

Article

# Transmitting Health Philosophies through the Traditionalist Chinese Martial Arts in the UK

George Jennings

Universidad YMCA/Lago Alberto 337, Col. Anáhuac, Delegación Miguel Hidalgo,  
11320 Mexico City, Mexico; E-Mail: georgejennings@unymca.edu.mx;  
Tel.: +52-1-55-4821-2028

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**Abstract:** The dynamic relationships between “martial arts”, society and health remain unclear, particularly due to research that typically views health in a purely biomedical and compartmentalized way. Martial arts and combat sports (MACS) offer a diversity of disciplines with their own intended training outcomes and techne. The traditionalist Chinese martial arts (TCMAs), such as Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) and Wing Chun Kung Fu, stress health promotion/preservation, personal development and lifelong practice. Adopting a structurationist framework, this article explores the connections between three distinct philosophies of health and TCMAs, institutions spreading such discourse, and the personal narratives of transformation and self-cultivation through these embodied art forms. Taking a perspective starting from the practitioners themselves, I explore the interplay between discourse and narrative as applied in everyday British society. Following detailed qualitative analysis, “Western scientific”, “contemporary Daoist” and “New Age” health philosophies are identified as explored via three detailed, reflexive cases of long-term practitioner-instructors, their schools and documents that connect them to international exponents across time. This article thus contributes to sociological knowledge on MACS and health, while considering the connections between health philosophies, discourse and narrative.

**Keywords:** martial arts; health; health philosophies; narrative; discourse

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## 1. Martial Arts, Eastern Movement Forms and Health Philosophies

With the rise in non-communicable and preventable diseases, the topic of health is becoming increasingly important in the late modern world as seen through the vast array of projects of the World Health Organization [1], and it is now a key area in sociology through the two growing subfields of the sociologies of medicine and health, as indicated by a number of dedicated journals such as *Sociology of Health & Illness* and *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, and the changing names of specialist outlets in physical culture such as *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* (formerly *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*). How people see health, how they live their lives in (un)healthy ways, and the ways they are informed by mediations of health knowledge are important areas for social scientific research, as are the studies on how social conditions affect the health of families and communities. Within any given subculture, culture or organization, it is first vital to consider how a social group understands health in order to further analyze how they use such a philosophical grounding in their daily lives.

Nevertheless, as a concept, health is an extremely complex theme to research, with various competing health philosophies, paradigms, discourses, narratives, ideologies and numerous research methodologies used to explore them [2]. This exploratory article—the first of many required on martial arts, health and society—tackles an unexplored area in terms of sociology of health and qualitative research: The Chinese martial arts are taken as an example of broader martial arts and combat sports (MACS) and Eastern movement forms (EMFs), two areas of sociological inquiry explored over the first section of the paper.

MACS are now a core part of sociology and cognate disciplines, with investigations pertaining to wider topics such as gender, culture, identity, pedagogy and violence, as seen in collected, international texts such as that of Sánchez García and Spencer [3], Farrer and Whalen-Bridge [4], and a recent review on this ever-expanding corpus of knowledge on the unifying notion of embodiment [5]. Indeed, there is now talk of a new academic discipline known as “martial arts studies”, which embraces anthropological, cultural, historical, philosophical and sociological studies of these mind-body disciplines [6,7]. As demonstrated by various ethnographies, this term includes the sporting disciplines such as boxing [8,9] and mixed martial arts (MMA) [10] to the “reality” schools of Krav Maga and military combat [11,12]. This spectrum of activities also includes traditionalist arts such as Karate [13], Silat [14], Kung Fu [15] and Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) [16]. These studies have demonstrated that MACS are global phenomena that unite and influence different cultures, both “Western” and “Eastern”, “developed” and “undeveloped” and “modern” and “traditional”—that are commonly considered in dualistic terms.

However, health has yet to be tackled in any explicit way by social scientific researchers of MACS. Sociological research within this confounding area is limited, and instead of taking a holistic definition recommended by the WHO—a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing more than the absence of illness [17]—“health” is divided into areas of specialist (biomedical) scientific knowledge handled by experts from specific disciplines and sub-disciplines such as geriatrics, nursing, psychotherapy and sports medicine. The social scientific martial arts studies are largely ignored in favour of what could be described as “martial arts science”, *i.e.*, quantitative, empiricist and positivist investigations, which differs to Cynarski and Reguli’s [18] more inclusive definition of this so-called martial arts science

being all specialized martial arts research. Notwithstanding, as these authors have pointed out, specialist journals are now developing in this field, such as the *Wushu Science* in China, which differs significantly from the martial arts studies seen in publications such as the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*. In the martial arts sciences (and sciences examining martial arts), fitness and rehabilitation are priority areas for research.

Meanwhile, the research into the Chinese martial art and moving meditation, Taijiquan, are commonly examined in terms of public health, advocating clinical (and typically elderly) samples and a short intervention period in the form of controlled experiments. The health benefits and lifestyles of longer term practitioners are thus overlooked in favour of adopting non-martial Taijiquan as a form of curative (and sometimes preventative) medicine for cardiac patients, the elderly and depressed individuals, as seen in an array of research undertaken by Western and Chinese scientists over the last decade [19–21]. This draws from scientific stances that perceive the world in measurable and objective terms, removing a consideration of culture and discourse, and moreover, subjective perceptions of what health means for the research subjects in question.

Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature seeking to explore the subjective, first-person dimensions of health through a qualitative methodology, which has provided insights into: the integrative and multidimensional (physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual) aspects of health [22]; functional, emotional and social changes [23], community and social support [24]; and general insight and awareness of the mind-body relationship and sense of self-healing [25]. Despite the clear contributions in terms of methods and themes, there remains an emphasis on Taijiquan as a form of therapy for clinical populations, particularly the elderly and frail novices, as opposed to seasoned practitioners of a variety of age ranges and health/fitness conditions.

A very different area of research is on combat sports or sporting martial arts, which are commonly deemed to be “bad” for health, with a high incidence of specific and chronic injuries, and even risk of permanent disability or death—especially under competitive circumstances. Following continued medical calls for boxing to be banned [26], research has turned to MMA and sporting martial arts, forms of physical culture gaining sweeping popularity around the world [27]. Fortunately, there has also been an assessment of the lived experiences of the fighters, with the work of Spencer [10,28,29] assessing narratives of body callusing, pain and injury and Green [30], taking a similarly embodied perspective now common in social scientific fieldwork.

The traditionalist Chinese martial arts (TCMAs) presented in this particular article are quite different from the medically adapted Taijiquan and the modern combat sport spectacles televised across the globe: they represent a recent trend in social scientific research into EMFs as health-bringing or health-restoring practices both in the “East” and in the “West”, such as Yoga [31] and Qigong [32]. Practitioners and organizations alike have their own ways of interpreting the suggested health transformations, and for sharing these stories with others in an understandable manner. Different waves of migration, travel and (re)conceptions of TCMAs have affected their practice over time. In this light, Ryan [33] has contextualized the transmission of one TCMA, Taijiquan, to Britain in the second half of the 20th century. She noted the diversity in interpretation of history, concepts, training methods and fighting/health/spiritual emphasis that persist in British Taijiquan communities in the 21st century.

As Brown and Leledaki [34] and Brown [35] have noted, these arts have been taken up by a wide range of individuals from different sectors of Western society, and hold the potential for education, health and spiritual growth as body-self transformative practices. They were originally forms of what the contemporary Japanese philosopher Yasuo Yuasa [36,37] described as *self-cultivation* practices derived from religious disciplines, which are intended to enhance the mind-body relationship (unity), personality and character in a highly subjective manner that are quite different to the continually (externally) monitored and (objectively) measured Western athletics [38]. Undoubtedly, many EMFs have now been reflexively modified to suit their cultural, political and social context, and with healthy lifestyles being a priority in many industrialized, “developed” countries such as the UK, these mind-body disciplines have been scrutinized and often utilized by the scientific community using its own form of discourse and rhetoric. Furthermore, they are ordinarily commercialized and commodified within the health and fitness industries to suit the demands of contemporary societies in terms of positive health transformation.

The degrees and intensity of physical movement ranges tremendously across this umbrella term of EMFs, and studies of health should always consider techniques, training methods and the settings themselves. Despite different origins from countries collected within the “Orient” (now regarded as East Asia) [39], and historically and contextually different starting points, they are united by a pursuit of mind-body unity over the long-term—even lifelong—pursuit of self-mastery and embodied discipline that is removed from competition, winning or losing, and as spectacles for live and/or television audiences. They are individual activities taught within schools and hospitals across the Western world, including UK, as promoted by numerous BBC News Reports [40,41].

In recent decades, the British government has radically improved its National Health Service (NHS), the state-run, and (in theory) free of charge medical system. Researchers from other nations have critically appraised the work of the New Labour government (1997–2010) that aimed to minimize social health inequality [42,43]. Nevertheless, there have been calls from other circles to reconsider the dominant health philosophy that adopts a passive perspective for the public, and demands a great deal from specialists in curative medicine. Alternative philosophies based on individual responsibility and collective transformation may offer countries such as the UK a feasible social reality. Such alternative health philosophies abound the traditionalist Chinese martial arts, which originate from feudal (and commonly rural) China, where public health care “for all” was never on the political agenda. Instead, such an ancient culture possesses a similar viewpoint to several Native American, Maori and African traditions [44,45], which indicates that this is not necessarily an East-West dualism, but one based on pre-modern, modern and late modern philosophies, all of which having merits and weaknesses.

My article forms part of a four-year doctoral study into how the traditionalist Chinese martial arts such as Wing Chun Kung Fu and Taijiquan may act as transformative practices for their devotees [46]. Based on British participants with more than four years’ experience in training and teaching (commonly accepted as being long-term practitioners within TCMA circles), my research project and resulting publications adopted a qualitative socio-cultural perspective, and has so far explored sociologically notable topics such as secular religion [15], spirituality [47], ageing and related narratives of learning and mastery [48], mixed-sex training [49], the *martial habitus* [50] and body lineage [51]. Besides these themes, the project has also considered qualitative methods through the issue of embodied interactions [52,53] between the researcher and the researched. An aspect that

emerged throughout the various interviews and observations is health, which links closely to the religious-philosophical concepts saturating Chinese martial arts and the sense of spirituality among the exponents spoken to in this project.

As an exploratory, data-centered starting point for this new topic regarding martial arts, health and society, the article has a goal of identifying how specific health philosophies are being reflexively transmitted by practitioner-instructors of TMCAs. More specifically, it has three main objectives: (1) What health philosophies inform their teaching and training? (2) How are they connected to institutional and global discussions on health? (3) How do the research participants, as instructors, intend to influence others through their actions and words? The latter aspects of language and intended consequences, are vital to the analysis, as I demonstrate the interplay between health philosophies, personal narratives and popular/scientific/medical/holistic discourse taken together to mean three key health philosophies: (1) The Western scientific; (2) The contemporary Daoist; and, (3) The New Age. Before that however, I briefly explain the theoretical and methodological frameworks that have structured, and continue to structure, the project.

## 2. An Overview of Structuration Theory, Discourse and Narrative

The analysis of health philosophies, discourse and narrative is inspired by the original Structuration Theory envisaged by Anthony Giddens [54,55]. The fundamental concepts of this complex theory—developed over the course of three decades—provide a set of tools and sensitizing concepts with which to examine the connections between reflexive individuals (*agents*) and the *social structures* that they form part of. For Giddens [56], there is a *duality of structure* (rather than a dualism) in which *agency*—the potential to use rules and resources—is fundamental to structures. *Structures* are simultaneously enabling and constraining: constraining in ways that human beings never experience total freedom; and enabling, as people are not fully determined by their social surroundings. In MACS terms, all practitioners are agents that shape their schools, arts and the martial arts industry, but must simultaneously follow their rules in ways of fundamental activities such as talking, writing, training, healing and fighting. These agents are all slightly different individuals, with their own potential to shape the social world. Moreover, due to the dialectics of structure, researchers are encouraged to think in a non-dualistic manner, avoiding the contrasts between mind and body, and East and West, healthy and ill, to name a few most relevant to this study.

A further two aspects of Structuration Theory are the three levels of society and the intended and unintended consequences of action. According to Giddens [56], there are three levels of social analysis that should be considered holistically: *Macro*, *meso* and *micro*, which in the social world of martial arts could be interpreted as a global martial arts network, such an international, historical body lineage (macro), a regional association based within nearby towns (meso) and a small school or branch club of this association (micro).

Like Norbert Elias before him, Giddens [56–59] took a keen interest in the *intended* and *unintended consequences* of social action. By simply telling a personal story, an agent opens up a multitude of possibilities for the storyteller and listener, which are based upon the common structures of a given language that are in turn reproduced by uttering and repeating sentences. This is case of reading classical and modern texts on martial arts, which could develop a person's vocabulary and shape their

schemes of perception on germane topics such as the body and health. These consequences could be both “positive”, e.g., forging a more physically active lifestyle for beginners and “negative”, e.g., a teacher’s bad influence on overtraining and exercise addiction. It is very hard to predict or control social action or behavior in an individual or collective sense, as the period of late modernity acts as a “careering juggernaut” [59] which we must ride and may influence to a very small degree.

Giddens also took a keen interest in narratives reproduced and repackaged in late modern society. *Narrative* theory and methods have been taken up by a plethora of researchers in the social sciences, and the structure and application of a narrative can be readily seen from a structurationist position. The oft-cited proposal by Somers [60] provides a vantage point on narrative theory that pinpoints *metanarratives* (macro level of society), *cultural narratives* (meso level) and the *ontological* or personal narratives (micro level). In terms of health, these could be the global, cross-cultural narratives, the narratives specific to a given (sub)culture and, lastly, the personal interpretations of these different building blocks for accounting for embodied experience. I [49] have previously demonstrated three core narratives that bind the practice of TCMA: Continuous learning, mastery-practice and progressive ageing, which are informed by the international TCMA diffusion, which in turn can shape federations and associations (cultural narratives) within the highly unregulated martial arts industry and finally have an influence on individual learners and teachers of Kung Fu and Taijiquan.

Meanwhile, I am using the term *discourse* to refer to the forms of knowledge of the world as expressed through particular forms of language. This does not adopt a post-structuralist, theoretical form of analysis as is often the case, and is more of a methodological consideration in terms of the forms of language collected and analysed from a structurationist framework—as in sociolinguistics. The discourses analysed may include scientific, medical, popular and religious ones, which, in an information-saturated world, can provide people with ways of interpreting and expressing their experiences and those of others through personal narratives.

Despite the rich potential of Structuration Theory, discourse and narrative, their concepts have not been combined in any obvious sense in MACS research. Moreover, besides the pioneering work of Beedie [61] on adventure sports, structuration itself has not proved to be a frequent framework in the discipline of the sociology of sport, which contrasts sharply to its thriving popularity in health sciences in regards to timely issues such as social inequalities [62], institutional health studies [63] and working mothers’ food choice experiences [64]. This article thus links the areas of physical culture with health, and provides a fresh application of these three theoretical and methodological standpoints, the latter of which is seen next.

### 3. Methodological Considerations

As mentioned earlier, there are now various ways in which one can undertake research into MACS and EMFs, all of which derive from paradigmatic positions ranging from empiricism to postmodernism [65]. As qualitative research into the TCMA was limited at the time of embarking on the project, I adopted an interpretivist approach in order to explore the meanings, experiences and interactions of the members of specific case studies within this broad range of disciplines. With the focus on personal experiences, I interviewed 16 long-term practitioners of Taijiquan, Wing Chun, animal Kung Fu and hybrid styles, in order to explore the spectrum of TCMA from the “hard”

(or “external” styles) to the “soft” (or “internal” ones). This was first done using the life history method and involved follow-up interviews and corresponding observations within their training sessions. These exponents (13 male, three female, which reflects the male dominance in such arts) were purposely and theoretically selected as based on a model of ideal types derived from the concept of the martial habitus [51] developed over the course of participant observation, total observation and an ethnographic study [15]. Having practiced their chosen arts for more than four years, these people also boasted teaching experience, identities as instructors and a progression beyond an intermediate skill level, which provided them with agentic power and institutional responsibility. The addition of a life history approach was useful, with the dominance of ethnographic studies of MACS in recent years [3,4]. More specifically, interviews permitted the exploration of the experiences, insights and ambitions of practitioner-instructors, particularly in relation to often unspoken topics such as health.

It must be stated that the sample can never be truly controlled as in quantitative experimental studies. The TCMA practitioners frequently admitted to prior martial arts training and coinciding activities such as Yoga and fitness regimes, which undoubtedly influenced their outlook on health. As members of a cosmopolitan British society, they are free to choose from an array of exercise and fitness options before, during and after the project, and my analysis is by no means the final say on this prescient topic.

Continuing the legacy of ethical qualitative research, the true identities of the people and places in this study are protected by pseudonyms. With the research project being exploratory, the participants were made well aware of the broad nature of the questions and issues raised, and the possible academic outlets over the course of many years. Some individuals remain in close contact, taking a keen interest in how this and the broader EMF collaboration is progressing, as consultants and promoters, rather than passive subjects exemplified in the many medical experiments on Taijiquan. Nevertheless, anonymity could not be provided for one of the organizations with information in the public eye, an oft-consulted website, which is cited openly out of respect for the authors. This is an example of a national association with many transient members, a fact that protects the interviewee, as he has now left the organization in question.

Alongside this initial focus on these individuals, I firmly adopted a reflexive position, taking my autoethnography as the starting point of the four-year Ph.D. study (2006–2010), having been a practitioner of various martial arts since 1998. This positioned me as an established practitioner (with eight years’ martial arts training) and assistant instructor of Wing Chun, which was senior to some participants and junior to others, whilst my focus on this art made me a relative “insider” within one association, a “distant cousin” to other Kung Fu exponents, and a relative “outsider” to Taijiquan enthusiasts. My position as a fellow practitioner-instructor helped establish rapport by sharing stories before and after interviews, and the subjects of lifestyle, health and reading often emerged as we exchanged and (re)structured stories as active agents ourselves. Furthermore, my personal interest in health has been amplified by a recent back problem caused by overtraining Wing Chun techniques on the right hand, leading to a muscular imbalance and poor posture, which of the time of writing I am successfully fighting to amend—through movement and self-healing, being inspired by the words of the participants assessed here. As such, my interest in the topical issue of health is not just academic, but is inspired by real life experiences—much like Channon’s [66] reflections of training martial arts with women. My viewpoints on health are mainly informed by my academic background in the

exercise and sport sciences, and later interest in Western interpretations of Daoist philosophy (through embodied concepts), and direct experience with Qigong and related activities that opened my perspective to the notion of *Qi*—a concept better conceptualized as a verb and experienced through long-term, embodied practice [67]. With my martial arts career potentially hampered by a back problem, the topic of health has become increasingly alluring to me as a researcher whose embodied interactions have influenced his studies [53,54].

Following Brown and Leledaki's [34] call for a multi-modal approach that considers the macro, meso and micro levels of society, in this paper I have extended the original interview and ethnographic methods of the project by analyzing documents such as books, websites and other media that were recommended by the research participants. The interplay between documental analysis, fieldwork, interviewing and self-analysis has enabled me to consider health from global, institutional and personal perspectives, as demonstrated in the trio of exemplary case studies of practitioner-instructors: Will, an enthusiast of various Chinese martial arts, both traditional and sporting; Chris, a devotee of Chen Taijiquan; and Tony, a student of various EMFs including Wing Chun—all of whom offer clear examples of how health philosophies and discourses are transmitted in life and teaching through their ontological narratives. These personal narratives mix with the discourses both up and down their complex body lineages [52], linking them to other associations, federations and historical figures in the martial arts world. Their voices are edited and represented in the form of a modified (reflexive) realist tale [68], alongside the popular/scientific material that provided, according to them, a drive for their training. It is also important to note that these three individuals are also instructors in their chosen art forms, and have an influence on their students and fellow practitioners within and beyond the gates of their schools through seminars, workshops and writings, to name a few agentic possibilities. Nevertheless, it is vital to provide some socio-demographic details of the remaining research participants that were also structured and were involved in the structuring of the core health philosophies within their day-to-day lives, TMCA schools and transmission of the art to future generations of martial artists. They are detailed in Table 1 below, which offers a glimpse of some factors that may play a part in shaping the acceptance, rejection and adaption of the health philosophies themselves—which merits a study in its own right.

Following Smith and Sparkes [69], it is this content analysis that I turn to next, taking into account *what* was said, and, through observations, under what *circumstances* the stories were told.



**Table 1.** Socio-demographic details of remaining research participants.

Participant	Martial art(s)	Martial arts experience	Age	Sex	Ethnicity/origin	Occupation	Religion/ Philosophy	Education	Health philosophy
Sarah	Wing Chun and Capoeira.	5 years.	31	Female	White British.	Massage therapist and administrator.	Daoism.	Diploma in Massage and Tuina Chinese massage.	Contemporary Daoist.
Kelly	Hybrid Kung Fu System.	4 years (1 year as instructor).	24	Female	White Zimbabwean.	Exercise and Sport Science student.	Martial arts and philosophy; interest in <i>Qi</i> energy.	Ongoing B.Sc. studies.	Western Scientific / Contemporary Daoist.
Emma	Wing Chun.	14 years.	35	Female	White Cornish.	Social worker.	None stated; interest in “energies.”	Specialist training.	Western Scientific.
Terry	Wing Chun (previous TKD and Karate).	20 years (12 years as instructor).	38	Male	Mixed heritage British; Merseyside	Unemployed.	None stated: Catholic upbringing.	Diploma in Holistic Therapy.	Western Scientific.
John	Wing Chun; San Sau (Sanshou); Lion Dance; Choy Lay Fut.	28 years (18 years as instructor).	42	Male	White British; London.	Full time TMCA instructor.	Interest in Buddhism.	Ph.D. in Theology.	Western Scientific.
Dave	Wing Chun.	4 years.	34	Male	White British; London.	Photographer / assistant editor.	Magic and esoterism.	B.A. in Photography.	New Age.
Zack	Wing Chun.	9 years (2 years as instructor).	38	Male	White Cornish.	Chef / builder’s labourer.	Martial arts philosophy.	On- the-job training.	Western Scientific.
Ben	Yang Taijiquan (Zheng Manqing).	10 years (2 years as instructor).	50	Male	White Cornish.	Prison warden.	Daoist and Confucian philosophy.	Specialist prison training.	Contemporary Daoist.

Table 1. Cont.

Participant	Martial art(s)	Martial arts experience	Age	Sex	Ethnicity/origin	Occupation	Religion/ Philosophy	Education	Health philosophy
Joe	Yang Taiji quan (simplified 24- and 48-step and Zheng Manqing).	14 years (8 years as instructor).	36	Male	White British; Southern England.	Professional Taijiquan instructor.	Daoist philosophy; Catholic upbringing.	B.A. in Philosophy	Contemporary Daoist.
Ted	Wing Chun.	18 years.	68	Male	White British; London.	Retired accountant and banker.	Martial arts philosophy.	B.Sc .in Actuary.	Western Scientific.
Edward	Yang Taijiquan.	16 years.	55	Male	Chinese British; Hong Kong.	Engineer.	Confucianism.	B. Eng. in Nuclear Engineering.	Western Scientific.
Nick	Wing Chun.	12 years (4 years as instructor).	36	Male	White British; South West.	Professional photographer.	None stated; Indian philosophy.	Diplomas in photography.	Western Scientific.

#### 4. Discussion: The Health Philosophies in Principle and Practice

The following section adopts a triadic perspective, as with some of my earlier work [44,46]. This is to avoid the pitfalls of taking a dualistic position between the health philosophies of the supposedly spiritual East and the rational West, much like with recent anthropological considerations of the philosophy of the body (for an excellent example, refer to [70]). During the analysis, my initial viewpoints on health between two models of a scientific Western paradigm and an Eastern experiential model were challenged when I came across various mixed systems and influence from non-Chinese cultures and geographical origins. Here I present three of the clearest philosophies that are explored in-depth by using one life history (one participant) each. Instead of trying to generalize across many practitioner-instructors, I opted for depth of structurationist insight and analysis of the interconnections between these philosophies and the discourses and narratives accompanying them. Will's story is issued first, providing academic readers with a perhaps more familiar, Western lens with which to view and live within the social world.

##### 4.1. The Western Scientific Health Philosophy

The scientific health philosophy of late modern times is commonly regarded as a Western construct, although throughout history, the “East” or Orient (such as the Arab and Muslim world) also pioneered scientific and medical investigations. The Western scientific health philosophy is derived from the empirical paradigm that takes a singular view on a fixed reality and measurable forms of knowledge, and links to *Orientalism* [39], as it is popularly believed to be a product of the rational West (as opposed to the “exotic” East). A part of the expansion of scientific disciplines that follow this trend is the exercise and sport sciences (often called sport science or kinesiology), one of the most popular options for university students in the UK [71]. The martial arts can be subject to a detailed scientific analysis through the various sub-disciplines like sport biomechanics and exercise physiology, which utilize experimental methods and a purely quantitative, objective methodology and epistemology that avoids culturally specific, discursive concepts such as *Qi*, which is connected to the Chinese medical tradition.

Will, 27, is an exercise and sport sciences graduate who works within the NHS (National Health Service) as a stop-smoking advisor. Possessing a sporting talent and a scientific aptitude, Will became fixated on the so-called “internal martial arts” of Praying Mantis Kung Fu, Chen Taijiquan, Baguazhang and Yiquan as applied through pushing hands (a partner training exercise now offered) and Chinese kickboxing (Sanshou). These internal arts emphasize relaxation, body awareness and the constant link between body and mind through slow movement training, rather than physical conditioning, aggression and the obvious violent potential of the modern, pragmatic approaches of MMA and Krav Maga [11,29]. After several years of arduous training, Will became a British Chinese martial arts champion and instructor of Chen style Taijiquan. He learns from two “masters” (an English language equivalent to Sifu or Shifu): One (Chris) with a spiritual, experiential approach; and the other (Steven) with a more “scientific”, overt analysis of body mechanics. In a passionate discussion demonstrating a disdain for “wishy-washy” or non-scientific interpretations, Will stressed his perceived need for a Western perspective into the TCMA and implicit explanations:

When I did my instructor training (with Chris' teacher), I felt it was all very wishy-washy. It was like: "Can you do the form? Yep, great, carry on." OK, there was no passing down of any real teaching. They didn't check that you...not only that you could do it, but that you could teach somebody else how to do it and show them how to do it. If somebody's moving into a posture, what's the most important thing? Is it the alignment? Some people just can't be aligned. They're that stiff. What do you do first? Do you straighten their backs? Do you check their knees are good? Do you check their breathing's OK? Do you keep their head up? How do you break it down? What is the formula behind what we are doing? All these kind of questions: I looked back on the course and I think, 'Ahh, it was rubbish!' And that's why I'm quite interested to learn to teach with Steven, because he's got a year-long instructor training course which, in a year, I think you could learn quite a lot.

Furthermore, he called for detailed, scientific research on a macro scale in order to determine the true health benefits (particularly in terms of physical health), as opposed to a more artistic understanding that relies on metaphors and visualization:

The Chinese talking about energy and *Qi* and all that, it's like...not necessarily metaphorical, but it's a bit wishy-washy. And I think it also shows that we don't actually understand what's going on. Training internally, standing for an hour, standing still...what is it that it does? How? Why? What changes in your body? What am I doing? And until Western science has actually properly studied it and given us an explanation that we can understand and comprehend, then we have to use a metaphor to describe the ideals behind it a little bit, I think.

By avoiding an implicit pedagogical strategy that forces the student to explore and reflect upon problems over time, Will also draws upon scientific discourse in terms of the forms of questions asked and answers given. The structure of the art is therefore explicit for the agent in question, to consider this from a structurationist perspective (for a detailed analysis, see [72]). His personal narrative removed individual authority, and gives the privilege to scientific knowledge. Only a few concepts like Yin/Yang duality (it is not a dualism) and the Bagua (constant change in life and movement) were spoken of, disregarding Daoism as a plausible life and health philosophy. Will was even considering returning to the exercise and sport sciences as a postgraduate researcher, although he feared this would take up valuable time from his personal development and teaching at both schools. The "scientific" influence of his teaching and learning is mainly inspired by his Kung Fu and Sanshou instructor, Steven, who belongs to an association and lineage that adopts an explicit pedagogical strategy when explaining the art to British students and laypeople. Below is an extract from one of the many articles on the detailed website of Steven's master's master, one of the most vocal and respected representatives of the internal Chinese martial arts community in the UK, who Will recommended me to search online:

The health benefits flow directly from the requirements of Internal Martial Arts practice. To develop *Internal Power*, it is necessary to have the whole body connected so that it moves as one unit. In order to achieve this, the movements are performed in a slow, relaxed and unhurried manner, and with a great deal of concentration. This is obviously

greatly beneficial in reducing the level of stress—and stress is one of the biggest problems of modern life. All movements should be performed with an all-pervading spiral motion which benefits circulation, helps with many joint problems and improves digestion and other functions of internal organs. In recent years, there have been many studies done which document the benefits one can gain from practicing Taijiquan. Similar things can be said of the other Internal Martial Arts, too. [73].

After a period of regular practice, the effects can be felt in one's enhanced physical, mental and emotional well-being. On the physical level, the body becomes suppler and movements gain poise and become more graceful. On the mental level, one can think more clearly and one's concentration is greatly improved. On the emotional level, one becomes more relaxed, tolerant and generally happier. [73].

The breaking down of TCMA's for understanding the potential benefits for individual health is greatly welcomed in scientific communities, as is often the case with the biomedical perspective, using arts such as Taijiquan and Yiquan as forms of preventative and curative medicine. However, this may also have an important role to play in wider society, with family, friends, colleagues and communities all benefiting from healthy individuals among them. On Steven's own webpage, he claims that the aim of these seemingly esoteric practices is the battle with oneself, which has benefits for other people:

“The purpose of all this training, the discipline, the power and inner strength, is to better ourselves, but only in the sense that we will then be better for others.” (*Steven Jones*).

Such an ethos is a far cry from the lay perception of martial arts as “individual sports” or self-centered, micro-level activities, as they are promoted as being a bridge between the individual and society. Indeed, Will expressed a desire to contribute to the TCMA's in his own small way, by teaching in public open spaces and hospitals, and making the classes visible to young people in his local community, so that they could reflect upon its potential for their own lives in the future. Nevertheless, the scientific approach is not the only health philosophy that has a role to play in society both inside and outside of the martial arts. A modern take on Daoism that is accessible to Western learners is the second section in this analysis, and it appears to fit well within a contemporary UK open to foreign spiritual influence.

#### 4.2. *The Contemporary Daoist Health Philosophy*

Daoism (commonly spelt Taoism) is a religion and philosophy indigenous to China that promotes longevity, health and living in accordance to nature. As a philosophy, it has been transported and repackaged to the West at a rapid rate through arts such as Taijiquan and Qigong, and popular books such as the *Tao of Pooh* [74]. It is part of a growing new Orientalist movement, with people hailing from non-Chinese ethnic groups taking a vested interest in the core concepts and derived practices [75,76]. Grounded in Chinese classics such as the *Dao De Jing* or *Tao Te Ching* [77] and *Yi Jing* or *I-Ching* [78], it may offer Westerners an esoteric and mystical guide for living in a stressful and bustling society. It must be stated, however, that Daoism has mutually influenced the other two major religions of China, Buddhism and Confucianism, and holds no pure influence over the internal martial arts, which are continually changing themselves. The views expressed here draw on

general conceptualizations of Daoism as manifested through a contemporary Western Daoism from non-academic practitioners.

With this in mind, I have coined this particular health philosophy as *contemporary* Daoist because of its simplified interpretation of complex ideas for British learners and aficionados of TCMA's. This differs to what could be described as *classical* Daoist philosophy that has influenced Chinese philosophers for centuries. Contemporary Daoism (Taoism) is a steadily growing area of research for China scholars, and Taijiquan's dubious links to this ancient (and still widely practiced) religion have been called into question by historically sensitive research of [79,80], who identified a 19th century addition of Daoist concepts for nationalist political purposes during a time of foreign imperialism and risk to Chinese identity and a later incorporation of contemporary spirituality.

Chris, 46, is an example of a white British man who has a fondness for Daoism as a life philosophy. He started training in Chen style Taijiquan, the officially recognized original system, at the age of 34 while training as a carpenter (his now profession). Following several years under his Chinese teacher, the eminent Master Chow, he undertook courses in Tuina Chinese massage, which is also rooted in Daoist and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) concepts. Although interested in the self-defense capabilities of Taijiquan, and the many partner training exercises, Chris' real passion is the health and healing aspect that the art offers as a form of moving meditation through the Qigong exercises and solo forms. Like with most Taijiquan groups, his classes are largely composed of elderly, retired individuals, many of whom came with serious long-term ailments, and approached the art for a better state of health. Over green tea and some calming Chinese instrumental music at his home, Chris was keen to share some of his own student's stories of health transformation, taking an interest in the more subjective forms of knowledge:

I had a retired lady who was 70, 69 when she started training with me, and she had some sort of problem with one of her feet. The foot and the ankle. She didn't tell the specifics of the problem, but after doing six months of doing Taiji with me, she said, "Do you know what? My foot is 100% better." She said, "My doctor said to me, "There are only two options. One is to operate on you and do surgical intervention. And the other one is to give you powerful injections to kill the pain." She said, "Those two make me sick to the heart. There was no way I was going to have those. But I don't need to worry about that. My foot's 100%. It's just normal now." But if she hadn't done Taiji, the only option would be that the foot and ankle combination would have got worse and worse and worse and worse, and she would have either been crippled or would have to have a really dodgy operation. How fantastic is that?

Overall, for Chris, these personal and shared narratives provide the fuel for why he is a teacher: Because it enhances people's states of health and sense of wellbeing through a sense of shared transformation and cultivation. In his own words,

Obviously, it's to improve people's health and fitness. That's absolutely fundamental. So many people are so unfit and unhealthy. But in some ways...loads of students come to me with long-term, quite often long-term, chronic conditions: Back ache, knees, all sorts of aches and pains and pains. And I found through the teaching, through the years, more often than not, Taiji will just eliminate those problems. So that's one of the key reasons

why I teach. Is just because it helps people. Fundamentally, I teach because it helps other people. And it helps them to get fitter, and discover other levels to their human experience. That mind-body-spirit connection.

He felt extremely proud as being a facilitator for good health, and stressed that it was the students transforming their own states of wellbeing, and not institutional-level interventions of the British government, Western medicine or the exercise and sport sciences. He explained by offering an alternative perspective on health that is derived from Chinese medical discourse linking emotions, organs and health through the concepts of *Qi* and the “inner body”:

Long-term physical condition, it starts from nothing and then it just builds up. Then all of a sudden, something will happen in their lives where maybe they lose their job or their relationship breaks up, then their whole body health kind of disintegrates. They think it's happened overnight, but actually, there's been a very gradual build up. So Taiji can help to reverse that. And it also stimulates and revitalizes the internal organs. In the Western world, we're fixated on how we look on the outside, the outer body, is more important than the inner body. So Taiji addresses...it flushes through the internal organs with energy. It energizes it. And that makes you smile inside. So it's a win-win situation every time. I've had so many different stories of people telling me how their health is improved. I don't ask. They just tell me. It's just amazing. It's amazing every time. I feel really humbled that I'm able to be a facilitator for them. It's not me that's doing it, 'cause they stand in the lessons. They do the work, but I'm guiding them in the right direction, posture and everything. You've got to have good posture. But they're doing the work. So they're doing it for themselves. And that's very empowering as well. It's not like they're coming to me, and I'm giving them a pill. The pill has fixed them.

For this devoted instructor, Taijiquan can be an individual, agentic remedy and a prevention against the modern, societal phenomenon of stress, and the emotional trauma that often leads to physical health problems. Instead of Western science and medicine being the source of health authority, or medical experts, he places his trust in the Chinese medical tradition and their emerging scientific research into Taijiquan and Qigong. The individual agent (student) has the personal power to change their own lives, and this alternative narrative differs to the conventional doctor-patient relationship and idea of restitution through medical breakthroughs [81]. On the webpage of his school, which is part of a national and an international federation, Chris offers some insight into this form of knowledge in regards to Qigong:

We follow the principles and philosophy of Qigong from the Chinese Health Qigong Association (CHQA). The CHQA has its headquarters in Beijing, and is a member of the China Sports Federation. The Association promotes research into the health benefits of Qigong, and provides world class instruction from experts qualified to Master and Grandmaster level. The centre benefits from regular training with these high level Masters, who travel extensively teaching and promoting the wonderful health benefits of these exercises. Their vision is to “carry the wonderful work of China forward”; some of the exercises themselves are 2000 years old. Qigong exercises were designed to offer excellent

physical and mental health benefits, and help combat conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart problems, stress and depression.

This is a clear demonstration of the scientific research being undertaken in China at the time of writing, which indicates that late modern science is not a purely Western venture. Nonetheless, Chris' viewpoints are based mainly on the visible changes in his students, and the personal experiences he has in working with "energy" (*Qi*) and the concepts such as Yin/Yang, which is integral to both Taijiquan and Tuina massage therapy. At the time of the interview, Chris aimed to become a full-time instructor and therapist, in order to promote the benefits to a British community full of elderly, and, in many cases, infirm and isolated individuals. According to him, Taijiquan has been a spiritual journey with a "strong heart connection" where "there are no answers: only your own experience." This contrasts sharply to the Western scientific perspective, which stressed objectivity and removal of personal bias. However, there are also commonalities, with an emphasis on the problems in modern society and an ethos of helping others through continued, lifelong study. At the end of the interview, Chris kindly gave me a copy of a book on Taijiquan for health, in which he had written a section on the relationships between Tuina and the martial arts. His generosity and the Chinese set-up of his study all gave me a wider picture of how he put contemporary Daoism into action. When I glanced at his website more recently, it was stated that he is now a recognized Master in the art (one of few white British to attain such a title) and a second Duan Wei (equivalent to *dan* grade in Japanese martial arts) in Chinese health Qigong (as opposed to martial or spiritual Qigongs).

At this point in the analysis, it would be convenient to declare that there is an East-West gulf in terms of health paradigms. However, following the founding principles of structuration, this would be over-simplistic and problematic in a late modern society where globalization is a two-way process: Direct influence between the UK and other countries, such as former colonies. The globally popular art of Wing Chun is a clear example of this reverse cultural diffusion, being chiefly developed in Hong Kong by the late Grandmaster Ip Man, the famed teacher of Bruce Lee. Likewise, there are other nations and peoples with distinct health philosophies, such as the New Zealand Maoris [44], forming part of the British Commonwealth, but who are not normally labelled as "Easterners," despite being in the geographical East. Such a mixed health philosophy that blends different concepts and discourses from various cultural, geographical, religious and ethnic origins is assessed next, using the example of Wing Chun enthusiast Tony. Overall, his extract illustrates the structurationist notion that the East-West split is extremely limited considering cultural and societal changes over time via the structured and structuring processes such as globalization and colonization.

#### 4.3. The New Age Health Philosophy

The third philosophy is termed "New Age", as it is an amalgamation of Chinese, Indian, Japanese and shamanistic health philosophies through simplified discourse and unified concepts. There are many potential New Age health philosophies, as the idea of a New Age related to the agentic potential of each individual to pick and choose principles from different religions and spiritual practices [82]. It is almost certainly a reflection of late modernity, with various traditions being radically changed through reflexive modernization. EMFs including Yoga and Qigong are no exceptions to the rule [34], with new, commercialized, hybrid and simplified disciplines being created for Westerners [83]. It is



also an era of cross-continental travel for spiritual guidance and martial arts training, and the East-West dualism is lessened with the growing authority of Latin American traditions. Capoeira is an example of this, with social scientific research having identified global networks between and across the Americas [84].

Tony, 40, is a noteworthy example of a British citizen with a vested identity in a number of mind-body practices: Wing Chun Kung Fu, Hatha Yoga (India), five animal Qigong (China), meditation (of various forms including shamanistic) and Reiki (Japan). He is also a reflexology and massage therapist, and identifies himself as a “warrior of light” and a “healer” who needs to explore his “dark side” through the violent art of Wing Chun as taught by self-defense orientated Sifu who actually shuns New Age interpretations of this otherwise progressive system. Moreover, he is a shaman’s apprentice who spends half spring and summer in the UK for selling boat tickets in his local town and Wing Chun tuition, and the other half of the year in Bolivia, in a spiritual retreat. Tony has begun to teach Wing Chun in this South American country, where Kung Fu is relatively rare, and thus has a potential contribution on a global level. We met at two special places for him: A British town popular with hippies and festivalgoers; and a hidden cove known only to locals, where we managed to train some Wing Chun. Tony was forthright in sharing his spiritual beliefs, which centred on a Chinese and Indian discursive understanding on energies for his personal health:

I do many things, many practices. Wing Chun right now, in my life, is very important. It’s given me something that I need. A certain kind of energy, because there’s many kinds of energy. The Chinese reckon there are more than thirty different kinds of *Qi*. For instance, Reiki is a very high vibration of *Qi*. The Wing Chun is a lower vibration, but that doesn’t mean it’s lower in what it gives you. It’s just lower in connection to Chakras. It’s lower in Chakras, it’s connected to the first, second and third Chakras, especially the Dantien. You know, you punch from here, you punch from the solar plexus - Your energy, your centre, needs to be here. So you need to be aware of both. And you also need to be open in the root Chakra to allow the energy to come up my feet from the earth. Like, you sink in the seal of the Dao. You sink in the *Qi*. Yin sinking, Yang rising.

The idea of Chakras, a common term in Reiki, is juxtaposed here with Kundalini (Indian Yoga) and *Qi* (Chinese). Overall, Tony aims to explore different mind-body disciplines in order to cultivate health and spirituality. For him, Wing Chun plays a vital part in order to limit fear (which, according to him, stagnates enlightenment) and to promote physical health across the life course. He continued to explain the importance of sensing and cultivation such energies:

For me, *Qi* is a vibration of particles and molecules bouncing off each other. Which, normally, we cannot see. They’re invisible. Unless you have heightened awareness. Now, John (his Wing Chun instructor) can see auras. He has told me things like he said one day, he said to me, “You have a problem with the circulation in your hands, don’t you?” He wasn’t touching me—he was watching me. And I said, “Yeah, I do. But how do you know?” He said, “I can see it in your aura.” And...I knew that was true. I knew he could see that. Because I myself can sometimes see auras. If I’m working a lot with energy and ceremony, and Reiki, then my awareness gets heightened, and I get more aware of this light that we can’t normally see. And it is a light. Sometimes you can see it as white light.

Sometimes it's golden. And this is *Qi*. This energy flows through us through our Chakras. We have seven main Chakras. And we have a lot of smaller Chakras. We also have Kundalini energy, which flows through our spine. This is related to awareness and self-realization. We also have the energy that is connected to the earth. The bottom three Chakras. And in Qigong and Kung Fu and Taijii, this is the energy you are working with. It's a necessary energy. If you want to live a life a long, healthy life, then to work with your *Qi* is very positive. You can increase your *Qi* and be healthier. So, Kung Fu is working with that energy. You can be healthier when you do that Kung Fu.

Unlike with Will and Chris, it is difficult to pinpoint a clear, singular institutional or cultural influence on Tony's practices. The macro (global/societal) and meso (institutional/scholastic) levels of structuration are far more complex, with his wide reading of metaphysics and spirituality, and an ever-changing taste and personal understanding. For example, Eckhart Tolle's [85] international bestseller *The Power of Now*, was once vital to his life, but now remains limited for his understanding of the ego-spirit connection. Instead, the master-disciple relationship is more important, with his shamanic master and his own follower in Bolivia. This is indeed a rare lifestyle, and Tony admitted that it was extremely limiting in his integration into society and social wellbeing. He recalled a time of extreme training and denial:

For example, when I was doing Yoga at first, and I was vegetarian and I didn't drink, smoke, blah, blah, blah. Nothing. I mean, I was even celibate for six years. I was so like on this fucking path of energy that I needed to fully give it everything. But in some ways, I was too rigid. Like, if my pattern, if my routine was interrupted, I would lose energy. I was so rigid in my, 'I have to sit twice a day. I had to do three hours of Yoga. I have to eat not much, to drink plenty of water.' I became very rigid. I may have had this high fucking energy and self-realization, but I couldn't even go in a pub. It would pollute me. I was too pure. And now, OK, I indulge a bit in things. If I want something, if I meet a girl and I want to have sex (laughs), and we both want to, then I do it. It's like... If I want to eat food that I enjoyed as a child, sometimes I'll have it. It's not always about giving everything up. It's about giving some things up, but also doing other things. Because we are the gods. We have the choice of doing everything and experiencing everything. So if you want to have an ice cream, you know, shit, it may not be perfect for you. A bit of chocolate. It's good to have that. It's something that we need as well. It's good to have a good diet and do exercise and practices, but constant moment-to-moment meditation.

This moment-to-moment meditation could be understood as self-cultivation through meditation in movement [36,37], which is a principle that unites all EMFs and the majority of traditionalist martial arts. Tony's story, alongside those of Will and Chris, has thus provided a glimpse of the connections between Eastern philosophical concepts, spiritual subjectivities and health philosophies, which links the new topic of martial arts, health and society to more established themes. It is therefore time to consider broader implications of this initial study of TCMAAs and health.

## 5. Concluding Comments

The aim of this exploratory and data-focused article was to explore in detail some of the main health philosophies are being circulated and reflexively transmitted among certain British TCMA communities, which are undoubtedly some of many other prevailing ways of looking at wellbeing and illness in the MACS. Three core health philosophies were highlighted from this particular study: (1) The Western scientific; (2) the contemporary Daoist; and, (3) the New Age, and were assessed in turn from a practitioner-centred analysis that accounted for their associations and wider social networks, particularly the online material influencing and being influenced by a direct body lineage. In doing so, this article also identified the beginnings of health narratives and discourses that deserve to be explored in their own right via specialist methods of discourse analysis and narrative methods e.g., structural narrative analysis. Much like with Weber's [86] classical work and Frank's [81,87] contemporary sociology of the body, these three illustrative examples provide a case of ideal typing that makes a chaotic social world appear more clearly. Of course, hybrid models of health exist: An urban, scientific (neo)Daoist, or a Chan (Zen) Buddhist Kung Fu practitioner with a taste for meditation and health are all real possibilities in a culturally dynamic or "runaway" world, to borrow the term of Anthony Giddens [59]. These all demonstrate how through martial arts practice, agents embody the discourses, narratives and principles, much like Farrer [88] has shown in Hong Kong with his study on "becoming animal" in the Chow Gar Southern Mantis Kung Fu: Through repetitive, reflexive effort, one can live and perceive the world in new and exciting ways, and influence the society in which we form part of.

In spite of their obvious differences, the three health philosophies possess a clear commonality: They all strive to point out a way of being-in-the-world in which the individual utilizes their bodily agency through the long-term process of self-cultivation. In that sense, they can be transformative, much like EMFs and MACS in general. Such a process—potentially lifelong—aims to bring positive health benefits that can be understood from different cultural, philosophical and scientific vantage points. They are informed by the specific social structures of discourses (Western scientific, Daoist and a mixture of alternative health knowledge) and core narratives emphasizing the individual and social importance of looking after one's own health and those of others.

My sociological study was situated within the Western world. The UK, as a democratic, economically "developed" and neo-liberal society welcomes, and in fact, fosters a multitude of health philosophies and practices outside the formal state policy. It will be interesting to note how this develops in the future of time, with continued devolution within the United Kingdom, continued immigration, emigration and returning ex-pats, new governments and (continually) uncertain economic climates.

With this in mind, it must be stated that this is an exploratory, data-driven article in a new area of martial arts investigation. It is not a definitive analysis of all the prevailing health philosophies underpinning global martial arts practice or in British society more specifically. This article is delimited in its focus on some of the more popular TCMA's practiced in the West, with regional consideration of the rural and coastal Westcountry (South West England), which has a typically white British, conservative demography. Moreover, it is informed by the interpretive paradigm, it neglects the political and historical dimension of TCMA's in favour of the experiential.

It is clear, then, that an entire corpus of knowledge is required on martial arts, society and health that unite the two disciplines of martial arts studies and martial arts science: Health philosophies; research and scientific paradigms; the (mis)use of health knowledge; (un)healthy practices, and (un)healthy lifestyles are all noteworthy, if not vital, topics for colleagues worldwide who strive for a more integral understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks of martial arts training. Such research could continue to embark on projects from a sociological perspective, with many theories and methods at its disposal. Meanwhile, it could be informed by philosophy, cultural and social anthropology and history, in order to specify changes across time and place—or time-space in Giddensian terms—which reflects their inseparability.

Various research projects need to be conducted with this and a variety of theoretical frameworks. The complex and vast field of martial arts, health and society could be best studied through specific, age-related population groups, and later be approached to examine martial arts communities that provide intergenerational and mixed-sex training experiences, interpretations and perceived health outcomes (both intended and unintended). For example, in the understudied case of children and adolescents, how might youngsters actively use—albeit guided through qualified adult supervision—martial arts training for the specific health challenges they face in late modern societies? The audience of this work may include health policy makers, health workers, medical professionals, carers and martial arts instructors and promoters alike. In terms of sampling, beginners, intermediate and veteran practitioners could all be appreciated for their differing insights, while the vast array of MACS in contemporary society needs to be represented—taking the “trialectic” of such “body cultures” [89,90] of combat sports, self-defense/military combat and traditionalist martial arts as a springboard for specific and comparative research. Alongside this model, the accompanying EMFs such as Qigong could be taken into account for their diversity and unpredictable diffusion and cultural absorption, e.g., various Qigongs (in the plural form) that are mixed and matched with certain styles of TCMAs, as opposed to a universal Qigong.

In regards to research foci, there is a need for research into the relationship between martial arts, reading, philosophy and spiritual practice over time, which undoubtedly requires follow-up interviews, documental analysis and group discussions. Also, researchers could ponder on using longitudinal methods, such as follow-up interviews years later, which is something I am seriously contemplating, seeing the limitations of one-off or two consecutive interviews as a snapshot of a person’s ever-evolving life story. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies are all needed for their respective advantages and shortcomings in order to appreciate the theme of martial arts, health and society in a more integral manner. Comparative and cooperative studies between countries and urban/rural areas would also be fruitful in order to reach a more international and culturally-sensitive level of analysis that truly explores links between the local, glocal and global.

I leave the reader with some pressing questions in mind: How do instructors use forms of health knowledge in their classes, seminars and workshops? How are the (transformative) health philosophies linked to broader historical changes in the martial arts including the global popularity of MMA? In what ways do less experienced practitioners and learners of MACS employ the health narratives and discourses? In what ways do these narratives and discourses impact on their families, friends and work colleagues vital to the social support beyond the martial arts communities? Finally, to return to the introductory outline on EMFs, how are the other mind-body and health practices linked to MACS in

conceptual and practical terms? These are but a few exemplary guiding points that social scientists could use in their own cultural, mediated, political and social environments.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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