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Feel the Difference: The Dantian, Cultural Difference, and Sensory Remapping

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Abstract

This work engages with a longstanding problem of East-West cultural difference: the different conceptions of anatomy and biology between modern scientific/'Western' medicine and traditional Chinese medicine. To do so, the work focuses on only one example of difference: the Chinese notion of the *dantian* (丹田). This is not present in Western anatomy or biology. So, the question arises as to its objective existence: If Western science cannot detect it, what does it mean to say that it exists? Must a Westerner who has no prior exposure to such a notion believe in the dantian? What is the status of this belief? Many approaches to such questions turn to debates in phenomenology, epistemology, translation and religious studies. However, this work instead proposes a more direct way to proceed. It proposes that that such differences arise and can helpfully be understood in terms of the specific sensory maps and fields of the body that are developed by specific exercises, disciplines, or training regimes (what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk calls *anthropotechnic practices*).

Keywords

Dantian; Taijiquan; Qigong; Cultural Difference; Discourse; post-structuralism

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Introduction

Modern ('Western') science cannot detect such staple concepts of Chinese physiology, biology, medicine and martial arts as *qi* (氣), *meridians* (經絡/经络, *jīngluò*: channel network) and the *dantian* (丹田, also *dāntián*, and occasionally dantien).¹ So, debates about their existence are often politely (or impolitely) displaced into the terms of 'respect' for 'cultural difference'. However, while respect (or its opposite) is certainly one possible ethical response to questions of cultural difference, it does not resolve fundamental issues, especially questions about objective reality. Whether correctly or incorrectly held, there is an entrenched and tenacious Western belief in the idea of the univocity or singularity of reality (i.e., that there is only one reality) and that modern science holds the monopoly on establishing, verifying and speaking about what that singular reality is. There are many names for this belief. I will refer to it as *scientism*. Stated bluntly, when it comes to the human body, if Western biology can't detect it, then scientism holds that it mustn't exist.

However, neither science nor scientism holds a monopoly over the Western discourse on knowledge and reality. For instance, contemporary cultural theory in many fields of the academy has often critiqued both science and scientism, while at the same time studying questions of 'cultural difference'. Such fields as poststructuralism are actually well equipped to argue for the existence of multiple, heterogeneous, contextual realities. So, where science (or scientism) is wedded to the singular or unitary, contemporary cultural theory is much more comfortable with pluralising, multiplying and relativising. Several strands of poststructuralist cultural theory, for instance, have long insisted on the inevitable co-existence of different 'discursive

contexts', 'regimes of truth', epistemologies (or 'epistemes'), and so on, each established within, through and for different apparatuses of power/knowledge.

We will return to this. At this introductory moment, let us merely note that each field (science and poststructuralism) has its own forms of evidence: science tests, measures and verifies. Poststructuralism studies the contingent, political, and often violent historical struggles between different discourses of 'truth'. In modernity, it is the forms of evidence established in science, through the scientific method, that carry the most clout. Put differently, if Western science cannot find a way to 'see', detect, verify and measure the existence of something, then it cannot easily be said to exist at all.

This brings us to the problem of the dantian as a locus of East-West cultural difference. As Phillip Beach observes of the Chinese map of the meridians (經絡/经络, *jīngluò*: channel network) within which the lower dantian is one point:

Bioscience has looked in vain for the meticulously mapped meridians. Dissective studies, computerized axial tomography (CAT) scans, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, positron emission tomography (PET) scans, thermal imaging, radioactive tagging, scanning electron microscopy, and so on – the full armamentarium of modern medical investigative techniques has failed to demonstrate a physical substrate that is meridian-like. There are hints of something afield (such as endogenous opiates, skin rashes, some positive clinical outcomes, fascial winding from needles, etc.) but, to date, bioscience has been unable to fathom a contemporary understanding of the complex meridial map.²

Thus, he notes, we have a paradoxical situation in which 'meridians are now described with meticulous reference to Western anatomy but anatomically they do not appear to exist' (154). As he puts it: 'The situation is somewhat analogous to the use of herbs before pharmacology – herbs "worked" but how they did so was unknown' (155). Thus, when it comes to the dantian, we are not merely faced with a matter of cultural difference. We seem to be facing a kind of impasse that Jean-François Lyotard called a '*differend*' – i.e., an apparently *irresolvable* difference between two camps – here, modern Western medicine, on the one hand, and traditional Chinese medicine, on the other.³ These two fields are based on paradigms that involve radically different and apparently incommensurable conceptualisations of the anatomical entity of the human.

This opens out onto a world of conceptual and pragmatic problems that is so complex that many people may justifiably feel ill-equipped to comment. However, those same people are able to encounter and engage in practices that are steeped in Chinese biological, ontological and cosmological worldviews, such as t'ai chi ch'üan (hereafter *taijiquan* [太极拳], frequently shortened to *taiji* [太极]) or chi-gung (氣功, hereafter *qigong*).⁴ In such practices, the dantian is not only assumed to exist, it is *functional*, and essential to progress. Because of this, in what follows, I want to propose that the experience of learning taiji or qigong can be regarded as an *embodied cross-cultural encounter*, in which questions of cultural difference arise within the practitioner's own body, at experiential, affective, conceptual, and interpretive levels. It is a cross-cultural encounter even if the student never leaves their hometown, no matter where in the world that is, and even if they never even meet a Chinese person. This is because it is the sensations and the questions that arise of their meanings that constitute the 'contact zone' in which, regardless of geography, East might be said to meet West, in somaesthetic form.⁵ And these practices and experiences are not niche.

Taiji and Qigong in the West

The Chinese martial, healthful (and sometimes allegedly 'spiritual' or 'mystical') practices of taijiquan and qigong have grown in familiarity and popularity in the West, at least since the 1960s.⁶ While their popularity has waxed and waned in relation to other competing exercise, 'spiritual', martial and 'wellbeing' practices on offer at any given time, they have benefitted recently from the huge growth of (largely positively-accented)⁷ discourse around the burgeoning concepts of 'wellbeing' and 'mindfulness' in the West.⁸ Along with activities like meditation, yoga, 'unplugging' from technology, 'wild swimming', walking, and experiencing the feel and effects of being outdoors, both taiji and qigong have received positive press and publicity in Western media over recent years. In this climate, that is so hospitable to what now tend to be presented as 'wellbeing' practices, more people are both more likely and more able to have the opportunity to try them.

Of course, the recent growth in the discourse of 'mindfulness' in the West is one that has largely been deracinated or disarticulated from many of the South and East Asian meditative practices from which its contemporary Western forms derive many of their techniques.⁹ Contemporary mindfulness is often presented as a *rational*, *scientific* and *universal* approach to boosting mental health and wellbeing, one that can be accessed with minimal effort and at minimal cost, even without a teacher, by such methods as simply downloading smartphone apps like Headspace.¹⁰ The 'wellbeing' properties or outcomes of contemporary mindfulness practices are most often described today in terms derived from Western anatomy, physiology and psychology, rather than traditional Chinese medicine. So, when packaged as part of a *general* 'mindfulness' approach, rather than as *particular* Asian practices, terms such as qi, meridians and the dantian tend to be downplayed or removed. In their place, contemporary 'mindful' meditation discourse is more likely to evoke such entities as

the autonomic (sympathetic and parasympathetic) nervous system, the immune system and the vagus nerve. Nonetheless, even in their most 'Westernised' or deracinated 'capsule' forms, meditative practices and breathing exercises remain so heavily associated with Asia (thanks to the enduring legacies of Western orientalism), that even totally secular forms of mindfulness can become gateways into further exploration and deeper engagement with Asian traditions, such as the wide range of yogic pranayama or Chinese qigong.

The global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-21 also catapulted such practices as these into the spotlight of public attention, as they turned out to be eminently easy to present and market as fast-acting, compact, equipment-free, portable,¹¹ and easily-learnable self-care wellness activities.¹² Such practices were widely claimed to be helpful for boosting mood and maintaining or regaining health – features and benefits that were particularly sought after in pandemic times.¹³ Sometimes, even more tantalising claims were made: about such practices' ability to 'strengthen' the immune system, and to mitigate the effects or even ward off Covid-19.¹⁴ In other words, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, these practices – which have always been viewed positively (often romantically or mystically) in the Western press and other media¹⁵ – were given a popularity boost.

Discovering the Dantian

In engaging in activities such as taiji and qigong, practitioners are sooner or later introduced to terms such as *qi* and the *dantian*. They are told about and directed or led to feel these *within their own bodies*. In this way, the body of the practitioner becomes a site or staging-point of a cross-cultural encounter of the most embodied kind. In it, the Westerner 'meets' an element of specifically Chinese anatomy, and is encouraged to entertain it, in their own body. This may be in conceptual isolation,

without a larger explanatory overview of the anatomical structure within which the dantian is said to be an entity. Or instructors may provide (or students may seek out) a bigger picture of Chinese anatomy, physiology and cosmology.¹⁶ In this way, some fundamental differences between the 'modern West' and 'traditional China' take an embodied form within the minds, sensations, experiences and interpretations of Western practitioners of taijiquan and qigong. These are activities that are structured by the terms and coordinates of a non-Western conceptual field. Practitioners are routinely enjoined, in multiple ways, to accept and use terms such as qi, which does not exist in western discourse; or the dantian, which is not a recognised part of the human body in Western terms.

Although qi is the more widely known and discussed phenomenon, I will engage here only with the dantian. This is not merely because there are already many contributions to the debates about qi. Rather, is because the dantian is said to be a *thing* (noun-entity) that stays in one specific *place* (location/'body-part').

Furthermore, using the dantian as a case study has other advantages over qi. For a start, qi is a relatively high-level entity, or process. It is something that beginners and even intermediate taiji and qigong practitioners of several years might not be expected to have learned how to sense, experience or 'keep ahold of' (in both sensory and conceptual terms). As such, qi is somewhat removed from general experience and not quite as 'available' for locating, sensing and considering.¹⁷ Finally, qi is not static and hence not necessarily specifiable or 'findable' at a specific location at a specific time.

The dantian, on the other hand, is considerably more accessible. It is a *place*, or a part of the body. It does not move around or 'circulate', as qi is said to. In fact, you can press your finger into the skin at a definite point on the human body and say 'there it is – it's in there, right there'. Furthermore, the 'lower dantian' is also likely to be one of the first new, non-Western things that taiji and qigong practitioners will be

encouraged to learn how to 'feel' or develop awareness of. This dantian is said to be located inside the body, below the navel. Other than in specialist practitioner discourse, whenever people speak of '*the* dantian' they are most commonly referring to this lower-belly area. Hence, this is the dantian that we will be discussing here.¹⁸

First Contact

Helpfully, the lower dantian – or at least the place it is said to be – is comparatively easy to learn how to 'feel', although it does require *some* consistent and diligent training. After a period of training, the physical feeling is comparatively accessible. This is so even though the entity apparently being experienced is completely foreign to Western biology and physiology. So, what is going on here? On the one hand, if learning to feel the dantian is a process that enables Western practitioners of Chinese martial arts and qigong to access a *totally foreign entity or phenomenon*, one that requires no travel, but arises within their own bodies, then this is remarkable. But, on the other hand, there is an alternative interpretation: in this, the experience of 'feeling the dantian' might merely be one or another kind of misrecognition and misinterpretation, arising as the outcome of suggestion, projection, wishful thinking, confirmation bias, fantasy or desire. And these are the stakes: is it cross-cultural encounter or is it pure fantasy? To explore this, let us reflect on some of the training practices used to learn to feel the dantian.

Many Chinese martial arts deliberately train practitioners to be able to feel their own dantian. This is especially the case in 'internal' practices such as taiji – so-called because of their intense focus on internal matters such as posture, relaxation, physical sensations and qi. Their syllabi include forms of standing or postural qigong, combined with 'reverse', 'abdominal' or 'belly-breathing'¹⁹ for this express purpose. However, even so-called 'external' Chinese martial arts (such as very athletic styles of

wushu and Shaolin kung fu) also often seek to raise awareness of the dantian – typically as part of preliminary training. They do so by, for example, making students hold challenging static postures for extended periods of time. This is most commonly the ‘horse stance’, which involves placing the feet apart (‘twice shoulder width’ is a standard instruction), toes pointed forward, knees pushing gently outwards (so that they do not collapse inwards, which weakens the posture and increases risk of self-injury), remaining almost directly over the feet, with spine held as vertically as possible.

I first ‘felt’ my dantian sometime between 2003 and 2004, while performing one of the eight movements of the *baduanjin* routine. *Baduanjin* (八段錦) has various translations, including ‘Eight Pieces of Brocade’, ‘Eight-Section Brocade’, ‘Eight Silken Movements’, and ‘Eight Silk Weaving’. It is a sequence of eight movements, the majority of which involve exhale-stretching and inhale-relaxing, but two of which include an element of (exhale) ‘bouncing’. One involves ‘bouncing’ on one’s heels, by raising up onto toes while inhaling and bouncing down numerous times while exhaling (‘Bounce the air out’ was the instruction). The other involves adopting a medium-high horse stance, inhaling while relaxed and ‘neutral’ (with weight centred and head and hips positioned naturally), but then tilting both head and hips to the same side during the exhale and ‘bouncing’ them simultaneously. This exercise is given a wide range of different names; but when I learned it, we called it ‘shake water from the ear’, as the angle and action of the head and neck looks a little like this is what the practitioner is trying to do. However, the bouncing motion of the head is actually driven by the hips, which slide laterally and rhythmically to the same side. That is, when the head is tilted to the left, the hip ‘bounces’ or ‘slides’ to the left too. The exercise is not exactly a stretch, although the spine is somewhat stretched to one side or the other on each repetition (a bit like the way a bow flexes and stretches when the archer draws the string). But, most importantly, the sideways ‘bouncing’ of the hip sends a mild shockwave through the body that loosens the neck and

hip/lower-spine areas. The movement almost invariably amuses beginners (and onlookers), as it looks strange and somewhat like a caricature of a young Elvis Presley dancing.

It was during this movement that I first 'felt' my dantian. After feeling it during this movement, I soon felt it during other movements of the baduanjin sequence too, and then also during the taiji form. The key components of the syllabus I was studying at that time were taijiquan (solo form and partner-work), baduanjin, standing qigong (站桩, *zhan zhuang*), and *choy lee fut* (蔡李佛) kung fu.²⁰ I reported this new sensation to my instructor, who directed me to move onto the next posture in the standing qigong component of our syllabus. However, after my initial excitement, I soon began to wonder: what exactly did I feel? I knew that the dantian does not exist in Western biology, physiology or medicine, other than as a kind of 'import'. The term is not even used in translation – which would be something like 'field of elixir'. Rather, it is maintained, in its original (albeit normally mispronounced) Chinese form.

My investment in taiji at that time was undoubtedly fuelled by orientalist fantasies – by a desire to access and to learn how to 'use' almost occult forces or 'energies' that were imagined to be, essentially, little different from magic. But, even then, I vacillated regularly between orientalist excitement and secular cynicism. I wondered quite quickly: did I *really* feel something that *really existed*, called the dantian? Or was something else going on, perhaps something merely muscular but reconceived as differently 'internal' in a process of self-delusion caused by a mix of suggestion, fantasy and desire? '*What is the theoretical status of the dantian?*' became my question.

How we answer this question has serious implications for the understanding of cultural difference. For instance, an obdurate insistence that there is one reality – and

that it is fully and comprehensively mapped out by Western science seems unhelpful. Such perspectives threaten to discount or discredit anything that is not visualised or visualisable by the scientific gaze in its current stage of development. Yet, the symmetrical alternative to this – that of a totally flexible relativism – seems equally unsatisfying. Between myopic closedness and uncritical openness, there must be a middle path.

In looking for a middle way through questions of cultural difference, scholars often turn either to critiques of Western science and epistemology, or to the field of phenomenology. Critical studies of science have in various ways brought to light such matters as the contingent, limited and biased characteristics of scientific knowledge, its connection with power, its often unwitting investment in ideological values, and its episodic paradigm-shifts – all of which help to strengthen the case that perhaps Western science doesn't know everything. Combined with this, the field of phenomenology offers a conceptual landscape and vocabulary that can communicate and add weight to a more complex understanding of reality than the crude binary objective/subjective or fact/fiction.

However, this two-stage approach – 1) deconstruct science; 2) complexify phenomenal reality – may not be the only or even most effective route. Sometimes this approach can come across as both convoluted and equivocal.²¹ Consequently, in what follows, I want instead to offer a different approach – one that is (to borrow a phrase from Bruce Lee) 'simple and direct'.²² This neither relies on a deconstruction of Western science, nor delves too deeply into what some may find to be the impenetrable language of phenomenology. However, it remains indebted to and aligned with such work. In sidestepping such stages, I hope my approach is not received as naïve or ignorant of previous contributions. Furthermore, should people find my argument obvious, I would only ask why I have not seen more approaches like my own – approaches that may perhaps 'state the obvious', but that do so in

order to clarify the situation. The alternatives on offer seem either to require either a deep dive into complexity or to remain, stuck, dwelling at an impasse. To begin to take a step out of this situation, let's pursue a pragmatic question.

What do you do with a dantian?

What do people *do* with their dantians? This is not the same question as 'what does a dantian do?' The former is pragmatic, or practical; the latter, theoretico-anatomical. The question of *what it does* asks what the dantian *is* within an anatomical biological system. The question of what people *do with it* is about living, performative, technical choices, aims, and activities. Pursuing the theoretical or ontological question ('what is it?') is certainly the road more travelled. But perhaps this is the wrong question – one we only feel obliged to pose because we remain under the sway of the legacy of Western metaphysics and its fixation on questions of 'being'. This is a fixation that may itself only ever have arisen because of the powerful status of the verb 'to be' in Western languages, rather than because it 'is' the ultimate question. So, instead, let us engage with the practical question. What do people actually do with their dantians?

At the risk of sounding tautological: the fundamental thing that certain people must 'do' with the dantian is learn to *feel* it. These 'certain people' are practitioners of internal martial arts and health practices steeped in Chinese anatomy. Once perception has been achieved, practitioners then learn to incorporate that feeling into a new kind of sensory mapping of the body, and add awareness of it into certain technical matters of movement and stillness. Practitioners of taiji, qigong and other Chinese martial arts are taught how to practice various kinds of 'internal work' or *neigong*, such as standing postures combined with breathing exercises that focus on the area, along with various stretching and movement exercises such as the eight

stretches of the baduanjin or the various circular routines of 'silk reeling'. In performing such exercises, practitioners are asked to pay attention to seemingly ever-expanding (or ever-refining) range of postural and breathing matters – what I was taught to call 'posture considerations'. These vary from style to style, and even instructor to instructor. Taiji and qigong manuals are full of postural and breathing instructions, often combined with detailed reflections on what to look out for (good and bad) and what to avoid (right and wrong).

The big question that lies behind the 'what?' is the 'why?' Why, within what practices, and with what aims or purposes, to what ends, do people 'need' to feel the dantian? To simplify (but justifiably), the most common reasons for wanting to do things with the dantian fall into two main camps – at least in the modern Western world. The first relates to the execution of martial arts techniques. The second relates to health and wellbeing. And, of course, these two realms overlap.

Taking combative considerations first: some, but not all practitioners of taiji want (or come to want) to learn it 'as a martial art'. This is an aim which, when decoded, normally boils down to wanting to practice formalised taiji sparring with a partner. This is known as *push-hands* (*tui-shou*: 推手). It is a practice that almost all styles use to enhance balance (in trying to unbalance an opponent who is trying to unbalance you) and *rooting* (in trying break the connection to the ground of an opponent who is trying to do the same to you), along with certain other objectives, such as how to 'listen' (聽勁, *tīng jìn*: heightened awareness, i.e., learning how to sense your partner's movements and areas of muscular tension or floppiness, through touch alone), how to 'stick' (or maintain contact and connection without increasing, decreasing or losing pressure), how to 'yield' (or not resist an incoming force, whilst nonetheless not falling foul of it, while maintaining contact with it), how to 'neutralise' (whether by engaging a telegraphed force before it is actually issued, or by allowing it to run its course and empty itself without landing, perhaps via a slight deflection or

redirection), and how to 'issue force' (by applying a technique correctly, without using localised muscular exertion, but rather a relaxed and coordinated approach).

Push-hands and formalised partner-drills can also be trained in order to learn how to transform specific moves and postures of the taiji form into combative applications. In some styles, or at some stages, push-hands is highly formalised, rule-bound and circumscribed. However, other styles and practitioners progress into freer and less rule-bound forms of push-hands, especially if they have an interest in self-defence, competition or combat. But, in line with the more or less Daoist philosophy that is usually (rightly or wrongly) attributed to or projected onto taiji,²³ training in push-hands is also regarded as a valuable pedagogical practice even for those who do not want to approach taiji 'as a martial art'. This is because partner-work enables practitioners to attain more refined posture, balance, mobility, proprioception and interoception, all of which feed directly into improvements in one's solo training, in individual form practice or in the companion art of qigong.

In this kind of 'martial' approach, learning (through training) to be able to feel the dantian is part of a fundamental, foundational and ultimately pragmatic sensory remapping of the body. Being able to feel your dantian is just one of a whole family of forms of interoception and proprioception that can translate into being able to 'do' taiji better. Being able to 'feel' the dantian is one part of a cluster of ('internal' and 'external') posture considerations, which all add up to how good your taiji is. For instance, if one is receiving a force – in the form of one or another kind and angle of strike, push, or pull (forward or backward, to one side or the other, upward or downward, or in combination) – it is one's ability to respond to an appropriate degree and kind (one that is neither excessive nor insufficient in relation to the opponent's force) that determines whether one is disrupted (knocked or thrown in a way that breaks one's rooted connection with the ground and destroys one's posture) or whether one disrupts the other. In all of this, foot-positioning, knee-

positioning, weight distribution, rootedness, sunk-weight, relaxedness, low and relaxed elbows, spinal alignment, coccyx, head and neck alignment, feeling certain qualities of tension and/or relaxedness in different regions (or what Phillip Beach calls *contractile fields*) of the body, and multiple other 'considerations' – even the position of one's chin, tongue and whether one is tense in the face or forehead or not – all play a part. All such postural matters can only be learned through practice, through learning to feel, and through being diligently and self-consciously analysed many times over, every day, until they become second-nature, or effectively unconscious and automatic.

On the other hand, if one *only* wants to learn taiji or qigong for reasons of health or wellbeing, then learning to feel the dantian becomes even more crucial to the sensory remapping required to progress in this direction. In such approaches, the emphasis is often put on the concept of *qi*. Here, the dantian is regarded both as a kind of reservoir and also one of many waystations or points in the 'circulation' of *qi* in its flows around the body. Again, all of this must also be learned by the body – and, more specifically, 'felt'. In fact, whenever 'health' or 'longevity' are the primary reasons for wanting to practice taiji or qigong, these motivations ultimately require a much more concerted commitment to – *and belief in* – the terms and concepts of traditional Chinese medicine.

Put differently: when the dantian is referred to in relation to 'combat', it is fundamentally just a good point in your body to be able to feel in order to execute combative techniques. In crude terms, it is harder to uproot or throw someone who has their weight consciously grounded in their legs and lower abdomen, and the dantian 'is' the junction point between the upper and lower body. By the same token, in order to be able to learn how to do a hip throw, say, or how to deliver a powerful reverse punch, a strong conscious awareness of this same area is also hugely beneficial. In this respect, when it comes to combative skill acquisition, the dantian

need not be regarded as a discrete entity at all – it is just a region of the body in movement, the trained body in practice, one that is felt and activated by developing a specific technical mind-body connection. In fact, its cosmological and indeed ontological aspect is irrelevant. Much like a centre of gravity, or fulcrum for a lever, it exists effectively in and as a technical moment or machinic operation of the living organism. So, in practical martial arts discourse, one does not need to believe a whole lot about the dantian. Here, it exists primarily in functional pragmatic terms. But in the discourse and conceptual universe of health and longevity practices, the dantian is a trained and manipulable coordinate on the mental, somatic and somaesthetic map of qi circulation. It is in this realm of practice that one needs to believe, feel, and learn a lot about the dantian.²⁴

As Phillip Beach puts it, in his exploration of the question of precisely what it may be that the traditional Chinese medical map of the meridians is a map of:

The Dai Mai meridian crosses the ventral midline in the region of Ren-6 to Ren-4. This region is given special significance in Chinese culture. The Dantian (or Cinnabar field, or Hara) is where the deepest energies reside and is the source of all movement. I remember, as a student of aikido, the teacher imploring us to move from the Hara, but I had little sense of why. From a CF²⁵ perspective this is also a special region of profound biodynamic interplay. [...] Our bipedal stance necessitated a strengthening of the pelvic floor that was allied with a mechanism for generating visceral lift. Also, the kidneys are associated with a loin-to-groin pattern of pain distribution. As half of your body weight is above this lower abdominal region and half below, I now can understand why the lower abdomen was singled out for such special consideration regarding movement, both internal and external.²⁶

In other words, you might say: when you are doing taiji, then *you have a dantian*. Or rather, you must develop one. During a physical manifestation of taiji, you will 'have' a dantian much as you will 'have' other qualities of taiji physicality (such as roundness, slowness, sunk-ness, rootedness, or body lightness), and you will have all of these things simultaneously in and through and as the taiji practice. As such, these qualities are more *evental*, *technical*, and *contextual* than fixed or stable entities. But then, so is taiji. Therefore, even in taiji, *so is the dantian*. You can only feel it *sometimes*. Perhaps, like a fist, you always 'have' it (lying latent, as a potential), but you only *make* it sometimes. A fist, a stance, a kick, agility, or a certain posture: these are all things that you definitely 'have', but which are not always there and that are at other times merely kinds of virtual or immanent propensity. Translated into the cross-cultural anatomical terms offered by physiotherapist and acupuncturist Phillip Beach:

Here is the link between contractile fields and meridians. With the contractile field model of movement I could see how a pinprick would elicit a whole body movement. Lines (i.e. meridians) then emerge on the living body that, when pricked or pressed, will elicit the same basic movement pattern. As meridians are emergent from the whole living form they will not be found on a cadaver. In essence, I think the Chinese learnt to predictably influence subtle body shape by using a three-dimensional pattern of pinpricks. Shape and function dance closely together.²⁷

Transforming the Essence into Event

Friedrich Nietzsche once declared: 'there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed'.²⁸ In this line of thinking, identity is never a static 'being', but always a processual 'becoming'. 'We' do not exist as entities 'behind' our acts. We become what we are in and through and as what we

do. This line of thinking defines one of the 'anti-essentialist' (Butler, Laclau) or anti-metaphysical (Derrida, Deleuze) impulses in poststructuralist thought that many have used as a way to bring modern (or postmodern) cultural theory into alignment or affinity with a seam of Chinese thought – most commonly Daoism.²⁹ It offers numerous avenues as viable escape routes out of the East-West ontological or epistemological impasse that we are currently engaging 'metonymically', in our consideration of the dantian.

As mentioned earlier, almost any well-known poststructuralist thinker could be evoked here. Michel Foucault's notions of contingent and variable discursive regimes of truth or epistemes offers one way to account for the difference.³⁰ Jacques Derrida's characterisation of Western styles of thought as fixated on unitary 'being' offers another.³¹ Roland Barthes' deconstruction of the idea of an 'author' as (if) an entity who exists outside and independently of the act of writing also echoes the Nietzschean anti-essentialist processual sentiment above.³² But, perhaps most strongly, the line of scholarship that runs from Spinoza through Deleuze, into contemporary poststructuralism and affect theory, often refuses to essentialise events and processes ('verbs') into supposedly fixed entities, ('nouns').³³ The situation was once summed up well by the cultural theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who wondered whether she was drawn to poststructuralist theory because she was so persuaded by the anti-essentialist philosophies of Buddhism, Zen and Daoism, or whether she was drawn to the anti-essentialist philosophies of Buddhism, Zen and Daoism because she was so persuaded by the 'constructionist' theory of poststructuralism.³⁴

A less immediately or obviously relevant – but deeply connected – example is Judith Butler's landmark 1990 work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.³⁵ This work has such prominence that today it has the status of being one of the most well-known and frequently-cited works in all of cultural, feminist, gender

and identity studies. However, *Gender Trouble* is most commonly referenced to support the point that gender is a cultural construct – that maleness and femaleness or masculinity and femininity are culturally variable. Yet, even though this argument is the most common reason for citing Butler, it is nowhere near the most radical claim made in the book. For, as well as making this argument about *gender* being a construct, Butler also makes the claim that *biological sex itself* is a cultural construct. That is, the 'male' and 'female' *of biology* (and not just the 'masculine' and 'feminine' of culture) are not simply objectively existing phenomena of the world. They are constructed categories within, by and of the *scientific field of biology*. Their supposed objectivity is merely the outcome of the scientific gaze.

This is a tricky point to keep a grip on. But it is perhaps easier for mainstream discourse to get a handle on it today than it was in the early 1990s, thanks to a growing awareness of 'trans' issues. These sometimes (but not always) involve an appeal to non-stable and non-binary identity. So, although many people still regard the trans issue as a matter of *gender* identity rather than 'objective' *biological sex*, at root, the most radical dimension of this discourse relates to the fact that certain trans identities offer a *performative demonstration of the ways in which the binary 'either/or' of biological sex is not adequate to their own objective reality*.

This brief mention of the deconstruction of science (that I said I wouldn't enter into) is pertinent here for a couple of reasons. One is to link my argument to other established, and often accepted arguments circulating in and around cultural theory; and accordingly to telegraph the fact that the work being done here seeks to add something further to this field. Another is to set the scene for my conclusions by demonstrating the extent to which the argument I am making is not actually all that radical, shocking or controversial by comparison with other, well-established and well-respected arguments.

Yet, I also hope to add something – a dimension that is missing from much poststructuralist discourse: namely, the implications of the *anthropotechnic* dimension – the dimension of *training*. For, ultimately, my argument here is merely that *the dantian only exists if you make it*, that it is *made by cultural practices*, and that therefore the bridge between cultures and the route to comprehending cultural difference is neither merely nor entirely linguistic, nor neutral or objective, nor a matter of ‘relativism’; but is rather fundamentally what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk calls *anthropotechnic*.³⁶ Anthropotechnics is Sloterdijk’s term for the way humans are made: through practices of physical training, discipline, exercise. Sloterdijk argues that *all* cultural capacities arise as a result of training, and that the vistas that can emerge and the abilities that can develop through training are in no way graspable or even conceptualizable from positions prior to or outside of the practice.

Build it and they will come

Where Sloterdijk argues ‘in general’, martial arts studies scholar Daniel Mroz advocates an approach to understanding martial arts specifically that aligns with this perspective.³⁷ With regards to some of the ostensibly intractably ‘untranslatable’ phenomena from Chinese and other Asian traditions, Mroz deconstructs and recasts the ontological question of their objective existence by referring the matter to training. Points such as the dantian are *constructed*, he argues. You have to *build* these things. You do not ‘open’, ‘unlock’, or ‘access’ them, as if magically – as if the ‘push’ of your desire eventually forces the universe or the godhead to ‘give in’ and open the door for you. Rather, you *build* them through the regular and specific exercise regimes that focus on specific areas, fields, sensations, effects and affects. These regimes are always forms of mind-body postural, breath, concentration, imagination and visualisation work.

This reference to imagination and visualisation is not to say that the effects and affects are imaginary. As multiple academic literatures (spanning everything from posture to politics) often remind us, many very real things cannot be said to exist until there is consciousness of them. In fact, consciousness is what 'makes' them; with growing consciousness strengthening them. Consider *exploitation*, for instance, or 'women's experience'. As Donna Haraway put it in the 1980s: it was actually the international women's movements themselves that *constructed* 'women's experience' – something that became such a 'crucial collective object' of feminism. Yet, this 'experience is *a fiction and fact* of the most crucial, political kind'.³⁸ Political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argued the same about the crucial Marxist category of exploitation. There is no objective measure, moment or degree at which exploitation can be said to exist. If workers accept the terms of their employment, then there are only contractually agreed relations of hierarchy and subordination. But the moment workers decide they are being exploited, and mobilise accordingly, then they *are* being exploited.³⁹ Exploitation as an experience is both a fact and a kind of fiction. It is a construct, one that is nonetheless experienced and lived as real, and *is* real, to the extent that it is a consciously apprehended interpretation of the situation.

The work of taijiquan and qigong training builds both the consciousness and effectivity of key points. However, this construction work is not so much like building a muscle as it is like building, say, the ability to stand on one leg, walk a tightrope, or juggle. In fact, the building of awareness of certain meridial points is sometimes achieved in and through the development of skills such as balance or 'lightness': learning to 'sink the weight' (down to and below the lower dantian) can significantly improve one's balance; combining this with an awareness of a point in the mid-back (*jiā jí guān*, 夾脊關) can add to this a quality of movement called 'body lightness'.

With reference to Phillip Beach's argument that human anatomy can only be fully understood in terms of the materially-imposed logics and dynamics of movement

and rest, the process of training can be thought of as a specific kind of *intervention of consciousness* into what he calls the body's 'emergent lines of shape control'.⁴⁰ 'Emergent lines of shape control' is his term for what he argues the Chinese meridians map. Western anatomy, he argues, has long been both methodologically and conceptually dominated by the primacy of the dissective study of cadavers. However, cadavers do not possess all of the qualities and hence objective dimensions that living bodies do. Crucially, notes Beach: 'Lines (i.e. meridians) [...] emerge on the living body that, when pricked or pressed, will elicit the same basic movement pattern. As meridians are emergent from the whole living form they will not be found on a cadaver' (5). For Beach, the meridians and points reflect movement and pain-response structures, fields of contractile force, and key areas and relationships within and in relation to those fields.⁴¹

In his discussions, Beach occasionally refers to martial arts, albeit principally in terms of the logics and dynamics of body movement response patterns as illustrated by the effects of techniques such as wrist locks. These, he argues, are predictable in ways that illustrate precisely what it is that meridians map. However, he does not enter into a consideration of the *active engagement* with meridians and key points like the dantian within qigong training, or the references made to meridians and areas such as the dantian within taijiquan training. But the active and reciprocally strengthening mapping of the body in terms of such key points is *crucial, specific, particular*, and perhaps even *singular* or *unique* to these cultural practices.

Cross-Cultural Conflation

It is important to note uniqueness and specificity in order to avoid or redress a common form of cross-cultural conflation. Namely: it is quite common for people to conflate the points and processes named in one tradition with those of another. For

instance, the dantians and qi of Chinese medicine and martial arts are quite frequently conflated or equated with those of other traditions, such as the chakras and prana of Indian yoga, *as if they are the same thing*. But this is an error. Mroz argues that this kind of conflation tends to happen when different anthropotechnic traditions are viewed in what he calls 'low resolution'. Low resolution perspectives are those produced through a lack of direct experience or understanding of the different practices and fields. However, when viewed at 'higher resolution', he suggests, it soon becomes clear that prana and qi, meridial points and chakras are actually different, and reflect different cosmologies, ontologies and their corresponding orthodoxies and orthopraxies. By contrast, 'high resolution' perspectives, he suggests, are those informed by the sustained physical experience of training in one, another or several different traditions, in ways supported, reinforced, or mutually constituted by and through an adequate working knowledge of their conceptual fields.

The practice of qigong produces entirely different experiences, outcomes and effects to the experiences and effects produced by kundalini yoga; just as training in power-lifting produces entirely different experiences, outcomes and effects to training in bodybuilding, or cross-fit – and certainly very different effects to training in long-distance running. This is because each practice is literally – or, rather, physically – very different, and each refers to, activates and builds extremely different conceptual and sensory maps of the body, each working towards different ends. Across anthropotechnic traditions, practitioners are trained to 'look' for, to feel, and to *do* entirely different things.

The (Western) engagement with different cultural practices of sensory (re)mapping is often couched in religious, mystical or spiritual terms. Mroz describes this as a belief that 'all paths lead to the peak of the mountain'. In other words, 'low resolution'

(frequently Western) perspectives, which flatten, link and conflate different affective mappings of the body across all of the most widely-known 'mystical' Eastern traditions, is a version of what Sophia Rose Arjana calls 'muddled orientalism'.⁴² Moreover, it is also a form of *religionism*, in that it interprets all forms of unusual somaesthetic experience as evidence of some kind of encounter with one or another version of the (singular) divine. Such 'low resolution' interpretive universalism, no matter how New Age or countercultural, however, remains a form of latently Christian universalism, which looks for and finds 'one true god' everywhere.

Of course, the most cynical or scientistic response to all of this would be to interpret all of the different experiences across different anthropotechnic disciplines in terms of a scientistic psychological universalism, which would view all potentially equivalent experiences across all world traditions as versions and variants of equivalent non-objective and purely psychological (*qua* imaginary) experiences. (As many have noted, including Adorno, Horkheimer and Derrida: in Western thinking, hallucinatory 'intoxication' has long been associated with 'the Orient' and its practices.)⁴³

Both of these alternatives are equally unsatisfactory. We can avoid falling into either universalist religionism or scientistic psychologism if we allow for the dual possibility that something specific *is* happening while also bracketing off the possibility that this involves contact with the divine. This requires maintaining the view that we are neither immersed in the pure fantasy or intoxication of self-delusion nor are we really on a spiritual journey that will allow us to access, commune with and have a direct embodied encounter with the spiritual essence of the universe. If we bracket off all variants of these two equal and opposite interpretations, then we are more able to disambiguate the differences across practices and traditions and to see them for what they are: *anthropotechnic training regimes that map a territory differently in order to build and do completely different things there.*

Conclusion: Doing Cultural Difference Differently

Such a position may be accused of nihilism, on the one hand, or cultural disrespect, on the other. However, I would counter such criticisms with the proposal that understanding these venerable practices from diverse Asian traditions as being specific and precise *ways of making* is both respectful and enabling. It offers us a point of entry into heterogeneous practices that variously and dynamically might enable us to see, feel, think, be and do more than we could otherwise. Training in them may enable us to encounter other cultures and other abilities in other ways – in our bodies, in our breath, on our pulse. It may allow us to contain multitudes: to learn more things about more traditions in more ways than other approaches could enable.

Of course, the risk inherent in trying to invest in the potentials of numerous cultural anthropotechnic training systems is that heterogeneity or training promiscuity might lead to *dilettantism* – and, worse, *consumerist dilettantism* – or that clichéd kind of countercultural tourism in which Western ‘spiritual seekers’, as Palmer and Siegler put it, ‘progress through a string of disparate techniques ranging from reiki to shamanism and tai chi to kabbalah’ in ways that display a ‘striking uniformity and standardization’.⁴⁴

In pragmatic terms: attempting to ‘do too’ much can always be regarded as the source of achieving ‘too little’. The attempt to cover too many practices can always be regarded as a reason for the failure to cover enough of any of them.

Of course, the question of ‘how many is too many’ is unlikely ever to be resolved. Similarly, the question of whether someone’s involvement in this or that cultural practice is ‘consumerist’ or ‘authentic’ will always be a conceptual minefield. Almost everything involves financial investment and/or reward; and the determination of

'authenticity' is itself at best a contingent and contextual structure of feeling, and most often a highly mobile floating signifier. Authenticity is mainly a matter of experience and taste.⁴⁵

What Sloterdijk calls 'anthropotechnics' is what produces *abilities*: sensory, affective, technical, practical. Put differently, rather than imagining that East/West cultural difference devolves on access to the supernatural versus blinkered scientism, it is more appropriate to engage the matter in terms of embodied practices and the sensory maps they produce. Unless we do this, we (perhaps Westerners in particular, perhaps all of us) are doomed to live in the repetition of the clichéd countercultural gesture of moving 'God' from West to East, merely in order to rediscover 'him' in a different guise – transforming him from an old white man with a beard reclining on a cloud into a little old Chinese man doing taiji⁴⁶ or a brown-skinned guru sitting in the lotus position.⁴⁷

¹ Phillip Beach, 'Decoding the Chinese Meridial Map', in *Muscles and Meridians* (United Kingdom: Elsevier Health Sciences, 2010), 154.

² Beach, 154.

³ On the *differend* (a book which does not actually deal with East-West cultural difference, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). For an effective entry-level discussion of what we might call the differend between Western and Chinese medicine, see Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (Chichester: Capstone, 2006).

⁴ As David Palmer explains: 'It's possible to be engaging in a pragmatic ontology without knowing about an associated conceptual ontology, and it's possible to discourse on a conceptual ontology without engaging it in a pragmatic way. For example, to practice *taijiquan* is to transform one's body into an expression and experience of Chinese cosmology. However, it is not necessary to have any intellectual knowledge of this cosmology to do so. Conversely, Daoist cosmology is rooted in a specific experience of the body. Many people have intellectual knowledge of Daoist philosophy, without having ever practiced or experienced it in an embodied manner'. David A. Palmer, 'Isomorphism, Syncretism, and Poly-Ontological Dynamics: The Implications of Chinese Religion for Covenantal Pluralism', in *The Routledge Handbook of Religious Literacy, Pluralism, and Global Engagement*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Routledge, 2022), 124, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036555-11>. With thanks to Daniel Mroz who alerted me to this work.

⁵ On the cross-cultural concept of the 'contact zone', see Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession*, no. 91 (1991): 33–40.

⁶ See: Alexandra Ryan, 'Globalisation and the "Internal Alchemy" in Chinese Martial Arts: The Transmission of Taijiquan to Britain', *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 2, no. 4 (2008): 525–43, <https://doi.org/10.1215/s12280-009-9073-x>; Adam Frank, *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old*

Chinese Man: Understanding Identity Through Martial Arts (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West*, 2016.

⁷ The notion of wellbeing, wellness and mindfulness are presented as unquestionably positive in and of themselves, although there is a growing number of connections being made between certain wellness beliefs and the slide into the ideology of conspiracy theories. See, for example: Derek Beres, Matthew Remski, and Julian Walker, *Conspirituality: How New Age Conspiracy Theories Became a Health Threat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2023); Sirin Kale, 'Chakras, Crystals and Conspiracy Theories: How the Wellness Industry Turned Its Back on Covid Science', *The Guardian*, 11 November 2021, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/11/injecting-poison-will-never-make-you-healthy-how-the-wellness-industry-turned-its-back-on-covid-science>; Richard Sprenger et al., 'Has Wellness Become a Gateway to Conspiracy? A Sceptic's Guide to the Industry – Video', *The Guardian*, 21 November 2022, sec. Life and style, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/video/2022/nov/21/has-wellness-become-a-gateway-to-conspiracy-a-sceptics-guide-to-the-industry>; Eva Wiseman, 'The Dark Side of Wellness: The Overlap between Spiritual Thinking and Far-Right Conspiracies', *The Observer*, 17 October 2021, sec. Life and style, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/oct/17/eva-wiseman-conspirituality-the-dark-side-of-wellness-how-it-all-got-so-toxic>.

⁸ A huge body of research has sprung up around the theme of mindfulness, its practices, effects, and relationship to a range of ideologies. See, for example: Steven Stanley, 'Mindfulness' (Springer, 2014), <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/88005/>.

⁹ Peter Doran, 'Mindfulness Is Just Buddhism Sold to You by Neoliberals | The Independent | The Independent', *The Independent*, 25 February 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/healthy-living/mindfulness-sells-buddhist-meditation-teachings-neoliberalism-attention-economy-a8225676.html>; Catherine Wikholm and Miguel Farias, 'Mindfulness Has Lost Its Buddhist Roots, and It May Not Be Doing You Good', *The Conversation*, accessed 15 November 2016, <http://theconversation.com/mindfulness-has-lost-its-buddhist-roots-and-it-may-not-be-doing-you-good-42526>.

¹⁰ Headspace has even strategically chosen to give those who work in many universities around the world free access to its features, on the condition that people who use it become participants in a study that seeks to elaborate the benefits of Headspace. The rhetorical and semiotic power of such a study for the branding and marketing of the app is clear.

¹¹ On which, see: David A Palmer and Elijah Siegler, *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Thomas J. Csordas, 'Introduction: Modalities of Transnational Transcendence', in *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1–30.

¹² See: Paul Bowman, Izzati Aziz, and Xiujie Ma, 'Translating Tai Chi and Transforming Qigong in British Media Culture', *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 2 (2023): 173–90, https://doi.org/10.1386/eapc_00106_1.

¹³ 'Chinese Doctor in Hazmat Suit Teaches Coronavirus Patients Tai Chi to Help Them Exercise | Daily Mail Online', 02 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8003703/Doctor-hazmat-suit-teaches-coronavirus-patients-Tai-Chi-help-exercise-quarantine.html>.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, therefore, because of such hopes in the preventative, healing and restorative powers of 'natural' approaches such as 'positive thinking' and tapping into the wisdom of holistic ancient traditions, outlooks and practices of mindfulness, wellbeing and 'alternative' health regimes were also pulled into the orbit of 'anti-vax' and 'anti-Big Pharma' discourses – or the novel hybrid of Western spirituality and conspiracy theory, or what is now termed 'conspirituality'. Charlotte Ward and David Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26, no. 1 (1 January 2011): 103–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2011.539846>; Beres, Remski, and Walker, *Conspirituality: How New Age Conspiracy Theories Became a Health Threat*; Wiseman, 'The Dark Side of Wellness'.

¹⁵ The overwhelmingly popular media representation of taiji in the UK context is detailed in Paul Bowman, *The Invention of Martial Arts: Popular Culture Between Asia and America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). See also Bowman, Aziz, and Ma, 'Translating Tai Chi and Transforming Qigong in British Media Culture'.

¹⁶ In my own studies, my own instructors tended to introduce particular terms – such as *qi*, *jin* or *shen* – or locations of the body – such as the dantian, or the *yongquan* meridian – in isolation, one at a time, and only when pertinent to a certain stage of training.

¹⁷ Daniel Mroz disagrees with me on this point, arguing that in certain contexts, it is only said to take 100 days of 40-minute daily practice to begin to feel *qi gan*. However, I would propose that it takes some considerable time to be able to get anywhere close to anything like 100 consecutive days of 40-minute qigong practice.

Ultimately, though, perhaps this difference or disagreement boils down to the specificities of different syllabi. In the school I studied in, one progressed through different stages of the taiji form (square, round, continuous, slow, high/low, light), and it would not be until training reached 'slow' (something that took many months or even years) before the 'feelings' that slowness training engendered might be connected directly with those of qigong.

¹⁸ 'Internal' practices such as taiji and qigong actually identify three dantians, each located at a different point of the body (head, chest and lower-belly). But they tend to make most regular reference to what is called the *lower dantian*. (The distinction between 'internal' and 'external' martial arts is often problematic. However, it is useful in this discussion to the extent that practices such as taiji are characterised by preoccupations with such 'internal' entities as qi and the dantian.)

¹⁹ In this practice, the very bottom of the belly is contracted on the inhale, in a way that is used to 'pull' air into the body. On the exhale, muscles slightly higher up the belly are used to gently massage the air out.

²⁰ I was studying in what was then called The Yongquan Tai Chi Chuan Association, whose name was subsequently changed to The Yongquan Martial Arts Association, to reflect the wider range of styles practiced. My instructor was Graham Barlow. I became a certified instructor in 2006, but a catastrophic ankle injury in 2009 ultimately stymied my progress thereafter.

²¹ See, for example, Peter Skafish, 'Equivocations of the Body and Cosmic Arts: An Experiment in Polyrealism', *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 25, no. 4 (2020): 135–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2020.1790845>.

²² Bruce Lee, 'Liberate Yourself from Classical Karate', *Black Belt Magazine*, 1971.

²³ On which, see Douglas Wile, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics of the Late Ch'ing Dynasty* (New York: State University of New York, 1996).

²⁴ There are a spectrum of other possible reasons for wanting to train in this way and to look for or learn these things: taiji and qigong are associated with various forms of health and wellbeing practices, therapeutic and complementary medicine, meditation and mindfulness, each of which can be more or less connected with or divorced from 'Eastern' beliefs in phenomena such as the dantian, qi, and so on.

²⁵ CF stands for 'contractile field'. This is Beach's term for his theory of human movement anatomy: 'The CF model explores the innate patterning found in the human neuromuscular system. Based on an analysis of vertebrate movement, I have identified the minimum number of interactive CFs needed for primary human movement patterns'. Beach, 'Decoding the Chinese Meridian Map', 2.

²⁶ Beach, 182–83.

²⁷ Beach, 5.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Penguin, 2013), 33.

²⁹ David Hall, 'Modern China and the Postmodern West', in *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives*, ed. Eliot Deutsch (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 50–70. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke, 2003).

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970).

³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

³² Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*, European Perspectives Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

³⁴ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*.

³⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1990).

³⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (London: Polity, 2013).

³⁷ Mroz is currently working on a monograph for Cardiff University Press which covers this in detail. I have been able to see early drafts of his chapters. I am indebted to his thinking in what follows, and in terms of the general contours of my argument throughout this work. See also his podcast episode for The Martial Arts Studies podcast, of 20th November 2023. This episode is available as a video on The Martial Arts Studies YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rrbQsdTxD4&list=PLyww_DP-EcGaB2h_dPop3ozM8r2MzjSWX&index=164&t=193s. It is also available as an audio podcast: https://open.spotify.com/episode/3AexQC7n8BE4PkvwK6YfMD?si=O3wE-fQqRZyG_kjLzivW6g

³⁸ Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149. My emphasis.

³⁹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁴⁰ Phillip Beach, *Muscles and Meridians: The Manipulation of Shape*, 1st ed. (London: Elsevier Health Sciences, 2010), 5, 59, <https://doi.org/10.1016/C2009-0-38569-4>.

⁴¹ Beach, 155–83.

⁴² Arjana, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi*.

⁴³ See: Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Verso, 1986), 'Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment'; Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Weber, *Points - : interviews, 1974-1994* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 'The Rhetoric of Drugs'.

⁴⁴ Palmer and Siegler, *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality*, 97.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Culler, 'The Semiotics of Tourism', in *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 1–10; Heath and Potter, *The Rebel Sell*.

⁴⁶ I borrow this image directly from Frank, *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man*.

⁴⁷ Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).