.

Qigong teachers today operate on various societal levels: national, regional, and local. There is an emphasis on visibility, growth, and group size as indicative of success. Quantity of publications, numbers of students, and public prominence often supersede quality of instruction and depth of understanding. Where in traditional settings personal affinity with a teacher, the teacher's level of understanding, and personal experience of the system were paramount, now many within the Qigong movement harbor ambitions for greater recognition, influence, and economic prosperity. They find themselves contending and competing for status and resources both within Qigong as well as in the general area of complementary health care and alternative spirituality. As national Qigong organizations emerge and grow, to be known and wealthy is to be successful.

This kind of thing discourages traditional Chinese Masters to teach American students" (Towler 1996, 25).

Among the various levels of presence, without dismissing the cumulative effect and the contribution to individual lives made by local practitioners, national teachers and organizations are clearly the most visible and influential. They include:

- Effie Chow of the East West Academy of the Healing Arts (www.east-westqi.com)
- Ken Cohen of the Qigong Research and Practice Center (www.qigong-healing.com)
- B. K. (Bruce Kumar) Frantzis of Energy Arts (www.energyarts.com)
- Roger Jahnke of the Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi (www.feeltheqi.com)
- Jerry Alan Johnson of the International Institute of Medical Qigong (www.qigongmedicine.com)
- Mark Johnson of the Tai Chi for Health Institute (www.chi-kung.com)
- Solala Towler of the Abode of the Eternal Tao (www.abodetao.com)
- Michael Winn of Healing Tao USA (www.healingtaousa.com)
- Yang Jwing-ming of Yang's Martial Arts Association (www.ymaa.com)

Without going into biographical details and without disrespecting their personal experiences, they represent certain ideal types within the broader Qigong movement, which I would propose to call traditionalists, medicalists, spiritualists, and positivists.

Traditionalists (e.g., Ken Cohen) teach Qigong systems with older pedigrees, claim lineage connections with Chinese teachers, have knowledge of Chinese culture, and often wear Chinese clothing as a sign of their solidarity with things Chinese. They often identify themselves as Daoists. Medicalists (e.g., Jerry Alan Johnson, Roger Jahnke) teach preventative and restorative Qigong forms, often hold degrees in Chinese medicine, and frequently oversee and/or teach at TCM schools.

Spiritualists (e.g., Solala Towler, Michael Winn) identify Qigong as a form of spiritual (not religious) work, combining aspects from various religious traditions into a hybrid spirituality that has clear parallels with the characteristics of New Age spirituality and perennial philosophy outlined below, however much representatives resist such characterizations. Spiritualists frequently make claims about the connection between Qigong and "Daoism," with the latter stripped to a large extent of its historical and religious characteristics.

Positivists (e.g., Effie Chow, Roger Jahnke, Yang Jwing-ming), finally, interpret Qigong in terms of a modern Western scientific paradigm, often citing clinical and experimental studies that measure *qi* as electro-magnetism or that scientifically validate the health benefits and therapeutic success of Qigong.¹⁵ Their validation goes beyond personal testimonials to recognition by Western biomedicine and science with roots in Cartesian dualism and mechanistic organicism. They understand Qigong as a secular or quasi-secular health practice, which transcends religious affiliations and can be supported by scientific research.

The dramatic growth of popular interest in Qigong throughout the 1990s has also resulted in the formation of national membership organizations. The most prominent umbrella organizations include:

- American Qigong Association (AQA; www.eastwestqi.com/aqa)
- National Qigong Association (NQA; www.nqa.org)
- Qigong Alliance (QA; www.qigong-alliance.org)
- Qigong Association of America (QAA; www.qi.org)
- World Qigong Federation (www.eastwestqi.com/wqf)

Of these, the National Qigong Association is the largest, most representative, and most influential. NQA was founded in 1995 (Jahnke 2005), and most prominent Qigong teachers in America have at one time or another served as presidents and chairmen.¹⁶ NQA is a grassroots, nonprofit organization of Qigong practitioners working toward the following main goals:

¹⁵ Qigong represents an "alternative" cultural practice that cannot be easily domesticated into modern biomedicine, although new research in biology and physics is developing a language that may make cross-cultural communication more possible. On scientific studies of Qigong see Cohen 1997; Jahnke 1999; 2002.

¹⁶ The founders of NQA included James MacRitchie, Russell DesMarais, Berkeley Freeman, Jesse Dammann, Roger Jahnke, Damaris Jarboux, Mark Johnson, Richard Leirer, and Gunther Weil. The following individuals have been NQA president: James MacRitchie (1996), Russell DesMarais (1997), Michael Winn (1998; 1999), Solala Towler (2000; 2001), Jim Concotelli (2002), Malvin Finkelstein (2002; 2003), Shoshanna Katzman (2004), and Bonnitta Roy (2005). There also have been a variety of chairmen, some of whom include Francesco (Garri) Garripolli, Roger Jahnke, Michael DeMolina, and Gunther Weil.

1. To promote the principles and practices of Qigong.
2. To establish and integrate Qigong into all aspects of mainstream culture, healing, science, and education.
3. To encourage self-healing and spiritual self-development through daily Qigong practice.
4. To create a forum and network for sharing information about Qigong.
5. To unify classical and contemporary branches, schools and traditions of Qigong.
6. To assure the transference of the essence of Qigong between the East and West.
7. To integrate medical Qigong into the health care community.
8. To create, explore and establish unique forms of American Qigong.
9. To provide training for the public, students and practitioners of Qigong.
10. To foster peace and harmony throughout the world through Qigong principles and practices. (www.nqa.org)

NQA currently has about 700 members, organizes an annual conference, and provides online assistance for locating Qigong teachers and organizations. It has also sponsored an online Qigong journal entitled *The Journal of Qigong in America*, first issued in 2004 under the editorship of Michael Meyer.

Another major development on the national stage is the formation of the World T'ai Chi and Qigong Day (WTCQD). Bill Douglas, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to T'ai Chi and Qigong* (2002, orig. 1999), began this worldwide event in 1999. It begins each year at 10 a.m. local time on the Saturday of the week of United Nations World Health Day (April 29, 2006). In the United States, events are held in each of the fifty states. Local teachers and members of Qigong centers promote the event by opening their schools to the general public. There are also larger gatherings held in parks, during which practitioners introduce Taiji quan and Qigong to the larger public. Events range from small group sessions to massive public events, involving many teachers, practitioners, groups, and schools practicing in the same area. The motivation behind the event is to create a unique global health and healing celebration (Douglas 2002, 279-83; www.worldtaichiday.org).

The New Age Connection

What, then, accounts for the rising popularity of Qigong in America? One reason is obviously its greater visibility. Qigong has become increasingly accessible. In addition to many teachers and centers, there are numerous instructional resources, including books and articles as well as audio tapes, videos, and DVDs. Moreover, Qigong has been the subject of mainstream accounts, among them most importantly the 1993 PBS special *Healing and the Mind* by Bill Moyers, whose episode "The Mystery of Chi" documents the practice of Qigong in Chinese parks as well as external *qi* healing (N. Chen 2003, 28). Another Public Television documentary, *Qigong: Ancient Chinese Healing for the 21st Century*, was produced by Garri (Francesco) Garripoli and aired in 2001 (1999, 259-90; www.wujjproductions.com).

Another reason is that Qigong promises personal health and healing. Like Yoga, Taiji quan, TCM, and other Eastern arts, it fits into the larger contours of the American health and fitness movement and the search for alternative remedies (see Lau 2000; Roof 2001). As American health care sinks more deeply into crisis, fewer individuals and families can afford it. As patients find themselves more and more shackled by managed care, they grow increasingly skeptical of the motivations of physicians and the healthcare industry, whose research and products are largely funded by pharmaceutical companies (see Abramson 2004).

Qigong provides an alternative to the tendency of allopathic medicine to alienate individuals from their own personal experience, to view and treat the person as a machine with removable and replaceable parts, and to respond to disease along militaristic lines utilizing drugs with questionable results and serious side-effects. In contrast, the practice of Qigong emphasizes direct personal experience, focusing on both actual physicality and energetic layers of being. It provides people with a different kind of experience and practice, is much less invasive and more affordable, has positive effects, and results in personal benefits. Many practitioners find themselves more relaxed and having increased energy (Cohen 1997, 270-73). Joining a group for training and practice, many people also develop a feeling of belonging, which gives a greater sense of meaning in their lives. In contrast, few American Qigong teachers discuss possible dangers of Qigong practice, such as addiction and psychosis (see N. Chen 2003; also Cohen 1997, 273-78).

A third reason for the popularity of Qigong is that it is easily adaptable to the needs and desires of practitioners. It most frequently centers on health and fitness, complementary medicine, and alternative spirituality. Like the predominant American constructions of Daoism, Qigong matches the general characteristics of the New Age movement, which are as follows:

- Most New Age thought is essentially neo-Platonic. Adherents see all of existence as interconnected and all of the many levels of reality as forms of absolute Oneness.
- The Oneness of life can be discovered experientially in the depths of one's self. The essence of selfhood is divine.
- While most humans have forgotten this inner divinity, New Age adherents stress that it is possible to overcome these limitations and wrong ideas. For this, various spiritual technologies may be utilized.
- For New Agers, direct experience is what is authoritative, not the dictates of established tradition or the opinions of others. Daily decisions are made, not by obeying externally imposed commandments, but by following one's own intuition, inner guidance, and wisdom.
- Although New Agers are adverse to the authority of institutionalized or established religious traditions, they nonetheless feel free to draw upon those traditions as resources to create an eclectic and unique synthesis of various perspectives and practices.
- Most New Age adherents are perennialists. They believe that it is necessary to penetrate the external, superficial crust of religious dogmas and rituals—the differences that divide—in order to discover the universal core of hidden wisdom, the mystical essence that underlies all religions.
- New Age thought and practice is focused on transformation and healing (understood broadly), both for the individual and for the planet. By transforming and healing themselves, New Agers believe that they are helping to transform and heal the world around them.¹⁷

¹⁷ For discussions of the New Age movement, see Barnard 2001, 311-13; also Lewis and Melton 1992; Hanegraaff 1998.

The similarities with popular American publications on Qigong, Daoism, and the like are obvious. Like the New Age movement, Qigong is easily incorporated into Protestant-influenced conceptions of non-religious spirituality. It is individualistic, simple and easy, anti-clerical and anti-ritualistic. There are no demands or requirements for membership, and one can benefit as much from personal daily practice as from workshops, seminars, and group sessions. In addition, the seemingly nebulous nature of Dao and *qi* allow them to become almost anything for anyone. In short, Qigong is easily marketable and easily consumable.

Conclusion

Qigong is the embodied practice of universal energies for the sake of healing and/or spirituality. "Embodiment" means a lived experience in which the body and physicality are given primacy of place. The fact that Western culture is in need of such a concept reveals just how systemic philosophical dualism has become.¹⁸ In fact, there is no activity which does not involve the body, which is not "embodied," and the practice of Qigong should not be anything particular or special.

Still, embodiment is a useful metaphor to look at the American scene. It is what one's life represents, what is expressed through one's being and physical presence. Seen from this perspective, different people in the Qigong movement embody different things. Many prominent and influential teachers are individuals who began Qigong as a personal search for health. They became teachers through a sincere interest in helping others and embody a commitment to self-healing and altruism. Others began Qigong as a way to create and maintain identity. They became teachers in an attempt to gain power and authority and embody a commitment to self-aggrandizement and egoism. Yet others began Qigong as an opportunity to become recognized. They became teachers to profit from such recognition and embody a commitment to economic success and materialism. The intentions and motivations as well as goals and rhetorical strategies of American Qigong leaders are thus as varied as their life-stories and the exercises they advocate.

Their followers similarly practice Qigong for a variety of reasons: from maintaining and restoring health, through prolonging life and

¹⁸ On the concept, see Csordas 1994; Bermúdez et al. 1998; Williams and Bendelow 1998; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Komjathy 2005.

developing martial prowess, to cultivating energetic awareness and reaching mystical communion. They can achieve any of these, because Qigong is basically a series of efficacious systems that leads people to encounter a new way of experiencing and seeing the body, to have personal experiences with body-based transformations, and to discover the previously unknown ontological layer of *qi*. It is a way to put people back into their bodies and change the way they understand themselves in the world.

As Qigong spreads in American and other Western societies, it by necessity undergoes cultural adaptation. It reconstructs the history and concepts of Daoism in new ways, using perennial philosophy and New Age visions.

Created as an intentional secularization and medicalization of religious-based practices, Qigong is absorbed back into Daoist practice both in China and overseas and contributes to its formation in the 21st century. Just as the spread of Daoist teachings and practices into Western cultures leads to a new dimension of the religion, so the growth of the Qigong movement is in the process of leading to a reinterpretation of the religion. It is not what it used to be, and we do not know what it will be like. Studying Qigong in America is fascinating as it shows religion in the making and cultural interchange at its rawest front.

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