

Article

Looking East and South: Philosophical Reflections on Taijiquan and Capoeira

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Abstract: In a precarious occupation, martial arts instructors must be inspiring and build a shared philosophy. Drawing on Taijiquan and Capoeira, which have their philosophical or epistemological roots in Asia and Africa, this article explores core concepts that feature in students' enculturation. These concepts are grounded in epistemologies contrasting with Papineau's work on popular and elite sport, *Knowing the Score*. More specifically, the philosophical approach used builds upon Papineau's chapters on focus, cheating and racism, although these martial practices are not grounded in the Judeo-Christian Western epistemologies underlying Papineau's thinking. Indeed, one of the attractions for Western Capoeira and Taijiquan students is precisely their "strange" or exotic philosophical concepts driving specific pedagogical practices. Ethnographic fieldwork in Britain and written and oral accounts of embodied expertise are used to explore the practical uses of these non-Western epistemologies by teachers to build shared cultures for their students. Specifically, we examine the concepts of *axé* (life force) and *malicia* (artful trickery) in Capoeira, noting its contrast to Western ideas of energy and fair play. We then examine Taijiquan and the concepts of *song* (鬆 or "letting go") and *ting* (听 or "focused listening"), considering the movement skill of systematic relaxation and the focus on specific components of human anatomy and body technique among adults unlearning embodied tension built throughout their lives. We close with considerations for projects examining the diverse, alternative southern, non-Western, and potentially decolonial and subaltern epistemologies in such martial activities.



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1. Introduction: Rethinking Western Philosophy through Non-Western Martial Arts

Many martial arts and combat sports, especially those that can plausibly claim a long history such as the Kung Fu legacy from the famed Shaolin monastery [1] draw on philosophical principles. Contemporary instructors expound these philosophical principles to their students through oral commands, mantra, metaphors and analogies. Drawing on our two ethnographic research projects and embodied practices of martial arts of Capoeira and Taijiquan in the United Kingdom, we take David Papineau's [2] work *Knowing the Score* on illustrating philosophy with sporting examples and simultaneously using sport to "trouble" philosophy from a comparative approach. Papineau's work is firmly focused on classic Western philosophy in the Judeo-Christian and Ancient Greek and Roman traditions. He does not, for example, use the work of Mbiti [3] on African philosophy, Maffie [4] on Aztec philosophy or any Daoist, Confucian or Buddhist thought from China and nearby Asian countries such as Japan and Korea. Moreover, besides a few references to famous boxers such as Mike Tyson, Papineau does not include martial arts within his analysis. In contrast, we have taken his two-fronted approach in philosophy illustrated by sport, and sport used to develop philosophy—and focused on martial arts with their non-Western

epistemologies. Two core ideas are used in each exploration, *axé* (“life force”) and *malícia* (artful trickery”) for Capoeira and song (鬆 or “letting go”) and ting (听 or “focused listening”) for Taijiquan.

The paper is structured as follows: We first outline Papineau’s [2] approach, contrasting it with our own, then provide an introduction to the two martial arts central to the paper; after that, we briefly outline the research methods that produced the data we use; and then explore two concepts used by Papineau that are clearly central to the data on Taijiquan, and two others central to understanding Capoeira; we close with some considerations about how and why, in an effort to contribute to a philosophy of martial arts, scholars might seek to examine a broader range of epistemologies and philosophical concepts from an array of global martial arts that originate from non-Western cultures and civilisations.

The main focus of the paper is to illustrate the evocations of non-Western philosophies by the instructors we have observed over several years. Our qualitative data from field notes and secondary textual sources related to our in situ observations show that non-Western philosophies are central to these martial arts, and enculturation into them is part of the mental, and embodied, socialisation of students, providing a shared culture that keeps students engaged as paying “customers”, and supports them in their everyday lives. In the paper, we have used “philosophy” and “epistemology” more loosely than Papineau [2] does. Currently, the labels “martial arts”, combat/self-defence systems and combat sports can both be found in the developing academic field of martial arts studies (e.g., [5–7]). Because the *martial* in “martial arts” implies that the activities were, or are, used by soldiers in wars, some practitioners and scholars prefer “combat sports” to cover activities such as Savate (French kickboxing) and Capoeira, which have been used to improve fitness in armies but have never been used on any battlefield. However, following Martinková and Parry’s [8] taxonomy of martial activities, we perceive the martial practices of Capoeira and Taijiquan as martial arts developed largely in times of peace for non-lethal self-defence and the cultivation of treasured principles and values rather than for sporting competition (combat sports) or war and survival (close combat and warrior arts). These martial arts can be beautiful, enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding activities worthy of attention from the aesthetic perspective promoted by Allen [9]. This is particularly the case for the teachers and schools we have studied over the last few years, although we acknowledge that other approaches to these arts exist (e.g., Taijiquan as a form of martial therapy, which Holt [10] notes is the dominant modality of this martial activity).

2. *Knowing the Score: The Interconnections between Sport and Philosophy*

Papineau’s career as an orthodox philosopher in the UK and the USA took place in the mainstream of Western philosophy until the London Olympics in 2012. He was invited to submit work for a collection of philosophical papers [11] to mark those Olympics, the first in the UK since 1948. He had not previously been engaged in the philosophy of sport at all, although he describes himself as a sports fan and a keen amateur at cricket, tennis and golf. The 2017 book was Papineau’s first extended work integrating his professional life and expertise as a philosopher with his sporting interests. He used a two-step approach:

A first step is to show how philosophical theory can cast light on the sporting topic. But in nearly all cases the spotlight of illumination is then reversed. The sporting example tells us something new about the philosophical issues by highlighting ideas that are obscured in more familiar contexts [2] (p. 4).

The book is based on the orthodox philosophy of the Western, or “First”, World: one that is originally ideas from Ancient Greece and today clearly Judeo-Christian. The sports that Papineau uses are those of the Global North: soccer, rugby union, American football, tennis, golf, baseball and occasionally athletics and ice hockey. The publisher was unhappy that Papineau also uses cricket (because it is not understood in the USA), but as a keen cricket fan, he resolutely has some examples from cricket too. Papineau [2] sweeps his readers through a range of philosophical topics and debates in his eighteen chapters. We have focused here on five of them which are relevant to our demonstrations of non-Western

philosophies in current martial arts: Chapter 6 about cheating and Chapter 13 about race and ethnicity for our Capoeira analyses, and Part One (Chapters 1–3) on focus, the mind and nerves for our consideration of Taijiquan.

Our use of Papineau is contrastive in three ways. We focus on martial arts that are popular now in the Western world but are not “traditional” in its illustrative societies such as the USA or the UK. Taijiquan and Capoeira are foreign “imports” that have spread since the 1940s or later. These may be unfamiliar to readers, unlike soccer or baseball, which is why we have explained them below. We use social science data about the ways those martial arts are taught and learnt that we have gathered using social science research methods (namely ethnography), while Papineau draws on his own enthusiasm and popular media as a fan and an amateur participant. Thirdly, we explore non-Western philosophies which are very different from the core ideas that Papineau has deployed in his professional life.

As well as considering the content of the philosophical text, we also try to follow Papineau’s [2] accessible and relatable writing style. He writes in the first person (e.g., “when I play tennis” [p.15] and, “That is why I think that Jack Wilshere’s [former Arsenal and England football player] attitude is not only mean-spirited but destructive” [p.183]) about his own experiences and opinions. Where appropriate—as in this moment of reflection—we too write in the first person, but our experiences and opinions are not personal or autobiographical, but social-scientific. We draw on data, gathered first-hand using the well-known method called participant observation, ethnography or fieldwork, originally developed in anthropology and sociology (see [12]). This qualitative research method requires the investigator (ethnographer) spending many hours physically present in social situations, writing fieldnotes and recording speech [13]. Papineau [2] makes his philosophical points using sporting stories; we make ours using data we have gathered, but the style of the argument is the same. Papineau’s illustrations are essentially second-hand: he saw the incidents on television or read about them in the sports press. We have spent hundreds of hours in gyms, sports halls and dance studios participating in classes where the martial arts we write about are taught. This first-hand approach has been used by influential scholars of martial arts and combat sports such as Alter [14] in North Indian wrestling, Zarrilli [15] in Kalaripayattu, Wacquant [16] in boxing and the contributors to the edited collection by Sánchez García and Spencer [17]—all of whom use a reflexive, first-person voice common to contemporary ethnography that is in part confessional and impressionistic in its writing style see [18,19].

We have published our findings and described our research methods in social science journals and books (for example, [20,21]), so we have not explained them in detail in this paper. Following good social scientific and ethical research practice, our key informants and all the teachers and students have been protected by pseudonyms unless they are also co-authors of our publications. So, the Taijiquan instructor is protected by the pseudonym “David” (for which he is thankful), while the Capoeira master Claudio Campos is named because he is a published co-author of Sara’s monograph [22] who wishes to be named. These individuals are our main ethnographic gatekeepers and informants who provide an authoritative account as insiders, teachers and longstanding practitioners of the martial arts in question. Although not academics by trade, David and Claudio are knowledgeable of the philosophy and culture of martial arts in an embodied sense—expressing the principles of Capoeira and Taijiquan in their very movement. For that reason, the voices of our key instructors of these ethnographic settings form crucial aspects of the later analysis and discussion.

It is important to point out that we are sociologists, and empirical sociologists at that, rather than theorists at the philosophical “end” of sociology. The martial arts we have learnt (George) and observed (both authors) have emboldened us to enter Papineau’s world rather cautiously, as we would step out into a *kwoon* to play sticking hands in a Wing Chun Kung Fu class (George) or a Capoeira *roda* to play (Sara). In our ethnographic research, we have been privileged to learn from and observe many outstanding instructors who have enculturated many learners, changing their bodies, but also introducing them to

novel ideas. These teachers have demonstrated new embodiments to their students and explained philosophical concepts to their classes, concepts that underlie their physical skills, which they know will improve the students' lives, and de facto challenge the core ideas of the "Western" philosophy that students have grown up with. Of course, most learners are not consciously aware of the philosophy Papineau [2] professes to be an abstract discipline, but its core concerns are in the air around them. Our admiration for the exemplary teachers that we have studied has led us to treat epistemologies seriously.

Drawing on our data—the hundreds of hours we have spent in classes and at events—we do what Papineau [2] did. That is, we illustrate key philosophical issues with examples from two martial practices, and also use martial arts to explore the philosophies that interest the instructors. George has practiced Asian martial arts since he was a teenager and is a qualified instructor in Wing Chun Kung Fu. Taijiquan, although relatively young (a 19th-century evolution) has an elaborately (re)developed Chinese Daoist philosophy, with roots as long as the ideas in Papineau [2]. Sara has been studying Capoeira for over twenty years, and has immersed herself in its Afro-Brazilian epistemology as its experienced practitioners present it outside Brazil. Using these ideas, the core of the paper explains how the teaching of Asian martial arts draws on ideas from "oriental" traditions, and Capoeira from African spirituality to see whether, like Papineau, we can illuminate martial arts and martial arts can illuminate those philosophies.

3. The Two Martial Arts and Their Philosophies

3.1. Taijiquan

Taijiquan (太极拳 or "Grand Ultimate Fist/Boxing"), also known as t'ai chi, tai chi, tai chi chuan and taiji, is a well-recognised martial art, physical culture and form of meditation-in-movement for self-cultivation [23] known for its slow, formulaic sequences (*Taolu* or forms), standing postures and its relationships to other forms of Chinese physical culture such as Qigong (气功 or "skills with energy"), and to some extensive Chinese meditative, Daoist alchemical and medical traditions. It is chiefly concerned with the cultivation of a deep bodily awareness through the careful attention to one's actions [24]. In the public eye, it is perhaps quintessentially associated with elderly people in Chinese urban parks wishing to cure an ailment through supportive networks upholding notions of tradition, community and identity [25,26], and might be considered a classic example of what is now recognised as a "traditional" Asian martial art open to inventing new traditions [27]. Ryan [28] notes that it also includes self-defence applications, weapons sequences and internal training for combat conditioning. According to Mroz [29], Taijiquan has evolved from what is believed to be a Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) military training system to a civilian self-defence style (led by village clans) to a nationalist, Daoist-inspired art known as a "soft" or "internal" martial art concerned with flowing movement, relaxation and a focus on the internal mechanics of one's body and motion. Rare styles still exist that uphold earlier expressions of the art [30]. Indeed, following Eichberg's [31] tripartite body cultures model, one could perceive contemporary Taijiquan across three extreme, coinciding modalities: as a performance sport (within modern Wushu competitions with records and medals), as a health-oriented, state-sponsored form of exercise (for clinical populations and elderly people) and as a folk physical culture or experiential art (based on esoteric knowledge within lineages and families).

Beyond these three general modalities, there are several main branches of Taijiquan in the world, including hybrid styles reflecting the globalisation of the art and its transmission to countries such as Britain [28]. Their physical expression of the core Taijiquan techniques differs, although they are united by shared concepts and principles that use a similar terminology and worldview. The Chen, Yang, Wu, Hao and Song styles (named after their founders and their dynastic families) are accompanied by lesser-known styles such as Wudang (a region and legendary Daoist temple) and Lee (led by the late Chinese-British martial arts pioneer Chee Soo), which are popular in the UK and take a more combative approach involving extensive partner training. There are also simplified, reduced

version of Taijiquan (e.g., the 24- and 48-step developed by the Chinese Communist Party government) focusing on the solo forms rather than combat and partner training. A typical class might consist of a gentle warm up involving preparatory conditioning exercises and stretching, standing in the neutral stance (*wuji*—“no extremes stance”) or *taiyi* opening stance (sometimes referred to as the “bear posture”), and then working on specific movements and sequences of the form in question. This might also involve gentle interactive exercises to build a Taiji body with a training partner and also the flowing pushing hands (*tuishou*) exercise that develops specific shapes and principles in each practitioner. Some schools and clubs enter competitions based on the aesthetics of the form or pushing hands, but this is still relatively uncommon. Materials are also very important in martial arts, especially for those entering those *Tuishou* competitions [32]. Following the principles of Taijiquan, with its emphasis on flat, spread, feet connecting to the ground and the rest of the body expanding, students’ clothing is normally versatile yet loose and comfortable, although some avid practitioners might don a Chinese tunic and shoes with thin soles, such as Kung Fu slippers.

Learning Taijiquan within some schools can be a gruelling experience, with long periods of standing in tricky postures involving pain in the shoulders, back and thighs (due to stored tension). The aim of such training is to develop the correct structures and internal alignments for powerful techniques and “a relaxed yet strong, powerful body” (in our main informant David’s words). Regardless of style, the majority of Taijiquan classes emphasise a deep focus on one’s body and movement, including an attention to specific components of skills. This is accompanied by an emphasis on relaxation—only tensing the body enough to move into a posture. Words such as “sink”, “release” and “let go of the tension” are common utterances from instructors who seek to balance the deep focus or listening energy (*ting*) with the systematic release of tension built up over a practitioner’s lifetime—simply put as “letting go”, or *song*. These interconnected concepts are supported by the mental (and later, physical) alignment of the “eight principles” and also the six internal harmonies of shoulders and hips, elbows and knees and hands and feet. Phrases such as “raise the crown and let the tailbone drop”, “sink the scapula” and “sit into the kua” reflect the intention of the mind on the expansion of the body. This alignment is often thought of as an external or visible one, although some teachers stress that the harmonies are supposed to be felt from the inside of the body, with one’s form and posture changing over time to perhaps even levels of seeming sloppiness (due to the degree of relaxation and internal control). Mandarin Chinese terms for specific regions of body parts are used within classes, although many English words for the body are also used (e.g., *kua* and *yao* for the inner hip and wider waist area or the *laogong* region within the centre of the palms). Spellings sometime vary between schools, e.g., *kua* and *kwa*, *qi* and *chi*, as can attempted pronunciation of these Mandarin terms by Western practitioners, although the intended meaning is generally understood.

This particular study draws on the third modality of Taijiquan, being part of a specific hybrid Taijiquan lineage led by a famous British practitioner, author and social media influencer, “Malcolm Reeves” (as with “David”, all names, bar Claudio Campos, are pseudonyms). George has embedded himself within a branch of this “School of Internal Arts” for the last five years. His own teacher, “David”, is one of the senior representatives of Malcolm Reeves’s organisation, who sees himself as a gateway to the school and deeper learning into Taijiquan, Qigong and other internal arts such as meditation and Baguazhang, which are also taught within their school. Beyond the official classes, many keen students subscribe to Reeves’s online portal, known affectionally as “The Academy”, while reading some of his core books and listening to his podcast. As with many Taijiquan classes in the UK, classes are kept at an accessible, pay-as-you-go rate of GBP 10 per 2 h class. The class is divided up into levels of attainment, enabling students to maximise the large rented hall in order to work on standing postures, moving sequences and the Short Form, which is often broken into small segments of four to five movements repeated over and over again. This coincides with a shorter online class working on the core principles on Zoom, which is, in

part, caused by restrictions in space and lessons learned for best practice during teaching martial arts during the COVID-19 lockdown [33]. There are another two forms within Malcolm's organisation, including an advanced Long Form from a different Taijiquan lineage that David and some senior students are working on, along with two kinds of weapon: the sabre and Xian straight sword. To mark David's recent 60th birthday, the students gifted him with his own sabre and a special Fu, a red and white banner that he proudly displays within his garden training room from which he delivers the online classes. This Fu, supposedly imbued with positive energies, is placed alongside a chart depicting human anatomy, Daoist alchemy and portraits of four of his principal martial arts forefathers in Taijiquan and Karate, the latter being his first martial art. These black and white photographs reflect the importance of lineage and martial ancestry in many Asian martial arts.

3.2. Capoeira

Capoeira is often called the dance–fight–game because it is always carried out to music, and combines attacks and take-downs, usually with a playful attitude. Capoeira “games” (not fights) are played: the Brazilian Portuguese verb *jogar* is used, not the word for fight (*lutar*). The origins of the moves, the contests and the music are all African, as is the philosophy underlying it. Capoeira “travelled” to the Americas in the bodies and minds of enslaved Africans, and probably existed in the Caribbean and North America during times of slavery [34]. However, modern Capoeira developed in what is now Brazil, initially on plantations, and then, when slavery was abolished in 1888 and the “freed” people moved to the cities, there, where Capoeira became a male street pastime. It was illegal from the 1890s until the 1930s [34]. After legalisation, Capoeira was used in the army and taught in school to improve fitness, and its modern forms were codified as a martial art, with its own representative ranks and belts. In the 1970s, Capoeira spread in a diasporic movement out across the world, and was taken up by women and children in many countries and of many ethnicities.

Capoeira is acrobatic and sensuous, and while it uses kicks and head butts (but not strikes with knees, elbows or hands), escapes are highly valued, and blocks are not used. A great deal of Capoeira is carried out upside down: the players are on their heads or on their hands, and the whole dance–fight–game is a discourse of verbal and embodied deception [34]. Games are played in a *roda*, a circle of people including musicians (playing five instruments of African origin), call and response singing and clapping of rhythms. In the UK, classes normally last 90 min or two hours, cost about GBP 10 in London and GBP 8 outside the capital. After a warm up and stretches, moves are taught and drilled by individuals or in pairs. The instruments and the songs are taught, and many teachers seat students to instruct them in the history and philosophy of Capoeira. As one teacher and key informant told Sara, “if you aren't interested in the philosophy you might as well do Zumba”.

There is a literature on Capoeira, mostly written by anthropologists, going back to the 1930s [35,36]. Much of the research has been conducted by people who learnt Capoeira themselves, often in Brazil. There are three varieties of Capoeira in Brazil and across the world today: Angola, regional and contemporary [25,34,35,37–39]. This paper draws on fieldwork primarily on contemporary groups in the UK, supplemented by a small amount on Angola groups in Britain. Most of the research has been conducted on Angola groups in Brazil, and their offshoots in north America, Europe and Australia. In general, Angola groups in Brazil and across the world are more explicitly grounded in the history and philosophy of slavery, in African-Brazilian religions and in the importance of students understanding the need to be properly “engaged” with the dance–fight–game. For the purpose of this paper, the distinctions between Angola, regional and contemporary practice are not important, because *axé* and *malícia*, the concepts we discuss, are central to all three.

The African origin and the years of Brazilian slavery are seen as foundational to Capoeira today everywhere in the world. A central element of good Capoeira is a mystical element—*axé*—which is a supernatural power or energy created by, and central to the

dance–fight–game. Students are often told it is like “The Force” in *Star Wars* [40]. It shares its name with the power of the gods and goddesses in the African-Brazilian religions of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. These religions are important to many Capoeira teachers, even those who are not themselves believers in them, because they are religions of African origin that developed in Brazil as Capoeira did. We discuss *axé* in the later sections.

4. Research Methods and Data

The data on Taijiquan were collected by George, a British martial arts scholar-practitioner in his late thirties who, over the last five years, has embarked on a dual ethnography of historical European martial arts (HEMA) and Taijiquan and related practices taught in the School in Internal Arts, such as Qigong and Daoist-inspired meditation. After several weeks as a new student in the two martial arts schools, George identified the potential of studying the rich pedagogies and the relationship between language and the anatomies of the blade (in HEMA) and the body (in Taijiquan). As with many “fighting scholars” [17], George took the position of an immersed apprentice in the arts, learning them from scratch, while trying to unlearn some of the habits from his previous training in Wing Chun Kung Fu and other martial arts, which were embedded in his posture and movement habits [41]. He first attended a mixed-ability class, which was later stratified into the beginners’ and intermediate classes. Having spent two years in the beginner’s class, George was deemed fit to progress to the intermediate class, which typically extends beyond the “cross hands” sequence midway through the Short Form. He has now progressed further, having completed the Short Form, and he is often used a demonstration partner by his teacher, being one of the more advanced students in the room. Field notes were taken by hand in situ during the regular drinks breaks and pauses for demonstration in the class, and they mainly focused on language, specifically, analogies, jokes and sayings, which appeared in every single class and event. These notes were then word-processed after the class, and edited the next day.

George also attended one-day courses on the fundamentals and pushing hands as well as online morning meditation sessions and weekend workshops on Qigong. During the pandemic, the classes were flipped online through Zoom, enabling George to study the pedagogy and philosophy and take more extensive notes from his home. He also took photographs of theoretical diagrams drawn and designed by the teacher (“David”) while also consulting online podcast and video material from the wider organisation. Finally, he has conducted interviews with David, and is currently interviewing a range of students in the school about their experiences and understandings of the art, while also conducting a survey study on the martial arts in the region of the United Kingdom, which helps to understand the wider economic, social and political context of this martial art and Capoeira.

There are histories of Capoeira (e.g., [34]) and books by *mestres* (masters), who are experienced and respected teachers, some of whom are also scholars. Mestre Luiz Renato, for example, is a Professor at the University of Brasilia, as well as an inspirational Capoeira teacher and the composer of many “modern” songs. He taught the *mestre* Claudio Campos, with whom Sara has collaborated the most.

Sara has not learnt to play Capoeira herself but has worked closely with a young male sociologist, Neil Stephens, who learnt it seriously, and a Brazilian teacher [22]. The data come from a classic ethnography [12] based on close observation with fieldnotes written in classes and at festivals and other events, such as carnival parades and public performances. The methods are described in detail in Appendix 1 of [22] (pp. 178–191).

What follows is an early ethnographic approach to comparative philosophy—comparative through the contrasts between the Western philosophy of sport and alternative philosophical concepts from the Eastern (Chinese) and Southern (African-Brazilian) traditions. It is not a direct comparison between Chinese and Afro-Brazilian philosophies, however, which could be another article in itself. Our approach to comparative philosophy is different from the conventional approach using conceptual enquiry alone, although comparative philosophers such as Maffie [4] are now making use of contemporary field-

work to bolster their theoretical understanding of civilisational and cultural principles—in Maffie’s [4] case, the use of ethnographies of Nahuatl-speaking communities for him to better understand Nahua (Aztec) philosophy in daily life.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. *Song and Ting: Two Examples from Taijiquan*

Papineau [2] begins his text with three chapters devoted to metaphysics and the philosophy of mind. To begin, he considers the state of mind that elite athletes need to uphold within competition. Papineau contrasts two main schools of thought: the “yoga” view, in which one should not think at all during action, allowing the body to do the work, and the other view, in which athletes need to be thinking about what they are doing and what to do next. The author proposes a more balanced perspective that blends unconscious reflexive action with calculations for strategy. This is a sound strategy for athletes with decades of experience in their game (such as the Wimbledon champions Papineau features in his chapter one), although it might be different in the case of learning Taijiquan. Papineau [2] also focuses on athletes’ need to read cues in the body, indicating their deep, often semi-conscious awareness of specific tell-tale actions from an opponent. In this section, we will contrast some of these philosophical proposals with the case of a Taijiquan class, which has a deep focus on the relationship between body and mind, the lowering of stress (and feelings of anxiety) and the control of one’s thoughts.

Many Taijiquan classes use the language of the host culture in which they are practised, and this extends to the names of many of the techniques. For example, English terms such as “repulse monkey” and “diagonal flying” are used in place of the original Chinese terms. However, specific terms with deep philosophical meanings are retained in Mandarin, such as “step out into Wuji”, which corresponds to Daoist spiritual ideas around the emptiness and nothing needed to create an action [42]. In this section, we examine the two interconnected core principles of Taijiquan expressed in the Chinese language, *song* and *ting*, which have connotations of relaxation and focus that Papineau [2] delves into in the opening of his text (in Chapters one and two). Regardless of the style of Taijiquan, *song* and *ting* are two core concepts that bind the different schools of thought. It is as David once commented in class, “you have to find an authentic lineage, and whatever that is, it’s the principles”. *Song* and *ting* are built into the Taijiquan practitioner from the commencing of a class, with its stretching exercises and specific conditioning exercises, to its final closing-down exercises that involve the hands moving slowly downwards in front of the body to the floor, repeated several times, finishing with a physical stretch above one’s head. Over the last five years, George has witnessed the teacher David using many analogies to help the Western students understand the principles and eventually transform their body–mind relationship through the systematic release of tension (*song*) and finding the right balance of focus (*ting*). An early fieldnote showed some commands in 2018 to “let the flesh drop”:

The class continued with this theme, with special slow exercises in which we were asked to “think of your skin is hanging down” and “as you move your hands up, think of the ground David reminded us: “The skeleton is up and the tissues are down”.

Over the years, David has moved on from his key mantra: “hang the flesh off the bones” to consider other structural analogies to help students picture what should be going on with their bodies and minds. Recently, inspired by the COVID-19 lockdown classes on Zoom, where one student, Nick showed the class his garden, David has used the idea of a hammock “as a good metaphor for Taiji”, with the structure of basic Taijiquan postures being a hammock that one can relax in through the skill of *song*. He has also used the notion of a trampoline, another popular garden contraption with parents of young children, such as Nick: “You’ve got to build the spring in the trampoline. You *are* the trampoline”. To enable the building of this springy, explosive Taijiquan body, the crown point (top of the head) is elevated by raising up from the occipital bone at the back of the skull. This action then sets the stretch in the spine, as students are told to “consolidate the back” (maintain

this stretch) and “find the floor” (relax the body from the top down, until one feels the connection with the ground through the soles of the feet). Over time, it is common to hear a cracking sound in specific parts of the spinal column as the vertebrae open up, as George found one evening:

I felt and heard cracks among the lumps in my spine; clicks moved from the lumbar region to just below the neck (Fieldnotes).

Such movements are seen as internal ones that are hard to view from the outside perspective, unlike some of the principles in Capoeira covered later. The exercises are meant to open up the body and release tension in specific pockets which have built up over many years of sedentary living, work-related stress, trauma, sporting endeavours and manual labour. This tension is often deep within the body and mind and hard to detect, even in oneself. They are often invisible issues only detected after sustained training. Because of this abstract and often silent and invisible nature of the principles of song and ting, a series of analogies must be used, often using popular cultural reference points and mechanical ideas. These contemporary comparisons are also inspired by engineering, as David once reflected on a documentary on the famous Victorian achievement of the Clifton Suspension Bridge (designed by the renowned Isambard Kingdom Brunel in nearby Bristol) that captured the ting (attention) needed to hold one’s body up while relaxing all the soft tissues towards the floor (song). Below is another comparison to quicksand and treacle, which many British people would have enjoyed with their morning porridge as children:

“Imagine you’re in one of those old movies. Pull yourself out of the quicksand. David has given us this image last week, mentioning the classic Tarzan movies. I had watched these as a kid, and understood the image instantly. Today’s analogy was a spoonful of treacle: “Imagine a spoonful of treacle. The bones are the spoon. The flesh is the treacle. The treacle is really heavy and drops slowly [...].

It’s a spoonful of treacle. The treacle takes its time to drop. Or something thicker—like a spoonful of molasses”. He said, glancing at me while creating another analogy.

Although David has a repertoire of regular analogies, he sometimes has to adjust the analogies he employs, depending on the demographic of his students. Nevertheless, many of the Taijiquan students are above the age of 45, and they come from backgrounds in yoga, qigong and martial arts, with the martial artists often retiring from Aikido, Cheng Hsin and Kung Fu due to the search for a system that is “more holistic” (in one classmate, Aidan’s, words) or “something deeper” (for David). These students are not normally so interested in the martial applications of the art, but the health benefits and longevity of movement that is enabled by Taijiquan. David reflected that: “It’s a peacetime art. We aim to develop over many years. It would be different if we were at war. We’d train for five or six years to go to battle. But knowing that, we’d have trouble with our bodies because of that training”. The martial aspects of this school of Taijiquan are more concerned with one’s own conditioning, than learning of a rehearsed response to a variety of attacks; as David once joked as we students gathered round in a circle: “It’s not about him [demonstration partner], it’s about me. It’s self-centric in that way”.

Some devoted students travel for 60 to 90 min from other regions to learn from this particular lineage, with one student, Eleanore, originally from the USA, having visited many other classes in the region and regarded this class as being “the real deal”. David remarks that hailing from a martial arts foundation (like George in Wing Chun Kung Fu) is actually “a double-edge sword”, as those students tend to pick up physical techniques and sequences rather quickly, but retain a great deal of tension—especially in the pelvis region. He once remarked, “You’ve got the movements, but are trying to find something with them [in terms of self-defence applications]”. Instead, students are encouraged to focus on their own bodies and minds rather than an imaginary opponent. This focus is supposed to be relatively light-hearted, as encouraged by the soft jokes and accessible analogies, as too much mental focus (*yi*-intent) is not seen as beneficial for sustained periods of time. Instead, the practitioner is urged to pay attention to their bodies to then try to release tension in specific areas, such as the sternum and solar plexus at an intermediate level,

which George is now working on. After years of Taijiquan training, David claims that the cultivation of body and mind will manifest in specific ways: “You’ll feel taller and lighter after this [training session]. All internal arts give you a light-hearted view on life”.

David has decades of training in Shotokan Karate, and he has admitted on several occasions—often demonstrating a forward stance and basic Karate punch—that “it took me years to sink my pelvis”. George’s own challenge is to relax the pelvis so that it tilts forwards naturally without any physical intervention such as the “tucking” encouraged in his previous Wing Chun schools. While in the basic standing posture (*wuji*), David will walk around the students in their two rows, checking on their alignments and for any pockets of tension in their bodies. This tension is attributed to stress within the mind, and specific exercises are followed to encourage students to loosen their bodies and become accustomed to discomfort in the small muscles and ligaments around the scapula (rather than the deltoids) and the soles of the feet—often overlooked regions in Western modes of exercise. One student, Luke, once said after the class: “Only *you* can cause yourself stress. It’s just if you let things stress you out”. Peter, a senior student, replied: “Yeah. Just look at workmates in the office. Some have weeks off on sick leave. While others come in bright and breezy (whistles and smiles). They’re doing the same job! But what’s different is how things affect them”.

The tension is also linked to potential trauma built into the mind and body which the human being cannot simply “shake off”, unlike wild animals (as David once remarked about antelopes immediately recovering after being chased by a lion). Indeed, trauma-informed approaches to martial arts are increasingly popular (see, for example, the Conscious Combat Club), and some members of the group advocate the teachings of the best-selling Hungarian-Canadian author Gabor Maté, as expressed in the acclaimed documentary *The Wisdom of Trauma* [43]. Indeed, certain members of the Taijiquan class’s WhatsApp group (set up during the COVID-19 lockdown) such as Aidan (another key informant) wrote praising comments about Maté’s approach to dealing with trauma built up and retained within the body without people’s conscious awareness of such suffering—even decades after a trauma-inducing event in people’s childhood or young adulthood. In the film, Maté claims that the majority of adults living in the world are living with the remnants of trauma within the way that they hold themselves, interact with others and perceive the world. Taijiquan offers people a deep experience of specific regions of the body that enable one to shut off from the worries of everyday life, as seen from this field note from the first year of George’s training:

During class, I felt heat expanding across my back as it was extended and my chest relaxed. Sweat formed across the small of my back—across the entire lumbar region. My feet muscles ached across my arches. The balls of my feet (what David termed “the bubbling spring point” or Kidney One point) ached due to the suspension of all my bodyweight).

David is adamant that Taijiquan is “like nothing else, except other internal practices” which become deeper as you progress: “Once you go beyond the movements, Taiji is a state of mind”. David has likened this to the discovery of an alternative world, as in the Victorian novella *Flatland*, a satire using the analogies of worlds of lines, shapes and three dimensions [44]. This alternative reality relates to comments on the deeper “energy body”, which can be understood as a subtle body that cannot be measured from an external scientific perspective (see [45]). However, David did admit that Taijiquan has its closest parallels with meditation. Although some of the preparatory stretches are akin to those seen in yoga, David stresses that they “are quite particular to what we do”. This leads the students to pay attention—using their *ting*—on specific regions of the body, starting with the head alignment and pelvis, moving into the groin region (*kua*), considering the compression and release of the feet (a region not explained in Chinese terms), and later the waist and sides of the torso (*yao*). This finally reaches the connections between the hands and the feet, in which “the sinews of your toes connect into the sinews of your fingers”, for “in the beginning, the hands are not important. Later on, they are one of the most important parts”. David instructs his students to repeat the same motions dozens—and often hundreds—

of times within a single class, stressing the mantra of “it’s how you do it, not what you do” and “learn less, practice more”, which was once expanded to a paraphrasing of the 10,000 things in Daoism (see [46]): “I don’t fear the man who has 10,000 techniques; I fear the man who has one technique he’s practised 10,000 times”. As a Shotokan Karate black belt with martial arts training since his late teens, David sometimes refers to his foundational art, making reference to the book *Five Years, One Kata* [47] as an exemplar of this kind of mindset of deep training and unpacking of one pedagogic, formulaic sequence (see [48]) over the training of many forms in a superficial manner. This unpacking is seen as a form of reverse engineering, as explained by one story that David is keen to recount to his students, from when he encountered a professional who repaired coffee makers: “Most coffee machines are made from the outside in; real coffee machines are made from the inside out”. For David and many Taijiquan teachers, Taiji is an internal martial art that builds the body from the inside out. Indeed, David often tells students, “you’ve got to build the Taiji body. It’s just like a bodybuilder’s got to build a bodybuilder body”.

Even the final closing-down posture is taken with a deep dose of mindfulness (a term that has been employed in recent years), where we students have been encouraged to “think of nothing in particular for one minute”. David often reminds students about the healthy balance of focus and attention: “With intention, but not too much intention. A reasonable amount of intention”. This balance is somewhere on a sliding scale in between daydreaming (the “dull” or “acquired mind” as in when relaxing on the beach) and overt straining on an action (“it’s not a willpower thing!”)—both of which are seen as detrimental to the cultivation process.

The same balance is needed in the song process (relaxation), in which the Taijiquan practitioner actively avoids tension but also the excessive floppiness of the limbs. Such a balance is enabled by another duality, stillness and movement, which are mixed into any given class; as David summarised: “The thread that holds the beads together. Static and moving, static and moving”. This is manifested in holding postures—especially the foundational stance wuji—and moving within parts of the form sequence and eventually the entire form itself. As David once reflected: “Anyone can relax on the floor...but how many people can relax standing up without collapsing their body? Not many. It’s highlighting the tension...where your muscles are tensing”.

Overall, the concepts of song and ting (or ting and song) cannot be separated, as they rely one another; to relax (or release tension), we must focus on relaxing specific parts of the body, and this relaxation in terms helps us reduce the tight focus to a gentle awareness of the body. This enables us to “put the mind into the body” or enable “presence in the body” as David has uttered at times. These principles are later tested with a training partner through push hands and other cooperative exercises, such as testing people’s transitions between postures by progressively pressing against their limbs. This contrasts somewhat with Papineau’s views on the role of the mind in achievement sports (in Chapter one), where one should avoid focusing the specific mechanics or elements of a skill. In the Taijiquan class, the practitioner is not concerned with a sporting strategy, such as where to return the ball in a tennis match, but fixes their mind deep into very specific parts of their anatomy.

Following the duality of yin and yang, David often contrasts what we are supposed to be doing with what is incorrect. On one occasion, the direct opposite of song and ting are physical and mental tension summarised in the 3Cs:

“I was inspired by the G7 [recent political gathering]...they have the 3Cs: Climate change, COVID and China. And we have our 3Cs: Compression, collapse and contraction”, laughed David with Piotr, one of his senior students from Poland.

This final field notes extract reflects the creative and often spontaneous development of analogies and slogans within this specific Taijiquan school. Other sayings are likely to be created in different classes around the world to fit their language and culture, but what unites them is the core Chinese principles of song and ting. Another aspect of Taijiquan that is common across schools is the focus on constant practice. There is no emphasis on

competition in this School of Internal Arts, as the students are in what Papineau [2] calls “practice mode”. They are, therefore, not in danger of “the yips” described in Chapter 3 of Papineau’s book—nerves that are exacerbated by the need to perform a finite set of sporting skills under pressure from the audience and cameras (as in sports such as golf). Although there is sometimes a performative element in Taijiquan, as in when advanced students demonstrating the form in front of junior students, it is not judged and measured as in sport. The group learn the art indoors within a community centre and in their own homes online, rather than the stereotypical park setting. No one’s record is tarnished if they make a mistake. In fact, in five years’ fieldwork, George has not witnessed or experienced severe anxiety in relation to the physical execution of techniques and movements. This illustrates another difference between a martial art concerned with practice and ritual and a combat sport focused on performance and records. Indeed, there is a sense of playfulness in Taijiquan, and in some schools, their practitioners are referred to as “players”. This is akin to Capoeira, where ideas around a deeper force within and between people, jokes and joy are emphasised on a regular basis.

5.2. *Axé and Malícia: Two Examples from Capoeira*

In this section, two fundamental aspects of Capoeira, *malícia* and *axé*, with roots deep in the African-Brazilian (and, therefore, the African) origins, philosophy and history of the dance–fight–game, are explained and explored. The section demonstrates how, in this martial art, core values are better contextualised with African-origin concepts than with “Western” ones. Merrell [49] is an explicit attempt to explore the religious roots of Capoeira. The two concepts fundamental to Capoeira have parallels in Papineau’s [2] Chapters 6 and 13 on fair play and on race and ethnicity. One of Papineau’s chapters (6) is about cheats or “cads”, and a second (Chapter 13) focuses on racism tied to notions of race and ethnicity. Twenty years of ethnographic immersion in Capoeira classes in the UK (see [22]) allows us to argue that the core principles of Papineau’s two chapters on race and on cads need to be inverted for any analysis of the philosophy of Capoeira. Firstly, being a cad, and not playing fair, is a fundamental skill in good Capoeira players, and secondly the most admired and respected Capoeira players are African-Brazilian men who can be called *malandros*: a folkloric, symbolic, living trickster figure in urban Brazil.

Cheating in sport and racial prejudice are used by Papineau [2] to explore philosophical debates around “fair play” and race equality. Cad is a deliberately old-fashioned term in British English, mostly obsolete today. It was used in English novels and stories (it was not common in Scottish and Welsh literatures) in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In that fiction, both Sherlock Holmes and Lord Peter Wimsey are fit men who train regularly in a “Japanese” martial art (e.g., Baritsu (the misspelling of the Victorian-Edwardian martial art of Bartitsu) for Holmes), and use it to defeat criminals and thugs. An upper-class or upper-middle class hero, such as Raffles, Bertie Wooster, Dr. Watson (the companion of Sherlock Holmes), and Lord Peter Wimsey, would use the term cad to shame a man of a similar social class who broke the code of that subculture. Behaving improperly to a lady, cheating at cards or sport (especially cricket) or failing to honour financial obligations would provoke this deliberately offensive epithet.

In his chapter on cads, Papineau’s [2] focus is the importance of “fair play”. He explores “the players’ own understandings of where the limits [of fair play] lie in a range of sports, because each sport has its own sense of fair play” (p. 89). In the “cads” chapter, he explores the limited literature on gamesmanship, and recounts examples of famous players who challenged the rules and the fair play conventions of their sports. Our argument here is that Capoeira routinely inverts the idea of fair play described by Papineau as central to “Western” philosophy and “Western” sports.

In Capoeira, which is partly taught and learnt in its native Brazilian Portuguese, students acquire knowledge from their teachers and fellow students, from the songs that always accompany Capoeira play, and also from films, books, websites and other social media. The following terms can be translated, but are generally retained in Portuguese.

The *malandro* is an urban African-Brazilian working-class man who paradoxically does not work. As a typically heterosexual male, a voyeuristic *flâneur* in urban centres (see [50]), he floats through the streets in a white suit—a symbol that he does no manual work, unlike other African-Brazilian men who sweat at manual labour. The *malandro* lives off women, or by outsmarting other men, and by gambling. He is a skilled dancer, especially at carnival time, an accomplished lover, and a great Capoeira player. He is a cad. Metaphorically, the term can be applied to a football (soccer) player who moves very well, makes love to the ball, and outwits his opponents. Applied to the late Pelé, it was a great compliment. The *malandro* is lauded in songs, and in fiction, especially the magical realist novel by Jorge Amado [51], *Dona Flor and her Two Husbands*. Dona Flor's first husband was a *malandro*. After his death, she marries a pharmacist who has nearly every virtue but is a dull lover. Luckily, the ghost of her dead husband comes to her at night to make love to her so she has the best of both worlds: economic security and sensual pleasure.

The *malandro* is clearly a cad, but all men who play Capoeira have a whiff of the cad because of *malícia*. *Malícia* is fundamental to Capoeira and is enacted by the Capoeira player and the *malandro*. The word *Malícia* looks as if it means malice, but it is better understood as trickery and deceit, “street-smarts” or cunning. It is related to *mandinga* and *malandragem*, both words for magic. All three ideas are understood to be forms of knowledge and skill that have African origins in the beliefs and practices of West Africa that came to Brazil with the enslaved peoples.

Capoeira involves learning explicitly taught and drilled physical moves such as kicks and escapes. Games in the *roda* (the circle of musicians and singers) need some mastery of the moves, but also doing them in time with the music, and most importantly in a dialogue with an opponent or partner [52]. Learners need to acquire a tacit, indeterminate form of ringcraft, in which *malícia* is fundamental. A good Capoeira player uses deception and trickery, and is ever watchful for it to be deployed against them. *Fair* play is not expected: the player is a cad. Using *malícia* on children or novices is not acceptable, but between consenting adults it is a requirement. The good Capoeira player deceives like a conjurer or magician. It is expected that good players will deceive the opponent if s/he is too naïve, dim-witted or inattentive and will fall for *malícia*. However, *malícia* has its limits, as there are boundaries of conduct set within the *roda*—even among consenting adults. Breaking the rules and causing damage to one's training partner are normally seriously frowned upon.

In general, however, deceptions are very funny for the people in the *roda* and any audience. Stories about *malícia* are told and retold for weeks after an incident. Once, when Sara was in a routine class and asked the teacher about a performance in a night club the previous weekend, he replied with an enormous grin:

‘Oh Sara it went well. It was so funny. I wasn't concentrating and Sycamore took me down!’

Sycamore is a small woman, but had caused the experienced, athletic male teacher to fall onto the floor.

Papineau [2] asks, rhetorically, “is it always unacceptable for athletes to try to unsettle their opponent?” (p. 87). Any Capoeira player would be adamant that their sport depends on unsettling the opponent. *Malícia* is fundamental to Capoeira practice, yet instructors are adamant it cannot be *taught*. Sara was at a big event with several world-famous masters present, where public questions could be asked, and enquired “Can the *mestres* tell us if *malícia* can be taught?” A young *mestre*, with good English, translated the enquiry and the answers for the whole hall. The assembled *mestres* agreed that Brazilians do not need to be taught it, or rather Brazilians who “do not grow up with a tennis court” but instead grow up in the streets, acquire it in the streets, have it “naturally”. But non-Brazilians do not have “street smarts” from childhood so they need to acquire *malícia* while learning Capoeira, but it cannot be *taught*: it can only be learnt from watching games and playing in *rodas* (see [53]).

Varela [54] (p. 95) offers this account of a famous *mestre* “bewitching” him in a *roda*, demonstrating his *mandinga* or *malandragem*.

When we began to play, I felt very comfortable playing with him—very at ease. This was not an easy task... I thought for a second that I had really improved my game strategies... Then Valmir asked “Are you ready”? At first I did not understand, but I felt that something in the air had changed... I am at a loss for words to explain what happened. All my confidence collapsed, and I couldn’t move. Suddenly Valmir looked immense and I was nervous with fear. We began...but I was caught.

He was kicked, taken down, and head butted. He had been completely humiliated. What Varela had learnt was:

The power of a *mestre* is real whether or not you subscribe to that power...Its source may be spiritual, but its effects are here in the world.

Varela [54] came away with an insight into the philosophy of Capoeira. His experience: Made me wonder about reaching a concept of power that defies or goes beyond the realm of Western conceptualisation.

We have stressed that *malícia* is an essential element in skilled Capoeira play, but cannot be explicitly taught. *Axé*, to which we now turn, is equally essential for a good Capoeira class, game or festival, and if it is missing, experienced students and teachers can feel its absence: the class, the game, the festival is flat, lifeless and joyless.

In the accounts given to Capoeira students, and in songs, *malícia* is represented as a skill which was fundamentally necessary for the survival of African-Brazilians, especially men, as enslaved people, and as an underclass in the society after the slaves were liberated. Deceit and trickery were essential for keeping some self-respect and autonomy while being oppressed individually and as a group. One famous song has a refrain that says “*Vou dizer a meu senhor que a manteiga derramou*” (“I’ll tell the master that the butter spilled”) when in fact the slaves have stolen it (words translated from [55] p. 90), and students are explicitly taught this was an example of using “*malícia*” for survival.

In Papineau’s chapter (13) on race, the examples are all about players of African, African-Caribbean, or African-American origin being banned from sport, discriminated against, and being regularly insulted by fans. While the philosophical arguments about racial and ethnic equity are applicable to Capoeira, in its practice, the racial hierarchy is inverted. While the rhetoric is that all races can play and everyone is welcome, there is no doubt at all that the founding fathers and most respected masters were and still are African-Brazilians. Authenticity is attributed to African-Brazilians who can teach about slavery, the history of Capoeira, *malícia*, *axé* and the African-Brazilian religions from their own bodies, family histories, experiences of racism and so on. Old age adds gravitas to African-Brazilian teachers. A famous modern Capoeira song “Sometimes they call me a Negro” says that if non-Capoeira people call “white” players “Negro” they may think it is an insult, but for a Capoeira player of *any* race it is high praise, because the African-Brazilians used Capoeira to fight for freedom, and any Capoeirista can feel proud to practice it as part of that struggle [34].

Papineau [2] reflects on race and ethnicity in sport using two philosophical sources: James [56] and Appiah [57]. In his “race” chapter, Papineau explores the arguments for driving racism out of sport. He includes a sympathetic account of the Rachel Dolezal case of racial self-identification (e.g., an American descendant of Europeans passing as an African-American). Papineau’s overall stance is that, now science has entirely abandoned the idea that there is any scientific basis for biological races, although popular opinion that race is “biological” and “real” continues to exist, people should be free to choose whatever “race” or “ethnicity” they wish to identify with. Our discussion of *axé* can be seen to develop Papineau’s arguments about race in Western sports.

A more clearly religious idea than *malícia axé* refers to the power of the African gods and goddesses that can be drawn down and harnessed to affect human affairs. *Axé* is the power central to the African-Brazilian religions of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*, which are forms of spirit possession. In Capoeira, *axé* is the power or energy that is created by good

Capoeira singing and instrumental music, and itself drives the play. Important analogies sometimes draw on modern materials, just like in the case of Taijiquan. As a *mestre* (master) observed, ‘*Axé* is the petrol that drives the engine: you create the petrol’. *Axé* is so fundamental to Capoeira, and so firmly an African and African-Brazilian concept, that Capoeira players all over the world, of any race, are told that good Capoeira depends on good *axé*, and that creating and sustaining the good *axé* are their responsibility. They have to clap the rhythms loudly, sing lustily, play the instruments with enthusiasm and open their bodies to receive and reflect the *axé*.

Teachers explain that *axé* is African in origin and refers to the powers of the *orixas*—the gods and goddesses of the religion that in Brazil is called *Candomblé* (in Cuba, it is *Santeria*, and in Haiti, *Voudou*). These are religions based on spirit possession: in ceremonies, the *orixas* are called, and can descend to possess believers. While possessed, experienced believers can harness the power (*axé*) and use it to tell fortunes, diagnose problems and heal the sick. Floyd Merrell [49], an expert on C.S. Peirce, is a Capoeira player and has deep interests in *Candomblé*. His position is that *Candomblé* and Capoeira are grounded so completely in their African origins and the history of slavery in Brazil that they only make sense if understood together. He argues that *Candomblé* is “a rich philosophy of life” which:

Is also more than the sort of intellectual Western philosophy that remains divorced from concrete living: it involves bodymindspirit as a whole (p. 103).

Varela [38] explores the “religious” foundations of Capoeira. Stephens and Delamont [39] explore *axé* in diasporic Capoeira at greater length than is appropriate here. Sansi and Parés [58] provide a thorough overview of the social science literature on Afro-Brazilian religions. In the UK, novice Capoeira students who ask what *axé* is are told by more experienced students to think of it like “The Force” in the *Star Wars* universe, or the Brazilian equivalent of the Chinese *Qi/Chi*. In Wales, where we are based, *axé* can be related to a Welsh force, *hwyl*, that has no English equivalent, but is used to characterise the force that can drive a rugby team or a choir to unimagined heights. Indeed, there are connections between the singing of hymns and the performance of rugby, with the history of the Welsh national anthem stemming from a local hymn [59]. Religion, music and sport can also be inextricably linked, as in Capoeira.

Capoeira *axé* is not believed to be the manifestation of supernatural powers in this world, and is used more metaphorically. Some African-Brazilian teachers are initiated *Candomblé* practitioners or believers; others are not adherents of the religion, but all expect their students to “know” that *axé* is a kind of energy that the enslaved Africans brought to Brazil. Capoeira students outside Brazil are not expected to believe in the *orixas*—their religious beliefs are their private concern—but they do need to learn how to generate good *axé* in their Capoeira classes for everyone’s benefit. In conversation, “the *axé* was great” is a quick way to characterise whether a class, game or event was successful. A Capoeira teacher will be described positively as one whose “*Axé* is great” and a dull one as “his classes have no *axé*”. Individual students use *axé* to explain their own performances, saying the *axé* was high when they are pleased with their game, and that they cannot feel the *axé* when they play poorly. Just as there is a well-known Capoeira song that celebrates *malícia* (and there are others celebrating being a magician, or using magic), there are songs that celebrate *axé*. One commonly used song has the simple chorus “Bahia *Axé*, *Axé* Bahia”; Salvador de Bahia in the north east of Brazil is celebrated as the heartland of Capoeira.

Papineau argues that focusing on sport can challenge philosophical ideas. A study of Capoeira certainly raises questions about his position on fair play and on racial equality, because it is a martial art in which being a cad is essential, “fair play” is replaced by “*malícia*” and the concept of *axé* is so widely deployed that Capoeira students learn of a space where African-Brazilian people and their ancestral beliefs are revered over European people, and learn that the latter’s seemingly mainstream worldviews are not universal.

6. Conclusions: A Case for Contrasting Alternative Epistemologies within the Martial Arts

As part of this special collection of *Philosophies* on the science and philosophy of the martial arts, we have attempted to contribute to the knowledge on the philosophical aspect of martial pedagogies from an empirical social scientific (namely ethnographic) perspective. Pairing the data from our ongoing ethnographic fieldwork with references to key texts and locations referenced by our gatekeepers and informants, we have sought to illustrate key principles that stem from the non-Western philosophies of Taijiquan (mainly drawing on Daoism) and Capoeira (influenced by African philosophical ideas). This contrasts with the mainstream post-Enlightenment Western philosophical foundation expressed in Papineau's [2] popular book *Knowing the Score*, which we also use to contrast the martial arts with the case of competitive (Western) sport. It is important to acknowledge that this Western philosophy has slowly been removed from its Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman belief systems, unlike the Chinese Daoist and African Candomblé worldviews, which could still be deemed to be religions in and of themselves.

This takes us to the current interest in the decolonial approach in social sciences and wider academia, as the epistemologies learned in Taijiquan and Capoeira can connect to other perspectives on the body, knowledge, ancestry, history and belonging. Although some critics might not accept Chinese and African philosophies as philosophy in the narrow (and often colonialist) Western sense dominating Westernised universities, becoming open to them can allow us to consider the embodied wisdom cultivated in many martial arts, as argued by Australian philosophers and Karate practitioners Priest and Young [60] and, more recently, in Holt's [10] article within this collection. This combines with calls from Spatz [61] to consider technique as a form of embodied knowledge and practice as a mode of researching that knowledge. For example, the ability to relax in Taijiquan can be perceived a highly valued movement skill in itself, offering embodied knowledge about oneself, humanity and ancient (pre-European-colonial-contact) Chinese thought. Indeed, both Taijiquan and Capoeira might be regarded as decolonial pedagogies re-educating Western or Westernised practitioners about their bodies, their minds, deep focus, relationships with others, notions of fair play and a sense of united community that are often lost in our individualised, mechanised society. That is not to suggest that Western scientific notions are totally absent in these pedagogies. In fact, this is far from the case, as our ethnographic data have revealed through the repertoire of analogies expressing mechanical and technical ideas of bridges and trampolines (the Taijiquan body forged by the principles of song and ting) and petrol as fuel (the *axé* in Capoeira). It might be impossible for martial arts in the 21st century to be removed from any modern Western ideas of science and engineering. The histories of many Asian martial arts and Capoeira are in many ways those of post-colonial nationalism, with Daoism being imbued in Taijiquan to challenge the dominance of Western sport. Lorge [62] posits that Asian martial arts developed in the 19th and early 20th century as a response to this imperialism, just as Alter [63] and Spatz [61] argue the case for modern postural yoga stemming from a response to British colonialism and military control. Discussions on these long-term geopolitical processes are beyond the scope of this ethnographic article, which examines two particular, local pedagogies. Nonetheless, further research could (and perhaps should) examine the anthropological and historical considerations of these authors in light of a range of other martial art schools, styles, associations and movements that aspire to challenge dominant modes of knowing about the body, combat, humanity, nature and the world at large.

This article approaches Papineau's [2] writings on Western sport from a comparative perspective: comparative both in terms of philosophy and in the sense of sport being different from the two martial arts of Taijiquan and Capoeira. We focused on specific principles that resonated with are and different from Papineau's analysis of key concepts in sport, from the mindset and focus required to problems surrounding communities, such as racial discrimination. In a different article not using Papineau's work as a springboard, we might have explored other philosophical, religious and magical ideas often encountered through

these martial arts, such as the Chinese astrological system, the celebration of Chinese New Year in Taijiquan and the immersion in courses on acupuncture and Chinese medicine, which several of the senior students in the School of Internal Arts have undertaken. Ideas relating to superstition and mathematics could also have been discussed, as seen in the special numbers followed in the Taijiquan class—using sets of three or nine for exercises and avoiding unlucky numbers, according to the traditional Chinese worldview. Moreover, we could turn to comparing the philosophies of Taijiquan and Capoeira more directly through unpacking ideas around concepts that cross between the arts, such as energies of qi and *axé*. This article is therefore one of many possible ways of doing a comparative philosophy of looking East and West, as well as North and South.

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