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MANUFACTURING MARTIAL SPIRIT

ETHOS, IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY IN THE CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the enduring place of 'martial spirit' (*shangwu jingshen*) in China. It argues that it emerged decisively as a discursive trope during the late nineteenth-century as China faced the existential threat of internal rebellion, Western and Japanese imperialism and a moribund Manchu dynasty. This was when China's self-image as the 'Central Kingdom' gave way to the international image of the 'Sick Man of Asia', prompting many native and foreign observers to attribute China's vulnerability to a chronic deficiency of martial spirit. The article shows that progressive intellectuals sought models of courage and self-sacrifice, looking both to China's ancient history and to Sparta and Japan, while foreign historiographers, from Montesquieu, Hegel, Marx and Spencer to Lattimore and Wittfogel, proposed various theories to explain China's weakness. Similarly, Confucian and Daoist, as well as Legalist and Moist philosophers of the late Bronze Age, all identified a role for martial spirit in character-building and the construction of national ethos, while military strategists from Sunzi to Qi Jiguang addressed such issues as *esprit de corps* and dedication to national salvation. Finally, the paper argues that even today, in the midst of unprecedented economic and military expansion, the competing demands of filial piety and patriotism continue to bedevil Chinese parents and policy makers.

INTRODUCTION

In 1920, Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen), founder and first president of the Republic of China, presented the Jingwu Athletic Association with a calligraphic inscription, declaring: 'Revere the martial spirit', in recognition of the role traditional martial arts played in reviving the nation. After the founding of the People's Republic, Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed: 'As much as possible, we should promote […] taijiquan and every form of physical exercise'. Premier Zhou Enlai added: 'Studying and practicing taijiquan is a very good fitness activity. It can strengthen our bodies, prepare us for self-defence, mould our moral character and is a wonderful pleasure. It brings infinite blessings and promotes longevity'. Vice President Liu Shaoqi, Admiral Chen Yi, and Admiral He Long have all expressed similar sentiments in praise of traditional martial arts. In 1978, future Chinese President Deng Xiaoping wrote a calligraphic inscription for a visiting Japanese delegation affirming: 'Taijiquan is wonderful'. Behind this rhetorical enthusiasm for martial arts lurks a fear that China may once again lapse into the stereotype of the pusillanimous Chinaman, satirized by author Lu Xun, whose hapless hero Ah Q defends himself by saying, 'A gentleman uses his tongue and not his fists'. All of this represents an attempt to splice a martial gene into the national DNA.

Where does the martial spirit live within a society characterized as 'super stable' [Jin 1998], where no Chinese mother wants her son to grow up to be a soldier, let alone a martial artist? This essay interrogates the paradox of China's image as the cradle of the martial arts and self-image as the graveyard of the martial spirit. Like the missing Pierre in Sartre's failed rendezvous in *L'être et le néant*, absence, or 'nothingness', becomes a hyperawareness, or phenomenological 'presence' [Sartre 1943]. Thus, the martial spirit emerges as a problematic precisely because of its perceived absence, or in Liang Qichao's words, 'loss' (*liushi*) [Liang 1904].

DYNASTIC DIALECTICS AND HISTORY LESSONS

If we define the martial spirit as a willingness to use violence to resolve conflict, then contradictions may arise along fault lines of class, race, ethnicity, gender or generation; it may play out on battlefields or playing fields; it may be infused with nationalism or religious zeal; and it may be imperialist or separatist. However, the martial spirit can never be seen in a values vacuum: one man's terrorist is another man's hero. Yesterday's rebel is today's emperor.

What motivates a person to put their life on the line? Self-defence: surely; protection of loved ones, neighbors, co-ethnics: often; religion, ideology, principle, nation: sometimes? Historically, the Chinese have, like all monarchies, assumed that they would be ruled by someone not of their own choosing, and they do not assume that a benign foreign conqueror is inherently less desirable than a domestic despot. We have only to ask if all Taiwanese were initially delighted to be 'liberated' from Japanese colonial rule by the Kuomintang (KMT), or if all Hongkongers were thrilled with the 1997 handover to China. Today's military recruits are made to swear allegiance to the Party, not the nation or constitution.

Reflecting on the lessons of history and the fate of nations, contemporary commentator Yao Tianhua concludes: 'Martial spirit is the backbone of the nation and the perpetual motion machine of its strength and prosperity. […] Nations that lose the martial spirit, and who are prosperous but not strong, will inevitably be defeated' [Yao 2016]. Familiar Chinese aphorisms capture the negative stereotype of the warrior: 'Men of quality do not become soldiers, and iron of quality is not used for nails' and 'Soldiers and bandits are cut from the same cloth'. On the policy level, this tilt is often traced to Song dynasty Emperor Taizu's 'emphasizing the civil over the military' (*zhongwen qingwu*). As China was forced to transition from empire to nation state in the twentieth century, the image of the soldier, too, required a makeover. This is reflected in the contemporary patriotic lyric, 'Soldiers are all lusty lads, seeking glory and winning fame. For the sake of national security, we keep a tight grip on our rifles'. It is assumed that with the victory of a peasant revolution and the founding of a modern 'republic', the citizen has a stake in national defence not enjoyed by the serf or slave in the old feudal society.

There is much interest but little agreement among historians regarding the questions of an ancient aristocracy in China and the relative status of civil and military officers. Whether the political dominance of the aristocracy ended with the Han or the Tang dynasties is debatable, but there is general agreement that the Song elevated the status of the literati at the expense of the military. Song Emperor Taizu, fearing the power of his generals, convened a drinking party and convinced them, in the words of the aphorism, 'to give up military power for a cup of wine'. Paradoxically, it was during the Song that China became the world leader in military technology, developing chromium-plated steel blades, crescent-bladed halberd, triple crossbows, repeating crossbows, whirlwind catapults, 'cloud bridges' (for scaling walled cities), 'nest carts' (for aerial reconnaissance), flame throwers, grenades, incendiary bombs, rockets, landmines, and ultimately handguns and cannon.

Nevertheless, in the end, these were no match for the mobility, decentralized command, near real-time communications and martial spirit of Genghis Khan and his Mongol horsemen. The Song was constantly harassed by the Khitan, Tungut, Tartar, Oirat, and Jurchen

tribes, and finally obliterated by the Mongols, but only after losing the North to the Jin and relocating the whole court to the South. When Yue Fei (1103–1141), who fought against the Liao and Jin incursions, was asked when peace would return, he perhaps apocryphally replied, 'When officials are not corrupt and generals are not afraid to die'.

The Song, who surrendered to the Mongols, and the Ming, who surrendered to the Manchus, are held up as lessons that elevating the scholars above the warriors is a disastrous policy. There is a saying in Chinese: 'When a scholar meets a soldier, the scholar may be right, but he will never convince the soldier'. Nevertheless, the scholars were accorded higher status and compensation, and during the Ming, the generals had to suffer the double indignity of court eunuchs dispatched to the battlefield to tell them how to conduct their operations. This reflects the delicate balance between legitimacy and power, i.e., civil legitimacy and military power.

The Mongols attempted to crush the martial spirit of their Chinese subjects by crude policies, such as controlling the possession of kitchen knives, but their rule lasted a mere 70 years. Four and a half centuries later, the Manchus, engaged as mercenaries by the Ming court to put down the Yellow Turban Rebellion, exploited their military advantage, staying on to become the new rulers of China. There is no more vivid example of lacking martial spirit than employing duplicitous foreign mercenaries to fight one's own domestic battles. Proclaiming the Qing dynasty in 1644, the Manchus employed a subtler policy of 'using Han to control Han' by promoting Neo-Confucian doctrines of loyalty and obedience to authority. Moreover, success on the battlefield and the toppling of dynasties is considered *ipso facto* proof of the passing of the 'Mandate of Heaven' to new hands, even foreign hands. While weakening the Chinese with their own doctrines, the Manchus themselves preserved their traditional martial customs, especially horsemanship and archery. The empire was expanded most dramatically under robust foreign dynasties, and today's 'China' lies within the borders drawn by seventeenth-century Manchu conquerors.

Like the biblical exodus, the Long March, Mao's 1934 Red Army retreat from Nationalist and warlord encirclement, has acquired mythic significance in modern Chinese history. Mao's poem 'The Long March' says: 'The Red Army fears not the hardships of a long march. Ten thousand rivers and a thousand mountains are mere trifles' [Mao 1935]. Two of the essays collected in the influential *Little Red Book* [Mao 1966] are 'Revolutionary Heroism' and 'Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win', invoking the martial spirit at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Comparing Mao and Moses, Mao's righteous struggle is legitimized by the universal laws of dialectical materialism and class struggle, while Moses is a prophet, channeling the commands of the Hebrew deity Yaweh. With the Pharaoh's chariots bearing down, and the Red Sea before them, it was Yahweh, ancient god of storm and war, who assured Moses, 'The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace'. The warrior heroes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Achilles and Odysseus, epitomize the human condition: aware of their fate, unlike animals, but not immortal like the gods. They manifest the martial spirit in accepting their fate, dying bravely, and achieving lasting fame. Greek mothers exhorted their sons on the eve of battle: 'With your shields or on them' (return victorious or dead). Faith was the fuel of the martial spirit for the Hebrew prophets, while fate, fame, and fear of shame inspired the Greek warrior heroes. Mao becomes Moses, the liberator; if Moses speaks to Yaweh, Mao speaks to Marx, and the whole peasant class becomes the 'chosen people'.

Contemporary Chinese historians believe that a fundamental difference between East and West is that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of 'original sin' sanctions the use of force to curb cupidity, whereas Confucian faith in 'the goodness of our original natures' (*xing ben shan*) favors the persuasive power of words. Ming dynasty Neo-Confucian scholar and statesman Wang Yangming, in a letter to disciple Xue Shangqian, said: 'Defeating the bandits in the hills is not as difficult as defeating the bandits in the heart' [Wang 1516]. Many Chinese historians today, however, feel that the reason Japan's Meiji reform movement of 1868 succeeded, whereas China's Reform Movement of 1898 failed, was that the former was led by samurai and the latter by scholars. Art historians often compare William Michael Harnett's nineteenth-century painting 'After the Hunt', illustrating man's conquest of nature, with eighteenth-century Wu Li's landscapes, showing tiny human figures against a backdrop of towering mountains, highlighting the different cultural values of domination versus harmony. Others point to the influential Confucian 'Doctrine of the Mean' (*zhongyong*) to illustrate China's fundamental accommodationist ethos and faith in the seductions of civilization to sinicize conquerors. 'The highest good is like water', 'softness overcomes hardness' and 'greatness embraces the many' are common epigrams plucked from classic works that express the value of tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution. Just as late Qing reformers blamed Neo-Confucianism for China's inability to evolve and change, today's advocates of reviving the martial spirit still blame Neo-Confucianism for 'emphasizing the cultural (*wen*) at the expense of the martial (*wu*)'.

Chinese Communist Party founder Chen Duxiu, in an essay entitled 'Resistance' (*Dikangli*), states: 'Daoism values quietism; Confucianism values decorum; and Buddhism values emptiness. Righteous knights-errant are considered outlaws, and upright men are considered ruffians' [Chen 1915]. He calls attention to the modern environment, where he says the martial spirit is still relevant, but instead of physical prowess, it

requires social skills and discipline. Today, surveys of current recruits' motivation for joining the army consistently find that no one checks the box for 'loyalty to the ancestral homeland', prompting calls for renewed emphasis on the martial spirit in the context of patriotism.

THE MARTIAL SPIRIT AND ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

The Warring States Period, as the name suggests, was an era of intense internecine conflict between the former feudatories of the Zhou Dynasty. The ideal remained peace and unity, but the various schools of thought proposed solutions that ranged from restorationist to evolutionist, optimist to pessimist, and pacifist to imperialist. The martial spirit is by no means a recent preoccupation of modern Chinese nation builders, but has been a perennial *topos* in Chinese philosophy from earliest times.

In the *Analects,* 'Shuer' says: 'What Confucius was very cautious about was fasting, war and disease' [Yang 2018]. His emphasis was on character-building through the performance of rites and reading of the classics, and his heroes were righteous rulers rather than courageous warriors. However, he was realist enough to not neglect military preparedness, and said in *Analects,* 'Weiling gong': 'Men of steadfastness and righteousness should not put life above righteousness, and should be prepared to die to preserve their righteousness' [Yang 2018]. In the *Kongzi jiayu,* we find a vision of the Confucian utopia: 'City walls are not built, moats are not dug, weapons are melted for plowshares, horses are put out to pasture, and there is a thousand years without the disaster of war' [Wang 2009]. The *Analects,* 'Yanyuan' lists three essentials for the nation: adequate food, adequate weapons, and confidence of the people. It goes on to say that if you have to sacrifice one, it would be weapons, and if you can have only one, it would be the confidence of the people [Yang 2018].

This idea of confidence is echoed in *Sunzi's Art of War,* when it says: 'The *dao* is what unites the hearts of the population to their leaders' [Sun, Wu, Guo 2006]. For Confucians, then, a model emperor with a righteous cause is the soul of military power. The emperor inspires morale in the troops, and in the words of the *Book of Odes*: 'The king raised an army, forged armor and weapons, and marched together side-by-side with us' [Han 2017]. For the Daoists, an invisible emperor, apolitical literati, and contented peasantry was the best recipe for peace. The cultured class was loathe to forfeit the comforts of home and court and needed to be reminded of their patriotic duty by Eastern Han historian Ban Zhao 'to throw down the writing brush and join the army'. More cynical was Warring States poet Qu Yuan, who said: 'The wind sighs and the Yi River is frigid; our soldiers march off but do not return' [Qu 2014]. Thus, we cannot expect the *Five Classics* and *Four Books*, compiled under Confucian influence, to celebrate warrior heroes. The Legalists, by contrast, were ruthless realists and advocated a totalitarian, Spartan-like state, with a population of citizen soldiers.

Confucianism has often been considered synonymous with Chinese culture itself, but May Fourth Movement modernizers chanted: 'Down with Confucius and Sons', and Mao, in turn, mocked Confucius as Kong Laoer (Confucius the Cock). It was not until Hu Jintao's 2005 proclamation of the 'harmonious society', signaling an end to class struggle, and the proliferation of more than 1000 Confucius Institutes around the world, that Confucius is now considered officially rehabilitated. The Confucians are often accused of weakening China by emphasizing the cultural/civil (*wen)* over the martial/military (*wu),* but Confucian apologists point to a more muscular Confucianism in ancient times, where archery and cherioteering were counted among the 'Six Arts' in the education of a gentleman, and Confucius is reputed to have said, 'To fail to teach the people the military arts is tantamount to slaughtering them'. Moreover, apocryphal accounts of Confucius' life record his extraordinary physical strength, his endorsement of avenging wrongs against family members, and the distinguished military careers of disciples like Zi Lu and Ran You.

Speaking of courage (*yong*), the *Analects*, 'Xianwen' records, 'The man of *ren* (benevolence) will necessarily possess courage, but the courageous man does not necessarily possess *ren* [Yang 2018], and the Confucian classic *Liji* (Book of rites) states, 'A true Confucian can be killed, but he cannot be humiliated' [Chen 1987]. The second most important classic in the Confucian canon, the *Mencius*, says, 'The gentleman would prefer not to fight, but if necessary, he should fight to win'. This grudging endorsement is also reflected in Mencius' anecdote about the King of Qi, who confessed to the *vice* of admiring martial courage, and the *Shiji's* account of King Wu, who prided himself on his physical prowess and died in a cauldron-lifting contest. Later, with the installation of Confucianism as the state ideology under the Han, the martial spirit declined, setting the stage for almost four centuries of division, known as the Six Dynasties.

The Daoists, like the ancient Greek Cynics, rejected social conventions and went on to constitute the quietist strain in Chinese culture. Their classic touchstone, the *Daodejing*, unequivocally condemns warfare, linking it to the twin sins of 'grasping' and 'insatiability': 'When the *dao* prevails in the world, even war horses plow the fields; when the *dao* does not prevail, mares foal on the battlefields' [Wen 2012]. Thus, the *Zhuangzi* devotes a whole chapter to an allegory about swordsmanship. As the story goes, the emperor, a connoisseur of swordsmanship, hosts 3,000 fencing masters, who delight their patron with a daily display of lethal dueling. Hearing of Zhuangzi's skill, he is summoned to court, but

before trying conclusions with the emperor's best, he relates a parable of 'three swords'. In this tale, each of the swords represents a different station in life and a different standard of conduct: the sword of the emperor, the sword of the feudal lords, and the sword of the common people. On hearing the moral that the emperor occupies the highest station but models the lowest standard, he is instantly enlightened and dismisses his entire stable of retainers [Fang 2017].

The Spring and Autumn to Warring States transition saw a shift from bronze to iron, chariots to infantry, and aristocracy to meritocracy, together with the rise of a new political philosophy called Legalism. The optimistic view of human perfectibility and virtue ethics in Confucius and Mencius began to give way to Shang Yang and Han Fei's more cynical appraisal of human nature and an embrace of peasants and warriors as the real foundations of prosperity and security. Accepting self-interest as the underlying motivation in all endeavors, they observe that, although agriculture and warfare are bitter and dangerous, people will engage in them for the prospect of wealth and fame. The state should be ruled by impartial administers, not sages, who institute a strict system of predictable rewards and punishments. 'There is no place to flee from the army ranks' says the *Book of Lord Shang*, and there are handsome rewards for decapitating the enemy. Disparaging merchants and intellectuals, the text says: 'Those who do not work but eat, who do not fight but attain glory, who have no rank but are respected, who have no emolument but are rich, who have no office but lead […] these are called villains' [Pines 2017].

The Confucians celebrated exceptional acts of filial piety, while the Legalists opened a path to fame and glory for the rank and file through the martial spirit. Only the Legalists explicitly advocated militarism and ultimately were embraced by the state of Qin, which under the First Emperor reunited the fractured empire. By famously 'burning the books and burying the Confucians', the First Emperor signaled his intentions to elevate the military and sideline the Confucian masters of ceremonies. This was China's first deliberate attempt to revive the 'martial spirit', and its chief accomplishment was reunification of the empire. Mindful of their rebel roots, new dynasties were keen to consolidate their own rule and discourage future rebellion. The Qin was a short-lived, Spartan-like state, demonized for two millennia by Confucians for its decivilizing influence but lionized by Mao. Internal rebellion and external invasion were the twin engines of the dynastic cycle.

Finally, the Moist School, remarkable for its synthesis of compassion and utilitarianism, science and religious revivalism, offers an interesting example of militant pacifism. It acknowledges the reality of war, but does not accept its inevitability, preaching universal love and practicing defensive deterrence. In 'Against Aggression' (*Feigong*), Mozi details methods for hardening city walls and defence against scaling, incendiaries, tunnels and sneak attacks. Ever the meticulous logician, Mozi exposes the cognitive dissonance of regarding the man who kills his neighbor as a murderer, while the ruler who attacks another country is glorified as a conquering hero. At the same time, if Confucius was nostalgic for the rituals and decorum of the early Zhou nobility, Mozi advocated a return to the primitive piety of the common people and a personal relationship with Heaven (*tian*). As Heaven loves all equally, so should we practice 'universal love and mutual benefit'. This message gave his teachings a religious resonance, but put him at odds with the particularistic morality of the Confucians, though even Mencius was forced to acknowledge that Mozi 'was willing to wear out his body from head to toe in the service of others'. While specializing in anti-siege technology for defence of weaker states, a kind of preventive intervention, he also allows that wars of liberation from tyrants may be justified, and laid the ethical foundation for the knights-errant when he said approvingly in the 'Jingshang': 'The knights-errant sacrifice themselves to benefit others. […] They do what others fear to do and rescue them in their time of need' [Li 2007]. Thus, as early as the fifth-century BCE, we see with Mozi the expression of the martial spirit in collective defensive warfare and in the righteous resistance of individuals.

Two thousand years later, Ming official Lü Kun wrote a manual on city defence entitled *Jiumingshu* (Treatise on saving lives). Addressing the issue of failed defence, he says that after the enemy has breached the walls and is sacking the city, 'Those who are still able to resist should fight to the death with all their might, and to those who say that this only enrages the enemy, I answer, "The only fear is that our courage flags and our will falters"' [Lü n.d.]. Blending the principles of martial spirit and honor, he considered suicide preferable to a servile surrender.

The utilitarianism and consequentialism of the knights-errant exposed them to the criticism of the second most important figure in the Confucian camp, Mencius, who said: 'They have no respect for fathers or rulers' [Zhu 1983]. Similarly, Legalist Han Fei roundly condemned them as one of society's 'five vermin', undermining respect for authority and no better than hired thugs. However, Han Fei shows equal contempt for the Confucian scholars and the knights-errant when he says: 'The literati corrupt the proper order with words, and the knights-errant flout the law with martial arts' [Xu 2003]. Like the Daoists, the knights-errant had distain for worldly success, but unlike them, were socially engaged. The Confucians and Legalists were both upholders of social harmony – one through moral suasion and the other law and order; and the knights-errant and Daoists were both individualistic – one advocating action and the other non-action (*wuwei*). Although

Daoism and Buddhism have been adopted as the house religions of the internal martial arts and Shaolin respectively, it is Legalism, Moism, and the knights-errant who have historically contributed most to promoting the martial spirit. Whether Confucian, Moist, Legalist, or Daoist, social harmony was the sacred goal of all schools of thought, but divergent attitudes toward the transgressive acts of the knights-errant provide a convenient litmus test for separating out their fundamental differences on the question of martial spirit.

Neither the scholar-official nor the peasant led lives conducive to the preservation of the martial spirit, and both Moism and Legalism eventually disappeared as living traditions. Prior to the Song dynasty, civil and military officials enjoyed equal status, but the Song saw a decisive tilt to the civil, and we no longer hear exhortations such as Han dynasty Ban Chao's, 'Throw down the writing brush and join the army', as recorded in his *History of the Later Han* biography. However, China often seemed to have more confidence in her ability to 'sinicize', i.e., civilize, her rivals than to repel them. At the same time, these conquerors were often clever enough to use China's own doctrine of the 'Mandate of Heaven' and the Confucian emphasis on deference to authority to neutralize resistance. External pressure, necessitating revival of the martial spirit and the empowerment of frontier military garrisons, often led to an imbalance between center and periphery, which set the stage for the overthrow of the court. The martial spirit requires a certain spiritual fervor, which the Manchu warrior possessed by virtue of lifestyle, the Taiping and Boxer rebels possessed by virtue of millenarian and magical beliefs, and the Republican and Communist revolutionaries possessed by virtue of ideology and national salvation.

While Marxist historians employ the dialectic of class struggle, traditional Chinese historians rely on the organic yin-yang paradigm to explain the rise and demise of dynasties and the vicissitudes of family fortunes, as 'wealth cannot be maintained for three successive generations' (*cai buchuan sandai*). In this latter framework, China is cast in the passive 'yin' role in an ineluctable struggle between agricultural and pastoral or seafaring civilizations. This theme was particularly prominent during China's nineteenth-century encounter with the West, and reemerges today, even as China embarks on an ambitious expansionist policy of 'one belt, one road', creates island outposts in the Pacific, and is poised to become the world's largest economy. China's richest man Ma Yun (Jack Ma), a martial arts enthusiast who has produced a gongfu fantasy video starring himself, and has even branded his own martial arts style (gongshoudao), says: 'A great people will certainly possess the martial spirit. […] However, those today who revere the martial spirit should strive to overcome themselves rather than seeking to overcome others' [Ma 2017]. This enlightened attitude attempts to replace the social Darwinism of Lu Xun's 'man-eating' (*chiren)* society, and Mao's insistence on 'armed struggle' with a 'harmonious society' called for by former President Hu Jintao. This concern has even entered the realm of gender politics, and in a recent book by Sun Yunxiao entitled *Zhengjiu nanhai* (Save our boys), Wang Xiaodong claims that in contemporary society, men are getting weaker, while women are getting stronger [Sun 2010]. The gender binary as a metaphor, however, has a long history, going back to British formulations of 'the manly Englishman' and 'the effeminate colonial'. The Western student of Asian martial arts may have 'something to prove' to the bullies on the block or the school yard, but he does not carry the burden of effeminizing colonialism on his back. The stereotype of the 'Sick Man of Asia' reproduces itself.

THE MARTIAL SPIRIT AND MILITARY STRATEGY

Moving from martial ethos, the peace-loving or warlike disposition of a people, we now examine the theories of those actually tasked with defence of the nation. China is justly famous for its ancient works on military science, and in spite of great differences in technology, they are still found relevant today for their psychological insight and applicability beyond the battlefield. The earliest of the 'seven classics on military strategy', Sunzi's *Art of War*, distinguishes the martial spirit of the leadership and that of the rank and file. The head of state and generals must check their temper and guard against impulsive decisions. The classic says, 'Anger can turn to joy, and resentment can turn to happiness, but a defeated country is lost forever, and the dead can never return'. The foot soldiers, at the tip of the spear, are subject to a group psychology that reacts to immediate conditions: 'If you corner the enemy, they will offer stiff resistance; if you allow an escape route, they will eventually wear themselves out; pursue them closely, but do not press them, and their *qi* will gradually be exhausted' [Sun 2006]. The '*qi*' that the classic speaks of is an amalgam of physical stamina and psychological will, and is as good as any definition of martial spirit.

Within the 'seven military classics' corpus, compiled during the Northern Song, the *Art of War of Master Wu* (Wuzi bingfa), generally dated to the Warring States Period, shows a balance of Confucian and Legalist philosophy, addressing both the need for virtue in the ruler to win the hearts and minds of the people and political indoctrination in the troops to make them willing to sacrifice for a righteous cause. *The Three Strategies* (Sanlüe) adds that prosperity is proof to the population of the wisdom of the ruler's policies, and failing that, they will not make sacrifices merely to preserve their poverty. Moreover, they are far more willing to make the ultimate sacrifice if they know conscription will not interrupt their vital economic activities, that generals are willing

to share the harsh conditions of long campaigns, and that the families of the fallen will be comforted and compensated. Beyond this, in order to take advantage of group psychology, the *Art of War of Master Wu* recommends that fighting units be composed of recruits from the same village, as they share a common language, bonds of mutual affection, and investment in face.

The *Taigong's Six Secret Teachings* (Taigong liutao) is often cited for its Daoist influence, owing to its emphasis on 'soft power' and the subtlety of its understanding of psychological warfare. This begins with concealing one's own strength in order to beguile the enemy into overconfidence, because, as the *Daodejing* says, 'Excessive strength inevitably breaks'. The text outlines twelve techniques for undermining the enemy's preparedness, including flattery, bribery, disinformation, duplicity and spying. Moreover, to win the devotion of one's own troops, there should be a code of discipline that features harsh punishment for misconduct by high-ranking officers and handsome rewards for valor in the rank and file. Similarly, the *Art of Sima* (Simafa), using Confucian terms, advocates *ren* (benevolent) treatment of soldiers to inspire loyalty and willingness to sacrifice. By contrast, the *Wei Liaozi* recommends a Legalist, spare-the-rod policy of aversive discipline, including the death penalty for lack of fervor. The *Fanjing* warns, however, that both awards and punishments can have untoward consequences: awards may foster quarreling and punishments devolve into cruelty.

As Europe strode the globe like a colonial Colossus, the vast Ming empire cowered at the onslaught of a handful of Japanese pirates. It was at this juncture that General Qi Jiguang created his *Quanjing* (Classic of pugilism) form, as much to stoke the marital spirit as train skills that, after all, were not applicable to battlefield conditions. Qi Jiguang was China's preeminent, pre-modern exponent of military science. In his *Jixiao Xinshu* and *Lianbing shiji*, he covered every aspect of the material and psychological requirements of an army. His recruitment policies strongly favored 'honest country folk' over 'city wastrels' ('Recruiting'), and he warned that morale depended on a fair system of rewards and punishments, with no tolerance for rape, pillage, and mistreatment of prisoners of war ('Jinling'). Qi was a master of group psychology and realized that the slightest hesitation or hint of a desire to retreat could infect a whole army with indecision and be toxic to their confidence: 'If a single soldier turns his head, it sows doubt in the whole army; if a single soldier retreats an inch, it deflates the spirit of the whole army' ('Answering Questions').

He was skeptical of the value of martial artists in the ranks, observing that fighting in close formations on the battlefield, 'the courageous cannot charge to the front, and the cowardly cannot fall to the rear ('Answering Questions'). However, Qi added, 'Those with natural courage, and who have strength, stature, and agility, can benefit from martial arts training to reach an even higher level' ('Recruiting'). For those in command, leading by example was essential for maintaining troop morale, and even the general must be prepared to share the bitter lives of the troops and to participate in rigorous training [Qi 1560]. All of this is a footnote to the third-century BCE *Lüshi chunqiu*'s epigramatic: 'The undefeated army consists of many soldiers with one mind'.

WESTERN THEORIES OF CHINA'S MARTIAL ETHOS

Historiography as it developed in the West, whether materialist or idealist, teleological or non-teleological, analytical or speculative, often viewed China as an enigmatic exception. For Hegel, the dynastic cycle made it a static civilization, essentially without history, and for Mao, it required a revision of classical Marxism to allow the peasants rather than the proletariat to play the role of revolutionary vanguard. Materialist hermeneutics of cultural difference generally rely on some version of environmental determinism. This approach has a long history in the West, beginning with Plato, Aristotle, Strabo and Hippocrates, who attributed the relative sophistication of Greek culture to a temperate climate. A number of medieval Middle Eastern scholars linked water, soil and temperature to racial differences, a theme taken up by Western thinkers such as Montesquieu during the period of European expansion. Still later, in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Ratzel applied Darwin's theory of evolution to explain differences in human physiology.

The road from determinism to racial essentialism is not unknown in China either, where early Zhou philosopher and statesman Guan Zhong focused on rivers as accounting for the different customs of the various feudal states. Thus chapter 39, 'Rivers and Lands' (*Shuidi*), of the *Guanzi* attributed to him says of the people of the state of Qi: 'The rivers are wild and tortuous, and therefore the people are brutish and fearless' [Guan n.d.]. Here we have a classic statement of a causal connection between environment and ethos.

Two modern historians who applied this notion of environmental determinism to China were Owen Lattimore and Karl Wittfogel. Lattimore emphasized the Cain and Abel contradiction between agriculturalists and pastoralists, with Chinese civilization growing up on the loess plains of the Yellow River basin, and nomadic herders occupying the northern steppes. Settled agriculturalists expand inch-by-inch, bringing more land under cultivation, while pastoralists periodically swoop down to raid their riches, or even to conquer and rule them.

Pastoralists grow up in the saddle, and the skills of herding and hunting are seamlessly adapted to cavalry warfare and nurturing of the martial spirit. Echoes of this clash of civilizations can be seen today in China's identity politics and separatist movements among Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols and Manchus. Han Chinese textbooks until recently gathered them all under the rubric of 'barbarians' (*yeman minzu*). The Great Wall is the ultimate monument to this mentality and bears mute testimony to the perception of irreconcilable contradiction, as well as the failure of walls to guarantee security.

Pursuing another line of environmental determinism, Karl Wittfogel proposed the theory of 'hydraulic civilizations' and 'oriental despotism'. For Wittfogel, however, it was the necessity to contain and channel the Yellow River, whose seasonal flooding, like the Nile Valley, necessitated strong central authority to conscript able-bodied men to undertake great public works. Whether threats from rivers or raiders, large-scale conscription requires transcending local interests and gives the martial spirit a distinctly defensive quality. Only a 'despotic' central government, according to Wittfogel, could pry sons loose from their families and villages and commit them to large-scale projects.

The notion of a 'changeless' China was challenged by John Fairbank, who offered a model of 'change within tradition', though this was criticized as Eurocentric and patently tautological. Levenson, Wright and Feurerwerker argued that Confucianism was fundamentally incompatible with modernity, while Naitor Torajiro countered that the decline of the aristocracy and the institution of the civil service examination system created a meritocracy, which marked an indigenous turn to modernity. However, others point out that the exams were based on mastery of classical texts, and physiocratic hostility to commerce and military service persisted. Of the four traditional social classes – gentry, farmers, artisans and merchants – traders were the lowest, and soldiers were excluded altogether, along with slaves, entertainers, eunuchs and clergy.

CHINESE SOCIETY AND THE MARTIAL SPIRIT

People will fight for their lives, for their land, for their kin, and for their beliefs. If land and agriculture represent the base, the superstructure begins with the extended family, which in China can be characterized as patriarchal, patrilineal, and polygamist, with arranged marriage and equal partition of inheritance. The family ideal is 'three generations under one roof' (*sandai tongtang*) and clan villages (*zongzu cunluo*). It is precisely this dense web of familial bonds, including collective punishment for the wrongdoing of individuals, that led Hegel to regard Chinese culture as inhospitable to personal freedom or the full development of subjectivity. It was the strategy of the Communists to transfer this group loyalty from the family to the class and the village to the Party. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the term 'martial spirit' was replaced by the 'Lei Feng spirit', a shift in emphasis from martial skill and battlefield bravery to the story of an orphan who owed his survival to the Party and became a 'model' soldier. Although lauded for his selflessness and gratitude, Lei Feng participated in no battles and died in a truck accident.

If the environment and agriculture represent the base, and the first layer of superstructure is family, the next layer is myth, religion, and ideology. In China, the cult of filial piety and ancestor worship was practiced by the imperial clan right down to the lowest peasant, a unifying ethos, but decentralized and without a grand teleological narrative. Unlike the European 'divine right of kings', or apotheosis of rulers as in ancient Egypt and Japan, the Chinese emperor worshipped his own ancestors but was not the object of popular worship as a deity himself. In this system, rooted in land and clan, there is no evangelical imperative: I worship my ancestors and would not dream of compelling another to worship them, much less conversion by the sword. Hence, there is nothing comparable to 'religious wars', and crusades or *jihad* are unknown.

The interdependence of parents and children in life continues in the afterlife, when the welfare of ancestors depends upon continuing veneration by descendants, and the ancestors, in turn, sit in judgment on the living. As in ancient Greece, the Chinese dead were dependent on the memory and ritual offerings of the living. This picture is somewhat complicated by an overlay of belief in reincarnation, but regardless of the vision of an afterlife, they all feature a system of rewards and punishments for behavior in this life, which would have a significant impact on willingness to die for a higher purpose. The idea of martyrdom and sacrifice as a fast track to paradise has been prominent in Islam and Shinto, but religion can cut two ways: it can make people willing to sacrifice in this life in hopes of reward in the next, or convince them to turn the other cheek and accept circumstances as part of a divine plan, out of their hands.

In the Chinese case, the valorization of care for living parents and veneration of ancestors normally trumped the ambition to achieve family glory through arms. The Chinese have not regarded religion as something to die for: certainly there is no equivalent of martyrdom in the Coliseum or the Crusades, or wars between Catholics and Protestants, Sunni and Shia. Reflecting the tension between the demands of filial piety and broader social consciousness in today's Hong Kong protestors, who, anticipating detention or even death, leave letters of apology to their parents before taking to the streets.

If the core of Chinese religion is ancestor worship, nevertheless, the typical altar is crowded with an eclectic assortment of gods, goddesses, bodhisattvas, sages and culture heroes, each petitioned for special blessings. China's 'god of war' Guan Yü, the Three Kingdoms general, depicted in iconography in full armor with eponymous halberd in hand, is deified and venerated as a champion of justice and powerful ally in exorcizing demons. He did not, however, define the cultural ethos like the nearly thirty war gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, or the centrality of the martial spirit in Sikism or the Kshatriya caste.

Together with ancestor worship and polytheism, the third pillar of Chinese folk religion is a belief in fate (*ming)*, the commonsense notion that you did not choose the circumstances you were born into, particularly important in a society with limited social mobility, strict gender roles and arranged marriage. Fate is not entirely opaque, however, and the veil may be lifted by myriad techniques of divination, including astrology, numerology and necromancy. Acceptance of fate may have propelled the ancient Greek warriors onto the battlefield, but it was not a similar motivator in China. For the rationally inclined, the *dao*, operating through *yin* and *yang*, the Five Phases (*wuxing*), and Branches and Stems (*ganzhi*), seemed an adequate metaphysics to explain the natural world. *Ren* (benevolence), operating through the Three Bonds (*sangang*) and Five Relationships (*wulun*), seemed adequate to order the social realm. If there was no theory of progress, there was also no damnation or salvation, and all the laws were immanent in creation, with no need for divine intervention. For deeper seekers, Daoism and Buddhism offered inner peace and outer harmony, and with a little more imagination, inner and outer alchemy promised embodied immortality.

THE 'HUNDRED YEARS OF HUMILIATION': VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

After two centuries of Manchu rule, mid-nineteenth-century China experienced a series of devastating upheavals: the Taiping Rebellion, lasting 14 years, ravaging 17 provinces, and costing 20 million lives; defeats in the First and Second Opium Wars against Britain and France, resulting in the humiliating Unequal Treaties; the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 which saw the loss of Korea and Taiwan and a staggering indemnity; as well as the failed Self-Strengthening Movement, the failed Reform Movement and Coup d'Etat of 1898, and the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Much of what we would consider sovereignty, as well as large swaths of territory, had been sacrificed, tens of millions of lives lost, and China's political status was generously referred to as 'semi-colonialism'. Landless, starving peasants cannot be induced to forfeit their lives by appeals to patriotism when they correctly conclude that things could hardly get worse under new masters, while the Manchus, for their part, did not feel they were defending their sacred heartland.

By the late nineteenth century, leading intellectuals faced the double dilemma of a moribund foreign dynasty and aggressive Western and Japanese imperialism. The enervating influence of opium certainly did little to ignite the spirit of self-confidence and resistance. Added to this was the humiliation of a modernizing Japan, that had already defeated both China and Russia on land and sea. The Jewish forces that chased the Roman legions out of Judea in the second century CE were not Talmudic scholars. Cultural renewal was now a matter of survival and not merely style. The reform agenda included politics, society, religion and a host of cultural values, one of which they called the 'martial spirit'. This historical experience informs a discourse around martial spirit today and a fear that China is once again lapsing into the declining curve of the national defence cycle.

A generation of reformist intellectuals realized that the 'Central Kingdom' would need to re-imagine itself as one among many nation states, locked in a Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest. Cantonese scholar Kang Youwei (1858-1927) emerged as senior ideologue for the reform movement and personal adviser to the young Manchu emperor Guangxu. Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the millenarian Taiping Rebellion, Kang proposed a constitutional monarchy with a kind of progressive Confucianism as its political and spiritual ideology. Recasting Confucius as a messianic prophet, whose core teaching was 'benevolence' (*ren*), he blended nationalism with a spiritualized Confucianism. Ultimately, this top-down approach was doomed by the youth and inexperience of the Guangxu Emperor, and the Hundred Days of Reform was aborted by the coup d'état that brought the Dowager Empress and conservative party back to power. It was not until the twentieth century, and only after a Nationalist Revolution, Communist Revolution, and Reform and Openness Policy that China would emerge in the twenty-first century as a world super-power, with nuclear bombs, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the world's largest standing army.

One of the most radical of the generation of intellectuals who faced the double dilemma of Manchu rule and Western imperialism was Tan Sitong (1865-1898). His first task was to remind his countrymen that rule by a foreign dynasty was not normal. After the Coup d' Etat of 1898 ended the Hundred Days of Reform and brought the Empress Dowager back to power, he plotted a counter coup with General Yuan Shikai and cultivated the support of the bodyguard brotherhoods led by Great Sword Wang the Fifth (Dadao Wang Wu). After Yuan betrayed the plotters, and Tan was arrested, Wang Wu and a cadre of martial

artists planned a daring but ill-fated rescue at the execution grounds. In the true knight-errant tradition, and believing that no revolution in history had succeeded without its martyrs, Tan allowed himself to be a sacrificial lamb, while other reformers fled to Japan and continued agitation. Truly, martyrdom and the martial spirit are inextricably bound. Tan sought to take the martial spirit of the *xia*, which operated on the local level, and apply it, as with Japan's *samurai*, to the creation of a national martial ethos.

One of T'an's co-conspirators, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), survived the 1898 counter-coup in exile, and in 1904 wrote the first monograph dedicated to the topic of the martial spirit as a cultural trait: *Zhongguo zhi wushidao* (China's *bushido*). Liang exhorted his countrymen to rouse themselves and gives seventy examples of men from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods who exemplified the martial spirit. He reserves the highest praise for Zhao Wuling, who rallied resistance to northern incursions and even adopted 'barbarian' trousers as better suited to mounted warfare. The book was banned by Manchu censors, but published in his *Yinbingshi heji* (Collected works from the ice drinker's studio).

Written explicitly as curricular material for the next generation of students, this work is a rebuttal to Western and Japanese characterizations of China as 'a nation without military history and a people without the martial spirit. I am ashamed, angry, and cannot accept this' [Liang 1904]. With the unification of the empire and imposition of autocratic rule, the martial spirit was discouraged, as it might pose a threat to the imperial power holders. This was a process begun with the Qin and continued by the Han. In his 'Preface', Liang sought to prove that the apparent lack of martial spirit was not an essential part of the Chinese people's makeup, but gradually withered under despotic policies designed to foster a passive population.

Comparing the ancient state of Zhao to Sparta, he likened China's Warring States period to a microcosm of modern international competition, periods that produced men of daring and ambition and punished complacency. Liang notes that although *bushido* was the code of the feudal samurai class, rather than becoming obsolete with the Meiji Restoration and Westernization, it actually diffused to all levels of society and formed the 'soul' of Japanese nationalism. Thus he attempted to resurrect role models of ancient martial spirit, while at the same time championing modernization and balancing the claims of individualism and patriotism [Liang 1904].

During his years of exile, Liang learned many lessons from Japan's response to contact with the West. In a recollection published in the *Qingyi bao,* and collected in his *Yinbingshi ziyoushu*, Liang recounts a moving incident, where passing a Japanese military camp, he beheld a banner with the exhortation: 'Pray to die in battle'. In a shock of realization, he compared this to the dread of conscription and the bitterness of military service reflected in so much Chinese poetry. Concluding that *bushido* was the 'soul' (*hun*) of Japan, he set about to discover the soul of China. In his *Xinmin shuo* (Essays on the new citizen), Chapter 17, 'Shangwu' (Revering the martial spirit), he cites the traditional Chinese aphorisms, 'enduring a hundred insults is golden' and 'spit on the face eventually dries', as unfit to serve China in a global struggle for survival. Denying the incompatibility of martial spirit and 'civilization', he insists that civilizations are founded on the martial spirit and perish without it (Liang 1936). He mourned its loss in China like a death in the family.

Rejecting the traditional ideal of 'universal peace' (*taiping)* as too static, Kang Youwei (1858-1927), the elder statesman of the reform movement, attempted to synthesize Confucianism with a theory of progress; Liang Qichao adopted social Darwinism, earning the title 'China's Huxley'; Yan Fu championed Hegel's view of history lurching from extreme to extreme, but always tending toward reason and freedom; and Tan Sitong believed that revolution required the ultimate sacrifice. Tan invoked the Buddhist doctrine of 'uncreated and undestroyed' to break down attachment, fear of death, and promote martyrdom as an aspect of the martial spirit. What we find here is a terrible optimism: violent disruption is the price of progress. The martial spirit required individual acts of sacrifice for the survival of the 'race', viewed in the nineteenth century in narrow essentialist terms. Would China merely exchange incompetent Manchu colonialism for the efficiency of Western colonialism?

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) said: 'It is difficult to imagine Chinese men fighting a war. If they do have disagreements with one other, it is more like the petulance of women, or might come to hair pulling' [Shelke 2010]. Diaries of Japanese veterans of what the Chinese call the 'Nanjing Massacre' (1937) marveled at the passivity of the population and wondered if they had a natural inclination toward submissiveness, or were simply enlightened about death. To counter this stereotype, late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century reformers cited passages from the ancients, like *The History of the Han,* 'Annals of Geography', which says: 'The men of Wu and Yue are all warriors, and therefore they love the sword; they take death lightly and are easily aroused' [Ban Gu]. They also noted contemporaneous examples like martial artists Huo Yuanjia and Wang Ziping, who defeated Western challengers in public matches.

The arrival of Western frigates, gunboats, and steamers in the nineteenth century was like an alien invasion. Adding insult to injury, Japan, junior partner in China's own cultural sphere, not only resisted Western colonization, but even defeated China herself in the Sino-

Japanese War of 1894. Unlike the Japanese, who combined Western technology with emperor worship and Shinto, China's nineteenth-century advocates of reviving the martial spirit rarely appealed to folk religion, and even Guan Yü, the God of War, or mythical civilization founder Yellow Emperor, never seemed to gain the cult status of Japan's Amaterasu. Religious and 'philosophical Daoism', too, were dismissed as either too superstitious or too quietist. The Japanese synthesis of militarism and Shinto seemed not to resonate with the Chinese as much as the Western model of imperialism and Christian evangelism, and reformist intellectuals tried to rehabilitate elements of Confucianism, Moism and Buddhism to form a quasi-religious ideology as the basis of nascent nationalism.

In Japan, imperial incarnation, more powerful even than Europe's divine right of kings, justified the divine nature of the emperor, the superiority of the Japanese race, and their destiny to rule over other peoples. Kamakazi volunteers exceeded available aircraft, and fallen soldiers were venerated in Shinto shrines. It was not lost on Chinese intellectuals that European knights were defenders of the faith, that Christian missionaries worked hand-in-glove with Western imperialism, and that Shinto was a part of Japanese militarism. Prussia and Japan both transformed themselves from peasant societies into industrial and military powerhouses with a militaristic ethos. Recognizing the roles of religion, racialism, science, industrialism and colonialism in the rise of Japan and the West, Chinese reformers debated the merits of constitutional monarchy versus republicanism and defensive versus expansionist military policies.

During the nineteenth century, the martial arts community was a hotbed of patriotism, but its loyalties were tested during the Taiping Rebellion's attempt to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and the Boxer's assault on all foreigners. Again, during the Warlord, Republican, and Communist eras, wanting to align their martial skills with the knight-errant ethic of aiding the oppressed, the martial arts community found themselves with few good choices. This was the dilemma that drove patriotic martial arts hero Chen Zizheng to drink and an untimely death.

China's defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894), resulting in the loss of Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan, Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria, and 1937 attacks on Nanjing and Shanghai created a widespread consensus around the need for self-strengthening. The role of athletics, calisthenics and martial arts in Western and Japanese nations prompted a series of private and public efforts to infuse physical culture into the educational system. The half-century between the First and Second Sino-Japanese Wars saw a process of stylization, politicization, commercialization, institutionalization and urbanization transform the martial arts.

Family styles became public, with standardized forms, texts and founding myths. Enabled by mass media, celebrities emerged who carried the banners of their styles against native and foreign challengers in widely publicized matches. Chinese winners became national heroes, burnishing the reputation of their style, the nation and even the 'race'. As styles became brands, and brands competed for market share, secrecy and the family lineage system gave way to public dissemination and commercialization.

Styles competed, but also came together under umbrella organizations like the Jingwu Association, and eventually government sponsorship with the Central Guoshu Institute, thus marking the evolution from popularization to policy. This parallels the broader cultural evolution from family-based education, hereditary professions, and the imperial examination system to public schools, voluntary careers, and standardized physical education.

This period also saw a mass migration from the hinterlands to urban centers, the growth of international ports like Shanghai and Hongkong, and eventually beyond to the Chinese diaspora in Singapore and Chinatowns in the West. The diffusion of eugenics theories from the West encouraged the abolition of footbinding and the participation of women in physical culture, largely to make them 'fit breeders for the race'. Family styles and lineages survived these modernizing trends, adding an antique cachet to the burgeoning martial arts marketplace.

Opposition to this martial arts revival might be totally overlooked by history were it not for the fact that the leading contrarian happened to be China's most celebrated literary figure and public intellectual: Lu Xun (1881-1936). Although promoters of the martial arts included President of the Republic Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and President of Beijing University Cai Yuanpei, literary giant and May Fourth New Culture Movement leader Lu Xun was skeptical. Born in 1881 during the last days of the Manchu dynasty, he saw China's humiliating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the abortive Coup d'Etat of 1898, the Unequal Treaties and Spheres of Influence, the Boxer Rebellion, the Warlord Era, the Shanghai Massacre, the Nationalist-Communist Civil War and Japanese occupation of Manchuria. He died one year after the Communists' Long March and one year before the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Seeing a photograph of the public execution of a suspected Chinese spy by Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War, while a crowd of Chinese countrymen looked on apathetically, convinced Lu to abandon medicine and devote himself to curing China's sick soul. Further, after contributing tens of thousands of Chinese laborers to the Allied cause in WWI, only to be betrayed at the Versailles Conference, Lu Xun wondered why China, with its hundreds of millions, could not muster

the 'Spartan spirit' of Thermopylae, where 300 Spartan soldiers held the pass against the massive Persian army. Lu's assessment of the Chinese psyche closely parallels Nietzsche's vision of the slave mentality of a sick society – kowtowing to the powerful and cruel.

Most of all, Lu Xun was fearful that his countrymen's confidence in their 'cultural superiority' might lead them to dismiss Western military hardware as cheap tricks and fall prey to the kind of delusions that led the Boxer rebels to believe that their *qigong* practices made them bulletproof. In two opinion pieces written in 1918 and 1919, and published in *Xin qingnian* (New youth), Lu employed his biting sarcasm to expose the likes of Ma Liang, who created a synthetic style he called 'New Martial Art', considering it a 'national treasure' and superior to Western calisthenics and pugilism. Lu ridiculed the invented traditions and fantastic mythic origin stories of the many family styles and Ma Liang's proposal that military officers wear swords denoting their rank in order to promote 'martial virtue' (*wude)* and 'martial air' (*wufeng).* He called the debate that erupted between traditional lineage stylists and modernizers 'mere professional jealously', and ridiculed the passage on March 22, 1917 of a bill drafted by Wang Ne to 'popularize China's New Martial Art'. To those who claimed Chinese martial arts were 'a perfectly good and perfectly beautiful form of physical education' and 'the means for strengthening the nation and saving the race', he responded, 'Maybe you knights-errant and brave warriors from Zhili and Shandong could dedicate your strength to…self-improvement and saving others and think of ways to help each other instead of ways to hurt each other' [Lu 1918]. Thus, if Sun regarded martial arts as still relevant for physical culture and instilling the 'martial spirit', Lu regarded it as an embarrassing feudal relic, fraught with self-delusion and distraction. Interestingly, both men gave up medical careers for culture and politics. In the struggle to overthrow the dynasty, Sun cultivated allies in foreign powers, warlords, secret societies and the underworld, whereas Lu blamed their initial lack of success on not having a revolutionary party and relying on targeted assassinations of Manchu figures.

MARTIAL HEROES
WARRIORS, KNIGHTS-ERRANT, OUTLAWS, ASSASSINS, FIGHTING MONKS AND TRICKSTERS

Although China has been more inclined to make heroes of its models of filial piety, as in the 'Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety', Chinese myth and folklore are not without their martial heroes. Lacking any analogue of ancient Greece's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or India's *Mahabharta* and *Ramayana*, the Chinese popular imagination, nevertheless, possesses a rich cast of martial heroes, drawn from historical records and vernacular fiction. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguo yanyi), an example of mythologized history, is set in the century between the Yellow Turban Rebellion (184 CE) and the Jin Unification (266–420), and is rich in characters, plots and models of military strategy. It reached its present form during the late Yuan and early Ming. In the novel, Guan Yu (c. 160–220 CE) is a loyal general serving warlord Liu Bei during the end of the Eastern Han and beginning of the Three Kingdoms period. Among the three heroes of the narrative – Guan Yu, Liu Bei and Zhang Fei – Guan Yu is depicted with a red face, green cloak and tripartite beard, holding a hefty halberd. A ubiquitous figure of folklore and legend, he has been elevated to the status of God of War, and his iconic image adorns countless household, business and temple altars. His story is endlessly recycled in contemporary fiction, film, video games, and theme parks.

After four centuries of the Han dynasty, China once again fell into disunity during a period called the Six Dynasties, Three Kingdoms, Jin, and North South Dynasties. Straddling this transition from the last days of the Han to the beginning of the Three Kingdoms was Cao Zhi (192-232), son of Cao Cao, the founder of the Kingdom of Wei, who wrote a famous poem, 'White Horse' (*Baima pian*), signaling the revival and transformation of the martial spirit:

> A white horse with a golden bridle
> Gallops off to the Northwest.
> May I inquire whose son is this?
> Oh, a young knight-errant of Youzhou and Bingzhou.
> Bidding farewell to hearth and home at a tender age,
> He sought fame on distant battlefields.
> A stout bow and deadly crossbow never left his hands,
> And on his back a quiver of long and short arrows.
> Drawing the bow, he hits the bulls-eye on the left,
> And in the next instant, shreds the target on the right […]
> Increasing alarms from the border towns,
> As enemy forces press hard on the frontier.
> With desperate dispatches arriving from the North,
> Our young knight mounts his horse and rushes to the front.

He vows to crush the forces of the Xiongnu
And trample the rebellious Xianbei.
Risking his life on the point of a sword,
How can he worry about life and death?
He cannot afford to give a thought to his parents,
Much less wife and children.
His fame will live forever in the annals of mighty heroes,
As he turns his back on personal interests.
He sacrifices his life to protect the nation,
Seeing death as a homecoming.

This poem sounds all the themes of martial literature. Whether internecine warfare among the civilized states or invasion by 'barbarian' border peoples, the sons of Han are called upon to trade the personal for the patriotic, the comforts of home for the hardships of the campaign, and place loyalty to the nation above filial piety [Cao Zhi n.d.].

It would be another four centuries before China was once again unified under the Sui. During the long interregnum of disunity, there was fierce warfare between rival kingdoms and opportunistic attacks by border peoples. The tradition of 'borderland poems' continued and produced a plethora of works, sharing not only the themes of patriotism and hardship, but even the same generic title 'Congjun xing' (Marching with the army). Among these was Zhang Yan (444–505 CE) of the North South Dynasties, Xiao Wang (503–551 CE), emperor of the Kingdom of Liang, and early Tang warrior-poet Wang Changling (598–756), who wrote: 'Yellow sand, a hundred battles dressed in golden armor; if I do not destroy Loulan, I will not return home. [...] As long as the Flying General of Longcheng lives, we will never let the barbarian horses cross the Yin Mountains' [Wang Changling n.d.]. Fellow warrior poets Li Ang, Li Bai, Yang Jiong and Chen Yu all wrote 'Congjun xing' poems during the Tang. On the cusp of the Song-Yuan transition, female poet Zhang Yuniang (b. 1250), also wrote a 'Congjun xing' poem, and her contemporary, Wen Tianxiang (1236-1283), refused to surrender to Mongol invaders with the words: 'Death is inevitable, but if we die for the motherland, our memories live forever' [Wen Tianxiang n.d.]. A thousand years later, Mao sounds the same sentiment, announcing his intention to join the revolution in a parting poem for his father: 'Your son has determined to leave home and will not return until he makes a name for himself. Why should I be buried in the family graveyard, when I can make my home anywhere?' [Mao 1968]. This is very much in the tradition of last will and testament poems, written by those who set off on perilous missions, a custom continued today by Chinese dissidents. Fame becomes a form of inheritable family capital, and thus can be made to serve the ideal of filial piety.

Turning now from the warriors to the knights-errant, the latter inhabit a gray area, outside of official state sponsorship, but often beloved in the popular imagination. Nathan Sivin has warned against using the term 'Daoist' as if it denoted an organized, homogeneous formation, and the same caveat applies in spades to the 'knights-errant'. Discussions of the knights-errant invariably begin with a list of the several names in Chinese (*youxia, wuxia, xiake, renxia*), the unsatisfactory translations, and other disclaimers relating to the nebulous and slippery nature of this category. As we seek to de-essentialize these identities, we increasingly resort to a list of attitudes or behaviors, thus, sociologically, the 'knights-errant' might be swords-for-hire, 'social bandits', or simply a humble individual, compelled by conscience to take justice into their own hands. They are not confined to a specific historical period and do not constitute a special class. They are united by a spirit – a spirit of righteous indignation that can express itself on the private level as revenge for a personal wrong, on the local level in fighting corruption, or on the national level as patriotism, assassination, or rebellion.

As early as the 3rd century BCE, Legalist philosopher Han Fei classified the knights-errant as one of the 'five vermin' (*wudu*) and was baffled by the grassroots popularity of those who flouted the law in the name of justice. Second-century BCE historian Sima Qian and first-century CE historian Ban Gu both devote chapters to the role of the knight-errant in Chinese history. In his *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji), Sima Qian offers this sympathetic definition in 'Biographies of Knights-errants' [vol. 124, no. 64]:

Though their actions may not conform to perfect righteousness, yet they are always true to their word. What they undertake, they invariably fulfill; what they have promised, they invariably carry out. Without a thought for themselves, they hasten to the side of those in peril, heedless of their own safety. Yet they never boast of their accomplishments, considering it a disgrace to tout what they have done for others.
[Sima 2006]

Whereas both historians acknowledged the knights-errant's selflessness and courage, but had reservations about their heterodoxy, Sima concedes their righteous indignation, while Ban Gu warns of 'using martial skills to violate social order' [Ban 2007].

The knights-errant operated under a code of 'reciprocity' (*bao*), by which kindness was repaid with kindness (*baoen*) and injury with injury (*baochou*). Whether unemployed peasants and artisans, déclassé nobles, or simply men of conscience, the knights-errant shared an ethical code of righteousness, loyalty, and honor, and occupy a mythical

space in Chinese folklore called the *jianghu* (rivers and lakes), not unlike our Sherwood Forest or Wild West. Although undertaken as private vigilante justice, these acts of retribution do not fundamentally threaten the social order, unless they provoke full-scale clan vendettas (*xiedou*). The murder of one's father provides most of the recorded cases of justifiable revenge, highlighting the deontological dilemma of conflicting duties to family and state.

Late nineteenth-century revolutionary Tan Sitong attempted to revive the ideal of 'righteous knights' (*renxia*), with an emphasis on self-sacrifice in the spirit of Mozi. He modeled this in his own life, when following the abortive Coup of 1898, his co-conspirators fled abroad, while he remained to face execution as an example to his countrymen of what liberation required. With an arrest warrant out for him, he resolved the competing demands of filial piety and righteous self-sacrifice by forging a series of letters in his father's hand urging his son to desist from political activity, and thus protecting the elder Tan, a high official, from any involvement in the plot [Tan 1998]. In thinking about filial piety and the martial spirit, readers should keep in mind the nature of the traditional extended family, where 'growing up and leaving home', or 'starting your own family' were unthinkable, and where collective punishment for crime could reach nine familial removes (*zhulian jiuzu*). Of course, 'getting involved', or playing the good Samaritan/knight in shining armor, runs directly counter to the tendency to 'look on with folded arms' (*xiushou pangguan*) for fear of 'becoming implicated' (*lianlei*).

The Tang dynasty is China's golden age of poetry, and Li Bai is arguably China's national poet. He grew up on the rugged Western frontier, and in a letter to a friend declared: 'At fifteen, I was devoted to swordsmanship'. His poems frequently reference the sword and the wine cup, symbols of the knight-errant lifestyle: 'I draw my sword and strike the water, but the water flows on. I lift my wine cup to dispel the sadness, but feel even sadder'. The word 'sword' appears 107 times over 106 of Li Bai's poems, and he often boasts about how many men, and even tigers, he has killed. His poetry reveals a fascination with the figure of the knight-errant, and a famous line that every Chinese student can recite: 'Killing an enemy every ten paces, he roams a thousand miles without opposition. When finished, he brushes off his clothes and departs, concealing his person and name'. The poem references Xinlingjun, who during the final dramatic days of the Warring States period heeds the entreaty of the King of Zhao to save his country from Qin aggression. In an episode recorded in the *Shiji,* 'Biography of Wei Gongzi', the King of Zhao was reluctant to stand up to Qin, prompting Xinlingjun to take matters into his own hands. Using a stolen commander's tally to gain access to the encampment, he killed the reluctant Wei commander and personally led the Wei troops to relieve the siege of Zhao. This is a classic example of an individual act of courage and ingenuity, even to the point of committing treason in answer to a higher calling. Whether the bold chest-beating of Su Shi's, 'We boldly ate the flesh of the barbarian invaders, and laughing drank their blood', or the melancholy counterpoint, 'We lie drunk on the desert battlefield, but there is no laughter; from ancient times, how many return safely from war', these are a far cry from the stereotypical poetic themes of love, nature, beauty and nostalgia.

During the last days of the Ming dynasty, Huang Zongxi, a young nineteen-year-old scholar, avenged the murder of his father in a very public assassination of a member of the court eunuch faction. For this act of filiality and courage, he was pardoned by the emperor and lionized by the masses. Years later, he went on to lead the remnants of armed resistance to the Manchu takeover, and his son Baijia wrote the foundational work of the 'Internal School' (*neijia*), in which he praised contemporary lineage holder Wang Zhengnan as a 'real knight-errant': 'Wang Zhengnan was a knight-errant, championing the oppressed and acting only in the cause of justice' [Gu 1982].

Even more unconventional were the female knights-errant, the most famous of whom, Qiu Jin (1875-1907), saw her literary aspirations thwarted by arranged marriage, and ultimately became a vanguard feminist and anti-Manchu conspirator. During a tour of Japan, she was impressed with the military discipline displayed across all sectors of the society, and on her return to China, founded a feminist newspaper, writing under the pen name 'Female Knight of Mirror Lake', and established a school featuring military training to prepare cadre for an anti-Manchu uprising. She eventually joined the Tongmenghui, drafting the military code for their armed wing. Wearing men's clothing, she participated in martial arts training at the school along with the male students, but a plot was uncovered, and she was summarily executed after refusing to reveal co-conspirators under torture. Her fictional doppelganger is Wen Kang's Sister Thirteen (Shisanmei), a heroine who appears in his nineteenth-century collection *Tales of Heroes for Children* (Ernü yingxiong zhuan). After the murder of her father, and failure to get justice from the corrupt legal system, she trains in the martial arts and avenges her father's death with her own hands [Wen Kang n.d.]. These women warriors fight for family, country, justice and gender. However, even today, female folk heroes like Hua Mulan are viewed with a degree of ambivalence for their extrajudicial approach to seeking justice.

After two centuries of Manchu rule, compounded by Western and Japanese imperialism, progressive intellectuals sought inspiration for the spirit of resistance. The first generation of intellectuals who recognized the threat and attempted to rescue the Manchu regime were

associated with the Self-Strengthening Movement. Zeng Guofan, one of the architects of the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion, in his famous 'Encouragement to Study' (Quanxue pian), appeals to his countrymen to emulate the spirit of the knights-errant, who 'look lightly on worldly gain', 'sacrifice themselves to save the world' and 'value righteousness over life itself'. Finally, he says that when compared with the 'way of the sages', the way of the knights-errant differs only in method [Zeng 1984].

The next generation of patriots turned both against the Manchu regime and the new external threats. Xue Fucheng (1838-1894), lamented the carving up of China by foreign powers and called for 'exceptional heroes' to step forward [Xue 1898]. Tan Sitong credited the pacifying of Xiongnu tribes in ancient times to the knight-errant spirit. Kang Youwei declared that, 'The people are complacent—gentlemen do not have the knight-errant spirit, and the common people's hearts are weak'. He considered the knights-errant the true preservers of the Moist tradition [Kang 1988]. Zhang Taiyan (1869-1936) insisted that: 'The knights-errant are very important at this time of national crisis'. In his 'Geming zhi daode' (Revolutionary ethics), he tried to make the case that the knight-errant tradition had its roots in the teachings of Confucius, which were corrupted by those who selfishly pursued personal profit, concluding that: 'Without courage, one is not a complete human being' [Zhang 1906].

Influenced by Nietzsche and Bergson, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) called for 'guts, muscle, and mind', seeing the knight-errant as an analog of the *übermensch*, and expressing admiration for Sparta and Germany's promotion of the 'martial spirit', he insisted that this was not 'physical strength but the power of the mind'. Tan Sitong's *Renxue*, Tang Caichang's 'Xiake pian' and Liang Qichao's 'Lun Shangwu' all praised the Japanese samurai and attributed Japan's rise to the spirit of righteous resistance. Tan and Liang sought to take the martial spirit of the *xia*, operating on the private and local level, and apply it as with Japan's *bushido* to the creation of a new national ethos. Both Tan and Liang sought to rehabilitate Mozi and the knight-errant spirit of courage and righteousness, which was suppressed under the Confucian orthodoxy of the Eastern Han. After the failed coup d'etat of 1898, Huo Yuanjia retrieved the severed head of Dadao Wangwu, publicly displayed by Manchu officials as a warning against rebellion. Huo went on to found the Jingwu Association and earn the admiration of the leader of the Republican Revolution Sun Zhongshan.

The most famous novel reflecting the subculture of loveable outlaws is *Water Margin (Shuihuzhuan)*, variously attributed to Shi Naian or Luo Guanzhong of the Ming, set in the late Song dynasty on the eve of the Mongol takeover [Shi 1997]. The plot, inspired by the leader of a 1121 rebellion, is a series of episodes involving righteous outlaws, working class heroes all, who are bound together by their common outrage at official corruption. Eventually numbering 108, including three women, they embody the virtues of loyalty and justice, and turning their wrath on local officials, they remain loyal to the emperor, whom they see as likewise the victim of venial court lackeys. This band of brothers was adopted by the Daoist folk religion, and the 108 were said to be incarnations of the 36 Heavenly Spirits and 72 Earthly Fiends, sent to earth by the goddess Xuan Nü to amass good karma by fighting for the people. After many heroic exploits, they are ultimately brought to heel by government forces and granted amnesty in exchange for fighting on behalf of the court.

Water Margin was tolerated during the Mongol dynasty for its negative image of the Song government, but banned during the Ming for its frank seduction scenes and sympathetic portrayal of sedition. The archetype of the righteous outlaw is as beloved in China as Robin Hood and the cowboy in American folklore, a free spirit who refuses to bow to injustice and possesses superior martial arts ability. Hobsbawm calls this archetype the 'noble robber', or 'social bandit'.

Modern narratologists agree that what the knights-errant and righteous outlaws have in common is a personal history of suffering injustice, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, killing only in self-defence or revenge, support by the people, and ultimately falling victim to betrayal. It combines the *topos* of injustice with the archetype of the martial arts hero. Mao claimed to have been inspired by the Liangshan bandits during the War of Resistance against Japan, but in 1975, during the Cultural Revolution, criticized it for ending with capitulation to the ruling class. These role models of rebellion are inscribed in the popular imagination and can provide either escapist fantasies or inspiration to action.

By far the most perilous path to martial fame is that of the political assassin. Jing Ke's failed attempt to assassinate the King of Qin during the Warring States period to protect his native state of Yan is the paradigmatic model of loyalty and daring. An anonymous poet, writing in the *chuci* style, immortalizes the would-be assassin: 'Facing danger without regard for life, the body may be killed, but the soul will fly away'. From Chu Yu of the Spring and Autumn Period to Xu Xiling of the Republican era, history records countless assassination attempts to rid the nation of internal oppressors or external aggressors. Assassins act in the political arena, avenging the destruction of a state, while the knights-errant avenge private injustice and are often motivated by filial piety or loyalty to a supportive patron. By the nineteenth century, and still under Manchu rule, Chinese revolutionaries like Yang Dusheng

were inspired by the writings of anarchist Bakunin to make an attempt on the life of the Dowager Empress and Rasputin-like court eunuch Rong Lu. In Han historian Sima Qian's view, what unites the knights-errant and assassins is their willingness to use violence in the cause of justice. He compares them favorably to the Daoist recluses, who, he says, selfishly preserve their own purity by withdrawing from society but are of no benefit to their fellow men.

For shear swashbuckling appeal, the knights-errant are rivaled only by the famed Shaolin fighting monks. Although they share the reputation of using their martial prowess to benefit the oppressed, the knights-errant are too diffuse to be associated with a branded martial arts style, whereas at least since Huang Baijia's famous *Neijia quanfa*, Shaolin gongfu has been associated with the hard style, or 'external school', of Chinese martial arts. The Indian (by some accounts Persian) fifth-sixth century Buddhist monk Bodhidharma is credited by legend with introducing both Chan (Zen) Buddhism to China and the martial arts, which he taught his disciples as an antidote to somnolence during protracted meditation. Modern historians, beginning with Tang Hao in the 1930's, consider the story of Bodhidharma's presence at the Shaolin Temple a Ming invention, and the *Yijinjing,* attributed to him, a Ming forgery. Once credited with suppression of Japanese pirates (*wokou*) in the sixteenth century, the Shaolin monks are now understood to have been part of a multiethnic alliance of Japanese, Korean, and native Chinese forces.

Still, it is reasonable to assume that the monks developed martial skills for the defence of the temple, hired out as mercenaries for imperial patrons, venerated violent Buddhist deities, and saw a link between self-discipline in the martial arts and meditation. Although history records Shaolin support for Li Shimin, future founder of the Tang dynasty, and his granting of imperial patronage, there is no mention that they fought with anything but conventional military techniques. Alternating between patronage and persecution under different reigns, the Shaolin monks have become fixtures of China's intangible cultural heritage and international icons.

If the warriors, knights-errant, outlaws, assassins and fighting monks disrupt the social order, it is worth revisiting the conventional norms to which they are the cultural counterpoint. These may be summarized as: filial piety (*xiao)*, that binds one to hearth and home and care of the elderly; fate (*ming)*, that fosters acceptance of one's lot; reincarnation (*lunhui)*, that promises a higher rung with the next birth, and partible inheritance (*fenjia)*, that guarantees an equal share to all male heirs. All of these tend to cement the status quo and prevent the individual from going rogue and taking risks. The 'Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety' vividly illustrate the centripetal force of the Chinese family, with homely examples like the filial son who bares his own flesh to distract mosquitoes from tormenting his father, or the one who tastes his ill father's stool as a diagnostic test. Many of these stories involve extreme physical tests, no less than those required of warriors. Male primogeniture was abandoned after the Qin and Han, replaced by partible inheritance, which meant that there were no junior sons seeking their fortunes far from home, unless, of course, it was through examination success and official appointment.

Finally, the trickster is perhaps the most beloved antihero in Chinese folklore and literature, satisfying some adolescent longing in the collective unconscious for unapologetic transgression. Sun Wukong, the magical, mischievous monkey in *The Journey to the West* (Xiyouji) steals the show from the putative protagonist, the Tang monk Xuan Zang, much like his prototype Hanuman in the *Ramayana* [Huang, ed. 2013]. Attributed to Wu Chengen in the sixteenth century, it chronicles the famous pilgrimage of Xuan Zang through Central Asia and India in search of Buddhist sutras. Mixing history and fantasy, human and fabulous characters, terrestrial and celestial geography, it is a veritable encyclopedia of Chinese folklore and religion. The Monkey King Sun Wukong is a binary buster – a monkey-man chimera, subhuman and superhuman, bestial and divine, a creature of unrestrained ego and id, with omnipotent magical powers. His encounters with various mythical authority figures – the Jade Emperor of Heaven, Laozi, Queen Mother of the West, Dragon King of the East Sea, or the Buddha himself – set the stage for comedic chaos and result in appeasement of the incorrigible trickster by conferring ever more dazzling magical powers. After acquiring immortality, invulnerability, metamorphosis, clairvoyance, teleportation, and an arsenal of invincible weapons, he is given the assignment of accompanying Xuan Zang on his sutra-seeking mission. Sun's status as a fantasy creature gives him license to thumb his nose at authority and expose the hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness of those in power. The trickster represents that aspect of the martial spirit that longs for super powers to rebel against all restraints, transgressing and transcending the laws of nature and of man.

As history morphs into legend, and legend gives rise to archetypes, these folk heroes become timeless touchstones of inspiration for the masses. Looking at the warriors, knights-errant, outlaws, assassins and tricksters as figures on what narratologists call 'the hero's journey', they step outside of conventional social roles, much like the Buddhist monk or Daoist recluse, but provide the yang to their yin.

THE MARTIAL SPIRIT TODAY

Contemporary exponents of reviving the martial spirit must walk a fine line between seeming to glorify war and acknowledging that revolution has seldom been accomplished without violence. The 'century of humiliation' was deeply traumatic and occasioned much soul-searching. A mixture of self-doubt and 'never again' was etched into the national psyche. From the seventeenth-century Japanese pirates, to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, to the Russo-Japanese War, to the Japanese invasions of 1931 and 1937, the Chinese developed a very ambivalent attitude towards their island neighbors. They reviled them with all manner of pejoratives but admired their boldness, indomitable spirit, and competitiveness.

Many Chinese intellectuals internalized the racialist views of their foreign occupiers, a tendency which has not altogether disappeared today. A recent anonymous editorial on the *Yun Wushu* blog, entitled 'China Lacks the Martial Spirit', reflects this perspective. It claims that, like animals, some 'races' are carnivores and some are herbivores, some are expansionist and some are isolationist, and that only constant warfare preserves the martial spirit. 'Aggression', according to this writer, is a positive virtue and is despised only by inferior races, who do not possess the 'aggressor gene'. He distinguishes between nations that excel at exploiting each other internally and cannot wait to emigrate, but are helpless when attacked from outside, and nations that are civil and democratic at home, but prey on weaker nations [Anon n.d.]. A recent study shows that the vital capacity of Chinese youth is only 60% of their Korean counterparts, linking this to the inclusion of taekwondo in the Korean public school physical education curriculum, and adding insult to injury, many Chinese parents' only association with martial arts is taekwondo. Paradoxically, at the same time, Korean influence, through K-pop culture, is also blamed for the feminization of Chinese teens and compounding the 'little emperor syndrome' with a full scale 'masculinity crisis'. This, in turn, manifests as an alarming physical examination failure rate for military recruits, which poses a national 'security threat'. All of this reveals a deep anxiety about constructions of masculinity (*nanzi qigai, yanggang zhi qi*), martial spirit and national security.

Ironically, even as both Communists and the KMT were promoting the martial spirit, they also condemned *wuxia* novels and films as frivolous, if not outright subversive. Their resurgence in the 1980's and 90's, under more liberal policies, has more than made up for lost time to become the most popular genre in all media, and authors like Jin Yong are revered as national treasures. Now, like martial arts themselves, gongfu literature and films are considered an intangible cultural heritage that is a source of nationalistic pride. Should the enduring popularity of the *wuxia* genre be viewed as an expression of the martial spirit, or simply an innocent escape from the pressures of the college entrance exams (*gaokao*)? Might it also be seen as the kind of folk arts revival that often accompanies modernization, comparable to similar revivals in folk music and ethnic dance? If modernization tends to produce one global homogenized culture, folk revivals preserve unique heritage and identity. They also stir the pot from the bottom and allow arts from the grassroots to enter the mainstream.

Martial arts training is almost always framed as a solo endeavor, but martial skills and the martial spirit are almost always applied in the real world in collective military groups, where troop morale, unit cohesion, and *esprit de corps* are decisive. This will be equally true on both sides in international or internal armed conflicts. Adrenalin is addictive, and many undergo on the battlefield the kind of 'peak experience', or 'flow', that makes civilian jobs and domestic life seem boring. The same can be said for young people participating in demonstrations and protests, especially when they turn violent. Additionally, fatalities create a kind of 'an eye for an eye' momentum and the feeling that sacrifices are an investment that can only be redeemed by victory.

Building on the work of Le Bon, Freud recognized mass psychology as substituting egocentric perfectionism with the common cause of the group, directing libido towards an idealized leader and eliciting a sense of amplified power, safety in numbers, and release of repressed instincts [Freud 1921]. From Tiananmen to Hong Kong, Xinjiang to Tibet, pro-democracy and separatist movements still rely on the martial spirit of resistance. Whether resorting to firebombs or self-immolation, today's protestors increasingly appropriate the language of earlier struggles, and street banners are once again emblazoned with the words 'liberation' and 'revolution'. In a new twist, however, the ghost of Bruce Lee has been revived as a spiritual leader for Hong Kong protestors: his image and quotations appear on banners and T-shirts, and his pugilistic strategy of 'be like water' has been adopted as the theoretical principle guiding their fluid, hit-and-run tactics.

CONCLUSION
MEANING AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

Martial arts are practiced in China and the West against fundamentally different historical experiences and symbolic backgrounds. As we have seen, martial arts are promoted in China as compensation for the 'Sick Man of Asia' stereotype and the self-image of passivity and non-resistance. By contrast, Western students of martial arts are more likely to cite concern for personal safety than ethnic identity or national security. America's struggle for decolonization and democracy, from the Boston Tea Party of 1763 to the Treaty of Paris of 1773, is a mere decade, compared to China's centuries of rule by foreign masters. We see the martial spirit in individualistic or subcultural terms, but we do not carry the weight of centuries of colonization on our backs.

The *Art of War* says, 'When the troops are full of spirit, they fight; when the spirit is exhausted, they run'. Appraising the outcome of the Korean War, in which China faced America troops, Chairman Mao said, 'The Americans had much iron and little spirit; we had little iron and much spirit' [Zhang 1995]. This highlights an ironic role reversal: the former 'Sick Man of Asia', just months after the triumph of its second revolution, finds itself flush with confidence and enjoying the psychological high ground on the battlefield against a superpower. Is this a Marxist version of the Confucian emphasis on the moral over the martial, or Ah Q's proclaiming 'spiritual victory'?

The martial spirit is a psycho-somatic complex: on the somatic side, it is strength, stamina and skill, and on the psychological side, it is something to die for. The individual may put his life on the line to save face, but in traditional China, the extended family and clan village were synonymous with identity and a strong disincentive to risk life and limb for abstract ideals, imperial ambitions, or even defence of the motherland. As the proverb says: 'Heaven is high, and the emperor is far away'. Nationalism as practiced by modern industrial societies had to be learned. Fanatical devotion to a cult of personality, to an ideology, and to a party had to be learned. Oppressed peasants could identify as a class against rapacious officials or foreign invaders, but the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat or fomenting and financing worldwide revolution was not within the native tradition.

We have outlined some of the psychological baggage that Chinese martial artists bring to their experience through the asymmetry of colonizer and colonized. The U.S. alone has boots on the ground in 150 countries, and since its founding, has been at war 222 years out of 242. Our military expenditures represent 16% of the total federal budget and is four times as large as China's. We are home to football, boxing, professional wrestling, ice hockey, rodeos, rugby and mixed martial arts, assuring Americans a steady diet of vicarious and participatory violence. In all categories of violent crime, the US leads China by a very wide margin, meaning that the average American citizen has a much higher probability of looking down the barrel of a gun. The US comprises 5% of the world's population but owns half the world's guns, and boasts a quarter of the world's prison population. Domestic violence, kidnapping, drug addiction, organized crime, home invasion, rape, homelessness, domestic terrorism, ideological militias, and high rates of violence against racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities all contribute to a pervasive paranoia and sense of personal insecurity. Differences in the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity also give rise to different expectations. Westerners are more likely to pursue Asian martial arts as a strategic cultural appropriation, but certainly not out of nativitst pride and cultural preservation. For both, the pursuit of health and fellowship may be considered a constant; for Chinese and Western women, self-defence is a shared priority, and all of this plays out against the background of mammalian territoriality and competition for alpha male dominance.

China's 'four great inventions' – the compass, gunpowder, moveable type, and paper – were adopted by Europe to propel unprecedented expansionist policies, resulting in the far-flung empires of Britain, Spain, France, and Germany. Even tiny countries, like Portugal and Holland, reached across the globe to conquer and colonize vast territories. China, however, did not exploit the Silk Road, connecting the Far East to the Mediterranean, nor the fifteenth-century seafaring voyages of Zheng He to create uncontiguous colonies. It was not a lack of technology but martial *zeitgeist* that kept China inward-looking. Japan, by contrast, with far fewer resources, but possessing the 'martial spirit', took on the task of liberating all of Asia from Western imperialism, striking as far West as India and as far East as Hawaii. In spite of its periodic neglect of the martial spirit, China today occupies roughly the same footprint as the Manchu Empire, including the territory of its former conquerors, Mongolia and Manchuria, whereas after the fall of the Roman and Holy Roman Empires, and notwithstanding Napoleon, Hitler and the European Union, Europe never again achieved lasting political unity.

China's geo-political reality is that it is ringed with former conquerors, separatists, marriages of convenience, and allies of the West, while the US shares borders with Canada and Mexico. Many Chinese feel that democracy equals 'chaos' (*luan*), and if government delivers prosperity and stability, that constitutes tacit 'mandate'. We accuse China of waging chemical warfare against the West by manufacturing and smuggling opiods, conveniently forgetting the two Opium Wars the West fought with China to secure the right to sell opium to their population. We are offended by China's 'theft' of intellectual property

and 'unfair' trade practices, forgetting the 'Unequal Treaties' imposed on China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Are old Chinese martial arts masters who teach their 'secrets' to foreigners selling 'intellectual property'? Are Western students of Asian martial arts guilty of 'cultural appropriation'? Western popular opinion tends to sympathize with separatist movements in China, forgetting that we fought a Civil War to suppress separatism in our own country. We are short on historical memory and long on hypocrisy, but in much of the world, the martial spirit is fueled by historical memory and revenge for past wrongs.

A veritable kaleidoscope of conflicting attitudes towards the martial spirit is reflected in the proverb, 'Good men do not join the army', Mao's 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun' and Xi Jinping's, 'Chinese martial arts are a unique cultural practice and a trademark of Chinese culture'. Hosting a state visit by Vladimir Putin, Xi confessed a childhood admiration for martial heroes Yue Fei and Qi Jiguang and a lifelong love of sports and martial arts. Speaking at the opening ceremonies of sporting events, Xi never misses an opportunity to express his personal fondness for martial arts and link them to realization of 'the Chinese dream' [Xi 2019].

The waxing and waning of the martial spirit closely tracks the threat of external invasion and internal rebellion, and most often resurfaces as remedy rather than preventive. In a 2019 New Year's address to the nation, Xi Jinping warned China not to relax 'disaster consciousness, crisis consciousness, and war-making consciousness', and to maintain the option of reuniting Taiwan with force. Once again, the martial spirit is invoked in the sacred task of unifying the empire under China's rightful role as the 'Central Kingdom'. The peasant hates to put down the plow; the scholar hates to put down the pen; and filial sons of all classes hate to leave home. Thus the martial spirit is rarely seen as an intrinsic good in Chinese culture, but rather a necessary evil, serving the higher ideals of loyalty, justice and patriotism. The martial spirit—a trait always found deficient in friends, always excessive in enemies.

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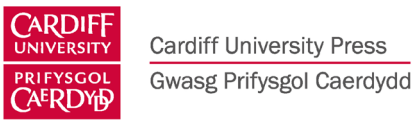

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