Fighters, Thinkers, and Shared Cultivation: Experiencing Transformation Through the Long-Term Practice of Traditionalist Chinese Martial Arts

Submitted by George Bradley Jennings, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in Sport & Health Sciences, August 2010.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

George Bradley Jennings
Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Traditionalist Chinese martial arts (TCMAs) are popular in Britain, and some advocates have made extensive claims of their body-self transformation through sustained training. Despite extensive physiological research, there are few investigations of these practices regarding their socio-cultural practice. This qualitative sociological study examines long-term British practitioners’ experiences of transformation via Taijiquan (Tai Chi) and Wing Chun by addressing five issues: 1) Rationales behind practice 2) Resulting transformations 3) Explicit/implicit pedagogic strategies 4) Cultural transmission 5) Relations to broader social life. It approaches these questions through an emergent research design incorporating autobiographical vignettes as a practitioner-teacher-researcher, life histories of experienced practitioners and ethnographic fieldwork of two case study schools. Following thematic, metaphorical and narrative analysis, a structurationist theoretical framework illuminates the data by incorporating sensitising concepts from diverse thinkers including Bourdieu, Frank, Giddens and Yuasa. The findings are represented through autobiographical, modified realist, impressionist and confessional writing and structure the thesis as follows: Firstly, my own story demonstrates shifts in transformation from a technique-orientated approach to a more spiritual/holistic perspective, finally emerging as a scholarly position of a thinker-martial artist. Secondly, practitioner case studies further articulate transformations along a flexible continuum of changing body-self-society relations interpreted here as three ideal types: Fighters, martial artists and thinkers. Thirdly, the connecting pedagogical issues are addressed, as well-rounded TCMA systems possess specific partner exercises to develop intercorporeal awareness and embodied sensitivity, which are explicit aspects of each association’s martial habitus and body lineage. Meanwhile, socio-linguistic metaphors articulate these transformations and are also interpreted as transformations in thinking and schemes of perception. Overall, these sensitising concepts and empirical findings offer a social theory of shared cultivation that acknowledges transformation on individual, relational, institutional and art levels. This shared cultivation framework may be useful for future methodological, theoretical and empirical considerations of wider physical culture.

Key words: Autobiography, Body-self transformation, Chinese martial arts, cultural transmission, ethnography, life histories, qualitative research, sociology, shared cultivation.
# Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements .................................................. 2
- Abstract .................................................................. 6
- List of Figures .......................................................... 8
- List of Tables ............................................................ 10
- Abbreviation of Terms ................................................. 11
List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Adaptation of Wilber’s (2000) integral matrix

Figure 4.1 Representing Giddens’ (1984) Structurationist framework

Figure 4.2 Model of Structuration Theory

Figure 4.3 Bourdieu’s (1990) field-habitus-capital relationship

Figure 4.4 Elaboration of the field-habitus-capital relationship

Figure 4.5 Frank’s (1991) embodiment matrix

Figure 4.6 Yuasa’s (1993) body circuit 1 - The external sensory-motor circuit

Figure 4.7 Yuasa’s (1993) body circuit 2 - The circuit of coenthesisis

Figure 4.8 Yuasa’s (1993) body circuit 3 - The emotion-instinct circuit

Figure 4.9 Yu’s (2007) relationship between body, culture & metaphor

Figure 5.1 PhD Research Design

Figure 6.1 Matrix of the ‘Natural’ Fighters

Figure 6.2 Matrix of the ‘Trained’ Fighters

Figure 7.1 Matrix of the Modernizers

Figure 7.2 Matrix of the Traditionalists

Figure 8.1 Matrix of the Healers

Figure 8.2 Matrix of the Meditators

Figure 12.1 A linear representation of the practitioner continuum

Figure 12.2 Ideal types and subtypes in the TCMAs
Figure 12.3 Adaptation of Yu’s (2007) body, metaphor and culture model

Figure 12.4 A linear representation of TCMA transmission

Figure 12.5 A dynamic representation of TCMA transmission

Figure 12.6 Field-habitus-capital relationship in TCMAs

Figure 12.7 Ideal Type Framework as Questions

Figure 12.8 Matrix of Ideal Type Generic Structure

Figure 12.9 Matrix of Transformation and Transmission
List of Tables

Table 4.1 Structuralist, Voluntarist and Structurationist Theories

Table 4.2 Weber’s ideal types of leadership

Table 4.3 Narrative Theory in Philosophical Perspective

Table 5.1 Philosophical assumptions behind paradigms

Table 5.2 Ethical considerations based on Plummer’s (2001) guidelines

Table 9.1 A comparison between pushing and sticking hands

Table 12.1 Ideal types and initial rationale for training

Table 12.2 Theoretical contributions of the PhD

Table 12.3 Methodological contributions of the PhD

Table 12.4 Empirical contributions of the PhD

Table 12.5 Empirical questions emerging from the PhD

Table 12.6 Adaptation of Bolelli’s (2008) MAs model for TCMFs
## Abbreviation of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCCMA</td>
<td>British Council for Chinese Martial Arts</td>
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<td>EMAs</td>
<td>East Asian martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMFs</td>
<td>Eastern movement forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOC</td>
<td>International Olympic Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>JMAs</td>
<td>Japanese martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAs</td>
<td>Martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMA</td>
<td>Mixed martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>National Health Service (UK)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>SMAs</td>
<td>Sports martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Taijiquan/Tai Chi (in field notes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCM</td>
<td>Traditional Chinese medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCMAs</td>
<td>Traditionalist Chinese martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCMFs</td>
<td>Traditionalist Chinese movement forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCUGB</td>
<td>Tai Chi Union for Great Britain</td>
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<tr>
<td>TMAs</td>
<td>Traditional martial arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WC</td>
<td>Wing Chun (in field notes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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