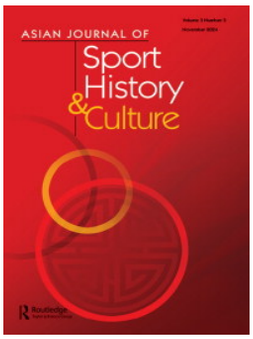

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Orientalist Fever: Qigong and Orientalism, East and West

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ABSTRACT

In Western discourse, the Chinese practice of *qigong* (氣功) is frequently depicted as ancient, timeless, magical and mystical. Such representations might therefore be regarded as 'orientalist', involving formulaic simplifications, myths, exoticisation, misrepresentation and othering. But, what do we see when we turn to the Chinese discourse about qigong? This work argues that, in 20th century China, qigong was *already* depicted as ancient, timeless, magical and mystical. Accordingly, I argue that something about qigong tends to pull practitioners – Eastern and Western – towards perspectives that might be called 'orientalist'. However, this stretches the paradigm too far. So instead, I argue for the need to re-evaluate the paradigm of orientalism and indeed of the antiorientalist critical impulse itself. Orientalism is one of the constitutive paradigms of postcolonial studies and is an enduringly important tool in cross-cultural studies of all kinds. But, I suggest, despite being associated with an ethical commitment to responsibility and sensitivity in cross-cultural representation, antiorientalist criticism can easily become focused on the moral condemnation of Western representations. Therefore, the work concludes with a proposal for critical vigilance in the use of 'orientalism', to avoid judgmentalism, moralism, and essentialism when analysing cross-cultural practices and representations.

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Epigraph

> [W]e need to explore alternative ways of thinking about cross-cultural exchange that exceed the pointed, polemical framework of 'antiorientalism' – Rey Chow[1]

Introduction

Orientalism is one of the constitutive paradigms of the field of postcolonial studies and it is an enduringly important tool in cross-cultural studies of all kinds. Since the 1970s, antiorientalist criticism has justified its often polemical critiques on the basis of arguments about the need for responsibility and sensitivity in matters of cross-cultural representation, or for an 'ethical commitment' or 'hospitality' to 'alterity'. Paradoxically,

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however, such commitments have sometimes come to mean that antiorientalist criticism becomes a moral condemnation of Western representations or appropriations of non-Western cultural identities and practices, especially when they are deemed to be different/incorrect, inadequate, stereotypical, or essentialist.

In what follows, two examples are introduced. These are representative of the ways that popular Western discourse tends to engage with the Chinese physical cultural practice of *qigong* (氣功). These examples are evaluated in two ways. First, in terms of their obvious orientalist features. But then, the further context of the history of popular representations of qigong *in China*, during the high period of what David Palmer calls 'qigong fever' (from the 1940s to the 1980s) is introduced. This recontextualization enables a second form of evaluation: not of the veracity of the Western 'copy' (or translation) of some 'true', 'authentic' or 'correct' Chinese 'original'; but rather of the more recent Western representation *viewed as a construct* and evaluated in relation to an earlier Chinese *construct*. I argue that doing this recasts recent Western representations of qigong, allowing us to regard them as 'heirs' to earlier Chinese representations.

However, given that the Western representations are clearly 'orientalist', this raises the vertiginous question of whether Chinese representations of qigong should themselves be regarded as 'orientalist', or whether the orientalist paradigm reaches its limit here and obfuscates rather than illuminates our understanding of the situation. In exploring this, the article seeks to contribute to the 'antiorientalist project' that has long been elaborating itself in cultural, cross-cultural, media, and postcolonial studies. It does so first (following Rey Chow's lead)[2] by problematising the tendency to use orientalism as a form of moral condemnation, and second, by urging antiorientalist criticism to remain alert to the limitations of this otherwise valuable paradigm.

Romantic Rumours and Secret Promises

To begin, let us turn to the first online qigong courses that I ever encountered (during the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020). These courses were offered by a British company called Hayo'uFit, that claimed to be the first in the field.[3] In order to introduce what qigong is, the Hayo'uFit website describes the differences between qigong and two other entities – *kung fu* and *taijiquan*. It says: 'if qigong is the grandmother, kung fu is the parent and tai chi is the child. Tai chi is a stylised martial arts form of qigong, rumoured to have been created by a Taoist master called Zhang Sanfeng in the 14th century'.[4] Thus, even with its 'rumoured' 14th century birthdate, taiji is said to be but a 'child' when compared to the older kung fu and the still older qigong.[5] Adding further information for a readership assumed to be entirely uninformed about qigong, the website also evokes 'Taoist masters' (vaguely alluding either/both the problematic 'wandering monk' Bodhidharma creation myth or the mythical Laozi ('Lao Tsu')):[6]

> [Qigong] was invented as 'dynamic meditation', to allow Taoist masters to keep their muscles relaxed, supple and strong after hours of sitting meditation but without breaking their focus. Its roots can be traced as far back as 8000 years. By the 3rd century BCE, this practice had crystallised into the beginnings of qigong as it is today. Despite its ancient roots, it's as relevant to modern life as it has been for millennia.[7]

It is 'relevant', we are told, because qigong practice 'leaves you feeling fit, energised, sculpted and strong. But more importantly, it works to encourage restorative sleep, good digestion, better mood and vitality. Shrouded in mystery in the East and undiscovered in the West, Qigong is quite simply the ultimate self-healing technique'.[8]

Students and researchers from multiple academic disciplines may detect here the work of the representational structure known as *orientalism*.[9] In orientalist representations, elements of Asian culture are transformed – arguably, mistranslated – for a Western audience, in formulaic ways. Most commonly, they are simplified, romanticised, projected back into the mists of time, mythologised, and regarded almost as unchanging time-travellers, arriving in the modern world unchanged, despite the passage of time.[10] Hence, in the 'orientalist imaginary',[11] to do qigong today is to commune directly with an ancient past, whether that be an almost unimaginable '8000 years' ago, or the mythic moment the Indian monk Bodhidharma taught meditation to Shaolin monks (supposedly somewhere between the 6th or 5th century CE), or of Laozi teaching 'Taoist masters' (traditionally 6th to 4th century CE), or Zhang Sanfeng inventing *taijiquan* ('tai chi') in the 14th century – or all of the above.

The Hayo'uFit site is exemplary, both in that it claims to be the first and also in that it is far from unique. There are many other such sites, which all provide similar dubious narratives about ancient Chinese physical cultural practices, claimed to be unknown in the West (but that have actually been prevalent in the West for decades).[12] These sites, and their narratives, are nourished by myths that proliferated during the 'kung fu craze' of the 1970s, and which became solidified as 'true' for many people, simply because they were repeated so often. The hold of these myths did not wane with the receding of the kung fu craze. If anything, they have grown stronger. At least in some contexts.

For instance, consider next an article in *Men's Journal* – a magazine positioned as 'the source for active, accomplished men to fuel an adventurous and discerning lifestyle'.[13] On 5th December 2019, *Men's Journal* published a piece titled 'Could Qigong be the Next Yoga?' Directly below this title is the large-font introduction: 'Is America ready to spread what has been a secret up until now? One Zen master says qigong has all the benefits of yoga and so much more'.

Once again, qigong is presented as a newly discovered ancient secret, one that is shrouded in mystery but that promises almost magical results. Structured by a cluster of quotations from 'Zen master and blogger Anthony Korahais', thematically and narratively the article follows a predictable pattern, trading in the same small list of ingredients as the Hayo'uFit website (and many other texts on qigong, which frequently depict it as a miraculous practice). In such texts, qigong is first presented as an ancient Chinese exercise system that is a new discovery in the West, one that is about to become the next big thing ('Once people start to realize what qigong (pronounced *chee-gong*) can really do […] then everyone will be using it'). After this, a set of remarkable outcomes are attributed to it: in this article, we are told qigong can 'heal' many things, including 'debilitating anxiety and clinical depression'.

In these – as in many other Western media treatments of the subject – qigong is depicted as gentle, healing, calming, soothing, grounding, balancing, and energising. As such, if we were to attribute a gender to depictions of qigong in Western media, we would most likely choose *feminine*.[14] Such gendering is inherent to orientalism, in

which the West is masculine and the East is feminine. However, *Men's Journal* aims to appeal to active, health-conscious, outdoorsy and athletic *men*. Hence, the first paragraph of the article contains some key demographic-specific cues: the first quotation from Korahais says that qigong will 'help you get to peak performance and stay there'. This immediately moves qigong onto the desired ground: the sporty objective of attaining and maintaining today's much-fetishized notion of 'peak performance'. Then, after the mandatory run-through of the key features of qigong – 'features' that are actually *orientalist mythemes* (elements that are almost always present in the Western narrative treatment of qigong) – the article makes an attempt to move the discourse onto both more masculine and more Westernised terrain.

Of qigong, we are told (in gendered terms): 'she is the grandmother of tai chi, an ancient Asian practice – and one of the four branches of traditional Chinese medicine – that combines gentle breathing, flowing movements and mindfulness meditation'. Furthermore: 'Followers like the simple practice for a variety of reasons, including its purported ability to restore wellness, build mental and emotional strength, reduce stress and increase vitality'. This is because, as Korahais says: 'Qigong gets your energy, your qi, flowing better'. But, he is quick to add: 'This isn't mystical. When your energy is flowing better, your immune system functions better, your inflammation goes down, your lymph fluid cleans out the toxic junk faster'.

There are a lot of scientific-sounding (but actually *scientistic*) claims being made here. At the same time, this ancient, Eastern, and frequently-feminised object ('*she* is the grandmother of tai chi') is being concisely translated into Western and also – crucially – *athletic* terms. Most of this conceptual, discursive or cultural translation (from ostensibly Eastern into ostensibly Western terms) happens via the bridge provided by the word 'energy'. 'Energy' is a common cliché associated with and often taken to be definitive of *qi*.[15] However, even in English, the word 'energy' has a broad range of possible meanings. Aside from its scientific meanings, in everyday life, energy most commonly refers to how lively or lethargic a person feels. But also (at the either end of 'normal' or 'ordinary language' usage, so to speak) 'energy' can equally be recruited to describe 'paranormal' or 'supernatural' phenomena, from the perception of strange sensations (from 'ghostly presences' to 'strange tingling'), all the way through to mysterious or magical 'powers'.

In our current example, the *Men's Journal* article mentions 'energy' but then makes a concerted effort to move its possible meaning away from magic and towards 'science'. We are quickly reassured that this energy 'isn't mystical'. Rather, it is presented as if it is being used in a biological sense – as if, in biology, it would be fine to use a formulation like 'when your energy is flowing better'. However, while there are things within modern conceptions of the human body that biologists might describe in terms of 'flow' (blood, for instance, can be said to 'flow', although the term 'circulate' would be more common), 'energy' is not something that would normally be said to flow.

All of this works first to establish and then to change the status of qigong: from an unknown foreign entity into a valid practice that a sporty Western man might want to add to his physical regimen – as it enables 'peak performance'. At this point, the next theme (or conceit) of the article is engaged. This is the question: 'why is

this a "well-kept secret among amateur and pro athletes" […], that no one else has heard of'?

To be clear: the three propositions (1) that 'no one' had heard of qigong in 2019, (2) that it was a secret that only some athletes knew, and (3) that those who knew about it wanted to keep it a 'secret', is a tough cluster of claims to swallow. Articles on qigong were not uncommon in 2019. Stories about 'alternative' and 'spiritual' or 'mind-body' practices – ostensibly or actually from the East – like yoga, meditation, mindfulness, taiji and qigong had circulated within and across different media contexts increasingly since the 1980s, in the UK having a peak around the year 2000.[16] In fact, this article is not unique. It is not breaking a new story. Rather, it is representative of a well-established genre – or formula, 'capsule', or *portable serial form*[17] – for thinking, talking and writing about qigong in the West.

This is characterised by a cluster of mythemes: qigong is called ancient, but new to the West. It is called secret, but popular in China. It involves ancient Chinese terms and concepts, but these are explained or illustrated through well-known contemporary categories. It is said to be not mystical, but its effects are often depicted as miraculous. It is also often said to be *easy*: 'It's easier than yoga or tai chi: One movement called "pushing mountains" requires nothing more than gently moving your palms back and forth in a flowing manner while coordinating your breath with the movement'; 'It's accessible to all: You don't need much training to start. Korahais says he can train a beginner to start seeing results in as little as three hours'. It is also *quick*: 'It's a fast path to healing: Following solid instruction, just 15 minutes of qigong a day can lead to noticeable changes in health and wellness, promises Korahais'. It's *fashionable*: 'It's mindfulness and medicine: You've seen the cover of *Time*: The world is ready for mindfulness. Qigong facilitates this practice'. It's massive in China: 'like acupuncture, qigong started as a branch of traditional Chinese medicine. Some hospitals in China dedicate an entire wing to qigong'. It's totally *tailorable*: 'It can grow with you: Some qigong techniques are incredibly challenging, physically and mentally, and can be raised to a level that even an Olympic athlete would find difficult, according to Korahais'. It's *magical*: it can provide 'a flowing fountain of youth'. But (paradoxically, and crucially for its salespeople), it requires an *expert* or 'authentic' *instructor*: 'Even today […] it's hard to find a genuine teacher. You find more and more teachers, but they don't have much training, so their students don't get the spectacular results that some people get'. In other words, if you don't experience the magical or miraculous results promised, this is because you haven't studied under an authentic expert.

Given the participatory sport and exercise focus of *Men's Journal*, this article also adds a range of benefits specific to those who exercise: 'Some professional athletes are already tapping the secret sauce'. For them, 'Qigong is [their] secret weapon', allegedly helping them to 'stay focused and relaxed' as well as 'more resilient', and to 'avoid injuries or heal faster'. But, crucially for the amateur practitioner readership of the journal, 'Everyday athletes stand to gain a lot from qigong too'. It quotes Korahais: 'I think it's especially important for weekend warriors because we tend to overdo it. Qigong can help us build resiliency, like when we were younger'. Thus, qigong is positioned as a panacea, a magical supplement that can quickly and easily be added

to one's daily routines to improve physicality, increase vitality and even preserve or enhance youthfulness. But – and this is a big but – despite all its qualities (its easiness, its capsule form, its accessibility, its popularity in China, its simplicity and its pleasantness) it is nonetheless a *secret* that requires an *expert teacher*.

Hence the question that is the conceit of the entire article: the riddle of why qigong is a 'well-kept secret among amateur and pro athletes', one that – supposedly – 'no one else has heard of'. The answer given in the article is this:

> 'Martial artists were the stewards of qigong for many years, and they were notoriously secretive of their skills. Their lives depended on their art, and they kept the secrets closely guarded', says Korahais, whose international organization Flowing Zen has certified 25 qigong instructors.

This is an astonishing answer to the (preposterous) question of why qigong was 'secret' in the West in 2019 – that martial artists kept it a secret because their 'lives depended' on concealing the source of their skills from others. At the very least, this claim begs certain questions. *Which* martial artists are these? *Where* are they? *When* are they? Why do or did their lives (until recently? Still?) depend on their art? Where and when is this social context? It is certainly not that of the majority of today's Western- or Eastern-based martial arts practice, which involves going along to a club for classes, once, several times a week, or every day to practice techniques and workout, whether that be in Chicago, Cardiff, Chennai, or Shanghai. No: this is rather an entirely fanciful orientalist realm – a piece of dreamscape conjured up by a quasi-cinematic orientalist imaginary, peopled by bandits and vigilantes, perhaps in the rivers and lakes of the water margin.[18] It is neither historical nor geographical. Rather, it is a mythic and imagined *no-time* and *no-place* ('no place' being the literal meaning of the word '*utopia*'). This is not geography, it is mythic imaginative geography. As Edward Said explains: 'Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as "long ago" or "the beginning" or "at the end of time" is poetic – made up. … [I]maginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away'.[19] Crucially, this is *imagined geography* and *mythic history*, yet it nonetheless *informs and organises lived practice*. This is a mode of fantasizing and imagining that, when it supplements physical practices, I have come to think of as *orientalist physical culture*.[20]

Qigong Magic and Mythemes, East and West

The Western discourse on qigong is largely devoid of historical knowledge. In the place of history are *allochronic orientalist mythemes*.[21] These are the building blocks of orientalist discourse, producing imagined histories and mythic geographies.[22] Here, qigong has the status of a mystical, magical visitor, emerging from the mists of time into the modern Western world. The practice is presented as if it is ancient and unchanged, as if it had been teleported through a wormhole in the space-time continuum, pure and unchanged since time immemorial. Thus, it seems to offer a way for 'we moderns' to commune with the ancients, who themselves communed with nature and, through this, attained a kind of pre-lapsarian or 'noble savage' supernature. In essence, then, qigong is presented as a kind of rediscovered biophysical Rosetta Stone, enabling 'inner alchemy'.

When faced with such an obvious mythic structure, scholars therefore seem to be faced with an easy task: *myth-busting*. This is why antiorientalist studies seek to puncture such myths and misinformation and to replace it all with historical knowledge.[23] Of course, at this point, the question becomes one of what historical knowledge it might be that would 'correct' the Western orientalism. This is a knotty problem, and it is not simply a problem of 'choice' – i.e. *which* knowledge to believe. Rather, as Chris Goto-Jones's historical study of orientalism and magic reveals, there are subtle and complex 'translatory' dynamics and inevitable interplays between facts and fictions in the movement of information and ideas between Europe and China.[24] For instance, noting how powerfully the anti-foreigner Boxer Uprising in China of 1900 played on the European imagination at the time, Goto-Jones reflects on the ways that facts and factoids became translated into popular 'consciousness':

> The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 provided an early episode in this future history [of the exoticisation of China], with the European press paying considerable attention to the claims of the Boxers to be able to shield themselves from bullets by magic. It was also at this time that ideas about 'magic boxing' started to circulate in Europe and North America. Cashing in on this, as we shall see, William Robinson (aka Chung Ling Soo) started to incorporate a 'bullet catching' effect into his stage show at the time of the Rebellion. In itself, a bullet catch had no particular 'Chineseness', but the glamour of Chinese magic re-enchanted the feat not only through silken robes and exoticism but also via association with the 'magic armour' of the Boxers.[25]

Let us reflect briefly on the cross-cultural dynamics implied here. The 'Western' belief about 'Eastern' magic is not an entirely independent fantasy construction, conjured up illegitimately and out of nothing by the Western orientalist imagination. Rather, Chinese Boxers themselves seemed to entertain or advocate similar beliefs.[26] Thus, you might say, the seeds of the orientalism – at least in this case – were drawn in some way, or in some relationship with, *Chinese self-imagining*. Furthermore, as Goto-Jones also observes, throughout the twentieth century, the Chinese cultural industries themselves were extremely proactive in forging strong connections, in the domestic Chinese cultural sphere, between Chinese martial arts, superhuman abilities, sublime forces, and magic:

> The association between martial arts and magic is powerful in China. In [the early to mid-twentieth century], the association emerged most strongly in the form of the *wuxia-shen'guai* (martial arts and magic) movies, in which Zhang Huichong frequently starred. The association has persisted and even recent movies such as the 2011 Derek Yee film, *The Great Magician*, starring Tony Leung Chiu-Wai, make use of traditional structures from the *wuxia* genre but simply replace the martial arts with magic. Themes of quests for secret scrolls of power (illustrating lost techniques), duels between rival schools, and competition with Japan (and the West) are staples of the genre.[27]

Historian and sociologist David Palmer further illuminates the role of these films in forging the Chinese popular imagination of martial arts and qigong:

> These films and novels depict Buddhist monks and Taoist masters who can fly, disappear and reappear, and read people's minds – abilities they are said to have acquired through the mastery of 'inner cultivation' (*neigong*), which involves the body, breath and mind control exercises associated with *qigong*. For thousands of kung fu fans, it thus became

> apparent that the magical feats of the past and the stunts of pulp films were not fiction: they could be mastered through initiation to a *qigong* master. *Qigong* masters, with their miraculous healing abilities and their Extraordinary Powers, soon came to be seen as living incarnations of the wizards of kung fu culture.[28]

In other words, the antiorientalist critic should at least consider the possibility that perhaps the Western reception/representation of Chinese practices may not simply be an illegitimate invention, conjured up out of thin air and driven entirely by Western fantasies. A degree of *pre-enchantment* seems present around the practices even before, and evidently alongside, their spread to the West. Similarly, the cultural power of media (such as literature and film) to inform beliefs about practices is significant. Such beliefs and associations are not uniquely Western. They are also a staple of Chinese discourse. As ethnographer Adam Frank observed:

> I often asked [*taijiquan*] practitioners in Shanghai to tell me about the origin of the art. With very few exceptions, they began with Zhang Sanfeng. However, as time went on, I noticed that the version of the Zhang Sanfeng story I was hearing bore a striking resemblance to a popular Jet Li film called *Taijiquan Zhang Sanfeng*. Whether the story spawned the movie or the movie spawned this particular version of the story is difficult to determine, but the story [is certainly] told through film [and also] passed on orally.[29]

Thus, when it comes to the Western reception of qigong, we might say: to the extent that this reception *seems* orientalist, it may be prudent to entertain the possibility that this is not entirely the consequence of a specifically Western gaze. It perhaps also relates to earlier ideological or discursive operations *taking place in Chinese discourse*.

The complicating factor, however, is that, despite all of these qualifications and caveats, the way that qigong is treated in Western discourse *is* clearly orientalist. To borrow one of Slavoj Žižek's oft-repeated Lacanian aphorisms: the husband who is pathologically obsessed with the idea that his wife is having an affair definitely still has profound pathological obsessive psychological problems *even if his wife is having an affair*. Similarly: even if Chinese discourse does seem to be involved in something that might be called 'self-mystification', this does not invalidate Said's argument that Western 'ways of seeing' or 'structures of visibility' often display orientalist tendencies. To use the words of Edward Said: the Western treatment of qigong remains exemplary of 'the Orientalist attitude in general'.[30] This attitude, says Said, 'shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter'.[31]

Nonetheless, now that we have reflected on popular Western styles of representing qigong, and posed the (complicating) possibility that this style of representation may not have been imposed upon it entirely by the orientalist gaze contorting it into different and inappropriate pre-existing European categories, let us now reflect further on the status of qigong discourse in China, to see what else is going on. As Rey Chow writes in the essay from which my epigraph is drawn:

> Said's work, insofar as it successfully canonizes the demystification of Western cultural pretensions, is simply pointing to a certain direction in which much work still waits to

> be done […]. This work that needs to be done cannot be done simply by repeating the debunking messages that Said has already so clearly delivered in his book. Rather, we need to explore alternative ways of thinking about cross-cultural exchange that exceed the pointed, polemical framework of 'antiorientalism'…[32]

Chow's own essay goes on to reflect on the place of sexual fantasy and desire in the construction of identity in relation to cross-cultural encounters. Here, I will be looking at rather different forms of fantasy and desire – *epochal*, you might say, or *epistemic*, rather than sexual. To do so, I will draw heavily from David Palmer's far-reaching study of the history of qigong in China, *Qigong Fever*.[33]

Qigong in China: Self-Orientalism?

To begin, it is important to note that Palmer's discussion not only of the history but also the etymology of qigong suggests that the potential for 'orientalising' qigong can already be discerned at an etymological and semantic level in Chinese. In discussing the suffix '*gong*' of the term 'qigong', Palmer writes:

> *Gong* is a term associated with the martial arts tradition: composed of the two characters 'work' and 'force', *gong* is related to *gongfu*, an untranslatable word which refers to the virtuosity of the martial artist: a perfect mastery of the body and mind which is the fruit of a rigorous training discipline culminating in the manifestation of magical powers.[34]

Magical is a very particular word. It is not a word that is applied to things that do not seem connected to the miraculous. Interestingly, throughout *Qigong Fever*, Palmer uses the word numerous times, often in dense descriptive clusters. For instance: '*Gong* is sometimes understood as the magical power of a person with a high level of *gongfu*, which can be projected towards other people (*fagong*); in this case, it is another way to refer to the emission of *qi*' (262–263); 'The character *gong* is also found in the word *gongneng* which means "function," a term which takes a specific meaning in *qigong*, often referring to the "Extraordinary Powers of the human body" (*renti teyigongneng*) – the magical or paranormal powers said to appear at a high level of *qigong* practice';[35] and:

> In the same sense, the expression *shengong*, 'divine power', is sometimes used to designate the miraculous aspects of *qigong*. *Qigong* practice is often abbreviated as *liangong*, a formulation which can connote the training or exercise of the magical power of *gongfu*, in order to enter into a '*qigong* state', a state of profound relaxation which can resemble hypnosis. Another term used to speak of this training, at a higher level, is *xiulian*, often translated as 'cultivation', the spiritual discipline needed to forge the elixir of immortality, which evokes the Taoist traditions of inner alchemy (*neidan*).[36]

Palmer shows many connections between qigong, gongfu and magic in his sociological, archival and cultural study of the discourse of qigong in China. As its title suggests, *Qigong Fever* is a book that deals with the qigong 'craze', 'boom' or 'fever' that gripped China, particularly from the late 1970s through the 1980s. Palmer traces this 'explosion' from origins that are *not* many thousands of years ago, but that are

rather from the mid-1940s. The first words of the book are:

> A few years before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 a group of Communist cadres in the mountains of the South Hebei Liberated Zone discovered an ancient technique that, at almost no cost, could bring health and vigour to the sickly and impoverished masses. It was a simple set of exercises that anyone could learn: every day stand still for half an hour, control your breath, concentrate on the *yongquan* acupoints at the centre of the soles of your feet, recite the mantra 'My organs move, my mind is still'. The cadres called this and other sitting, lying and stretching exercises *qigong* (pronounced 'Chee-gong') – a name that literally means 'breath training'.[37]

Qigong Fever sets out the remarkable history of the modern Chinese discovery of qigong, as it marched – or indeed rampaged – through the institutions of Chinese society. Thus, he continues, setting the scene for the historical narrative that he will detail throughout the book:

> Within a decade the nation's leaders were practising *qigong* at their exclusive seaside resort of Beidaihe, and *qigong* clinics were founded in hospitals around the country. By the late 1980s, every morning at dawn millions of people came out into the parks and sidewalks to practise the miraculous technique. Elderly men and women could be seen standing still, facing clumps of bushes, eyes closed, their hands forming a circle below the abdomen. In the yards of residential compounds practitioners drew arcs in the air with their stretched arms, following the rhythm of taped traditional Chinese music. In parks students recited mantras, sitting on stones in the lotus position. *Qigong* healers grasped the air, removing pernicious *qi* from the sick. Others hugged trees, while people in trance rolled on the ground, crying, shouting, laughing, and still others danced or kicked like kung fu artists. In sports stadiums charismatic *qigong* masters held mass healing sessions for audiences in the thousands. Researchers invited masters into their laboratories, to detect and measure the mysterious power of *qi*. China's leading nuclear scientist raved about an imminent scientific revolution of historic implications, as *qigong* contained the key to the power of life.[38]

The modern Chinese discovery of qigong in twentieth century China has all the hallmarks of what cultural theorists, following historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, would call an *invented tradition*.[39] This is because, although many of qigong's specific 'body technologies' were and are *said* to have 'originated in ancient times', they were nonetheless given what Palmer calls entirely new 'modalities of […] transmission by specific social organisations' in the twentieth century, each of which held and disseminated specific ideologies.[40] The physical 'raw material' of the practices – ancient, or not – was recast or repainted in ways that expressed the ideologies of their new times and new institutions, all the while asserting an ancient origin and an implicitly unbroken tradition, even though qigong had certainly not been part of the dominant story or daily life of much of Chinese history before the 1940s.

Most importantly, Palmer is absolutely unequivocal in his contention that even (or perhaps especially) in China, '*Qigong* discourse rests on the premise that *qigong* is much more than a simple hygienic or therapeutic technique, and that the magical, mystical and extraordinary dimension, expressed as Extraordinary Powers, is essential to the definition of qigong'.[41]

In Palmer's Foucauldian archaeology of this discourse, he argues that in the mid-to-late-20th century Chinese context, qigong was believed to provide a connection to what he calls an 'animist substratum':

> The universe is perceived as imbued with invisible forces, which it is possible to manipulate through the mastery of specific techniques. *Qigong* gymnastics is a kind of dance between the practitioner and invisible force flows. Its meditation techniques allow the adept to act on these forces through the exercise of mental power. The use of charms, 'information objects' and incantations expresses the idea that certain objects and sounds can be infused with magical powers.[42]

The idea of a dance between cosmic or (super)natural 'forces' and an adept who can conjure with them could just as easily have been derived from the most orientalist text of Western popular culture or esotericism as from Chinese discourse itself. But, in China, writes Palmer, a 'qigong sector' emerged on the basis of this sense that qigong was a 'dance' between practitioner and 'force flows':

> The *qigong* sector formed itself around this inspiring and legitimising discourse, bringing into its fold an assortment of practices which had long been disdained, excluded or marginalised not only by Western science and medicine, but even by modern Chinese medicine and by its predecessor, literati medicine, for centuries: incantations, divination, magical battles, martial arts, trance, inner alchemy and so on. The rejects of the great official medical institutions, hoping to rid themselves of the odious label of 'superstition', huddled under the banner of *qigong*, which gave them a new identity as 'gems of Chinese civilisation', and which was at the same time a 'cutting-edge scientific discipline'.[43]

The bridge that qigong discourse constructed between magic and science is significant. The key, according to Palmer, lies in a particular way of expressing the situation: first, that a 'wide range' of the 'magical practices' associated with qigong were legitimate, but that historically it had been 'the folk explanations of their effects that were wrong'. To bring qigong entirely over to the side of truth and reality, all that was therefore deemed necessary was rigorous scientific explanations based on rational-sounding interpretive paradigms through which the apparent magic could be understood properly. These interpretations must meet rationalistic and scientific criteria. But – given the prominence of the mysterious phenomena associated with qi – such explanations would likely require the transformation of scientific paradigms themselves (or what Thomas Kuhn would call a paradigm shift).[44] Thus, observes Palmer, scientific inquiry into qigong in China sought to replace 'superstitious' explanations 'based on ghosts and demons' with what he calls 'more rational-sounding, and thus "scientific," theories based on the materialist framework of *qigong* science, with its concepts of "*qi*" and "information"'.[45]

In this discursive atmosphere, certain qigong-fevered gazes were wont to assess any and everything in relation to or through the new master narrative about qigong. Palmer notes that prominent interlocutors even sought to reinterpret such cultural phenomena as 'the ancient practice of the kowtow, involving prostration before a master, a lord or a divinity in such a manner that the forehead hit the ground' as being connected to or derived from an originally qigong-related exercise. Thus, in the revised (fevered?) interpretation, the kowtow 'was not a superstition, but a type of *qigong* for exercising the parietal bone, which only appears after birth'. Palmer quotes the prominent figure Yan Xin: 'The ancients discovered that training the parietal bone allows one to verify the effect of *qigong* practice. So they used the method of the kowtow as training'.[46] In fact, notes Palmer, under the sway of 'qigong fever',

many interlocutors were keen to re-imagine origin stories (or reinvent tradition) so as to transform many Chinese cultural practices as being somehow derived from qigong-related training principles:

> Yan Xin also explained that the 'superstitious' practice of burning incense before images or statues of gods was actually a *qigong* method to create an atmosphere conducive for meditation, for stimulating the circulation of *qi* along the meridians, and for measuring the passage of time. The custom of burning 'spirit money' for the dead was originally invented by *qigong* adepts who had visions of ancestors in need.[47]

In the end, however, China's qigong fever did not produce a comprehensive new science that overturned former paradigms, epistemologies, ontological theories and cosmologies. Rather – and as unsatisfying a narrative closure as this may be – in many respects, the fever just fizzled out. A number of factors conspired to make official interest and institutions step back from zealous advocation of qigong, most prominently the rise and subsequent government clampdown on the Falun Gong movement.[48] With the loss of institutional enthusiasm and support across China's social body, qigong lost its centrality to discourse, and moved from the mainstream.

Hopefully it is clear that these aspects of the story of China's qigong fever can give a fresh perspective on the current state of qigong as a now-global form of 'orientalist physical culture'. Most significantly, Palmer argues that *something about* the practice seems – as if, *inherently* – to exert a centrifugal force that tends to pull practitioners away from modern secular or scientific discourse and towards the marginalia and *disjecta membra* of esoteric belief:

> Even in a context of purely individualised self-training, *qigong* practice tends to produce a rupture with the rationality of modern-style style institutions. Indeed it is not uncommon for *qigong* practice to trigger mental states and experiences which are difficult or even impossible to explain satisfactorily with materialist theories. The meaning of such experiences must thus be sought elsewhere: either through metaphysical concepts derived from religious traditions, or through new theories, such as those of 'Extraordinary Powers' or 'somatic science', which attempt to transcend the limitations of mechanical materialism. Either way *qigong* draws the practitioner away from the conventional discourses of institutional rationality.[49]

He goes on to suggest that the process follows a certain arc: 'From health technique, then, *qigong* leads inevitably to chains of belief [in which] its organisation builds itself outside of medical institutions to take on an increasingly religious form'.[50] (Anecdotally, this trajectory is familiar to me, having practiced qigong in a Western context; and even if the two main examples I began with were most obviously marketing qigong in terms of a kind of 'magical realism', it is nonetheless the case that these forms of marketing still allude to super/natural forces and forms of internal alchemy).

Palmer has much more to say about the status of qigong in Chinese culture and society than we can cover here. But, having traced out only this much, it seems possible now to return to the overarching problematic, introduced by my epigraph and touched on several times throughout this article so far: namely the status of the paradigm of 'orientalism' and the orientations of antiorientalist criticism to Western popularisations of Eastern practices such as qigong.

Conclusion: De-Orientalising the Curriculum?

To recap briefly: When qigong was rediscovered or reinvented in China, this involved the activation of certain claims that, if they had been made by Westerners, could easily have been deemed orientalist. Common here are such themes as: the idea of the *ancient* (practice), the belief in the *timeless* (forces and relations), the presence of the wisdom of the ancients, the connection to fundamental (super) natural forces of the universe, and through all of these the generation and veneration of the idea of the ancient masters as having been superlative. When Westerners congregate such ideas around practices like qigong, they are inevitably also conjuring up an idea of an Other culture (ancient China). *Therefore* – as the logic of the antiorientalist critique runs – they are guilty of classic Western orientalism. However, it seems, these same imaginative operations were also at play in the discursive construction of qigong in twentieth century China. Qigong functioned as a 'rediscovered' (invented) tradition, whose long absence from the mainstream scene (from 'ancient times' to the mid-1940s) was glossed over so that qigong practice could be presented as part of the continuous history of Chinese culture and civilization.

Within China, qigong was revered as an ancient practice, reflecting the wisdom of the ancients, one that could enable practitioners to tap into and manipulate the timeless forces and energies of the universe. The key difference between the Western veneration of the idea of the ancient cultural practitioners and the Chinese veneration of the same is that, in the Western context, this takes the form of the romanticisation of *another culture*, whereas in the Chinese context that which is venerated is felt to be a present or coeval part of a continuous Chinese culture. Thus, a key difference between Western orientalism and Chinese 'self-orientalism' in this context primarily comes down to the fact that the ideological gloss given in the Chinese discourse tends toward an immanently *nationalist* narrative, even if the practice may run at some variance to contemporary institutions. Meanwhile, in the Western discourse, its ideological trajectory is already more *countercultural*.[51] However, both involve impulses that tend towards what Palmer calls 'a rupture with the rationality of modern-style style institutions'. Thus, 'orientalism' does not quite explain or exhaust what is going on in either context.

As Sophia Rose Arjana puts it, 'the appeal of mysticism is situated in part in a kind of apathy with modernity – a search for magic in a disenchanted world'.[52] In the Western orientalist tradition, she suggests, 'the Orient's magic and spirituality is presented as the antithesis to the modern West and its post-Enlightenment commitment to rationality and logic'.[53] Yet, if we pause to remember that China is also a part of modernity, then there is no reason at all why similar fantasies or structures of desire would not also be present in modern China.[54] If it is the 'condition' of modernity that generates the sense of lack that produces the 'symptoms' of nostalgia for times and places that never really existed, then this is far from an exclusively Western affair. Of course, the tendency to regard Western conceptions of Eastern practices as 'orientalist' spread like wildfire across Western academia in the decades following Edward Said's landmark 1978 book, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. (It is interesting that these decades – the late 1970s through to the late 1990s – were also the decades of the greatest popularity and international spread of qigong.) By

1998, twenty years after Said's landmark publication, even such an eminent figure as Rey Chow would claim (in the essay from which my epigraph is drawn and from which I have quoted) that the likelihood of finding orientalism in Western representations of Asia is so great that this should have the status of a *likely presence* and not be treated as some kind of possible *surprise or unexpected discovery*. Hence, Chow argued, cultural criticism should treat orientalism as a starting point and not as an unexpected element to be constantly rediscovered and denounced in the conclusions of works of cultural analysis.

Today, after the antiorientalism fever of late 20th century academia has cooled, it feels possible to reevaluate this situation without the risk of being deemed reactionary. To do so – and because no analysis can cover everything – I have reflected on just one phenomenon: the physical cultural practice of qigong (氣功). The international popularity of this meditative, breath- and posture-focused Chinese practice peaked during the same era as the antiorientalist impulse in Western academia. In Western discourse, both at that time and still today, qigong is frequently depicted as ancient, timeless, magical and mystical. Hence, Western representations of qigong almost inevitably come to be regarded as exemplary examples of 'classic' Western orientalism. But, we have asked, what do we see when we turn to the Chinese discourse about qigong? Using David Palmer's detailed history of qigong in China, this paper has argued that, in 20th century China, in the immediate prehistory of its widespread journey to the West, qigong was *already* depicted as ancient, timeless, magical and mystical. Accordingly, after a reflection upon this perhaps unexpected situation, what now seems required is a deeper reflection on the limits and applicability of the paradigm of orientalism.

As one of the constitutive paradigms of the field of postcolonialism, and as an enduringly important tool for any and all cross-cultural studies, 'orientalism' has been hugely enabling. But if and when the paradigm of orientalism works merely moralistically or judgmentally, or works to close down thinking, then we reach its limit. Such closure might take the form of assuming in advance that a Western representation must inevitably go against, offend or do violence to a preferred or 'authentic' Eastern representation (which itself must be treated as sacrosanct, 'respected', and protected from any criticism, no matter what it may ethically or ideologically be aligned or infused with). Or it might take the form of shutting down further questioning once the charge of orientalism has been 'clinched' or deemed 'proven'. For instance, it would be very easy to denounce or disparage the two Western examples of qigong discourse with which we began, and to stop thinking at that point. But, as we have seen (and as my epigraph from Rey Chow enjoins us to notice), even if they are orientalist, there is also much more going on in and around these texts – fantasies, desires, insecurities, interests, cross-cultural translations, transactions, transformations – than is captured in the moralistic denunciation of this or that as a 'bad representation'.

Equally, although the discursive treatment of qigong in China might also *seem* to fall into the category of orientalism – in the form of 'self-orientalism' – this feels like a rather convoluted way of approaching the situation. The paradigm of orientalism (and self-orientalism) necessarily implies scopic and power relations structured by some kind of powerful *Western* 'gaze'. And, although it might be possible to construct an argument in which the articulation and elaboration of qigong in China from the

1940s through to the 1980s could be seen as some kind of performative or symptomatic response to the West,[55] it still does not quite work to call this 'orientalism'. The Chinese discourse on qigong cannot be said to have been straightforwardly constructed for, articulated with, or filtered or refracted through or in response to a 'Western gaze' (although closer study of this matter could perhaps reveal connections to develop such an argument).

The main work of this article has been to urge caution in relation to the academic tendency to denounce (as 'orientalist' or 'wrong') popular Western appropriations of Eastern practices. It has done so by suggesting that even the most ill-informed and 'lite' Western representations are not *entirely* unjustified when appraised in relation to popular pre-existing Eastern representations of the same subject. However, I want to end by stating that having an awareness of the limits to the field of applicability of the paradigm of orientalism does not mean that we should abandon it. Rather, it should help us to sharpen and refine our use of it.

I am not advocating 'deorientalising the curriculum' – neither by seeking out and moralistically denouncing supposedly orientalist representations (in the manner of 'classic' antiorientalist scholarship), nor by rejecting the theory of orientalism entirely, just because it has limitations. To do the latter would amount to throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Rather, the point of this paper has been to reiterate the need for critical vigilance in the use of the antiorientalist paradigm. For, as problematic and potentially damaging as orientalist representations can be, scholars must also reflect on what might be enabled when paradigms such as orientalism are weaponised for moralistic purposes. As problematic as our two representative examples of the Western treatment of qigong certainly are, it seems unfair (or incomplete) to regard these representations as entirely fanciful, unilaterally-invented, exclusively Western creations. As Said states directly on page one of *Orientalism*, western conceptions of the orient may be many things, 'yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative' (Said 1978: 1). It is not *entirely* imagined. It has *some relation* with previously existing material. As such, the onus is always on antiorientalist scholarship to avoid making the very mistakes (or committing the same 'crimes') that it often accuses Western representations, appropriations and translations of making – namely, assuming the simple and stable existence of a 'correct' or 'true' Eastern 'original', in relation to which the Western version is an incorrect and inferior copy.

Notes

1. Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading*, Theories of Contemporary Culture 20 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 74–75.
2. Ibid.
3. This example is discussed in more depth in 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.
4. 'Hayo'uFit FAQ' https://hayoufit.com/about/faq/ (accessed March 17, 2021).
5. Needless to say, these ostensible 'histories' are deeply problematic. See Douglas Wile, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics of the Late Ch'ing Dynasty* (New York: State University of New York, 1996); David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China* ([Kindle

Edition] London: Hurst & Co. in association with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris, 2007); Meir Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery: History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts* (University of Hawaii Press, 2008); Benjamin N. Judkins and Jon Nielson, *The Creation of Wing Chun: A Social History of the Southern Chinese Martial Arts* (SUNY Press, 2015).

6. Shahar, *The Shaolin Monastery*; Judkins and Nielson, *The Creation of Wing Chun*.
7. 'Hayo'uFit FAQ'.
8. 'Hayo'uFit Homepage' https://hayoufit.com/ (accessed March 18, 2021). For a full unpacking of the semiotics of these sentences, see Bowman, Aziz, and Ma, 'Translating Tai Chi and Transforming Qigong in British Media Culture'.
9. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1978).
10. See Stuart Hall's essay, 'The West and the Rest' in Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, *Formations of Modernity*, Understanding Modern Societies; 1 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
11. The term 'imaginary' derives from post-Lacanian cultural theory. It evokes a way of imagining, or the structures and coordinates of a certain genre of fantasising and imagining. See, for example: Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992).
12. See Paul Bowman, *The Invention of Martial Arts: Popular Culture Between Asia and America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
13. 'Men's Journal', *Men's Journal*, 1 November 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20131101182405/http://www.srds.com/mediakits/mens_journal/mission.html.
14. Bowman, *The Invention of Martial Arts: Popular Culture Between Asia and America*; Bowman, Aziz, and Ma, 'Translating Tai Chi and Transforming Qigong in British Media Culture'.
15. Recent research by Daniel Mroz – disseminated so far in conference presentations, podcast discussions and a forthcoming monograph from Cardiff University Press – is showing that it was actually a late 19th and early 20th century Euro-American obsession with 'energy' that led words like 'qi' along with other terms to be bundled together, frequently conflated, and overwhelmingly translated as 'energy'. See: The Martial Arts Studies Podcast, 'Energy Talk! A Conversation with Professor Daniel Mroz (Ottawa University)', The Martial Arts Studies Podcast, https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-ccvk7-14fda15?utm_campaign=w_share_ep&utm_medium=dlink&utm_source=w_share (accessed December 16, 2024).
16. The Oxford English Dictionary states that 'qigong' is a category of word that occurs 'between 0.01 and 0.1 times per million words in typical modern English usage'. Such words 'are not commonly found in general text types like novels and newspapers, but at the same they are not overly opaque or obscure'. Google N-gram (which tracks the occurrence of words appearing in books) suggests that the word 'qigong' slowly started to become more frequent in English language books from the early 1970s, that it peaked in frequency in 2001, and that it tailed off slightly in frequency from 2001 onwards. Google Trends (which tracks the frequency of words used in internet search terms) provides results back to 2004, but shows a slow gradual decline in frequency, from a high-point back when Google Trends records began in 2004.
17. The formulation 'portable serial form' is constructed from the combination of two arguments. First, Csordas's claim that practices travel across cultures most easily if they are 'portable' (i.e. discrete packages) with 'transposable messages'; and second, Ruth Mayer's argument that the 'serial form' of publication was responsible for the dissemination of, for example, orientalist ideas via fictional figures like Fu-Manchu in the early twentieth century. See: Thomas J. Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David A Palmer and Elijah Siegler, *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Ruth Mayer, 'Image Power: Seriality, Iconicity and The Mask of Fu Manchu', *Screen* 53, no. 4 (12 January 2012): 398–417, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjs036; Ruth Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu: The Chinese Supervillain and the Spread of Yellow Peril Ideology* (Temple University Press, 2013).

18. See: Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects: Chinese Martial Arts Literature and Postcolonial History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2011).
19. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 55.
20. I develop the theme of orientalist physical culture in my forthcoming monograph, *The Sublime Object of Orientalism*, forthcoming in 2026.
21. On 'allochronism', see: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1983). The term 'mytheme' derives from Claude Lévi-Strauss and refers to structural elements ('building blocks') of myths, narratives or discourses.
22. Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', in *Cultural Studies: From Theory to Action*, ed. Pepi Leistyna (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 256–69.
23. Of course, the irony is that many of the theorists within the disciplinary field upon whom antiorientalist critics rely – such as Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, or more recently, Gayatri Spivak, Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Žižek, Rey Chow, etc. – have actually argued that myths cannot be eradicated, not even after being debunked; and that myths are constitutive of conceptuality as such. See, for example: Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading*; Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
24. Christopher Goto-Jones, 'Magic, Modernity, and Orientalism: Conjuring Representations of Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 06 (November 2014): 1451–76, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X13000498.
25. Christopher Goto-Jones, *Conjuring Asia: Magic, Orientalism, and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 264.
26. Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
27. Goto-Jones, 'Magic, Modernity, and Orientalism', 264.
28. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*, loc.1041–1045.
29. Adam Frank, *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man: Understanding Identity Through Martial Arts* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 193.
30. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 70.
31. Ibid.
32. Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading*, 74–75.
33. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*.
34. Palmer, loc. 259–261.
35. Palmer, loc. 264–266.
36. Palmer, loc. 266–269.
37. Palmer, loc. 46–49.
38. Palmer, loc. 49–56.
39. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 1983).
40. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*, loc. 74–75.
41. Palmer, loc. 1240–1241.
42. Palmer, loc. 1352–1357.
43. Palmer, loc. 1368–1371.
44. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
45. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*, loc. 1427–1434.
46. Palmer, loc. 1427–1434.
47. Palmer, loc. 1427–1434.
48. On which, see also: Frank, *Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man*.
49. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China*, loc. 3184–3188.
50. Palmer, loc. 3193–3194.
51. On the use of ideas about China as part of Western countercultural thinking, see: J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought*

(London: Routledge, 1997); Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (Chichester: Capstone, 2006).

52. Sophia Rose Arjana, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2020), 9–10.
53. Arjana, *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi*, 15.
54. As Douglas Wile has argued, the invention of intellectual and ideological discourse (and fantasies) about taijiquan in China took place during a period in which Chinese identity was undergoing all kinds of threats and assaults from European and other nations. In the picture Wile paints, the fantasies about an ancient taijiquan were invented in nineteenth century China as a kind of reaction formation to the threats of Westernisation. See: Wile, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics of the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*.
55. Such an argument would have strong similarities to Douglas Wile's argument that taijiquan was intellectually and ideologically elaborated in nineteenth century China as a response to Western and Russian military, technological and cultural threats to Chinese identity. See: Wile, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics of the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*.

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