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“How Strong Is Your *Gongfu*?”
The Violence and Art of Taijiquan – Martial Arts, Sports
and (Trans-)National Cinema in Popular Culture

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中国功夫

卧似一张弓
站似一棵松
不动不摇坐如钟
走路一阵风
南拳和北腿
少林武当功
太极八卦连环掌
中华有神功

Chinese Martial Arts

Crouching like a bow
Standing like a pine
No moving, no swaying, sitting like a bell
Walking like a gust of wind
Southern fist and Northern leg
Shaolin and Wudang gongfu
Taiji, Eight-Trigram, Linked Palm
China has amazing martial arts

Lyrics for 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan
Song “Chinese Kungfu” (2009, own translation)

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List of Abbreviations

BCE	Before Christian Era
CCTV	China Central Television - 中央电视台
CE	Christian Era
HK	Hong Kong
HKMDB	Hong Kong Movie Database
IMDb	Internet Movie Database
IOC	International Olympic Committee
PRC	People's Republic of China
TMDb	The Movie Database
VHS	Volkshochschule = adult education centre
WHO	World Health Organisation
ytv	YouTube Video

1. Introduction

In the PR China, morning sport plays an important role and the park as main venue gives a platform to a variety of outdoor activities, practiced alone or in groups, from gymnastics, roller-skating, singing, playing an instrument and writing calligraphy to dancing and practicing martial arts in various forms (see Chen 2015). Among all these happenings, Taijiquan – the “*Great-Ultimate Boxing*” (Li/Du 1995: 8), a Chinese internal martial art, fascinated me the most: for a few minutes the practitioners are engulfed in a slow sequence of elegant and peaceful movements, moving with grace and agility, demonstrating the flexibility and elasticity of the body in perfect harmony with the music – and proving that a maximum of body control is not a question of age, since most of them are advanced in years. I was astonished that these harmonious motions should be a martial art that used to harm, injure and kill opponents. Taijiquan belongs to a whole range of different kinds of Chinese martial arts and gives an insight into the basic fighting techniques that can be practiced by everyone.

Within the theoretical framework of popular culture (Hall 2016, Edensor 2002, Storey 2008, Fiske [1989] 2010) and violence (Galtung 1969, 1990; Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois 2004; Allen 2015), I want to examine Taijiquan (representing the broad variety of Chinese martial arts) (Chen [1928] 2000, Li/Du 1995, Wile 1996, Frank 2006, Chen 2007, Li 2009) under the aspect of “participation and spectatorship” (Latham 2007: 265) as sport and as important component of Chinese (trans-)national cinema(s) (Wu/Chan 2007, Berry 2010; Teo 2016; Zhang 2012; Chan/Willis 2016; Browne et al. 1996), taking the methodological approach of participant observation, interviews and film analysis (Gray 2010, Sutton/Wogan 2009).

Sports and martial arts films represent two important key factors of leisure time and of popular culture, both expressed as embodied knowledge by the human body (see Mauss [1935] 1968; Brownell 1995; Chen 2007) through countless iterative acts, the *gongfu*, where the violence is executed with bare hands or weapons like swords or fans and linked by choreography, similar to dance (Bourdieu 1990a/b; Wacquant 2004; Anderson 2001) – leading the performance to perfection and to the pleasure to watch (see Chow 1995, Goldstein 1998).

There are two primary aims of this study: 1. to investigate the connection between violence and Taijiquan (used as reference point for various martial arts) in sports as well as 2. to ascertain the connection between the violence of martial arts and its representation in cinema.

In general, the master's thesis is organized thematically in two main parts: analyzing Taijiquan as sports in "a) participation in violence" and analyzing martial arts films in "b) spectatorship of violence". In that respect, this paper has been divided into eight parts, including this introductory chapter and the bibliography at the end. The second chapter is laying out the methodology used for this study. Chapter Three is concerned with the theoretical dimensions of the research and looks into aspects of popular culture (with a brief outlook on cultural performance) as well as violence in connection with anthropology, martial arts and the body. Under the general aspect of violence, the fourth section analyses the socio-historical background of Taijiquan, the role of religion, monks and rebels together with their representation in fictional literature. Chapter Five deals with the participation of practitioners in Taijiquan and presents the findings of the research, focusing on the sportization and simplification processes, also used for mass performances, along with the way the new forms spread within mainland China and to the international spheres in connection with new masters and their teaching methods. Furthermore, that chapter looks into the way Taijiquan is embodied by the practitioners, their attitude towards violence and weapons. In this context, the role of the sword, also used in martial arts movies, as well as violent feelings that occur during the training are analyzed. Chapter Six is concerned with the spectatorship of martial arts film with focus on the representation of violence on the silver screen through well-liked stars and movies. Finally, the conclusion draws upon the entire thesis, tying up the various theoretical and empirical strands in order to give a brief summary and a critique of the findings while identifying areas for further research.

In this paper, simplified Chinese characters and the *hanyu pinyin* (*fāng'àn*) system of transliteration (汉语拼音方案) will be used, if not stated otherwise. The words "Taiji" and "Taijiquan" are synonymously applied to talk about this martial art and are equal to the Wade-Giles form "T'ai Chi Ch'üan", "Tai Chi" or "Taichi" employed by other sources. For the Chinese characters 功夫, the Wade-Giles form of "kung fu" equals the *pinyin* form "gongfu".

Throughout his paper, mainly the male notion is used and includes, unless specifically mentioned, the female meaning to facilitate the readability. Chapter headings with the notion of violence are used to express the author's writing style and do not indicate specific theories on violence.

2. Research Strategy

The present paper was motivated by my personal interest. Growing up in the 1970s in a little Styrian town in Austria, I was fascinated by martial arts and watched the American TV-series *Kung Fu* (1972-1975) with David Carradine in the role of a Chinese Shaolin monk fighting for justice with his bare hands. I wanted to have these skills, too! At the age of 15, I persuaded a friend from school to join me to apply for a membership at a local Judo club which took all of our courage, only to be told that we are a) too old and b) not boys – martial arts seemed out of reach for me.

Between 2004 and 2012, a crucial time for the nation-state China on her way to become a super power, I lived in Beijing and experienced the vivid “park life”: mostly elderly people enjoyed their lives by walking with their bird cages, dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. Among their colourful and mainly loud activities, people were also practicing martial arts: men and women, alone and in groups, different ages, styles, and techniques, with or without weapons. After a few years of visiting parks, tiptoeing around and watching these practitioners, I started my own Taiji experience and became “addicted”.

At the same time, I wallowed in another vice of my martial arts craze and used the enormous offer of DVDs in every street corner of Beijing to watch the latest blockbusters as well as the classics of so called kung fu films, mostly starring Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Jet Li or Michelle Yeoh. And all the while I kept asking myself: *“How can these peaceful practitioners in the park be part of the violent martial arts depicted in movies?”*

During my studies at the University of Vienna, seminars on the topics of cultural performance by Univ.-Prof. Doz. Dr. Elke Mader¹ and popular culture connected with art

¹ Seminars “New Identities, Cultural Performance and Media” (2018S) and “Ritual and Cultural Performance” (2018W)

and violence as well as entanglements of film and anthropology by Dr. Ulrike Davis-Sulikowski² showed a possible connection between my interest in martial arts and film and built the foundation for this master's thesis.

2.1 Literature Review

A considerable amount of literature has been published on Taijiquan that not only encompasses writings in Chinese but also a large variety of English translations (e.g. Chen [1928] 2000; Chen [1929] 1985; Fu [1963] 1999). In addition, a huge variety of works that account for the self-help book sector (e.g. Wayne/Fuerst 2013) are available. However, the paper will use sources in English and does not engage with the analysis of written Chinese sources or with source criticism.

So far, however, there has been little discussion about Taijiquan classics in English. The “classical” writings on Taiji were analyzed in English by Lo et al. (1979), Wile (1996) and Davis (2004). In the year 2004, Barbara Davis published an annotated translation of the five core texts *The Taijiquan Classics* that includes *Taijiquan Jing*, *Taijiquan Treatise*, *Exposition of Insights into the Thirteen Postures*, *Thirteen Postures Song*, as well as *Playing Hands Song*. She compares these texts as handed down within the Yang family lineage (already published by Chen Weiming in the 1920s) and the Wu/Li lineage version of Wu Yuxiang (a friend of Yang Luchan), his elder brother Wu Chengqing, and his nephew Li Yiyu (see Wile 1996). Davis' work gives an insight into origins, allocation to authors, socio-historical background as well as content around philosophy (in context with body and cosmos), principles, instructions and practice guidelines embedded in Chinese culture and history (Davis 2004: 59).

In *Lost T'ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty*, Douglas Wile (1996) analyses four classic sources of the Qing Dynasty that surfaced in the 1990s: the writings of the brothers Wu Chengqing and Wu Ruqing, the works of Li Yiyu as well as the *Yang Family Forty Chapters*. Wile puts these classical writings within the socio-historic context of the declining last Chinese Dynasty struggling with British intruders, the Taiping Rebellion and the quest for national identity.

² Seminars “Violence, Art & Popular Culture. Anthropological Approaches” (2018S) and “Anthropology & Film – Entanglements” (2019S)

An earlier translation of the Taijiquan classics, *The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan* by Lo et al. (1979) state that Taijiquan practice is grounded in the *Taijiquan Lun* written by Wang Zongyue (1736-1795) who is considered to be the successor of Zhang Sanfeng, the founder of Taiji; *Expositions and Insights* by Wu Yuxiang (1812-1880); *Essentials of Form and Push-Hands* as well as the *Five Character Secret* by Li Yiyu, Wu Yuxiang's nephew. In mid-19th century, Yang Chengfu (1883-1936), Yang Lushan's grandson, wrote *Yang's Ten Important Points*, while his disciple Zheng Manqing (1900-1975) wrote the *Song of Form and Function*, translated in English as *Thirteen Chapters* (Lo et al. 1979: 10-11).

Li Deyin's *Taijiquan* (2009) is a common contemporary source that gives an insight into the basic knowledge of this martial art and he assigns the *Song of the 13 Methods* to Wu Yuxiang (1821-1880) (Li 2009: 38-41). Li uses the works of Wang Zongyue whose *The Genealogy of Taijiquan* was discovered in the 1950s in Wuyang County, Henan Province (Li 2009: 33) and ascribes the introduction of the name Taijiquan to Wang Zongyue's *Treatise of Taijiquan* in the 18th century (Li 2009: 30).

In general, studies about martial arts published in English belong to different disciplinary fields with different interdisciplinary approaches. In their article *Exploring embodiment through martial arts and combat sports: a review of empirical research*, Channon/Jennings (2014) aim to explore physical violence and embodiment through martial arts and combat sports by reviewing studies of empirical research available in English language. The authors demand an interdisciplinary approach and analyse in their study body cultures as embodied cultural transmission, body pedagogies (in physical education in schools) as education of and through the body, the embodiment of gender by reproducing or subverting patriarchal structures as well as bodily harm including violence, pain and injury. Furthermore, Channon/Jennings (2014: 776) suggest that embodiment can even lead to the construction of national identity or identities (see Frank 2006). In their study, they exclude martial arts films and argue that movies show the representation of the body instead of the body's action and experience. In the context of gender, the authors argue that physical violence is used as a main topic to explore the gender component and to express identities within participants of these fighting techniques.

Sports and the role of the human body in China was examined by the anthropologist Susan Brownell (1995) who became part of her university's track team during her language

studies in China. She trained her body for the Chinese nation-state and took part in the National College Games of 1986 side by side with her Chinese colleagues. In her work *Training the Body for China – Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic of China*, she scrutinizes the deployment of the human body for and by the nation-state through sports without considering the aspects of violence.

In his participant observation in Shanghai on identity as a sensually experience through Taijiquan, Adam Frank (2006) uses his own body as research tool and as a means of recording, based on the methods of Abrahams (1993). Breaking the tradition of having only one “master”, he learns from three different teachers at the same time and shows an effort to “*evoke a sense of Chineseness by appealing to the imagination as well as the intellect*” (Frank 2006: 26). Frank regards the popularity of Taijiquan in China as a process of self-awareness and self-Orientalizing and as a cultural and historical symbol of pride (Frank 2006: 36). He called the emphasis on the historical roots of Taijiquan “*...the search for the little old Chinese man*” (Frank 2006).

Avron Boretz (2011) examines in his book *Gods, Ghosts, and Gangsters*, in a comparative and multisited ethnography ritual violence and masculinity in martial arts of the *jianghu* - 江湖 (= rivers and lakes) underworld. Studying these communities that live on the edges of society in Taiwan and mainland China, the author includes aspects of the *wuxia* - 武侠, the knight-errant tradition as well as Daoism, traditional literature and performance under the aspect of popular religion.

A different approach above physical harm and injuries is used by Barry Allen (2013, 2014, 2015) who examines the aesthetical side of violence within martial arts. From the philosophical point of view Barry Allen (2015) evaluates in his work *Striking Beauty – A philosophical look at the Asian martial arts*, violence of global practiced unarmed personal combat techniques, “*the martial arts of the kung fu movies, China's contribution to world cinema. It is also the martial arts one finds taught in practice halls in nearly every major city of the world*” (Allen 2015: ix). Allen scrutinizes the religious and philosophical traditions of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism in relations to martial arts and analyzes the aesthetics of beauty and violence by comparing these combat techniques with sport and dance, since “[*m*]artial arts practice is like sport but is not sport and is dancelike but is not dance” (Allen 2015: xi). Allen (2015: 13) understands martial art as speech act like “*an*

unexpected answer to an uninvited aggression”, but martial arts is based more on righteousness than on violence.

In *Politics and Identity in Chinese Martial Arts*, Lu Zhouxiang (2018) examines the development of martial arts as the symbol of Chinese strength and pride within the context of politics and history. He puts the special focus on its role in constructing national identity and nation building by ruling regimes of politics and military in the social and economic environment since the 1990s. Lu points out the transformation of martial arts into a performing art, a competitive sport as well as a sport for all by scrutinizing the global popularity of an unique Chinese cultural and national symbol. Connecting the bodily practice of martial arts with its globalized hype within the transnational media landscape, Tim Trausch (2018) evaluates *Chinese Martial Arts and Media Culture* in combination with the global spread across borders of space, time and multimedia from the early 1920s *wuxia* cinema to digital computer games.

The phenomenon of popular culture in Beijing was examined by Zha Jianying (1995) in the crucial time of the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 and the impending end of colonial rule in Hong Kong in 1997. She gives an insight into the enormous changes within the Beijing society after the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of popular culture by using her personal networks to look behind the scenes of TV-productions and filmmaking, modern art and architecture as well as print media, media moguls and the lure of sex in literature. Zha examines the social impact of the beginning liberalism with a strong focus on consumption and money through new concepts of employment and private enterprises. As an addition to the publication *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic* Link et al. (1989) that gave an insight into the PRC before the Tiananmen incident, in *Popular China – Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, Link et al. (2002) examine popular culture under the aspect of globalization in a changing society challenged by the party's authoritarianism, they analyse what people actually do, think and feel in the social market economy of the People's Republic whereby the urban-village dichotomy of women's lives, migrant workers, beggars, entrepreneurs, and university graduates, the employment sector, corruption, activism as well as satirical sayings and thoughts are paramount. In *Pop Culture China! Media, Art and Lifestyle* Kevin Latham (2007) scrutinizes contemporary popular culture of mass media from radio to internet and telecommunications, from newspapers to magazines,

from videos to cinema, also including consumption, leisure time, sports and martial arts, theatre performances and popular music. The author examines the upcoming of various lifestyle forms and recreation activities that developed from the uniform mass culture of the Mao era. In his reflections about sports and martial arts, Latham uses the findings of Brownell (1995) as source and foundation. Reading popular culture as leisure time pleasure in the form of martial arts novels is examined in *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*. Hamm (2004) gives an insight into the popular genre of martial arts novels in China dominated by the author Jin Yong as part of China's cultural identity (see Huss/Liu 2007). Background information about the popular author and his media empire provides Zha Jianying (1995: 168-170).

Stefan Kramer (1997) introduces the history of Chinese cinema from the early stages between the end of the Qing Dynasty to the dull grey mass of homogeneity in the movie landscape of the newly built nation-state by largely ignoring the blossoming cinematography of Shanghai and Hong Kong between the 1920s and the 1940s (see Song/Ward 2011). Using archived and rare film material difficult to access in his pioneering study, Poshek Fu (2003) examines the politics of Chinese Cinema between Shanghai and Hong Kong within the historical violent time frame from 1935 to the 1950s. Placing the people within the film "industry" in the center of his considerations that kept cinema alive and blossoming, he depicts the historical and political phenomena of that period.

Chinese scholars like Zhang Yingjin (2004) examines the notion of *Chinese National Cinema* with focus on the "national" as depicted in manifold facets in movies from an historical, ideological and aesthetical angle that reflect the different political points of view used by the Chinese nation-state in the form of "one country, two systems" - 一国两制. The notion of "new Chinese Cinemas" and its plurality is treated by "foreign" scholars, as Zhang differentiates scholars of the PRC from "other" scholars, reflecting upon the enormous social changes in the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong since the 1980s that affects the forms, identities and politics depicted in cinema making films a social document as well as an aesthetic expression like Browne et al. (1996). In *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, Zhang Yingjin (2012) scrutinizes the myth of homogeneity of a (national) Chinese cinema comprising movies from the PR China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese diaspora with all the different Chinese languages and dialects (see Song/Ward 2011).

Chan/Willis (2016) scrutinize in *Chinese Cinemas: International Perspectives* the influence of the growing international and Chinese film industry and on independent as well as popular cinema in China questioning the space and place within the contemporary global film industries. Various authors employ their range of expertise in *Chinese Films in Focus II* (Berry 2008) about a broad spectrum of Chinese movies. Chris Berry (2010) pursues in his article *What is transnational cinema?* this topic within the Chinese context and concludes that this approach is a further development of cinematic culture from the national cinema beyond the neo-liberal consequence of globalization and production.

Rey Chow (1995) as well as Jianying Zha (1995: 79-104) emphasize the competition between the mainland directors of the “Fifth generation,” Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, both prominent figures of the (trans)-national Chinese cinema(s). While Chow compares the subjectivity of Chen Kaige concerning national culture and male narcissism with defiance through the force of surfaces by Zhang Yimou in their films, Zha gives insides into their biographies and their quite different social backgrounds.

Stars and directors are the topic researched by the film journalists Schnelle/Suchsland (2008) who compare the works of Zhang Yimou from the PRC and Wong Kar-Wai from Hong Kong from the aesthetical aspects of camera work and pictorial composition, the application and usage of colors and music. Depicting these two directors as twins and antipodes, the authors analyze their styles and methods from a more visual point of view as well as focusing on the female stars Gong Li, Maggie Cheung and Zhang Ziyi.

Kin-Yan Szeto (2011) analyses *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora – Ang Lee, John Woo, and Jackie Chan in Hollywood* as the embodied flexible representatives by directing, producing and planning films between national and transnational experienced displacement under the aspect of cosmopolitical consciousness with the influence of martial arts films and Hong Kong fight choreography integrated into Hollywood blockbusters. A similar approach is made by Sabrina Qiong Yu (2015) who places her focus on the star *Jet Li – Chinese Masculinity and Transnational Stardom*.

Leon Hunt's *Kung Fu Cult Masters* (2003) researches the popular Chinese martial arts films with focus on the physical performance of Bruce Lee and transnational stars of this genre with its early influence from Beijing Opera to the modern computer game technologies

mostly considered of low value. The most comprehensive research to the topic of Chinese martial arts films and the *wuxia*, the martial chivalry tradition, was conducted by Stephen Teo (2016) that includes the historical as well as the contemporary developments. His dedicated research includes the early Shanghai cinema in the 1920s until the government banned it, the further evolvement of this genre of myth, religion and folklore in Hong Kong and Taiwan with first international successes in the 1970s and the international breakthrough around the millennium. Blake Matthews (2013) looks in his work *It's All About the Style – A Survey of Martial Arts Styles Depicted in Chinese Cinema* into the different styles applied and weapons used in martial arts films.

The literature review demonstrated key studies of the current state of research, while the next section will give an insight into the research process.

2.2 Research process

The research for the thesis was conducted in two main phases: the preparation period in the parks of Beijing from 2004 to 2012 with the early phase of learning Taijiquan (that lies before the beginning of the CREOLE master's program and I gathered information based on my social and cultural anthropology studies, completed in 2003) as well as the implementation stage in Vienna from October 2018 to January 2020 by taking part in regular courses and in trial lessons. Through the regular courses, on the one hand the training conditions of already known forms were examined while on the other hand completely new forms were learned to contrast the inscribed patterns by mastering new and unknown ones. The present paper wants to give an insight into the topic and does not claim to be an exhaustive survey about Taijiquan in Vienna. In addition to the field research, tutorial videos, movies and fighting scenes on DVDs, on YouTube, as well as on streaming services and in online film databases were analysed. In the section that follows, the underlying research questions which will be outlined.

2.3 Research Hypothesis and Research Questions

The research process was guided by the hypothesis: "When Taijiquan, is practiced, violence is used. When martial arts films are made, violence is choreographed." In this context, the central question in this thesis asks, "How can these peaceful practitioners in the park be part of the violent martial arts depicted in movies?" and wants to give an insight into the

way Taijiquan is practiced as link between sports and martial arts cinema.

In particular, this paper will examine five research questions: The sport aspects that is closely linked to the process of sportization of Taijiquan, the creation of new forms as well as new ways of knowledge transfer, will be examined by the question “How can these harmonious moves belong to a violent martial art that was used to kill opponents?” The question “How is Taijiquan practiced (in Beijing and in Vienna)?” will analyze how Taijiquan is taught and embodied. The cinema aspect is scrutinized with the questions “How is violence depicted in martial arts films?” and “How is the body (in terms of fighting skills) of the actor/actress important?”. The later question is closely connected with the fighting skills of the martial arts actors and actresses since these films belong to the “*body genre*” or “*genre of bodies*” (see Hunt 2003). Furthermore, it will be asked “How is popular culture used by the nation-state to create national identity and to gain power?”

The main purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the connection between the violence of martial arts used by the individual practitioner as sport (with Taijiquan as reference point) and the representation of violence in martial arts movies. In the following section, the methodological processes will be outlined.

2.4 Methodical Approach: Participant Observation, Interviews and Documentation

During the field research the methodological approach of participant observation (Guest et al. 2013, Dewalt et al. 2000; O'Reilly 2009; Cohn 2014; Breidenstein et al. 2015), interviews (Wulff 2014, Skinner 2014) and film analysis (Gray 2010, Sutton/Wogan 2009, Chow 1995) were followed.

“... *going where the action is*” (Guest et al. 2013: 76) was essential at the participant observation (Dewalt et al. 2000; O'Reilly 2009; Cohn 2014; Breidenstein et al. 2015: 71-80) of the Taiji group at VHS. Being a member since summer 2013, access to the field was granted effortlessly as well as building rapport with the participants (Guest et al. 2013: 76; Breidenstein et al. 2015: 60-66). The group was informed about my project, but I tried to stay in the background to avoid disturbing their concentration during the practice. My research position plied between complete participant to participant as observer (O'Reilly 2009: 153-154) in a constant change of registers between strong and weak participation

(Breidenstein et al. 2015: 67) and trying to balance between being involved and distanced. I took part in the practice of 24-Step Simplified Taijiquan - 24 式简化太极拳 and the Qigong form *Eight Pieces of Brocade* - 八段锦, 32-Step Taiji Sword - 32 式太极剑 and 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan - 太极功夫扇. The fieldwork at this environment started in October 2018 and lasted until January 2020. In total three semesters regular courses and four Saturday workshops were observed in participant observation. Six basic interviews in German were conducted with members of this group and informal talks over the whole research period were recorded in memos. Passages of the interviews needed for the thesis were translated by the author.

“We learn these things by doing them,...” (Guest et al. 2013: 81) was crucial for my participant observation at a Taiji club to learn a new Taiji fan form as well as *Pushing Hands* – an opportunity to finally apply the basics of Taijiquan in a fighting form for pairs. In both courses, I took part on beginner’s level and I tried to learn as much as possible myself during the innumerable iterative acts of practicing. Taking the position of strong participation (Breidenstein et al. 2015: 67), I was as complete participant (O’Reilly 2009: 153) occupied with my own progress as a record tool (Frank 2006: 27) and less attentive to my surroundings.

Another point to clarify was my role as researcher and participant observer (Cohn 2014: 83-85). Since I was only interested in the styles taught, I took part in trial lessons in other Viennese Taiji schools and organizations than the VHS as an interested potential client trying to find a new and suitable sport without revealing my research intentions there. The purpose of the trial lessons was to avoid the disadvantage of *“going native”* or *“over-rapport”* (O’Reilly 2009: 11-12; 87) caused by a lack of distance through my long membership at VHS.

The meditative form of the sport and the focus needed to perform the movements prevented the immediate taking note during the session (see O’Reilly 2009: 70), therefore a training protocol was drafted immediately after class (see Guest et al. 2013: 98). The notes were as detailed as possible for my purposes, but some information could be kept short because of pre-knowledge. In contrast, this close connection to the members of the VHS group can be used as an advantage to get inspiration at both sides (Wulff 2014), as seen from the six interviews I conducted between the beginning of November and the middle of December

2018. All interview partners were women (aged 40 to 70) taking part most regularly in the courses and their interviews built the foundation for informal talks and exchanges during the further research process. Because the Taijiquan scene in Vienna is small, the names for Taijiquan institutions and instructors will not be revealed; for interviewees modified first names will be used (see Overview in Appendix, Figure 1).

The six interviewees Ulla, Anna, Nina, Susanne, Uta and Elsa were informed about the purpose and asked individually if they wanted to take part in this research, but not about the contents to hinder them from preparing themselves in advance with knowledge previously researched online or in books since “unprepared” and spontaneous answers were pursued. During the interview, recorded in German, a catalogue of questions was loosely followed in conversation form to avoid a questionnaire-like situation by ticking off one question after the other. For a successful interview, the interview partner should feel as comfortable as possible to share the knowledge (see Skinner 2014: 9). The pleasant atmosphere of Viennese cafés proved disadvantageous for the transcription caused by the high noise level of the surrounding environment, therefore the locker room of the gym was the best location to record interviews, due to its good acoustics and the time after class was most convenient for the interviewees who had between eight and thirty years of Taijiquan experience. All interview partners signed a privacy statement (= “*Datenschutzerklärung*”) and agreed to be recorded. These initial interviews were conducted in a guided form to acquire information that was otherwise quite limited since Taijiquan is considered a leisure time activity and not a profession. As one of the interviewees had over 30 years of experience in practicing Taiji, it was possible to follow a more open narrative style and the roles were swapped when the interview partner started to ask about the researcher’s Taiji experience (see Wulff 2014: 174). Within the following year, different aspects of the interviews were deepened by informal talks around the training hours.

In training protocols, field notes and diaries the trainings were documented, memory logs were written, and the conducted interviews were recorded and transcribed. To organize and to survey the written material collected in the field, the program *atlas.ti 8* was used to create memos and networks as mind maps that helped to organize thoughts and concepts for further data analysis.

2.5 Implementation of Research Methods

The ethnographic field(s) can be separated in the actual geographical location of the parks in Beijing respectively the gyms in Vienna and in the body of the researcher, which experienced as record tool the inscription and embodiment through uncouneted iterative acts during Taijiquan practice (Frank 2006: 27; Wacquant 2004; Collins/Gallinat 2013).

In contrast to the sportive activities stands the analysis of (inter-)national martial art blockbusters representing the visual ethnographic field of cinema (Pink 2006; Gray 2010; Sutton/Wogan 2009; Chow 1995), and violence in context with popular culture is essential for choosing movies and movie scenes. Because of the countless martial arts films available – the *Internet Movie Database* mentions more than 5,600 titles (IMDb: martial arts) – the opinion of the fan community in cyberspace (see Dudrha et al. 2015) is used to manage the huge variety offered. These consumers of the film, the martial art lovers who are a part of popular culture with their passion, voice their preference for violent “trash” films in ranking lists and film databases available on Hong Kong Movie Database and Internet Movie Database. After identifying the ethnographic fields, it is necessary to specify them in the following sections: first, the parks of Beijing will be contrasted by the gyms of Vienna; afterwards, an insight into the visual field will be given.

2.5.1 Taijiquan in Parks of Beijing and Gyms of Vienna

In Beijing, the parks as urban space and extension of the living room because of the restricted housing conditions in the city, host a variety of different Taijiquan styles and forms: practiced individually or standing in line as a group and practicing together, with or without weapons like swords, fans, staffs or sabres. In each park there are different Taijiquan groups with fluid memberships that have their special areas within the territory, their own “masters”, some have special dresses and equipment, but almost all have the special composed Taiji music for the aim of delight and health (see also Chen 1995: 352-353). The various forms of Taijiquan, each one with typical sequences of movements, last between three and twenty minutes. Furthermore, it can also be practiced with a partner in *Tui Shou* or pushing hands - 推手, a more open style of Taijiquan.

For Taijiquan activities, four parks were in the center of my interest: Tuanjiehu Park (团结湖公园), a local park in the East of the city hidden from the tourist paths, and the famous

touristic spots of Beihai Park (北海公园), Ditan (The Temple of the Earth) Park (地坛公园) and Tiantan (The Temple of Heaven) Park (天坛公园). In summer 2010, I came across a Taiji group in Beihai Park near the Nine-Dragon-Wall (九龙壁) and started to watch these practitioners every Friday morning. The parks as well as the groups were picked at random by personal preference with a focus on how people practiced Taiji.

Taiji has a meditative character and the flow is easily disrupted. Since I had no basic knowledge of this martial art, a participation in the activities in the parks was not possible. Nowadays, foreigners – *waiguoren* (外国人) – can move around freely, but their presence is still “noticed” everywhere. Therefore, I was sitting on benches nearby taking notes or walking around to avoid disturbing the practitioners. After some time of looking on and writing down in the parks, I got the opportunity to join a group of ten practitioners (nine women and one man) at an international school in my neighborhood where the sports teacher offered Taijiquan classes and we practiced there every week for two hours – in winter in the small gym and in summer outside at the school’s sports ground. In the beginning, this group practiced 24-Step Simplified Taiji and – after mastering the groundwork of the sequence – added the 32-Step Taijiquan first and later the 42-Step form. Additionally, some of us learned the basics of 32-Step Taiji sword using a telescope sword with tassel. Because the weekly training was not enough to make progress, our instructor told us, to watch DVDs of Li Deyin, a well-known Taiji instructor from Renmin University - 人民大学 (Li 2009), at home in slow motion and to practice along.

Bringing my own experience inscribed into the body to Vienna, a Taiji group was needed that uses the same methods and training approaches as in the PR China. After taking a couple of summer workshops with different instructors (both Chinese and Austrian), I found in 2013 a group most suitable for these requirements at a VHS (Volkshochschule) in Vienna and since that time took part continuously in two courses to learn the following Taijiquan forms: course a) offered 24-Step Simplified Taiji combined with the Qigong form *Eight Pieces of Brocade* and course b) provided 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan and 32-Step Taiji Sword. To get an insight into the difference between sword forms in Taijiquan and in kung fu, I took part in four workshops between April 2019 and January 2020 learning the basic principles of a 32-Step Kung Fu Sword form at the VHS.

To get another impetus for the research, the basics of a Taiji Fan form with a Chinese female instructor were mastered in two successive classes (7-units each) at a Taiji association. There, a group of eight to nine women, from 25 to about 60 years of age, practiced together on Wednesdays – from beginners’ to advanced level. This weekly course is offered only at irregular intervals, each time for seven weeks. For an insight into the pre-form of fighting, I was also taking a 5-unit class for *Taiji Tui Shou - Pushing Hands* - 推手, a form that is not regularly taught, at this Taiji association with an Austrian male instructor and five middle-aged men. All had experience in the basics of Taijiquan (mostly the 37-step form by Zheng Manqing), but in this form their knowledge ranged from beginners’ to advanced level. For the first time, I experienced the application of Taijiquan in fighting – with an additional (and not expected) insight into the aspects of gender.

In randomly picked trial lessons (by no means exhaustive) it was examined and compared how other groups are conducting their training and what styles are taught in Vienna. The aim was to get an overview of the variety of possible fighting techniques of Taijiquan: individually in a group, with a partner, with bare hands or with different weapons like sword and fan. Practicing Taijiquan to embody the art and knowledge of violence was contrasted by analysing martial arts representations in films as visual ethnographic field that will be discussed in the next section.

2.5.2 Taijiquan in Films: The Visual Ethnographic Field

“Feature films have the ability to relate to our daily life in ways that are almost frighteningly accurate, and yet can also be wondrous flights of fantasy that free us from the stresses and strains of our daily lives” (Gray 2010: 136).

The other domain of research for this paper is the visual ethnographic field represented in cinema and films, since “[n]o film is made in a cultural vacuum...” (Gray 2010: 99). Today media create points of contact across international borders and time zones and media contents experience de- and recontextualization according to the analyses of the consumer. An important agent in this context is cinema – with movies as meaningful cultural products and practices to make sense of the world. Popular films where meaning is constructed in manifold ways contain opportunities to apply theoretical anthropological approaches of rituals and myths, visual culture, national identity, globalization, and diaspora as well as the presentation and construction of gender (Gray 2010).

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1996) considers the modern world as imagined landscapes made of transnational elements of blurred, flowing structures influenced by international economy where the imagination is central to the new global order. He surveys the routes of global culture and scrutinizes the flows of media in the worldwide cultural economy as multiple, coinciding or separating forms of *mediascapes*. Appadurai regards them as components of imagined and diversified worlds made by people's comprehensive dispersed vision with the acteur's personal reception of these cultural landscapes on the receiving end. *Mediascapes* contain transformed and experienced parts of reality as images and narratives provided by scripts, to imagine lives and places as metaphors and promises of other potential ways of life (Appadurai 1996: 35). In further development of Appadurai's *mediascapes* (1996) for the flow of pictures and films, Mader (2008: 179) regards the interaction of cultural practices in a world of cultural flows in connection with myths and global media as *mythscape*s. Through dissemination and transcultural reception of local myths, their value systems and narrative structures circulate and blend with other cultural practices to construct meanings as the examples of Bollywood cinema or kung fu movies show. Boundaries are challenged by hybridity and mixing, by modernity and globalisation under inconsistent circumstances “*in a world where nearly everybody is forced to be a citizen*” (Eriksen/Schober 2016: 15).

Gary Xu (2007) even refers to *Sinascape* in his research about popular Chinese films from the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong that address the social, political and economic changes of the early 21st century in a network of transnational film production and consumption of Chinese cinema within the globalized world. The experience of cinema with film, media coverage, stardom on local and global basis can be considered as *media assemblage* (see Dudrah et al. 2015: xxiv).

While Sarah Pink (2006) in her approach of visual ethnography emphasis that videos and pictures taken by anthropologists during their field work have – as visual texts – the same value as narratives and becoming “*ethnographic knowledge*” (Pink 2006: 1-2; 98), Sutton/Wogan (2009) go a step further by using movies produced for the masses of the Hollywood film industry, the popular culture, as ethnographic material since historical incidents and everyday life build the foundation and templates for films. Preliminary work on “*Cinema – A Visual Anthropology*” was undertaken by Gordon Gray (2010). He scrutinizes the different layers of cinema with its rapid global dissemination under the

aspect of visual anthropology by addressing anthropology in film and film in anthropology. According to him, cinema is not only a physical location or an entertainment medium but also an industry that can – as cultural producer – grant insight and access into societies of “*different time and place*” (Gray 2010: x). In the 1940s Hortense Powdermaker (1950), takes already great interest in the connection between cinema and anthropology in in her study about Hollywood, but only in the 1970s visual anthropology and reflection about different visual (cultural) representations prevail (Österreichische Mediathek n.d.). Despite criticizing Powdermaker for “*a fairly unproblematic understanding of mass media as a tool of and for manipulation*” (Gray 2010: 99), Gray acknowledges that she already understood Hollywood as an industry **and** an art form that belongs to and takes place within a society. According to Gray, film can be considered as cultural product and a cultural practice as well as a popular and visual culture. Anthropology and cinema construct in multiple ways an understanding of the world where culture gives the frame and can be reflected upon with various anthropological theoretical frameworks – although Hollywood films are rarely examined this way:

“Film provides anthropology not only with a new venue in which to investigate the human condition, but is also an arena where so much of the unspoken (ideologies, taste and distinction, and other forms of embedded culture) come out on display, especially in terms of the cultureproducing class. For film, anthropology offers new insights into arenas that film has often either overlooked or dealt with poorly: the way real people engage with the cinema and its unspoken ideological content; or the cultural embeddedness of those traits that marks French films as French or Nigerian films as Nigerian” (Gray 2010: xvi-xvii).

The golden era of fiction film between the late 1920s and early 1930s already had all the cinema key elements like genres, studios and stardom as global phenomenon (Gray 2010: 15). Subsequently, different styles or “cinemas” developed, for example the American Hollywood style, the French new wave filmmakers or the British social realist films in the form of kitchen sink dramas (Gray 2010: 24-26). Gray (2010: 99) stresses that in context of a film’s production norms and values are culturally embedded and captured:

“An approach to cinema that takes seriously the local constructions of meaning, power, and politics (context) *as well as* the actual content of the films being studied, for their analytical value (cultural embeddedness) and for their dialogue with the audience. It is particularly in regards to providing new and useful ways to address some of these issues that anthropology has so much to offer to the study of the cinema” (Gray 2010: 106, emphasis original).

Early Hollywood's cinematography for the international audience(s) bases its productions on Orientalized and stereotyped representations of China. In his work *China and the Chinese in Popular Film – From Fu Manchu to Charlie Chan*, Jeffrey Richards (2017) scrutinizes the depiction of China and Chinese people in Hollywood respectively the US-American TV-landscape as described by the works of Sax Rohmer, the Fu Manchu series, as well as the “*oriental detectives*” like Charlie Chan, James Lee Wong and Mr. Moto (Richards 2017: 196), with “Western” actors playing “Asian” characters. Richards provides an historical overview of the Chinese encounter with the West where admiration of a peaceful civilization and allegations about crimes, drug using and gambling alternate – culminating in the Boxer Rebellion and the siege of the foreign legations in Beijing in 1900. In the United Kingdom and in the USA, stereotypes started to penetrate the fiction, helped by the sensational press, with Chinese clustered settlements, the Chinatowns, at and as the centers of crimes and drug addiction. Between the world wars, public opinion changed through the modern and cosmopolitan appearance of the Chinese First Lady, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, and the novels of Pearl S. Buck, the daughter of an American Missionary who grew up in China. After the Second World War and during the Cold War, China under Mao Zedong became the global villain, the yellow peril, feared by the Western world (Richards 2017: 1-11).

Movies and films from China were among the first ones to be analysed by anthropologists. In the 1950s and 1960s, as mainland China was closed to the outside world, while reforms and the Cultural Revolution were demanding the lives of millions of people and the superpowers were entangled in the Cold War, the USA wanted to know more about China. The anthropologist John Weakland (1966) analysed Chinese films for the questionable purpose of “know your enemy”: his research of films from communist China was distributed to military research facilities and wanted to explain elements of Chinese culture, to understand statements of Chinese political leaders and to predict their course of action. By working with Chinese movies, Weakland (1966) brought two ‘new’ approaches to film analysis: 1) films allow for comparison and contrast of verbal and visual behaviour and 2) he watched the films in the presence of “native-born” Chinese “informants” to study their reactions (see Sutton/Wogan 2009: 9). He focuses on the way propaganda is rooted in ‘real life’ because political themes are “*subtly embedded in larger cultural themes of the family, the position of women in society, the role of education, and the relationship of the individual to the group*” (Sutton/Wogan 2009: 10). Despite the – from today’s perspective –

questionable ethical concept of distributing his work to the military, his approach shows that the everyday life depicted in the films behind the propaganda provides useful information about the lives of “ordinary” people.

In the 1990s, Rey Chow (1995) scrutinizes the factors of visuality, sexuality and ethnography in her book *Primitive Passion* within the context of contemporary Chinese film that combines interdisciplinary approaches of film, literature or women’s studies at the intersection of a visual and literary portrayal of elite and popular culture. Under the aspect of emotional intensity triggered by films from the literary point of view, she sees film as text. This approach of textualization was also taken up by Sutton/Wogan (2009): “*The value of textualist approaches needs to be stressed because the proper relationship between anthropology, ethnography, and mass media remains a matter of contention*” (Sutton/Wogan 2009: 4). With the attempt to exoticize the familiar, the authors take their anthropological knowledge and skills to analyze films of their own (American) culture not as ethnographic media studies or ethnographic analysis of production and circulation but as textual readings of films. The authors (2009: 1-2) show the blurred lines between (cultural) anthropology and ethnography and state that textualism should be considered as a field on its own within the anthropology of media.

Cinema’s spell on its onlookers, the “*skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure*” (Mulvey 1999: 835), is also achieved by the spectator’s separation from the occurrences on the screen, which implicates a division between the subject in the audience and the displayed object in the film and emphasizes the interconnection with this object through allurements as Laura Mulvey (1999) in connection to her analysis of scopophilia and the male gaze states.

Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of the huge variety of martial arts films available. The (subjective) selection process was supported by the viewers represented in the internet and does not include martial arts films from other Asian countries like Japan or Thailand. Spectatorship is conducted by a broad mass of fans – the voices of the “anonymous” audience(s), expressing their opinion in cyberspace in film reviews, ranking lists, film reviewing platforms and film databases as online resources: Rotten Tomatoes (n.d.), The Guardian Film Blog (2013), Screenrant (Brandt 2016, Crump 2014) as well as Eric-Scissorhands (2011) and evolve-mma (n.d.). These sources were used

as foundation to cope with the huge range of martial arts movies and included as main selection criteria violence, popularity, performance of actors and actresses as well as famous directors. Among the “best and most violent” fighting scenes (selected by actors) are for example Bruce Lee against Chuck Norris in “*The Way of the Dragon*” (1972, dir. Bruce Lee), Jet Li against Donnie Yen in “*Once Upon a Time in China II*” (1992, dir. Hark Tsui), Jackie Chan against Ken Lo in “*Drunken Master II*” (1994, dir. Lau Kar-Leung) or Donnie Yen against Louis Fan in “*Ip Man*” (2008, dir. Wilson Yip), (evolve-mma n.d.). Although this selection introduces only the most famous male martial arts actors, the question of gender (see Chen 2012; Brownell/Wasserstrom 2002) will also be given marginal consideration.

Fighting scenes were analyzed by using the method of textualization of film plots and stories (see Chow 1995, Sutton/Wogan 2009). Important factors, besides aesthetic criteria of the fighting scene, to evaluate and assess violence were opponents, reasons to fight, techniques and weapons as well as by what means the characters win. Predominantly, 20 films from the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong were analysed:

1. *A Touch of Zen* (1971, dir. King Hu)
2. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, dir. Lee Ang)
3. *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006, dir. Zhang Yimou)
4. *Drunken Master II* (1994, dir. Lau Kar-Leung)
5. *Enter the Dragon* (1973, dir. Robert Clouse; starring Bruce Lee)
6. *Fearless* (2006, director’s cut, dir. Ronny Yu; starring Jet Li)
7. *Hero* (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou; starring Jet Li)
8. *House of Flying Daggers* (2004, dir. Zhang Yimou)
9. *Ip Man* (2008, dir. Wilson Yip, starring Donnie Yen)
10. *Once Upon a Time in China II* (1992, dir. Tsui Hark, starring Jet Li)
11. *Police Story* series (starting 1985; dir. Jackie Chan, starring Jackie Chan)
12. *Shadow* (2018, dir. Zhang Yimou)
13. *Tai Chi Master* (1993, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping, starring Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh)
14. *Tai Chi Zero* and *Tai Chi Hero* (both 2012, dir. Stephen Fung)
15. *The Way of the Dragon* (1972, dir. Bruce Lee)

contrasted by productions of “Western” directors

16. *Rush Hour* trilogy (1998/2001/2007, dir. Brett Ratner; starring Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker)
17. *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008, dir. Rob Minkoff; starring: Jackie Chan, Jet Li)
18. *The Karate Kid* (2010, dir. Harald Zwart; starring Jackie Chan, Jaden Smith)

and the recent most successful productions of the PR China

19. *Wolf Warrior* (2015, dir. Wu Jing)
20. *Wolf Warrior II* (2017, dir. Wu Jing).

To understand the context about the Chinese martial art style Taijiquan as popular culture in relation to sports and cinema, in the next chapter an overview of the theoretical approaches will be given.

3. Theoretical Framework: Popular Culture, Violence and the Body

The theoretical framework of popular culture (see Docker 1994) is dealing with topics that do not easily fit into the picture of “intellectual” pursuits of university circles. Emerging out of “common culture” through industrialization and urbanization, popular culture takes a shift to commercialisation and residual separation of classes as well as repressed radicalism (Storey 2008: 13). Popular culture, harmful and addictive, with cultural decline through advertising, in context of and as answer to capitalist development and enlightenment, where capitalist societies suppressed and influenced the culture of the masses and a separation in high and low culture took place, builds the framework, where violence is a significant factor. Popular culture consists of “... *cultural practices that are typical of subordinate allegiances*” (Fiske 2010: 38). The notion of culture, like *yin* - 阴 and *yang* - 杨 in the black-and-white Taiji diagram

“..., is constantly in a process of becoming, of emerging out of the dynamism of popular culture and everyday life whereby people make and remake connections between the local and the national, between the national and the global, between the everyday and the extraordinary” (Edensor 2002: vii).

In the pioneering and fruitful debate about mass culture between Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, Benjamin considered resistance as powerful instrument that influenced the art world (see Benjamin 1979; Eiland/Jennings 2014), while Adorno – together with Horkheimer considered its political and economic influence that leads to uniformity and equalization. Adorno/Horkheimer (1944), representatives of The Frankfurt School, shaped the term “cultural industry” within popular culture that creates products and processes of mass culture through homogeneity and predictability maintaining social authority. Hall/Whannel’s ([1964] 2018) work *The Popular Arts* considers popular culture as a fight between the quality of culture within modern forms of communication – the “good” against the “inferior” within media (Storey 2008: 51). The viewpoint that working classes are

culturally uneducated and resistant is challenged by Stuart Hall (2016) who represents British cultural studies, and he emphasises the different means of cultural struggle through factors of connection and separation between the dominant and dominated classes.

John Storey (2008) concludes that popular culture is “a ‘mass culture’” (Storey 2008: 8), “widely favoured or well liked by many people” (Storey 2008: 5), a “left over... residual category ... [of] inferior culture”(Storey 2008: 6), “that originates from ‘the people’” (Storey 2008: 9), fitting in Gramsci’s (1971) “concept of hegemony. ... to refer to the way in which dominant groups in society, through a process of ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (...), seek to win the consent of subordinate groups in society” (Storey 2008: 10, emphasis added), “informed ... around the debate on postmodernism” and “is definitely a culture that only emerged following industrialization and urbanization” (Storey 2008: 12). Storey states that in general

“[p]opular culture is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic – that is, as an attempt to understand a process or practice – it is also political, to examine **the power relations** that constitute this form of everyday life...” (Storey 2008: 12, emphasis added).

Popular culture in everyday life (see de Certeau 1984) depends on the creative ways of resource usage by the lower, weaker, more vulnerable social strata without succumbing to the power, “best described through metaphors of struggle or antagonism: strategies opposed by tactics, the bourgeoisie by the proletariat; hegemony met by resistance, ideology countered or evaded; top-down power opposed by bottom-up power, social discipline faced with disorder” (Fiske 2010: 38-39).

Within this context, Tim Edensor (2002) explores the narrow, but dynamic, contested, diverse and fluid separation as well as the “the dense spatial, material, performative, embodied and representative expressions and experiences of national identity” (Edensor 2002: vii) between popular culture and everyday life under the aspects of history and political economy. He analyses also the often unreflected modes of performance from invented traditions and large formal national events as in the case of sports.

In his considerations about popular culture, John Fiske ([1989] 2010) states that popular culture is an act of subordination and a reaction to dominant culture. It cannot be part of

the dominant culture and their members cannot take part in popular culture – if they do, they have to seek other alliances outside the circle of dominant culture (Fiske 2010: 35; 37). During urbanization and industrialization, pleasures of the body were considered as menace to the norms of the society and were concealed to be appropriate and decent (see Docker 1994: 162). Fiske argues that today's culture is violent, and he sees the causes more in social than in psychological reasons. He states that mass media provides violence for the lowest human instinct, but not all violent media are popular, and they show tightly organized violence. While social violence is not popular, represented violence is and it allows the identification in societies with uneven distribution of power and resources. On TV, violence represents society's conflicts and the heroic figures epitomise endemic values (Fiske 2010: 106), a topic that was already discussed by Hall/Whannel in 1964 in their analysis of popular art.

Kevin Latham (2007) links martial arts with cinema through the interwoven terms of "*participation and spectatorship*", expressed by taking part in as well as the mediated watching of martial arts films – mostly originating from Hong Kong – as important fact of Chinese popular culture after the year 2000 (Latham 2007: 265). Fiske (2010: 39) understands pleasure as main motivator triggered by eschewing social regulations of power wielding authorities. The issue of violence depicted in films and *Why We Watch* is examined by Goldstein (1998) who questions not the production or the effects of watching or "consuming" violence on the human beings but scrutinizes the reception of the consumer and poses the question why violent imagery is so appealing. Goldstein points out that the representation of violence is pervasive and expected in media and in sports – where interpersonal violence not only seems to be appropriate but violence is even the main attraction (see Guttman 1998), while on TV broadcasts violence is simulated and cannot be considered as an "*action intended to harm*" (Goldstein 1998: 2).

The fascination about watching martial arts films, commonly called kung fu films (a notion that will be further defined in Chapter 6.1), can be explained since "*[v]iolent entertainment seems to be most attractive when it contains an engaging fantasy theme in which disliked characters are defeated by liked characters in the cause of justice*" (Goldstein 1998: 4). The fact that the hero or heroine (a morally good person of integrity considered to be righteous, honest, virtuous, upright, blameless, brave and law-abiding) defends a weaker one against unfair treatment and the shown violence of beating, physically harming and

even killing that occurs is ethically justified by the viewer, creates a feeling of “the bully deserves it”, while comfortably sitting in front of the screen. Hunt (2003: 2) applies the term “body genre” (see Dyer 1985; Williams 1991) that evokes a physical reaction in the onlooker like horror, pornography, melodrama or comedy to martial arts films and argues that “*Kung fu is a genre of bodies; extraordinary, expressive, spectacular, sometimes even grotesque bodies*” (Hunt 2003: 2, emphasis original).

Class or social clashes cause the popularity of physical violence where the subordinate group uses violence to assert their rights and interests (Fiske 2010: 108). Despite the fact that violent behaviour is to a great extent enacted: “*Additionally, a great deal of human fighting among those peoples considered to be exceptionally ‘prone’ to violence often turns out to be staged, dramaturgical, and mock aggression, a kind of ‘locking horns’ that inflicts relatively little damage*” (Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois 2004: 15). A point of view that is substantiated by Avron Boretz’ (2011) study among the margins of society in mainland China and Taiwan practicing martial arts.

Therefore, Fiske (2010: 107) states, violence is not within the individual person but has its origin in society itself. As representation of social power relations, the subordinate groups can see their surrogates on TV fighting against authorities. Violence also represents masculine popular cultures as a cultural resource of resistance for the (economical) weak to vent their discomfort within the class, race, and gender barriers for (symbolically) masculinity (Fiske 2010: 108):

“In popular culture, the axes of power may support, contradict, or compensate for each other. So class subordination may coexist with gender domination, a sense of racial superiority with class inferiority, or racial subjugation with sexual chauvinism. Power is experienced and exercised, both socially and discursively, in relatively discrete domains” (Fiske 2010: 108).

The combination of masculinity, hegemony and structural violence (see Crawshaw et al. 2010) leads in the social, cultural, and political sectors to the systematically and institutionalized domination through economic and patriarchal structures. The structures of violence in popular culture function as a metaphor for power relations in a society therefore “[t]his popular involvement with the art form is reproduced in the involvement of the popular art form with everyday life” (Fiske 2010: 110). For Fiske, popular culture is connected to politics within the notion of power play and social subordination, but he warns

to victimize the disadvantaged of this system for overlooking their tricks against the system and their part of insistent resistance against these agencies of domination through everyday practices. Their way of defeating the system in their everyday lives often operates under the radar of social and cultural sciences (Fiske 2010: 127-128).

3.1 Popular Culture and Performance Studies Interface

For the theoretical approach located between popular culture and performance studies, the point of intersection places discourses of everyday life in sports and cinema through globalization as designed assemblage in the focus. Edensor (2002), representing British cultural studies, examines performances within the dynamic context of popular culture, whereas performance studies – founded and framed by Victor Turner (1986) and further developed with Richard Schechner – uses theater studies and anthropology as theoretical approach. In his concept of anthropology and performance, Turner considers cultural patterns as processes performance studies that *“is an academic discipline designed to answer the need to deal with the changing circumstances of the “glocal” – the powerful combination of the local and the global”* (Schechner 2013: 25). Lewis’ (2013) ideas about special events and everyday life associate culture with concepts like embodiment, process or performance. While performances are *“ordinary routines with traces of extraordinary experience”* (Lewis 2013: 6), special events are set apart from ordinary daily routines of everyday life and can be frequent or rare, planned or spontaneous, elaborated or informal as well as explicit (with names, rules, codes and prescriptions) or implicit (emerging practices or attitudes). In this context, Lewis regards the international sports event of the Olympic Games as public events that have also a private claim and a hierarchic approach. According to Richard Schechner (2013), the whole spectrum of framed, highlighted or displayed action from theatre, sports, and everyday life performances to media and the internet is a performance. Performativity builds a common ground to perform self-awareness and make event sequences subject of discussion. Grimes (2014: 231-232) talks about *“designed assemblages”* and considers these performances as the product of its smallest units to build cultural and scholarly constructions as skillful works of choreographies of unrelated fragments.

These entangled cultural discourses of everyday life, place sports as well as cinema at the intersection between the theoretical approaches of popular culture and performance studies,

but in this paper the emphasis will mainly be put on popular culture.

3.2 Violence Represented in Social and Cultural Anthropology

In their anthology *Violence in War and Peace*, Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois (2004) examine intellectual trajectories of different approaches about violence, since “[v]iolence is a slippery concept – nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive. It is mimetic, like imitative magic or homeopathy” (Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois 2004: 1, emphasis original). They point out that violence and the rejection of violence is a *conditio humana*. Within the difficult to grasp or categorize, individually designed and versatile concept of violence some violent factors trigger the emergence of other forms of violence in “*chains, spirals, and mirrors of violence – or, as we prefer – a continuum of violence*” (Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois 2004: 1), a definition for all kinds of social exclusion and marginalization as well as an objectifying of violent behavior against others.

The approaches to study violence are versatile: within the framework of *structural* violence, Fanon (1963), describes the dehumanizing impacts and violent effects of colonialism, while Arendt (1963), demonstrates that scrupulous performance of duties and a complete lack of moral responsibility allows the evil to look banal with the state playing the role as violent agent. The term *symbolic* violence shaped by Bourdieu (1977) to describe power differences between social groups, whereas the *bio-power* concept of Foucault (1998) investigates the technology of power to control populations – to have power over bodies – through disciplining institutions, where power is encoded into human behavior and social practices. In social and cultural anthropology, the notion of violence has a comprehensive history, but was addressed quite late as a topic, from the unidimensional perception of violence, to considering economic and political influences and the post-modern era with a wider spectrum of theories on violence (see Accomazzo 2012).

One of the earlier works engaging with the topic in depth is *The Anthropology of Violence*, edited by David Riches (1986). In the introduction, he looks into the witnessing, performing perspective, the dynamics and potency of violence as well as the effects of alcohol on violence. Riches (1986) takes the phenomenological perspective within the triangle of perpetrator, victim and witness as well as their assessment of the circumstances into consideration and defines violence as a fundamental behaviour pattern. Besides structural

and symbolic violence that is further differentiated by Stewart/Strathern (2002) between *functional* violence within the reciprocity of law and order and *symbolic* violence within the cultural meanings of subjective experiences, this notion is categorized by Schmidt/Schroeder (2001) in *operational* violence, for considering objective and political causes, *cognitive* violence, on cultural constructions, and *experimental* violence through subjective perceptions. Veena Das (2007) attempts to create an ethnography of violence to give gender specific violence a language of pain. In recent years, a shift from structural and symbolic to historical and social concepts occurs and are “replaced by attention to the everyday experience of violence, while central concepts such as state, power, ritual, mobilization, and resistance made way for terror, trauma, suffering, subjectivity, and resilience” (Robben 2016: 1), in turn challenged by new technologies that require not practice but mediation approaches to study violence.

In summary, anthropological approaches to the notion of violence concentrate on violent acts within their cultural concepts, their social role, their different cultural connections, their specific reasons, causes and roots. The concept of violence, enforced “horizontal” or “vertical”, from “below” or “above”, can be categorized into structural, symbolic and physical, collective or individual, as well as gender-specific or individual violence with subjective design or collective violence as result of a violent social act and it is now challenged by upcoming new technologies. Although social and cultural anthropology deals with a large variety of forms of violence, as seen above, this paper will predominantly focus on physical violence in connection with martial arts.

3.3 Violence and Marital Arts

“Chinese martial arts thinking never entirely spiritualizes combat arts. They remain effective instruments of violence” (Allen 2014: 252).

In the context of martial arts, it is necessary to examine the existing types and classification of violence. As a network of organizations including the WHO, the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) defines violence with regard to physical, sexual and psychological forms that can be self-directed, interpersonal or collective as “*the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation*” (Violence Prevention Alliance n.d.).

Already in 1969, in the sociological model of the typology of violence, Galtung (1969: 173) classifies violence as intended or not intended, as manifest or latent, as physical or psychological personal (direct) or structural (indirect) violence that can be enforced with or without weapons (see Appendix, Figure 2). His model describes a triangular relationship between cultural, structural and personal violence, where structural violence is imposed by social structures between individuals and collective groups where violence is part as personal as well as structural violence. Cultural violence is expressed by ideological ideas that legitimize violence in order to maintain the ideology (see Galtung 1990). The conception of structural violence, as defined by Galtung (1969), is executed by an unjust and exploiting system in political, economic or social ways that causes psychological and physical harm and can not only be applied by individuals but also by unseen structures that hinder people's potentials. Personal somatic violence can focus on the physiology by denying basic human needs or on the anatomy, where “*crushing*” as in fist fights and “*piercing*” with knives and spears (Galtung 1969: 174; see Appendix, Figure 3) can be applied to martial arts. The preoccupation with the topic of physical violence causes a balancing act between taking action against violence and following a curious desire:

“Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning” (Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois 2004: 1).

In *Striking Beauty. A philosophical look at the Asian marital arts*, Barry Allen points out that through artful represented violence in cinema, the personal experience becomes unhinged from reality (Allen 2015: 168-173). Allen scrutinizes also the connection between “real” fight and the representation of fighting in Cinema. He states that martial arts work as a response, an interactive way to fight against uninvited aggression not a military strategic form of war (Allen 2015: 13). The knowledge of fighting directs violence by righteousness, in a twisted logic that culture commands the violence of martial arts in a fight for culture (Allen 2015: 49). Even the practicing of martial arts as a non-contractual and non-playful violence is dangerous and follows a strict rule of etiquette within the training grounds (Allen 2015: 102-103). Allen stresses that “[v]iolence is body on body, with or without a weapon, but with arrogant disregard for the other's will, with the intent of destroying that will, either temporarily or permanently” (Allen 2015: 161). Therefore, in contrast to the objective form (like hate speech), cruelty (to make someone suffer by

manipulation) or symbolic violence forms, the subjective form of violence, the physical assault, is paramount when dealing with Chinese martial arts.

Unlike violence staged in films, real violence, as analysed by Rory Miller (2008), is feared by people and easier executed by distance. It establishes dominance in status violence and through sudden attacks as predatory violence. Through artful represented violence in cinema, the personal experience becomes unhinged from reality (Allen 2015: 168-173). *“What these films typically depict, therefore, is not marital arts but a kind of performance art with a genealogical relationship to martial arts. This performance art is its own creature, organized by principles alien to those of the martial arts it supposedly imitates”* (Allen 2015: 174), whereas a real fight is quick, brutal and fast with little drama, the cinematic fight, carefully staged, stretches the duration. The emphasis on the use of physical forms of violence require a closer examination of the human body within the context of martial art.

3.4 Violence and the Body

Taijiquan, as a form of *wushu* – the Chinese martial arts, is considered a body-centered art, the trained body of the practitioner against the body of the opponent. In martial arts violence is practiced *“body on body”* (Allen 2015: 161), therefore it is necessary to examine the concept of body.

The body as performing agent learns or “embodies” violence in countless iterative acts how to enforce violence and how to react to violence, because *“... the pugilist's body is at once the tool of his work—an offensive weapon and defensive shield—and the target of his opponent”* (Wacquant 2004: 127, emphasis original). The body is a much-examined and controversial topic in the scholarship of social sciences since the reflections of Descartes and the dualism of body and mind that brought a division in a (material) body and a mind that controls or masters the body. In Durkheim’s ([1912] 2008) point of view, the body is divided in a physical and a higher valued socialised body, while Mauss ([1935] 1968) sees the body as a natural and basic tool in human society. According to him, every bodily expression like walking or laughing is an acquired skill in a motoric and linguistic sense and part of a cultural body technique. Mauss introduces the term “habitus” that is later picked up by Bourdieu (1977). With Csordas’ work *Paradigm of Embodiment* (1990), a

body is not considered an object but a subject of culture with its main function of “making” culture, where the body is not only the result of culture, but also the result of objectifying that begins inside the body and manifests it through the body. This process of embodiment as methodological paradigm is based on the ideas of Merleau-Ponty (1945) who applies the notion of embodiment for the bodily aspects of human subjectivity. He uses the German word *Leib* in his work to describe not the material body but the embodied self (*leibliches Selbst*) that is able to perceive, act, think and feel as “self” in the social world. The concept of embodiment uses the *Leib* as embodied experiencing body (Platz 2006: 9-10). Plessner ([1941] 1970: 43) as well as Rees (2017) reflect upon the dilemma of “having” a body and “being” a body³ (see Kastner 2014).

In Chinese language exists the word *shen* - 身, the animate body and *ti* - 体, the unanimated body as well as *shi* - 尸, the dead body. The phrase 锻炼身体 - “duanlian shenti, ‘train the body’, combines the two kinds of body, implying that one simultaneously trains the body-person and the flesh-body” (Brownell 1995: 17, emphasis original). In imperial China, physical training combined moral character and life force; it linked self-cultivation as well as life-cultivation for example in Daoist exercises for immortality: “In the course of its march into modernity, and under Western influence, China has moved away from the Taoist ‘way of life-cultivation’ (yang sheng zhi dao⁴) and toward ‘physical education’ (tiyu⁵)” (Brownell 1995: 17, emphasis original).

According to the *The Illustrated Canon of Chen Family Taijiquan* (Chen 2007), the founding family of Taijiquan, the concept of the human body consists of outer appearances and inner factors. Its constituent parts are body, mind/heart, consciousness, volition or willpower, perseverance and constancy, coherence and tracing, management, intrinsic energy as well as feelings and sensitivity, beauty, spiritual power and the transformation of physical strength into spiritual power (Chen 2007: 191-208). In Taijiquan, the body is seen as a tool in combat that can be trained to apply the movements correctly. Chen for example states: “Theoretically, it is the body that directs the play of the hands. As for the hand movements, they play as the body moves” (Chen 2007: 191, emphasis original). The

³ „Ein Mensch ist immer zugleich Leib... und hat diesen Leib als diesen Körper“ (Plessner [1941] 1970: 43, emphasis original).

⁴ 养生知道

⁵ 体育

considerations about the “body” in Taijiquan is also linked to traditional Chinese medicine to find the opponent’s physical weaknesses during combat and to keep the own body, as a living entity, in good “working condition”. However, as Gore et al. (2014: 129) state, “... *embodied cognition in anthropology has remained largely underexploited*”.

Li Deyin uses the *Song of the 13 Methods* by the Qing scholar and Taiji master Wu Yuxiang (1812-1880), a disciple of Yang Luchan and the founder of Wu (Hao) style, as theoretical foundation for his Taijiquan teachings. Wu Yuxiang “*points out that the mind and qi⁶ are inner and primary, the body is outer and secondary*” (Li 2009: 40) and he uses military analogies for the different parts of the body mentioned in the Taiji classic: the mind as commander, the life energy as the flag, the vitality as general and the body to executes the commands. Body and mind take the strength from the waist, from the point *mingmen* - 命門 at the lumbar zone (Li 2009: 40). In one of the Taiji classics, the *Treaties on Boxing* by Wu Chengqing, the elder brother of Wu Yuxiang, the paradox between practice and knowledge already occurs without giving a logical explanation of the phenomenon, as Wile (1996) demonstrates:

“[t]he knowledge of the mind (*hsin-chih*) must be prior to the knowledge of the body (*shen-chih*)⁷, but the body’s knowledge is superior to the mind’s. Since the knowledge of the mind cannot be transmitted orally (mind to mind), but is the fruit of “enlightenment” (*hsin-wu*), we must ask if it arises spontaneously or is the culmination of practice (experience)” (Wile 1996: 42).

A similar concept is pursued by Bourdieu (1990a) who sees sports as well as dance as a means to express practice together with theory in unity with language and the body. The teaching of this choreography is difficult to theorize, because most of the processes take place subconsciously. Influenced by the French sociologists Mauss ([1935] 1968) and Bourdieu (1977; 1990a/b), Wacquant (2004: 60) sees boxing as a “*temporally structured and kinetically remodeled [body] according to the specific demands of the field.*” Bourdieu (1977) considers the change of the savage body into a habituated one through pedagogical acts that stands in contrast to Wacquant’s (2004) experience of socially regulated use of violence among African-American boxers in the ring and on the streets of Chicago. While Wacquant (2004: 59) points out that the capital of a successful boxer at the end of his career

⁶ qi - 气 can be translated as “vital life energy”

⁷ knowledge of the mind (= 心知, xin zhi); knowledge of the body (= 身知, shen zhi)

is embodied and without value anywhere else, Taiji masters try to teach their knowledge and keep it for future generations in written form, as books of the founders, the founding families (see Chen 2007) and of their disciples (see Cheng 1981, 1985; Chen [1928]/2000; Fu [1963] 1999; Li/Du 1995; Li 2009) show. In their investigation about knowledge transfer, transmittance and transformation within martial arts with the concept the body lineage, Brown/Jennings (2011) conclude that practitioners through the embodiment of techniques during their lifelong training of a “body art form” create new physical capital (see Channon/Jennings 2014: 775). Adam Frank (2006) who did his research on Taijiquan and identity in Shanghai, broke with the tradition of just following one Taiji master. He used techniques based on the works of Abrahams (1993) and considered Taijiquan practitioners as

“folklorists who use their bodies as recoding media, rather than relying on tape recorders or video cameras, and, perhaps more importantly for my purposes here, folklorists who have inherited, lived, and passed on contending sensual histories of the art, of China, and of the city of Shanghai” (Frank 2006: 27).

As in narratives, where every word is exactly repeated as before in numerous iterative acts with no or almost no changes for generations, in Taiji the sequence movements are repeated and embodied also in innumerable iterative acts that are called *gongfu* (功夫). This notion transcribed with the Wade-Giles transliteration as “kung fu” is closely connected to the fighting style of Bruce Lee represented in Hong Kong films (see Chapter 6.2.1). It got a whole new range of value and meaning outside the PRC and is nowadays mostly connected to the fighting style of the Shaolin monks. Within mainland China the concept of *gongfu* represents the “work” invested in iterative acts to embody knowledge. Through these repetitive acts, movements are imitated exactly the way a Taiji master practices and teaches them and each Taiji master only makes small personal alterations to mark his/her own personal style.

Dancing is often mentioned in connection with body technique (e.g. Mauss ([1935] 1968: 82; Bernstein 2009) and it can be compared with Taijiquan. The correlation between dance and martial arts films is made by the kinesthetic understanding of violence as Anderson (2001) states and was already saved on film in 1948 by Maya Deren in *Meditation on Violence* (1948, dir. Maya Deren; ytv: The Third Eye / MOV MayDer 2012; see Teo 2016:

11; 95). To regard Taijiquan as popular culture, it is necessary to examine the entanglement of the socio-historical with the philosophical and political background.

4. Violence and Art of Taijiquan

Outside the ancient walls of the public park, in the corner, almost unnoticed, an old man – dressed in a faded grey martial arts outfit and a grey cotton hat – practices his martial arts with the skill, flexibility and elegance of a young man. Concentrated, serious and silent, oblivious to the hustle and bustle of a busy early Beijing morning, he follows his routine. Behind him, leaned against the wall, a long bamboo staff and a metal sabre give a glimpse into his lone practice programme ahead that he dutifully fulfils every day out in the open during the park season from March to October.

Inside the park in a corner, a loudspeaker box is blaring the official music for the 24-Step Taiji form – trying to be louder than those of the neighbouring dancing groups. The piercingly sharp voice of the woman on the tape is announcing the names of the next movements for about fifteen middle aged elderly men and women who are trying to imitate the graceful moves of their female Taiji master – herself not so young anymore. In bags hanging from the trees like birdcages, telescope-swords and Taiji fans are waiting their turn to equip the martial artists with the fitting weapons for the upcoming forms: 32-Step Taiji Sword and the newer, very popular Taiji Gongfu Fan form. Bottles of cold green tea are standing on the sideline and will be gone by 8.30 a.m. latest – as well as the practitioners.

Near the park gate by the bus stop, some street vendors start their busy, nerve-racking day on the run from the arm of the law by offering their clandestine merchandise: pirated copies of the latest (inter-)national blockbusters or DVDs of movies that were secretly filmed from the big screens of new shiny theatre halls that find their way to the interested consumer who looks for a good bargain or cannot afford a ticket to enter the expensive cinema chains in the glittering and promising shopping malls.

Like the Taiji diagram symbolized by the black and white *yin* and *yang* symbol, the practiced popular forms of this body-centered art are outside and inside the common urban spaces: practiced by farmers and scholars, changed over centuries from violent to peaceful, moving between old and new. Where the silent, lone, grey traditional form of transcribed secret knowledge from master to disciple almost lost in a small corner outside intermingles with the loud, colorful simplified forms of the masses informed by instructional videos on the internet dominating their corner inside before spreading worldwide, going from local to global, and claiming their (inter-)national space as popular culture in gyms and movie halls.

4.1 Taijiquan Anchored in Popular Culture

“Even though *Taiji* boxing is considered a microcosm of the Absolute Way, one must remember that in the small you can notice the great” (Chen 2007: 191, emphasis original).

According to legend, a Daoist monk and immortal by the name of Zhang Sanfeng - 张三丰 who lived in the Wudang mountains - 武当山, Hubei Province, further developed the Shaolin fighting style by observing fights between snakes and sparrows in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). The skills of Taiji, a soft, inner style (内工) were revealed to him in a dream (Wile 1996: 16; 26; Li 2009: 26; Lo et al. 1979: 9). *The Illustrated Canon of Chen Family Taijiquan* published in 2007 claims to be “universally acknowledged by the Taoist community and Taiji practitioners as the seminal sourcebook of Taiji philosophy and techniques” (Chen 2007: v) and shows the contested correlation between a combat technique and Daoism in various diagrams where the first glimpse does not expose the deeper meaning for the “uninitiated” ordinary practitioner. In Daoist philosophy, Taiji as a cosmological term, consists of *tai* - 太 meaning the highest or supreme, the highest heaven or supreme ruler and *ji* - 极, the last or the ultimate, a state of oneness and infinite potentiality arising of *wuji* - 无极, the “without ultimate” where the concept of *yin* - 阴 and *yang* - 阳 originates, expressed in the Taiji diagram - 太极图 (Cheng 1981: xx, see Appendix Figure 4; Davis 2004: 58, 62; see Appendix, Figure 5). The concept is rooted in *The Book of Changes*, the *Yi Jing* - 易经, about 3000 years ago “in reference of the origin of all changes, the highest realm of existence” (Li 2009: 29). The fist, *quan* - 拳, was later added to the underlying theory system to name the unarmed method of combat *Taijiquan* - 太极拳. Before this technique was known as under different names like long fist, soft fist or adhering fist as well as the *13 Methods* symbolizing the eight basic hand techniques and the five basic stances (Li 2009: 30). These *13 Postures*, as another source states Taijiquan was called, “were associated with the alternations of *bagua* [eight trigrams] and *wuxing* [five elements]” (Li/Du 1995: 97, brackets original).

After analyzing and translating four collections of nineteenth-century manuscripts on Taijiquan, discovered in the 1990s, Douglas Wile (1996) sees the entanglement of martial arts with medical and military knowledge, the Chinese Classic *Book of Change* and Daoism within Taijiquan. These skills are centred on the body that built the base for independence and national identity as an achievement of Qing Dynasty (Wile 1996: 15-16). His considerations conclude the colonial invasion of China during the Opium Wars, the Taiping

Rebellion and the downfall of the last Dynasty as well as the role of the elite circle of imperial intellectuals. According to Wile, the combination of fighting techniques practiced by the local farmers in connection with scholars and intellectuals who fought against colonial rule brought forward the blending of Taijiquan martial art technique with Daoism, as martial art philosophy, in order to have a means to critique the prevailing conditions of the ruling Manchu Dynasty as well as the British invaders (Wile 1996: 25-26; see Lu 2018). Sharing Wile's view, Barry Allen (2014) argues that Daoism and martial arts only came together in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty. According to his point of view not Daoist monks invented the combat style, but martial artists turned to Daoism to explain this practice as a result of "*ideological Sinification*" (Allen 2014: 261; Wile 1996: 30): "*The idea the Chinese communicated was the dual cultivation of the spiritual and the martial, each perfected in the other, with the proof of perfection being an **effortless mastery of the violence***" (Allen 2014: 251, emphasis added).

In her analysis, Davis (2004: 3-4) considers the declining strength of the Qing dynasty troubled by a corrupt and weak government struggling for power. China's impoverished countryside suffered not only from natural disasters and the spreading negative effects of opium addiction, but also from numerous upcoming bandits roaming the areas. Local people were forced to organize themselves for defence and included their knowledge of medicine and philosophy in this martial art. Travellers hired these practitioners for their fighting skills and expertise as security. Martial artists performed to entertain the audience at marketplaces and town fairs (see Li 2009: 17) and "*Chinese operas, whether performed in a big city theatre or in a local village square, were not complete without their intricately choreographed fight scenes – precursors to today's Chinese martial arts films*" (Davis 2004: 4). Farmers used the combat technique that was secretly practiced for resisting the exploitative norms of the state. The scholar's role in writing down and preserving the forms is ambivalent – their hegemony is executed when taking the farmer's fighting techniques to underlay it with ideology of Daoism – at the same time their writings express their hidden, disguised and discrete ways of subordination and resistance to critique the system they also belong to and are, in their role as civil servants, a significant part of. The religious aspects within Taijiquan in the context of violence and the entanglement with socio-historical processes need to be examined in the next paragraph.

4.1.1 Violent Monks, Rebels and Leisure Time Heroes

“... we may see t'ai-chi ch'üan as a form of ritual, a ritual whose function in the nineteenth century was to embed the practitioner in an inviolably Chinese community and Chinese-defined cosmos” (Wile 1996: 29).

The Shaolin fighting style, older than Taijiquan, is named after the fighting Buddhist monks of the Shaolin monastery *who developed martial arts for meditation and fighting*” (Jerryson 2013: 60; see Shahar 2008), since martial arts training prepares the mind and enables the teaching as well as the learning of Buddhist lessons (Allen 2015: 204). Nowadays, the Shaolin Monastery as synonym for kung fu technique is staged and exploited like a theme park with the monks as living exhibits whose fighting abilities are shown on worldwide tours. However, the origin of Chinese martial arts lies in India:

“According to legend, the Chinese martial arts were invented by Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk who traveled from India to China in the fifth century. Supposedly he carried an unwritten Buddhist teaching that had been passed from mind to mind in an unbroken lineage back to the Buddha himself. Arriving in China, he makes his way to the Shaolin Temple” (Allen 2013: 242).

The intertwining of Chinese Daoism with Indian Buddhism is seen by Nabil Ranné (2011: 52-53) as a mutual influence, but Daoism stresses longevity through bodywork and Buddhism accentuates the stage of nirvana, the freedom of mind through spiritual enlightenment (see Shahar 2008). As combat technique, Buddhist traditions use staff fighting, while Daoist traditions use hand fighting methods to cultivate the “self” (Allen 2015: 4; Shahar 2008). The phenomenon of fighting monks has a lengthy history in China even though it seems impossible to establish a connection between peaceful monks and violent fights: *“Buddhism and martial arts should be oil and water. Buddhist law forbids weapons and fighting for monks. Moreover, ahimsa, “nonviolence,” is one of the most important precepts in all Buddhist traditions”* (Allen 2015: 4). In *Buddhist Traditions and Violence*, Jerryson (2013) states that as peaceful depicted Buddhist monks are part in a long practice of violence – expressed in and through scripts, symbols and various actions like self-harm, war, punishment or torture in opposition to peace activism and reconciliation.

In connection with Taijiquan, Wile (1996) categorizes violence in the Qing Dynasty as vertical (along class or sectarian lines) and horizontal (disputes within the lineage or village). He links social occurrences in North China like the scarcity of marriageable women caused by polygyny and infanticide to the excess of unmarried men and the

emergence of a marginalized male group involved in criminal machinations of secret societies and in the development of martial arts (Wile 1996: 8-9). The lower classes, firm in martial arts, mixed with scholars who were willing to learn martial arts, took part in imperial examinations and these fighting scholars were able to write about the techniques and to equip it with a philosophical foundation (Wile 1996: 30) to express their protest against authority.

The emerging new social class of rebels, thieves, and wandering monks fighting against the corrupt state, known as *jianghu* - 江湖 and translated as “rivers and lakes”, surfaced and became also heroes of various novels (Ranné 2011: 97; 102, see Hamm 2004). Their attributed sense of honour is rooted in the historical narrative of China, since the historian Sima Qian describes chivalry and loyalty of the knight or *xia*-tradition in two chapters of his *Records of History* (104-91 BCE) that enhanced until the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Teo 2016: 17). The knights-errant organized in private armies with a great master on the top as a kind of shadow society in opposition to the state, a Utopian construction free of (state) authority (Teo 2016: 18).

Avron Boretz (2011) who worked multisited on the margins of Chinese societies to study ritual and violence in martial arts, stresses the close relations between religion and violence by highlighting the historical determined “*religiously inspired, directed, and/or justified collective violence*” (Boretz 2011: 8) triggered by divinations of sectarian religions or millenarian sects. He mentions as the examples the Yellow Turban rebellion in Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) that was influenced by Daoism, while Buddhism influenced the White Lotus sect in Ming and Qing Dynasty, or Christianity that influenced the Taiping rebellion (Boretz 2011: 8-9). These rebels acted as idols and role models in literature of popular culture, “[t]he heroes of the novels appealed to the Chinese imagination because they defeated modern weapons with traditional physical skills” (Liu 1967: 135 quoted in Brownell 1995: 52). Boretz (2011: 15-16) points out that nowadays communities of secret societies become archetypes and heroes of popular culture in narratives and martial arts films, while at the same time they consume these media products of collective fantasy:

“From classical vernacular novels like the *Water Margin* to the bestselling works of modern authors like Jin Yong and Gu Long to comic books, television serials, and the gangster and “kung-fu” genres of Hong Kong and Taiwan cinema, the violence and romance of the *jianghu* are among the most enduring and pervasive motifs in Chinese popular culture” (Boretz 2011: 33).

The classic Ming novel *The Water Margin – Outlaws of the Marsh* - 水浒传, forbidden during the Qing Dynasty, tells the story of 108 rebels in Song Dynasty who – like Robin Hood – fight the powerful and corrupt government of Shandong Province to give to the poor. This story in combination of religious ritual influenced Chinese martial arts up to the Boxer Rebellion in the year 1900 (Teo 2016: 20, 109; Ranné 2011: 163-164). “*A decade after the Eight Powers subdued the Boxer Rebellion, there was a revival of the martial arts, or ‘knight errant’ novel (wuxia xiaoshuo)*⁸” (Brownell 1995: 52) as a way to deal with history in popular culture.

Taijiquan as popular culture is coming from the everyday life experiences (see de Certeau 1984) of farmers, the people of lower social ranks, were hegemony in the form of corrupt governments met resistance through the appearance of the *jianghu*, the rebel groups whose organized societies provided social compensation for the poor.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Four Olds (四旧) – old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas – were fought against, culminating in an enormous loss of lives and cultural values (see Dikötter 2017). After the militaristic demands of (communist) body culture in the Mao era, another transformation toward the new consumer culture followed Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms (Brownell 1995: 21-22). This economic and political opening also changed the leisure time that experienced an invasion of privacy during Cultural Revolution by regulating the amount, the forms, and the content of people’s time off (Wang 1995: 152). Gradually and slowly people conquered their private space and spare time back. Reading – and therefore the book and newspaper industry (as well as illegal publications) account for an important sector of leisure time. In the 1980s the trend for detective stories was followed by traditional and modern knight-errant fiction and the market has to satisfy the fashion tastes going from “*supernatural martial arts, romance, fashion, violence, crime, intrigue, and, above all, sex*” (Wang 1995: 171; see Zha 1995). In the beginning of the last century, the stories of knights-errant, printed in series in Shanghai newspapers, influenced first the Beijing Opera and later the scripts of films. When *Dingjun Mountain* - 定军山 (1905, dir. Ren Jingfeng), the first (silent) film entirely shot by Chinese artists, was made, it already revealed the close relation between the two genres of opera and martial arts in popular Chinese culture (Teo 2016: 24). Besides the old, classic *wuxia*

⁸ 武侠小说

(knight-errant) novels, writers like Louis Cha, famous under the pen-name Jin Yong (see Zha 1995: 168-170, Hamm 2004; Huss/Liu 2007) or Wang Dulu (1909-1977), known as the author of the underlying story for the box office success *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000; dir. Lee Ang), create the new *wuxia* novel genre (Teo 2016: 23).

With the change of political strategies of the nation-state and the upcoming urbanization, the private place of leisure time was once again opened to personal decision, where the identification with a written hero who is fighting social order brought the pleasure of latent resistance to the reading consumer. Another leisure time activity that was forbidden during the chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution, Taijiquan, slowly reconquered the parks and the way how the practitioners interface violence will be outlined in the next chapter.

5. Participation in Violence

“In English, the term *sport* first occurs in 1863 in the narrow sense of an athletic activity regulated by rules” (Besnier et al. 2018: 3, emphasis original).

The narrative of modern Chinese history states that Taijiquan was already practiced along the Yellow River in Henan Province at the end of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It was taught secretly only to its own family members (see Chen 2007) and the most influential masters were Chen Wangting and Jiang Fa. Both masters used the martial arts techniques of ordinary peasants together with *yin yang* philosophy, Daoist theories and traditional Chinese medicine for maintaining good health as well as the philosophy of the Eight Trigrams and Five Elements (Li/Du 1995: 95; Wile 1996: xvii; Li 2009: 27). Taijiquan was brought in the 19th century to Beijing by a disciple of the Chen family, Yang Luchan who initiated the spread of Taijiquan throughout the whole country.

The traditional master of Yang style (楊氏), Yang Luchan (1799–1872, see Appendix, Figure 6), is said to have gotten access to the closed circle of the Chen family fighting technique by secretly observing their Taijiquan practice (Fieldnotes VHS, Nov. 2018; see Chen [1928] 2000: 75-84). The disciple of the Taijiquan founding family in *Chenjiagou*, Henan Province (Chen 2007; Wile 1996), created one of the longest and oldest forms, the 81-Step Yang-style Taiji where variations of it count between 85 and 107 steps. Yang

Luchan, alleged to have “supernatural” skills (see Cheng 1981: 2), brought Taiji to Beijing and the imperial court of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Li/Du 1995: 98). Yang-style Taiji, is known for its soft, gentle and even movements, the slow rhythm combined with firm flexibility and inner strength. About hundred years later, in 2010, only a few elderly men within the Taiji group near the Nine-Dragon-Wall in Beihai Park, practiced this style – some were able to conclude the twenty minutes lasting form, others stopped somewhere during their performance – watched by the admiring group members (Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji). Because he is not patient enough to practice the long form, a disciple of Yang Luchan, Zheng Manqing (1900-1975), “*Master of the Five Excellences: poetry, painting, calligraphy, medicine, and T'ai Chi Ch'uan*” (Lo et al. 1979: 11), creates a concise form of 37 movements out of the common 128 preserved motion sequences (both without a special composed music) that is also practiced in Vienna (see Fieldnotes Taiji school, Nov. 2018; Taiji association, May 2019).

The emergence of modern weapons, the downfall of the empire, the image of a weak nation-state, the redundancy of martial art masters, the already proven positive health effects, the aim to improve the health of the masses, and the wish to preserve knowledge can be seen as factors leading to the process of development and standardization of Taijiquan that started in the 1920s and it is also a process of change from combat violence to peaceful sports. Brownell (1995: 53-55) explains that the (feudal) body culture of the Qing Dynasty had to change in order to meet the new economic requirements of the communist nation state and to take part in new forms of (international) sports. Sports in the modern competitive form with rules, where violence is limited and a fatality is not a fixed component but a tragedy, was unknown in imperial China and brought along by foreign missionaries. Martial arts that used to physical harm, mortally wound and kill enemies, had to change in order to take part in sportive tournaments.

The popular culture of martial art, used by farmers and rebels to express their resistance against unfair political power structures came with Yang Luchan, who trained the imperial guards, right to the center of power to defend the common interests against the foreign intrusion. In the era of the Republic of China (1912-1949), martial arts were called *guoshu* - 国术, to emphasis the strength of the nation and the nationalist biased “*martial art revival period*” as Brownell (1995: 53) states, occurred approximately at the same time, the 1920's,

as the film industry started to develop, and used the changed image of the practitioners of this fighting technique from rebels to supporters of the new nation-state:

“the unique ways in which body techniques are utilized by a modern state. The martial arts (*wushu*) were renamed the ‘national arts’ (*guoshu*) and reshaped to fit the Western model of sports. ... In brief, the martial arts were categorized, bureaucratized, scheduled into mass displays, and stamped with an official ideology that explicitly linked them with Republican nationalism” (Brownell 1995: 53-54).

Influenced by Christian missionaries, established through the YMCA – The Young Men’s Christian Association, educational institutions and sport clubs, the formation of sport had a relatively short time frame to develop. Sport became a factor to modernize the Chinese armed forces to international standard and to re-establish national pride – martial arts being already a basic component of military training (Latham 2007: 266-267; see Brownell 1995: 35-37). The National Martial Arts Competition in Shanghai in the year 1929 showed that Taiji as a competitive martial art and “sports” in the Western sense needed not only rules and regulation but also a common form to take part in competitions and tournaments (Li 2009: 56).

Shanghai as a city with focus on “cultural” life, could be considered as an early center for Taijiquan – a fact Frank (2006) used about 60 years later to study Taijiquan with three different masters. Patrick Kelly, disciple of Zheng Manqing as well as Huang Xingxian and a “foreigner”, even opened a Taiji school in Shanghai (apart from his centres in Auckland and Zurich) “to give some of the knowledge back” (Fieldnotes Taiji school, Nov. 2018). Already in 1925, Chen Weiming, a disciple of Yang Chengfu (the grandson of Yang Luchan), founded a school for Taijiquan in Shanghai and started to teach (Chen [1929] 1985: 11). Another disciple of Yang Luchan, Wu Quanyou (= Wu Chuan Yau, 1834-1902), founded in 1935 in Shanghai *Wu’s Tai Chi Chuan Academy*. Wu’s son, Wu Gongyi (= Wu Kung I) opened the *Hong Kong Academy for Taijiquan*. With the opening of schools correlates an open access to the skills of the masters for the interested masses. Famous masters tried to write books to maintain the knowledge but only decades later their works were translated into English: *Taiji Sword and Other Writings* by Chen Weiming, for example, was published in 1928 and only in the year 2000 translated into English; the *Essence and Applications of Taijiquan* by Yang Chengfu (actually written by his disciple Zheng Manqing) published in 1934, entered the market only in 2005 in English language. Martial artists (mostly starting from Shanghai) migrated to Hong Kong (like Wu Gongyi),

Taiwan and the USA (like Zheng Manqing) and began to teach their art, spreading the national knowledge into the international sphere, from the local to the global. With the upcoming of modern technology, TV became an early means of knowledge transfer: in the 1960s, Wu Gongyi used the upcoming medium of television in Hong Kong to teach this martial art (International Wu Style Tai Chi Quan Federation 2017). Because his Taijiquan skills are questioned by Hong Kong newspapers, in 1954 Wu Gongyi accepts the challenge to demonstrate his skills in a public charity fight.

5.0 EXCURSUS: The Clash of Styles in 1954

One of the few public Taiji fighting events that were not international competitions or demonstrations of skills for practitioners was held in the year 1954 in the Portuguese colony Macao (yvtv: lhbfmtaijialarts 2013; see Teo 2016: 84). The black and white video in Cantonese, with Chinese and English subtitles, shows two masters of Chinese martial arts, Chen Kefu (or Chan Hak Fu, 陳克夫) master of White Crane style and Wu Gongyi (or Wu Kung I, 吳公儀) master of Wu style Taijiquan. They met in a major public event that attracted the masses. Master Wu, a disciple of Wu Jianquan, the founder of Wu style Taiji, agreed to test his fighting style against Master Chen from White Crane style. Before the fight starts, master Dong Ying Jie (or Tung Yingchieh, 董英杰) – another senior disciple of Yang Chengfu – performs a Taijiquan form (yvtv: DPGDPG 2006). Wu Gongyi, despite being about twenty years older than his opponent, seems to be less injured since Chen Kefu suffers a bleeding nose in round one. The blows and kicks are brutal and hard, and the fighters wait their turn to strike. Both dressed in white T-shirt, black trousers and cotton shoes, Chen Kefu fights faster with a lot of arm movements, but Wu Gongyi takes his time to dominate the field and to apply strategic blows. The fight lasts two rounds until the fight is declared a draw. It can only be assumed about the reason why in this charity event a tie was decided, either that due to the lack of competition rules and the fact that the whole body can be targeted, opponents can be seriously harmed or severely injured or that the winner would damage the image, status and heritage of the other martial art.

5.1 Simplified Violence: The Process of Sportization and Simplification

In the People's Republic of China, the process of sportization and simplification was induced to bring the popular martial art Taijiquan to the masses. The communist government saw the potential of Taiji as a way to improve the health, but the learning process was too complicated for ordinary people. In 1954, the newly established Martial Arts Research Institute assigned the task to standardize and simplify Taijiquan for the general public to Taiji experts of all major styles, but the first attempt was still too complicated to learn. Finally redesigned, their combined effort lead to the creation of 24-Step Simplified Taijiquan (拳, *quan* = fist; a hand form) or Beijing form with elements of Yang-style Taiji. This hybrid style is *“an easy-to-learn-and-to-practice sequence of movements, concise and clear, that preserved the traditional features of Taijiquan, emphasized the health benefits of Taijiquan and encouraged wide public participation”* (Li 2009: 132). Also created in the 1950s, the form 32-Step Taijijian (剑, *jian* = the tasselled, double-edged sword) is a clear, precise technique with traditional movements also adapted from the Yang-style (Li 2009: 336). Both forms (all two equipped with a special music) spread quickly and are most commonly practiced within mainland China and worldwide (Li 2009: 20).

The State Physical Culture and Sports Commission was eager to research, classify and spread the forms of *wushu* (武术), the martial arts describing not only sport but also the national health program (Teo 2016: 4; see Hunt 2003: 31) by compiling standardized textbooks, by simplifying the forms and by developing competition rules (Li 2009: 28-29). Only a decade later, during the Cultural Revolution martial arts were considered an unwanted feudal art and their ban, especially for Taijiquan was lifted by Deng Xiaoping whose calligraphy *“Taijiquan is wonderful”* (太极拳好) (Li 2009: 11) prepared the ground for Taiji masters and their disciples to practice their martial art in the parks again:

“In the early 1980s, following the Cultural Revolution, the party once again called on teachers to return to the parks and teach publicly. As one of the many “feudal” arts that had been attacked by Red Guards, taijiquan, along with qigong, became even more popular in the post-Cultural Revolution period” (Frank 2006: 239).

From 1975 on, various forms of martial arts were also taught to foreigners within and outside of the PR China, since *“Taichi strengthens our people and country”* (Chen [1929] 1985: 11) to contrast the former designation as a weak nation (Li/Du 1995: 14, Brownell

1995: 58). In 1989, during the time of political opening, the Chinese Martial Arts Research Institute commissioned martial arts experts to create a Taijiquan form for competition, the 42-Step Taiji form (Li 2009: 184), followed in 1991 by 42-Step Taiji Sword performed with the double-edged sword with tassel (Li 2009: 267). One of the later very popular forms is Taiji Gongfu Fan that Li Deyin created with his wife, Fang Mishou, in 2001 that combines various Taijiquan styles and kung fu elements with movements of Chinese Opera through the artful application of a red fan (Li 2009: 25).

The institutions of the nation-state collect and transform the knowledge of martial arts by taking the edge off the dangerousness and by using the hybrid new and competitive form to promote the health of the people. The skills of the masses and their role within the hegemonic ideas of the nation-state will be explored in the following.

5.2 Drilled Violence: Mass Performances for the Common Good

Perfectly executed mass performances under the watchful eyes of the nation-state's leadership to impress the (inter-)national audience(s) can be seen as part of China's hegemony. The inscribed knowledge of the Taijiquan forms is proudly represented by the groups who are used to perform in public and take pleasure in practicing for the surrounding audience. Because of the accurate embodiment of the forms in each group, many groups from different locations can spontaneously perform together in harmony without practicing this group performance for a long time. Like the individual parts of a jigsaw puzzle, these individual groups can be joined to perform together.

In 1990, more than thousand practitioners of different Taijiquan groups from the former "enemy" Japan and from Beijing performed together for the prestigious opening ceremony of the Asian Games in the Chinese capital (Li 2009: 24). Taijiquan as mass performance on Tiananmen Square under the observing portrait of Chairman Mao, was used to gain national and international attention and supported the nation-state's aim to become a global player (Schechner 2013). In a mass performance in the year 1998, 10.000 Taiji practitioners visually fostered the application for the Olympic Games (Li 2009: 14). After the bid was won, "[m]any Chinese felt that when the IOC⁹ selected Beijing, China had emerged from under the colonial shadow, recognized and respected at last as a world power. To desire

⁹ IOC = International Olympic Committee

such respect is to enact a concept made real by globalization” (Schechner 2013: 297). The very popular Taiji Fan form accompanied by the artful implementation of a red fan (Li 2009: 25) was performed in another mass event of 2.008 participants during the 2008 Olympic Games (Li 2009: 25). Staged as a mass performance on the historical location of Tiananmen Square, the government as representative of the state used the inscribed, trained body and the drilled, practiced beauty to express the national pride of China within the nation-state and to the world outside:

“The martial ... still occupy an important place in Han Chinese identity, as well as in the world’s perception of China. Highly stylized forms are practiced by **state-supported athletes, who after retirement often star in the ever-popular kungfu films**. The promotion of martial arts worldwide and their eventual inclusion in the Olympic Games are an important item on China’s international sports agenda” (Brownell 1995: 55, emphasis added).

Sport events transform the body into a publicly displayed cultural artefact (Brownell 1995: 8). Despite the fact that the Games of 2008 as a sport event did not include Taijiquan as an Olympic discipline, the accuracy of the preparation that drilled the bodies to perfection left nothing to chance and did not show any weakness to impress the (inter-)national audience(s) as a flawless host with high security requirements, while trying to conceal conflicting views on human rights and democracy.

Spectacular mass performances of martial arts are also part of the New Year’s Gala, the TV program watched by millions every year on Chinese Lunar New Year’s Eve on CCTV, China Central Television - 中央电视台, linked to the National Radio and Television Administration. The Spring Festival Gala (*chunwan*, 春晚), one of the most watched TV shows in the PR China, broadcasted in February 2019 a flawless mass performance of different styles of Chinese marital arts (see Appendix, Figure 7) – among them Taijiquan – and created during their presentation an enormous Chinese flag (ytv: CGTN 2019; see also Koetse 2019). In the *chunwan* gala in January 2020, where Jackie Chan was present also, thousands of martial arts students made the journey from their schools (ytv: CCTV 春晚 2020, min 1:21) to participate in a breathtaking extravaganza (ytv: CCTV 春晚 2020, min 3:33:52) of color, performance, and physical fitness, but it is not the aim of this thesis to examine the social and cultural dimensions of violence as experienced by thousands of young talents drilled in martial art schools to supply artistic bodies for huge events.

Mass performances show the strength and unity through its mediated spectatorship that fosters national identity. Under the nation-states hegemony, institutions induced and supported the simplification of martial arts and used the simplified forms of Taijiquan that are now easy to learn, to achieve a high level of distribution of this inscribed knowledge to promote health and enhance well-being on one hand, and on the other this embodied knowledge is used to channel the power of the masses. People can practice martial arts and feel like fighters in a facilitated form, to stay healthy and to be an important “puzzle” part to support the nation-state – but without expressing the “dangerous” elements of violence, crime, and resistance. The practitioners, in their small groups, can be kept under control of the nation’s surveillance system while simultaneously contributing to the prestige of the nation. Resistance and subordination can be controlled and channelled to serve the nation to make sure that potentials are not used for destruction. Concurrently, the audience is spellbound by the unity and harmony of the masses that is building and supporting identity and the nation-state.

In summary, Taijiquan can be categorized as popular culture, because this combat technique was originally practiced by the farmers, representatives of the lower social strata, in Hubei province. Their widely favored and well-liked performances of martial arts entertained the villages on special occasions. Taiji, as a residual category of an “inferior” rebel (*jianghu*) culture that originated from the people, prospered and spread through urbanization and industrialization. Furthermore, institutions of the nation-state started to simplify the forms for the masses to promote their health, discretely using the skills of the practicing groups as impressive form of publicity for the purpose of dominating them while winning their approval. In order to understand the radical change that took place within the Taijiquan practicing circles, the new forms that required new masters will be analyzed.

5.3 Hybrid Violence: New Forms and New Masters

“This is the martial arts of the kung fu movies, China's contribution to world cinema. It is also the martial arts one finds taught in practice halls in nearly every major city of the world” (Allen 2015: ix).

The change Taijiquan was going through by the process of sportization and simplification lead to a new generation of Taiji masters as well as hybrid forms to practice their technique. Taijiquan made its way into the gyms worldwide and two main ways of transnational dissemination can be traced. In one way of distribution, Taiji masters migrated to other

countries in order to practice their martial arts, where, for example, Zheng Manqing and his technique can be placed. Another way is the state induced expansion of the new simplified forms to advocate (a political motivated) “friendship”, using Taijiquan as “*China’s cultural ambassador to the world*” (Wile 1996: xv; Allen 2015: ix; Guo et al. 2014). Taiji made its way from the public parks of Beijing to the gyms of Vienna.

The process of development and standardization of Taijiquan can be described around the family history of Li Deyin who took part in the evolution and modernisation as well as the commercialisation of Taijiquan. Born in 1938, he describes his own learning process during his childhood, the inscription and embodiment of martial arts through *gongfu* - 功夫, the Chinese notion of iterative, meditative acts of acquiring a skill, as he experienced it through lessons with his grandfather Li Yulin (1885-1965), a professional Taijiquan master and Dean of Studies at the Shandong Provincial Martial Arts School. Despite the strict and daily practice of one movement for weeks combined with reading of the ancient books, it took the children more than a year to learn the form (Li 2009: 21).¹⁰ As professor for physical education at the Renmin University in Beijing, Li Deyin did research among famous Taiji practitioners and Daoist as well as Shaolin monks to make Taijiquan a part of the University curriculum of sports students. The Li family influenced the (inter-)national landscape of Taijiquan by further developing the Yang-style Taijiquan and Li Deyin took part in 1989 to create the 42-Step Taijiquan competition form that brings the different Taijiquan styles of Chen, Yang, Wu and Sun together. However, the Li family has no “famous lineage” that can be traced to the Taiji masters who created their own Taiji styles, where the reason to practice Taiji stands for health and longevity as an important part of establishing a secular form of Daoism.

With the body as recording tool, traditionally martial arts knowledge is passed on within a closed circle from master to disciple by personal training through countless iterative acts inscribed into the body that consist more of exact imitating than explanations due to limited talk during the training. A special relationship between master and disciple exists, because a master only takes a disciple when he/she is worthy to share the knowledge with him/her.

¹⁰ Li Deyin’s uncle, Li Tianji (1914-1996), was among the group to facilitate the access to Taijiquan, writing *A Guide to Chinese Martial Arts* (Li/Du 1995), where a picture of the nowadays famous actor Jet Li or Li Lianjie depicts the martial art *Chang Quan*, Extended Boxing or Long Fist (Li/Du 1995: front picture section, w.p.).

Taiji masters keep their last secrets about forms to themselves (see Interview_EK_20181210_06) and support – because of their extraordinary abilities – a cult of personality. Their disciples are talking in awe about them and their accomplishments as, for example, Chen Weiming describes the supernatural skills of his master Yang Luchan (Chen [1928] 2000: 75-84). With the death of the master, all the wisdom is gone, too. Therefore, the *wushu* associations want to systematize and conserve the already existing martial arts “material”.

The process of sportization opened this sector for the masses and the purpose of martial arts changed from combat technique in war to health preservation in a kind of secular form of Daoism. Due to changes within the politics of the nation-state an “outsider” of the traditional families (like Li Deyin and his family) could join the rank of Taiji masters. The implementation of Taijiquan in the curriculum of university education added to the spread of Taiji to the whole country and came to the parks as popular sport. Therefore, it needs to be examined how the ability of performing Taiji is passed on to the practitioners.

5.4 Spreading Violence: Forms of Knowledge Transfer

The early forms of knowledge transfer through drawings of each pose on Taiji charts or pictures in books were for a long time the only way of preserving knowledge, but the “new” Taiji masters of the simplified, hybrid forms use modern communication and distribution techniques not only in Taijiquan schools but also on TV, DVDs or the internet to reach and teach the masses. Li Deyin’s book (2009) shows the development of knowledge transfer: photographs of his grandfather Li Yulin from the 1930s teach the early form of 81-Step Yang-style Taijiquan in 227 pictures (Li 2009: 55-131). Pictures of his father Li Tianchi from the 1950s mark the movements with arrows and teach the 24-Step Taijiquan in 135 pictures (Li 2009: 133-183), while the newer, hybrid forms of different styles like the 42-Step Taijiquan show pictures of Li Deyin himself (Li 2009: 190-266). The other two forms are presented by his daughters: 42-Step Taiji Sword form shows pictures of Li Defang (Li 2009: 267-335) and the 32-Step Taiji Sword used pictures of Faye Yip (Li 2009: 339-392). Additionally, the book offers a complimentary DVD of these forms. Li Deyin offers a wide range of instructional videos (e.g. ytv: HuaxiaPeople 2013) and his family maintains a Taiji institute in Great Britain (Deyin Taiji n.d.). His disciple Chen Sitan, called “Prince of Taiji - 太极王子”, also teaches in New York (Sitan Taichi n.d.) or Wu Amin, the “Princess of Taiji

- 太极公主”, gives lessons in California (Wu Amin Taichi n.d.). In their instructional videos these Taiji instructors explain and show in detail how the movement is done and what kinds of mistake might occur. These videos follow specific methods and didactics: first the whole form is shown from frontal view. Then each sequence, the *taolu* - 套路 of the form is shown, each movement of the sequence is explained, and the practitioner is advised how to avoid common mistakes. When all sequences are done, the whole form is shown from back view. The practitioners can watch the videos as often as they want, watch the performance of more than one instructor and they do not have personal contact with their instructors. The strong connection between master and disciple is missing as well as the awe, when talking about them. Susanne from the VHS group (Interview_SL_20181126_04) who is very ambitious to achieve her best performance, uses the internet to improve the Taiji forms she already knows and likes to practice individually new forms. Her way of learning involves watching instruction videos in slow-motion on a tablet by her favourite Taiji instructor Wu Amin (see SifuAminWu 2016).

A new form of teaching surfaced during the Coronavirus pandemic in spring 2020, when special regulations and a lockdown made it necessary to teach and practice Taijiquan in online courses, but a full discussion of this new phenomenon lies beyond the scope of this paper. Through new technologies like the internet, knowledge transfer is not limited to time, borders or languages and the practice of participating in violence intermingles with mediated spectatorship. Whereas myths are narratives that experience oral transition (see Mader 2008), in Taijiquan the body is the record tool and the learned forms can possibly be considered as embodied myths. In the upcoming paragraph, the focus will be put on the techniques of embodiment, the teaching methods and training aspects of Taijiquan.

5.5 Practicing Violence: Taijiquan Training

“My opponent does not understand me, but I understand him” (Wu Chengqing’s *Notes to the Original Treaties* quoted in Wile 1996: 43; 127).

For the peaceful looking martial art Taijiquan it is mandatory to focus on how the body is prepared for violence while training and practicing it. Today Taiji has five main schools: Chen (陳氏, see Chen 2007), Yang (楊氏), Wu (武氏) also known as Wu/Hao (武/郝氏), Wu (吳氏) and Sun (孫氏) (see Appendix, Figure 8) that became after 1949 an important part of the martial arts (Guo et al. 2014: 3) and

“... practice methods are essentially the same for each style, consisting of three main elements: individual practice, dual combat practice, and push-hands. Most important and widely practised [sic] are the individual routines. The nature of these routines varies from style to style in length, complexity, strenuousness and speed” (Li/Du 1995: 101).

As instructor, Li Deyin names four important facts to practice this martial art successfully by reacting to the opponent: feeling, neutralizing, controlling and attacking, where *“Taijiquan as a martial art emphasizes waiting in stillness to allow the opponent to initiate movement and then to get the better of the opponent through its various strategies and techniques”* (Li 2009: 32). The “feeling” describes the right assessment of the opponent’s oncoming movement; the “neutralizing” should defang it; the “controlling” should elude the impact while “attacking” the opponent’s weak points (see Li 2009: 32) and the waist as axis together with the *“spine dictate to all”* (Li 2009: 40).

In his teachings, Li Deyin uses the writings of Wu Yuxiang (1821-1880) and his *Song of the 13 Methods*, written in colloquial Chinese, as a theoretical foundation (Li 2009: 38-39; see Appendix, Figure 9). In Taijiquan exists a clear separation between body and mind (spirit), where the mind and the free flowing energy (qi) are guiding the body and its muscles: the center of attention is the waist (the crux of the matter) with a straight tailbone and a relaxed abdomen in a circuit between movement and stillness, between tension and relaxation expressed through the Taiji diagram. In the beginning, a Taiji master is needed but later the person has to practice to perfection by him-/herself to achieve longevity and youth (seen as the main goal in Daoism). This practice, the *gongfu* - 功夫, reflects the individual skill of the practitioner. The *13 Methods* consist of the eight basic hand techniques of Taijiquan that are ward off, roll back, press or squeeze, push forward, pull down, split, elbow strike and shoulder or lean. The five basic foot techniques are step in, step back, move to the left, move to the right and keep to the central position (Li 2009: 38-40). The same moves with a different execution are performed by the disciples of Zheng Manqing, as one of the Viennese -Taiji associations use these eight basic hand techniques as a warming-up exercise when practicing *Tui Shou* – pushing hands, but the five basic foot techniques are not specifically trained (Fieldnotes Taiji association, May/June 2019).

For many practitioners in China, the “centers” of Taijiquan are the public parks with their lively recreation activities. In order to spend one day with Taiji in Beijing, training in the

early morning hours will start at the local neighborhood park before changing locations to other parks:

The loose community of Taijiquan practitioners in *Tuanjiehu* Park (团结湖公园) in Beijing consists of a group of about fifteen women and men. During the park season they practice daily during the week the basic form of 24-Step Simplified Taijiquan, easily recognized by the special music. Their training starts with the warming up phase: rotating the shoulders, hip rotations, rotating the knees and the tip of the toes. In the exercise phase some sequences are practiced – mostly “cloud hands” because the coordination of the hands in diametrically opposed circles requires concentration, focus and *gongfu* - 功夫, the repetition. Interested bystanders are trying some movements on their own but do not join the group. The female Taiji instructor, an elderly woman who hardly speaks, starts the music and takes her place in the front. The group members gather on their place and practice the whole form accordingly – watching their instructor closely and trying to imitate her movements. After practicing the form twice, the group divides – some have to leave to perform their daily task at work – others who are already enjoying their retirement, stay to practice more to add to their skills.

While the members of this group are on their way home, in *Beihai* Park (北海公园) at the historical location near the Nine-Dragon-Wall (九龙壁), a larger and more advanced group than the one in *Tuanjiehu* Park, starts with the warming up phase and after that the hand forms with music are practiced. First the 24-Step simplified Taijiquan form that is known by all participants is performed and followed by the 32-Step Taijiquan form, where some are at the center (able to execute the whole form) and others are at the sides (able to practice just some parts). Next in their program come the Taiji forms with music and weapons: the 32-Step Taiji sword form, where all the practitioners take part. After the successful completion, the latest and most recent form of 52-Step Taiji-Gongfu Fan are practiced (some performing in the center and others just practicing at the sides), where the number of practitioners participating declined while the number of viewers increased. Each form is accompanied by a special music setting the pace that adds to the harmonious performance of the group and some recordings announce the names of the sequences that should be performed next that helps the beginners to remember the succession of the movements. After finishing the performance, the group splits up: the majority practicing and repeating

the forms or some sequences, helping each other to master difficulties, while four elderly men practice a long Taijiquan form without music that lasts for about 20 minutes – not all of them are able to complete it.

When it is almost noon, not only the “ordinary” training (as seen in other parks) takes place in *Tiantan* Park (天坛公园), but individual practitioners also use the scenery and the historical building of the temple of heaven as background to perform with special Taiji dresses and different weapons for private videos. When the heat of the day dies down a little, the early evening hours show a more heterogenous picture about various martial arts in *Ditan* Park (地坛公园) and different styles of Taijiquan are practiced: individual or in groups, alone or in pairs, different ages, with weapons and without, the old styles without music and the new styles with music – all side by side (Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji) until it is time to leave the park.

Watching these groups is a delight, but the whole first year of learning Taijiquan in Beijing was a frustrating experience for me: being younger than most of the practitioners in the park and neither keeping the movements in mind nor being bodily able to perform them properly, despite putting a lot of effort in the training and doing the *gongfu* - 功夫 in many – very boring – repetitions of the motion sequences without making much progress in this simple and most commonly practiced form of 24 movements that range from easy to difficult. Practicing the 4th movement called *Brush Aside over the Knee in Reverse Forward Stance* – *zuo you louxi aobu* - 左右搂膝拗步 (see Appendix, Figure 10), I rotated the shoulders and arms in the wrong direction during the training hours for a few weeks until the practitioner behind me called attention to my mistake. The group wanted to learn as many forms as possible: 24-Step Simplified Taiji, 32-Step Taijiquan, 42-Step Taijiquan and finally 32-Step Taiji sword. To achieve this, DVDs of Li Deyin, a well-known Taiji instructor from Renmin University, were watched repeatedly in slow motion in order to aid the learning process. All the forms were passionately rehearsed, however, none of them were understood by the practitioners (Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji).

To conceptualize the basics of Taiji it takes about 10 years of constant practicing – with an instructor and individually (see Chen [1928] 2000: 10; see Interview_EK_20181210_06). The 24-Step simplified form of Taijiquan needs approximately a year of learning and

practicing until the single movements can be performed within the time limit of the music and still the fluency and grace of the movements are lacking. When the form is not practiced regularly, it is easily forgotten because the knowledge is not anchored in the body. The commonly practiced 32-Step Taiji form and the 42-Step Taiji form, which I started to learn in my Taijiquan class in Beijing, were soon forgotten when I stopped practicing them because no Viennese group offered a course and the vaguely embodied knowledge was lost.

After my return to Vienna, I was looking for Taiji courses that were comparable to my experience in Beijing. Finally, I came across a Viennese VHS, which fulfilled all criteria. Every Monday, from February to June and from September to January, a female Taiji instructor from the PR China provides 15 Taiji sessions at the small gym of a primary school. In 2012, she taught the basics of the 24-Step Simplified Taijiquan as a first layer of knowledge with constant proceeding and withdrawing, with constant preparedness to attack and defend. It took a year to learn just the foundation of these 24 movements and while practicing the rudiments, the body is slowly prepared for the next layer of learning. With each repetition of the form and correcting the possible mistakes a new layer of is obtained: the posture is getting better, the muscles stronger and the Taiji step less noisy. The program extended after two years to a Qigong practice called *Eight Pieces of Brocade*, a form that is easy to learn: the first time of learning the form, the first layer, gives an insight into the movement sequences. After laying this foundation, each repetition of learning by practicing the form and each layer of embodiment anchors the knowledge deeper. After the body got used to practice Taijiquan and knew how to move and to walk, the forms with weapons could be tackled. First, in a few three-hour Saturday workshops the foundation of the Taiji-Gongfu-Fan form (a 52-Step Taiji Fan form (see Appendix, Figure 11) that includes elements of Taiji, Chinese Opera and kung fu was practiced and was later included in the VHS program as regular course. The fan, made of bamboo and artificial silk, needs coordinated movements to open and close it in addition to the steps. Then, the group showed interest in practicing Taiji Sword as well that was again first offered in weekend workshops before it was included into the regular course that was now offering 52-Step Taiji Fan as well as 32-Step Taiji Sword (see Appendix, Figure 12).

Each lesson consists of three parts and each part lasts for approximately 20 minutes. The first hour starts with general warm-up exercises that are followed by Qigong practice and 24-Step Simplified Taijiquan. The second hour, where Taiji Fan and Taiji Sword are

practiced, starts also with warm-up exercises that are followed by a 20-minutes-programme for each weapon. Since all the members of the Taiji sword group learn the Kung Fu Sword form, the last five minutes are used to repeat and practice the new form. When learning the Kung Fu Sword form, the Taiji techniques serves as the foundation. Each movement of the form is practiced slowly until the fundamental movements of the form are known, which takes about a year. The knowledge is embodied through the iterative acts of *gongfu* and after knowing the form by heart (in body and mind), it is possible to increase the pace and a Taiji performance will be a kung fu performance.

All members of the groups (many of which are taking both advanced classes) are at an intermediate level now and the number remained quite constant over the years with about 8 to 10 regular participants. Apart from one elderly man, all the participants are women, ranging from 40 to 70 years of age. Some members left over the years (because of relocation, old age, sickness, and death), while others from the beginner's class joined.

The Taijiquan training at a Viennese *VHS*, where the members have to enroll and pay for the course in advance, follows each Monday the same routine: the gym is entered and after a few minutes of private conversation and individual warming-up exercises the training starts. The instructor and the group greet each other with the official hand sign, where the fist of the right hand is put on the open palm of the left hand approximately at the level of the jaw line. Each lesson is divided into three parts of 20 minutes each: warming-up exercises, practicing one form followed by the other form, each with its special music and duration. The end is marked by another official greeting. Most members of the VHS group practice Taijiquan for more than five years and the outcome of the weekly training is shown in slow but steady results: The thighs have the strength to perform the Taiji steps noiselessly, the muscles are elastical and the whole body is flexible. The only shortcomings are the tailbone that is not properly pulled downwards to straighten the spine and the hip area that is not mobile enough (Fieldnotes VHS, Oct./Dec. 2018).

In the beginning, the main problem is the lack of strength in the thighs and the missing equilibrium. Therefore, the heels nosily meet the ground when doing Taiji steps and the foot is not pulled through but stops in the middle to gain strength before reaching with much noise the final, unstable position. Since Taiji is performed with bended knees and a body that should stay at the same height during the form, the missing strength in the thighs

leads to an involuntarily up and down movement of the body during the steps, while the knees are bend to much forward and reach over the toes, causing knee problems. The weak tights are also responsible that the tailbone is stuck out like a duck instead of pulled straight down, while the insufficient flexibility in the area of the hip, hipbone and spine causes a lack of fluidity of the movement. Furthermore, the upper body is not upright and does not keep the three points of *bai hui* - 百会 (on top of the head), *dantian* - 丹田 (below the navel), and *hui yin* - 会阴 (at the perineum) in line “*like a pearl necklace*” (Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20). When the torso is bend forward, the equilibrium of the whole body is out of balance. In the first training units, thighs are trembling and after the training sessions sore muscles are the result. Flexibility in the hip area, strength in the tights, the upright posture of the body as well as the position of the knees are important factors in the Taijiquan training (Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji; Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20). In the VHS group, in every unit, the instructor reminds the participants while practicing Taiji:

“Imagine someone pulls your head up on a string, keep the shoulders in line with the elbows and the wrists, imagine one egg under each of your armpits, keep the fingers relaxed, but not lazy and the strength should come from the wrists, be flexible in the waist and pull the tailbone straight down, keep the knees bend at the same height all the time” (Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20; see Li 2009: 43-45).

In general, the important points to consider while practicing Taiji are: keep the point *bai hui* - 百会 at the upper part of the head, the point *dantian* - 丹田 two fingers below the navel and the point *hui yin* - 会阴 at the perineum in one line so that the spine is relaxed and straight. Keep the shoulder, waist and knee in one line as well as the shoulder, the elbow and the wrist (Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20). For the body posture, the female instructor at a Viennese Taiji association added “*make the back between the shoulders a bit round*” and the male instructor who taught the practitioners in *Tui shou* - pushing hands recommended that “*the knees should be as flexible as a shock absorber*” (Fieldnotes Taiji association Jan. 2019; May/June 2019; see Li 2009: 43-45).

The move sequences at the beginning of the forms are often repeated and properly inscribed in the body, whereas the movements at the end of the form (that are more tedious to perform because the level of difficulty increases) seem to deserve little consideration and are not so often practiced. In this way, the Taiji masters can “*keep a secret*”, as Elsa from the VHS group mentions (Interview_EK_20181210_06). In winter term 2019/20 the instructor

decided to repeat and improve the different moves of the 24-Step Simplified Taiji beginning with the last movements. The VHS participants do not like when every move is watched closely and corrected while practicing. They prefer harmony in the group and the improvement of their health to achievements in competitions.

It takes long years of practice to perform Taijiquan properly, but it is easy to learn, and age does not matter. Taijiquan makes the practitioner feel good, it strengthens the back muscles and gives an upright posture, all parts of the body are trained (except for the belly muscles) and in general the health improves, and all these accomplishments are specified in the Daoist aim to achieve longevity.

The “old” style and the (political induced) “new” style have the same origin in the Yang-style Taijiquan of Yang Luchan (1799-1872) that was improved and completed by his successors. In variations, the number of steps vary, but the basic movements stay the same. In Vienna, the “old” Yang style as practiced before the sportization that is going back to Taiji master Yang Chengfu is taught, as well as the style that is based on the forms of Zheng Manqing and his disciples. One of the main difference, besides some body techniques, is that the “official” styles of the “new” tradition are practices with the typical music for each Taijiquan form, while the “old” Yang style forms have no music (Fieldnotes Taiji organization, Dec. 2018; Taiji association, May/June 2019). In the next section, an insight into the Taijiquan experience inscribed into the bodies of some practitioners at the VHS in Vienna will be given.

5.5.1 Embodying Violence: Learning and Practicing Taijiquan

“The aesthetic quality of martial arts movements comes from their purposiveness, their instrumental effectiveness. Aesthetic quality is a byproduct of real efficacy” (Allen 2013: 250).

In Vienna, Taijiquan is not a sport for the masses and the hype around the years 2008, when Beijing was the venue of the Olympic Games, subsided in the recent years with less and less Taiji courses offered. In contrast to Taijiquan other martial arts, for example the Korean fighting technique and Olympic discipline Taekwondo, uses a belt system (ranging from white to black belt) as well as break tests. It consists of fighting practice as well as a practice of set movements, the “*poomsae*“, where the first eight forms are called “*Taegeuk*“, the Korean word for Taiji (Kim/Lee 2011). Taijiquan does not have colourful belts or

spectacular breaking tests with wooden boards that trigger exam stress, and this “easy-going” approach is a characteristic the Taijiquan practitioners at the VHS group appreciate and they value this contrast to the pressure of everyday life (Fieldnotes VHS, Jan. 2019).

When Elsa, the VHS group member with three decades of inscribed Taiji knowledge, started her Taijiquan experience, it was considered something esoteric and prestigious. This martial art was practiced not only by patients with musculoskeletal diseases but by elitist groups in Austria, medical doctors (see Kubiena/Zhang 1995) or people who opted out of their bourgeois lifestyles and taught by Austrian instructors. Chinese teachers of different Taiji styles, equipped with short-time travel visas, came for two weeks to hold workshops and to teach the foundation as there are: knees should not reach over the length of the toes to avoid knee damage, the weight shift should be anchored on the heels and, as the most important factor, the mobility should be in the waist. Some forms were taught back-to-front after knowing one side to train the brain. For Chinese teachers pushing hands was a fixed component on their trainings-agenda and single moves were practices for 15 minutes and more. These teachers never taught the whole form but always kept some knowledge to themselves – the last moves of the form were not revealed in detail. In one of these Taiji experts’ opinion, perfection can only be achieved by keeping to one form and to practice only this one form for more than ten years daily and independently – in addition to the weekly training hours with a Taiji master to correct the movements. Within Elsa’s body, the “old” and the “new” styles collide: the “traditional” movements of Zheng Manqing are done by turning the heel, while the “new” style demands that the movement is done by turning on the ball of foot. When practicing Zheng Manqing’s style, the energy should flow from the shoulder to the wrist without blockage and the wrist joints are not as drastically bent as in the “new” style. The “old” style puts the training emphasis on the step, because it is important to turn the body in the right direction and focus should be put on the distance between the feet to acquire stability. With a stable stand it is difficult to be pushed over or to be pushed out of balance, a requirement that reminds of the origin as combat technique (Interview_EK_20181210_06).

During Taijiquan practice, Elsa states that the breakthrough comes right behind the failure, when every movements seems to be wrong, then “*it makes click*” (Interview_EK_20181210_06) and suddenly the movement can be performed in the right way. A clear separation of body and mind is noticed when the instructor sees mistakes and tells us “*the*

mind already knows but the body does not follow the commands yet” (Fieldnotes VHS, Jan. 2020). These repetitions, the *gongfu* - 功夫, require patience that comes with the years of training, as Anna from the *VHS* group after more than a decade of practicing points out

“I find that good, because I believe that it has to inscribe into my memory, in my body somehow. The body does not forget anything, nothing gets lost, it is overwritten with other patterns of movements – if one has learned something the wrong way... these are automatisms, it works automatic eventually, the body knows already, which movement is followed by the next, therefore this repetitive does not bother me, that is maybe also a part of the meditative component of the whole process, that one ... completely forgets the world and does not think of other problems...” (Interview_AT_20181112_02).

For Anna, the concentration, the ability to move and the balance are more important than different levels of achievement, therefore repetitions are useful, but perfection is not pursued. Taijiquan is emphasizing the correct execution of the movement patterns in slow motion. It is important to use the intention *yi* - 意 and not the muscle strength *li* - 力. It is aesthetically pleasing and a joy to watch, when Taijiquan is practiced in excellence, as Anna indicates:

“..., I find it an elegant movement, it is like a dance, one step merges into the next – one movement merges into the next – and that I find beautiful, very harmonious. I find that also beautiful if somebody can perform it perfectly – to watch that, I like that a lot” (Interview_AT_20181112_02).

To get that precision, a lot of patience is required and *gongfu* in (multitudinous) repetitions of a movement is necessary until the basics are embodied. Therefore, each sequence of the form is first taught, repeated, connected to the next, and repeated in the whole sequence until the next movement is attached. In extra three-hour workshops on Saturday the foundation of the forms is practiced. In the regular weekly courses, it takes then approximately a year to know the whole form by heart and the entire process of learning the sequences starts again, this time by improving each movement in smaller and smaller details. During the training, repeating a sequence at least five to six times in the lesson and on four to five succeeding weeks, inscribes the knowledge in the body (Fieldnotes VHS, Oct. 2018).

When practicing alone, without the possibility to watch a neighbor while performing, it is difficult to remember the exact implementation of the motion sequences and often the practitioner stops mid-movement not knowing how to proceed and neither the mind can

recall nor the body can perform the next step (Fieldnotes VHS, Jan. 2019). That even Taiji masters who practice their forms every day for decades, have sometimes difficulties remembering small techniques of motion sequences was an insight the trial lesson at a Viennese Taiji School in Vienna revealed: During the training, while practicing one particular movement, the instructor stopped and explained that her Taiji master Patrick Kelly (a disciple of Huang Xingxian whose teacher was Zheng Manqing, a Taiji master of Yang-style; see Patrick Kelly n.d.) just called the other day and remarked that his teaching from the previous summer training was not correct and that this particular movement should not be performed with the ball of foot, because he remembers now clearly that his (already deceased) master Huang Xingxian has done it on the heel. The solution for the instructor in Vienna was performing this movement both ways until her Taiji master can remember how to perform it correctly (Fieldnotes Taiji school, Nov. 2018).

New technologies in the form of DVDs or online videos can help to avoid this kind of transfer problem, especially when the Taiji master is already deceased, since the practitioners can watch the trainings sequences whenever they want. Watching videos in slow-motion is similar to the older teaching method, still practiced in the parks of Beijing, where practitioners watch their Taiji master performing the movement without any proper instruction how it is done – just by looking at him or her, as one interviewee (who has experienced this teaching style herself in workshops) points out:

“[a]ctually the way the Taiji masters in China taught it, ...they did not talk – they come in, stand there for 10 minutes, practice two movements, talk nothing at all, you practice and then they leave again, and then they [the students] practice alone – actually he stayed [to watch] but did not talk how movements are made... or where the weight is, but only watch, watch – the way children learn – watch, imitate, and that is on the one side a hard way to learn but also a good way,...” (Interview_EK_20181210_06).

Just watching a video of a Taiji master proves not always fruitful, because it is not easy to detect what the practitioners actually do – it might be too fast or the camera angle cannot follow the whole movement, as the example of Zheng Manqing performing *Taiji Tui Shou* demonstrates (Energie in Equilibrio 2019). When taking part in the pushing hands class in Vienna, I experienced this form as the playful application of practiced movement sequences, where the combative side of Taijiquan, the actual possibility to fight, is hidden. The main principle of Taiji can be deployed, where “*the human being is the connection*

between heaven and earth. While practicing Taiji the feet are deeply rooted in the ground (that shows reality), and the head is in the sky (that shows creativity)” (Fieldnotes Taiji organization, Dec. 2018). The tree is a popular metaphor and other sources see the waist as trunk and the limbs as branches (see Li 2009: 40). *Taiji Tui Shou* or pushing hands, is practiced in pairs and follows an open choreography. The training of other Taijiquan forms has prepared the body’s flexibility, strength and reaction, but the practitioners can now test their physical abilities while actually participating in fights and neither strength nor size matters, only the applied technique to unsettle the opponent. This form is practiced in an apparently endless loop of certain arm movements, where alternately one is pushing and the other tries to give in to the pressure and neutralize the push, while simultaneously looking for the *open door*, the *kong men* - 空门, the point to unbalance the opponent. Important is to stay in contact with the opponent and to react naturally and without resistance to the attack by using the opponents force and power for the own benefit (Fieldnotes Taiji association, May/June 2019).

Practicing Taijiquan with the aim to feel emotionally and physically balanced can possibly be explained with the *yin* and *yang* principle: through this fighting technique as an act of brutality, harmony and an inner peaceful feeling can be achieved as an eternal change between violence and peace. In the following, the ambivalence towards violence will be outlined as experienced by some practitioners in Vienna.

5.6 Denying Violence: The Love of Fighting Versus the Hate of Violence

Attracted by the elegance of the fan made of bamboo and red fabric, the women of the VHS group wanted to learn the Taiji Gongfu Fan form. The progression of this 52-Step Taiji fan form with elements of Shaolin kung fu and Chinese opera, is well balanced and coordinated despite different styles and abrupt, sudden moves, and the sequences of slow and fast movements. A harmonious performance is a pleasure for the eye (not so much for the ears, because the opening of the fan with zest is quite noisy) when all fans are opened and closed at the same time, giving an additional sound effect as well as a visual impression of colour. That a fan can also be used as a weapon is hidden behind the aesthetic movements and it reveals an interesting ambiguity in the VHS group: participants like to practice Taiji that is categorised as martial arts, but do not consider themselves as violent persons or as fighters. Nina summarizes that attitude as *“fighting... I am not a fighter... actual fighting, I don’t*

like it at all...” (Interview_CN_20181119_03). The VHS practitioners are not concerned about using a fan or even a sword, because they don’t consider these objects as “deadly” or harmful weaponry.

One participant of the VHS group, Ulla, likes her weapons: she owns three different swords with different characteristics. She likes to practice the kung fu sword form, because it has more momentum and drive and it is more like fighting – combative, aggressive and militant (Interview_UJ_20181101_01), but she doesn’t think of herself as a fighter or a violent person. Neither is Nina (Interview_CN_20181119_03) who dislikes fighting, but she considers Taiji as “the mother” of martial arts, where the slow embodiment of movements through iterative acts are practiced until the body knows them. She is convinced that the inscribed knowledge can be used in dangerous situations, because Taijiquan helps the body to keep balance and to put the centre of gravity to the *dantian* point below the naval, while at the same time the inner strength builds up during the training to prepare the body for a fight. Other members like Anna or Uta do not agree and think that Taijiquan cannot be used for self-protection (Interview_AT_20181112_02, Interview_UE_20181210_05). For Uta who practiced Jiu Jitsu as a form of self-defence years ago, Taijiquan does not belong in the same category of martial arts. It brings her body in harmony and improves her health in a relaxed atmosphere without performance pressure or the stress of competition. Despite their different opinions about the role of Taijiquan as martial art, their interviews also revealed a paradox: most practitioners love their sport, but they hate violence, a phenomenon martial arts practitioner are familiar with according to Channon/Matthews (2018). These authors plead for a moral, anti-violent pedagogies and a positive transformation within combat sports. A similar concept is described by Yu (2015: 178-180) used by the actor Jet Li who promotes non-violence and charity work as an alternative to his violent representation on the movie screen. The sword manifests the well-liked and elegant instrument often used when practicing Taijiquan, as the next section will demonstrate.

5.6.1 Elegant Violence: Fighting with the Sword

“Things invite us to dance, and when we sweep them onto the dance floor, they appear to become animate” (Bernstein 2009: 70).

The sword can be considered an elegant form of executing Taiji violence. Hand forms build the foundation of Taijiquan, and practitioners need to embody the basic knowledge before

the advanced technique with the sword can be tackled. In Vienna, it took almost two years, before the group was fit enough to take part in workshops for the Taiji fan form and another year before the Taiji sword form was on the program.

The (female) interviewees at VHS consider the sword more like an elegant training tool than a weapon. Carrying the sword in the street, disguised in a bag, or practicing sword forms in a public park causes curiosity and sometimes fear within the bystanders and onlookers (Fieldnotes VHS, Jan. 2020). Some participants use their weapons just for functionality without developing a special relationship with the sword and seem to like the red tassel (that adds weight and helps to balance the sword) even more.

In Chinese martial arts, there are traditionally 18 weapons as mentioned in the classic Chinese Ming novel *The Water Margin – Outlaws of the Marsh* - 水浒传 about 108 rebels who fight against the powerful and corrupt province government to give to the poor. Generally, there exist four types of weapons: long weapons (used with both hands like spear or staff), short weapons (used with one hand like the broadsword), soft weapons (linked with robe-like material like a flail) and twin weapons (with one weapon in each hand) (Li/Du 1995: 18-19). From the eighteen military weapons used in Chinese martial arts, the double-edged sword *jian* - 剑, the one-edged sword or sabre *dao* - 刀, the spear *qiang* - 枪, the long staff *gun* - 棍 or the Chinese fan *shan* - 扇, for example, are commonly used in Taijiquan (Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji; see Li/Du 1995: 18-20).

Taijiquan practitioners in the parks of the PR China perform the 32-Step Taiji Sword (also created and simplified in the 1950s) that has a clear, precise technique with traditional movements adapted from the Yang-style (Li 2009: 336). The sword (*jian* - 剑), a straight, double-edged, narrow-bladed weapon, has a long combat tradition in China: “*Throughout the millennia, it has inspired royalty, soldiers, poets, story-tellers, performers, astral observers, and martial artists alike. Swords were imbued with magical powers in many tales, and they were linked by some to comets*” (Chen [1928] 2000: x). The usage of staff, sabre and sword is very common amongst the Taijiquan practitioners. Not only in poetry or in novels, but also in the Chinese opera, swordplay is a fixed component of the expected entertainment (Chen [1928] 2000). Directors of martial arts films like Lee Ang in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) or Zhang Yimou in *Hero* (2002) and *House of*

Flying Daggers (2004) count on the swordsmanship of their actors to attract (inter-)national cinema audiences.

For sports in the park, most people use the telescopic sword with a stainless steel blade and a plastic handle (see Appendix, Figure 13) for pragmatic reasons since this sword can be folded into portable size that is easy to carry through a busy city, more advanced practitioners might use a stainless steel sword and the quality of the swords can differ enormously (Yang 2014). While Chen Weiming, a famous Taiji master and disciple of Yang Chengfu (see Appendix, Figure 6). describes very detailed the Taijiquan practice in his book *Taiji Sword*, the sword itself gets almost no attention. Only in the footnote, a few descriptions are made:

“There are two Cloud Heads on a Taiji sword. The upper one referred to here is the hand guard between the blade and handle. The lower Cloud Head is at the far end of the handle of the sword where a tassel would be attached. It is used in butting moves. Both Cloud Heads are shaped as stylized clouds” (Chen [1928] 2000: 20, footnote).

The body and the sword should act in harmony. To achieve that in the 32-Step Taiji Sword form, the body has to perform seven stances or seven ways of standing, ten footwork techniques or ten ways of stepping as well as self-defense techniques like shift, rotate, draw back and turn around. The sword has 13 techniques or ways to move it: to point, stab, sweep, draw, chop, pull back, slice upward, block, hook, intercept, lift, strike, and to smear (Li 2009: 336). In the older form, Chen Weiming uses only four sword moves: *kan* (to chop, or cut), *ce* (to thrust, pierce, or stab), *xiao* or *xue* (to slice or cut) and *dian* (to dot) and two sword blade position: *zhimian* (sword blade upright relative to the ground) and *pingmian* (sword blade flat relative to the ground) (Chen [1928] 2000: xiv).

Chen Weiming transformed the Yang family form that consisted just of sets of swords practices into a motion sequence with 55 postures. The different practices have names like e.g. “*Three Rings Circle the Moon*”, “*Great Star of the Literary God*” or “*Swallow Searches the Water*” as the first three postures are called (Chen ([1928] 2000: 71). These names show specifics of the practice and are necessary to keep the complex forms in mind. In addition, the definitions separate one set of postures from the following one, with a smooth transition from one to the next. The longer the practice, the better the knowledge about the posture is embodied and the smoother the transition between the movements can

be performed. When the Taiji sword form is practiced in perfection, it resembles a dance between a body and an object. A similar approach to dance and violence but with a different weapon, the sabre, was used by Maya Deren. In her short film *Meditation on Violence* (1948, dir. Maya Deren), the actor and dancer Chi Chao-li, born in Shanxi province, practices his martial art as a dance performance with underlying sounds of Chinese flutes and Haitian Drums (an influence of Deren's research interest in Haitian religions), "*based on traditional training movements of the wu-tang and shao-lin schools of chinese [sic] boxing*" as stated in the opening credits (ytv: The Third Eye / MOV MayDer 2012; see Teo 2016: 11; 95). The new forms of Taijiquan have a choreography and a special composed music, therefore the performance might look like a dance. The Taiji pushing hands form does not follow a strict choreography, but – like dancing – the training partners have to "listen" to the other person's body to react and to practice the movements correctly.

5.7 Violent Feelings: Imagined Cruelty

Fighting and violence is not the main factor when practicing Taijiquan or shadow boxing as it is also called. The Taiji practitioner fights against a shadow opponent that is imagined but not physically present. Hands and feet can be weapons – a fact that is blended out during the Taijiquan practice and an ambiguity can be noticed: practicing a violent martial art with a calm, harmonious and peaceful awareness. Taijiquan is often seen as a harmonious form to achieve inner peace, but violent feelings of rebellion and resistance bottled up inside the practitioner might be expressed and released.

Taijiquan training is not violent and violence is only mentioned theoretically – it is a fight in theory: which part of the body is used as a protection from an attack and as a means of defence, and which part of the body can be used to attack or to block an attack. In 24-Step Taijiquan, the main point of force comes through the wrist joint to the side of the hand whilst keeping inner strength that is not shown on the outside (Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20). When practicing certain motion sequences, the VHS instructor emphasises, where the force should come from and she demonstrates the movement with each participant to show her/him how the right move feels like. These techniques are also important in the sword form to show where the inner strength (executed again through the wrist joint) is transferred to the sword.

The sword is a weapon – even when it is a telescope sword with blunt edges, but in the eyes of the participants at the VHS it is more an object of elegance, a sign of subordination as well as form of empowerment. The Taiji sword group at VHS consists only of women and the elegant movements are in the foreground. To handle the weapon with grace and to be dangerous at the same time, bolsters the practitioner’s self-confidence (Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20). At the Taiji association, the male instructor talks of sword forms as an “art of weaponry” and mostly men are his clients, but the way of handling a sword according to Taijiquan rules are gender neutral (Fieldnotes Taiji association, May/June 2019). Within the VHS group, a tendency to prefer the elegant sword can be noticed, especially since the 32-Step Taiji sword form is extended by a kung fu sword form, that uses the basic techniques from Taiji, but much faster and livelier. To achieve the speed of kung fu, the movements need to be performed in perfection, otherwise the optimum velocity and pace cannot be reached.

Some movements are stimulating the imagination of subordination. Nina likes the sword and its easy handling. While she practices the form, she pretends the sword to be sharp and imagines how to execute violence against opponents – but without ever wanting to hurt anyone in reality. Other members at the VHS also express their “murderous” thoughts during the training – all hidden behind the upright façade of practitioners integrated into corporate work life. In 32-Step Taiji Sword, for example, one movement consists of a 360-degree turn of the body with the flat sword at collar height and some of the group members imagine their “enemies” standing in front of them while practicing this movement, implying their decapitation without mentioning this fact. In the kung fu sword form, a similar movement inspires their “fantasy of murderousness and blood lust” that will never be executed in real life: a 360-degree turn of the body with the flat sword ends with a straight stab to an imagined opponent at chest height (Fieldnotes VHS, Jan. 2020).

The harmonious movements performed when practicing Taijiquan do not look like dangerous attacks to the audience. How is Taijiquan considered violent? Within the framework of physical violence, in contrast to boxing (see Wacquant 2004) or mixed martial arts (see Spencer 2012), Taijiquan has no opponent to fight with. When practicing the forms, an opponent is imagined that is not there – explaining this martial art’s name “shadow boxing” in the Western world. Violence in Taijiquan is feinted as an imagined and constructed violence. When performing *Tui shou*, pushing hands, the opponent is

standing right in front of the practitioner, but in the imagination he/she is “*like a ghost*” and not physically present (Fieldnotes Taiji association May/June 2019). In all cases violence is not executed for real but it is a form of feinted violence. While practicing Taijiquan, violence is just “simulated” since there is no “victim” to experience force, no assault or infliction of pain and nobody loses dignity or value. During the practice of Taijiquan at the VHS only once “pain was inflicted” unintentionally when a Taiji fan was dropped with verve and landed accidentally on the ankle of the practitioner behind (Fieldnotes VHS, Dez. 2018). If Taijiquan is practiced for self-defense, the practitioner pretends to attack and prepares to react to this feinted violence. During the training, the body is prepared for a fight that is never fought against an imagined opponent. In *Tui Shou*, pushing hands, the opponent is blocked and attacked in an open sequence of possible movements and the aim of the training is to unbalance the competitor. Violence in Taijiquan is not to harm somebody, but to prepare the body as a tool for feinted violence by following the choreography of the form. In special Taijiquan tournaments that lasts for days, the opponents from all over the world do not fight against each other, but a single practitioner performs the motion sequences of the *taolu* - 套路 (the form) and this performance is marked by a jury and watched by the interested audience(s), (see Wushu TV 2018).

The practice of participating in violence, supported by mediated spectatorship on the internet and on TV changes to spectatorship by watching martial arts movies. The imagination of violence feinted during Taijiquan practice expressed with bare hands or with weapons connects the Taiji practitioner with the imagined violence on the silver screen as depicted in the following part.

6. Spectatorship in Violence: Martial Arts Represented in Cinema

“Like reading *Water Margin* and even taijiquan verses, watching a film is not direct experience of the world it depicts, but **it may inspire a martial arts practitioner to reconstruct that world**” (Frank 2006: 196, emphasis added).

The individual practitioner of martial arts in sports often changes the career path from athlete to film actor, where the similar choreography of combat styles like Taijiquan practiced in the park and of fighting techniques represented in films serve as a link between sports and cinema.

Jet Li, or Li Lianjie as he is known in the PRC, was a martial arts prodigy before becoming a famous actor (see Yu 2015). He took part in international competitions in Hong Kong with a sabre performance when he was eight years old (yvtv: Ninja Turtle 2007). In 1978, he won the title with a long hand performance (yvtv: dong wang 2008). Sabrina Qiong Yu (2015) who places her focus on the star *Jet Li – Chinese Masculinity and Transnational Stardom*, examines the career of “[a]rguably the best martial arts actor alive” (Yu 2015: 6) starting with his early success in *Shaolin Temple* (1982, dir. Chang Hsin Yen) in the 1980s that made him not only a Chinese *wuxia* hero in the 1990s but also a transnational kung fu star who crosses boundaries of cultural, geographical and cyberspace domains and lead to a remasculinization of Chinese action bodies. Yu argues that Jet Li’s work describes a “*journey across borders therefore offers a perfect site from which to explore the challenges, achievements and difficulties associated with the transnationalisation of Chinese-language cinema, and martial arts films in particular*” (Yu 2015: 6).

To understand Jet Li’s achievements, it is necessary to examine the notion of Chinese cinema that comprises the PR China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in connection with the concept of national cinema as well as its specific film genres. Representing the nation-state, national cinema – closely interwoven with the perception of diaspora or exile cinema (see Dudrha et al. 2015) often essentializes films and their directors without considering the international influences (Gray 2010: 86; see Gateward 2001). In his article *Film Genre and Chinese Cinema: A Discourse of Film and Nation*, Teo (2012) explores the question if Chinese productions have genres and he suggests to consider the model of “national cinema” as container of genres while genres contain “*traits and characteristics that may be defined as national ... [and they] encompass a sense of identity and provide a certain satisfaction in the audience seeking identification through the local indigenous characteristics of given genres*” (Teo 2012: 287). Zhang Yimou, director of the Chinese blockbuster *Hero* (2002), explained that Chinese cinema was influenced by Chinese literature as well as art. During his education he “*was widely exposed to the New Wave and the Italian neo-realism. Also, to American cinema*” and in the beginning of his professional career he “*tried to find authentic sources of inspiration, keeping in mind the Western film images we had seen in school*” (Ciment 2001: 24). His approach to filmmaking shows the global entanglement of mutual influences and inspirations within the movie industry.

Zhang Yingjin (2004, 2012) points out that the notion of “Chinese movies” includes not only mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese diaspora but also all the different Chinese languages as well as dialects that exposes the myth of homogeneity of a (national) Chinese cinema. Therefore “[i]n the current English discourse, ‘Chinese cinema(s),’ ‘Chinese-language cinema,’ and ‘Sinophone cinema’ are three principal contenders, each carrying its own ideological baggage and each working toward an explicit aim of deterritorialization or reterritorialization” (Zhang 2012: 3; see Zhang 2004; Xu 2007).

In the case of Chinese cinema from the mainland, the questions of production, distribution and exhibitions play an important role. In the past films that were forbidden in the PR China due to objected contents or violation of financing laws, gained a large popularity when shown on international film festivals in Cannes or Venice. Film directors like Zhang Yimou or Chen Kaige balance the thin line between criticizing and playing along to fulfil the requirements and demands of the nation-state (see Ciment 2001: 23; Zha 1995: 79-104). Chinese movies that are highly praised on the international stage of festivals, claiming their space in high culture, made their way back to the consuming masses on the street corners by undermining the economy’s ordinary ways of distribution. The pirated copies and their creative ways of distribution not only contributed to the fame of the filmmaker, but also to the surge of illegally produced DVDs on the black market (see Yang 2002; Gateward 2001).

Berry (2010) pursues the issue of transnational cinema within the Chinese context as a neo-liberal consequence of globalization. The four most globally and financially successful Chinese movies in the 1990s and 2000s according to Zhang Yingjin (2012: 1) are: *The Wedding Banquet* - 喜宴 (1993, dir. Lee Ang), *Farewell My Concubine* - 霸王别姬 (1993, dir. Chen Kaige), and the martial arts films *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* - 卧虎藏龙 (2000, dir. Lee Ang) and *Hero* - 英雄 (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou). The fact that “... the PRC permitted Ang Lee, a Taiwan national, to shoot a nostalgic, conservative swordplay film set in pre-revolutionary China, and filled with characters who could fly and believed in superstition...” (Eperjesi 2004: 33) bears testimony of the entangled ways of Chinese cinema in a transnational circuit.

In the years before the Olympic Games in Beijing, spirit of optimism and “we can show the Western world” was noticeable in PR China and in this period, John Eperjesi (2004)

investigates and analysis China's "*kung fu diplomacy*" based on the worldwide box office success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) directed by Lee Ang, from a political angle. He points out that the nation state uses pandas, Shaolin monks and the transnational dissemination of neo-Confucianism as a strategy to boost her economic power. In her pursuit to bridge the gap between mainland Chinese, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese in the diaspora, the PRC tries to "*generate structures of feeling that make a territorially dispersed community of 'Chinese everywhere' imaginable*" (Eperjesi 2004: 30). While Lee Ang is a director from Taiwan, Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou both belong to the so-called "Fifth Generation" of Chinese filmmakers who were among the first graduates of the Beijing Film Academy after the Cultural Revolution in 1982 and gained international fame (see Gateward 2001; Zha 1995: 79-104). Their movies films were successful long before the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games 2008, staged by Zhang Yimou, was televised around the world (see Zhang 2012). The Chinese nation-state used Zhang Yimou's cosmopolitan fame gained by his creative and successful ways of circumventing norms and regulations of this same nation-state to take part in international film festivals to be in the spotlight when the whole world paid particular attention to the PRC.

6.1 Violent Chinese Film Genre(s)

"... In other words, the more *wuxia* changes, the more historic it seems to be" (Teo 2016: 166).

Martial arts performances as entertainment at special occasions in the villages continue within the range of Chinese cinema(s) and have as martial arts films a special significance. In cinema, the fascination for these movies – commonly known as kung fu films – with their extensive bandwidth of different manifestations delights and entertains the audience inside and outside the People's Republic of China. Within mainland China, a North-South division is noticed: The Mandarin speaking North practices the Wudang styles with the sword and Taijiquan is a part of it, while the Cantonese speaking South practices Shaolin kung fu with bare hands without weapons. As Teo (2016: 4-5) states, in the mainland China martial arts films are called *wushu pian* - 武术片 or *wuyi pian* - 武艺片 ('martial arts cinema') or *wuda pian* - 武打片 ('martial action cinema') for all kinds of martial arts films, for *wuxia* and non-*wuxia* films. Teo defines for the *wuxia* genre (rooted in swordplay movies of the Shanghai silent film era) that "*the knight-errant is almost always a master of both unarmed and armed techniques. It is not uncommon in wuxia movies to see a fighter wielding a sword in combat, only to lose it and continue with his bare hands*" (Teo 2003:

24, emphasis original). As in Taijiquan practice, the hand form as foundation has to be learned and mastered before the sword form can be practiced. Therefore, the practitioner who is able to use the sword can also perform the hand forms. But it is less likely that a practitioner who masters the hand form only, can perform Taiji with the sword. For the genre of knight-errant swordplay with magic features – especially attractive for the cinema, the specific term *shenguai wuxia* - 神怪武侠 is used, that “denotes gods and spirits (shen) and the strange and the bizarre (guai: which could also refer to monsters and creatures of legend and the imagination). Wuxia’s integration with shenguai and its absorption and the imitation of foreign genres, ..., attests to my central proposition that the genre was highly adaptable in spite of its historicist roots” (Teo 2016: 11, emphasis original). Teo states that

“[a]mong Chinese indigenous genres, wuxia today is perhaps the best known throughout the world. It has become a representative genre of the Chinese national cinema because of its stronger propensity to convey a certain sense of nationalism and values of justice, duty, and honor. Genre in this sense defines the collective values, ideals, and traditions of the nation. **The characteristics of the genre are then the characteristics of the nation, defining both the nation and its cinema**” (Teo 2012: 288, emphasis added).

In contrast, Hunt (2003: 3) considers the kung fu movies of the late 1960s in Hong Kong as “*cultural hybrid*” influenced by Japanese Samurai cinema and slow-motion violence used by American directors. To differentiate *wuxia* and kung fu films, Lau (2000: 161) points out that in *wuxia* films heroes are armed with swords and possess supernatural powers, while in kung fu (or *wushu*) films the protagonists are unarmed. Contrary to this assumption, Teo (2003: 24) points out that opponents often change from weapon to bare hands during their fight. For Teo, the *wuxia* cinema, clearly separated from the intersecting kung fu cinema with its own specific characteristics, represents a distinct Chinese film genre (Teo 2016: 4; see Teo 2012), but he concludes that *wuxia* and kung fu “... *can usefully be seen as two distinct but inter-related genres*” (Teo 2016: 20). For the purpose of this paper, the suggestion of Teo (2016: 4) will be followed for the depicted styles in the broadest sense only: *wuxia* (including *wuxia shenguai*) will be used on films with swordplay, righteousness, and chivalry as well as supernatural powers that is, because of the technique, also known as “wire fu” movies (Hunt 2003: 24), and the notion of kung fu will be applied for films that utilize the physical skills obtained through iterative acts.

In the 1920s, the film industry started in Shanghai and for about ten years the Mandarin speaking North prospered and dominated the Cantonese speaking South in this field (Teo 2002). Already a decade later, *wuxia* films dealing with chivalrous knights-errant, where the *wu* (武) stands for violence and martial art and the *xia* (俠) for chivalry, were banned in mainland China out of fear that the shown superstition could interfere with the nation building process and neglected for about fifty years. The communist leadership of the newly founded People's Republic of China in 1949 soon influenced the growing film industry and during the Cultural Revolution, only a few model films were allowed (Kramer 1997; Donald 2000; Chan/Willis 2016).

The popular martial arts films featuring a romantic hero with patriotic actions were still produced in Hong Kong (Teo 2016: 1; 51; see Bordwell 2000, Zhen 2005, Desser 2000, Fu 2000), where the inferior regarded *wuxia* genre focusing on physical efficiency flourished and regenerated itself – well-liked by the audience but considered of very low value (Teo 1997: 98; Eperjesi 2004: 30; Hunt 2003). According to Hunt (2003: 2), Hong Kong martial arts movies are the gateway to transfer this film genre, its stars, directors and choreographers to the global presence of Hollywood mediated by their technologies as well as their aesthetics.

The notion of “Chinese cinema(s)” in its political conceptuality as well as the term “Sinophone cinema” does not seem to be expedient in the analysis of violence in martial arts films, therefore the approach through the Chinese film genres of kung fu and *wuxia* (with the special form of *wuxia shenguai*) appears more auspicious, as the next chapter will show.

6.2 Choreographed Violence: Stars, Movies, and Plots

The audience of martial arts movies does not look mainly for the plot and or the cinematography of a movie but for the quality of the fighting scenes. In the center of their critique stand the skills of the martial artists who use their trained, inscribed body to perform these violent scenes. Among the most famous male actors dominating this field on the silver screen are Jackie Chan, Jet Li and Donnie Yen, while Chang Pei-Pei and Michelle Yeoh are considered the best martial art actresses and Zhang Ziyi connects with her performance in (inter-) national blockbusters the audience(s). Already in the 1960s, the

Shaw brothers produced martial arts films that entertained the masses and they strived at conquering the world market – a goal that Hong Kong cinema could reach with the upcoming of a new star: Bruce Lee.

6.2.1 Real Violence: Hong Kong, Bruce Lee, Kung Fu and The Idea of “Real Fighting”

“Ten years later, ‘kung fu’ had permanently entered the transnational imaginary – it was the name of a television show, a genre, a pedagogic industry, the subject of comics, magazines and other merchandising” (Hunt 2003: 1).

The film legend, the global, transnational superstar Bruce Lee (李小龙, born 1940 in San Francisco; IMBd, TMDb, HKMDB: Bruce Lee), is closely connected to the notion of “kung fu” (Lee 1963). This word “功夫” (in pinyin: *gongfu*) means an achievement through the hard work of iterative acts to embody knowledge and is written “kung fu” in the Wade-Giles transliteration of Chinese characters that was used in the United States before the *hanyu pinyin* system proved to be more fruitful. Bruce Lee’s training of martial arts, his “kung fu” is commonly associated with the whole concept of martial art cinema in Hong Kong movies and got a whole new range of “Orientalized” meaning. Bruce Lee learned Wu-style Taiji from his father (Little [1997] 2016: 186-187) adding Taekwondo and Wing Chun among other combat techniques before creating his own hybrid style: *Jeet Kune Do*. With his concept of “kung fu”, he created the idea of “real fighting” in “*combining body and cinematic techniques*” (Teo 2016: 79; see Teo 2010). Lee choreographed his own martial arts scenes, used special camera angles and martial arts techniques that lead to the worldwide kung fu film and fighting craze in the 1970s and 1980s:

“Thus, he maintained some of what the audience expected to see from *wuxia* pictures (the flying, leaping and jumping), but presented something else they had never seen before – an intense, animalistic fight sequence of two men using real kicks and real punches. In other words, the ‘real fighting’ of kung fu had to undergo a cinematic change” (Teo 2016: 76, emphasis original).

His idea of the “real fight” technique is represented in a violent martial art scene (evolve-mma n.d.), the showdown between Bruce Lee and the US-American Karate fighter Chuck Norris in the film *The Way of the Dragon* - 猛龙过河 (1972, dir. Bruce Lee). Staged in Rome in the Colosseum, the two opponents meet in a fight of life and death, where scenes with cats in between serve as distraction during the cruelest sequences and at the same time indicate that Bruce Lee, the cat, is playing with Chuck Norris, the mouse. It ends with a brutal killing with bare hands that leaves the audience shocked by the witnessed calm and

controlled execution of violence. The (dead) body of the opponent is left at the scene, covered by his “murderer” with his martial art jacket and honored with his black belt in fulfillment of “martial art etiquette”.

Bruce Lee’s film *Enter the Dragon* - 龙争虎斗 (1973, dir. Robert Clouse) was released after his early death and featured the “three dragons” of martial arts cinema in supporting roles: Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao who got their education together at the *China Drama Academy* in Hong Kong (see Frank 2006: 199). In this movie, Bruce Lee plays the Shaolin martial artist Lee who takes an invitation to a tournament of crime lord Han. This competition is thought to be a disguise for criminal schemes of drug production and human trafficking. Han was responsible for the suicide of Lee’s sister and Lee wants to reveal Han’s misdeeds for the British secret service. In the showdown in the maze of mirrors between Lee and Han who is fighting with his hand prosthesis equipped with different weapons, Lee can finally defeat the drug lord.

In his films, Bruce Lee is defending exploited and wronged women, putting them in the role of the weak and helpless female victim of violence. On the screen, he is executing physical violence in a fight man against man and kills his opponents with his “kung fu”, his extraordinary martial arts kills.

Bowman (2013) states that the figure of Bruce Lee – torn between the USA and Hong Kong – offered not only a popular “*counterculture*” for the West, but also “*something more: a complete transformation in the image of the male hero... of perfectly self-reliant grace*” (Bowman 2013: 5). This Orientalized image as representative of the body genre – as “*genre of bodies*” (Hunt 2003: 2) intermingles with real-life heroes of the Chinese underworld as Boretz (2011) defines Chinese male subjectivity. Their masculinity expressed

“[b]y embodying, not merely mimicking, the “image” of what they would like to be — demonic, heroic, violent, capricious, austere, completely self-possessed—ritual actors dissolve the aesthetic distinction between subject and object, role and instance. This is the very object of *wu* masculinity: to embody (self-)productive, (self-)transformative, efficacious power. Therein must lie a great—but ultimately silent—pleasure” (Boretz 2011: 211).

It took more than 30 years until this craze reached mainland China. In October 2008, after the Olympic Games, an opulent CCTV (China Central Television - 中央电视台) produced

series *The Legend of Bruce Lee* - 李小龙传奇 in 50 episodes, starring Danny Chan, was the highlight on public TV with high audience share (China.org.cn 2018).

Because the productive phase of Hong Kong kung fu cinema in the 1970s for the “*universal body*” (Hunt 2003: 3) of international audience(s) stresses, nevertheless, nationalism in the form of fights against imperialist oppression, some Bruce Lee films were forbidden in the PRC. The production was fueled by three main companies: *Shaw Brothers* (mostly featuring studio films about the historic China and the Shaolin “myth”), *Golden Harvest* by Raymond Chow – supporting Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan (or Chen Long in the PRC) as well as Sammo Hung as choreographer. Together with Yuen Biao, “*Hung, Chan and Yuen were to be major figures in the modernisation of Hong Kong genre cinema, while Shaws ceased production in the mid-1980s*” (Hunt 2003: 6). The third company, *Seasonal Films* had the talented choreographer Yuen Wo-ping (also known as Yuen Woo-Ping), later working with *Golden Harvest* who supported actors with physical talent and made the kung fu comedies their brand (Hunt 2003: 5-7). Yuen Woo-Ping is responsible for the successful choreography of many (inter-)national martial arts blockbusters.

6.2.2 Virtuous Violence: Jackie Chan

The name of Jackie Chan (成龙, born 1954 in Hong Kong; IMDb, TMDb, HKMDB: Jackie Chan) is commonly associated with kung fu and as one of “*the most commercially successful Asian film personality since Bruce Lee*”, he represents (besides Lee Ang and John Woo) film artists “*from the Chinese diaspora of Hong Kong and Taiwan embody the histories of colonialism; the geopolitics of race, masculinity and power; and the experiences of transnational filmmaking*” (Szeto 2011: 3). As martial arts actor, director, producer and choreographer he takes part in the international media landscape and controls his projects as well as “*engaging with and undermining dominant ideologies involving such categories of identities as Asianness, masculinity, and femininity*” (Szeto 2011: 4).

In films with Jackie Chan, the forms of violence can be identified and categorized as fighting against bullies, imperialists and colonial powers, destruction of capitalist symbols and the victory of the morally good, fighting international organized crime: drugs, counterfeit money, smuggling of cultural treasures, gambling as well as empowerment of the weak to fight against mobbing and bullying. In his roles, Jackie Chan is characterized

by good character traits and virtues who dedicates his private life to fight against the evil. In the following, significant movies as samples will be examined.

6.2.2.1 Uprising: The Fight Against Oppressive Forces

The early films by Jackie Chan depict the fight against bullies, imperialists and colonialist powers, an uprising against suppressors. In *Drunken Master* - 醉拳 (1978, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping), a classic kung fu film with elaborate fighting scenes executed with bare hands, Jackie Chan emerges out of his stuntman's image and Bruce Lee's shadow and developed his own, independent film style with acrobatic and humor. In this film he plays the young and roguish Wong Fei-hung (黄飞鸿, the Cantonese name is read in Mandarin Huang Feihong) who is sent by his frustrated father to a martial arts master, Beggar So, to complete his training. When Wong Fei-hung tries to leave a restaurant without paying that results in a fight with enormous damage to furniture, food and guests, he meets his new master. After an assassin defeats and humiliates him, he takes up the hard training with Beggar So. The embodiment of the drunken fist style gives an insight in the brutal training methods of martial artists and the *gongfu*, the innumerable iterative acts inscribing the practice into the body of the fighter. He gets the opportunity to use his new skills and defend his father against the assassin. Fei-hung fights the drunken fist style of the eight immortals and succeeds with the feminine one which gives the film a comical note within the seriousness of the combat, before he defeats the assassin.

The sequel *Drunken Master II* - 醉拳二 (1994, dir. Lau Kar-Leung), released in the USA in the year 2000 as *The Legend of the Drunken Master*, features Jackie Chan again as Wong Fei-hung. His father does not approve the drunken fist style of the eight immortals because of the misuse of alcohol. Wong Fei-hung fights against British imperialists who suppress the local steel factory workers. Jackie Chan uses different weapons, among them a fan, in a fight against British colonialists who were trying to steal Chinese cultural treasures under the guise of diplomatic immunity. In the long fighting scene against Ken Lo, he applies the drunken fist style-to win (evolve-mma n.d.). Ken Lo has the role of the British gentlemen fighter in a suit applying a Taekwondo-like fighting style characterized by foot technique. Jackie Chan is fighting the style of drunken master und uses the British three-piece suit as weapon against the opponent. While his enemy is left deadly wounded, the comical element loosens the audience(s) tension: Jackie Chan "vomits" soap bubbles.

The use of “substances” to win a fight is also depicted in the movie *The Young Master* - 師弟出馬 (1980, dir. Jackie Chan). Jackie Chan as star and director created the plot around the “traditional” Chinese Lion Dance and excels in an almost twenty minutes long fighting scene in a dusty landscape in the hills. In the beginning, Jackie Chan has no chance against his opponent, who hurts and injures him. The opium water from his companion’s pipe gives Jackie Chan enough strength to develop a kind of “monkey style” and to be victorious against his opponent. In this scene only physical force is shown – the body is the weapon and the target without a damage to property (ytv: Midnight Pulp 2019).

These films show violence enforced body on body with pure fighting skills and depicts a victory of the weak against bullies, imperialist forces or colonialist powers.

6.2.2.2 Destruction: Demolition of Capitalist Symbols

Destruction of capitalist symbols and the victory of the “morally” good person is depicted in the numerous films of the *Police Story* series - 警察故事系列 starting in 1985. In this series, Jackie Chan relocated the plot of martial arts movies to the urban environment “mixing it with broad comedy, dangerous stunts and other kinds such as gunplay” (Hunt 2003: 4). The following movies serve as milestones of the progressive development of the series:

In *Police Story* - 警察故事 (1985, dir. Jackie Chan), a police officer framed by a drug lord has to prove his innocence that culminates in “the mall scene” with a spectacular acrobatic fighting scene on escalators that leads to a lot of broken glass vitrines and destroyed high class consumer products like expensive technical equipment, cameras, and brand footwear – even a motorbike is used to break more consumer goods. Jackie Chan can show his fighting skills with different weapons that come his way and his acrobatic abilities when he is abseiling himself on a sparkling light chain (ytv: uniques 2020).

In *New Police Story* - 新警察故事 (2004, dir. Benny Chan), Jackie Chan as police officer has to fight against a youth gang, spoiled kids from rich parents, the gaming generation. This gives him the opportunity to excel in his “body art” techniques like drunken master, combined with finest acrobatic skills acquired through the disciplined training in an Beijing Opera School in Hong Kong: rappelling from skyscrapers or falling from a bridge using a

lamp to land on a bus while leaving a path of destruction of cars, broken glass, and telephone booths toppling over like dominoes behind – symbols of a powerful economy and capitalism. In a Lego shop, Jackie Chan can show his marvelous fighting skills among piercing colors of plastic toys, balloons and innocent Lego constructions, where a fight in a ball pool loosens up the tight atmosphere of a battle of live and death. The comical elements are not missing, for example when Jackie Chan fixes the head of an enormous Lego figure before the fight resumes. In another scene, hundreds of yellow plastic ducklings fall of a truck into the bay. In a spectacular nerve-wracking showdown on a roof with the last surviving youth of the gang, the son of the police chief. For the romantic part of this *wuxia* story and the happy ending, Jackie Chan as a man of honor proposes to his colleague who has a scar on her cheek, a wound she got during a police operation.

In recent productions like *Bleeding Steel* - 机器之血 (2017, dir. Leo Zhang), Jackie Chan takes a science fiction approach with cyborg creatures and modern weapons, but he abides by the underlying idea that an honorable police officer puts his work before his family life to fight his good cause against crime.

In these films, the fight of the morally good person against evil forces leads to mass destruction of consumer goods as symbols of capitalist economy.

6.2.2.3 Crime: The Fight Against Organized Evil

The fight against all kinds of vice, the international organized crime with corruption, gambling, and smuggling of cultural treasures as well as counterfeit money is depicted in the *Rush Hour* trilogy. In *Rush Hour* (1998, dir. Brett Ratner) Jackie Chan as Hong Kong police officer Detective Inspector Lee has to work together with the cheeky L.A.P.D. detective James Carter, played by Chris Tucker, against a powerful drug lord to rescue the kidnapped daughter of Consul Han. Located in Hong Kong and Los Angeles, the cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations between the two actors contribute to the success, besides the spectacular fighting scenes. In the sequel *Rush Hour II* (2001, dir. Brett Ratner), James Carter takes a vacation in Hong Kong to meet his friend Lee, when a bomb explosion in the US Consulate kills two officers. The two policemen take up the case and follow the path of counterfeit money and gambling to the showdown in a casino. In the third part, *Rush Hour III* (2007, dir. Brett Ratner), the former Consul Han, now Ambassador, is shot

while talking to the criminal court in Los Angeles about triads and their evil machinations. Han's bodyguard Lee (Jackie Chan) teams up again with Carter (Chris Tucker), who was demoted to traffic policeman, to fight international crime. Their investigation brings them to Paris and leads them to the decisive battle on top of the Eiffel tower.

In these movies, the police officers use their personal "cultural differences" between "being Chinese and African-American" (not only in their taste of music) and language problems as the comical element around the brutality of organized crime within the Chinese triads, the smuggling of national treasures and counterfeit money.

6.2.2.4 Empowerment: Encouragement of the Weak

Another topic in Jackie Chan movies is the empowerment of the weak to fight against mobbing and bullying. In the film *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* - 蛇形刁手 (1978, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping), Jackie Chan himself has the role of an orphan as the bullied kid in a kung fu school who is trained by the master of the snake fist style to win against his opponents. In 2010, in the film *The Karate Kid* (2010, dir. Harald Zwart), Jackie Chan plays Mr. Han, an old janitor and martial arts master. Jaden Smith plays the role of Dre Parker, a Black teenager from the US interested in kung fu. He is the only son of a hard-working single mom sent to Beijing to boost her career. Dre attends an international school, where he is bullied by his Chinese schoolmates who are disciples of a martial arts instructor with a dubious reputation. The bullied boy gets support from the old janitor, Mr. Han, who has an account to settle with the kung fu trainer and prepares Dre for the competition. In just a short time and with persistent training, Dre can win the competition. The movie depicts the relationship between master and disciple as well as the *gongfu* of martial arts, the countless iterative acts of patient practice until the body is fit and has inscribed the essential knowledge to fight a battle. Despite this insight into the hard training conditions to make it to the top and the participation of Jackie Chan, the implausibility of the story impaired the possible success. Not only was an American plot placed into Beijing without considering the cultural differences, but also the depiction of a dishonorable martial arts instructor and the defeat by an American did not please even by the most dedicated Jackie Chan fans (Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji). In these films, violence is learned by the weak in order to rely on their skills and to empower them to fight their oppressors.

Four broad themes concerning violence emerged from the analysis: uprising as a form of self-empowerment, destruction of capitalist symbols as a form of resistance, fighting against international organized crime as well as empowerment of others to fight against unjust. During his career Jackie Chan changes from kung fu fighter using his bare hands to his own characteristic style of martial arts and acrobatic that includes various weapons (including random objects) as well as comical elements. The locations of his movies range from the rural areas of farmers to the inner cities, the business centers as heart of finance and economy. Recently, a transformation within the films can be noticed towards the use of science fictional plots, cyborgs and modern, war-like weapons to attract the younger audience of the computer gaming generation. Jackie Chan impresses his fans with his enormous physical involvement in his projects and they eagerly wait for the closing credits of his productions to see the bloopers that happened during the filming since he acts as his own stunt double, a self-inflicted form of violence expressed against his own body. An equally dedicated actor and star who also brings determination and proficiency to the screen, is Jet Li.

6.2.3 Proficient Violence: Jet Li

The Beijing born Li Lianjie (李连杰, born 1963; IMDb, TMDb, HKMDB: Jet Li) better known as Jet Li outside the PRC, is associated by Sabrina Yu (2015: 6) for being responsible for modernizing *wuxia* films in Hong Kong, and Westernizing this genre in Hollywood, where “[i]t is instructive to consider how Li is actively involved in and accelerates the interaction between *wuxia* films and action films” (Yu 2015: 6, emphasis original). The examined samples of his long filmography feature him as embodiment of “mythological” figures as well as historic personalities and show his dedication in perfectly executed fighting scenes,

6.2.3.1 “Legendary” Figures

Jet Li who shows an equal impressive bodily commitment in his motion pictures as Jackie Chan, did not “fight” against him until the movie *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008, dir. Rob Minkoff) brought them together. This film shows them in a perfectly choreographed fighting scene, giving both actors the chance to show their skills (ytv: PWC222 2010) in this story about the “mythological” figure of the Monkey King *Song Wukong* - 孙悟空, rooted in oral history and mentioned in the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* - 西遊記/西游记 of Ming

Dynasty. In the movie, an American teenager and kung fu film “nerd” has to bring a mythical weapon, a long pole, back to the Middle Kingdom in ancient times to free the Monkey King. He is supported by mythical heroes: a different appearance of the Monkey King, played by Jet Li, and the drunken immortal, played by Jackie Chan. After they fight against each other in an impressive wire-fu fight of best trained martial art actors, they unit with the same aim – to train the teenager to fulfill his mission. This picture tells the well-liked legend of the Monkey King in an Orientalized ancient China and depicts again the training methods of *gongfu* and how masters train their disciples, although it is unusual to have two masters at the same time and not in succession.

Within the PRC, the film *Shaolin Temple* - 少林寺 (1982, dir. Chang Hsin Yen) starring the young martial arts champion Li Lianjie, who later became known as Jet Li, in his first film that made not only the location and the fighting style of the temple famous but also brought a deeper interest in this film genre to mainland China. The fictionalized story is based on a Shaolin folklore narrative of a general who organizes a successful coup against a Tang emperor. Jet Li, as a loyal subject of the emperor seeks refuge at the Shaolin Temple, where he learns the fighting skills of the Shaolin monks to avenge his father’s death by killing the traitor. Yu concludes that “*The Shaolin Temple series also stimulated the first wuxia trend since 1949 in the mainland Chinese film industry, an industry which has usually downplayed entertaining genre films*” (Yu 2015: 6, emphasis original) and helped Hong Kong’s *wuxia* film industry to new heights. During Jet Li’s successful career, “[n]ot only did he continue his graceful physical performances in contemporary settings, but the chivalrous spirit which defines his *wuxia* heroes also characterizes many of his action roles” (Yu 2015: 6, emphasis original).

Another “legendary” character embodied by Jet Li is “Nameless”, the assassin in *Hero* (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou), (see Chapter 6.2.7). In this movie, the family of “Nameless” from Zhao, the enemy of Qin, was killed by the King’s army. “Nameless” tries to avenge them when he plots to assassinate the King of Qin, but in the end sacrifices his own life for a higher goal: the unification of the empire that will bring peace.

In these *wuxia* movies staged in a historicized, ancient China, Jet Li uses force for a specific purpose, and he fights to avenge suffered misfortunes. His convincing fighting technique includes not only bare hands, but also classical martial arts weapons as long pole or sword.

6.2.3.2 Historical Personalities

Jet Li's participation in epic martial arts movies depict the fight against colonial powers and intruders through his embodiment of historic martial art heroes like Zhang Sanfeng, the legendary founder of Taiji, Huo Yuanjia (1868-1910) and Wong Fei-hung (1847-1924).

In the movie *Tai Chi Master* - 太极张三丰 (1993, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping), Jet Li plays the role of Zhang Sanfeng who is rooted in the narrative of Taiji history as its founder. His part is characterized by the transformation he is going through: a virtuous fighter who is betrayed by his childhood friend and suffers almost deadly injuries, watches nature while he is recovering. His fighting experiments not only help him to gain back his physical and mental health, but to develop a fighting style based on the elements and laws of nature – Taijiquan. When he meets his former friend as opponent in a fight of life and death, he successfully uses his new skills and the misled, ambiguous adversary dies through the effects of his own force (see also Chapter 6.2.8).

As Jackie Chan in the *Drunken Master* films before, Jet Li plays the legendary Wong Fei-hung in the series of five films between 1991 and 1994, *Once Upon A Time in China* - 黄飞鸿 (dir. Hark Tsui), situated in Guangdong province who fights against foreign invaders of Hong Kong and Macao. In the sequel *Once Upon A Time in China II* - 黄飞鸿之二男儿当自强 (1992, dir. Hark Tsui), Jet Li meets his opponent, Donnie Yen, in an impressive fighting scene of these two former members of Beijing's national wushu team: between a bamboo scaffold with rice in baskets and big clay pots the fight between Wong Fei-hung (Jet Li) and an imperial official, Commander Lan (Donnie Yen) starts with long weapons – each fighter uses two long (bamboo) poles as defense. Within the fight, Donnie Yen takes a soft weapon, a long piece of with silk against Jet Li who still uses a long pole. Finally, the exhausting fight ends with the defeat of Commander Lan among enormous amounts of wasted rice, destroyed storage containers and demolished bamboo frameworks. The fighters excel not only with their physical effort, foot technique and acrobatic while climbing on the scaffold but also with their flawless skills when using their weapons (evolve-mma n.d.).

In the film *Fearless* - 霍元甲 (2006, dir. Ronny Yu), Jet Li plays the martial arts master Huo Yuanjia who first relies excessively on his fighting skills and indulges in pride, drinking,

partying, extravagance and even murder that causes him to flee Tianjin. In a village he learns empathy and returns as a changed man. He makes a name by battling against foreign fighters that stand for the colonial powers, Western imperialism and Japanese intruders at the end of Qing Dynasty. In a fighting competition in Shanghai in the year 1910, he wins against three opponents with different weapons, but gets poisoned during the last fight – while he is dying, he is declared the winner. *Fearless* is loosely based on Huo Yuanjia's biography and became an international blockbuster (TMDb: Huo Yuanjia).

In these self-Orientalized *wuxia* movies about important personalities rooted in the narrative of official history, Jet Li embodies famous martial arts fighters who use their outstanding ability of their *gongfu* to fight against ambiguous opponents with classical weapons and physical skills. The focus lies not on revenge but on liberation of oppression from competitive adversaries, representatives of power or colonial intruders.

6.2.4 Patient Violence: Donnie Yen

The former martial arts champion Donnie Yen (甄子丹, born 1963 in Guangzhou; IMDb, TMDb, HKMDB: Donnie Yen) has an enormous potential of embodied fighting skills and starred in countless supporting roles playing mostly unnoticed on the side of Jackie Chan (e.g. in *Shanghai Knights*, 2003, dir. David Dobkin), Jet Li (e.g. in *Once Upon a Time In China II* - 黄飞鸿之二男儿当自强, 1992, dir. Tsui Hark) or Michelle Yeoh (e.g. in *Wing Chun* - 咏春, 1994, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping). Even his part as “Sky” in *Hero* - 英雄 (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou) did not attract much attention in the shadow of the overwhelming Jet Li. Already in 1984, he played a lead role in the film *Drunken Tai Chi* - 笑太极 (1984, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping) depicting Taijiquan as fighting style (see Chapter 6.2.8).

The breakthrough as international known martial arts actor came only after three decades in the film business with the movie *Ip Man* - 叶问 (2008, dir. Wilson Yip). The success lead to a series of *Ip Man* movies: 2010 (*Ip Man 2* - 叶问2: 宗师传奇), 2015 (*Ip Man 3* - 叶问3), and 2019 (*Ip Man 4: The Finale* - 叶问4: 完结篇), all directed by Wilson Yip. The plot is based on the life-story of Ip Man, a grandmaster who taught Wing Chun as self-defense in real life and Bruce Lee was also among his disciples.

The first film is staged in the year 1937 during the Japanese invasion and in one impressive fighting scene, Ip Man is visited by four intruders in his own, nicely furnished living room showing discreet wealth in the form of elegant engraved wooden furniture and porcelain vases. One intruder starts the fight and through the skilled defense of Ip Man only one flowerpot breaks during the skirmish. The well-to-do martial arts grandmaster is fighting in the private sphere of his home, while his little son is riding a tricycle oblivious of his surroundings. When the opponent involves a sword into the fight, Ip Man takes a feather duster and uses this short bamboo utensil as weapon to attack the weak points of his attacker's body. Ip Man wins – holding the feather duster on the aggressor's larynx leaving him help- and defenseless pinned against the wall (evolve-mma n.d.).

Donnie Yen embodies an enormous potential of martial arts skills but played for a long time just the supporting roles of his more prominent “movie opponents” until he found the part that suited his abilities: Ip Man. He embodies this historical personality as calm, patient and ironic Wing Chun master who defends and empowers the weak through mindful execution of force. Donnie Yen supported not only male martial arts fighters but played also the counterpart for female martial arts actresses.

6.2.5 Female Violence: Cheng Pei-Pei, Michelle Yeoh, and Zhang Ziyi

Three generations of female martial arts representatives in cinema are centered around the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: the star of Hong Kong movies in the 1960s Cheng Pei-Pei, the star since the late 1980s Michelle Yeoh and the star of the millennium Zhang Ziyi.

Cheng Pei-Pei (郑佩佩, born 1946 in Shanghai) is the first female star of *wuxia* movies. In the classic *Come Drink with Me - 大醉侠* (1966, dir. King Hu) staged in Ming Dynasty, she impresses as Golden Swallow with her swordplay skills in her mission to free her kidnapped brother held in a monastery. This film inspired the international blockbuster *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000, dir. Lee Ang), where Cheng Pei-Pei also takes part in the role of Jade Fox (IMBd, TMDb, HKMDB: Cheng Pei-Pei) on the side of Michelle Yeoh.

As celebrity of the Chinese diaspora, Michelle Yeoh (杨紫琼, born 1962 in Malaysia)

featured in English, Mandarin and Cantonese films and in 2008 was elected the “*greatest action heroine of all time*” by the movie review platform *Rotten Tomatoes* (IMBd, TMDb, HKMDB: Michelle Yeoh). She excels in the film *Dynamite Fighters* also known as *Magnificent Warriors* - 中华战士 (1987, dir. David Chung), an action comedy that is depicting her as a kind of “*female Chinese Indiana Jones*” (IMDb: Magnificent Warriors) fighting against the Japanese invasion in the 1930s.

In the 1990s, she was featured in supporting roles for her male counterparts in productions like *James Bond: Tomorrow Never Dies* (dir. Roger Spottiswoode 1997), but mostly as top fighting character in Hong Kong action films. In *Police Story III: Supercop* - 警察故事 3 超级警察 (1992, dir. Stanley Tong), Michelle Yeoh (as Interpol director of China) works together with Jackie Chan (as Hong Kong police officer) against a Chinese drug lord – both performing all the stunts themselves and Yeoh has a podium to show her martial arts skills (ytv: revokcom 2010). In the film *Butterfly & Sword* - 新流星蝴蝶剑 (1993, dir. Michael Mak), a *wuxia* “wire fu” movie depicting love and betrayal, Michelle Yeoh plays the part of a loyalists who fights together with Donnie Yen against revolutionaries for the King to stay in power (IMDb: Butterfly & Sword). Donnie Yen also takes the role as her comic counterpart in the film *Wing Chun* - 咏春 (1994, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping), where Michelle Yeoh represents the historic figure of Yim Wing-Chun, the female founder of this southern style kung fu technique. In the movie, she learns her fighting skills from her master, embodied by the actress Cheng Pei-Pei, another female martial arts icon (IMDb: Wing Chun). At the side of Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh played his female fighting companion in *Tai Chi Master* - 太极张三丰 (1993, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping), but her part in the opening scenes of *Fearless* - 霍元甲 (2006, dir. Ronny Yu) did not make it to the movie hall and can only be watched in the director’s cut. There, Michelle Yeoh explains the essence of *wushu*, the Chinese martial arts, to the Olympic committee. In her plea to make *wushu* an Olympic discipline, she tells the story of martial arts master Huo Yuanjia who participated in the successful creation of this sport (TMDb: Huo Yuanjia).

The third female participant in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, dir. Lee Ang) is the Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi (章子怡, born 1979 in Beijing). She also takes part in the international blockbusters *Rush Hour II* (2001, dir. dir. Brett Ratner), *Hero* (2004, dir. Zhang Yimou) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004, dir. Zhang Yimou), (IMBd, TMDb,

HKMDB: Zhang Ziyi).

Cheng Pei-Pei, Michelle Yeoh, and Zhang Ziyi are three actresses who stand in the center of controversial and contradictory feminism in a patriarchal society depicted in the film narrative around the box-office hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, dir. Lee Ang) that used to put the focus on “Chinese” cinema interwoven with politics and will be examined in the following section.

6.2.6 Gender Violence: Female Fighters and Male Heroes Entangled in Politics

“... the PRC permitted Ang Lee, a Taiwan national, to shoot a nostalgic, conservative swordplay film set in pre-revolutionary China, and filled with characters who could fly and believed in superstition...” (Eperjesi 2004: 33).

Coinciding with the upcoming kung fu cinema dominated by Bruce Lee and his epigones, a Taiwanese production by director King Hu, rooted in Hong Kong cinema, fascinated at the international film festival in Cannes in the year 1975, Fu/Desser (2000: 3) called an “art-house success [... that] showcased the cinematic artistry the genre was capable of producing”: *A Touch of Zen* – 俠女 (1972, dir. King Hu; see Teo 2007) featuring a female lead role played by actress Hsu Feng as Yang Hui-zhen. Teo (2007) characterizes her part as knight-lady in Ming Dynasty with feminist ambitions whose path of revenge leads her and her supporters to scholar Gu who gets between the frontlines of her battle against the corrupt government.

A Touch of Zen, this three-hour long *wuxia* movie in Chinese language, was the first to win an international award – a success that only a quarter of a century later was surpassed by the blockbuster *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* - 卧虎藏龙 (2000, director Lee Ang) that gave an insight into the world of rebels, the *jianghu* - 江湖. The accomplishment of the original could not be reached by the sequel *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny* - 卧虎藏龙: 冥界之剑 (2016, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping) featuring Michelle Yeoh and Donnie Yen.

The film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is based on the novel of Wang Dulu (1909-1977) who created with this Qing Dynasty romance story around the sword Green Destiny the new *wuxia* (knight-errant) novel genre (Teo 2016: 23). In China, the martial arts stories with knights-errant have a long tradition with historical roots, as the historian Sima Qian

(104-91 BCE) already gives an insight into the existence of chivalry and loyalty of the knight or *xia*-tradition (Teo 2016: 17) that enhanced until the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Douglas Wile (1996) links social occurrences in North China like the scarcity of marriageable women caused by polygyny and infanticide to the excess of unmarried men and the emergence of a marginalized male group involved in criminal machinations of secret societies and in the development of martial arts (Wile 1996: 8-9, Teo 2016: 18). The lower classes, firm in martial arts, mixed with scholars who were willing to learn that combat technique and able to write it down: “*T’ai-chi ch’üan might have served as a kind of bridge between lower-class knack-masters and the literati who supplied a legitimized philosophical overlay*” (Wile 1996: 30). A new social class of rebels, thieves, and wandering monks fighting against the corrupt state (known as *jianghu*, translated as rivers and lakes) emerged and became heroes of various, very popular novels (Ranné 2011: 97; 102). The swordplaying martial arts heroes and heroines of *wuxia* novels follow their own code of honour and are – equipped with supernatural powers – able to fly through the air and walk on water.

The representation of *wuxia* in the fighting scenes with wire technique in Lee Ang’s film was not favoured by the audience inside the PRC (Frank 2006: 198), but the further evolution of this cinema genre culminates in productions for the modern (inter-) national audience where “*[t]he cinematic realism of violence superseded the emphasis on the fantastic in the old shenguai wuxia formula, and the association of violence and masculinity heightened the perception that the genre was invariably a male-dominated one*” (Teo 2016: 109, emphasis original). The international success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* surprised – not only with three female characters in the role of the fighting heroines in a male dominated patriarchal society of honest, chivalry man:

“*Crouching Tiger* is a Mandarin-language film set in 19th-century China (...). Since the film is in Mandarin, with subtitles, and its story centers on the legendary *wuxia* (swordsmanship) and *jianghu* (swordsmen’s world) – two concepts in Chinese culture that might be difficult to understand for many foreigners – virtually no one expected the film to be a global blockbuster. To many people’s surprise, it turned out to be more than a blockbuster – it was a record setter in 2001” (Wu/Chan 2007: 195).

The plot of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* brings the audience to a historic China in late Qing Dynasty with five main characters – Chow Yun-fat as Li Mu Bai, Michelle Yeoh as

Yu Shu Lian, Zhang Ziyi as Jen Yu, Chang Chen as Lo – Dark Cloud and Cheng Pei-pei as Jade Fox: Li Mu Bai, an honourable sword master, wants to retire and gives away the famous sword “Green Destiny”, because Jade Fox in search of the Wudang fighting skills murdered his master. He is supported by a female friend and martial art fighter, Yu Shu Lien, once engaged to Li Mu Bai’s now deceased friend. The villain Jade Fox lives disguised as a servant with Jen Yu, daughter of the governor who has to agree to an arranged marriage. Jen Yu, secretly a martial arts fighter herself, steals the sword “Green Destiny” at night that in her eyes is rightfully hers. She admires Yu Shu Lien for her free lifestyle as *jianghu*. At Jen Yu’s wedding, her former lover Lo – Dark Cloud, a bandit of the desert wants her to leave with him. After fighting with Yu Shu Lien and wounding her with the “Green Destiny”, Jen Yu is confronted by Li Mu Bai in a bamboo forest. Jade Fox feels betrayed, because Jen Yu secretly studied Wudang fighting skills without revealing them to her. In an attempt to kill Jen Yu, Jade Fox mortally wounds Li Mu Bai, who can kill her. Li Mu Bai dies in Yu Shu Lien’s arms in unfulfilled love and Jen Yu arrives too late to administer the antidote. Finally, at Wudang mountain, Jen Yu spends one last night with Lo. The morning after, Jen Yu jumps off the bridge to do penance and to fulfil Lo’s wish: to be – according to legend – reunified (see Wu/Chan 2007: 214 -215).

The main fighting scene between Michelle Yeoh and Zhang Ziyi in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, dir. Lee Ang) was choreographed by Yuen Woo-Ping who is famous for his realistic representations of combat scenes as well as the wired fighting technique, the “wire-fu”, in martial arts films. The duel of Jen Yu and Yu Shu Lien (yvtv: hammertime 2006) is staged inside a traditional Chinese courtyard and Michelle Yeoh as Yu Shu Lien can demonstrate all her fighting skills using a huge array of different martial arts weapons. Her opponent, Zhang Ziyi as Jen Yu, equipped with the famous “Green Destiny” can only keep up, because of this “magic” sword. Despite the seriousness of the scene as Yu Shu Lien reaches for one weapon after the other to defend her live, a comical element loosens the tension when she grasps an unsuitable one that is too heavy and Jen Yu’s look just expresses disdain. Weapons are one part of the fight, but skill is even more important and for a short moment Yu Shu Lien seems to win, too sure of herself. Jen Yu uses a slight inattention of her opponent to wound her. Despite the fact that these two are enemies, their aims are similar: they want an independent life and career path that the patriarchic society does not really approve of. This idea of liberty and freedom shown by strong women gives the “Western” female audience a means to identify with through the aspect of gender.

While most authors focus on masculinity expressed by martial arts films (see Yu 2015; Teo 2016: 92-104), Chen Ya-Chen (2012) scrutinizes gender politics, the role of women and feminist emancipation in Chinese martial arts films after the millennium through narrative analyses and discovers a “*Chinese cinematic martial arts feminism*” (Chen 2012: viii). Chen argues that martial arts films create an image of freedom for Chinese women in ancient China in contrast to the prevailing patriarchal social system (see Brownell/Wasserstrom 2002) that entangles masculinity, hegemony and structural violence. In their approach to gender theory in China, Brownell/Wasserstrom (2002) state that Chinese culture and society experienced enormous changes in politics and daily lives especially in the case of gender. They use the experienced and contested concept of the “*polymorphous, plural nature of gender constructs*” as “*a collection of roles, symbols, and behaviors...*” (Brownell/Wasserstrom 2002: 1). The authors scrutinize political and economic influences, exclusive and popular ideas of ethnicity, class and generations that have changed enormously the ideal images and the notion of femininity and masculinity that varies within the frames over time according to people and contexts. While the approach that stresses the construction of “man” and “woman” that allows the possibility of a third gender will not be applied in this paper, the oversimplified and extreme approach of “inequality-patriarchy” use the notion of “*the immutable existence of two biologically differentiated sexes and ask how power is divided between those on opposite sides of the divide*” (Brownell/Wasserstrom 2002: 5). With the inequality-patriarchy approach, where men dominate women or monopolize power, the voiceless oppressed group is researched and power differences between the sexes are ethically and morally assessed to eventually destroy the patriarchal systems, where “*older men, as heads of households, possessed the ultimate authority over all members of their households*” (Brownell/Wasserstrom 2002: 6). Through the practice of female infanticide and the preference of male offspring rooted in patrilineal residence and lineage structures from fathers to sons the categorization of gender other than female and male is irrelevant and the biological “facts” decide the value of a person’s life – automatically oppressing women who only become a whole person when bearing a son – denying women without sons their full gender status (Brownell/Wasserstrom 2002: 5-6).

In *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, the bamboo forest fighting scene (ytv: xcjustin 2011) not only resembles the bamboo forest scene in the movie *A Touch of Zen* (1972, dir. King Hu) but helps to reestablish social values: Li Mu Bai wants to revenge Yu Shu Lien and

follows Jen Yu to the bamboo forest. Their fight high up on the flexible shafts of the bamboo canes show all mastery of wire-work and of real swordplay fighting skills. The lush green color of the bamboo surrounds and contrasts their white dresses and gives an oceanlike impression. Both fighters show high standards and the requirements make enormous demands on their fighting capacities, but Li Mu Bai is master of the scene and easily wins the fight. Between the bamboo canes an enormous attraction and tension between the opponents is noticeable and regrettably, Jen Yu must subordinate to the man who is the better fighter – the norms of the patriarchal society are restored.

Lee Ang's cinematography tries to connect the audiences of "East" and "West" and to satisfy both tastes in his artful feat. His *wuxia* film comprises a mixture of topics like (self-)orientalization and gender as well as romantic love, crime, murder, betrayal, death and the possibility of a tragic, but promised happy ending in the gorgeous landscape of China. The fighting scenes in the *shenguai wuxia* style are supported by stunning wire-work that make the actors and actresses fly through the air in best magic knight-errant manner. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* establishes a fresh approach to martial arts films by satisfying the thirst for romantic exoticism as a means to escape the everyday life in tension with post-oriental world. Loved by the global audiences worldwide, the local audience in the PRC was disappointed and complained mostly about the quality of the fight scenes: "*That Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon was not nearly as popular in the PRC as it was in the United States informs us about what Chinese audiences may and may not identify with in wuxiapian*" (Frank 2006: 198, emphasis original). In contrast, the film *Hero* (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou) as another example for martial arts cinema in connection with globalization and transcultural processes was highly praised by the audience in mainland China (see Rawnsley 2007; Rawnsley/Rawnsley 2010), despite the fact that both films "*follow on the same transnational-orientalist path to sell wuxia to global audiences; Hero is also dissected for its perceived nationalistic stance working apparently as a parallel concern along with its transnational objective*" (Teo 2016: 13, emphasis original). Besides the political implementations, the movie amazed with Zhang Yimou's trademark: the use and symbolism of colours that will be examined in the following.

6.2.7 Colorful Violence: The Cinema of Zhang Yimou

Colors are the trademarks of Zhang Yimou as representative of the so-called “Fifth generation” of Chinese filmmakers and already a visual highlight in his early movies that do not belong to the martial arts cinema and were successfully shown on the international silver screens: *Ju Dou* - 菊豆 (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* - 大红灯笼高高挂 (1991) and *The Story of Qiu Ju* - 秋菊打官司 (1992). This famous “trilogy” depicts the lives of three women, played by the actress Gong Li, and their struggle in the Chinese countryside had an enormous impact on the Chinese Cinema of the PRC (see Gateward 2001). His martial arts movie “trinity” *Hero* - 英雄 (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* - 十面埋伏 (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* - 满城尽带黄金甲 (2006) is staged in ancient China as an impressive cinematography of enormous aesthetical impact (see Schnelle/Suchsland 2008) hiding different kinds of violent behavior.

6.2.7.1 Possessive Violence: Ideologies of Territorial Demands

Hero - 英雄 (2002, dir. Zhang Yimou, PRC), a Chinese film production was swimming on wave of international success of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* that fascinated the audience(s) with its color concept and with great fighting scenes by the actors Jet Li as the hero “Nameless” and Donnie Yen as “Sky”. Praised for its artistic approach with an incredible palette of colors and condemned for its nationalist political currents, *Hero* was seen by Stringer/Yu (2007: 238) as a forerunner of Chinese cinema as contrast and threat to Hollywood. The artful cinematography of Zhang Yimou tells the critically acclaimed story of an attempt to assassinate the King of Qin (see Kun 2009), a historic figure who unified the Middle Kingdom and founded the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE). The unification is expressed by the Chinese notion of *tianxia* - 天下, meaning “all under one heaven” and is associated with political sovereignty. This notion put the film in the nationalistic corner because some critiques interpreted the movie as a Chinese approach for territorial claims over Taiwan and Hong Kong (see Rawnsley 2007; Rawnsley/Rawnsley 2010). The focus on the territorial demand might be hidden in the color scheme – black, red, blue, white and green – marking the different “true” stories Nameless tells about the assassination of the King’s enemies: The black world of the assassin Nameless equals the black cold Qin palace. The first “truth” is set in red for the love triangle between the assassins, the color blue stands for freedom and fighting spirit, white symbolizes purity, death as well as grief and finally green, the color of hope promises a new beginning.

In this movie, the major part of the battle of life and death between Nameless and the King of Qin is not resolved with weapons but words and their combat focusses on the personal avenge of his family's death by Nameless against the common good of peace and unity pursued by the King. In the end, the individual (motivated by a sense of honor) subordinates to the public interest, enforced by the King's troops and their armed force.

6.2.7.2 Romantic Violence: Tragical Love Triangles

The movie *House of Flying Daggers* - 十面埋伏 (2004, dir. Zhang Yimou), a *wuxia* romance film, succeeds the blockbuster *Hero* (2002), and gives a female heroin the stage: Zhang Ziyi plays the blind dancer and skilled fighter Mei alongside Andy Lau (as Leo) and Takeshi Kaneshiro (as Jin). The title, literally meaning being ambushed from ten directions, is also the name of a rebel group fighting against the corrupt government of the emperor. Leo and Jin, two police officers and friends are ordered to arrest the rebel leader. Leo is secretly a member of the rebels and Jin helps the arrested Mei to escape. The dramatic love triangle – Mei and Leo are engaged, but Mei and Jin fall in love – ends with the death of Mei and two deadly wounded grieving survivors. Between yellow meadows and the fighting scenes in the green bamboo forest and birch wood, the fighters are surrounded by the white of snow and red blood.

Another *wuxia* movie, *Curse of the Golden Flower* - 满城尽带黄金甲 (2006, dir. Zhang Yimou) features Gong Li as lead actress on the side of actor Chow Yun-fat. In this King Lear-like story, staged in an imperial court in ancient China (the English version ascribes the time to the year 928 in Tang Dynasty, a historical mistake, because this year falls in the reign of Song Dynasty), another love triangle runs its course: The Empress loves the Emperor's son (from a previous marriage), but he loves the pharmacist's daughter. The jealous and betrayed Emperor slowly poisons his unfaithful wife with medicine brought to her by the pharmacist's daughter, her rival. Colors are again the magic of Zhang Yimou's cinematography alongside spectacular mass scenes as an aesthetical pleasure for the eye: The red and golden imperial palace reflects abundance and power, also expressed by the sea of yellow chrysanthemums, the golden flowers of longevity. Through the symbol of this flower, the Empress shows resistance to the evil deeds of her husband, because she knows that he is poisoning her with the dark green and unappealing medicine that burns the wooden symbol of the flower in the final scene – leaving the audience with an open end.

The visual sensation of Zhang Yimou's Orientalized historical movies keeps the audience(s) engrossed in the stories of resistance, tragic love, betrayal and loyalty on the screen, but when the transposition of a fictional story turns out to be too unrealistic, even the most dedicated fans turn away.

6.2.7.3 *Fantastical, Fictional Violence: The Failed Experiment with Monsters*

Subsequent film projects like *The Great Wall* - 长城 (2016, dir. Zhang Yimou) with Matt Damon failed to convince the spectators and it failed to continue the international success. The artful cinematography of his first English language film could not hide the utopian framework around mythical creatures behind the Great Wall and the heroic measures of the emperor's elite army supported by British travelers to defeat them. The production of the film in the Wanda studio within the new film city *Oriental Movie Metropolis* - 东方影都, even before it was officially opened in April 2018, might be considered as an attack of the Chinese film industry on its opponent Hollywood (Spiegel Wirtschaft 2018).

6.2.7.4 *Calligraphed Violence: Staging an Aesthetical Picture*

Fans of martial art cinema were waiting in vain for the release of Zhang Yimou's film *Shadow* - 影 to the international theatre halls. It was first shown to an international audience at the film festival in Venice in September 2018, then brought to the market in the form of DVDs and it is now available on streaming services (IMDb: Shadow).

Like a Chinese calligraphy in black and white with the red seal of the artist, Zhang Yimou arranges his film *Shadow* - 影 (2018) depicting the Three Kingdoms era (220-280 CE) around the *yin yang* diagram. He is using the dominance of the colors black and white interrupted by the red color of blood, sinking the green and brown of nature into the grey of weapons and moral indecisiveness. Zhang Yimou's film *Shadow* takes the foundation of Daoism and the duality of *yin* and *yang*. The success of the "new" fighting style invented in this film is due to adding the female element to the combat technique with umbrellas made of iron while their opponents use traditional weapons. A slight hint of a science fiction approach that Zhang Yimou already applied in *The Great Wall* (2016) is shown in the fighting attires of attackers and the bamboo diving gear. The artful movie that is seducing the audience with a narrative of ancient heroic times and soft colors seems to be outdated in between war action films favored of the gaming generation.

The ruler of a shadow province is oppressed by his rival and wants to settle this fight with his sister as bargaining chip, but the rival's son will only accept her as concubine that is seen as an enormous loss of face for the sister. His military commander secretly plots against the king because he wants to regain power, but he is living in the shadow to hide his poor health and sickly appearance behind his doppelgänger "Jing". The commander trains Jing in martial arts and he practices fighting with the commander's wife on a gigantic *yin yang* diagram using a metal umbrella as weapon. During the act of practicing they discover that the fight is more effective through the application of the female principle, making the combination of *yin* and *yang*, the female and the male principle, the key to a powerful fight.

Despite showing elements of the Taijiquan philosophy in form of the *yin yang* symbolic and involving a female element into the fighting style, the film *Shadow* does not apply this combat technique. Since the 1970s, Taiji is not often depicted in martial arts films as will be shown in the following section.

6.2.8 Soft Violence: Taijiquan Movies

Taijiquan films represent within the martial arts genre just a small niche (see Matthews 2013: 95-99). Compared with kung fu, it is less common to depict Taijiquan as fighting technique on the silver screen. These movies show a different kind of brutality and violence than other martial arts: the strength of the opponent is used against him/her and subsequently the opponent is hurt by his/her own misapplied force.

Shaw Brothers produced the movie *The Shadow Boxer – Tai Ji Quan* - 太極拳 (1974, dir. Hsueh Li Pao) with Yuen Woo-Ping as choreographer, featuring the young martial artist Chen Wo-fu, in the role of a worker who fights for the rights of his workmates against a cruel boss, but the vicious superior takes revenge on Chen by raping his girlfriend. Out of shame, she commits suicide and Chen avenges her death by defeating the culprit with his Taijiquan skills (HKMDB, IMDb: The Shadow Boxer).

Taiji is also featured in the film *Drunken Tai Chi* - 笑太極 (1984, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping) with Donnie Yen in the lead role as an educated rich and pampered son of an unjust father, with a good relationship to his brother. In the film, an assassin kills his family and burns his

home and fortune. On the run, the young man joins a Taiji master to learn his skills whereby he changes into a serious, honorable fighter. This knowledge enables him to win against the assassin to avenge his family (IMDb: Drunken Tai Chi).

These two early works depict Taijiquan as a form to avenge the death of family members or close friends who fell victim of assassination or cruel crimes like rape (that results in the self-inflicted violence of suicide); whereas other Taijiquan films tell the life-stories of Taiji masters interwoven with fictional elements.

The film *Tai Chi Master* - 太极张三丰 (1993, dir. Yuen Woo-Ping) tells the life story of Zhang Sanfeng, the legendary creator of Taijiquan played by Jet Li, who is fighting side by side with Michelle Yeoh (credited as Michelle Khan). In the movie, the good-natured Zhang Junbao is betrayed by his ambitious childhood friend Dong Tian-Biao, he grew up with in a Shaolin monastery and is critically wounded in a fight against the corrupt government troops. On his way to recover, Zhang uses his insanity to study Daoism, to watch nature and to create a new combat technique he calls Taiji that balances strength, power and velocity, and he takes a new name, Zhang Sanfeng (Zhang Treetimes-Crazy). The former friends meet again as enemies on the battleground and Dong Tian-Biao is defeated by the new combat style. Zhang Sanfeng retreats to the *Wudang* Mountains to establish a Daoist monastery to teach Taiji (IMDb: Tai Chi Master).

Another historic character that was influential in spreading Taijiquan and making this combat technique known is Yang Luchan, the founder of Yang-style Taijiquan that builds the basis for most of the forms practiced today. A film trilogy is loosely based on his biography and *Tai Chi Zero* - 太极拳零起点 as well as the sequel *Tai Chi Hero* - 太极2 英雄崛起 (both 2012, dir. Stephen Fung) made it to the international movie theatres and streaming services, but the third part *Tai Chi Summit* - 太極3 巔峰在望 (data not available) is not yet released (IMDb: Tai Chi Summit). Parts of the film are designed in a cartoony style that connects two forms of popular culture: the written fiction of comic books with the enacted fiction of martial arts movies.

The two films depicts the common narrative about the life of Yang Luchan, the Freak, played by the real-life *wushu* champion and actor Yuan Xiaochao (also known as Jayden

Yuan), who was born as outsider due to his malformation on the head that was interpreted as a sign of great martial art ability. Yang Luchan, a proven fighter in the Taiping rebellion, learns about a fighting technique that can save his life since the force of the other styles would kill him soon. He wants to learn this Chen style Taijiquan, only practiced in the village of *Chenjiagou* (陈家沟) by the Chen family that does not teach their “Chen kung fu” (as this style is named in the film) to outsiders. Through watching and imitating the villagers and how they fight against him, he gets the basic knowledge of their Taijiquan technique, but to get insight into the combat technique and to bring it to perfection, he had to marry the grandmasters daughter and take her name. The showdown, the fight of Yang Luchan with the grandmaster of *bagua*, is staged in the kitchen of Prince Dun, a member of the imperial family: while the cooks are preparing the enormous and elaborate order of the imperial menu below, the opponents fight high up on the edges of the partition walls separating the different parts of the kitchen – showing the actors’ fighting skills as well as the perfect usage of “wire fu” technique. The fight, that did not break anything, ends with a tie and Prince Dun names the style “Chen Taijiquan” (IMDb: Tai Chi Zero; Tai Chi Hero).

The story is interwoven with the upcoming technical progress brought by foreign invaders who are represented by the East Indian Company in the film. The Chinese engineer working for them, a power-hungry revenge seeking loser who was born in *Chenjiagou* plans to bring the modern life (represented by electric light, gramophones, coffee and top hats) and the railway to the village. He eventually failed and could not even succeed with the support of imperial troops and canons that attacked the villages.

The progress of industrialization is used to show the emerging change that was about to reach the Middle Kingdom at the end of Qing Dynasty and shows parallels to and similarities with Charlie Chaplin’s film *Modern Times* (1936, dir. Charlie Chaplin). There an assembly-line worker falls victim of progress before he can destroy the machine, while in *Tai Chi Zero* the railway constructing machine, a steam spewing monster depicted with gigantic interlocking metal gearwheels, should prepare the grounds for progress in the form of a railway line to the village *Chenjiagou*. It is destroyed in an act of resistance by Yang Luchan and grandmaster Chen’s daughter in order to save the village.

In the film *Man of Tai Chi* (2013, dir. Keanu Reeves), a disciple of Yang Luchan, Tiger Chen (Chen Li-Hu) and his inner change from an accomplished martial art combatant

fighting for the Hong Kong underworld boss Donaka Mark (Keanu Reeves) to a Taijiquan fighter with embodied values and skills is depicted (IMDb: Man of Tai Chi).

The examined Taijiquan films reveal the following similarities: Taijiquan alters the individuality of violent fighters and the main characters undergo a change concerning physical features or health aspects. Zhang Sanfeng gains his mental health and sanity after he uses the laws of nature in his fighting style and Yang Luchan's malformation on the head would kill him, if he did not change his techniques. In real life, Zheng Manqing had to practice Taijiquan, because of his ill health (Lo et al. 1979: 11) and Li Yulin, Li Deyin's grandfather, was sent to learn Taiji by his mother to become strong and healthy to preserve the paternal lineage (Li 2009: 17). Taijiquan as martial art represented in movies is used to improve the health, the personality as well as the fighting skills of the practitioner. This fighting style with body on body violence seldom represents the requirements and demands of the new generation of internet users and the requests of computer game enthusiast.

In spite of the fact that Taijiquan has "soft" feminine or *yin* features, men in Qing Dynasty, who were frustrated, colonized and suppressed in real life, felt strong and powerful during their Taijiquan practice and training fights (Wile 1996: 27), since "[o]n a large scale, *t'ai-chi ch'üan can strengthen the nation and the race, and on a small scale it can eliminate illness and promote longevity*" (Wile 1996: 30). Brownell argues that "..., *the Maoist culture of the body was egalitarian in that it was to erase gender distinctions: women and men alike wore short hair and army green, and both did manual labor and broadcast exercises*" (Brownell 1995: 58). Through the change from a patrilinear society into a nation-state with communist ideology, also women become famous Taiji masters as the examples of modern instructors like Li Deyin's wife and daughters as well as female Taiji instructors on TV like Wu Amin show. Nowadays, Taijiquan and martial arts are not limited to male participants and in the parks, they are often outnumbered by their female colleagues. At a VHS in Vienna, the hand-form group has only one male participant and the weapon-forms with fan and sword have only female participants, but in the *Tui Shou* pushing hand group only one female (the researcher) took part among male participants.

6.2.9 Violent Tendencies: Martial Arts Movies for the Computer Game Generation

Movies as popular culture are characterized by zeitgeist and depend on the prevailing trends, therefore, martial arts cinema is also heading in a new direction (see Trausch 2018). Hollywood directors like Quentin Tarantino in *Kill Bill* (2003) and *Kill Bill II* (2004) use the appearance of martial art in the form of choreography in their movies without transferring the moral and “ideological” background of the fighting technique (see Szeto 2011: 3) and in recent years martial arts films follow the new approach of violence for terror and trauma, challenged by new technologies.

The enormous success of two blockbusters in the PRC belonging to the martial action cinema or *wuda pian* - 武打片 give an insight into the future developments of martial arts films: *Wolf Warrior* - 战狼 and *Wolf Warrior II* - 战狼二 (2015 and 2017, both dir. Wu Jing) that the international audience(s) did not appreciate the same way. In *Wolf Warrior* (2015, dir. Wu Jing), a military action film, the main character in the role of an elite soldier fights against a drug lord who sends foreign mercenaries to kill him. Impressive action scenes that look like a computer game with an enormous and expensive war machinery give an insight into the propaganda of strength but it could not hide the meagre story around the special force agent Leng Feng of the People’s Liberated Army played by the martial artist Wu Jing (IMDb: *Wolf Warrior*; *Wolf Warrior II*).

This movie was only surpassed as most successful movie by the sequel *Wolf Warrior II* (2017, dir. Wu Jing) staged in Africa. In his movie Wu Jing as Leng Feng, plays a soldier who was sacked for violent behavior and now protects civilians against mercenaries in “Africa”, where rebels want to overthrow the “African government” in an explosion of bombs, fire and blood everywhere. While most Chinese nationals are rescued by the Chinese marine, Wu Jing stays behind to save the stranded Chinese people and to fight against a deadly fictitious virus. In this movie, an “Orientalized” Africa is the venue, seen as a country and not a continent, that it is bringing the old “friends” in Africa on the Chinese silver screen. It depicts the nation-state’s endeavors to expand the political and economic ties to the African continent which is politically courted for economic cooperation and mutual support on the international diplomatic scene with the example of the fictional virus that reminds of the Ebola crisis from 2014 to 2016 in West Africa. In these movies the kung fu film genre evolves from bare hands and physical skills in a relatively closed area of

China, Taiwan and Hong Kong to new technologies in warfare to the allies in Africa – in the Chinese nation-state’s mission to help and support, while the “West” or some critical African countries might see this strategies as “new colonialism” (see Bräutigam 2009, 2015; Harneit-Sievers et al. 2010). From the ideas of the Bandung Conference in 1956 or the early policies of Zhou Enlai that understood African countries as allies in the political approach against the imperial West (see Yuan 2008; Li 2006; Ogunsanwo 1974) not many ideals could be saved to the year 2017, when the film was produced. These two martial art action films reach the masses within mainland China ideologically, especially the young consumers of violent computer games and spreads the propaganda about the benefits of an expansion in Africa. While showing its power and strength over the African continent hidden in their effort of support, the nation-states neo-liberal economic interest is paramount.

Both films depict the “hero” Leng Feng as an elite soldier who fights against foreign mercenary soldiers send by crime lords not only with martial arts but also with war machinery in a computer game-like representation of modern martial arts movies. Additionally, the second part emphasis on international politics through its location in an Orientalized “Africa” as depiction of ideological tendencies that attracted predominantly the young (and at a guess mostly male) viewers of the PRC.

In general, it can be stated that the early stages of martial arts films in the 1960s and 1970s are dominated by kung fu fight movies that gained (international) popularity through the star Bruce Lee. This era is characterized by a special choreographed movie fighting technique simulating “real fight” and depicts violence body on body. Films of this period include the movies *Way of the Dragon* (1972) and *Enter the Dragon* (1973) starring Bruce Lee along with films of the young Jackie Chan like *Drunken Master* (1978) or *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978). In Hong Kong in the 1980s, through the increasing impact of Jackie Chan and his individual skills, this film sector opened up to the urban spheres and includes acrobatic and gunplay as shown in the series of *Police Story* movies, while in mainland China Jet Li started the excitement within the nation-state for “historic” martial arts films with *Shaolin Temple* (1982). Jet Li’s impressive martial arts skills not only lead to the revival of the genre in the 1990s that spilled over to the Hong Kong film industry with the *Once Upon a Time in China* series (1991-1994), but also allowed him to embody important personalities within the *wushu* historical narrative. His films depict physical violence as

revenge against misfortune and the inner transformation of a martial arts fighter.

Taking the 1970s production *A Touch of Zen* (1972) as inspiration, the transboundary production of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* in the year 2000 brought for martial arts films the international breakthrough to the glocal high culture. Both movies depict female fighters in major roles challenging their traditional set role within a patriarchal society structure dominated by masculinity, hegemony and structural violence. Movies from mainland China like *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) by Zhang Yimou followed the mainstream of an Orientalized representation of a historic, ancient China that pleased the audience not only with the visual aesthetics of color but also with the components of a fascinating storyline around love, betrayal, and crime. Approximately since the year 2015, with the influence of new technologies, martial arts films made a transition and show now a combination of human combat techniques in connection with science fiction and war machinery. This development might be directly or indirectly related to the fact that famous martial arts actors, like Jackie Chan, Jet Li or Michelle Yeoh, are already advanced in years and long fighting scenes might be too arduous to perform due to the limitations of their bodies. Apart from that it is likely that the audience(s) demand more sci-fi scenarios known from computer games where their own avatars engage in virtual combat negating the need for an actor.

In the PRC, two productions excelled at the box office: *Wolf Warrior* and *Wolf Warrior II* (2015 and 2017, dir. Wu Jing), bringing the mixture of action, computer game ambience and an ideology of strength to the mainland audience, but missed the same success at the international scene. A similar fate was experienced by the movie *The Great Wall* (2016, dir. Zhang Yimou) featuring Matt Damon that could not convince the international audience(s) with the fantastical battle against mythical monsters. The film *Shadow* (2018, dir. Zhang Yimou), surfaced as a cinematographic piece of *wuxia* genre art at international film festivals, but did not make it into the main motion-picture chains before becoming available on streaming services and DVDs. The depicted martial art style with emphasis on the female element as well as the prominent display of the *yin* and *yang* symbol reminds the viewers of Taijiquan within the broad landscape of martial arts.

Taijiquan as fighting technique occupies just a niche segment in movies and cannot account for a special star who would represent this combat style besides martial artist actors like Jet

Li and Donnie Yen, who are both trained *wushu* champions. Taiji is mostly used in biographical movies about Taiji masters like Zhang Sanfeng, Yang Luchan or Tiger Hu. Compared to other martial arts or the notion of “kung fu” in films, Taijiquan uses the force of the opponent to defeat him/her. Within Taijiquan practice and martial arts in film there are similarities: both activities of violence are just feinted, choreographed and staged without an intention to harm somebody for “real” and violence is just imaginised and constructed as a violent practice of feinted violence. This simulated violence is an artful performance of popular culture executed by the body of the Taijiquan practitioner trained for sports as well as by the body of the actor in martial arts films in a staged fight: the body executes in both situations “feinted” violence that is embodied through *gongfu*, the uncounted and patently performed repetitions during practice.

7. Conclusion

The present paper tried to develop an advanced understanding of the connection between the violence of martial arts used by the individual participating in a violent sport, and the spectatorship of violence through martial arts representations in popular culture. Linked by the central research question “How can these peaceful practitioners in the park be part of the violent martial arts depicted in movies?” I scrutinized the relationship between violence and popular culture on the example of the Chinese martial art of Taijiquan. This special fighting style with slow movements mostly exercised in the parks, has undergone the transformation of a secret combat fighting technique used in reality to protect and defend, to sports that is easily learned and practiced by the masses for health and self-defense reasons where everybody can take part in performing the graceful beauty of violence. Taijiquan was practiced for centuries by farmers and passed on secretly within families, written down as disguised critique on the state by scholars who attributed and anchored Taiji to Daoist roots and finally brought as defense technique to the imperial court.

Sport, in the Western sense of the word to be performed as competition, was unknown in imperial China, and therefore it was necessary to standardize the rules as well as the movements of martial arts to avoid harm and deadly injuries at the trials of strength on the one hand, and to enable an assessable participation in tournaments and (inter-)national sport events on the other. Through the process of sportization and simplification, Taijiquan

changed its appearance from combat techniques that killed adversaries to a form of fitness exercise to preserve and promote health – sometimes promoted and sometimes forbidden by the leaders of the new nation-state. As popular culture entangled with religion, philosophy and traditional medical knowledge it became part of the historical narrative and national pride of China. Its political induced, transformed and modified styles disseminated to the international spheres and were exported to the world to act as cultural ambassador. A modification and development within the knowledge transfer can be observed through “new” Taiji masters like Li Deyin who became “national” Taiji instructors. The “old” teaching method of exactly imitating the Taiji master’s movements in innumerable iterative acts (the *gongfu*), can be compared to embodied myths. Whereas myths are narratives that experience oral transition, in Taijiquan, the body is the record tool and the various forms of movements experience a physical inscription into the body that could be considered as embodied myths. The hegemony of the nation-state that took away the martial arts’ danger and made Taijiquan popular, uses these “embodied myths” in the form of the trained bodies for mass performances to endow identity, gain national pride and international awareness.

The comparison between Taijiquan practice and embodiment in Beijing and Vienna showed that the knowledge transfer from a silent Taiji master whose movements were imitated changed with the upcoming of modern technology. In instructional videos on the internet, the “new” Taiji masters explain and train their unknown disciples worldwide, through the same the iterative acts, the *gongfu*, the countless repetitions of the movements until they are inscribed into the body. In pedagogic acts of practicing can be compared to an endless circle between *yin* and *yang* – the mind leads the body until the body knows the movement. Practitioners like to fight (or practice) Taijiquan against an unseen opponent, but they do not like violence. When weapons like swords or fans are used, the elegance of the performance stands in the center of awareness with phases of unspoken feelings of violent “bloodlust” that are just imagined. The combination of martial arts and pleasure in violence is also experienced in the traditional *wuxia* novels that tell about knights-errant fighting for oppressed people where the reader can take part in the brutalities in his/her imagination. A step further is the visualizing of violence in the representation of martial arts in cinema and it can be argued that both sets of movements, Taijiquan as well as violent film scenes, are choreographed like a dance: in Taijiquan the individual practicing sports without audience or performing in masses for the glory of the state and the actor/actress is performing on the movie set for the (inter-)national audience(s).

Martial arts films were already popular in Shanghai in the Republican era – and soon forbidden for undermining the nation building. Secretly practiced in the new communist state, martial arts made their comeback since the era of Deng Xiaoping’s opening policy. Meanwhile, martial arts cinema – not always with good reputation, but loved by the audience – flourished in Hong Kong, where the special kung fu films, starring Bruce Lee, combined camera and film technique with real fighting skills to generate the effect of maximum violence. Stars like Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung developed the kung fu tradition further, opened it to the locations of modern cities and introduced acrobatic, including gunplay as well as comical elements. In the PRC, Jet Li’s physical skills as martial arts champion made a substantial contribution to the development of the *wuxia* genre. Although these films put an emphasis on masculinity, female stars played important roles within martial arts cinema in contrast to the patriarchal structures set by society. Starting in the late 1990s, China wanted to become a superpower equal to the former “imperial” Western powers, taking popular culture – Taijiquan as well as martial arts films – as cultural performances to reach this aim. Around the millennium, the films *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the “trilogy” *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* as well as *Curse of the Golden Flower* set a new dimension for martial arts films that give a glimpse of love, betrayal, violence, crime, exoticism, (self-) orientalization, and othering, depicted in a tourist journal-like landscape with a splendid cinematography of martial arts scenes, wire-work that satisfied the demands of the spectators as well as colors and mass scenes. Despite all efforts, subsequent productions could not achieve the same international successes and their popularity declined. In mainland China, modern forms of martial arts movies like *Wolf Warrior I & II* (2015 and 2017) combined military action scenes and war machinery that attracted the computer game generation. In 2018, the art-house martial arts film *Shadow*, set in a historical Orientalized China, followed the trend of the millennium, and its director Zhang Yimou draws a cinematographic calligraphy in black and white around the symbol of *yin* and *yang* along with the invention of a new fighting style that involves a female element. Although the combat technique is similar to Taijiquan, this martial arts style only plays a minor role in cinema. Taiji can be considered as the basic form, the preparation for further martial arts practices and shares with violent film sequences the exact choreography, the iterative acts of embodiment as well as the perfection of performance. The practitioners of Taijiquan within the audience across the world watch the fighting scenes and compare the visual experience with their own *wuxia* efforts of hand forms like 24-Step Taijiquan or

their own workmanship of 32-Step Taiji Sword. In both cases, in Taijiquan and in martial arts movies, violence is feinted and controlled – it is in the flow, as depicted in the Taiji diagram which represents the values of the *yin* and *yang* principle. A violent sport usually associated with old people doing very slow movements in a park contains as popular culture the pride of a nation as well the potential to entertain the (inter-)national cinema audiences.

This paper gave a small insight into a variety of approaches within the complex topic of Taijiquan as martial arts and its representation in movies connected by the theoretical concept of popular culture and the notion of violence that could only be discussed perfunctory and created possible starting points for a further discussion of the matter in depth.

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8.5 Interviews

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8.6 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes Beijing Taiji, Aug. 2004 to May 2012

Fieldnotes Taiji association, Jan. 2019

Fieldnotes Taiji association, May 2019

Fieldnotes Taiji association, May/June 2019

Fieldnotes Taiji organization, Dec. 2018

Fieldnotes Taiji school, Nov. 2018

Fieldnotes VHS, 2018/19/20

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8.7 Glossary

4th movement of 24-Step Taijiquan: *Brush Aside over the Knee in Reverse Forward Stance*
– *zuo you louxi aobu* - 左右搂膝拗步

“all under one heaven” - *tianxia* - 天下, Chinese notion of political sovereignty

“one country, two systems” - 一国两制, constitutional system of the PRC

“Taijiquan is wonderful” - 太极拳好, Deng Xiaoping’s calligraphy

animate body - *shen* - 身

Beihai Park - 北海公园

dead body - *shi* - 尸

Ditan (The Temple of the Earth) Park - 地坛公园

fist - *quan* - 拳

foreigners – *waiguoren* - 外国人

Genres of Martial Arts Films:

chivalrous knights-errant (with swordplay) – *wuxia* - 武侠

knight-errant swordplay with magic features - *shenguai wuxia* - 神怪武侠

kung fu (with bare hands / the body) - 功夫

martial action cinema for all kinds of martial arts films - *wuda pian* - 武打片

martial arts films (in the PRC) - *wushu pian* - 武术片
 martial arts cinema (in the PRC) - *wuyi pian* - 武夷片
gongfu - 功夫 - *pinyin* form of “gongfu” equals the Wade-Giles form of “kung fu”
 inner style - 内工
 intention - *yi* - 意
 knight errant novel - *wuxia xiaoshuo* - 武侠小说
 knowledge of the body - *shen zhi* - 身知
 knowledge of the mind - *xin zhi* - 心知
 kung fu - 功夫 - Wade-Giles form of “kung fu” equals the *pinyin* form *gongfu*
 martial arts - *wushu* - 武术
 martial arts (Republican era, 1912-1949) - *guoshu* - 国术
 Ming novel *Journey to the West* - 西遊記/西游记
 Ming novel *The Water Margin – Outlaws of the Marsh* - 水浒传
 Monkey King *Song Wukong* - 孙悟空
 muscle strength - *li* - 力
 Nine-Dragon-Wall - 九龙壁
Oriental Movie Metropolis - 东方影都, film city near Qingdao
 physical education – *tiyu* - 体育
 point to unbalance the opponent, the “open door” - *kong men* - 空门
 Qigong form *Eight Pieces of Brocade* - 八段锦
 Qigong, health exercise - 气功
 rebels, translated as “rivers and lakes” - *jianghu* - 江湖
 Renmin University - 人民大学
 sequence of a Taijiquan form - *taolu* - 套路
Systems of Transliteration:
 hanyu pinyin (fang'an) - 汉语拼音方案
 Wade-Giles - 威翟式拼音
 Taiji diagram - 太极图
Taiji Weapons:
 double-edged sword - *jian* - 剑
 one-edged sword or sabre - *dao* - 刀
 spear - *qiang* - 枪
 long staff - *gun* - 棍
 Chinese fan - *shan* - 扇

Taijiquan - 太极拳

Taijiquan Forms:

24-Step Simplified Taijiquan - 24 式简化太极拳

32-Step Taijijian - 32 式太极剑

52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan - 太极功夫扇

Taiji Tui Shou - Pushing Hands - 推手

Taijiquan Points on the Body:

on top of the head - *bai hui* - 百会

below the navel - *dantian* - 丹田

at the perineum - *hui yin* - 会阴

at the lumbar zone - *mingmen* - 命门

Taijiquan Styles:

Chen style - 陳氏

Yang style - 楊氏

Wu style - 武氏 , also known as Wu/Hao style - 武/郝氏

Wu style - 吳氏

Sun style - 孫氏

the “without ultimate” - *wuji* - 无极

The Book of Changes - *Yi Jing* - 易经

the Four Olds - 四旧: old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas

the highest or supreme - *tai* - 太

the last or the ultimate - *ji* - 极

The Spring Festival Gala – *chunwan* - 春晚

Tiantan (The Temple of Heaven) Park - 天坛公园

train the body - *duanlian shenti* - 锻炼身体

Tuanjiehu Park - 团结湖公园

unanimated body - *ti* - 体

vital life energy - *qi* - 气

way of life-cultivation - *yang sheng zhi dao* - 养生知道

Wudang mountains - 武当山

yang - 杨, the male principle

yin - 阴, the female principle

8.7.1 Names

Chan Hak Fu = Chen Kefu - 陳克夫, master of White Crane style

Chan Jackie Chan - 成龙, born 1954, actor

Chen Changxing - 陳長興 / 陈长兴, 1771-1853, Taiji master

Chen Kaige - 陈凯歌, born 1952, director

Chen Kefu = Chan Hak Fu - 陳克夫, master of White Crane style

Chen Sitan - 陈思坦 = “Prince of Taiji - 太极王子, Taiji instructor

Chen Weiming - 陳微明 / 陈微明 (1881–1958), Taiji master

Cheng Pei-Pei - 郑佩佩, born 1946, actress

Dong Ying Jie = Tung Yingchieh, 董英杰, senior disciple of Yang Chengfu

Fu Zhongwen - 傅钟文 (1903 – 1994), Taiji master

Huang Feihong = Wong Fei-hung - 黄飞鸿 (1847-1924), *wushu* master

Huo Yuanjia - 霍元甲 (1868-1910) - *wushu* master

Lee Bruce - 李小龙, born 1940, actor

Li Deyin 李德印, born 1938, Taiji instructor

Li Jet = Li Lianjie - 李连杰, born 1963, actor

Li Lianjie = Jet Li - 李连杰, born 1963, actor

Li Yiyu - 李亦畬, Taiji master

Tung Yingchieh = Dong Ying Jie, 董英杰, senior disciple of Yang Chengfu

Wang Zongyue - 王宗岳, Taiji master

Wong Fei-hung = Huang Feihong - 黄飞鸿 (1847-1924), *wushu* master

Wu Amin - 吴阿敏 – “Princess of Taiji - 太极公主, Taiji instructor

Wu Chengqing - 武澄清, Taiji master

Wu Gongyi = Wu Kung I, 吳公儀, master of Wu style Taijiquan

Wu Kung I = Wu Gongyi, 吳公儀, master of Wu style Taijiquan

Wu Ruqing - 武汝清, Taiji master

Wu Yuxiang - 武禹襄, 1813–1880, Taiji master

Yang Chengfu - 杨澄甫, 1883–1936, Taiji master

Yang Luchan - 楊露禪 / 杨露禅, 1799–1872, Taiji master, creator of Yang style Taiji

Yen Donnie - 甄子丹, born 1963, actor

Yeoh Michelle - 杨紫琼, born 1962, actress

Zhang Sanfeng - 张三丰, the legendary founder of Taiji

Zhang Yimou - 张艺谋, born 1950, director

Zhang Ziyi - 章子怡, born 1979, actress

Zheng Manqing - 郑曼青, 1902–1975, Taiji master

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	Name	Courses	Experience	Interview
1.	Ulla	52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan and 32-Step Taiji Sword	more than 10 years	Interview UJ_20181101_01
2.	Anna	24-Step Simplified Taiji, 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan and 32-Step Taiji Sword	more than 8 years	Interview AT_20181112_02
3.	Nina	24-Step Simplified Taiji, 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan and 32-Step Taiji Sword	more than 8 years	Interview NC_20181119_03
4.	Susanne	24-Step Simplified Taiji, 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan and 32-Step Taiji Sword	more than 7 years	Interview SL_20181126_04
5.	Uta	24-Step Simplified Taiji	more than 5 years	Interview UE_20181210_05
6.	Elsa	52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan and 32-Step Taiji Sword	more than 30 years	Interview EK_20181210_06

Figure 1: Overview of Interviewees of the VHS Taijiqian Group (own compilation)

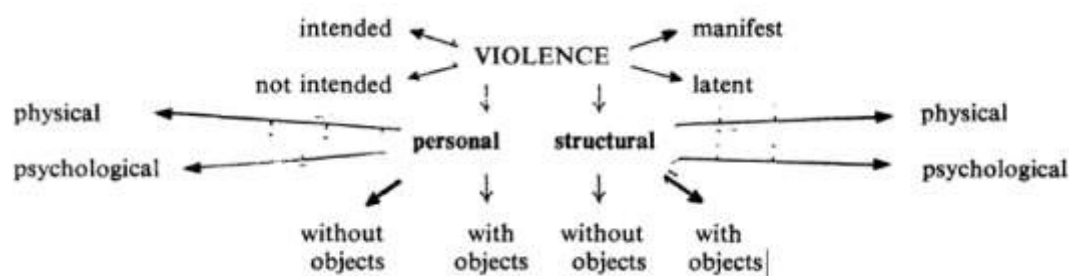


Figure 2: A Typology of Violence (Galtung 1969: 173)

Focussed on the anatomy	Focussed on the physiology
1. <i>crushing</i> (fist fight, catapults)	1. <i>denial of air</i> (choking, strangulation)
2. <i>tearing</i> (hanging, stretching, cutting)	2. <i>denial of water</i> (dehydration)
3. <i>piercing</i> (knives, spears, bullets)	3. <i>denial of food</i> (starvation due to siege, embargo)
4. <i>burning</i> (arson, flame, thrower)	4. <i>denial of movement</i>
5. <i>poisoning</i> (in water and food, in gases)	a. by body constraint (chains, gas)
6. <i>evaporation</i> (as in nuclear explosion)	b. by space constraint (prison, detention, exile)
	c. by brain control (nerve gases, 'brain-washing')

Figure 3: A Typology of Personal Somatic Violence (Galtung 1969: 174)

Diagram of the Three Powers (San-cai)



FIG. 0.28.1 DIAGRAM OF THE THREE POWERS (SAN-CAI)

Descriptions:

- Heaven, the pure Yang;
- Man, the semi-Yang and semi-Yin;
- Earth, the pure Yin.

Figure 4: Diagram of the Three Powers: Heaven, Man, and Earth (Chen 2007: 67)

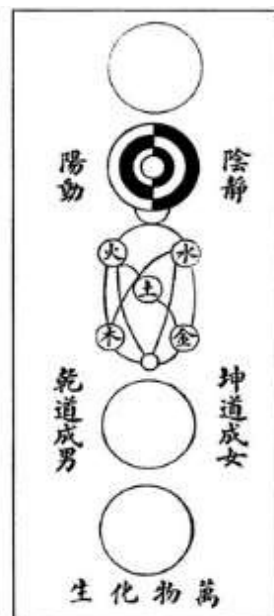
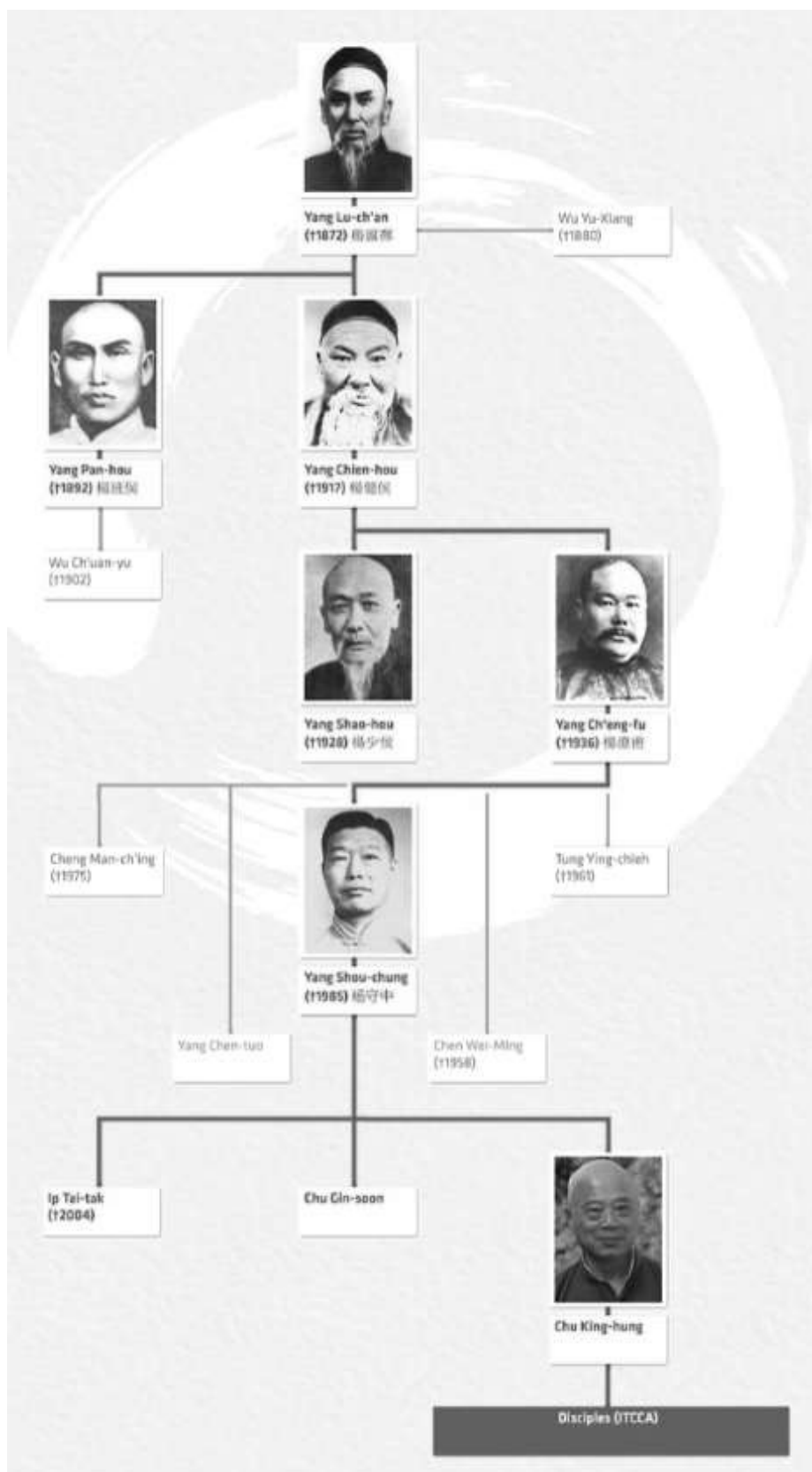


Figure 5: *Taiji Diagram of Zhou Dunyi* (Davis 2004: 58) and *A yin-yang diagram* (Davis 2004: 62)



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Figure 6: Original Yang Style Lineage (Yang Style Family-Tree n.d.)



Figure 7: Mass Performance (Koetse 2019)

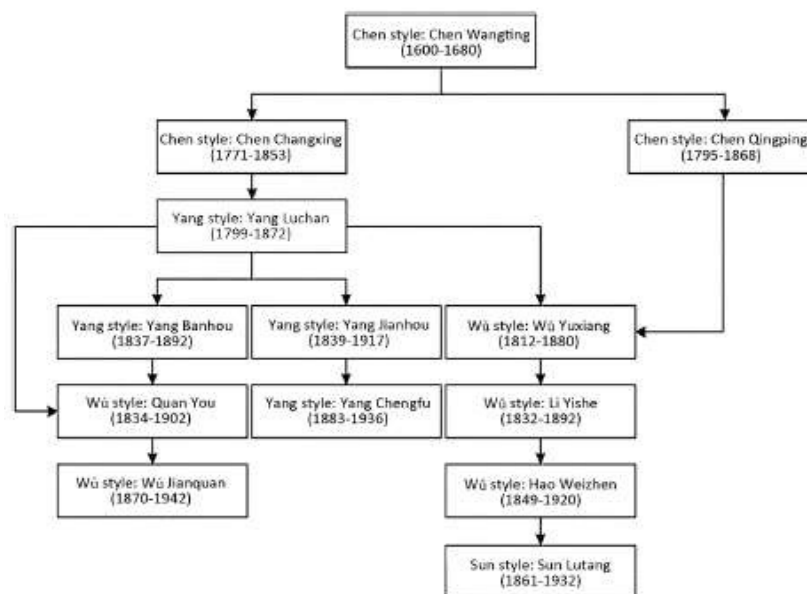


Figure 8: Summary of the evolution of the five classic Tai Ji Quan styles (Guo et al. 2014: 4)

Song of the 13 Methods or The Song of Taijiquan

The 13 Methods should never be treated lightly.
The source of strength of the body and spirit is in the waist.

Pay attention to the changes between empty and solid;
Make sure that qi flows freely throughout the body.

Feel movement in stillness and seek stillness in movement;
Fill the opponent with wonder with your unpredictable responses.

Make a thorough study of the meaning and purpose of each movement.
This will make it easy to achieve the goal.

Always keep the mind centered in the waist;
When the abdomen is relaxed and at ease,
The qi can rise without hindrance.

Keep the tailbone straight to let “spirit of vitality” rise to the top of the head;
Then the whole body is relaxed and light,
The head is upright as is suspending on a string.

Research techniques deep to their roots,
Bend – extend, open – close, all will be done with high skill.

When entering the door, you need a teacher to lead the way;
Then you have to practice unceasingly and to study on your own.

What is the principle of Taijiquan that guides its application?
The mind and qi are king, and the bones and muscles are the subjects.
Think carefully what the ultimate aim of Taijiquan is:
To prolong life and maintain youth.

Every word in this song of 140 characters is true and accurate;
No important meaning of Taijiquan is left behind.

If you don't follow this song closely,
You will waste time and come to regret it.

十三总势莫轻视，命意源头在腰隙。
变换虚实须留意，气遍身躯不少滞。
静中触动动犹静，因敌变化示神奇。
势势存心揆用意，得来不觉费功夫。
刻刻留心在腰间，腹内松静气腾然。
尾闾中正神贯顶，满身轻利顶头悬。
仔细留心向推求，屈伸开合听自由。
入门引路须口授，功夫无息法自修。
若言体用何为准？意气君来骨肉臣。
详推用意终何在？益寿延年不老春。
歌兮歌兮百四十，字字真切意无遗。
若不向此推求去，枉费功夫贻叹息。

Figure 9: Song of the 13 Methods (Li 2009: 38-39, emphasis added)

24-Step Simplified Taijiquan - 24 式简化太极拳

	Name	Pinyin Transliteration	English Translation
1	起势	qi shi	Commencing position
2	左右野马分鬃	zuo you yema fen zong	Part the wild horse's mane to both sides(3)
3	白鹤亮翅	bai he liang chi	White crane spreads it's wings
4	左右搂膝拗步 (3)	zuo you louxi aobu	Brush knee and twist hip on both sides(3)
5	手挥琵琶	shou hui pipa	Hand strums the lute
6	左右倒转肱 (4)	zuo you dao juan gong	Repulse the monkey both sides(4)
7	左揽雀尾	zuo lan que wei	Grasp the bird's tail,left side
8	右揽雀尾	you lan que wei	Grasp the bird's tail,right side
9	单鞭	dan bian	Single whip
10	云手 (3)	yun shou	Wave hands like clouds (3)
11	单鞭	dan bian	Single whip
12	高探马	gao tan ma	High pat on horse
13	右蹬脚	you deng jiao	Kick with the right heel
14	双峰贯耳	shuang feng guan er	Strike opponent's temple with fists
15	转身 - 左蹬脚	zhuan shen - zuo deng jiao	Turn body & kick left heel
16	左下势独立	zuo xia shi duli	Squatting & standing on one leg.left side
17	右下势独立	you xia shi duli	Squatting & standing on one leg.right side
18	左右穿梭	zuo you chuan suo	A fair maiden threads the shuttle.both sides
19	海底针	haidi zhen	Pluck needle from the sea bottom
20	闪通臂	shan tong bi	Open fan through the back
21	转身 - 摆拦捶	zhuan shen - ban lan chui	Turn body wrench,parry,punch
22	如封似闭	ru feng si bi	Apparent close-up
23	十字手	shi zi shou	Cross-hands
24	收势	shou shi	Closing form

Figure 10: 24-Step Simplified Taijiquan - 24 式简化太极拳 (Li 2009: 133-134, modified)

52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan - 太极功夫扇动作名称

预备势

第一段

- 1、起势（开步抱扇）
- 2、斜飞势（侧弓步举扇）
- 3、白鹤亮翅（虚步亮扇）
- 4、黄蜂入洞（进步刺扇）
- 6、金鸣独立（独立撩扇）
- 7、力劈华山（转身劈扇）
- 8、灵猫扑蝶（转身抡压扇）
- 9、坐马观花（马步亮扇）

第二段

- 10、野马分鬃（弓步削扇）
- 11、雏燕凌空（并步亮扇）
- 12、黄蜂入洞（进步刺扇）
- 13、猛虎捕食（震脚推扇）
- 14、螳螂捕蝉（戳脚撩扇）
- 15、勒马回头（盖步按扇）
- 16、鹞子翻身（退步藏扇）
- 17、坐马观花（马步击扇）

第三段

- 18、举鼎推山（马步推扇）
- 19、神龙回首（转身扎扇）

第四段

- 27、野马分鬃（弓步削扇）
- 28、雏燕凌空（并步亮扇）
- 29、黄蜂入洞（进步刺扇）
- 30、猛虎捕食（震脚推扇）
- 31、螳螂捕蝉（戳脚撩扇）
- 32、鹞子翻身（退步藏扇）
- 34、坐马观花（马步击扇）

第五段

- 35、顺鸾肘（马步顶肘）
- 36、裹鞭炮（马步砸拳）
- 37、前招势（虚步拨扇）
- 38、双震脚（震脚劈扇）
- 39、龙虎相交（蹬脚推扇）
- 40、玉女穿梭（云扇合抱）
- 42、霸王扬旗（歇步亮扇）
- 43、行步过门（托扇行步）

第六段

- 44、七星手（虚步棚扇）
- 45、揽扎衣（弓步棚扇）
- 46、捋挤势（后捋前挤）
- 47、苏秦背剑（并步背扇）

Figure 11: 52-Step Taiji Gongfu Fan - 太极功夫扇动作名称 (n.d.)

32-Step Taiji Sword – 32 式太极剑套路名称

起 势	01、并步点剑	02、独立反刺
03、扑步横扫	04、向右平带	05、向左平带
06、独立抡劈	07、退步回抽	08、独立上刺
09、虚步下截	10、左弓步刺	11、缩身斜带
12、缩身斜带	13、提膝捧剑	14、跳步平刺
15、左虚步撩	16、右弓步撩	17、转身回抽
18、并步平刺	19、左弓步拦	20、右弓步拦
21、左弓步拦	22、进步反刺	23、反身回劈
24、虚步点剑	25、独立平托	26、弓步挂劈
27、虚步抡劈	28、撤步反击	28、进步平刺
30、丁步回抽	31、旋转平抹	32、弓步直刺
收 势		

Figure 12: 32-Step Taiji Sword – 32 式太极剑套路名称 (n.d.)



Figure 11: Telescopic Taiji sword with tassel, stainless steel blade and plastic handle (own source)

10. Abstracts

10.1 English Abstract

Taijiquan, a Chinese martial art, is an important component of popular culture in the PR China. It stands at the center of a dynamic field of transitions that turned a violent combat technique used in wars, entangled with religious philosophy of Daoism and only transmitted within the closed circle of families, into a sport practiced worldwide. Starting from the question of how these harmonious movements of the people in the park can be part of a martial art that has been used to kill opponents and which has become the subject of cinema blockbusters with brutal fight scenes, the present thesis will scrutinize the participation in violence through Taijiquan training and the spectatorship of violence of cinematic representations through the theoretical approach of popular culture with emphasis on the notion of violence. The methodological approach of participant observation started in Beijing, which allowed the researcher to take the embodied knowledge to the gyms of Vienna, where the focus was put on interviews and informal discussions with a Taijiquan group at a Viennese adult education center. The practice of forms of physical violence, which in Taiji is directed against a non-existent opponent, is subject to a choreography, only feinted, and imaginised by the practitioner. A perfect execution of the Taiji movements depends on the countless iterative acts, the *gongfu*. This allows comparisons with *wuxia* films, known generally as kung fu movies, where the violence is also feinted and choreographed, whereby the credibility of the performing artists depends on their embodied skills.

10.2 German Abstract

Taijiquan, eine chinesische Kampfkunst, ist ein wichtiger Bestandteil der Populärkultur in der Volksrepublik China. Sie steht im Zentrum eines dynamischen Feldes von Übergängen, das eine in Kriegen verwendete gewalttätige Kampftechnik, die mit der religiösen Philosophie des Daoismus verknüpft und nur innerhalb geschlossener Familienkreise weitergegeben wurde, in eine weltweit praktizierte Sportart gewandelt hat. Ausgehend von der Frage, wie diese harmonischen Bewegungen der Menschen im Park Teil einer Kampfkunst sein können, die verwendet wurde, um Gegner in kriegerischen Auseinandersetzungen zu töten und die Gegenstand von Kino-Blockbustern mit brutalen Kampfszenen geworden ist, wird die vorliegende Arbeit die Teilnahme an Gewalt beim Taijiquan-Training sowie das Zuschauen bei der Gewalt von filmischen Darstellungen mithilfe des theoretischen Ansatzes der Populärkultur mit Schwerpunkt auf dem Begriff der Gewalt untersuchen. Der methodische Ansatz der teilnehmenden Beobachtung begann in Beijing, was der Forscherin ermöglichte, das dort verkörperte Wissen in die Turnhallen von Wien zu bringen, wo der Schwerpunkt auf Interviews und informellen Diskussionen mit einer Taijiquan-Gruppe an einer Wiener Volkshochschule lag. Das Üben der Formen von körperlicher Gewalt, die sich im Taiji gegen einen nicht existierenden Gegner richtet, unterliegt einer Choreografie, wird von den Praktizierenden nur vorgetäuscht und ist imaginär. Eine perfekte Ausführung der Taiji-Bewegungen hängt von den unzähligen iterativen Handlungen ab, dem *gongfu*. Dies ermöglicht Vergleiche mit *wuxia*-Filmen, die allgemein als Kung-Fu-Filme bekannt sind, in denen die Gewalt ebenfalls angetäuscht und choreografiert wird, wobei die Glaubwürdigkeit der darstellenden Künstler von ihren verkörperten Fähigkeiten abhängt.