Purging the Ghost of Descartes: Conducting Zhineng Qigong in Singapore

CHEE-HAN LIM

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This thesis is the original work of the author except where otherwise acknowledged

Chee-Han Lim
Department of Anthropology
Division of Society and Environment
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
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As a senior once pointed out, getting a PhD is one of the most selfish things one can possibly do. I have indeed been rather selfish, not only in spending so much time with myself, but more importantly, leeching on the benevolence of others.

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the practice of Zhineng Qigong in Singapore. It focuses on the relationships between epistemology, habitus, discourse, and power. Zhineng Qigong is a relatively new school of qigong that incorporates principles from both classical Chinese thought and modern science, presenting itself as a systematic and scientific form of self-cultivational art that promises health, wisdom, and an overall betterment of a person's quality. Zhineng Qigong teachers and the students manifest disparate worldviews, carry themselves in different ways and employ divergent logics to rationalize their behaviors. The teachers tend to employ holistic and monistic Zhineng Qigong concepts in legitimizing their practice of self-cultivation and their critiques of the Singaporean state while the students appeal to the state's ideological framework in explaining their pragmatic choices and practice of self-reliance. Despite the differences, the teachers and students share concerns with a practice of self-discipline.

Although ethnic Chinese make up three quarters of Singapore's population, traditional Chinese practices like qigong continue to occupy a marginalized discursive space. Since independence in 1965, Singapore has seen rapid modernization and westernization. Its authoritarian state is dominated by a single political party that practices social engineering explicitly, employing both institutional and ideological means to cultivate citizens who can provide the most utility for a modern capitalistic society. Deeply embedded within the state's discursive practices are dualistic conceptions of human ontology, which in combination with the official ideologies of pragmatism, meritocracy, and non-welfarism, and their corresponding institutional manifestations, establish a regime of body-politics that seeks to produce docile bodies and pliant minds.

Through comparing the habitus of Zhineng Qigong teachers and that of the students, I aim to show that, at the level of practice, the holistic and monistic epistemology of Zhineng Qigong do not necessarily come into conflict with the dualistic and reductionistic epistemology of the state. On the contrary, the non-Cartesian philosophy of Zhineng Qigong works effectively in 'technicizing' the teachers' practice of self-discipline as self-cultivation, obfuscating the political and social origins of their habitus and thus maintaining its durability. The adoption of the state's ideological frameworks in rationalizing their behaviors also ensures that Zhineng Qigong students continue channeling their energies towards the private sphere as they practice pragmatism and self-reliance in everyday life. Therefore, even though Zhineng Qigong teachers and students employ rationalization strategies founded upon contrasting epistemological models, in practice, both groups of practitioners are similarly complicit with the goals of Singapore's body-politics.
CHAPTER 1:

HETERODOX AND ORTHODOX DISCIPLINE UNDER THE SINGAPOREAN STATE

Introduction:

Teacher Ang palpated the pulse of a 53-year-old lady as he lamented to me the lack of theoretical profundity and curiosity in students learning qigong. Teacher Ang’s wife, Teacher Ng, hovered over another female patient lying on the bed, simultaneously administering acumoxa and griping about the current state of Chinese education in Singapore. Both Teacher Ang and his wife seemed unconcerned with the therapeutic activities demanding their attention as they competed to fill the clinic with their individual complaints about the superficiality of the average Singaporean. All of a sudden, Teacher Ng burst out loudly to her patient, “Isn’t this great?” as she pointed two fingers at Teacher Ang and I, “Talking about academic stuff unlike everyone else who pursues the material life”. Teacher Ang smiled in agreement, as he always did when philosophical discussions interfere with his monotonous clinical schedule.

Mr. Kang was practicing chengshou 撐手 (arm-propping) when I caught his eye. It was the usual Sunday morning before qigong training began, and I had just walked in through the main gate. He smiled and asked me about my teaching at the university while he carried on with his training. I observed him for a few seconds before asking him how long he has been doing the exercise. He pondered for moment and replied, “I can’t remember...it doesn’t matter”, subsequently dropping his arms and sighing, “It’s not working...I’m doing xianggong 香功 (Fragrance Qigong) on Thursdays, I heard it’s good for the ringing in my ear, you want to come along?” I smiled and declined politely.
The above accounts represent two very different attitudes towards Zhineng Qigong among practitioners in Singapore. Teacher Ang, a Chinese physician and Zhineng Qigong instructor, takes an intellectualist approach that treats qigong not only as a physical exercise that promotes health, but also as a bundle of teleological, ethical, and cosmological obligations that require a holistic intellectual-spiritual-physical way of life. Mr. Kang, a student of Zhineng Qigong, on the other hand, is a pragmatist who scouts around for the best means to acquiring good health as he tours between biomedicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), folk medicine and qigong. Although the two men differ in their purposes for practicing Zhineng Qigong, their life-choices, their health-seeking rationales, and their fundamental assumptions about reality, they both continue to engage in a traditional Chinese art in a modernized and westernized Southeast Asian society.

Zhineng Qigong is a ‘scientific’ form of qigong that emerged from China in the late 1980s as the country was experiencing what Palmer calls a “qigong fever” (Palmer, 2007). Locating this relatively new form of qigong in Singapore, a Southeast Asian country populated by a majority of ethnic Chinese, provides a unique opportunity for exploring the interplay between an authoritarian state, a society with modern infrastructures, and the practice of a Chinese traditional art. How does Zhineng Qigong survive modernization and westernization in a small island-state? Why are traditional therapeutic methods preferred by some Singaporeans over modern biomedicine? Who are these people who have devoted themselves to the practice and advocacy of an art that has been marginalized by mainstream discourse? These were some of the questions that floated in my head as I hung out with my qigong classmates and teachers, exploring inner realities which were revealed to me little by little while I practiced qigong with them, argued with them, ate with them, and played witness to their everyday conducts.

The emphasis of my research as that of Farquhar (Farquhar, 1994: 2), is “epistemological in the broadest sense”. My main intent in this thesis is to provide a
picture of the relationships between epistemology, habitus, discourse, and power in Singapore. This is achieved through relating Zhineng Qigong epistemology and the conduct of Zhineng Qigong practitioners to state ideologies and institutional practices. I aim to show that varying epistemological models employed by groups of people with contrasting beliefs do not necessarily come into conflict with one another at the level of practice. In the course of my research, human ontology emerged as a major point of discord, albeit not always explicitly, between Zhineng Qigong teachers and the state. Zhineng Qigong teachers often utilize holistic and monistic conceptions in their reflections on their actions and their critiques of the state while the latter employs Cartesian dualisms in the design of its policies and the framing of its ideologies. In their attempts at legitimizing their actions, both Zhineng Qigong teachers and the Singaporean state appeal to contrasting epistemological assumptions about human nature and the ways humans should be typified. However, even though the two parties appear to lock horns regarding the foundation of their beliefs and practices, the conduct of Zhineng Qigong teachers and the strategies of the state are much friendlier to one another than epistemological analyses can possibly reveal. This necessitates an ethnography that describes the everyday conduct of Zhineng Qigong practitioners vis-à-vis the political methods of the state, as the two parties attempt to reconcile or distinguish between two contrasting sets of epistemologies and behavioral prescriptions.
An Intelligent and Capable Qigong

“Qigong is not used for training qi 氣; it is used for training yi 意 (the volition)”

: -- Teacher Ang

“Qi 氣” (pronounced ‘chee’ without curling the tongue) is probably the most salient phrase that one associates with the Chinese martial arts. The word commonly peppers mnemonics instrumental to the learning of esoteric and at times, clandestine fighting techniques¹. My experience with martial arts began at the age of 13, when with a small group of friends, I began studying various combative systems. In the years to come, I took up classes, both private and institutionalized, in various kinds of what I now refer to as ‘external’ martial arts. The distinctions between the ‘internal’ and the ‘external’ schools of martial arts, though taken for granted by many martial artists today, was originally a political rather than a technical distinction (see Henning, 1999). However, because I was trained using modern-day interpretations, I have adopted the popular use of the terms, where internal martial arts refer to those that focus on training jing 精 (the qi-concentrate), qi 氣, and shen* 神 (the sentiency-knowledge) rather than the external school’s jin 筋 (tendons), gu 骨 (bones), and pi 皮 (skin). It is because of this asymmetrical devotion to the ‘externals’ that I came to distance myself from the notion of qi, which had curiously been missing from the core curriculum of what I had been learning. This distance, expanded further with an education built around Cartesian assumptions about human physiology and society², drove my pursuit full-circle back to a rediscovery of Chinese bodily epistemologies, which landed me as a student of Zhineng Qigong.

¹ A martial arts instructor of mine once made the students vow that certain strokes are not to be taught to the non-Chinese. See Gast (1984) for similar cases in North America.

² I majored in physics, chemistry, and biology until I switched to the social sciences and humanities at the university.
At the introductory level, qigong can be understood as “the skill-ability-mastery of qi”. This inevitably begs the question: “what is qi?” Several translations of the concept have been attempted by philosophers, sinologists and anthropologists alike (e.g. Chen, N., 2003; Farquhar, 1994; Ho, 1985; Hsu, 1999; Kohn, 1993; Kuriyama, Shigehisa, 1994; Porkert, 1974; Sivin, 1987). These translations include “matter-energy”, “vital-force”, or “pneuma”, and entail considerable debates. The difficulties faced with translating the term is succinctly summed up by Farquhar (1994: 34) as “qi is both structural and functional, a unification of material and temporal forms that loses all coherence when reduced to one or the other aspect.” The word “qi” also pervades the everyday usage of Chinese languages, including common Mandarin phrases which utilize the word to connote ‘aura’, ‘feelings’ or any phenomenon which lack tangibility, for example, xiaoqi 小气 (petty), qizhi 气质 (personal aura or charisma) or yunqi 运气 (luck). ‘Qigong’ has been translated in several different ways as well (see Chen, N., 2003; Hsu, 1999; Ots, 1994; Palmer, 2007; Xu, 1999). Rather than enter debates over terminology, this thesis examines how qi and qigong are understood and expressed in Zhineng Qigong texts and practices.

There are probably hundreds or thousands of schools of qigong existing in the world today (Chen, N., 2003: 6), each with its own principles and methods. However, what they share in common is a devotion to the manipulation of qi for the purpose of health, combat, intelligence or extra-sensory-supra-human capabilities called “teyi gongneng 特异功能”. Besides qigong, other Chinese practices have traditionally incorporated theories of qi into their programs as well, including martial arts, calligraphy and dance (Lin, 1988; Liu, 1996: 676; Ma, 1983: 8). The richness of the word qi, the continuing emergence of new forms of qigong, and the difficulties at distinguishing qigong from other self-cultivational arts make attempting a comprehensive account of qi or qigong as ambitious as attempting one for the Chinese culture. My discussions of qigong theory remain within the boundaries of Zhineng Qigong principles.

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3 Qi is pronounced as “Ki” or “Kee” in Japanese, in Chaozhou, and in Fujian dialects, and as “Hei” in Cantonese.
Zhineng Qigong is a relatively new school of qigong, at the frontline of what Xu Jian (1999) calls “qigong’s difficult romance with Science”. Teacher Ang calls it “The most scientific and systematic form of qigong”. This allusion to its systematic and scientific virtues no doubt reflects the influence of scientific discourse on qigong’s legitimacy and inner logics. Zhineng Qigong thus belongs to the ‘qigong scientism’ camp which emerged in China in the seventies and eighties, which attempted not only to scientize qigong methods, but also to standardize them (Palmer, 2007). This ‘open-form’ or ‘public’ (kaifangshi 开放式) qigong was the brainchild of Pang Ming 庞明 or Pang He Ming 庞鹤鸣, who refined a prior style called Soaring-Crane Qigong (Hexiang Zhuang Qigong 鹤翔庄气功) and renamed it “lift qi up and feed it into the top” (pengqi guanding 捧气贯顶), offering it as the first level of Zhineng Qigong in 1986. This renaming was done to emphasize the style’s ability to release and cultivate (kaifa 开发) both mental and physical potentials. “Zhi” stands for zhihui 智慧 (wisdom and intelligence), defined as “the brain’s functional capacity at handling external matters” while “neng” stands for nengli 能力 (capability-potentials), which includes “both the brain’s and the body’s functions” (Centre, 1995: 1). Together, Zhineng Qigong was designed or presented as a scientific qigong that provides an overall betterment of life without the risks of qigong deviation (an ailment that may arise from incorrect qigong practice) and the side-effects of biomedicine, TCM, and other forms of ‘closed-form’ or ‘private’ (guanbi shi 关闭式) qigong. As for the profiles of practitioners, the organizational and historical aspects of Zhineng Qigong in Singapore, they will be left to the next chapter to be discussed in detail.

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4 His exact words were: “tashi zuixue zuixitonghua de qigong 它是最科学最系统化的气功…”

5 It is always a predicament when choosing to use the bifurcations mind/mental together with body/physical as this echoes the Cartesian duality. However, when used in certain contexts, such dualities are indeed intended as they were so by practitioners.

6 The original Chinese definition is “danao piceng chuli waijie shiwu de gongneng 大脑皮层处理外界事物的功能”. 
Singapore, the field site

"Singapore is the most formal-rational country I've ever seen."

-- Geoffrey Benjamin
(Anthropologist at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore)

With a population made up of mostly ethnic Chinese, English institutionalized as the administrative language, western-educated political leaders re-learning their vernacular languages to forward their political careers, a legal-medical system left over from the British colonial era and ethnomedicines that continue to flourish, Singaporean society is contradictory in many ways. Within this complex social configuration towers an authoritarian state dominated by a single political party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), which attempts to micro-manage all domains of life. Social engineering is explicitly practiced, rationalized, and justified in the name of achieving and maintaining “national objectives” of economic competitiveness and social integration.

As a former British colony that gained independence in 1965, Singapore embraces much of the infrastructural components of a modern western society, including capitalism, universal suffrage, and biomedicine, yet the state explicitly rejects cultural imports like political-liberalism and state welfarism with ideological buffers like “Confucianism”, “Asian Values” and “Shared Values” against what it considers “decadent western individualism” (Chua & Kuo, 1995: 113). Together with the typical consequences of rapid modernization, this Janus-faced attitude towards the West has created sets of social-cultural puzzles (Haas, 1999) which the state attempts to resolve through legal means or ‘softer’ methods like public campaigns and propaganda carried in the mainstream media. Noteworthy social problems include the breakdown of the

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^ Singapore was classified as a developed country by the United Nations in 1990, drawing flak from the country’s leaders who were concerned with the reduced assistance that a developed country can potentially receive from the United Nations.
traditional three-generational family unit, which the state believes negates the care of the elderly, the populace’s loss of the abilities to speak vernacular languages that the state believes invites encroachment of western values, and the chronic political apathy of the citizenry that the state believes threatens nation-building. Zhineng Qigong practitioners find themselves wedged tightly within this complex and fluid interplay of tradition, modernity, and the state, as they attempt to find meaning and utility through a scientifically packaged traditional art that is at best treated by the authorities with dismissing neglect.

Singapore has a population of approximately 4.7 million people (on an island area of 692 km²), consisting of 76.8% Chinese dialect groups, mainly Cantonese, Hokkien (fujian 福建), Teochew (chaozhou 潮州) and Hakka (kejia 客家), 13.9% Malays, 7.9% Indians and 1.4% others (Singstat, 2000). It is predicted that there will be 6.5 million people living on the island by the year 2025, mainly due to immigration, which has to date brought the number of non-Singaporeans on the island to a quarter of the total population. The heterogeneous make up of the island’s inhabitants serves as powerful political excuse for various social control policies and legislation, including media censorship, family planning, and the reining of free speech. Singapore’s ‘Chinese-ness’ has also become a constant source of ideological squabbles with the surrounding Malay-Muslim countries of Malaysia and Indonesia. Given this supposed Chinese-ness and the state’s backing for “Asian Values”, traditional Chinese practices should logically find themselves having considerable institutional backings. However, the adoption of western social, legal, and economic structures for the past 40 years and the western-educated background of the political leaders have not made it plain-sailing for

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8 Former president Habibie of Indonesia referred to Singapore as “a little red dot”, alluding to the symbolic Chinese-ness of the color red and the island’s size. Similarly, some Taiwanese politicians had also called Singapore “mucus” and “testicles” in response to Singapore’s increasingly intimate diplomatic relations with Mainland China.

9 Due to an association of “Asian Values” with Confucianism (George, 2000: 162; Wee, 1989: 19) in a country with 25% of its population consisting of the non-Chinese and a regional ideological climate which is distinctively Muslim, the five “Shared Values” was implemented in 1991 in the educational curriculum as a politically-correct replacement and as a formalized national ideology. The “Shared Values”, even though merely a “floating signifier” (Chua & Kuo, 1995: 121) is intended as a mobilizing and integrative apparatus for nation-building (Chua, 1995a). It is ironic that most Singaporeans I know are unaware of what the five values are, and I myself often struggle to recall them as well.
the flourishing of these practices. On the contrary, qigong has been forced to take several compromising steps to occupy a marginal discursive space, being associated with images of Chinese-educated senior citizens moving their limbs arthritically at daybreak, along with a monotonous voice uttering instructions against a backdrop of traditional Chinese instrumental music emanating from an archaic battery-operated radio. Even with the recent quasi-incorporation of TCM into public health services, Chinese therapeutic methods, especially qigong, still suffer from the plight of the forgotten, the status of the unscientific, and the image of the old-fashioned.

The Body and Embodiment

"I am my body."

: -- Jean-Paul Sartre.

When I first started practicing Zhineng Qigong, I entered the field with certain preconceptions that I acquired from decades of education in Singapore’s public schools where English is the medium of instruction and the natural sciences are compulsory subjects. Even though I was brought up speaking Mandarin and Chinese dialects and studying Chinese literature, my training in the natural and social sciences made me approach Zhineng Qigong with implicit ontological separations of the mind and body, culture and nature, and self and society. Doing and writing about Zhineng Qigong had forced me to reckon with another contradictory reality, leading to a personal practical encounter with a ‘clash of epistemologies’. For the past few decades, cultural studies of the human body have been devoted to critiquing Cartesian, or what some scholars in the field call “western” dualisms, implicit in the social sciences and the English language (e.g. Kasulis, T. P. A., Roger T. and Dissanayake, Wimal, 1993; Lock, M., 1993; Ozawa-De Silva, 2002; Strathern, 1996; Turner, B. S., 1996; Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987). My personal experiences with a clash of epistemologies also echo what these other
Researchers have written about the problems that Cartesian dualism creates for cultural interpretation.

Probably the earliest explicit anthropological discussion of the problem of imposing Cartesian dualisms on the study of the human body emerged from the field of medical anthropology, in Lock and Scheper-Hughes' *The Mindful Body* (1987). The two authors propose that the human body should not be seen merely as a biological or an atomistic entity, but also as possessing properties traditionally assigned to the mental faculty or social domain. The traditional dichotomization of the mind from the body raised a series of sticky epistemological questions in western philosophy that are still encountered in the fields of medicine, psychiatry and the human sciences today (see Barish, 1981; Best, 1974; 1978; Gibson & Ingold, 1993; Hanson, 1979; Harre & Krausz, 1996; Streeck, 1993; Turner, B. S., 1996). The mind-body dualism established a series of models of the human body that continues to dominate both the natural and the social sciences. These models include that of the body as a machine, as an instrument, as a cage, and as a temple (see Ferguson, 1997a; 1997b; Synnott, 1992). Shared among these models is the prototypical image of the body as a material container within which the non-material aspects of personhood resides. According to this Cartesian body-conduit criterion, the human being is literally, a “ghost in the shell”.

In addition to the antagonism between the mind and the body, Lock and Scheper-Hughes also addressed other dichotomies including that of the self and society, nurture and nature, and agency and structure. The “three bodies” they propose call for putting a stop to treating the human being as the ‘individual’ – an atomistic *indivisible* agent – but

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10 Although Blacking's (1977) edition of the ASA conference on the Anthropology of the Body emerged a decade before Lock and Scheper-Hughes' publication, his collection of papers did not address the Cartesian issue rigorously, but paid more attention to building on the works of Marcel Mauss and Mary Douglas. The frequency with which Lock and Scheper-Hughes' work is cited in research on the body compared to that of Blacking's indicates that the former are highly regarded by scholars as pioneers of the field.

11 Strathern (1996: 5) argues that the lack of a third faculty – the soul – is a result of the French term, *âme*, that conflates the mind with the soul.
as being interconnected with experiential, social, cultural, and political factors. In the field of sociology, Turner’s *Body and Society* (1996) linked the dualisms encountered by the anthropologists of the body to a series of epistemological assumptions commonly found in mainstream social theory. Sociology tends to treat social order as a product of mental faculties and the body as the origin of threats to this order (1996: 60-83). Turner’s analysis suggests that a major revolution in social theory is necessary if sociological assumptions about the relationship between self and society are to be collectively overhauled (see also Featherstone, Hepworth, & Turner, 1990).

Even though it was only in recent years that the body surfaced as an analytical category, it has always existed in anthropology, albeit surreptitiously. It was Mauss (1935) and Douglas (1969; 1973) who brought ‘the body’ to the surface of anthropological writings, establishing (not necessarily intentionally) the two ‘anthropology of the body’ traditions that Turner (2006) distinguishes respectively as the *embodiment* and the *body* approach. The earlier days of the anthropology of the body were devoted to visual phenomena like tattoos, masks, and ornaments (Farnell, 1999: 347), but with Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990; 1998) further development of Mauss’

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12 This was followed up with Lock’s “Cultivating the Body” (1993) where she provided a review of anthropological works on the body, including phenomenological approaches of Bourdieu and Mauss’ (Lock, M., 1993: 137-138) under the umbrella of ‘embodiment’

13 This assumption is best represented by Durkheim’s “homo-duplex” (Durkheim, 1982: 306), where the social ideal keeps the biological will in check.

14 Together with developments in medical anthropology and social theory, medical sociology (e.g. Leder, 1992; Turner, B. S., 1987; 1992) is notably the other major contributor to discussions about conceptions of the body, healthy and sick. Feminist writings (e.g. Firestone, 1970; Grosz, 1994; Martin, 1987; Singer, 1989) have also brought scholarly and popular attention to the study of the gendered body while the study of sport (e.g. Bourdieu, 1978; Bourdieu, 1988; Wacquant, 2004) is another area in which the body stands out as an analytical category.

15 In a campaign that Frank (1990) calls “bringing the body back in”, several books have been published to address the body’s absence and the role it should play in social scientific writings about the human self, culture, and society (e.g. Blacking, 1977; Burroughs & Ehrenreich, 1993; Csordas, Thomas J., 1994; Featherstone et al., 1990; Shilling, 1993; Strathern, 1996; Turner, B. S., 1996)

16 All experiences are bodily and all human practices, including rituals, involve the human body (Ferguson, 1997a: 1); it is therefore impossible to document rituals without presupposing the medium which enacts them. It is taking the human body as an explicit analytical category that separates the anthropology of the body from traditional anthropology.
concept of the habitus, studies in the *embodiment* lineage have been shifted towards the experiential, the processual, and the practical. Michel Foucault’s (1975; 1978; 1979a) contribution to the study of bodily social control techniques has also added on to the *body* tradition, in providing a framework for ‘the body politic’.

### Primary arguments of the thesis

My research on Zhineng Qigong borrows from both the *embodiment* and the *body* lineage. Broadly speaking, the *embodiment* approach pays more attention to the ‘internal’ unity of the person while the *body* approach addresses the inter-relations between the individual body and the larger dimensions of society. In addressing the holism of Zhineng Qigong principles, I argue against making discrete distinctions between the mind and the body, between the ideal and the material, and between the ghost and the shell. This requires what I call an ‘epistemological overhaul’, in which the anthropologist has to exercise a *verstehen* that treats a traditional art in its own terms.

Being able to appreciate the internal unity of the person is crucial in understanding how Zhineng Qigong teachers are able to devote themselves to extreme regimes of self-discipline and how the language of holism helps rationalize their behaviors while simultaneously aiding their critiques of the state. The *body* tradition on the other hand, provides a framework for understanding the role that Singapore’s political discourse plays in the cultivation of docility in Zhineng Qigong practitioners.

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17 The seventies saw, in the field of anthropology, sociology and linguistics, an emergence of a set of academic approaches bundled around ‘practices’ (Ortner, 1984: 44). In anthropology, this trend is exemplified by Bourdieu’s advocacy for “practical logic” against “scientistic logic” in social theory (1977; 1990; 1998), Geertz’s emphasis on symbolic actions rather than symbolic systems in the interpretation of cultures (1973) and also Sahlins’ (1981: 6) stark reminder against losing “what anthropology is all about” – human action in the world. These and other relevant developments in sociology’s symbolic interactionism (e.g. Blumer, 1998; Goffman, 1959) and Giddens’ attempt at resolving the structure-agency debate (Giddens, 1979) together with the incorporation of existential philosophy, primarily Merleau-Ponty’s (1962; 1965) phenomenological approach, paved the way for a new method of looking at culture – culture as practiced and as embodied.
In addition to the concepts put forward by cultural theorists of the body, I rely heavily on Bourdieu and Foucault in showing how the actions and choices of individual Zhineng Qigong practitioners relate to the larger socio-political configuration of Singapore. Although Bourdieu did mention the role of power in his conception of culture, in that political order is inscribed on the body (see for e.g. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), I do not find his theories adequate enough in analyzing specific strategies of the Singaporean state. On the other hand, Foucault's theories on government are less useful than Bourdieu's conceptions of the habitus and the field in describing and analyzing particularistic behaviors of everyday life. Through combining the two, I hope to provide a more comprehensive picture of how power relations, maintained through acts of governance, are embodied by Zhineng Qigong practitioners.

In my fieldwork, I observed that although Zhineng Qigong teachers and students exhibit conducts that are motivated or justified by contrasting assumptions about reality, both their habitus function towards the maintenance of the field. I borrow the term 'habitus' from Bourdieu (1977; 1990) to refer to the semi-bodily and quasi-conscious behaviors of individuals which are oriented towards the 'field', a series of social and political relations. Any given field is characterized by its own 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977: 159-169; 2001), taken-for-granted fundamental presuppositions of reality that informs the habitus and which is in turn sustained by the habitus. There are, however, selected members of the field who do not buy into the doxa and who consistently work against the status quo. As marginalized middle-aged Chinese intellectuals critical of the Singaporean state and culture, Zhineng Qigong teachers exhibit what Bourdieu calls 'heterodoxy' (Bourdieu, 1977: 159-169). Zhineng Qigong students, on the other hand, tend to accept and embrace the norms of the field, exhibiting considerable 'orthodoxy' (ibid) and representing to a great degree, the doxic attitudes of fellow Singaporeans of their age-group. Even though Zhineng Qigong teachers and students differ in their attitudes towards a whole range of issues, from education to religion to politics, both groups of practitioners are very similar in that they share a habitus that is characterized by the practice of self-discipline. It is through this unreflexive practice of self-discipline that Zhineng Qigong practitioners 'misrecognize' the mechanisms of 'symbolic
violence', leading to a reproduction of their dominated positions in the Singaporean society.

In looking at the relationships between Zhineng Qigong practitioners and local politics, I employ Foucault's concepts of governmentality, disciplinary power, bio-power, and body-politic. Government, in Foucault's terms, refers to the conduct of conduct while governmentality refers to a set of organized practices through which individuals are made subjects, i.e. self-conscious and self-rectifying agents whose conduct produce the greatest utility for modern society (Foucault, 1979b). The Singaporean state's governmentality can be observed in its discursive practices built around the ideologies of pragmatism, meritocracy, and non-welfarism, and the national objectives of economic competitiveness and social integration. When the ideologies are normalized as a set of necessary behavioral means towards the national objectives, they establish a Singaporean doxa of individual self-reliance and pragmatism that is reflected in the habitus of Zhineng Qigong students. As behavioral prescriptions, state ideologies constitute the mechanisms of disciplinary power, a form of surveillance that is internalized within individuals (Foucault, 1979a). This surveying property of disciplinary power ensures that Zhineng Qigong students' carry on with the semi-bodily and quasi-conscious practice of pragmatism and self-reliance, consequently maintaining the complementary relationship between the Singaporean doxa, the field, and their own habitus.

Disciplinary power forms one pole of bio-power while scientific categories of human beings form the other. Bio-power, or power over human lives, maintains a regime of body-politics - "the regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and in leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference" (Lock, M. & Scheper-Hughes, 1987: 7 - 8). The two poles of bio-power are evident in the discursive spectrum of the Singaporean state. Biological reductionism, which makes dualistic distinctions between nature and culture, is employed as the epistemological foundation for the categorization of Singaporeans while the ideological framework serves as the measuring
stick for desirable conduct. These two poles of bio-power work in conjunction to cultivate Singaporeans who can provide optimum utility for a modern capitalistic society.

To sum it up, through integrating Bourdieu-ian, Foucauldian, the *embodiment* and the *body* approach, I hope to show that even though Zhineng Qigong teachers operate from a holistic and monistic epistemological platform that appears heterodoxical in comparison to the state’s dualistic and reductionistic paradigm, the practical dimension of holism and monism do not threaten the mechanisms of Singapore’s body-politics at all. The teachers’ practice of self-cultivation might appear teleologically contrasting to the practice of self-reliance of Zhineng Qigong students. However, the two groups of practitioners resemble one another in their semi-bodily and quasi-conscious practice of self-discipline in their everyday choices and actions. Zhineng Qigong teachers and students are thus both complicit with the basic goal of disciplinary power – the production of docile bodies and pliant minds.

**Methods**

In the course of my fieldwork, I found Zhineng Qigong teachers generally quite willing to reveal snippets of their private lives, but the students were rather suspicious of my intent. The difficulties encountered in my interactions with the students steered my research towards another direction. Although I set out to investigate Zhineng Qigong practice and practitioners, I ended up devoting more attention to Zhineng Qigong teachers, a dying breed of Chinese intellectuals in Singapore who deviate greatly in their beliefs and behaviors when compared to Zhineng Qigong students. As an anthropologist immersing myself in participant observation for an intellectual project, I found myself leaning more towards the teachers’ intellectualist style of practicing Zhineng Qigong. Without specific health problems (except for my martial arts injuries), I also found it more difficult empathizing with the students’ medical concerns. However, as a fellow Singaporean who comes from a working-class background, I share many common
experiences and memories with my respondents, which made the students’ responses to my questions rather predictable but also facilitated my understanding of their often vague references to events and issues. The teachers were the ones who seemed different. Their practice of Zhineng Qigong provided a channel through which they revealed shared and unique past experiences, convictions for the present, and aspirations for the future.

To approximate as much as possible what it means to practice Zhineng Qigong, I attended classes held by a local Zhineng Qigong organization from 2005 - 2009. I went to those on Sunday mornings once a week, and shuttled between other classes held on weekday evenings. I also visited another Zhineng Qigong group where I observed and spoke to both the teachers and the students without participating in training. Because of a certain degree of animosity between the two Zhineng Qigong organizations, I decided that it was better to remain active in just one group\(^\text{18}\). I developed rather chummy friendships with a few Zhineng Qigong students and had the fortune to win their trust enough to drop by their houses on a few occasions and meet some of their friends and family members. My relations with the teachers were characterized by a certain formality and hierarchy but much more intimacy. Although they speak to me as a fellow academic, I do not find it proper to treat them as equals; their statuses as elders within a Chinese context demands a certain degree of respect. This, however, did not stop them from being candid about private matters; on the contrary, they often volunteered to tell me more than I asked for on account of my research.

My attendance of the Sunday morning sessions were usually followed by invitations to Teacher Ang’s and Ng’s house for a monotonous breakfast spread of fried vermicelli and Chinese tea. These occasions often buzzed with a festive spirit, as their house would be filled by miscellaneous characters including students, patients, relatives, fellow teachers, and Chinese physicians. Just being there was often enough to fill several

\[^\text{18}\] Because of my research topic and my English-educated background, I had become a sort of resource for certain teachers eager to market their services to the masses. In view of my usefulness to some teachers and the friction between the two factions, I stuck to a cautious policy of at least having one group of respondents rather than risk my relationships with both.
pages of field-notes, as the participants went on at length about issues ranging from medicine to politics to art. These were also the best occasions for conducting interviews, as the context made the teachers much more spontaneous in their answers and their visitors much less guarded.

Straddling the role of the anthropologist and the practitioner is a particularly perplexing experience for a research on this topic. Qigong training requires immersing in participative awareness rather than a distanced observation of what others are doing.\(^9\) Switching between the two modes is not easily accomplished, but necessary nonetheless. As a project in the anthropology/sociology of the body, this research requires more than interviews and observations; a critique of dualism also requires access to Zhineng Qigong’s phenomenological world. I grew to realize that my body was a central tool and site through and within which my scholastic preconceptions were subjected to scrutiny, questioning and eventually, reconfigured. As put forward by Okely (2007),

“Knowing others through the instrument of the field worker’s own body involves deconstructing the body as a cultural, biographical construction through a lived and interactive encounter with others’ cultural construction and bodily experience. This is not merely verbal, nor merely cerebral, but a kinetic and sensual process both conscious and unconscious which occurs in unpredictable, uncontrollable ways.”

I interpret Okely’s call as a personal experience of the effects of an epistemological overhaul on one’s sensual states, and consequently, on the substantive and methodological aspects of ethnography. Practicing Zhineng Qigong requires much more than an intellectual appreciation of principles; students often argue that it is the very experience of Zhineng Qigong’s efficacy that makes the art “true” while teachers critique the vacuity of concepts that are detached from practice and experiences.

\(^9\) Practitioners are required to close their eyes during qigong training; I was often torn between focusing on the phenomenological aspects of my fieldwork and observing what the others are doing. I resorted, rather ridiculously on hindsight, to keeping one eye closed and the other opened.
Although I do not intend to include a large portion of phenomenological analysis in this thesis, being able to approximate the experiences of Zhineng Qigong practitioners nevertheless provides an insight into the possible contribution of personal experiences to their resolute devotion to the art.

Besides participant observation, textual sources form an integral part of my data. References to textual materials became unavoidable when Teacher Ang decided that it was time to impart the theoretical aspects of Zhineng Qigong. Two manuals were distributed to students but few bothered with them. For those who did, they often complained that they could not understand much of what was written. The teachers' references to texts during training were thus often flavored with anecdotes to ease students into qigong theory, and were limited to the practical applications unless questioned. Pure intellectual musings over qigong principles were restricted to my private conversations with the teachers and their correspondences with others within the academic context. In order to engage with the teachers on a competent level, I read all the Zhineng Qigong manuals available, but my unfamiliarity with classics like the *Yijing* 易经 (the Book of Changes-Simplicity) and the *Huangdi Neijing* 黄帝内经 (the Inner Canons of the Yellow Emperor) turned out to be a considerable shortcoming on my part. Teacher Ang and Chin lent me several books (some of which they wrote themselves) on general qigong methods, TCM, philosophy, and novels to help me along. Teacher Cheng from another Zhineng Qigong group also sold me a couple of books published by the organization, including the original and translated writings of Pang Ming and some other documentations of Zhineng Qigong's history in Singapore. Qigong texts allow me to compare principles existing in writing and the forms in which they took shape in the teachers' behaviors and rationalizations while documents about Zhineng Qigong organizations serve as sources for understanding the ways in which Zhineng Qigong is presented to the public.

In dealing with the discursive practices of the state, I took note of political rhetoric, official statements, social policies, legal stipulations, media reports, and other propaganda materials as indicators of the reality that the state attempts to construct for
Singaporeans. I did not attempt systematic narrative or content analysis of these materials but instead relied on my experiences as a resident and citizen of over 30 years and my training as a social scientist to identify and extract the typical discursive elements. This experience allows me to relate the conduct of Zhineng Qigong practitioners to official ideologies and institutional practices.

As Stewart (1998: 3) notes, "the formalization of the ethnographic method is radically limited, by the flexibility of the investigative process and the uniqueness of each situation". There were several other less formalizable means through which I collected my data, all of which are familiar terrain to any ethnographer. These include participating in gossip, overhearing conversations, people-watching, etc. that do not need to be discussed at length. The goal of interpretation or for that matter, ethnography, is accomplished through a finessed combination of emic and etic perspectives. Although a Cartesian interpretive grid does make it somewhat easier for readers to access my documentation, it is merely the document that is being understood and not what it seeks to represent. As Kasulis (1987: 1) aptly puts it:

“To understand a phenomenon, we superimpose a conceptual grid by which we relate it to the known and define what must be investigated further. But the grid itself always conceals a bit of reality. When the study’s focal point is not hidden by the lines of the grid, there is generally no problem, but when that obfuscation does occur, there is a critical blindspot. The more intently we look for the answer in terms of the grid, the more impossible the task becomes. In such instances the only solution is to readjust the grid, to alter the categories through which we understand the world and our experience. Such an alteration may eventually involve a full-scale reorientation in our ways of knowing.”

As an attempt to readjust the grid, I have allocated considerable space in this thesis to describing the esoteric categories used in Zhineng Qigong while employing social scientific theories to demonstrate how a holistic art adapts to a dualistic discursive climate. This, I believe, is the best way for my thesis is to fulfill its hermeneutic function.
Teacher Ang once declared that qigong theories are an advanced form of consciousness; it represents the essence-concentrate (jinghua 精华) of cosmological evolution and it contains the seed for replacing the superstition of primitive human beings. In his own words “if everyone practices qigong, religion will cease to exist. I believe that qigong can purge religion”.20 It is during my personal experiences with Zhineng Qigong that my Cartesian ‘ghost in the shell’ interpretive grid encountered the alternative reality posited in Teacher Ang’s statement, inspiring the title of this thesis – “Purging the Ghost of Descartes”. I believe that if one is to understand Zhineng Qigong practices and practitioners sui generis, Descartes’ apparition must be purged before a space can be cleared for the anthropologist to step in with a clear conscience.

Some notes on translation

Even though I borrow heavily from the anthropology/sociology of the body, my experiences as a practitioner of qigong and Chinese martial arts had revealed some critical dissonances between what I seek to represent and the conceptual tools I have for doing so. Others who have experienced fieldwork similar to mine have also arrived at similar conclusions. Ots, for example, (1994: 117) argues from his observation and practice of Soaring-Crane Qigong that using the term ‘embodiment’ might in turn perpetuate the dichotomies that were being critiqued in the first place, as “we may again describe the process of something else taking possession of the body, as becoming embodied.” This reinforces both the body-conduit and the body-machine models, which is further aggravated by using English as the language of representation. Writing about Zhineng Qigong in English demands unceasing attention to nuances, especially when the word “body” is mentioned. The word “body” was derived from the old German bodig which meant ‘barrel’ (Ots, 1994: 117), a perfect graphical representation of the body-

20 His exact words in Mandarin were: “ruguo renren dou lian qigong dehua, tianxia jiu buhui you suowei zongjiao de cunzai. Wo xiangxin qigong keyi paichu zongjiao.” 如果人人都练气功的话，天下就不会有所谓宗教的存在。我相信气功可以排除宗教。”
conduit implicit within its modern English counterpart, which by itself or in combination with other words, implicitly excludes mental and environmental factors. This problem can be seen in Lock and Scheper-Hughes’ concepts of the body-social and the body-politic and Hsu’s the body-ecologic (Hsu, 1999: 78-83), which although attempts to represent the body as something inseparable from the social, political and ecological-cosmological environment, still end up reproducing the term “body”. I believe that these problems can be dealt with by attempting to be much more mindful in my choice of words and translations. In order to approximate the meanings of “the body” and other terms that vary across the contexts in which they were used, I shall be flexible in translating Chinese terms found in Zhineng Qigong texts and as used by practitioners. This means that there will be different translations of single Chinese concepts throughout this thesis. As much as the practitioners themselves do not hang on to a single definition or understanding all the time, I do not see any reasons to over-standardize mine as well.

_Hanyu Pinyin_ will be employed to Romanize Chinese words in this thesis. Simplified Chinese characters will be included after the _pinyin_ translations to help the reader distinguish between words with similar Romanized spellings. When possible, I will also translate Chinese dialect terms into their Mandarin versions with their respective _pinyin_ and Chinese characters. Other phrases from Malay, Tamil, and Creole English (Singlish or Singapore English) languages and their appropriate translations will also be included in order to preserve the original flavor of my respondents’ utterances. Finally, as the final draft of this thesis has been written in the field, my analyses are constantly updated by my continuing participation in Zhineng Qigong training. Therefore, I chose to use present and past tenses selectively, reflecting both changing and unchanging events, practices, beliefs, and characteristics of my respondents.
Thesis structure

This thesis will be organized according to themes and groups of respondents. Chapter two will introduce the reader to the field, including descriptions of the training sessions, the organizational aspects of Zhineng Qigong, and the profiles of teachers and students. Included in this chapter are also some discussions about how I entered the field and my relationships with a few important characters who will make regular appearances in this thesis. Chapter three zooms in on the theoretical and applied aspects of Zhineng Qigong, with particular focus on Zhineng Qigong’s holism and monism. I use a qigong healing session to illustrate the centrality of an epistemological overhaul to ethnographic validity and to understanding the relationships between epistemology and habitus.

Chapter four lays out the relations between the state’s institutional practices and the coping strategies adopted by Zhineng Qigong teachers. This chapter shows how Cartesian assumptions in institutional practices directly limit or enable the practice of Zhineng Qigong and TCM. Chapter five discusses the Zhineng Qigong teachers and addresses the relationships between Zhineng Qigong epistemology, the teachers past political encounters, and their conduct of everyday life. Chapter six deals with the Zhineng Qigong students, showing how state discourses relate to the students’ behaviors and reflections on health, religion, education, and their practice of qigong. The concluding chapter sums up the observations and arguments made in the entire thesis.
CHAPTER 2:  

THE PRACTICE OF QI

Introduction

It took me approximately half an hour to find the place. Teacher Ang had earlier informed me of the seminar on Zhineng Qigong theory at the drug association\(^{21}\) and had hastily recited the address to me over the phone. Tucked into an isolated corner in Little India\(^{22}\) was a stack of three-storey buildings reminiscent of pre-war architecture. Parked illegally outside were rows of cars unintentionally contributing to the dingy and rustic appearance of the narrow lane. Taking a shortcut through a recently furnished coffeeshop\(^{23}\), I arrived sun-baked at the doorstep of the association, rubbing shoulders with people moving in and out in groups of twos and threes. Peering through the window grills with paint peeling off in slabs, I saw a room half-filled with middle-aged men and women, dressed prepared for the afternoon heat. Directly facing the door towered an altar that appeared out-of-place with its rows of Chinese books neatly arranged on top instead of the usual statues of Chinese religious figures like the Goddess of Mercy or Da Bo Gong (大伯公). Nailed to the wall were two faded paintings of tigers descending from their respective mountains, standing guard on both sides of the altar as the neatly arranged name of the association formed a perfect arc over their heads. The hall, approximately 20 square meters, was lined with black and white photographs of

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\(^{21}\) To protect the identities of my respondents, I have chosen not to name the particular association. All I can reveal is that it deals with Chinese herbal medicines.

\(^{22}\) Little India, as with Chinatown and Bugis, is one of the enclaves carved out for retaining vernacular practices for the purpose of promoting the tourist industry. As the name suggests, one can find shops, eating places and religious sites dedicated to providing traditional Indian services.

\(^{23}\) A local term, the ‘kopitiam’ or ‘coffeeshop’ (*kafeidian* 咖啡店) refers to a cafeteria-like eating-house that serves cheap beverages and common local cuisines. Many of these eating-places have recently undergone facelifts, replacing movable plastic chairs with embedded swiveling stools resembling those found at McDonalds. The new glow of coffeeshops reminds one of their more uptown air-conditioned ‘food courts’, destroying the rustic and communal nostalgia which makes coffeeshops very much an integral symbol of the old ‘kampong’ (rural) way of life. For more descriptions of the life that revolves around the kampong coffeeshop and the analysis of their ‘nostalgia’ functions in modern Singapore, see Chua (1997).
dead but important figures in the businesses of Chinese medical products, frozen in time and looking strangely at peace within a this-worldly cacophony.

Teacher Ang was totally engrossed with his gadgets, fiddling with his microphone while Teacher Chin stood beside him arranging a stack of documents. In a room at the back, I could see the other teachers clattering around busy preparing the refreshments, as the leader of the pack rattled off instructions in a smattering of Mandarin and Cantonese. In all, cloaked with traditional Chinese decorum, books, and languages, the room exuded an air of Mandarin intellectualism. On other days, the hall was usually empty with the occupants choosing to escape upstairs to the air-conditioned second floor, but for this special occasion, the usual barrenness of the first floor had been replaced with rented plastic chairs of various colors, leaving a narrow path that connects the entrance of the association to the stairway to the second floor. As the clock ticked towards two o’clock, the seats were all gradually taken up, leaving many attendees standing grudgingly around. Teacher Chin, appearing pleasantly surprised at the unexpected huge turn out, suggested that the two seminars be held simultaneously in the hall and the room upstairs. Amidst mutterings of agreements, half of the 80 strong crowds were then herded up the stairway, lead readily by Teacher Chin. I waited for the traffic to clear before shuffling to the front row, where I greeted Teacher Ang who replied with his usual tagline “Zhihan ni lai le 志汉你来了 (Chee Han you’re here)”.

As I scanned the room looking for familiar faces, I found it rather odd that I could not find most of my classmates. I expected them to turn up for what the teachers consider a crucial component of Zhineng Qigong, especially after a gentle reminder during training that very morning\(^\text{24}\). Sitting beside me was a reporter from a local Chinese newspaper, whom I got to know earlier at another seminar on TCM. He explained, rather self-consciously, that he was not there for work, but was merely interested in qigong theory. In the first place, he added, his editor and readers would

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\(^{24}\) Zhineng Qigong organizations advertise such seminars and training sessions in the main local Chinese newspaper Lianhezaobao 联合早报, but due to the cost, these often occupy little boxes at the least noticeable corners of the paper.
probably not appreciate a detailed report on such an “esoteric (shen’ao 深奥)” and “boring (fawei 乏味)” topic. His statement was not unexpected; after having scanned the local newspapers on reports on qigong activities over the past two decades, I noticed that qigong was either represented as a set of physical exercises suited for the elderly, a Chinese heritage, or as a communal activity. Nowhere have I come across any insider account of the qigong principles that this seminar was about to reveal.

Although the drug association had nothing to do with the content of the seminar, it was the only choice left. Due to the difficulties of securing a suitable venue, the organizers had to make do with a location that was not exactly accessible or spacious enough to accommodate the crowd. As the seminar wore on, I started hearing whispers and mutterings from those seated behind me expressing boredom, incomprehension, and general inattention. The seminar ended, with sighs of relief from the ‘uncles’ and ‘aunties’, as Teacher Ang led a song that he wrote specially for and about Zhineng Qigong. Most of the audiences left immediately, though not hurriedly, after the presentation, with just a handful going up to the teachers to enquire more about training sessions and to sign up for classes. Another attempt at reaching out to the masses had failed again.

25 The recent Falungong incident also fanned debates about qigong in the local newspapers, primarily regarding its status as a religion or a therapeutic system. Although it would be reasonable to address qigong philosophy in order to argue for or against its religious nature, I did not come across any of such attempts. On the contrary, articles were mostly arguing from the point of tradition, medical science or politics (see appendix 1-3).

26 As a sign of respect for the elders, especially strangers, Singaporeans of all ethnic groups address anyone older than they are as ‘uncle’ for the men, and ‘auntie’ for the women. These terms are at times used with a certain derogatory connotation, as an indicator of old age, passé mentality, and bad fashion-sense.
Zhineng Qigong organizations and practitioners

With regular mentions in Chinese pugilistic movies, TV series and novels, the notion of “qi” had become as a pivotal component of the Chinese Singaporean’s consciousness. As a traditional Chinese practice, however, qigong’s prominence in popular stereotypes belies its marginalized status in Singapore. Qigong theory is even more unheard of, drawing the interest of only selected groups of Chinese intelligentsia or martial arts fanatics. The various attempts by Zhineng Qigong teachers to reach out to the masses are thus regularly met with disappointments, not only because of qigong’s association with the passé, but also of a language barrier that prevents the English-educated from accessing a specialized Chinese domain of knowledge. As Singapore rapidly developed its economy over the past few decades, its educational system adopted English as the language of instruction, breeding new generations of English-speaking ethnic Chinese who gradually replaced and displaced their Chinese-speaking parents and grandparents. Without support from the English-speaking base, Zhineng Qigong faces a bleak future in Singapore.

As not-for-profit organizations, Zhineng Qigong groups often have to reach into their own pockets to finance any promulgative activities, with little observable returns. In my three years as an active practitioner, only three of the above such seminars have been held, drawing on average, less than a hundred people of whom most were never seen again. As 99 percent of Zhineng Qigong sessions are conducted in Mandarin, the English-educated young generally find the art highly inaccessible. Coupled with the emphasis on theory at the higher levels, only a select few can claim to be able to understand the art completely. A class conducted in English was intermittently offered in 2007, attracting a few young Chinese professionals and members from other ethnic groups. This class however, did not take off as intended, because the teacher-in-charge decided after a few lessons that he could not competently handle queries in English, and that the small number of attendees did not warrant allocating a separate session that demanded a different curriculum.
Ninety-five percent of Zhineng Qigong practitioners are ethnic Chinese over the age of 40. Although most students come from working-class backgrounds and most teachers from the middle-class, both groups speak Mandarin and other Chinese dialects. The ratio of male to female students is about 1:1 (with slightly more females than males), and as for the teachers, 3:1. Although gender stood out as a variable on first observation, it was not very relevant to my research. The most salient distinction was between the teachers and the students. They exhibit significant variations across and consistencies within their groups, in their understanding of and reasons for practicing Zhineng Qigong, their general everyday conduct, and their attitudes towards all issues in life.

Most Zhineng Qigong teachers are practicing Chinese physicians with clinics located in residential areas. These clinics often double-up as medical halls, dispensary-like grocery stores that sell a mixture of Chinese medicine, biomedical products, and other disposable goods like shampoo, toilet paper, and sometimes even lottery tickets. Besides spending their days managing their own clinics, some teachers also make house-visits for selected patients too ill to walk. As first-generational Chinese Singaporeans born and bred on the island, teachers received their basic TCM training at local institutions or as apprentices. Due to new regulations on TCM accreditation in Singapore in recent years, apprenticeship no longer warrants a practicing license. This shift has opened up new opportunities to senior physicians, as demand for lecturers at the TCM College saw some teachers offer their expertise for the night classes for a small fee. Judging from their multiple roles as shopkeepers and physicians, and the preference for teaching over treating patients, it appears that the teachers' practice of Chinese medicine is taken more as a means of livelihood rather than a life passion. As part of their belief in endless self-cultivation, Zhineng Qigong teachers have also gone on to pursue their Bachelors, Masters and Doctorates in Mainland China, as the authorities decided that the two local TCM colleges are not qualified to grant post-graduate degrees. Although one can find an increasing number of Chinese physicians and TCM trainees from China, Zhineng Qigong teachers are exclusively Singaporeans. The ones from the mainland or from Malaysia are usually invited to speak at seminars or to provide special training sessions, and do not stay for more than a week or two.
I was introduced to Zhineng Qigong by Teacher Ang, a renowned Chinese physician in Singapore, who specializes in acupuncture and ailments of the liver and kidney. Having recently obtained his PhD in TCM from the Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Mainland China, Teacher Ang is also one of the lecturers at a local TCM college. In 2003, before I started writing about Zhineng Qigong, I was conducting research on the practice of TCM in Singapore. I came across Teacher Ang a couple of times in newspaper reports and heard him talking about the treatment of kidney ailments on radio and TV programmes. It was purely a matter of coincidence that Teacher Ang’s son was a student of mine in the department of sociology at the local university where I taught, who eagerly brought me to his father’s clinic for the first meeting. Networking through the field was not difficult; my sample snowballed as I was introduced to the other practitioners by Teacher Ang as a fellow scholar or academic (xuezhe 學者). My status as a lecturer in a local university and my competency in Mandarin also made establishing connections in the field, at least with the teachers, rather smooth. I was treated with a certain degree of camaraderie, making it easier to elicit responses from my respondents rather than being waved away as a nosy young chap. However, my identity as a qigong researcher also attracted a certain degree of distrust from many Zhineng Qigong students. With the pervasiveness of political surveillance in Singapore, a general climate of fear (see Chua & Kwok, 2001: 91; Leong, 1999: 208; Purushotam, 1998: 133) limits the average Singaporean’s sense of freedom when discussing political issues in public. In my case, some practitioners suspected that I was a ‘government man’ (“zenghulang” in Fujian dialect or zhengfuren 政府人), a field-agent spying for the People’s Action Party. This problem became less pronounced as I my hair grew longer and I deviated from their stereotype of the clean-cut bespectacled bureaucrat.

Teacher Ang is my primary respondent and a mentor of sorts. At 65 years of age, he is physically a freak of nature. Although his wrinkles and balding head do mirror his age, when Teacher Ang dons his qigong attire (a collared T-shirt and blue track pants), the youthfulness of his physique would put anyone to shame. As a devout qigong
practitioner, Teacher Ang trains twice a day: once in the morning as he watches the Mandarin news on TV, and again in the evening as he watches the Mandarin news on TV. As a professional Chinese physician, Teacher Ang curiously spends most of his time doing everything else but treating patients, much to the chagrin of his wife Teacher Ng. Although Teacher Ng is a Zhineng Qigong instructor as well, she is much less of a fanatic about the art than her husband, treating it as a beneficial form of exercise for the elderly rather than researching and pondering on its teleological, cosmological, and ethical details. Compared to her husband, Teacher Ng practices Zhineng Qigong only twice a week, including teaching on Sunday mornings. Their son, Ming, believes that Teacher Ang looks much younger than Teacher Ng, even though he is chronologically older, because of his “hardcore” practicing of Zhineng Qigong. In the past three years that I have known both of them, Teacher Ang had never fallen sick while his wife suffers from ankylosis in her fingers and had to undergo a hip operation recently. Regardless of the differences in their degrees of investment in Zhineng Qigong, both Teacher Ang and Ng are equally competent and eager to transmit their qigong knowledge to me.

Teacher Ang was one of the pioneers of Zhineng Qigong in Singapore, and sits as the “Director of Qigong Methods (gongfa zhuren 功法主任)” in a local Zhineng Qigong organization. His training in TCM and classical Chinese philosophy led him to develop an interest in traditional Chinese self-cultivational methods (yangshenshu 养身术), which got him dabbling in various styles of self-cultivational arts in the 70s and 80s. Among his endeavors include calligraphy, music and chess, of which he believes he has the most talent for Chinese musical instruments. He also experimented with other bodily arts, including Buddhist meditation and various styles of qigong. He ended up practicing Soaring-Crane Qigong in the 80s and subsequently took a trip to Mainland China to further his research on the art where he met Pang Ming, who by that time was beginning to reformulate Soaring-Crane Qigong into something he considers more systematic, scientific, and accessible to the layperson. Teacher Ang followed Pang’s

27 These three skills form part of the classic four ‘scholarly’ skills in Chinese tradition: qin 琴 (the zither), qi 棋 (chess), shu 书 (calligraphy), and hua 画 (painting).
research closely and witnessed the birth of Zhineng Qigong in 1986. He subsequently brought the method back to Singapore and together with other Chinese physicians like Teacher Chin who also took lessons from Pang, established a Zhineng Qigong research centre in the late 80s.

Teacher Chin is the other Zhineng Qigong teacher with whom I trained regularly. His friendship with Teacher Ang went back to the 70s when they became acquainted through their political activities. Teacher Chin, 68 years of age, is also an alumnus of a local TCM College, and has been practicing Zhineng Qigong for more than 20 years. His rendezvous with Zhineng Qigong was not very different from that of Teacher Ang, as his training in TCM and his interest in traditional Chinese arts saw him dabbling with calligraphy, music, and particularly poetry. As a former Chinese language teacher in a local public school, Teacher Chin, unlike Teacher Ang, is deeply involved in the local Chinese literature scene, often serving as a judge for Chinese writing competitions. He has also published a series of short collections of his own writings, of which includes poetry, plays and social commentaries. Unlike Teacher Ang who is always in the pink of health, Teacher Chin used to suffer from neck problems due to long periods of grading assignments with a bad sitting posture. His painful past and his experiences with the effects of Zhineng Qigong, he reminisced, made his TCM training about the unity of the human body much more “real”.

Teacher Ang’s and Chin’s establishment of the Zhineng Qigong research centre coincided with the formation of another Zhineng Qigong organization, an officially registered legal ‘society’ in Singapore. Due to ethical considerations, I shall refer to the officially registered organization as Group A and the research centre Group B (similarly, I employ pseudonyms for all the characters in this thesis). The reasons for the establishment of two separate organizations are unclear, as each is more concerned with recording its own history than giving coverage to the other. Teacher Ang revealed that both sides were unhappy with how Zhineng Qigong teachers were accredited and how lessons were conducted. However, from the snippets of information gathered from other teachers, I found out that much of the friction was due to personal dislikes of certain
characters in the community. Nevertheless, each side practices enough tact to focus on their own ways of promoting qigong practices in Singapore rather than engaging in political bickering. With the gradual aging of the first generation founders, the new leaders are friendly enough towards one another to co-organize Zhineng Qigong mass training sessions occasionally. Although their relationships are not always cordial, sharing a common lineage means that Zhineng Qigong instructors are mostly acquainted with one another, belonging to a small community while teaching in different locations all over the island. To date, there are 24 locations in which Zhineng Qigong is taught, usually in public parks, sports stadiums, and community clubs.\(^{28}\) Most of my respondents come from Group B, which oversees the training curriculum for 23 locations while Group A has a single training ground within the compounds of its location in an industrial estate.

As part of the Chinese intelligentsia in Singapore, teachers represent a particular status group with certain shared experiences, aspirations, and skills. Students too, as another, express certain common features in their habitus as well. Teachers and students are distinguished primarily by their cultural capital, accounting for a social hierarchy where teachers are treated with respect because of the knowledge they possess. For the teachers, a good command of Chinese languages, philosophies, traditions, and modern science functions as prerequisites to a comprehensive understanding of the art, a competence in skills, and the ability to transmit effectively a set of technical esoteric knowledge to others who are often strangers to the art. However, given the lack of any institutional standards for the accreditation of teachers, these prerequisites operate mostly as a gate without a keeper. Teachers are thus mostly designated *ad hoc* by those of higher seniority in learning. As the pioneers of Zhineng Qigong in Singapore, Teacher Ang and Teacher Chin from Group B and Teacher Cheng from Group A wield a

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\(^{28}\) Community clubs, previously known as community centres, are state-administered 'correspondence locations' or *lianluo suo* 联络所located in neighborhood centrals, flanked by residential apartments and open-air fresh food markets. They provide a variety of services, including language courses and sport facilities, functioning as mingling and lingering places for residents and grassroot leaders. The community clubs were first established as part of the state apparatuses for diffusing ideologies and communicating policies to the citizens (Hill & Lian, 1995: 23); today they are generally perceived as places fit for the very old or the very young.
significant amount of influence in deciding who gets to teach what. A lack of consensus also makes selecting teachers a politically-charged process that lacks transparency. The mobility between a practitioner’s status as a student or a teacher is thus also made much more viscous and unpredictable, often dependent on one’s social capital.

The emphasis on gongli 功理 (qigong theory) in Group B makes it impossible for the illiterate to access the higher levels of the art or to teach classes of their own. Group A, in comparison, is much less scholarly-oriented, but similarly demands a degree of working knowledge of gongli for those aspiring to teach the second level and above. This requirement, however, does not seem to pose too much of a problem for students as most of them are not concerned with getting heavily involved with the practice or the community. Besides the health benefits they could potentially receive, Zhineng Qigong provides them with a sense of being in control of their medical problems in the face of rising medical bills and loss of faith in biomedicine. The economy of Zhineng Qigong is also part of its appeal to students; compared to expensive biomedical drugs and surgical procedures, its yearly membership fee of S$40 is a small price to pay, even if therapeutic effects do not surface readily.

Exceptions are often granted for membership fees and other miscellaneous costs, especially for students who are ‘testing out’ the art. Given the loose structure of the community and the authority of the senior members, such exemptions are often made ad hoc as well. I did not pay any membership fee or the cost of photocopying manuals because of my special relationship with Teacher Ang. In face-to-face encounters and e-mail correspondences, Teacher Ang and Teacher Chin had at times addressed me as “Teacher Lim”, especially during the period when I was helping them with a publication. I am seen as a possible (perhaps even the only) means through which Zhineng Qigong could reach the English-educated audience. Given the lack of interest in Qigong from his

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29 In order to introduce Zhineng Qigong to the masses, especially the English-educated, a lot more flexibility and discretion has been added to the selection process for teachers. I was asked to teach an English class by Teacher Ang even though I had only been practicing for about six months.

30 At the time of this writing, S$1.00 is approximately equal to US$0.73 and 5.10 RMB.
children, Teacher Ang is pleased that "at least you can help me pass down the knowledge that I have acquired in my life."\(^{31}\)

Compared to the teachers, the profiles of students vary in terms of their vocation and their specific medical reasons for taking up Zhineng Qigong. They range from administrators to hawkers, from school teachers to retirees while their medical problems involve mostly chronic sicknesses, like spinal spurs and neurasthenia\(^{32}\), debilitative conditions, and recuperation from surgeries. Out of the approximately 120 Zhineng Qigong students I know, about 80 percent come from working and lower-middle-class backgrounds, each taking in a monthly family income of less than S$4000. Teachers on the other hand, depending on how well their clinics and investments are doing, earn around S$8000 to $12,000 a month. Even though students belong to a different socio-economic class, as fellow middle-aged Singaporeans, they do share certain experiences with the teachers. These include witnessing the progress of Singapore from a developing to a developed country, dealing with the state’s social policies, and bearing the effects of aging. In contrast to the teachers, students generally lack any academic training, with some not having received any formal education at all. I believe that the lack of exposure to non-technical education partially accounts for the students’ general tendency to take ideological pronouncements at face-value. However, their faith in the state paradoxically co-exists with a profound distrust and fear of anyone representing government organizations, behaving very much like, when faced with the local authorities, a naughty child facing a stern father.

Among the male students, I hung out most with Mr. Tan, a senior mechanic at an automobile repair garage. Like many of the other students, Mr. Tan received a couple of years of Chinese education and is almost illiterate in the English language. Although Mr.

\(^{31}\) Even though both Teacher Ang and Teacher Chin are not particular at ease with the English language, they nevertheless insist that I show them what I have written about Zhineng Qigong. Most of the time, these writings were printed out and filed away to keep as souvenirs, together with photographs of me and them.

\(^{32}\) Although the term neurasthenia has largely been abandoned in psychiatric taxonomy, I employ it here, as used by Kleinman (1986; Kleinman & Lin, 1981), to refer to jingshen shuairuo 精神衰弱, which includes symptoms like dizziness, nausea, and lethargy.
Tan is quite able in Mandarin, he prefers conversing in Fujian dialect with me, the language he uses most often in his line of work and which expresses his working-class identity most strongly. Mr. Tan married at the age of 23, the year he found a job repairing vehicles. His background in the martial arts and a lifetime of manual labor have given him astounding physical strength, and together with a boisterous character and tattoos on his forearms, his general disposition reflects his past as a member of a Chinese triad. His aggressive and reckless personality also saw him getting into trouble with the law on a few occasions, either because of being involved in street brawls under the influence of alcohol or getting arrested at illegal gambling dens. Although he turned to Zhineng Qigong because of coronary sicknesses, his sturdy build and lively gait does not reflect his health condition. Like most other students, he picked up Zhineng Qigong through recommendations from the teachers, specifically after consulting Teacher Chin for his heart problems.

Madam Chua and Auntie Yuan are the two other students who are more welcoming towards my inquisitive habits. Both women in their 50s are devout Zhineng Qigong practitioners, training much more regularly than the rest of the students who usually turn up only for a session per week. Madam Chua had retired from her job as an administrator while Auntie Yuan works as a part-time caretaker in a Daoist temple. Both turned to Zhineng Qigong to aid in their recuperation from biomedical treatments for chronic sicknesses. Unlike most of her classmates, Madam Chua came from a middle-class background and had received a few years of English education necessary for her previous job. She spoke to her children in English at home but in view of the training context, preferred Mandarin when conversing with me, although she is much more fluent in Cantonese. Compared to Mr. Tan, Madam Chua is extremely health-conscious, and considers herself an expert on what she calls ‘alternative medicine’. She has experimented with ayurveda, yoga, aromatherapy, and a list of dietary regimes that included going vegetarian, Halal, and even the Atkin’s diet. She is probably the most well-read among Zhineng Qigong students, for her literacy in the English language and a personal belief that she is well-educated motivates her to read the English newspaper everyday and keep up with the most recent research on health issues. Auntie Yuan, a
close friend of Madam Chua, is much less well to do than her buddy. She has spent a considerable amount of her savings on her medical treatment and is thus particularly mindful about the financial costs of taking ill. She is prone to mood swings and what she believes to be clinical depression, and has the tendency to see the darker sides of life. I believe that her friendship with the jolly Madam Chua is one of the reasons that she had managed to add a healthy dose of social activities, of which Zhineng Qigong training forms a major portion, to her reclusive lifestyle. Like Madam Chua, Auntie Yuan is married with children in their twenties, some of whom had left the family nest after securing employment. Although Mr. Tan, Madam Chua and Auntie Yuan are each unique in their personalities and life histories, they are nevertheless quite similar in their pragmatic approach towards Zhineng Qigong.

The Intellectualist and the Pragmatist

Unlike the students, the intellectualist teachers treat the prescriptions offered by Zhineng Qigong as a set of behavioral guidelines, often quoting Zhineng Qigong texts to explain their beliefs in the dos and don’ts of life. Zhineng Qigong epistemology peppers their notions of ‘truth’ (zhendi 真谛), a concept that regularly appeared in their articulations but is comparatively missing from those of the students who instead often allude to the use values of things. The teachers’ idea of truth dissolves together a myriad of domains traditionally compartmentalized in western philosophy. Ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics and epistemology exist undifferentiated (but not always) within a single holistic practical paradigm within which Zhineng Qigong principles function as linguistic tools for reflection and articulation. Pragmatists on the other hand, mostly treat Zhineng Qigong as a means to an end, turning to the art for its health benefits, its inexpensive price, or as the last resort for biomedically incurable chronic sicknesses. Zhineng Qigong’s principles therefore do not appear regularly in the pragmatists’ rationalizations while its concepts function as nugget-like succinct carriers for the intellectualists’ scholastic accounts of reality. Intellectualists, as the name implies, tend
to intellectualize all matters of life, using technical languages to express their thoughts and to emphasize the truth value of any proposition, statement, or theory. They seek coherence, logic, textual and empirical verifiability as the mark of any reliable piece of information. The pragmatists on the other hand, rely more on the authority of the source of information without any awareness of methodological rigor, and are quite willing to compromise their belief in the reliability of the sources under peer pressure. General hearsay also features prominently in shaping the students’ beliefs and practices, as shown in their willingness to try out different types of therapeutic methods under recommendations from friends, relatives and strangers. Comparing the two groups of Zhineng Qigong practitioners, I came to a generalization of the intellectualists as those concerned with ‘truth’ while the pragmatists are concerned with ‘use’, although it is impossible to identify their authentic concerns in practice. Although I have represented teachers and students as distinct from one another, these two characterizations are merely ideal types. Not all practitioners fit neatly into the categories nor are they condemned to one particular approach. Teachers are not always epistemologically loyal nor do students stubbornly insist on being consequentialists. Most importantly, there are always opportunities for students to graduate from the classes and become teachers themselves.

The training ground

Because of Zhineng Qigong’s methodological requirement (see chapter three) and the lack of teachers for a one-to-one mode of transmission, training is always conducted in groups. Sessions are either held in the evenings on weekdays or the mornings on weekends, in consideration of the working hours of both teachers and students. Both Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng lead the Sunday morning class at a sport stadium approximately 300 meters away from their clinic. As the oldest residential estate in Singapore, the area around the stadium has been designated as one of the locations for housing the poor. Given that a significant proportion of the less well-off population are made up of the aged, one would notice a large number of senior citizens wandering
around, and at times, spending the night sleeping at public amenities around the area. The age of the stadium and its relative state of neglect add to the ambience of rust and rusticity, although the facilities within are still in working condition. The usual location of other ‘old people’s exercise’ like Taijiquan 太极拳 (or Tai-Chi) or folk-dancing in similar settings further contribute to stereotypes that associate qigong with other similar-looking arts, and these arts with the elderly.

Classes begin at seven in the morning and end at nine-thirty. Teachers argue that a three hour session would be ideal, with an additional half an hour for the more meditative “tranquil techniques”. However, for unknown reasons, no one had really pushed for an extension of training hours. The Zhineng Qigong group I train with occupies a semicircular corner of the stadium, with a radius of about 25 meters, just large enough for 40 students. Although early in the morning, the stadium is usually buzzing with other users, mostly elderly, engaged in a myriad of morning exercises that includes strolling around the tracks, random bodily movements, and Taijiquan. With two conspicuous groups of old people occupying two corners practicing Taijiquan and Zhineng Qigong, a simultaneous blaring of instrumental musical pieces and instructions makes the environment deafening at times. This became especially so after Teacher Ang decided to employ a microphone and a loudspeaker. With the early morning mist and the chirping of birds accompanying senior citizens moving slowly in synchronicity, the scene reinforces the stereotypical images of qigong and Taijiquan.

Mingling among students before the beginning of training is considerably subdued, with each practitioner engrossed in his or her own thoughts and displacement activities. Most of them stand alone observing others and the surroundings, while the more sociable hang around in pairs or trios making commentaries on mundane matters. The more industrious ones can be seen stretching their limbs, and the rest stand around dutifully watching them. The occasional banter between the very few old friends are often about everything else but qigong, ranging from tabloid gossip to disobedient children. I suspect that this lack of camaraderie has to do with the high attrition rate and irregular attendance. Only a few selected groups of students have stayed throughout the
whole three years that I have been training with them, forming relationships with one another that extend beyond the qigong training context.

Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng are clad in the same attire every session: the Zhineng Qigong T-shirt and blue track pants, rather than the white lab-coats they don in their clinics. The students on the other hand, wear track pants and T-shirts, which I believe has to do with a sense of propriety in dressing as part of an unspoken norm. The training context is characterized by a conspicuous air of informality; the arrivals of the two teachers are always greeted without any ceremony, which follows from the teacher’s insistence, not necessarily enforced, on Zhineng Qigong as a public form of qigong friendly to all interested parties. The session usually starts with random comments by teachers about something they read in the newspapers, or discussions about the training schedule for the day. The curriculum did not vary much until after the beginners’ class had the fundamentals established, subsequently becoming more specialized and theoretical as time went on, as both instructors, especially Teacher Ang, dwelled more and more on the philosophical aspects of the art. After about four months of training, the group was split into two, with the less competent continuing with the first level with Teacher Ng while the others moved on to the second that is taught by Teacher Ang. This remained the status quo for the subsequent two and a half years which I trained with the group, as I moved from the first level to the second and finally to the third where I practiced, and still practice, exclusively with the teachers.

What remains intriguing to me is that the emphasis on theory, on explaining the ‘whys’ behind each and every single movement, is virtually non-existent in the beginners’ class. Students seem uninterested in knowing the details of how the art works, or if and why it does; they do not seem to mind being unaware of the rationales behind the techniques. Instead, most are quite happy to remain at the beginner’s level and often wave away any suggestions to try the advanced methods or to read Pang’s original writings. This pervasive theoretical apathy is not something the teachers appreciate but nevertheless tolerate or ignore it for a variety of reasons. However, when the teachers
themselves approach Zhineng Qigong training, they do so with grave mindfulness of the art’s principles, and detailed knowledge of every single motion.

The next chapter deals with the fundamentals of Zhineng Qigong philosophy that teachers often speak to me about. I shall introduce a set of basic epistemological assumptions in Zhineng Qigong, contextualized within the formal training sessions, which guide specific qigong techniques, provide the foundation or means of expression for the teachers’ belief systems, and the tools with which they rationalize their conduct. This introduction demonstrates how a switch in epistemology on the anthropologist’s part can open up a whole new reality, phenomenological, bodily, intellectual, and cultural.
CHAPTER 3:  
THE PRACTICAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF ZHINENG QIGONG

Introduction

“ALL Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz. a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call’d Evil, is alone from the Body; & that Reason, call’d Good, is alone from the Soul.”

: -- William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, 1793

This chapter introduces the reader to the basic epistemological assumptions of Zhineng Qigong and how they are applied in practice. Through a case study of a healing session, I show how the concept of ‘symbolic healing’ has Cartesian roots, and how it fails to provide a valid interpretation of Zhineng Qigong healing methods. Being able to appreciate the holism and monism of Zhineng Qigong is necessary for understanding how a non-Cartesian epistemological system contributes to the practice of self-discipline in everyday life. Before I launch into the details, I shall present a brief discussion of how ‘the body’ is understood in classical Chinese thought in order to elucidate the holistic slant of Zhineng Qigong which contrasts with Cartesian dualism.

Many critics of western philosophy have pointed fingers at Descartes, using him as the whipping boy for dualistic epistemology. Dualism however, can be traced as far back as Plato (Synnott, 1992: 104), Pythagoras (Ames, 1994b: 150) and other branches of Greek rationalism (Ferguson, 1997a: 15). The Greek schools that separate the mental and the physical faculties found an ally with the advent of Christianity, as both share a common conception of the opposition between the soul and the body (Robinson, 1952)33. This produces a dominant European worldview in which reality is constituted by two

33 See also Kasulis (1994) for a genealogy of dualism.
elementary components that are ontologically distinct and opposing. The following passage from Ames (1994a: 159) best describes what dualism entails:

“A dualism exists in *ex nihilo* doctrines because a fundamentally indeterminate, unconditioned power is posited as determining the essential meaning and order of the world. It is a "dualism" because of the radical separation between the transcendent and nondependent creative source, and the determinate and dependent object of its creation. The creative source does not require reference to its creature for explanation. This dualism, in many various forms, has been a prevailing force in the development of Western-style cosmogonies, and has been a veritable Pandora’s box in the elaborated pattern of dualisms that have framed Western metaphysical speculations: supernatural/natural, reality/appearance, being/becoming, knowledge/opinion, self/other, subject/object, substance/attribute, mind/matter, form/matter, agent/act, animate/inanimate, birth/death, *creatio ex nihilo/destructio in nihilum* and so forth.”

The sets of binary oppositions in the above passage are fashioned in such a way that they align themselves with and elaborate the mind-body prototype, sharing either the transient intangible properties of the psyche (e.g. culture) or the immanent substantiality of the soma (e.g. nature). To make things clearer, I present below, a list of binary opposites in accordance to these alignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mind</th>
<th>Body</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal</td>
<td>Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Biological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the emergence of ‘the body’ as an analytical category in the social sciences, the incommensurability of dualism with the study of what some writers call “Eastern” practices (e.g. Ames, 1994a; Ozawa-De Silva, 2002; Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987) has received much scholarly attention in recent years (e.g. Chen, N., 2003; Deutsch, 1993; Hay, 1993; Hsu, 1999; Ots, 1994; Yang & He, 2004; Zito & Barlow, 1994). Questioning the demarcation of the mind from the body, the exclusion of nurture from nature, or the conflict between structure and agency are just some of the common themes explored. In the study of Chinese traditional practices, both the *embodiment* and the *body* approaches have been utilized to make sense of bodily techniques. Both etic and emic perspectives have been adopted as well, with the former utilizing concepts from Bourdieu (Brownell, 1995; Farquhar, 1994), Foucault (Chen, N., 2003; Kipnis, 1994; Xu, 1999) and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (Ots, 1994), while the latter grounding their analyses in Chinese epistemologies (Farquhar, 1994; Hsu, 1999; Zhang, Y., 2007). However the problem is tackled, translation is often the very first challenge when trying to explain to the exogenous reader, what ‘the body’ means in the Chinese language.

As Zhang (2007: 33) argues, Chinese verbalizations about the self are hard to translate into English without first reducing them into psychological or somatic categories\(^{34}\). It is this very embeddedness of dualism in the English language that has proven to be quite difficult to purge (Zito, 1997: 52), forcing anthropologists to resort to hyphenated terms like ‘psycho-somatic’ or ‘socio-psychological’ (Lock, M., 1993; Lock, M. & Scheper-Hughes, 1987) especially in the study of what Lock and Scheper-Hughes call “non-western civilizations” (Lock, M. & Scheper-Hughes, 1987: 12). To give an example, the word *xin* 心 contains references to the organic dimensions of the heart, the mind’s ability to think, and other moral-emotional aspects that one might associate with the faculty of the soul. Henceforth, to translate it as merely the ‘heart’ does not do justice to how the term is employed. To deal with the problem that Zhang reiterates,

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\(^{34}\) In the first place, somatization, widely considered as the definitive Chinese approach towards sickness (Brownell, 1995; Kleinman, 1980; 1986; Lee, S., 1996 ; Ots, 1990 ) already presumes a mind-body distinction when writers argue that emotional or psychological distresses are transformed into or diagnosed as bodily sicknesses in Chinese culture and medicine; it is as if trauma is necessarily first registered in the psyche before being somatized into the body.
earlier writers like Elvin (1994) translated xin with the hyphenating method, as the “heart-mind”. Other aspects of the self like shen* 神 that is observable in both somatic and psychological symptoms and xiang 想 that refers to both ‘want’ and ‘think’ makes writing about classical Chinese conceptions of ‘the body’ a tricky affair indeed.

“Body” or Shenti 身体 in Chinese can be translated as “body-person” or more aptly, “self-person-body”. Shen 身 in ancient times referred to ‘the self’. However, in contemporary usage, it has come to include explicitly more of the physical dimensions of the person that are often excluded in the English term37. Ti 体, on the other hand, is a flexible word that can be used to describe anything with a perceivable form38. Elvin’s translation of shenti as “body-person” (cf Elvin, 1994; Zhang, Y., 2007) fails to address the term’s variation from renTi 人体. Ren or human, refers to a person with connotation of ‘the other’ while shen refers more to oneself (Ames, 1994a: 165). RentTi is thus a generic term that refers to the body-persons of people in general while shenti implies one’s ownership of renTi. RentTi thus resembles the German notion of “korper”, a corpse-like body distanced from inner subjectivities, rather than “lieb”, one alive with sensations and self-awareness (see Brownell, 1995; Ots, 1994; Plessner, 1970; Scheler, 1970; Turner, B. S., 1992). However, because the Chinese traditionally do not make a sharp subject-object distinction39, the comparison between shenti and renTi should not be

35 For the various ways in which shen* can be translated and understood, see (Hsu, 2000).
36 Chinese dialects contain, as far as my knowledge of Fujian, Chaozhou and Cantonese dialects allows, equivalent words and understanding of shenti in Mandarin, namely simteh in Fujian, simtoy in Chaozhou, and santai in Cantonese.
37 Shen being used to refer to ‘the self’ in ancient times can be seen, for instance, in the writings of Zhuang Zi (Zhuangzi & Graham, 1981); it is only due to the increasing dichotomization of psycho and soma in modern days that it has come to include, explicitly, more aspects of the physique (Ots, 1994).
38 In traditional Chinese, Ti 体 is written as 體. Although homonymous, the two were used to refer to quite different things. 體 was equivalent to “lie 弊”, which means clumsiness or shoddiness while 體 was used as a component of shenti 身體. In simplified Chinese however, the above distinctions are no longer made. 體 when broken up into its etymological components, are made up of two words: gu 骨 (bone) and li 禮 (propriety). This reveals Ti’s “cognate relationship with ritual actions” (see Ames, 1994a: 169; Boodberg, 1953 for further discussions).
39 Although Merleau-ponty (see also Csordas, Thomas J., 1994; Farnell, 1994; 1962; Russow, 1988; Varela, 1994), had already questioned the distinction between the mind-as-subject/perceiver and the body-as-
seen as absolute parallels of *korper* and *lieb* (Brownell, 1995: 16; Zhang, Y., 2007: 36), but rather more a question of who’s body one is referring to.

*Shenti,* “*when used without clarification, implies a person or self with all the connotations of the physical, social, and mindful.*” (Zhang, Y., 2007: 35). Because the meanings of utterances differ from context to context and are contingent upon the style of the one who utters⁴⁰, I do not wish to make any claims about the universal usage of Chinese words. However, to draw some initial contrasts, I would like to emphasize that, as defined by Zhang above, “the body” in Chinese tradition (and subsequently in Zhineng Qigong) tends to be much less fragmented and less immutable than Cartesian versions, and possesses both corporeal and lived aspects of personhood. There are however, other Chinese words which precisely identify the *korper*-like characteristic of the Cartesian body. These words include *quti* and *routi*, which are sometimes employed in Zhineng Qigong practices to refer specifically to the physical self. There are also other more technical ways of naming the body that find no equivalence in the English language, like *qitai* (appearances of qi) or *jing* (qi-concentrate)⁴².

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⁴⁰ As Hacking observes (1992: 10), “*Every style comes into being by little microsocial interactions and negotiations*”.

⁴¹ *Quti*, however, differs slightly from *korper* in that besides having similar constituents of *pi* (the skin), *rou* (the flesh), and *gu* (the bones), it also contains *mai* (the meridians).

⁴² For a more comprehensive account of *shenti* and other related concepts, refer to Zhang (2007), Elvin (1994) and Ames (1994a).
Theoretical aspects of Zhineng Qigong

Zhineng Qigong draws upon various schools of thought, namely modern scientific, Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, Chinese Medical, Folk and Martial traditions. Its intellectual-historical density makes it impractical to account for the art’s entire intellectual bases. I have therefore chosen to rely on a few central concepts to account for the other auxiliary ones. This section covers five basic concepts in Zhineng Qigong, namely hunyuan-qi 混元气, yinqi 引气, qichang 气场, niantou 念头, and zhuangfa 庄法. I shall begin with my understanding, as a practitioner of qigong and martial arts, of what qi and qigong refer to.

The usage of the term “qigong” to refer to a specific self-cultivational art only emerged after 1949 (Palmer, 2007: 18); ancient techniques that resemble the systematized modern version had many names, including tuna 吐纳 (expelling-receiving), daoyin 导引 (directing), and xiudao 修道 (cultivating dao), etc. (see Chen, N., 2003; Palmer, 2007 for the etymology of "qigong"). Qigong, as I have come to comprehend, refers to a holistic self-cultivational technique that straddles the principles and techniques of martial arts and meditation. Its liminality results from a lack of words in the English language that can be used to capture its own sui generis domain, a domain that is neither purely physical (as martial arts are often perceived to belong to) nor mental (as with meditation) yet involves both faculties45. In addition, to call qigong a ‘spiritual art’ imports too much religious or supernatural baggage, which Zhineng Qigong, a ‘scientific qigong’, explicitly rejects. Furthermore, the concept of religion and its institutions did not surface in China until the 20th Century (Palmer, 2007: 23) whereas the notion of qi can be found in ancient writings like the Yijing or the Huangdi Neijing. The concept of “the soul” or “the spirit” thus emerged from a vastly different historical and cultural context that resembles little the circumstances surrounding the birth of the

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45 This echoes what Hunter and Csikszentmihaly (2000) suggests about dualistic distinctions between sport and contemplation. Sport is often considered to be a purely physical activity while contemplative activities like meditation, clearly intellectual ones. For further discussions about the mind-body distinctions in the study of sport, see Meier (1995).
concept “qi”. Qi or qigong are thus extremely sticky terms to translate into the English language without cramming them into incommensurable categories and chiseling off the contexts from which they evolved.

Regardless of how qi has been represented in scholarly (e.g. Harper, 1985; Porkert, 1974: 167; Sivin, 1987: 46-7; Unschuld, 1985: 72) or popular media (e.g. Jahnke, 2002; Yun & Yin, 2001), in Zhineng Qigong, it refers to the most fundamental material building block of everything in existence, re-named “hunyuan-qi 混元气”, or “undifferentiated primordial qi”. Hunyuan-qi plays an integral role in Zhineng Qigong’s ‘cosmogony’, which is based on that in the Yijing (see figure 1). Accordingly, the cosmos began with nothing, known as wuji (without distinctions) or dao 道. Dao gave birth to taiji 太极 or taiyi 太一, the great oneness, which subsequently brought forth the liangyi 两仪, yin 阴 and yang 阳, the most primordial polarity. I must emphasize that yin and yang are not dualities but polarities. As qualitative derivations from one another, the transcendent-immanent and oppositional relationships that exist between dualities are only two of the possible ways in which yin and yang relate to one another. In the words of Ames et al (Ames, Dissanayake, & Kasulis, 1994: 159 - 160), polarism refers to:

44 Palmer, however, argues that qigong practices can be seen as a form of religiosity, which he defines as “a subjective disposition, [it] disregards artificial boundaries between the private and the social, between the religious and the secular, between personal pain and political judgments” (2007: 25). Qigong, in his view, provides a similar holistic experience that can be found in spiritual practices.

45 It is very difficult to explain what wuji or nothing refers to. This has a lot to do with the difficulties in translating the words wu 无 and you 有, often interpreted as “non-being” and “being”, but this is due to the limitation of language rather than a lack of understanding (Bodde, D., 1955: 231). Calling wuji “nothingness” presupposes a “being” and carries connotations of substance ontology. Nothingness is in itself already an oxymoron; it is the nature of something which does not exist. In comparison, wuji and taiji exist without essence and form; they are inconceivable existences. This follows the conception in the Daoist classic Daodejing (Laozi & Lau, 2001), which states that “the dao that can be spoken of is not the permanent dao”. Nevertheless, the question of whether we can intellectually grasp the existence of something without knowing what it is, is in the words of one Zhineng Qigong writer, “useless, unconstructive, and of twisted intellectualism”.

46 Some controversies surround the interpretation of the etiological priorities between taiji and wuji mentioned in the Daoist texts Zhuangzi (Zhuang, 1949) and Yizhuan (Zhu, 1984) written around 200 B.C.E. Earlier scholars argue for the primordiality of wuji, but Zhu Xi insisted that there is nothing before taiji, the very first cause of everything.
“...a symbiosis: the unity of two organismic processes which require each other as a necessary condition for being what they are. In this paradigm, each existent is auto-generative and self-determinate. Each participant in existence is "so-of-itself," and does not derive its meaning and order from some transcendent source. ...a polar explanation of relationships gives rise to an organismic interpretation of the world, a world of "processes" characterized by interconnectedness, interdependence, openness, mutuality, indeterminateness, complementarity, correlativity, coextensiveness, a world in which continuous processes are related to each other intrinsically.”

_Hunyuan-_qi is equivalent to _taiji_; it is a material constituent with animating capabilities that has yet to acquire distinctions. The above descriptions inevitably raise the question regarding the differences between _wuji_ and _taiji_. Teacher Ang explained, "you can see hunyuan-_qi or taiji as the you 有 (something) version of wuji or dao, the wu 无 (nothing)", but hastily added, "it doesn’t really matter, you just have to know that everything comes from hunyuan-_qi and that it is material". As my experiences with practicing Zhineng Qigong accumulated over the years, I arrived at the conclusion that it is most heuristically and hermeneutically useful to see _dao_, _wuji_, _taiji_, and _hunyuan-_qi as referring to the same thing.47

47 However, _hunyuan-_qi compared to _dao_, comes across to me as a much less transcendental and mystical entity for it can ultimately be comprehended and manipulated by humans.
The concepts of yin and yang were initially used to refer to the dark and bright sides of a river bank (Blair, 1993: 942), but it can also be employed to represent polarities like negative and positive, female and male, or cold and warm. Yin and yang signal the arrival of cosmological permutational transformation, producing the four variables (sixiang 四象) or the five phases (wuxing 五行) which give rise to the eight permutations (bagua 八卦) which bring forth the ten-thousand entities (wanwu 万物).

The choice between sixiang and wuxing appears to be the major difference between Zhineng Qigong and the Yijing’s cosmogony. I suspect that the preference for wuxing in Zhineng Qigong over sixiang is in part due to the Chinese medical backgrounds of both

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48 The five-phases are often badly translated as the five elements, even by Joseph Needham himself, though he acknowledged the fluidity of the phases in comparison with Greek elements (Ho, 1985: 13). The elements are merely symbols of the phases and are understood differently in varying contexts, for example, fire tends to move upwards, is warm, and is associated with the heart, the organ-treasury (zang 脏) for joy.

49 Sixiang has been translated as the four symbols (Ho, 1985) or four images (Smith, 1991) while bagua as the eight situations (Tse, 1996) or eight trigrams (Sivin, 1995a). I find all the above translations unsatisfactory for my purpose; the usage of words like symbols or trigrams implies that sixiang and bagua are mere signifiers, drawing implicit distinctions between substance and form. My choice of ‘variables’ and ‘permutations’ is intended for speaking of these evolutionary stages as actual occurrences.
Pang Ming and the senior teachers. Given the integral role of *wuxing* in Chinese medical reasoning (Farquhar, 1994; Porkert, 1974; Unschuld, 1988) and the marketing of Zhineng Qigong as a healing art, the arithmetic discontinuity between five phases and its epiphenomenal eight permutations might have been discarded for public-relations concerns.

The arrival of *yishi* 意识, consciousness or *yi* 意, the volition, signals the final stage of this evolution. *Yishi*, like *dao*, *wuji*, and *taiji* is an existence that is without form or essence; in other words, *yishi*’s ontology is nothing. Zhineng Qigong has inherited the classical Chinese conception of a cyclical evolutionary trajectory (Loewe, 1982: 63), where the universe returns to its roots, from the ‘nothing’ of *wuji* to the ‘nothing’ of *yishi*. This rather counter-intuitive conception was explained by Teacher Chin using three-dimensional objects to illustrate how ‘nothing’ returns to itself. Holding my box of cigarettes, he showed how the width (representing *yi*, the volition), length (representing *qi*), and height (representing *xing*, the form) of the box diverge from a common point, a corner of the box, to converge subsequently at another common point, the opposite corner. Both corners terminate into the air, into something that we know exist yet defies our detection of its appearance and our conception of its nature. The beginning and the end of cosmological evolution thus meet one another; they are the same thing and nothing. This notion of cyclical cosmological transformation thus challenges linear causality implied in the very word ‘cosmogony’, so as others have argued (e.g. Hall, 1982: 118-119; Schipper, 1993), one can hardly call it cosmogonic at all.

*Hunyuan-qi* exists in all space and time, within the human person, in the skies and seas, and even in a vacuum. It reveals itself in the human person as the tripartite ‘three potentials’ (*sancai 三才*) \(^{50}\): *jing* (精), *qi* (气), and *shen* (神) or *xing* (形). *qi*...
and yi (意). There are several reasons why xing, qi* and yi are preferred over jing, 
qi* and shen* in Zhineng Qigong theory, but I shall deal with them in detail in the later 
chapters. Sinologists, philosophers and anthropologists have translated jing and shen* 
(as used in TCM) in several different ways (e.g. Davis, 1996; Hsu, 1999; Porkert, 1974; 
Sivin, 1987). Jing has been translated as ‘essence’ and shen* as ‘spirit’, both which are 
incompatible with hunyuan-qi theory. Jing is better understood as the ‘qi-concentrate’ 
while shen* as ‘sentiency-knowledge’. However, like essence and spirit, jing possesses a 
certain observable form while shen* refers more to an intangible state or entity. 
Compared to jing, the employment of the word xing is used to further emphasize its 
observability, even though xing does not differ from jing as the concentrated form of qi.

As jing, qi* and shen* are revelations of hunyuan-qi, calling them essence, 
energy-substance, and spirit respectively draws essentialist distinctions between them. 
Underlying Cartesian metaphysics is the existence of an inherent immutable ‘substance’ 
which remains constant across space and time (Graham, 1978). This essentialist 
epistemology or substance ontology extends beyond intellectual practices to everyday 
presumptions about reality which Farquhar (1994: 24) calls “a (modern Western) 
commonsense world of discrete entities characterized by fixed essences, which seem to 
be exhaustively describable in structural terms”. The TCM axiom, “[qi], when it gathers 
becomes jing, and when it dissipates it becomes formless” (ju ze cheng jing san ze wu 
xing 聚则成精散则无形), shows the ontological-morphological continuity of all the 
three potentials. The best way to understand this continuity is to compare the sancai to 
the three latent states of matter, namely solid (xing), liquid (qi*) and gas (yi), which

correlation between hunyuan-qi, jing, qi, and shen; hunyuan-qi as the forebear is after all much more 
fundamental and therefore ‘elemental’. Cai (才) originally refers to the germinating buds of plants, and 
thus when used on the human person alludes to his/her un-crafted raw potentials.

52 See MacIntyre’s entry on the spatial-temporal constancy of ‘essences’ in Edwards (1967: 59 - 61), Hall 
and Ames’ (1987) comparison of essentialism in western and Chinese cosmology, and a critique of 
essentialism in anthropology in Inden (2000).

53 Other versions include “when it gathers, it acquires form, and when it dissipates, it becomes wind” （ju 
ze cheng xing san ze cheng feng 聚则成形散则成风）.
differ from one another only in degrees of concentration and observability, and not in their basic constituencies.

A major mark of how the human person is modeled in classical Chinese thought is the existence of a ‘third’ entity that is neither mind nor body, but a root constituent of both (Kasulis, T.P., 1994: xxi). I am not arguing that Chinese bodily epistemology does not dissect the person into ‘faculties’, but unlike Descartes who departed from other philosophers in making mind and body ontologically54 rather than conceptually distinct, these faculties (in Zhineng Qigong’s case, the sancai) are merely permutations of yin and yang (and of the primordial dao) that can be found on the person. Among the major Western philosophers, perhaps only Spinoza and Schopenhauer came close to this conception, with Spinoza taking the mind and body as attributes of the same substance while Schopenhauer saw them as manifestations of the Will (Kasulis, T.P., 1994: xiii).

The notion of qi* used in the sancai differs slightly from what hunyuan-qi refers to; to avoid confusion, I shall use “qi” as a blanket term to refer to both hunyuan-qi and qi*. This qi* does resemble a concept of force or energy, defined by Teacher Ang as “shenti jineng de biaoxian 身体机能的表现” or “surface appearances of person-bodily mechanisms”. Qi* mediates between yi and xing, with yi referring to the intangible part of the human being, the volition, and xing, the observable, or the phenomenal-self. Qi* straddles the two with its force-like properties, acting as an information-conduit (xunxi ti 讯息体) for transporting human intention to the respective parts of the flesh-self (routi 肉体), giving the latter the impulse for kinesis and making deliberate motion possible. With the different constituents of the mind and the body, Descartes had to reckon with the mechanism that allows one to affect the other (Strathern, 1996: 1-8). Qi* as an information-conduit, fills in as the missing link, animating the xing of the person under the command of the yi. This functionalist conception of qi* also helps explain the occurrence of injuries and other ailments. As Teacher Ang argued, physical maladroitness is the result of a lack of volitional focus or obstructions in the meridians

54 Bhaskar distinguishes between ontic and ontology, where ontic refers to a general rather than the specialized (philosophical or scientific) reference to being or ontology (Bhaskar, 1986). I prefer not to make such distinctions in my thesis, using the blanket term ‘ontology’ to refer to both conceptions.
(jingluo zusai 经络阻塞). Without a deliberate participation of yi, qi* receives no clear instructions for its destinations while obstructed meridians hinder its deliverance of those instructions. It is thus the lack of ‘communication’ between yi, qi* and xing that accounts for, for example, ankylosis due to aging or lack of exercise. A fragmentation of yi, qi* and xing is thus seen as a state of sickness in Zhineng Qigong; its methods are thus designed specifically to deal with it by establishing a unity of the sancai (both xing, qi*, yi, and Heaven, Earth, Humans) through training the volition and clearing the meridians.

**Hunyuan-qi 混元气 and Materialism**

Zhineng Qigong adopts a form of materialism that differs significantly from its Cartesian counterpart. In the latter, all observables are constituted materially (Strathern, 1996: 3), with matter as the fundamental ingredient of the material world. This is contrasted to the nature of the mind, made of something else that is intangible and unmeasurable. Zhineng Qigong theory, on the contrary, considers the volition or consciousness a material product that is also constituted by hunyuan-qi. Instead of idealism, Zhineng Qigong’s monistic materialism or yiyuan weiwu zhuyi 一元唯物主义 takes keguan weixin zhuyi 客观唯心主义 or spiritualism\(^\text{55}\) as an opposing school of thought. However, instead of treating spiritualism as a legitimate competing epistemological system, Zhineng Qigong teachers frequently use the blanket term “superstition” to refer to any belief in the existence of non/supra-human sentient beings. Zhineng Qigong epistemology is thus strictly a-religious, and in Zhineng Qigong teachers’ eyes, anti-religious\(^\text{56}\). Zhineng Qigong teachers therefore practice what I call

\(^{55}\) Weixin zhuyi can be divided into zhuguan weixin zhuyi 主观唯心主义 (subjective idealism) and keguan weixin zhuyi 客观唯心主义 (objective idealism) (Feng, H., et al, 2006). Zhuguan weixin zhuyi refers to a Hegelian form of idealism, which resembles monistic materialism in certain senses while keguan weixin zhuyi postulates a trans-human origin of intentional design (spiritual beings), i.e. spiritualism.

\(^{56}\) TCM practitioners I have spoken to adopt this position as well, and like Zhineng Qigong theorists, strongly oppose keguan weixin zhuyi as a viable set of beliefs.

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humanistic fundamentalism, an ideal that demands a belief in a reality made up of only humans, materials, and not sentient “bull-ghosts and snake-deities (niu gui she shen 牛鬼蛇神)”. In a nutshell, monistic materialism and humanistic fundamentalism states that there is only a single cosmos of material constituents and nothing else; anything which is ascribed with spiritual properties like God, consciousness, or the soul are mere permutations of the material polarities yin and yang. Teacher Ang calls Cartesian scientific materialism “jixie weiwu zhuyi 机械唯物主义” or mechanistic materialism, a deistic model that treats the universe as a clockwork machine with teleological laws governing its functions. Mechanistic materialism allows for the existence of a non-interventionist sentient creator and the possibility of the material and the spiritual to co-exist within a single cosmos while Zhineng Qigong teachers’ monistic materialism, on the other hand, offers no such compromise.

Monistic materialism also blurs the distinctions between constructivism and realism, questioning the scientific axiom “only the material is the real”. Inasmuch as yi moves xing in the person via qi*, it is also theoretically possible that this is performed on other xing (objects) elsewhere. This means that the ‘real’ can be constructed through direct volitional efforts without the need for mediation by the corporeal body. “Extraordinary abilities” (teyi gongneng 特异功能) like pyrokinesis, telekinesis, telepathy, and other skills which violate ‘natural laws’ in modern science are therefore theoretically possible, though I have yet to witness such feats in person. Many qigong

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57 The stolid insistence on materialism has a lot to do with China’s ideological contact with Marxist dialectical materialism, and henceforth TCM’s materialistic approach (at least how it was sold ideologically) was the main reason for it surviving the Cultural Revolution (Farquhar, 1994: 3, 21; Lampton, 1977). Materialism occupies, together with wuxing and yin-yang theory, a central position in modern-day TCM theories (see Farquhar, 1994; Hsu, 1999; Scheid, 2002). As the teachers were trained according to TCM standards established in Mainland China, they too are firm advocates of materialism.

58 Teacher Ang related a story about how a group of psychologists experimented with the volition’s ability at altering the external world. He claimed that these scientists formulated a fictitious profile of a person and through collective volitional focus, ‘willed’ a ‘shadow’ of that personality onto a wall. There is no way I could verify his claim.

59 I have however, come across other qi-related experiences, in addition to the sensation of some viscous entity during qigong training. These came from martial arts training that included being hit in a part of the body but feeling the impact in other parts, and being able to send and receive ‘intentions’ during sparring sessions. Teacher Ang’s son also related to me how his father lifted his hand without touching it, but
practitioners around the world have made claims about their special abilities (see Dong & Raffill, 1997; Palmer, 2007), and in Singapore there are also records of research conducted at a local qigong research centre showing how collective volitions combined with qigong techniques managed to influence the growth patterns of bean sprouts. Other experiments of similar methods conducted privately by local practitioners were also reported in a local Zhineng Qigong magazine (Li, 2006).

Zhineng Qigong’s ultimate aim is to manage the movement of qi within the person and between the person and the cosmos, ensuring a state of connectedness between Heaven (天), Earth (地), and Humans (人). Zhineng Qigong thus qualifies as what Yuasa calls a ‘metapsychophysical’ art (Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987: 217), one that situates the human person within a cosmic model that encapsulates the metaphysical, the psychological, and the physical. This orientation of Zhineng Qigong considers the human-cosmos continuum as a process that is to be partaken in without first assuming apriori, immutable ontological distinctions between the three realms and their respective components. What De Silva calls “western traditions” on the other hand, “sought the most fundamental mode of being within the physical, that is, within nature as the material universe” (Ozawa-De Silva, 2002: 31). The human body is thus treated in these western traditions as belonging to the material universe, as an entity that simply is rather than a condition to be sought (Sullivan, 1990) while the mind belongs to the psychological realm and can only be explored through intellectual means (Johnson, 2000: 41). Mind-body relations in classical Chinese thought are, in comparison, transformed by and reflected upon through the lived experiences of self-cultivation rather than presumptions developed from detached contemplation. Classical Chinese theories about

Teacher Ang strangely denied that he has this ability when I asked him about it.

A qigong master cum TCM physician cum biomedical doctor Yan Xin had also published several papers in scientific journals which show that under strict laboratory conditions, he was able to alter physical and chemical properties (Yan, X., 2002a; 2002b; Yan, X. e. a., 2001). His findings were however, challenged by some as un-replicable and biased.

Deutsch calls the “Eastern approach” towards the person-body as an ‘achievement’ or ‘appropriating’ concept (Deutsch, 1993: 8). He argues that there are certain concepts which possess meaning only in evaluative or achievement terms, and that personhood is one of them. The lack of a presupposed substance ontology in the Chinese concept of shenti makes it an ideal example.
the person emerged from particular practices like the martial arts, medicine, or dance. Their very practical origins made them reflections and explanations of specialized or everyday praxes. As "practical epistemologies" (cf. Farquhar, 1994; Wartofsky, 1976), their very truthfulness is founded upon experience and practice rather than abstract theories of knowledge. Taking the person as a whole, as a living, practicing 'being-in-the-world', would thus make more sense than an ontological separation of the mind and the body (see Kasulis, T.P., 1994). This experientially and practically grounded holistic approach represents a general character of what Yuasa calls "Eastern cultivational arts" (Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987):

"One of the characteristics of Eastern body-mind theories is the priority given to the questions, "How does the relationship between the mind and the body come to be through cultivation?" or "What does it become?" The traditional issue in Western theories, on the other hand is "What is the relationship between the mind-body?" In other words, in the East one starts from the experiential assumption that the mind-body modality changes through the training of the mind and body by means of cultivation or training. Only after assuming this experiential ground does one ask what the mind-body relation is. That is, the mind-body issue is not simply a theoretical speculation, but it is originally a practical, lived experience, involving the mustering of one's whole mind and body. The theoretical is only a reflection on this lived experience."

Zhineng Qigong borrows heavily from classical Chinese theories of the person, operationalizing its metapsychophysics through combining TCM acupunctural theories with the Daoist model of the person and the universe as micro and macrocosmic maps of one another (see Hay, 1993; 1994; Sullivan, 1990). Projecting oneself suspended in the macrocosmic web is an integral part of all the levels of Zhineng Qigong. The very first step towards human-cosmic continuum always begins with the transformation of the self. This involves, at the most basic levels, clearing meridians for qi to travel unobstructed and unsealing acupoints on the surface of the skin. Acupoints or acupunctural points

62 By praxes or praxis, I am referring to practices that exist dialectically with theory.
serve as the rendezvous spots between internal and external qi, hence their ‘through-
ness’ (tong 通) is essential to the establishment of contact between the self and the
cosmos. Certain acupoints on the xingti, primarily the one on top of the head called
baihui 百会 and another between the anus and the genitals called huiyin 会阴, work as
the main gateways for this inner-outer exchange. The baihui and huiyin acupoints are
connected by the vertical 中 zhong or central meridian, the primary channel that
connects all meridians into a single system. The smoothness with which qi flows within
the person thus depends on the ‘through-ness’ of the zhong meridian, which can be
achieved through both physical and volitional manipulation. One could align one’s body
to straighten the channel or attempt a direct deliberate administration of internal-qi.

The basic levels of Zhineng Qigong consist of donggong 动功 or moving
levels utilize yi with jinggong 静功 or tranquil techniques. This staggered arrangement is
based on two sets of assumptions. Firstly, a layperson, being used to a state of xing-
motion and yi-distraction, can hardly be expected to settle into tranquility and stillness
without adequate preparation63. Secondly, due to a lack of training, his/her contact with
external-qi has mostly been taking place at the surface of the skin. What donggong does
is to first strengthen this surface mechanism, establishing more effective qi-exchange
between one’s skin and the external environment, slowly working its way into the
internal organs while maintaining a through-ness with the outside world. These steps are
then concluded with the final level that connects qi within the zhong meridian with that
within the cosmos. These gradual steps reflect “a process in which one’s soul progresses
gradually from the physical to the metaphysical dimension” (Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987: 217).

Moving qi through xing (i.e. physical exercises), is known as yixing yinqi 以形引
气, (using form to attract qi) while moving it through the volition, yiyi yinqi 以意引气

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63 I have been training in mostly donggong for the past few years and had started practicing jinggong for
about a year. Through making sense of the difficulties I encountered, I have come to agree with the
rationale for structuring training in the above manners.
A third technique uses one’s voice to attract qi, called yisheng yinqi 以声引气. Traditional forms of qigong utilize the principle of lingqi 领气 or leading qi. Yinqi is preferred in Zhineng Qigong because of its less coercive approach, which reduces the risks of qigong deviation (qigong piancha 气功偏差 or zouhuo rumo 走火入魔; see page 66 for further details). Lingqi on the other hand, drags qi while yinqi lures it; a certain ‘delay’ between the ‘attracting-force’ (yinli 引力) and the subsequent qi-reaction in yinqi techniques acts as a buffer against possible qi-manipulation mistakes. The following metaphor was used by Teacher Ang to further explain the differences: “Imagine a tour guide pulling the hands of his clients while the rest followed. What happens when he falls off a cliff? Those following behind would have been able to avoid tumbling over, unlike those holding on tightly to his hand.”

**Qichang 气场 and Atomism**

Qichang 气场 or qi-field refers to a collection of hunyuan-qi. Unlike traditional forms of qigong which are usually practiced alone or in pairs (master and student), Zhineng Qigong principles prescribe practicing “open-style” qigong (kaifangshi qigong 开放式气功) or public-qigong. Public-qigong, unlike its private counterparts, makes use of collective participation to generate a fertile qichang. The more participants there are, the more numerous the volitions and xingti, the denser the collection of hunyuan-qi. Group training thus ensures an abundance of concentrated hunyuan-qi around the practitioners, provided that the yi and xing of each practitioner is synchronized with that of the others. A dense qichang provides practitioners with an ample source of hunyuan-qi, allowing for better exchange between persons and environment. This approach towards public-qigong and qichang also explains why only three levels of Zhineng Qigong have been made public, out of the complete curriculum of six. As justified in Pang’s writing (Pang, 1992b):
“Zhineng Qigong serves the many rather than the few; in order for Zhineng Qigong to become popularized, a strong, expansive and powerful chi [qi] field is required for every stage of practice. Before and unless a specific chi-field is established for a specific stage of practice, it is quite difficult and painstaking to make progress.”

The concept of qichang raises questions about the nature of relationships between persons. Cartesian conceptions of the self adopt an atomistic model that treats the person as an individual, which like an atom, is considered the elemental in-divisible constituent of the whole. Atomism reduces the self into a singular isolated entity among other singular isolated entities (Dumont, 1965; Lutz, 1985). This conception of “the individual” in modern day usage also comes with a reference to rights, identities, and freewill that are psychologically or legally defined (Strathern, 1996: 2); it carries cultural connotations about an autonomous entity that embodies freedom that stands in opposition to society (Lock, M. M. & Gordon, 1988). Logocentric or semiological approaches in anthropology complements atomism by subjugating the body to the semantic (Jackson, M., 1983). This means that interactions between persons can only take place when mediated by meaning, communicated through symbols in body languages, rituals, and speech. Atomism and logocentrism is further bolstered by the Cartesian body-conduit model of the person that treats the body as a container for the mind or the soul. The body-conduit implies that an individual is distinct from others because all aspects of his/her self-hood are encased within, and separated from that of others, by a layer of skin. Zhineng Qigong’s notion of personhood, in contrast to the indivisible, autonomous, and encased Cartesian self, adopts what Needham et al (Needham, J., Wang, Robinson, Lu, Tsien, Ho et al., 1954) calls an organismic worldview, where the person forms a symbiotic chiastic continuum with other people.

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64 I have also heard from some teachers that Pang Ming was offered to have a research centre built in Taiwan by some Taiwanese politicians. Due to his Chinese citizenship, he decided not to accept the offer for fear of political reprisals from the Chinese Communist Party. This forced Pang to leave Taiwan where some of the research was conducted, and that caused a glitch in the research process. Apparently, since the crackdown of Falungong, Pang and other charismatic founders of qigong groups in China are currently under house-arrest. Because of the ideological nature of sources (including Zhineng Qigong manuals), both from the Chinese Communist Party and their qigong-practicing adversaries, it is almost impossible to verify hearsay like these, save for a personal trip to visit Pang himself.
and the cosmos. Hsu contextualizes this organismic approach within the practice of Chinese medicine, calling it the “body ecologic” (Hsu, 1999: 78), which

“...highlights the idea of mutual resonance between macrocosm and microcosm and the continuities between the inside and the outside of the physical body. The 'shared substrate', qi, that permeates the universe constantly transforms itself: qi is not only in constant flow, but also in constant flux (in the sense that it is subject to constant transformation). This conception of the body as part of its environment is characteristic of Chinese medicine.”

As a precaution, I prefer to use the term “body-cosmologic” because ‘ecologic’, to some readers, might imply a reference to only the natural and not the social environment. The body-cosmologic paints a picture of the self characterized by world-openness with an ontology which is processual (Ames, 1994a:163) rather than essential. The environment and social relations are not taken to be independent from the body-person; any disharmony at the other levels upsets the individual’s bodily sense of order (Zhang, Y., 2007: 49-51). This means that severing oneself as the perceiver independent from the perceived objective world is to expose oneself to health risks. Disequilibrium or disharmony within the person and between Humans, Heaven and Earth is the quintessential explanatory model of sickness in Chinese medicine, called “disorder accounts” (Kleinman, Eisenberg, & Good, 1978; Porkert, 1974; Unschuld, 1985). A

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66 Hsu herself mentions ‘natural environment’ a couple of times in her account of the body-ecologic (Hsu, 1999: 80, 235), but I believe that, under the constraints of language, she was trying to draw attention to the Chinese history of ideas regarding the connectedness of persons to nature.

67 The processual conception not only applies to human ontology, but is also used to describe the cosmos as constituted by processes rather than entities (Wu, 1969). The earliest source of this processual empiricism is probably the Yijing (Blair, 1993). Feng (Feng, Y. & Bodde, 1948: 169) argues that the word *yi* encompasses both the notion of change and simplicity. Change applies to individual entities while simplicity refers to the underlying principle of endless change. The substance ontology present in western thought was mostly a result of geographical and economic reasons, as with the tendency to emphasize transformation and processes in China (Feng, Y., 1947; Feng, Y. & Bodde, 1952). See also Needham (1956: 74, 201) for further discussions on the centrality of ‘change’ in Chinese thought.
refusal to participate in the continuum surmounts, as a sickness etiology, the lack of harmony within the continuum. Henceforth, to live one’s life in accordance to the atomistic conception of self, of others, and of the cosmos is, according to Zhineng Qigong criteria, the mother of all sicknesses.

Instead of being mediated by symbols and meaning, persons are part of a bigger whole constituted by *hunyuan-qi*. Since there are no autonomous encased individuals to speak of, it would also make no sense to postulate a medium that connects them. The person and his/her *shenti* is a “meta-body”, where it “has the potential to expand vertically and horizontally beyond the limitations of skin” (Ozawa-De Silva, 2002: 29). Relations between persons are better perceived as being *not-independent* rather than *interdependent*, for the latter already presumes separation and autonomy. A switch in such intellectual understanding is however, not quite enough; it further requires what I call a phenomenological departure from atomism and logocentrism. The self and other persons must be treated as permeable processes, *sensed* as ripples of viscosity rather than *conceptualized* as a bundle of skin, muscles and bones clearly distinguishable from other bundles. The meaningfulness and practicality of this switch can only be achieved by not treating it as an intentional act of imagination, but as a taken-for-granted reality. One must thus *‘surrender’* to this reality as the volition loses its everyday frivolity and sinks with faithful acceptance into every single cavity within the self. Within this state, the three boundaries between the self and others (one’s skin, the space between oneself

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68 Lewis’s (1990: 213), for example, account of qi as that which connects persons reveal an underlying presumption that persons are already individualized. Such atomistic imports are often invisible to the readers’ eyes unless one takes special care in reading.

69 This model of the self perhaps offers a unique Daoist take on what Heidegger means by the Dasein, the being-there or the being-in-the-world.

70 “‘Surrender’, as a methodological state of mind-body, was used by Wolf (1964) to refer to a suspension of preconceived notions, which may expose the suspender to certain risks. Although unlike Wacquant’s (2004: 11) ‘real’ risk of being physically harmed in “surrendering” himself in his fieldwork on boxing, paradoxically, resisting Zhineng Qigong’s epistemology may in turn result in qigong deviation. My use of the term may in fact resemble a Christian surrendering to a transcendental higher authority, which involves a certain leap of faith. Without any preceding experience of qigong’s effects, I would have to rely on a certain degree of trust in the teachers and students’ testimonies. Given that possible harm comes from within rather than beyond oneself, an epistemological overhaul functions not only as a part of ethnographic reflexivity, but a very real concern with therapeutic malpractice.
and others, and the others’ skin) vanishes gradually to take on the nature and appearance of osmotic fluid. This, in Zhineng Qigong metaphysics, is the state of equilibrium, the original state of the cosmos, and the inherent primordial ‘social nature’ of human beings. One’s social nature is therefore not a result of biological evolution or the development of civilization, but an integral organismic partner to the larger cosmological scheme of things.

*Niantou*念头 and the mind-body dualism

In the first four months of basic training, students go through common sets of exercises which include the first two levels, namely *pengqi guanding* 捧气贯顶 (lift qi up and feed it down the top) and *xingshen zhuang* 形神庄 (xing and shen* form). *Pengqi guanding* and *xingshen zhuang* work on what is known as *wai hunyuan* 外混元 or external *hunyuan-qi* that runs near the skin while the third level called *wuyuan zhuang* 五元庄, the five primordial form, works on *nei hunyuan* 内混元 or internal *hunyuan-qi* that runs within the five organs (liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys). These three publicly available levels of Zhineng Qigong focus on two specific placements of *qi*: external and internal. The most advanced levels, which have not been revealed to the public, train *zhong hunyuan* 中混元 or central *hunyuan-qi* that runs in the *zhong* meridian. *Pengqi guanding* involves mostly *donggong*, *xingshen zhuang* incorporates both *donggong* and *jinggong* while *wuyuan zhuang* focuses on *jinggong*. As one progresses, emphasis shifts from physical motions to volitional control, i.e. from moving to tranquil techniques71.

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71 In addition to these three structured curricula, students were sometimes taught other miscellaneous complementary techniques like *mianbi dunqiang* 面壁蹲墙 (facing the wall and squatting) which strengthens the lower and upper back.
(Students doing *pengqi guanding*, using their palms to direct *qi* from the top of the head down to the chest, across the armpits down to the end of the spinal chord, and subsequently through the legs into the ground.)

The instructor plays the critical role of keeping the correct tempo for each execution, through both verbal instructions and bodily motions. Verbal instructions do not simply indicate to the trainee the required sequences of executions, but draws the volition of each individual toward a common point of focus through both the *meaning* and the *resonation* of the words. For example, when Teacher Ang utters “*guang shu hui shou* 光束回收” or retracting the ray of vision, he connects the four words together and drags the statement for about three seconds. The trainees should have completed retracting their visions from the edge of the universe to the tip of their lower eyelids at the completion of the utterance. This way, it is not the retracting of one’s vision that is taking place but a collection of visions hitching a ride on and commandeering *hunyuan-qi* while collapsing towards the *qichang* in perfect synchronization. Another example of
such yisheng yinqi techniques would be the use of the word “kong 空” or “emptiness”\textsuperscript{72}. Uttering kong works through the word’s meaning by drawing the volition towards deliberate emptying of qi-cavities in the person, and through the way it sounds as it creates a certain ‘vibration’ that clears those cavities in a downward motion. Teacher Chin argued that kong is the sound of ‘voidness’ or dao; it is the Mandarin version of the Hindu “om” or the Buddhist “am 嗡”, the primordial sound of the universe from which all other sounds are derived. This interpretation, not found in any Zhineng Qigong writing I have perused, provides even more legitimacy for arguing that dao, with its voidness, is the origin of the ten thousand things, sounds and otherwise.

Besides the above functions, utterances help trainees remember particular techniques in the form of mnemonics (koujue 口诀 or xinfa 心法). Both pengqi guanding and xingshen zhuang begin with pre-practice preparation that establishes proper xingti and yishi states through a set of mnemonics as shown below. These lines are recited slowly and clearly by the teachers while the students align their postures and run the instructions through their heart-minds. The mnemonics consist of two parts, the first deals with volitional projection while the second, on the specific positioning of bodily parts:

1) “顶天立地，形松意冲。外敬内静，心澄貌恭。一念不起，神注太空。神意照体，周身融融。”


“Prop heaven up with the head and stand firm on the ground, relax the form and let the volition rush forth. Being-acting respectful on the outside and

\textsuperscript{72} Different sounds serve different purposes, with each directing qi to move in certain directions in selected parts of the body. These sounds include, in addition to “om”, he, si, hu, xi, xu, chuì, or as recorded in the Inner Canons of the Yellow Emperor, gong 龟, shang 商, jiao 角, wei 微, and yu 羽. Accordingly, words which contain the “ooo” sounds causes qi to converge while those which are uttered with the mouth wide-opened like “aaah” causes qi to dissipate.
being-acting tranquil on the inside, clearing the heart-mind and looking respectful in one’s appearance. Unify the volition and let it stay still, the volition casts itself upon outer-space. The volition shines upon-reflects the body, the whole person is in harmony.”

2) “下颚回收找喉头，喉头找玉枕，玉枕找百会，百会上领。展眉落腮，似笑非笑。捶肩落肘，含胸拔背。小腹收起，大腹鼓起。命门向后，会阴向前。全身放松。”

*Xia’e huishou zhao houtou, houtou zhao yuzhen, yuzhen zhao baihui, baihui shangling. Zhanmei luosai, sixiao feixiao. Chuijian luozhou, hanxiong babei. Xiaofu shouqi, dafu guqi. Mingmen xiangzhou, huiyin xiangqian. Quanshen fangsong…”*

“The chin pulls back and seeks the larynx, the larynx seeks the yuzhen acupoint, the yuzhen acupoint seeks the baihui acupoint, and the baihui acupoint leads upwards. Spread the brows and relax the jaw, smile and yet not smile. Drop the shoulders and elbows, relax the chest inwards and extend the back outwards. Contract inwards the lower abdomen and fill the upper abdomen with space. Extend the mingmen acupoint backwards, push the huiyin acupoint forward. Relax the entire person-body…”

Part one consists of eight key ideas targeted towards ‘inner adjustment’ (Pang, 1992b: 192), with each ‘idea’ or niantou 念头 represented in a single typical four-worded idiomatic structure. The idiomatic structure makes it easier to remember, and with its standardized rhythm, helps discipline the volition. The concept of niantou 念头 is one of the most important in Zhineng Qigong but also one of the most difficult to translate. However, I take it as the best example for discussing the lack of discrete mind-body distinctions in Zhineng Qigong. Niantou is more than an idea that exists in the mind or a linguistic-abstract concept that can be written in black and white. The exercise of a niantou requires a pinpointed will-full and sensual projection-motion; one must exercise the imagination and experience the effort of doing so. A niantou exists only
where *nian or mindful effort* does, so even though sets of *niantou* can be represented in words and uttered as mnemonics, without a strained engagement with those representations renders a *niantou* meaningless. Random strokes of geniuses or fantasies thus do not qualify as a *niantou*, not only because of the lack of sensed efforts but also because of the lack of specific purposes prescribed by principles derived from accumulated wisdom.

Exercising *niantou* is more of an inwardly contemplative harmonizing praxis meant to connect rather than an outwardly aggressive mental projection that seeks to overcome. Will-full action in dualistic practices is most often directed, besides the external world, at disciplining one’s own body. The narrative of Apollo’s battle with Dionysus in Greek philosophy, the Christian abhorrence of bodily sins, the modernist view of the body as a limitation to personal emancipation and the biomedical model of the body as a machine to be commanded led to the emergence of what Nietzsche called the “body-despisers” (*Deutsch, 1993; Ferguson, 1997a; b; Synnott, 1993; Turner, B. S., 1996)*. Compared to the damnable status of the body in these traditions, the *xingti* in Zhineng Qigong stands in a very different relationship to the *yishi*. Well aware of what he calls “*xifang eryuan chuantong* 西方二元传统 (western dualistic traditions)”, Teacher Ang argued that the *xingti* or the phenomenal-self, should not be treated as an enemy to overcome, but a young child to be nurtured through patience and benevolence. This highlights the role of the volition that encourages and ‘educates’ the *xingti* through mindfulness rather than to colonize it as a feral beast; this also acknowledges the *xingti*’s ‘sentient’, that it too possesses knowledge or at least the hidden potentials for it (see chapter five for further discussions on bodily sentiency or *yuanshen* 元神). This ‘cultivational’ relationship contrasts greatly with cultures of body-despising, of treating the flesh as an object that threatens subjectivity, reason, virtue, and social order (*Shilling, 1993; Strathern, 1996*). The relationship between *yishi* and *xingti* in Zhineng Qigong

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73 This is of course, an over-simplified view of historical attitudes towards the body in European traditions. As both Synnott (1993) and Turner argue (1996), there were many disagreements about whether the body should be treated with hatred, distrust, love or respect. However, varying threads of thought in European history also converge at certain points, and it happened that the mind-body dualism with the body as an object to be conquered turned out to become the dominant paradigm in modern western societies.
follows the Buddhist tradition, where the mind is the party that requires disciplining and that the body possesses subjectivity as well. This relationship is best illustrated by the notion of Qigong deviation, commonly known as *zouhuo rumo* 走火入魔, or literally, ‘misfiring and entering the realm of demons’. In classical qigong terminology, raising qi from the abdominal pit or Cinnabar Field (*dantian* 丹田) is called *qihuo* 起火 or ‘raising the fire’, and thus any misadventure in the process qualifies as ‘misfiring’. ‘Entering the realm of demons’ hinges upon the etymology of the word ‘*mo* 魔’, derived from the Buddhist term ‘*molo* 魔落’ that means ‘distractions’. Thus the realm of demons is a state of being-in-the-world characterized by a lack of volitional discipline; much of the principles and methods Zhineng Qigong borrowed from Buddhist traditions are directed precisely at taming those volitional demons. The ‘mind’ thus becomes the one that is ‘damned’, while the ‘body’ takes over, at times, as the ‘wise one’.

Another way of understanding the relationship between the volition and the *xingti* is to place the two in an inner-outer relationship. Part one of the mnemonics, *waijing neijing* 外敬内静, *xincheng maogong* 心澄貌恭 best explains this:

> “Being-acting respectful on the outside and being-acting tranquil on the inside, clearing the heart-mind and looking respectful in one’s appearance”.

The hidden “inside” and the observable “outside” are intimately related (see also chapter four for the inner-outer diagnostics of emotion), but not necessarily in a causal uni-linear fashion. Ames (1994a: 160) argues that western conceptions of the nature of space contribute significantly to seeing the mind and body as exerting extrinsic causal influences on one another, that the *yishi* is encased within the *xingti* or that the *xingti* occupies a repressed *lower* position. The prerequisite for such conceptions is that space is understood as an objective geometrical precondition in which events take place, i.e.

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*74* 走火入魔 *zouhuo rumo* is a familiar term for anyone who pays attention to Chinese pugilistic novels. It literally refers to “misfiring and entering the realm of demons”. In the novels, it is often depicted as a form of insanity that comes about from studying particular unorthodox martial arts system and moralized as retribution for those who, in search of martial excellence, deviates from the path of righteousness.
change occurs *within* space (Blair, 1993). On the contrary, classical Chinese thought does not assign such Kantian properties to space (and time), rather, specific points in space are seen as ‘gradients of change’ (Kuriyama, S., 1987: 56). Therefore, using the inner-outer paradigm to account for the relationship between *yishi* and *xingti* does not presuppose a geometric placement of two distinct components\(^{75}\), rather, it is more of a distinction between *biao* 表 and *li* 里\(^{76}\), or the observable and the non-observable dimensions of a person. One, however, should not see the outer observable as ‘a manifested’ phenomenon of a *prior* existing first cause residing inside the person but rather, both as corresponding processes. This can be seen in swapping *waijing neijing* for *neijing waijing*, which does not affect the meaning of the phrase at all. As Zhang rightly suggests:

“[The] Chinese do have the concept of "nei" 内 (inside), yet nei exists meaningfully only when it is manifested to the outside. There is no meaningful inside that is without an outside correspondence in speech, action, or inaction.”

Assumptions about the preconditional nature of space underscore the treatment of binary opposites as being only extrinsically related to one another. This leads to the causal prioritization of the mind over the body in social scientism or the reverse in biologism (Freud, 1988: 839). The child metaphor is one way of avoiding this overly causal antagonistic relationship between the invisible and the phenomenal part of the person. Therefore, a *niantou* should not be understood as an act of the mind with all its philosophical connotations of agency struggling to overcome, nor should the *xingti* be seen purely as the biological body that receives commands from the mind passively; the

\(^{75}\) Such presumptions about the nature of space have also been covered in the study of chronic pain (e.g. Honkasalo, 1998; see also Leder, 1990). Patients' reports about the fluid location or the lack of location of pain express a ‘Douglassian’ liminality which was often delegitimized in the face of deeply entrenched spatial conceptions in biomedicine. It is assumed in biomedicine that a disease must be located in order to be treated (Barthes, 1985: 297), but chronic pain defies such attempts (Good, M.-J. D., 1992: 39).

\(^{76}\) *Biao* and *li*, together with *yin* and *yang*, *han* 寒 (cold) and *re* 热 (hot), *xu* 虚 (depleted) and *shi* 实 (replete), are one of the eight rubrics or paradigm (*bagang bianzheng* 八纲辨证) used in TCM diagnostics.
person-body with its qualitative components of *xing*, *qi*\(^\ast\), and *yi* exists as a processual whole.

Due to a loose connection between the subject and predicate, a lack of inflection, and the interchangeability of noun and verb in the Chinese language (Wu, 1969: 426), translation of Chinese sentences to English often turns out sounding awkward or in some cases, overly reductionistic. The Chinese language, likewise with Hebrew, is event-oriented. This makes identifying the performer of an action through specifying the actor and the actant in a subject-predicate sequence unnecessary in order to make Chinese sentences grammatically sound (Blair, 1993). *Waijing neijing* has been translated in Pang Ming's (1992b: 192-195) writings as "Be tranquil within and respectful without" (note the inversion of the 'inside' and 'outside' position). This choice between using the word "be" and "act" in the translation can create significant differences for the English reader; I have henceforth utilized both in my own translations as "being-acting". The words "be" or "act" are missing in the original Chinese phrase; their absences make the phrases suggestive rather than descriptive, and leave space for imagination and experimentation essential for bodily techniques that are practical and experiential in nature. It is this imagination and experimentation that characterizes how *niantou* comes alive within the experiential and fluid practical logics of Zhineng Qigong. Inserting syncategorematic words that explicate the hidden meanings make the statements descriptively scientific (Wu, 1969: 433) and grammatically sensible for the English reader, but can result in serious misunderstandings. And if one were to explicate the "and" to either "because" or "therefore", this may make the nature of the relationship between the outer and the inner much more precisely causal\(^77\), but it undermines the type of holistic practical logic required for bodily techniques\(^78\).

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\(^77\) This habit of ascribing external causality in European science has been discussed by Needham et al (Needham, J. et al., 1954: 280, 281, 556) with a comparison with the Chinese form of what he calls ‘correlative thinking’.

\(^78\) As noted by Koller (1993: 57):

"...causal understanding is inherently atomistic; it cuts up the holistic process, regarding it as constituted by distinct factors that can stand in a causal relation to each other such that A causes B, B causes C and so on. But A can cause B only if A is other than B. This is the same kind of thinking that leads philosophers to say that experience proves that subjects and objects
Dualistic modes of thought can throw a student off-balance should he/she approach bodily techniques in an intellectualist fashion. Although dualistic classification system exists in many cultures (Needham, R., 1979) or even as a universal phenomenon hardwired by neurological structures (Russell, 1979; Schneirla, 1959; TenHouten, 1985), they do not necessarily dictate oppositional or causal correlations, especially between the mind and the body (Kirmayer, 1988: 77). The question of the mind vs. the body in the form of “should I be passive and listen to my body, or should I act upon my body?” can lead to practical conundrums that are blundering at the mildest and dangerous in the extreme. The model of the human body as an instrument for the mind acting as the commanding agent becomes rather counter-heuristical in actual practice. Attempts to make sense of these bodily techniques according to the rules of intellectualist logic, seeking consistencies in the rationale behind each and every single movement often lead to physical maladroitness and retarded reflexes. As Luke and Frank Chan, two teachers at the Huaxia Zhineng Qigong centre in China observes (Pang, 1992b: 25), the “western student has a penchant for theorizing and speculation”. Their advice given to these bearers of Cartesian scientism is quite simple:

“Do the practice correctly and faithfully, experience the benefits, and you will understand. But forever understanding and never practicing is only a recipe for frustration and failure.”

These words are reminiscent of Wacquant’s (2004: 16) concept of “pugilistic habitus” in his book on western boxing. He calls boxing a set of mental and bodily

have independent existence—that there could be no experience unless there were an experiencer and something to be experienced separate from each other, whereas, in truth, it is precisely their mutual interdependence that makes experience possible.”

79 Bruce Lee, known to most as merely a martial arts actor, was also a respected figure in the martial arts community both as a competent fighter/instructor and as a martial philosopher. Lee spoke of this self-as-agent verses body-as-tool duality several times in his movies, interviews, and books (Lee, B., 1975; Lee, B. L., John R., 1997; Lee, B. U., M., 1984). He summed it up in a statement: “...the word "I" does not exist...and when there is an opportunity... I do not hit...it hits all by itself. Any technique, however worthy and desirable, becomes a disease when the mind is obsessed with it.” The line between the actor (the intention) and the actant (the body) no longer exists during the actual execution of the bodily technique; “I do not hit... it hits all by itself”.

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schemata that “requires an exceptionally complex, quasi-rational management of the body and of time, whose transmission is effected in a purely practical mode, without recourse to the mediation of a theory, on the basis of a largely implicit and barely codified pedagogy.” Though I do not agree completely with Wacquant’s proposition that ‘transmission is effected in a purely practical mode’, my penchant for theorizing and speculation had proven obstructive as a both a qigong practitioner and a martial artist, but has allowed me to better appreciate Bourdieu’s (1977; 1990; 1998) advocacy for an embodied and praxis-oriented approach towards the study of culture. This is especially so for a Chinese bodily technique, of which rigorous English sentences and Cartesian epistemology can capture only that much.

Zhuangfa 庄法 and Xingti 形体

All Zhineng Qigong training sessions begin with proper posturing of one’s structure, with emphasis on straightening the zhong meridian and relaxation of the legs. The second part of the mnemonics is designed for this very purpose. Straightening the zhong meridian allows the unobstructed movement of qi up and down the vertical shaft while relaxing the legs allows one to sense the ground. Leg posturing involves inverting one’s toes inwards, bending one’s knees, and shifting one’s weight from the heels to the palms of the feet, with one’s centre of gravity leaning slightly forward. This stance is called a zhuang 庄. The word itself has many meanings, from “grassy” to “solemn” to “respectful”. The exact meaning of the word was never fully explained during training, nor was it accounted for in the manuals. Pang’s English writings (Pang, 1992b) does not contain any rigorous translation of the term as well, preferring to leave it as ‘zhuang’ or switch between the words ‘stance’ and ‘form’. I prefer to switch between ‘foundation’ and ‘stance’, depending on the contexts in which zhuang is used.

The pengqi guanding zhuang (see figure 2 for how the zhuang looks like) requires one to straighten the spine vertically while the shoulder blades are expanded horizontally. Combined with the jutting of the huiyin forward and the mingmen 命门
acupoint ("gate of life", a point between the two kidneys) backwards, two cavities are created, one around the chest and another around the hips. Together with another around the forehead and another around the ankles, they constitute the four ‘field-cavities’ (tian 田) in which qi gathers. In this context, zhuang is best understood as ‘foundation’ or ‘structure’, for it allows the practitioner to anchor his/her huiyin directly into ground like the stilts of a building.

The second set of the mnemonics focuses precisely on the attunement of bodily-forms (shenxing tiaozheng 身形调整), paying almost no attention to volitional matters. The first line of the first part, “prop heaven up with the head and stand firm on the ground, relax the form and let the volition rush forth”, deals with both the straightening of the spine and the volitional projection. On the contrary, the major prescriptions of the second part are to get the practitioner to pinpoint the exact parts of the xingti in order to align them accordingly. This assumes that a practitioner already possesses a working knowledge of where specific acupoints are. Given that there are over 350 acupoints on the person, only the ones relevant to specific stages of training are highlighted during training. The exact meanings of the names of acupoints had never been explained by any teacher before; this however, does not affect their labeling functions for certain parts of the body that everyday language has no name for. Employing acupoints to label parts of the body provides a much more concrete image of the self, expressing the very ‘phenomenal’ aspect of xingti.

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80 This theory appears more comprehensible when addressed through a metaphor provided by Teacher Ang:

"A balloon cannot be filled with air if it is collapsed, and it is collapsed because it is not filled with air. But which comes first, the air that fills the balloon or the balloon that can be filled with air? The first thing we need to do, is to make sure that the balloon is ready to be filled with air. And that is why when you were young, remember how your dad pulled and tugged at a new balloon to loosen it before blowing air into it? That is what we are doing now. But what really fills the balloon is not the blowing of air into it, but the yinian 意念 (intention) to do so.

81 "Zhuang" is known as "马 ma" or "horse" in Chinese martial arts, a short-form for mabu 马步 or "horse-stance" because the positioning of one’s legs resembles that when riding a horse.
The use of the term *xing* 形 or *xingti* 形体 in *donggong* approximates that of the Cartesian notion of ‘body’, less so than *quci* 躯体 but more so than *shenti* 身体. *Xing*, taking into consideration the inner-outer logic discussed earlier, should not be seen as a mere manifestation of content. *Xing* implies *xian* 现, “to appear”; it carries a morphological rather than a genetic or schematic nuance (Ames, 1994a: 165). *Xing* is thus better understood as ‘observable’ or ‘appearance’, but without an ontological distinction between itself and its invisible counterparts, *yi* and *qi*. *Xing* differs from the two only in qualitative degrees; I have therefore described it as the phenomenal\(^2\) dimension of the self. By ‘observable’, I restrict empirical methods to the five senses, although the phenomenological aspects of Zhineng Qigong involve more than that. *Xingti*, when employed in the practical settings of *donggong*, refers to the felt, tangible, and immediately-accessible resistance-prone\(^3\) part of the self.

\(^2\) I use ‘phenomena’ the way that Kant (Kant & Beck, 1950) did in his distinctions between the noumena (things in-themselves) and the phenomena (things as they appear).

\(^3\) In the phenomenological studies of sickness and pain, writers have noted that afflictions make one ‘objectify’ the body and to make it present, speaking of it as if it is a concrete living enemy to overcome (Bendelow & Williams, 1994; Good, M.-J. D., 1992; Jackson, J. E., 1990; 1992; Leder, 1990). Zhineng Qigong is not an easy art to master at all; pain and a general sense of one’s body’s ‘rustiness’ is common to all amateurs, infusing *xingti* in the context of *donggong* with the nature of an object that offers endless resistance.
Pengqi guanding focus a lot on the utilization of one’s upper torso, especially the palm and shoulders. The beginner’s set targets the upper torso qi-cavity because it is the easiest to access. This has to do with how the chest and shoulders are connected to the arms, the part of the xingti that one uses most regularly and henceforth has more control over compared to others like the diaphragm or the ribs. In donggong, the palms serve as the main tools for manipulating and directing qi to certain parts of the xingti; they are also usually the first parts of the xingti to experience qi’s existence. The palms are therefore used to sense qi, gather it, and pour it onto the top of one’s head into the baihui acupoint. The whole set of pengqi guanding then consists mostly of the palms moving along the external meridians of the xingti (a yixing yinqi method) to ensure that qi moves to the right places along the right paths. These external meridians run from the forehead, down the by the side of the face, the neck, the collar bones, the armpits, to the back, down the lower spine, the buttocks, the back of the thighs, the calves, the ankles and finally to the soles and into the ground (see figure 3).
The straightening of the zhong meridian is done with a volitional projection of oneself suspended in midair, clinging on to Heaven through the baihui point, connecting Humans, Heaven, and Earth in a single continuum. Such projections should not be seen as mere heuristic-mental tools for rectifying the physical structure, but taken as an act of participation in a reality. It must be accepted as a fact that one exists in a chiastic manner with Heaven, Earth, and other humans and that volitional projections are the participation in, the acknowledgement of, and the reinforcement of this fact. This logic entails an obvious paradox, for if one could switch one’s reality by will, the act is no longer an imperative but a practical application, yet in order for this switch to have any meaningful implication, one must take this reality as a necessary given. The necessity of suspending one’s disbelief or having faith in qigong cosmology (see chapter five for a
discussion on ‘faith’) is particularly important when one is in a ‘state of qigong’ (qigong zhuangtai气功状态), a condition where the sancai operate as one, utterly focused on any single task at hand. Qigong zhuangtai can be acquired any time and anywhere, when one is eating, walking or as I type this statement. Therefore, qigong is not just a particular form of exercise; it is a processual mindful state of being and way of life. The catch is however, that any task short of sleeping\textsuperscript{84} can involve xing, qi*, and yi. It follows that the range of contexts that one could (and should) adopt Zhineng Qigong epistemology and cosmology becomes limitless, making conduct which is contextually pragmatic, imperative for the serious practitioner. How imperative it is to the individual thus depends on how much faith one invests in Zhineng Qigong’s truth and utility. The strength of one’s faith not only outlines one’s range of conduct in everyday life but also determines the efficacy of Zhineng Qigong’s healing methods. The following section describes in detail how Zhineng Qigong epistemology is operationalized in healing.

Zhineng Qigong group therapy: 
An illustration of applied epistemology

One of the persistent assumptions in biomedicine is that ‘real’ disease is uncompromisingly biological (Good, B., 1994: 70). After Moerman (1979), therapeutic methods not considered ‘real’ by biomedical doctors have been referred to as ‘symbolic healing’, mostly used to label Christian healing, shamanism, and psychotherapy. The tension between identifying symbolic and actual healing is particularly felt in the study of ethnomedical efficacy, raising questions about the definition of ‘cure’ and the measurement of prognosis. Biomedical standards are often used in such attempts (see Rhodes, 1996), and are often smuggled into a series of other related issues in the cultural study of medicine like the curing/healing and the disease/illness distinction (Eisenberg, 1977; Good, B., 1994; Lock, M. M. & Gordon, 1988). Medical anthropology, until

\textsuperscript{84} Although a qigong zhuangtai cannot be achieved without the volition, there are certain Zhineng Qigong techniques that can be practiced during sleep (see chapter five).
recent years, had taken such Cartesian categories for granted. As Kleinman (1980: 72) noted earlier, "a key axiom in medical anthropology is the dichotomy between two aspects of sickness: disease and illness..." Several anthropologists have written about the delegitimation of non-physiological sickness symptoms and complaints (e.g. Jackson, J. E., 1990; 1992; Kleinman, 1992; Ware, 1992), yet medical anthropology unwittingly continues to participate in this process by using disease to refer to biological dysfunctions, and illness, to the experiential and social dimensions of sickness. Although the utilization of terms like 'disease', 'illness', 'cure' and 'heal' were intended as a critique of the biomedical definition of sickness as disease (Kleinman, 1980) and that they help lay bare the different dimensions of sicknesses, they also reinforce dichotomies like sickness in the body and that in the mind or sickness with natural versus that of social-cultural etiology.

My concern is with the idea of symbolic healing as a somewhat less 'real' form of therapy. It is not that medical anthropologists and physicians discount the efficacies of symbolic methods, but rather, seek to explain them with exogenous categories either from psychotherapy, e.g. 'catharsis' (La Barre, 1964) or neuro-physiology, e.g. 'release of endorphins' (Prince, 1982) or offer accounts like 'social restructuring' (Munn, 1973; Turner, V., 1967) or 'myth maintenance' (Dow, 1986). The result is a reduction to biological, psychological, or to social-cultural explanations, which still return full-circle to speaking of the psyche and the soma, and the self and society as binary opposites that causally affect one another. It appears that after decades of "the anthropologist's willingness to scrutinize his own concepts as a cultural system, to want to know and justify his own context of belief" (Young, 1982: 160), the Cartesian legacy is still, to use a military expression, dug in tight like a tick.

What I am suggesting is that anthropologists, especially medical anthropologists, need to be able to reckon with the possibility that a healing method that does not utilize observable material media like syringes and pills works through something else that

85 See also Frankenberg (1980) and Young (1976; 1982) for other critiques of the sickness-illness distinction.
defies reduction to the transient intangible or the immanent substantial. In other words, healing can take place through cosmic constituents, which has been rejected by modern science, that exists as a ‘third entity’ prior to mind and body. In this section, I shall attempt to describe how Zhineng Qigong materialism is applied in therapeutic sessions and show how its ‘symbolic healing’ can be as ‘real’ as biomedical procedures that work on the body-as-matter. Hopefully, this will help further elucidate the inner logics of Zhineng Qigong, its applications to the practice of self-cultivation, its implications for everyday conduct of practitioners, and the necessity of a phenomenological switch in providing a valid picture of its holism.

Chen (2003: 84) observed that qigong performances resemble evangelical healing sessions. I agree that Zhineng Qigong therapeutic sessions do resemble Christian healing in several aspects. However, unlike ‘faith healing’ sessions in religious settings, Zhineng Qigong group therapy involve structured steps and managed tempo, exhibiting a certain sobriety where practitioners do not break into songs or exhibit spontaneous bodily gyrations. Nevertheless, from the mass participations to the verbal utterances and bodily movements, to someone with no exposure to Zhineng Qigong theory or Chinese epistemologies, the session would seem like a Pentecostal event. The following section describes in detail what a Zhineng Qigong healing session looks like.

**Chang, the neurofibroma patient**

Chang was a 27-year-old man suffering from neurofibroma, a form of nerve fibril tumor. It was Chang’s mother who approached Teacher Ng for treatment and was recommended Zhineng Qigong together with other forms of TCM treatment that included acupuncture, acumoxa and oral medicine. Chang’s sickness affected not only his brain and spinal chord but also his skin, making him appear to be suffering from leprosy. Chang had difficulties articulating himself and had lost much control over the use of his limbs. Wheelchair-bound, he was helped dutifully through muddy terrains to the training ground by his parents, who also participated in the day’s training. Chang had
earlier undergone surgery to remove the growths in his brain but damage had already been done to his spine, rendering him almost immobile from below the neck. His condition had made him, according to his father, short-tempered and erratic in his behaviors. He was prone to screaming, cursing, and at times refused to take his medication and food. Most of the time he laid in bed or sat slumped in his wheelchair staring into space, ignoring the attempts of his family members to make conversation. His appearance also caused him to shy away from the public and he soon developed an adversity to human contact. These symptoms eventually made his parents suspect that he was suffering from some psychological problems and subsequently brought him to a psychiatrist for treatment. “Perhaps”, Chang’s father pondered with a touch of tragic irony, “there’s one thing positive about his handicap...at least he can’t thrash the house down...”

Chang was treated with what I would describe as a certain blasé-ness or even neglect by both the teachers and the students. Given that it was similarly my and the other students’ first time as healers, the lack of curiosity from my classmates was quite peculiar. Chang was wheeled to the left front corner of the training ground by his parents who stood by his side looking rather lost, while my classmates carried on with their usual pre-practice rituals. Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng were their usual light-hearted selves, chatting with a few students standing in the front row while preparing the portable CD player, some documents, and the megaphone, seemingly oblivious to Chang and his parents, who by that time were beginning to look rather stiff with nervousness. Although Chang and his parents received no special treatment from the other practitioners, I could still sense from their body language, a slight discomfort from anticipating the unique roles that they were going to play that day. It was Chang’s very first time as a Zhineng Qigong patient and to my knowledge, his parents also had no knowledge of Zhineng Qigong nor have they participated in any training session before.

While the students were waiting for training to begin, I saw Teacher Ang leaving his wife to deal with logistical matters as he approached the Chang family with a piece of paper in his hand. My spot in the group was always in the front row, so I was standing
less than a few meters away from the patient and his parents, trying to act nonchalant in order not to cause any discomfort to the family while juggling the need to observe. Chang’s parents greeted Teacher Ang with “Good morning Physician Ang (hong yishi ni zao 洪医师你早)” with which Teacher Ang responded with “Good morning! (ei zao 诶早!)” and a smile. He passed the paper to Chang’s father (which I found out later to be a list of tonics for Chang) and bent over to talk to the patient. Although Chang could not speak clearly, his alert eyes still indicated a certain degree of lucidity; I was thus quite sure that he could understand what the others were saying. Teacher Ang reached for Chang’s limp left hand to take his pulse and asked him some general questions about his diet, his sleeping habits, and the types of medication he was taking. Chang was visibly disturbed by the small crowd of curious students that started gathering around him. Teacher Ang, noticing the patient’s discomfort, tried to make the latter feel at ease with his kindly tone, mincing his words carefully as he instructed Chang on the basics of pengqi guanding and encouraged him to try his best to treat his own ailment. Contained within his instructions were emphases on the powers of the volition, on the exercise of niantou, and on the importance of having faith in Zhineng Qigong. In order to preserve Teacher Ang’s tone and measured words, I have included the original Chinese version below:

“既然你父母已经劳苦把你带来，你就不需要太犹豫去尽量尝试。有时候自己的病要靠自己去医治。我们的身体有它自己一套的自然复原方法：练气功是去加快它而已。这里很多新生都跟你一样不懂气功的，但只要你跟大家一起练，模仿我们的动作就可以了。我知道你现在身体还很虚弱，没什么精力，但只要你脑子还清醒就可以练功，但是你要有信念去用你的意志力去克服。练习的时候你要设法去想象自己跟着大家一起在动，去感觉自己体内那种劳动。过后我们给你发送

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86 Even though Teacher Ang is not a formally-trained biomedical doctor, decades of experiences and self-study provided him with a working knowledge of the possible conflicts between ‘Western’ and Chinese medicine.
Since your parents had taken the pains to bring you here, you should not hesitate to try hard. Sometimes one's own sickness has to be cured by oneself. Our person-body has its own natural healing methods; doing qigong is just to accelerate it. There are many new students here who like you, do not know qigong, but as long as you train with everyone else, imitate our movements, that's enough. I know that you're still weak and have no strength in you, but long as your mind is clear you can do qigong, but you must have faith to use your will to overcome. When training, you must try to imagine yourself moving along with everyone else, to feel the effort inside. Later on when we send external qi to you do not resist, you must train together and receive together. The one who has the will, succeeds.

Pengqi guanding is learnt primarily through imitation, at least for the uninitiated. Even though memorizing the strokes by heart does facilitate training in some ways (one does not have to open one's eyes to copy what the rest are doing), students were never asked to do so. Therefore, even though Chang and his parents had no prior exposure to Zhineng Qigong, Teacher Ang assured them, as he turned from Chang to his parents, that their unfamiliarity with the art is not a problem at all. "Beginners", Teacher Ang said as he addressed Chang, "only require applying yixing yinqi; just do as the others do and you'll receive the benefits". I doubt if the three of them understood what he said, but Teacher Ang described the methods with so much ease and self-assurance that Chang’s parents looked eager to go.

Compared to his parents, Chang was obviously overwhelmed by the sudden attention he was receiving, as the crowd around him grew bigger. He responded by struggling to sit up straight as Teacher Ang ended his conversation with Chang’s parents and prepared to return to his usual spot in front of the students. My classmates, having satisfied their curiosity, backed away in perfect synchronization following Teacher
Ang’s movements. The commotion ended with Teacher Ang and Ng taking up their respective positions, one in front and another at the back of the group, silently signaling the start of *pengqi guanding*, and just like switching on a lamp, inverted the mood of the training ground in an instant.

Before the actual training session began, Teacher Ang spent about five minutes emphasizing the role of the volition in Zhineng Qigong. Such discussions were rare for *pengqi guanding* training but were occasionally performed prior to *xingshen zhuang* and a regular occurrence for *wuyuan zhuang*. Teacher Ang’s anomalous behavior thus catered to the therapeutic purpose of the day’s session, as he repeated the importance of volitional participation together with an emphasis on Zhineng Qigong’s holistic epistemology. The paragraph below is an excerpt from his speech:

“When you’re training, you must use your *yinian*, not in trying to direct (daoyin 引) qi’s movement inside your *shenti*, but to use your *xin* 心 to imagine *yinian* and *xingti* moving together. For example, when you straighten your *zhong* meridian, imagine your head propping up heaven (*touding qingtian* 头顶青天), your feet stepping on earth (*jiaocai dadi* 脚踩大地), harmonizing yourself as one with nature (*yu da ziran rongwei yiti* 与大自然融为一体).

Healing did not begin only when the healers (all the qigong practitioners present) turned their attention to Chang; participating in *pengqi guanding* is already a form of self-administered therapy. The conversation Chang had with Teacher Ang already qualifies as a transmission of *gongli* (qigong principles), but mere intellectual comprehension of qigong principles, however and especially in *donggong*, does not qualify as an exercise of *niantou* without the sensation of effort. On the other hand copying the others’ movements appears to be an absurd method for Chang’s condition. However, to mimic (*mofang* 模仿) does not necessarily imply copying others’ movements with one’s own physical body. One can equally *mofang* with one’s *niantou*,

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to visualize, imagine, sense, and feel one’s own xingti movements even without corporeal participation.

The pengqi guanding set takes about one and a half hours. It would be impossible to describe the entire set of pengqi guanding even though it forms a major part of Chang’s healing. Instead, I shall focus on other procedures that were added only for this particular session. Pengqi guanding always ends with 15-30 minutes of jingyang 静养 or tranquil cultivation, where practitioners stand motionless in their zhuang as they place their palms, on one top of the other at the abdominal pit to cultivate qi that has settled within the zhong meridian into the Cinnabar Field.

After Teacher Ang signaled for us to recover from jingyang, I opened my eyes and saw Teacher Ng moving to the front of the class. An air of anticipation hung in the air as pairs of eyes locked onto Teacher Ang, expecting something out of the ordinary to happen. Usually, the end of training sessions were always signaled by Teacher Ang’s “see you next week!” or some other reminders about a change of venue or commentaries about qigong-related events and news. Everyone knew something different was going to happen as instead of his usual routine, Teacher Ang ambled over to Chang’s corner, right in front of me, and beckoned to the class, “Now I want all of you to turn and face the patient, stretch your arms out towards the sky, open your palms and follow my lead”.

The students then obediently made a 45 degree turn to the left while maintaining their feet placed firmly together and their arms hanging loosely by the side, the ready position for any Zhineng Qigong set.

After the practitioners had turned and faced Chang, donggong methods involving slow wide-arced open-palmed encircling motions were first used to gather hunyuan-qi in order to thicken the qichang. The palms, in their original ready position facing the hips, were gradually lifted skywards with outstretched arms, rotating out, up and then back in facing the top of the head, ending with the arms hanging loosely above.

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87 Teacher Ang believes that jingyang should take up at least 45 minutes, but having to cater to the time constraints of the students, he was forced to shorten it.
The hands were then brought down, as if hauling oneself over a wall, while breathing out slowly, halting right in front of the lower abdomen with the palms facing the ground. The name *pengqi guanding* literally refers to this very series of motion, where qi is lifted up and fed into the person through the top of the head (see figure 4). The encircling motion produces a sensation of a balloon-like grip between the palms, a warm sensation that resists pressing and pulling. This process was repeated several times until Teacher Ang was satisfied, and was followed by a collective slow-motioned lifting of the hand above one’s head as the palms were turned towards the patient.

![Figure 4: Gathering qi with the palms (Pang, 1992a: 430)](image)

*Yisheng yinqi* (using voice to attract qi) and *yi yi yinqi* (using volition to attract qi) were subsequently introduced once the palms were directed at Chang. As everyone settled into their positions, Teacher Ang called upon us to utter the following statement together: “qi and blood flows unobstructed, good health, and the disappearance-

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88 The distance between the palms varies from practitioner to practitioner, with contrasting explanations given. Teacher Ang argued that the higher one’s *gongli* 功力 (qigong-competency), the shorter the distance because one could ‘compress’ qi to a greater degree. Teacher Chang on the other hand, insisted that the better practitioner, compared to the amateur, could already sense the ‘balloon’ when his/her palms are far apart.

89 As prescribed in the manuals, three repeated sets were the standard for each *zhao* 招, or “move” in both *pengqi guanding* and *xingshen zhuang* but Teacher Ang took it as the minimum, and would sometimes go as high as six repetitions.
dispersion of neurofibroma (qixue tongchang, shenti jiankang, xianweiliu xiaosan 气血通畅，身体健康，纤维瘤消散)". This was accompanied by a slight swaying of the arms back and forth, towards Chang and back, as the palms paddle hunyuan-qi towards him. Yisheng yinqi’s utility in this case, does not include the resonation of sounds. Instead, it strives to synchronize and channel volitional focus through what the words mean to the healers, to reinforce one’s faith (xinnian 信念) through collective participation and affirmation, and to transport hunyuan-qi to the patient through one’s sincerity (chengyi 诚意) and to help the patient receive the meaning-intention (yi 意) of the words.

The function of sincerity, just like that of faith, anchors yi within certain prescribed boundaries and works to enrich it with resolve. However, sincerity differs from faith in that it is not directed towards qigong principles but towards other people. The above utterances, repeated several times, possess a direct material-therapeutic effect on sickness if and only if when accompanied by the use of xin (the heart-mind); without which it is no more than a series of sounds. Using xin includes sincerity towards wishing the patient well, faith in Zhineng Qigong’s powers, belief in the patient’s recovery, and certainty in one’s own ability to heal. In Zhineng Qigong context, xin contains a direct material effect on reality only when it is ‘used’. In Teacher Ng’s terse words, “Xin is something to be used, not spoken of (xin shi nalai yong de, bushi nalai jiang de 心是拿来用的，不是拿来讲的)".

The healer’s use of his/her heart-mind, however, must be reciprocated with that of the patients’ in order to achieve the best prognosis. Inasmuch as the volition has the ability to channel qi, it is capable of resisting it as well. This is why Chang was called upon by Teacher Ang to receive (jieshou 接收) hunyuan-qi and not to resist (kangju 抗拒). He has to similarly believe in the effects of qigong, his own chances at recovery, and the sincerity and ability of others to heal him in order for the healers’ attempts to work. The patient’s faith, together with that of the healers, are required to activate what
Pang calls a “life-field” (*shengwu chang* 生物场)\(^9\) that resides within the person. *Shengwu chang* is a technical term that refers to the animating effects of *hunyuan-qi* within the person. The ‘vibration’ of the *shengwu chang* indicates the effects of the wholesome, coordinated, sincere, and faithful participation of practitioners; without it, the goals of ‘group-qichang’ (*zuchang* 组场) cannot be achieved. *Yiyi yinqi*, *yisheng yinqi* and *yixing yinqi* are thus methods to initiate and maintain this collective vibration-resonance, which establishes a connection between Chang and his healers, without which his convalescence cannot take place.

If one were to use the onset of the utterance as an indicator of therapy, the session did not last for more than 10 minutes. The intensity of the mindful effort involved in exercising and synchronizing one’s *xin*, *yi*, *xing*, and *qi* however, made it feel like an eternity. No one really knew the effects of the treatment on Chang, and none had bothered to find out. Due to the amount of focus required for the 10 minutes of *qigong zhuangtai*, I had lost count of the number of times that the utterance was repeated. It was ended with a slow retraction of the arms through the arcing motion described earlier, finishing with the hands hanging loosely beside the hips, and finally a rotation of all participants back to their original positions facing the front. As with all other training sessions, the treatment concluded with *shougong* 收功, the cessation and retrieval of outwardly projected *yi*, *qi*, and *xing*.

The end of the session was, once again, marked with a sudden switch in collective ambience, from sobriety, attentiveness, and silence, to boisterous and gleeful forms of interactions. The end of the session also announced a drastic conversion in epistemological orientations and social norms, from Zhineng Qigong monism to the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life, as if what had happened did not take place at all. As Teacher Ng spoke to the Chang family, Teacher Ang advised Chang to continue with the *pengqi guanding* routines everyday, utilizing the same projectional methods he had earlier suggested. I said goodbye to Chang, whose gaze finally held mine for a split

\(^9\) *Shengwu* 生物 literally refers to “living organism”. Some have translated *shengwu chang* as “bio-field”, but it contains too much association with biology as a non-Chinese disciplinary conception.
second, as I looked for signs of any qigong effects on him. His parents looked much
more relaxed as they thanked Teacher Ang and Ng, and promised to come again the
following week. I shook Chang’s father’s hand as his wife unlocked Chang’s wheelchair
and pushed him strenuously over the grass and through the narrow stadium gates; this
was the first and the last time I met my patient, Chang.

I found out later from Teacher Ng that Chang was too traumatized by the
experience to want to participate again. His parents, under the advice of Chang’s
psychiatrist, had decided not to put their son through the tormenting ordeal again. Two
years had passed before I mentioned Chang’s case to Teacher Ang again, which he
replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

“This patient is doing fine now; he had re-acquired some movements in his
hands and is now learning to walk with some physiotherapy. No one can force
him to do qigong if he doesn’t want to; it’s not going to work if he’s unwilling
or does not believe in Zhineng Qigong in the first place. I understand how his
parents feel; it takes a lot of commitment to practice qigong. The slow-acting
effects often make people choose Western medicine. It doesn’t matter, as long
as he recovers, I’m happy.”

And when I asked Teacher Ang if he thought that Zhineng Qigong had helped Chang, he
chuckled and shook his head, “That’s possible, I don’t know”. No one ever mentioned
Chang’s case again in my remaining time in the field; it was as if the episode was merely
a mundane everyday affair that fades away as one moves on to another day.
Discussion

Although I am arguing for a monistic materialist conception of symbols, I am not discounting Zhineng Qigong’s ability to deal with problems of theodicy or to offer ‘social healing’. Hopes of recovery, social support, and the comfort provided by an authoritative healer could all contribute to ease Chang’s and his parents’ misery. My purpose however, is to disentangle a chronic problem in medical anthropology rather than add to the mass of literature regarding the above issues. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the label ‘symbolic healing’ insinuates that certain therapeutic methods are less ‘real’ than biomedicine. This ties in with the ways in which persons are conceived as encased, autonomous, and atomistic “ghosts in the shells”, mediated by meaning and symbols, each divided into the transcendent mind and the immanent body. Zhineng Qigong’s monistic materialism challenges these and more assumptions.

Monistic materialism proposes that reality is made up of a single continual constituent that assumes different faces. Zhineng Qigong specifies this constituent as hunyuan-qi, that which fills the person and the world, animating organisms and providing the myriad components of the universe their inter-integrity. The lack of an ontological distinction between the material and the symbolic is carried forward in the conception of the volition, the heart-mind, and words as having concrete direct material effects on reality. The case of Chang can be interpreted in several different ways; one can choose, using anthropological lenses, to call it faith healing, ritual healing, social healing, symbolic healing, or even ‘magic’. What I propose is to consider the possibility of another medical reality, one which human will and wishes, expressed as words and ‘rituals’, function in the same manners as needles, pills, and scalpels.

“Xinxiang shicheng 心想事成” or “that which the heart-mind wishes, becomes”, is one of the slogans for Group B that I train with (see figure 5).
“Xinxiang shicheng” is not merely a greeting used by the Chinese during the Lunar New Year or a welcome message for new students; in Zhineng Qigong’s terms, it literally means what it says. The ‘magical’ powers of words to heal is one of the oldest observation in the anthropological tradition (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Levi-Strauss, 1963; Tambiah, S. J., 1968), and has found its newer form in the notion of ‘illness narratives’ in more recent works (e.g. Csordas, T., 1983; Finkler, 1983; Kapferer, 1983). However, two problems are associated with study of magic, namely the definition of magic and related issues of establishing how magic works. Magic had been traditionally distinguished from religion in several ways. These include Tylor’s (1891) contrast of religion as the belief in spiritual beings with magic is a means of survival. Frazer (1923), adopting Tylor’s ‘personification’ as a mark of religion, added that magic refers to a more primitive form of belief system. Others, like Durkheim (1982), distinguished the two in terms of the types of social relations and institutions they involve while Malinowski (1954) compared the two in terms of their substantive and instrumental emphases. Critiques of these classical demarcations have reorganized them into categories like ‘symbolic’ vs. ‘scientific’ aspects of knowledge or as different interpenetrating ‘orientations to reality’ within the performance of rituals (Dein, 2002; Tambiah, S.J., 1990).
Calling certain healing practices ‘rituals’ disregards the possibility of therapeutic methods that contain non-symbolic effects not of a supernatural mechanism. Even if the ritualistic aspects of healing are played down in preference for the search of its ‘actual’ underlying mechanism, it still returns full-circle to explaining it in terms of the psychological, the somatic, or the social. It appears that anthropological attempts at understanding ethnomedical efficacy are condemned to shuttling between the dualisms of the supernatural and the natural, the symbolic and the real, and the mental and the bodily.

Moving on to the use of words in healing, Tambiah (1968: 109), after Malinowski (1954), notes that words are ‘forces in-themselves’, that they contain magical properties even with the ‘atrophy of meaning’ (Tambiah, S. J., 1985: 164), that the lack of clearly understood meaning are insignificant to or even unimportant for efficacy (Bloch, 1974). One example would be incantations and writings in Daoist traditions that carry power insofar that they are pronounced and written properly (Hsu, 1999; Schipper, 1993); the meanings of those words are not a necessary prerequisite. If one were to adopt the above anthropological frameworks, then wishing others xinxiang shicheng heals only because of the way it sounds, the way in which it is combined with ritualistic actions, the way works through the mind on the body, or the way it maintains a social and symbolic universe. It is just simply inconceivable within a Cartesian interpretive grid that the meanings of and intentions behind words are material in nature and in effects.

The inability or refusal to consider a primordial ‘third entity’ accounts for the failure to comprehend how Zhineng Qigong healing methods achieve their efficacy. The existence of the primordial hunyuan-qi allows its permutations to act on reality directly, without having to deal with the missing link between spirit and matter. Utterances, unlike ‘magical’ words, are therapeutically void if unaccompanied by xin and yr; it is the meaning of utterances that brings together the intention to heal and the object of healing within the act of therapy. The phrase “qi and blood flows unobstructed, good health, and
the disappearance-dispersion of neurofibroma” has no effect on Chang if he and the healers do not understand what it means. The heart-mind requires meaning in order for it to know what it is sincere about and the volition depends on meaning to know what it has to do. To ‘understand’ the meaning of words and to be sincere when one speaks them, are to fill words with a material content. Hunyuan-qi, as the basic constituent of the cosmos, heals through its movement within the person and between the person and the cosmos. The volition, guided by the specific instructions of words, attaches itself to hunyuan-qi and coaxes it through the person, clearing the meridians for qi and blood to flow smoothly, transforming neurofibromatic bingqi (sickness-qi) back to normal91, and bringing good health to the patient.

Zhineng Qigong’s monistic materialism prescribes only one world; there is thus no such thing as supernatural healing. All healing makes use of material apparatuses, regardless of their methods and no matter how ritualistic they look. Zhineng Qigong teachers have always insisted that Christian healing works through the mechanisms of qi, and that ideas and symbols of deities are merely objects that draw the participants’ xing, qi, and yi towards a common point of focus. Zhineng Qigong methods’ efficacy are direct results of their ability to move qi, the third entity which is revealed to humans in many different ways, such as xing, qi* yi, xin, spirit, or matter. Motions that appear symbolic and words that sound like incantations are in actuality systematic means of manipulating the world. Hunyuan-qi, when it acts on the person, regardless of whether it appears as the meaning of words, sounds, the volition or the xingtii, affects the person directly as one material thing on another. Therefore, the question for an anthropological approach to ethnomedical healing efficacy should not be “how does it?” but rather, “why not?” Teacher Ang could not tell if Chang had been healed by qigong or biomedical

91 Zhineng Qigong, with its emphasis on yinqi and public-qigong, employs “jiti zuchang zhibingfa 集体组场治病法” or “group qichang healing method”. Gathering qi with the palms establishes a qichang which practitioners direct towards the patient rather than summoning what each possesses within him/her. The latter method has a tendency of draining the healer and increases the possibility of accidentally absorbing bingqi 病气 or sickness-qi from the patient. It is not the purpose of qichang healing methods to chase away sickness-qi (ganzou bingqi 赶走病气), but to transform sickness back into normality (shi bing zhuanhua wei zhengchang 使病转化为正常).
treatment and neither can the anthropologist assume that there are ‘other underlying mechanisms’ besides those put forward by a particular system of knowledge. Insofar as anthropology seeks to bridge cultures through interpretation, it must be ready to acknowledge that sticking to one epistemological system can only lead to the failure to close the gap between the emic and the etic.
CHAPTER 4:

STATE CARTESIANISM AND
ZHINENG QIGONG PRACTICES

Introduction

This chapter identifies the epistemological assumptions that lay implicit within the institutional practices of the Singaporean state and relates them to the practice of TCM and Zhineng Qigong. Of particular relevance are the laws that govern TCM and the institutional taxonomies that define practices related to qigong. These discursive practices directly affect the professional lives of Zhineng Qigong teachers and indirectly shape the ways in which they make sense of their practice of traditional Chinese arts. I will show how teachers combine holistic and dualistic concepts packaged with Zhineng Qigong terms to articulate their concerns for the status of qigong in Singapore, to critique what they consider as biases of the state, and to ally their practices with modern science. Through describing how Zhineng Qigong teachers selectively employ dualistic and holistic languages in their struggle for legitimacy, I argue that contrasting epistemological systems do not necessarily come into conflict at the level of practice.

Members of the ruling party often emphasize that the rule of law functions as one of the necessary requisites for Singapore’s success. Besides the employment of public campaigns, legal apparatuses are most often utilized by the state in various attempts at social control. George (2005) calls the employment of the legal apparatus to discourage political dissent “Calibrated Coercion”, capturing the rather nuanced Foucauldian manners in which the state utilizes the minimum amount of resources to achieve political

92 These public campaigns are directed at shaping various aspects of social life aimed at cultivating specific what the state considers desirable behaviors. They range from the “Speak Mandarin” campaign targeted at removing differences between the different Chinese dialect groups, to the “Stop Spitting” campaign in the 80s to raise awareness about public health, to the “Teach Less Learn More” campaign in schools to cultivate innovative thinking and to address public concerns with over-demanding educational curricula.
hegemony. The primary advantage of the law is its apparent alignment with democratic systems of governance, even though some opposition political voices question the very fairness of the laws themselves. However, with the PAP’s 98% majority in the unicameral parliament, these opposing voices have little influence on the design of bills and acts that cover all aspects of life, from issues concerning public speeches to matters pertaining to private sexual conduct. The law similarly stretches to cover the practice of medicine, not only in defining what constitutes proper medical practice but also in the allocation of medical goods and the control over the content of medical products. The recent establishment of the TCM Practitioners Act directly affects, in their capacities as TCM physicians, the livelihood of Zhineng Qigong teachers while other related institutional prescriptions indirectly shape the status, image, and the practice of Zhineng Qigong in Singapore. I argue that crouched within certain bills, acts, and their legitimizing rhetoric are dualistic models of the human body that lead to a misunderstanding of and threats to the practice of Chinese traditional healing arts. The most concrete example of this can be found in the recent changes to the laws governing the practice of TCM.

In addition to their past shared experiences as political activists (see chapter five), having to adhere to the TCM Practitioners Act is probably the other most direct encounter between Zhineng Qigong teachers and the state. Cartesian dualisms within legal definitions of legitimate medical practices force Chinese physicians in Singapore to practice their healing art on the terms of biomedicine. Prior to the institutionalization of TCM regulations, other legal stipulations like the Poisons Act and the Medicine Act which ban “toxic substances” in medical products had already limited the medical arsenals available to Chinese physicians. Authorities explained that these regulations are measures implemented to protect consumers from toxic substances from both prescribed and over-the-counter medication. This resulted in Chinese physicians resorting to alternative cures when certain Chinese herbal or animal extracts become unavailable. However, several Chinese physicians to whom I spoke, including non-Zhineng Qigong teachers, did not find that these measures inhibited their medical practice. Even though they had to compromise on their use of, for example, small doses of mercury for
“attacking poison with poison (yidu gongdu 以毒攻毒),” they treated the Poisons Act and the Medicine Act as minor irritations. As Teacher Ang explained, rather sarcastically, that "We [Chinese physicians] are much more resourceful than the government assumes."

The requirement for Chinese physicians to register with the Ministry of Health, however, proves to be something more than mere a pinprick, but a double-edged sword that both disables and enables TCM practices. Even though legal regulations that define proper medical practice limit the range of medical procedures available to the Chinese physician, they are also received by Zhineng Qigong teachers as the most explicit form of recognition for TCM and perhaps eventually, qigong. Practitioners like Teacher Ang and Chin believe that the state’s role in setting explicit standards can help weed out quacks, protect patients, and ensure the professionalization of TCM. State regulations, however, have also implicitly shaped the practice of qigong in Singapore. Together with the legal apparatus, certain institutional classifications of TCM and qigong reveal the existence of a consistent Cartesianism within the discourse of the state.
The Body-Conduit and the practice of TCM

"Singapore's healthcare services are based on Western medical science. However, it is common practice among the various ethnic groups to occasionally consult traditional medicine practitioners for general ailments...Apart from the control of poisons; the Ministry of Health has in the past not been actively involved in TCM practices in Singapore. This is largely due to the lack of expertise in this area and the relatively low usage of TCM by the population. However, with the development of TCM particularly in China over the past 2 to 3 decades, and increasing interest in complementary medicine the world over, public interest in TCM has also risen. It is therefore timely to review the standards of training and practice of TCM in Singapore. The aim is to ensure a higher quality of TCM practice which will benefit members of the public who consult TCM practitioners."

: -- Ministry of Health, Singapore

Traditional Chinese Medicine has recently experienced a revival in Singapore. This is due partly to the rise of China as an economic and political power, bringing with it a re-evaluation of Chinese traditions and the commercial values of Chinese medical products and services. The above statement from the Ministry of Health (MOH) sums up the state's explicit acknowledgement of biomedicine as the legitimate model for Singapore's healthcare system, and its intention to bring traditional medicine under legal scrutiny. A Committee for Traditional Medicine was appointed in 1994 by the MOH to look into the regulation of TCM practices. This culminated in the formation of the Singapore Traditional Chinese Medicine Organizations Coordinating Committee (STCMOCC), the passing of the TCM Practitioners Act 2000, and the establishment of the TCM Practitioners Board (TCMPB) as the executive of the Act. The primary function of the TCMPB, the MOH argues, is to oversee the registration of TCM practitioners and the accreditation of TCM institutions. Stored within the TCMPB's database are two separate lists of registered TCM practitioners, one for "acupuncturists" and another for "TCM physicians".
Without the appropriation of TCM taxonomies into MOH's classificatory system, TCM practitioners are compelled to register and present themselves as either acupuncturists or TCM physicians. This classification of TCM practitioners reflects the body-conduit model that provides the epistemological basis for the TCM Practitioners Act. Modeling human ontology after the body-conduit leads to firstly, making a discrete distinction between the inner and the outer portions of the human person and secondly, the physical and the non-physical or the material and the non-material aspects of personhood. The sentient immaterial self is thus assumed to reside within a layer of skin, the material casing that serves as the final boundary before external elements (e.g. pathogens or other human beings) meet the very essence of the person.

These two distinctions is implied in the MOH's argument that the regulation of acupuncture is an urgent matter because it is "an invasive procedure carrying risks of injury and infection" (M.O.H., 1995). The inner-outer distinction provides for the conception that acupuncture invades the ghost through puncturing the shell while separating the material from immaterial makes reference to the ontology of the agent or object which invades. Separating the self into inner-outer and material-immaterial dimensions leads to legal and institutional distinctions between acupuncture and acupressure (tuina 推拿), resulting in the latter being excluded from the TCM Practitioners Act. Both acupuncture and acupressure operate on the similar TCM principle that qi travels along meridians (jingluo 经络) in the person and comes into contact with external qi through the various acupoints on or near the surface of the skin. A healer's manipulation of the patient's qi through certain acupoints allows for therapeutic effects to be achieved. The primary observable difference between acupuncture and acupressure lies in the medium which is used. Acupuncture employs needles, usually made from stainless steel, to 'puncture' the skin while acupressure

93 Though TCM has been "slow to develop a system that facilitates practitioners to specialize in only a subsystem or parts of the human body" (Chi, 1996: 1336), in recent years, an increasing division of labor has been undertaken in the practice of TCM in many parts of the world. In Singapore's case, one can find specialized courses on gynecology (jueke 妇科), ophthalmology (yanke 眼科) and pediatrics (erke 儿科) among others at the local TCM college. However, although TCM has imported the biomedical tradition of medical specialization, it has yet to receive the recognition for doing so.

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applies ‘pressure’ through either the palms, knuckles or fingertips. Comparing the similarities and differences between the two methods, it becomes obvious that the very ontology of needles play a pivotal role in defining whether a procedure qualifies as invasive or not. Acupunctural procedures are invasive insofar as needles are material objects that disrupt the integrity of the human skin while palms, knuckles and fingers only temporarily alter its shape. In order to understand the significance of the material-inmaterial dualism to legal and TCM taxonomies, one has to first take a look at the implications of Rene Descartes’ work.

The main problem that Descartes faced in his formulation of the mind-body dualism was accounting for the relationship between the soul and the body. Given that only bodies are able to move bodies or that the only the material can act on the material, how do emotions affect the physique? This epistemological problem was first raised in the correspondence between Elizabeth of Bohemia and Descartes (see Johnstone, 1992), in which the princess asked “how does the soul act upon the body?” Descartes’ answer preempted the modern-day biological reductionist strategy of somatizing emotions by postulating a meeting point, somewhere in the head, between the body and the soul. He called this rendezvous organ, the pineal gland.

Teacher Ang is well aware of this Cartesian problem, having read Chinese translations of several European philosophical classics. He believes that the legal distinction between acupuncture and acupressure is a result of a “western prejudice” against TCM principles. Using acupuncture and acupressure as illustrations, Teacher Ang argued that to the uninitiated, the two methods utilize different media and henceforth, different principles. However, he added, they are in “actual fact”, similarly employing qi as the “real” intervening therapeutic tool. Teacher Ang’s arguments are

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94 Even though the formulation of the mind-body dualism was religiously motivated, Descartes also intended a space for science (Kasulis, T. P. A., Roger T. and Dissanayake, Wimal, 1993: xvii). He conceived the mind as a faculty which is unadulterated and henceforth proper for theology while the body which is material in nature, should function as the object for science (Lock, M. & Scheper-Hughes, 1987: 9; Strathern, 1996: 3).

95 I cannot say for certain that Teacher Ang’s interpretation represents all TCM practitioners’ or reflects all TCM frameworks. So far, all the Chinese physicians I have spoken to share a similar perspective. Given
based on the assumption that qi is the basic constituent of reality, so regardless of whether acupuncture or acupressure is administered, it is qi within both needles and fingers that acts upon qi within the patient’s meridians. However, the Cartesian framework within the TCM practitioners’ Act leads to the recognition of needles as the only empirically-verifiable materially-constituted medium while excluding qi, its much more intangible counterpart. Without considering the ontology and the function of qi in TCM procedures, the state’s exclusion of acupressure from the Act expresses a consistency between its epistemological assumptions and its classification of medical practices, that acupressure be excluded from its definition of “an invasive procedure”.

It is important to note, however, that the precise legal wording of the TCM practitioners Act (Chambers, 2000) is much more flexible in its definition of acupuncture than what the MOH phrases in its public legitimation for the implementation of the Act. Consider the following excerpt from the Act:

"Acupuncture" means the stimulation of a certain point or points on or near the surface of the human body through any technique of point stimulation (with or without the insertion of needles), including through the use of electrical, magnetic, light and sound energy, cupping and moxibustion, to normalize physiological functions or to treat ailments or conditions of the human body...

: -- (TCM Practitioners Act, Chapter 333A, “Interpretation”)

Although the Act includes more than stainless steel instruments in its definition of acupunctural procedures, there was no mention of qi anywhere at all. The above definition, though attempting to cover all possible acupunctural methods, is merely a description of medical procedures; it leaves out any discussion of acupunctural theories. This shows that the state is only interested in making behavioral prescriptions and not

that some Zhineng Qigong teachers are senior lecturers at the local TCM college, I believe that this epistemological model has a considerable number of followers within the local TCM community.
scholarly assertions. In addition, the employment of the word “energy”, I believe, indicates an attempt to explain the mechanisms of acupuncture, accounting for qi’s ‘immateriality’ within a scientific framework rather than excluding it entirely from consideration. Both cupping and moxibustion do not involve puncturing the skin or the utilization of electrical, magnetic, light or sound energy, yet are included as part of acupunctural methods. The inclusion of cupping and moxibustion inevitably leads the Act towards a slippery slope, where it also has to include within its jurisdiction, acupressure or other therapeutic products like “magnetic beds” or similar “point stimulation” methods used in ayurveda. However, this extension to other healing practices has not taken place; ethnomedical procedures that resemble acupuncture are still largely classified as commercial or cultural practices. I believe that the appeal to acupuncture’s “invasive” property in the MOH’s public justification is an attempt to gloss over the law’s definitional ambiguity and could contain other surreptitious interests which I cannot verify. These could very well include the state’s intention at surveying Chinese intellectuals or the biomedical community’s response to the threat from TCM’s increasing saliency. Nevertheless, my investigations show that Cartesian epistemology is not so much significant within the formalized and inaccessible language of the law, but is reflected in its silent but salient role in the public discourse of the state.

Qi has so far not been recognized as a material substance or an existing entity by the mainstream biomedical community and even by some qigong researchers in China (see Palmer, 2007; Zhang, H., 1996). For example, the U.S. National Institute of Health recognizes certain effects of acupuncture, but “have not been able to fully explain how acupuncture works within the framework of the Western system of medicine that is commonly practiced in the United States.” (NIH, 2004). The World Health Organization has also acknowledged acupuncture’s therapeutic potentials in treating medical problems like pain, nausea and insomnia, and has even standardized the list of acupoints on the body (WHO, 1993), but it has yet to recognize qi’s existence (WHO, 2002). Given that Singapore’s healthcare framework is “based on western medical science”, it comes as no surprise that the legal-medical framework in Singapore does not pay any attention to either the theoretical aspects of TCM or is willing to accept the materiality of qi. This
bias leads to the evaluation of TCM practices in Singapore with standards laid out by biomedicine and excludes qigong therapy from any legal-medical regulation.

To speak of qigong therapy within the framework of "western medical science" is to deal with an uncomfortable liminal category. Qigong therapy approximates acupressure much more than acupuncture for not employing any 'material' instrument. However, it departs from acupressure in that it does not require 'physical' contact with patients in order for healing to take place. Qigong therapy works directly through the manipulation of qi existing between the healer and the patient without the need for 'carriers' like needles or the human body (fingers). Qigong has thus, together with other domains of knowledge that purport qi as an intervening 'stuff', been excluded from any legal-medical acknowledgement. The state's adoption of a Cartesian epistemology also explains why TCM herbs, tablets, mixtures and ointments all fall within legal jurisdiction (Chinese medical products are regulated by the Poisons Act and the Medicines Act), for medicines which are taken orally or applied onto the skin can also potentially threaten the self through the penetration of the bodily casing.

The Chinese physicians' points of view

The implementation of the TCM practitioners Act directly affects the economic dimension of TCM practice. Although the compulsory registration and institutionalized accreditation of Chinese physicians have, in the views of Chinese physicians I spoke to, raised the professional image of the Chinese physician\(^\text{96}\), it also compels practitioners to invest more resources in their clinical practices. Aspiring TCM physicians, under the Act, are no longer allowed to acquire their practicing licenses through apprenticeship; they are required to receive at least a bachelor's degree from either one of the two local

\(^{96}\) "Sinseh" is the local term used for Chinese physicians in Singapore; it is the Fujian dialect equivalent for xiansheng 先生. Though it literally means 'earlier-born' and was thus used to refer to an elder as a sign of respect, its literal meaning has almost been lost in Singapore today, and is instead used as an equivalent of 'mister'. Sinseh is also used to refer to teachers or any expert of any field. The Japanese equivalent, "sensei", is probably more commonly known.
TCM colleges or other state-recognized institutions in Mainland China. The fees payable for a basic degree costs the student at least S$40,000, considerably much more than an apprenticeship. Following that, registration with the TCMPB requires a non-refundable application fee, a registration fee, and subsequent yearly renewal fees for a practicing license.

All in all, the regulation serves, in Teacher Chin’s words, as “just another government ploy to extract more money from the people”. Teachers saw the new law as evidence of the state’s “all-pervasiveness (wukongburu 无孔不入)”. As members of the middle-class, teachers are generally quite well-to-do. Teacher Ang for example, owns two houses, a car, and had just bought another vehicle for his son. The price of a practicing license was therefore definitely within the teachers’ means; the administrative trouble of acquiring and renewing their TCM licenses probably hurt more than paying for them. In addition, teachers believe that the new laws only raised the public’s awareness of the TCM’s existence and efficacy but had not affected their clinics’ business in any way. This is because, they explained, their pool of clients consists mostly of regular patients or new ones who have heard of their reputation through word of mouth.

Economic consequences aside, Zhineng Qigong teachers are most miffed about the state’s loose classification of their TCM profession into either the acupuncturist or the physician. Many Chinese physicians I know perceive themselves to be specialists in areas beyond just acupuncture or general practice. Teacher Ng, for example, specializes in gynecology, especially in conception and in helping pregnant women manipulate the sex of their unborn babies. Teacher Ang on the other hand, specializes in ailments of the kidney and liver, particularly with related problems of male impotency and erectile dysfunction while Teacher Chin specializes in treating xinbing 心病 (ailments of the heart-mind) or psychological-emotional sicknesses. Being classified as mere acupuncturists or a general practitioner therefore does not reflect the teachers’ professional self-perception. I have not come across any teachers who display their new certificates in conspicuous places in their clinics or their houses. They are not
particularly proud of, and for some, even ashamed that their identities and status as Chinese physicians have to be sanctioned by the authorities. I witnessed an uncomfortable exchange between Teacher Ng and a new patient who asked to see her practitioner’s license. Teacher Ng’s response was straightforward and lacking in tact, but indicative of how she felt towards state intervention in her medical practice: “If you do not trust my skills, why did you consult me in the first place? Just go to another physician; whether or not I am good at what I do is not for the government to judge.”

Even though the TCM practitioners’ board includes a few Chinese physicians as committee members, many teachers feel that these individuals had either “defected to the other side” or were forced by circumstances to agree with the authorities’ ruling. The teachers’ decisions not to display their licenses are conscious forms of resistance against what they consider “unqualified people”. As Teacher Chin lamented, “Whether or not I'm a professional depends on what my patients say of me; my work involves treating sickness according to TCM principles and not pandering to western-educated bureaucrats.”

Teachers’ responses towards being boxed into state-defined categories were often articulated in relation to the “westernized” authorities’ inability or reluctance to understand the principles of TCM. The education that teachers received included not only classical Chinese thought, but in the process of studying the scientific method, they were also exposed to western philosophical traditions. Making comparisons between “western dualism” (xi fang er yuan zhuyi 西方二元主义) and “eastern monism” (dong fang yi yuan zhuyi 东方一元主义) often accompanied their explanation for their disagreements with the “western-educated bureaucrats”. Although their practice of TCM preceded that of Zhineng Qigong, most of their critiques were framed in the language of the latter. Although TCM and Zhineng Qigong principles share many similarities, the regular mention of phrases like “in Zhineng Qigong” or “like what Zhineng Qigong says” reveals the teachers’ preference for framing shared conceptions by both traditions in terms of qigong languages. For instance, I was talking to Teacher Chin about his treatment of patients with neurasthenia when he lamented over how little Singaporeans know about TCM’s long tradition of treating sicknesses of the heart-mind. He argued
that the authorities’ failure to acknowledge various forms of TCM specialization was not only due to their “western discrimination against TCM”, but also their belief that:

“Problems of the *jingshen* are psychological problems which can only be addressed through standardized psycho-somatic means (*xinshen guandao* 心身管道) and not by dealing with the unique constitution and value system of each person. Westerners have always thought that our souls exist in a different realm from our bodies. But if you think about it, that’s impossible, because when we die, we die as a whole. What is left of us is a form of energy that Zhineng Qigong calls *Hunyuan-qi*...some people are able to see *Hunyuan-qi* and think that they’ve encountered ghosts and deities. Of course these things don’t exist; the only world is the material world. The volition is a form of matter; in violent death a person’s volition operates at full vigor, and when it is suddenly extinguished where does it go? Matter cannot be destroyed, qi cannot be destroyed, what the westerners call the soul is just a religious misinterpretation of qi’s appearance....when we treat the so-called psychological problems of patients, we don’t make a distinction between his soul or body...what we treat is qi. The government doesn’t understand this; they believe that sicknesses of the heart-mind can only be treated by psychiatrists.”

The teachers’ tendencies to employ Zhineng Qigong concepts speak to the incursion of the state into the practice of TCM. Besides seeing the authenticity of TCM as being compromised by biomedical categories, teachers also experience a loss of an integral part of themselves to scrutiny by people who do not empathize with their sentiments towards a traditional Chinese art nor had the ability to appreciate the profundity of TCM. Their identification with Zhineng Qigong is perhaps a retreat to a private space where they can continue to preserve what they consider to be a Chinese tradition and where they possess the power to define their identities as Chinese intellectuals. A combination of this, their pride in being part of the Chinese intelligentsia, and their dislike of state intervention accounts for their utilization of Zhineng Qigong.
principles in their critiques of a singular adversary that bundles together the state, western culture, and dualistic modes of thought. Among the concepts that were used, monistic materialism and medical holism feature most prominently in the teachers’ critiques of the state’s misunderstanding of and prejudice against TCM and qigong.

The Body-conduit and the Practice of Qigong

Unlike the TCM Practitioners Act, there are no laws designed specifically to regulate the practice of qigong. Found in certain institutional practices however, are sets of categories which express the state’s interpretation of the nature and function of qigong. With the knowledge that no single institutional body has been established to manage qigong practices, I began my investigation into the state’s attitude towards qigong through moving from institutions that handle general practices to those that oversee the more specialized. Respondents from Group A informed me that the most direct encounter they had with government officials was with representatives from the Registry of Societies (ROS). Working from this piece of information, I started my interviews with representatives from the ROS, followed by those from the TCMPB, the National Sports Council and various other miscellaneous personnel from the MOH.

The ROS was set up as a wing of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to manage a database of what the state considers ‘legal societies’. Under the Societies Act, a “society” is defined as “any club, company, partnership or association of 10 or more persons”. Any such society is considered illegal and subject to legal actions under the Act if it does not register with the ROS (Societies Act "Interpretation" M.H.A., 2005). The Societies Act provides the registrar with the right to enter the premises of a society, search, and arrest any person or persons suspected of participating in illegal gathering. In addition, the registrar also has the right to reject any application for registration without providing the applicant with any reasons. This provision provides the state the legal means to put to a stop to any form of social movement that it considers a threat to what it calls “public order”. The power to do so, however, is not always exercised;
organizations which have been dissolved according to the Act consisted mostly of Chinese triads in the 70s and 80s and organized political movements in recent years. Under these conditions, any qigong organization in Singapore has to adhere to the stipulations of the Societies Act or risk dissolution.

The ROS classifies all registered societies into the following eight categories:

- Cultural & Social
- Old boys & students
- Trade & Professional
- Sports
- Political
- Racial & Communal
- Religious
- Welfare

Qigong organizations are, in the words of the Head of the ROS, “probably classified as sports”. The above classification system though publicly available, is not revealed to the applicant at the moment of application as “it is meant for internal use only”. The interviewee was not particularly candid when it came to other sensitive issues, for example, she declined to reveal if there were any qigong organizations that had been refused registration and for what reasons. What was concluded from the exchange was that qigong organizations, as long as they toe the line set by the Societies Act and maintain a set of internal organizational rules, are left alone to manage their own affairs.

"For some examples of how the Societies Act has been used, refer to Wee (1989: 11-13) and Rodan (1996b).

The interviewee was highly skilled in diplomatic rhetoric. Meticulous in her choice of words, she was careful not to over-commit herself to any position, hence the word ‘probably’.

Another example of the state’s relative neglect of qigong organization is its recent treatment of Falungong practitioners. The recent Falungong crackdown in China had also seen its practitioners take part in protests outside the Chinese embassy in Singapore. The state however, did not take any extreme measures against the local Falungong society, apart from arresting 15 protestors for illegal gathering in violation of the Societies Act (S.T., 2001a). The Falungong society continues to exist as a legal entity registered with the ROS under the name “The Falun Buddha Society”. This however, led to unpleasant...
To date, there are 14 qigong organizations registered with the ROS, including those prominent in China like Guolin Qigong Society and Yan Xin Qigong Association.

Group A is the only registered Zhineng Qigong organization with the ROS, although there are others which are related to Zhineng Qigong in terms of qigong principles (Hunyuan Qigong Association) or lineage (Hexiangzhuang Qigong Association). Group A was officially registered with the ROS in 1991, and is currently located in an industrial estate, occupying the ground floor of a multi-storey building co-owned by the chairman of the organization, Teacher Cheng. According to him, the society did not face any problems with the ROS when it applied for legal status in 1989, and it has since not encountered any need to liaise with the institution except for a change of address. Group B on the other hand, exists as a “research centre” under the wing of a TCM physician’s alumni organization, and is henceforth not required to register as a separate entity. Members of Group B have therefore even fewer contacts with the authorities regarding qigong matters.

Besides the ROS, I figured that the TCMPB, given its regulatory function over TCM practices, might possess some jurisdictional powers over qigong activities. However, an interview with the Executive Secretary of the board revealed otherwise. In forceful and tersely articulated words, she said: “the practice of qigong is not a prescribed area of TCM practice under the TCM Practitioners Act and the TCM Practitioners Regulations. Qigong instructors are not TCM practitioners.” Qigong malpractice is not a concern of the TCMPB as well, as qigong is “a form of physical exercise, and not a TCM practice.” My respondents from both Group A and B thus do not have to report to the TCMPB in their capacities as Zhineng Qigong practitioners at all. Finally, with a referral from the TCMPB, a check with the National Sports Council (NSC) showed that qigong organizations do not have anything to do with the council,

exchanges with The Singapore Buddhist Federation which accused the Falungong practitioners for masquerading as Buddhist practitioners. In spite of the setbacks the organization has faced around the world and in Singapore, The Falun Buddha Society is pretty much free to continue with its practices in Singapore, as one can find their members roaming around distributing pamphlets that accuse the Chinese authorities of the inhumane treatment of Falungong members.
unless the latter chooses to register as a member in order to obtain assistance in organizing activities. The chairman of the council confirmed again, in an interview with a local newspaper, that qigong is merely a sport, "just like yoga or aqua aerobics", without any "regulatory body in Singapore" (S.T., 2001b).

The 'sport' or 'physical exercise' status of qigong, together with the lack of any medical regulatory framework, echoes the state’s general treatment of qigong as a traditional Chinese practice that "promotes physical fitness" (S.T., 1999). As can be seen, the shared assumption held by all three institutions is that qigong is merely a physical sport. Besides these institutionally defined boundaries, from the ways in which qigong is represented in mainstream media, one could also find qigong being represented as a Chinese tradition without any references, except in terms of it being a sport, to its healthcare uses.

The physical and the otherwise

The classification of qigong as a sport implies that its methods only work on the physical dimensions of practitioners. This excludes it from possibly having any direct effects on the ghost except through the shell. Compared to acupuncture, qigong does not utilize any 'material' medium that punctures the bodily casing; it is thus not considered part of TCM and henceforth requires no regulation from the TCMPB. Qigong also does not require the use of ‘material’ medication and is henceforth free from the Medicines and the Poisons Act. All these remove the TCMPB, the MOH, and the ROS from any duties of overseeing qigong activities. The voluntary nature of membership with the NSC also means that there is no legal obligation for qigong as a sport to maintain a clearly defined standard of practice. All these institutional expressions of the body-conduit distinction between the physical and the non-physical have indirectly granted qigong the freedom from the surveillance of the state.
The physical vs. non-physical distinction that is used to classify qigong is not only reflected in its status in Singapore, but also in its medical classification in mainstream biomedical discourse. This distinction can be seen in the biomedical reading of possible side-effects and malpractice of qigong. Qigong deviation (see Chen, N., 2003 for details on the symptoms and treatment of qigong deviation in China) is called “qigong psychosis” and listed as a “culturally bounded syndrome” by the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (APA, 1994). This classification of qigong deviation as qigong psychosis, though seemingly a technical renaming, indicates an emphasis on the psychological aspects of the ailment rather than comprehending it in qigong terms. The APA has not only failed to acknowledge qigong orthodoxy but has also replaced its principles with a mind-body dualism. Qigong deviation, a direct translation of the Chinese term qigong piancha 气功偏差, through presuming the existence of qigong orthodoxy, takes the arts’ side-effects and malpractice as results of deviation from prescribed principles. “Psychosis” on the other hand, classifies these side-effects as culturally bounded psychological phenomena without paying dues to the various etiological, symptomatic and experiential aspects of qigong deviation sui generis. As understood in qigong theories in general, qigong deviation results from the misdirection of qi in the meridians; its symptoms include loss of appetite, lethargy, aches, inattentiveness, and in the extreme cases, hallucinations. It appears that the biomedical interpretation has latched onto the conspicuous psychological dimension of its symptoms (e.g. inattentiveness and hallucination), but has ignored qigong nosology that transcends discrete psycho-somatic dichotomies.

My attempts to contact local health authorities regarding qigong psychosis drew a blank. Officials and healthcare workers from the MOH responded in various ways. Some did not reply to my queries, others failed to understand what I was asking for, a few referred me to the TCMPB while the rest simply said that they do not or have not treated any such cases. It is unfortunate that I am unable to confirm one of my observations of qigong’s discursive status, that the health benefits it offers are considered physical while its negative effects, psychological. Although I am unable to address the state’s psychological interpretation (if any) of qigong malpractice, qigong’s...
status as a physical exercise proves to be quite salient in mainstream discourse, both of the state and of the laity.

Zhineng Qigong teachers’ points of view

Zhineng Qigong practitioners’ reactions towards the art’s freedom from direct institutional surveillance are quite mixed. On one hand, the lack of recognition from the state makes it much more difficult for practitioners to propagate what they consider a cheap and effective therapeutic method. On the other hand, this freedom from state intervention has removed any need to adhere to a centralized definition of qigong orthodoxy. Although practitioners, especially the teachers, yearn for the standardization, systematization and scientization of qigong principles, they believe that these should not be an exclusive right of the state, but the product of the qigong intellectual community.

As Teacher Ang explained:

“It has always been the government’s habit to poke its nose into the people’s affairs. I am not saying that this is not the right thing to do, but before you do that, you need to first understand issues from the people’s points of views. If it is inconceivable that TCM physicians get to define the efficacy of western medicine, why should western doctors be given the powers to tell us how to practice TCM? Unlike TCM, qigong lacks unity; there are so many different styles out there that no one can say that there is one single right way to practice qigong. However, Zhineng Qigong is the best that I have come across so far, because we have integrated the essence of various traditional arts and modern science. Only we know how to do it because we have experiences in all of them; those western-educated politicians should consult us before trying anything, don’t just try to impose western dualism onto qigong.”
The lack of regulation of qigong practices in Singapore results in a situation where Zhineng Qigong organizations and their members operate quite independently from the institutional policies of the state. The dualistic epistemological foundation of those policies has also provided Zhineng Qigong teachers with more scholarly tools to legitimize the practice of Zhineng Qigong. This is achieved through either explicitly demonizing dualistic modes of thought as an accomplice of the state, or implicitly appropriating them as a necessary characteristic that makes scientific qigong a superior form of knowledge. Even though Zhineng Qigong teachers habitually bundle together notions of "westerners", "western-educated", and "western medicine" in their critiques of the state, their employment of such terms are often selective. Certain aspects of what teachers consider the virtuous methodological aspects of science are often dissociated from the state and attached to the "advanced (xianjin 先进)" nature of Zhineng Qigong to be employed against the cultural biases of both modern science and the Singaporean state.

In the selective appropriation of scientific categories to raise Zhineng Qigong's status, Zhineng Qigong teachers increasingly speak of reality in much more dualistic terms compared to instances when they were making political critiques. Although Zhineng Qigong is grounded in bodily models that depart from the body-conduit, it does not mean that practitioners are only capable of, prefer, or adhere to monistic and holistic conceptions. As Ots (1994: 119) notes, "the argument that traditional Chinese medicine does not share the Western dichotomy of psyche and soma, and for this reason, that its outlook has always been holistic, is truly a cross-cultural misunderstanding: we simply employ different mind-body models". Zhineng Qigong teachers do at times utilize terms that resemble mind-body distinctions, including images that mirror the body-conduit. The concept that most approximates such images is the phrase quti 躯体, or "shell-thing". The word "qu", besides referring to the body, is also used to denote "carcass", "torso" or "trunk" resembling much more, when compared to routi or renti, the German "korper". Given that "ti" refers to anything with a perceivable form, "quti" can be used to denote something that looks like a shell. In several discussions of Zhineng Qigong theory, both in practice and in the manuals, quti is often used in contrast to phrases like
Although there are subtle differences between the three phrases, when used in conjunction with quti, they generally refer to a parallel Cartesian conception of the mind. The “ghost in the shell” is thus almost completely replicated by the employment of the word quti to refer to the physical aspects of the self that encases personhood. The discursive distinctions between the physical, non-physical, inner, and outer dimensions of the person, are therefore not always rejected for their association with the West or the state, but are at times appropriated by Zhineng Qigong teachers, rather unreflexively, for three main purposes:

- To systematize and scientize qigong theory and to utilize the prestige of science to legitimize qigong
- To distance Zhineng Qigong from other arts.
- To explain and transmit the rationales behind specific qigong techniques

Qigong Scientism

In his discussion on the “difficult romance of qigong with science” in China, Xu (1999) compares between two dominant discourses about qigong’s efficacy: the psychosomatic discourse which accounts for qigong’s healing powers through its mystical traditionality, and the rational discourse that attempts explanations within a scientific framework (see also Chen, N., 2003; Palmer, 2007). These two camps, however, are not mutually exclusive in practice; Zhineng Qigong can be both scientific and traditional at the same time. This is most clearly expressed by Zhineng Qigong teachers’ beliefs that Zhineng Qigong is scientific because it is traditional. In their attempts to find common grounds between modern science and tradition, Zhineng Qigong teachers ended up redefining the scientific method. The “scientific because it is traditional” line of argument is possible because of the teachers’ unique understanding of
jingyan zhuyi 经验主义 or empiricism, what they consider to be the defining method of modern science.

Teachers treat empiricism as a method or a school of thought that considers knowledge derived from observation as being more representative of reality than that acquired from purely rational means. According to this definition, Zhineng Qigong is scientific because it is a product of experiences accumulated over a few thousand years; making it “more empirical than western science”. The teachers’ conception of ‘experience’ or ‘jingyan 经验’ includes the historical, practical, and personal aspects of the processes of accumulating knowledge (cf. Farquhar, 1994). This conception allows them to emphasize the greater amount of time employed, the “tested-ness” of theories, and the importance of involving one’s entire person-body in “Chinese science”, from which Zhineng Qigong has inherited the jinghua 精华 or essence. Empirical methods adopted by traditional Chinese practices therefore differ from that of science in having an experimental field not bounded by the ephemeral, reality-estranged, and impersonal limitations of the laboratory. As argued by Teacher Ang,

“Holism (zhengtiguan 整体观), the main difference between eastern and western philosophy, is derived from observations in non-artificially-created conditions or real-life situations. Scientific empiricism, with its method of isolating variables in controlled environments, produces quick results and clear causal explanations, but its main weakness is the failure to consider a lot of other variables. This is why western medicine often results in side-effects. Our form of empiricism, in comparison, requires a longer period of time because we’re dealing with the real world, which has many streams, rivers, and lakes which are interconnected; any disturbance to any single tributary sets off ripples in the others, and that’s why when we treat patients, we always think of him/her in relation to the environment. This is what I mean by holism. Both methods, however, are similar in that they depend on observations to inform their theories. The problem with western science is that it has yet to address its reductionistic
tendencies while TCM and qigong empiricism had already done so through our accumulation of experiences over time, but we share many similar theories. For example, we came to understand the powers of the *yishi* over the *quti* long before they started prioritizing reason over desires. We also have concepts about external evils (*waixie*) and how to protect against them by cultivating our protective-qi (*weiqi*) before they warned of germs in the environment and taking vitamins to strengthen our immune systems...we have also been treating psychological problems or what we call sicknesses of the heart-mind before they started studying the person-state of sentiency (*jingshen*) in psychology. You can see that we’re very similar in many ways, it’s just that traditional Chinese language express these ideas differently and unfortunately, too metaphorically...If science involves testing theories so as to find out how the real world works, our methods are as scientific, if not more scientific than western science.”

From the excerpt above, one can clearly see how dualisms and the body-conduit are replicated in Teacher Ang’s defense of “Chinese science”. His take on the *yishi* over the *quti* expresses a mind over body prioritization, his mentioning of *waixie* and *weiqi* conceptualizes the human body as a container with a layer that protects the inner from the outer, and his comparison of psychology with the treatment of sicknesses of the heart-mind draws a distinction between illnesses of the material body and that of the immaterial mind.

Although teachers generally uphold the virtues of science and have adopted scientific languages in their explanation of Zhineng Qigong logic, qigong theories are still considered much more superior. This practice is not only because of methodological considerations or part of their promulgative strategies, but of the pride in qigong’s Chinese roots vis-à-vis science as a “western” invention. In such instances, the epistemological foundations of science are explicated and denounced as *cultural biases*. For example, in his reading of Joseph Needham’s *Science and Civilization in China*
Teacher Ang argued that although the author did bring attention to the existence of scientific methods in Chinese intellectual history, Needham was wrong in suggesting that the existence of Daoist philosophy explains why science did not emerge in China. On the contrary, Teacher Ang added, it was a failure to "penetrate our science buried within primitive metaphorical languages" that resulted in Needham's interpretive bias. To further support his position, he argued that Einstein's theory of relativity was "based on a qualitative approach towards reality, a worldview that Chinese philosophy has always adopted. If Einstein's work is considered a scientific breakthrough, then the Yijing should also be considered a scientific classic too. The westerners started to accept that time and space are relative only recently but our Daoist and Buddhist philosophy already spoke about these things long ago. Science is till young...it's only been around for a few hundred years so it still has some distance to go before reaching absolute truth. English is also a young language and it is much more rigorous because it is it developed together with science but this is also why it is unsuitable for explaining qigong theory. Qigong theory can help science achieve its ends, and scientific methods can help qigong researchers better explicate qigong's profound secrets. The main contributions of science are its methods, technology and concepts, but science must deal with some of its biases before becoming a truly neutral way of accumulating knowledge. The modern Chinese language has also incorporated many scientific words into its vocabulary, making our research into qigong much more systematic and precise. However, we must be mindful of not importing ideological elements into our research when we use scientific methods, especially certain ideas about creationism and deism."

All in all, through their selective marrying of Zhineng Qigong and science, teachers conclude that modern science, with its methodological rigor and technological superiority, serves as a tool that can help prove the existence and powers of qi while
qigong, a set of techniques that engages qi in its own terms, contains the *experiences* and *theories* to inform and improve the scientific method. Students, on the other hand, were almost silent about the issue of qigong scientism, either because they were totally uninterested in what they call “such useless questions” or that they believe that since they lack the required educational prerequisites, they are unable to make any judgments on the matter. My attempts at getting students to talk about the issues that teachers rose thus almost always drew incomprehension or refusals to make any comments.

**Zhineng Qigong as a non-physical art**

Instead of speaking about the person as a whole, the teachers’ attempt to explicate the workings of Zhineng Qigong further results in a compartmentalization of the person into his/her physical “shell-thing” and non-physical components. This dichotomy has been used to distinguish Zhineng Qigong from other art and legitimize its appeal as a set of techniques that trains the volition as compared to other “unsophisticated physical” sports like Taijiquan, body-building, and “external hard qigong (*waijia ying qigong* 外家硬气功)**. In Teacher Yang’s words, “Taijiquan should not call itself Taiji Qigong at all; it is not a form of qigong...it merely trains the *quti*”. Through the debasement of other arts, the dualistic comparisons between the *yishi* and the *quti* are used by practitioners to argue for Zhineng Qigong’s superiority. It soon became apparent to me that even though Zhineng Qigong postulates a holistic form of materialism, practitioners had similarly adopted a parallel Cartesian prioritizing of the ‘mind’ over the ‘body’, as if techniques of the *quti* are vulgar arts compared with those that cultivate the *yishi*. This debasing of the *quti*-arts can be seen in Teacher Yang’s statement:

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100 Teachers generally make a distinction between internal soft qigong and external hard qigong schools. They consider those used in Shaolin martial arts like The Golden Bell Cover (*jinzhongzhao* 金钟罩) and The Iron Cloak (*tiebushan* 铁布衫) as hard qigong that directs qi to the skin to protect the martial artist against impacts while those from the Wudang Daoist schools as much more sophisticated soft qigong that nurtures internal strengths.
“You see those street performers like to perform hard qigong like stabbing themselves in the throats with spears. These are just tricks of the trade that anyone can perform after a few years of training; they are lower-levels qigong (xiaceng qigong 下層氣功能) that train the *quti* while the higher level ones train the *yishi*. These people, just like those body-builders, will end up having a lot of health problems when they grow old...it’s a good thing you’ve stopped doing external martial arts, if not your fingers will start trembling once you hit 40. Training the tendons, bones and skin is important, that’s why we have them in *pengqi guanding* as the basics, but they must be done together with the training of the volition. Zhineng Qigong is an advanced and scientific form of qigong because it incorporates the essence of both internal and external martial arts while those that still stick to the old ways of doing things like to separate the two methods. A lot of western sports are *quti*-skills which are easy to pick up, like how you told me it took you just three years to get your black-belt while you’re still at the basics after doing Wing Chun for five years. The higher-level ones always focus on internal-qi, which cannot be done without first training the *yishi*. The *yishi* dictates the *quti* through qi; without our *yishi*, a human being is merely a piece of lifeless fat meat.”

**Transmission of Zhineng Qigong**

Dualistic categories also play a pivotal role in the transmission of Zhineng Qigong techniques. A good teacher, argued Teacher Ang, must not only know qigong principles and methods well, she/he must be able to empathize with the students’ educational and cultural background. Teachers understand that most students already possess a physical vs. non-physical conception when dealing with human ontology, and

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1. Wing Chun Kungfu or *yongchunquan* 咏春拳, a 300-year-old southern Chinese martial arts, is considered by many to be an internal school that utilizes internal-strength, finesse, and scientific logic instead of ‘external’ brute strength. It has thus been hailed as a combative art most fit for females.
hence teachers have to utilize a similar approach instead of trying to overhaul the students’ conceptions. Teachers therefore often resort to speaking in terms of quti versus yishi or the physiological (wuli 物理) versus the psychological (xinli 心理) in order to get their messages across. For example, in pengqi guanding, the self is modeled explicitly in the form of a bottle, where the practitioner gathers qi and feeds it into the top of the opening. This body-conduit model was always used by Teacher Yang to teach pengqi guanding, where he represented the person as a glass bottle with the baihui acupoint as its opening. During the session, as Teacher Yang lifted his arm over his head and brought them down aiming towards his skull with the palms facing inwards, he uttered the following:

“Imagine that you’re cupping red-colored water in your palms and pouring it into the mouth of the bottle, only the water remains in your hand and only the water enters the bottle. Let all the dirty stuff slip through your fingers, don’t bring in all the bacteria and viruses, especially bird flu and mad-cow disease, let the bottle remain clean and let the protective-qi on the surface of the skin protect you against external evils”

With each repetition of the movement, Teacher Yang changed the color of the water, from red to blue to yellow, and the types of impurities, from HIV virus, SARS virus, to spit, in order to, as he explained, help students sustain the their attention. The adoption of the bottle image draws discrete distinctions between that which exists within and outside of the practitioner, but in replacement of the human skin, acupoints are considered the potential entry points for external harmful elements. Teacher Yang’s rendering of pengqi guanding is just one of the several examples of how Cartesian conceptions are combined with Zhineng Qigong principles in transmitting the art.
Conclusion

Although the state’s Cartesianism does lead to certain institutional practices that inhibit the practice of qigong, the resulting marginalization of the art also provides considerable freedom to its practitioners. The abilities of the teachers to fashion teaching methods for specific functions, to utilize Zhineng Qigong principles as a representation of Chinese tradition against the westernized state, and to utilize the status of modern science to promulgate Zhineng Qigong’s sophistication, reflects the degree of adaptability in their struggle for legitimacy. These legitimation processes involve allying oneself with certain factions while demonizing the rest through selective appropriation of holistic and dualistic epistemologies. When arguing against the cultural biases of the state and modern science, Zhineng Qigong teachers employ holistic languages while dualistic conceptions are used when they attempt to elevate Zhineng Qigong’s status. The institutional marginalization-liberation of qigong practices coupled with Zhineng Qigong teachers’ appropriation of Cartesian conceptions show that Cartesianism does not necessarily weaken the practice of Zhineng Qigong but has instead provided Zhineng Qigong teachers with more justifications to stick to the disciplinary demands of the art (see chapter five). All these indicate that at the level of practice, holistic and dualistic epistemological systems do not necessarily clash with one another.

It is interesting to note that the teachers’ alliance with modern science is a strategy that employs the virtues of science, yet they did not attempt to associate themselves or Zhineng Qigong to any possible redeeming characteristics of the state. This is particularly self-defeating because Zhineng Qigong students and other potential Zhineng Qigong practitioners participate actively in the discursive practices of the state, often justifying their life-decisions with state-defined ideological elements (see chapter six). Marketing Zhineng Qigong to Singaporeans can therefore be made much easier if teachers are willing to package the art with state rhetoric. Their reluctance to identify themselves with the political elite has a lot to do with the teachers’ personal political experiences as marginalized Chinese intellectuals and political activists, and their discontent with the current state of local politics and society. The next chapter examines
these issues by addressing the relationships between the teachers’ life-histories, their habitus, and Zhineng Qigong epistemology.
CHAPTER 5:

EPISTEMOLOGY AS HETERODOXY

Introduction

Even though it is often hard to distinguish between Zhineng Qigong teachers' motivations and justifications for their own conduct, I believe that principles captured by crisp Zhineng Qigong concepts are more than scholarly defenses for the teachers' actions but are also indispensable in the maintenance of their habitus. By habitus I am referring to the semi-bodily and quasi-conscious manners in which the teachers behave in their capacities as healers, instructors, intellectuals, and other roles that they play in everyday life. The habitus of Zhineng Qigong teachers, a marginalized status group of Chinese intellectuals, has a lot to do with their adaptation to the political circumstances of Singapore. When juxtaposed with the attitudes of Zhineng Qigong students, who in many ways represent the average Chinese Singaporean of their age group, the teachers' worldviews can be considered, in Bourdieu's terms, heterodoxical. What truly stands out as a central defining unorthodox trait among Zhineng Qigong teachers is the highly measured manner in which they engage in self-cultivation within nondescript acts of everyday life, or habitual practice that requires an extraordinary amount of self-discipline.
Self-discipline

“The secret to health is regulation-regularity; you should have regulation-regularity in all aspects of life, you should have regular sleeping hours, you should not engage in excessive sexual activities, you should have fixed timings for meals. Everything you do should involve your volition, which is what we mean by a qigong state. Actually qigong can be practiced anytime…”

: -- Teacher Chin.

The word “jilù 纪律” or “discipline” is almost never mentioned in Zhineng Qigong texts or practices; in its place lies the central concept of “guilù 规律” or “regulation-regularity”. In Pang Ming’s “Basics of Zhineng Qigong” (Pang, 1992a), I found no trace of the word jilù at all but guilù was mentioned over 160 times. I noticed the same trend during my time in field; regardless of whether it was within or beyond the training sessions, it was taken-for-granted that it is in the practice of guilù that lies the secret to health, to a higher quality of life, and to other extraordinary abilities. Although there are subtle differences among the concepts, shared between the English word ‘discipline’, jilù and guilù is a common emphasis on the exercise of the volition over and against the self.

I realized the amount of self-discipline required in the practice of Zhineng Qigong when I was reading a speech given by Pang Ming off a website. Part of the speech also contained Pang’s conversation with a patient who was so weakened by
diabetes that he could not get out of bed without succumbing to giddiness and nausea. Taking his Zhineng Qigong teacher’s advice, the student conducted his training in bed: once in the morning immediately after he awoke, and once before bed at night. Exercising his niantou of all the movements while reciting the instructions under his breath, the student reported that after each session he could feel ripples of warm sensations coursing through his entire person-body while “purging cold perspirations” from his forehead to the sole of his feet. He subsequently felt well enough to resume his normal daily routines, and gave his two thumbs up (accompanied by a wide grin in a testimonial photograph) for the “miraculous efficacy of Zhineng Qigong (zhineng qigong de shenxiao 智能气功的神效)”.

Intrigued at this possibility, I related the testimony to Teacher Ang, who nonchalantly pointed out that what I had read is the standard method employed by patients suffering from paralysis: “As long as you’re still sober, there’s no reason why you can’t practice qigong. If you’re interested, I can teach you a set of techniques that you can use while sleeping...” I politely declined, giving the excuse that I have yet to master the fundamentals, that it is better to “do things step by step (anbu jiuban 按部就班)”. My real reason, however, was that I was afraid that once I had learnt how to do it, I would have no reason whatsoever not to do so, and practicing qigong while sleeping was a little too much. As I acclimatized to the qigong regime, I grew to appreciate the amount of discipline it takes to become the ideal Zhineng Qigong practitioner. I also started to detect the resemblances between the model of the ideal practitioner and what the teachers were trying to live up to. Their relentless devotion to self-cultivation, I concluded, is more than an instrumental pursuit of health or intelligence; deeply embedded in their everyday conduct are sets of personal-ethical-cosmological obligations and objectives which when actualized, empower and inhibit them

102 I subsequently followed up with Teacher Ang regarding the similarities between Zhineng Qigong’s ‘sleeping techniques’ and that of lucid dreaming (see Steven, 1987). I concluded that although both sets emphasize the management of the volition in dreams, the purposes are quite different. Zhineng Qigong’s intent is to manage the flow of qi, while catharsis serves as the objective of acquiring lucidity. The notion and technique of catharsis is obviously another derivative of a Cartesian mind-body dualism.
simultaneously. One of the origins of this mode of conduct, I traced, is found in Zhineng Qigong’s volitional theory.

The significance of the volitional theory lies in its demand for the exercise of mindfulness over one’s own conduct, belief, and sensations at all times; this is known in Zhineng Qigong as the ‘qigong state (qigong zhuangtai 气功状态). As prescribed by Teacher Chin, everything that one does should involve the volition and be informed by proper teaching directed towards a measurement and correction of any deviation from regulation-regularity. Directing one’s volition inwards, according to Teacher Ang, represents a unique mode of thought found in eastern tradition. This, he argued, can be inferred from the word “xing 省”, or ‘reflection’, a character made up of shao 少 (few/little/less) and mu 目 (sight/see/eye). This analysis of the characters suggests that reflection implies the simultaneous act of shutting out external stimuli (by closing one’s eyes) and the training of one’s volition inwards. This, Teacher Ang claimed, explains why Zhineng Qigong exercises unlike Taijiquan, are always done with the eyes closed. Although Teacher Ang’s dissection of 省 was etymologically incorrect, this was just one of the many ways in which the powers of the volition were articulated and emphasized. With the shift from the utilization of shen* (sentiency-knowledge) to yi (volition) in Zhineng Qigong theories, a much more “scientific”, intellectualized and graphical representation is used to emphasize the volition’s directedness, resembling to a large extent, the phenomenological definition of consciousness (see Scott, 1998). This allows teachers to articulate more clearly, the projections required during training, and for students to construct lucid images in aid of their exercises. Most importantly, this new directional model allocates much more responsibility to the volition’s ability to direct itself at itself and towards the manipulation of variables that exists between Heaven and Earth. When actualized in a practitioner’s everyday practice of self-

103 I find it difficult, given my role as the participant observer, to adhere to this. I have thus, rather absurdly on hindsight, kept one eye open and the other shut during training.

104 The word 省 was derived not from 少 or 小 (small) but from 目, a pictorial representation of grass, and 目 or eye. The word thus originally referred to ‘looking attentively at the grass’, i.e. ‘observing/observation’ rather than ‘inward reflection’.
cultivation, the volitional theory subjects the practitioner to an all-pervasive regime of self-imposed discipline.

The concern with agency in European thought can be traced to deistic and theistic cosmology, where both the Greek and Hebraic-Christian traditions took creation as the work of God or gods, whereas in China it was understood as something impersonal (Blair, 1993). In the social sciences, agency is often equated with conscious, rational, and willed action; it is a residue of a central concern in modernity with the freewill overcoming external limitations (Scott, 1998) with the designation of individual responsibility as one of the major consequences (Kirmayer, 1988). Without a common cultural-historical milieu, it would be rash to expect an emergence of a similar conception of agency in Chinese traditions. I remember asking Teacher Ang about the role of freewill or “zizhu yishi 自主意识” in Zhineng Qigong theory, to which he responded with a blank look and a “what's that?” Although Zhineng Qigong principles do not replicate the notion of agency, when it comes to allocating responsibility, the individual is expected to bear a large portion of blame for his or her failure in various aspects of life. Without having to contend with the Cartesian missing link between matter and spirit, the locus of control for the individual volition grows larger with the increasing incorporation of the volitional theory in daily practices. Keeping in the mind the maxim “should implies can”, life itself for the Zhineng Qigong practitioner becomes an arena for the exercise of mindful control, where every single action, emotion, and thought can and should be subjected to management. With the intellectualist teachers embracing Zhineng Qigong cosmology as an absolute reality, it comes as no surprise that they are the ones who subject themselves to the volitional theory’s prescribed regime of discipline.
Chinese medical terms are “notoriously vague and polysemous” (Hsu, 1999: 18); Zhineng Qigong terms are similarly referentially vague and contextually flexible. The notion of “lianxi 练习”, a phrase used in Zhineng Qigong and everyday talk acquires a range of meanings over different contexts. To many teachers, lianxi refers to ‘training’ within formal qigong sessions but also refers to the ‘practices’ of everyday lives. I once attempted to discuss Bourdieu’s idea of practical logic with Teacher Ang, having translated the term ‘practice’ as “shijian 实践”\(^{105}\). However, Teacher Ang interpreted this as the operationalization of scientifically verified theories within a controlled environment like the laboratory. This disparity between my conception and that of Teacher Ang’s reflects Farquhar’s observation that the Chinese term shijian is “much more intentional and intrinsically formal than the rather gritty practice, which is "theory’s" passive partner in English” (Farquhar, 1994: 2). Lianxi on the other hand, is a phrase that encompasses both formal training and informal conduct, revealing a lack of clear distinction between theory and practice. Compared to Farquhar’s research on TCM in clinical encounters (Farquhar, 1994), the absence of an institutionalized orthodoxy and clearly defined functions and professional roles in Zhineng Qigong accounts for the lack of specific spatial and temporal delimitation of the art’s applications. In Teacher Ng’s words, “a person’s behavior is a form of lianxi\(^{106}\), improper behavior indicates insufficient accomplishment and competency in qigong”\(^{107}\). To lianxi is then to mean more than participating in synchronized motions or volitional projections on misty Sunday mornings, but to literally, practice living a life prescribed by Zhineng Qigong principles.

\(^{105}\) Chinese translations of Bourdieu’s ‘practical logic’ generally agree with the usage of ‘shijian luoji 实践逻辑’, and given that it was an academic discussion I was holding with Teacher Ang, I had decided on ‘shijian 实践’ in keeping with convention.

\(^{106}\) Sometimes, lianxi was used interchangeably with shixi 实习, which injects a more ‘realistically applied’ flavor to the notion of training.

\(^{107}\) Her exact words were: “yigeren de xingwei jieshi yizhong lianxi, xingwei bu jiandian ye daibiao gongli buzu 一个人的行为就是一种练习，行为不检点也代表功力不足”.

125
Although Zhineng Qigong teachers' interpretation of 'practice' and application of the volitional theory potentially explains their will-full conduct, their practice of self-cultivation remains unaccounted for. The volitions' ability to directly affect the material world together with the idea of practice-as-training could very well lead to volitional effort directed towards others instead of the self. It would therefore be partial to reduce the teachers' self-disciplinary habitus to epistemological origins; there are other less visible social and political factors involved. In the following sections of this chapter, I show how the political experiences of Zhineng Qigong teachers contribute to the channeling of their volitional effort towards themselves in the everyday minute acts of self-regulation and how Zhineng Qigong principles help legitimize such behaviors. These details will be separated into two parts. The first part, on the teachers' life-histories, examines the relationship between the teachers' encounters with the Singaporean state, their practice of Zhineng Qigong, and their self-disciplinary habitus. The second part describes this habitus in action and the role that Zhineng Qigong epistemology plays in the teachers' attitudes towards religion, education and in their ethical and emotional conduct.
Part 1: Political experiences and Habitus

Politics and Self-discipline

"The word 'society' can never be explained clearly; instead of arguing over it, why not try changing it?"

: -- Teacher Ang.

Like any Chinese medical clinic, Teacher Ang’s smells strongly of a mixture of herbal and animal extracts. A set of calligraphic writings stands out obtrusively on the glass door, welcoming patients with a rhythmic reminder that the strengthening of oneself forms the foundation of national solidarity ("ziqiang qiguo 自强齐国"). Right at the back of the clinic sits a little room where Teacher Ang stores his books and gadgets, and where he dodges from treating his patients under the pretext of working on his academic research. An old computer still running Windows 2000 hums and clicks in the background, as the chatter between the physicians and the patients in the consultation area moves from topics about health, pop culture, to current affairs. Besides medical instruments like disposable acupunctural needles, an old sphygmomanometer, shiny acumoxa bottles, and the necessary beds and stools for the patients, the whole clinic is flanked with shelves hanging from the walls, stacked mostly with Chinese books on medicine. Occasionally, the undeniable scent of opium would escape from the backroom and penetrate the whole clinic, accompanied by mysterious smiles from both Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng. What truly struck me the very first time I entered that little

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108 Opium is a banned drug in Singapore, but with connections, especially that of Teacher Ang’s, getting a small amount for medical use was not difficult at all. My late grandfather had a regular supply of opium as well, which the authorities knew very well of, but chose to turn a blind eye because of his age. As a child, I grew familiar with the smell of fumes emanating from burning opium, and was thus quite quick to ask Teacher Ang and Ng about it. Although the two teachers did not voluntarily reveal what they were burning, they were nonetheless quite candid about it when queried.
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backroom was not the mess on the table, the rustic tinge of the walls, or the smell of drugs, but a bronze side profile sculpture of Chairman Mao hanging on the wall. I later discovered that the meanings of the calligraphic writings were more than mere doorway aesthetics to Teacher Ang, and that Chairman Mao's figure was a subtle and silent preface to Teacher Ang's often silenced political aspirations, his cosmological worldview, and most of all, life philosophy.

Teacher Ang, a Cantonese, was born in Singapore in 1942, the year the Japanese Imperial Army defeated the British troops on the island and renamed it "Syonan-To 昭南岛" or "Radiant Island of the South". Teacher Ang was raised by what he described as "a merciless traditional Chinese father", who with his mother migrated to Singapore from Guangzhou, China, before the Second World War, fleeing poverty like many others from the southern parts of the mainland. Teacher Ang grew up on a vegetable farm in the northern end of Singapore together with two brothers and four sisters. After
the war, his father gradually managed to carve a decent living out of his plot of land, and went about making sure that his children received the basic education which he himself could not. As the second youngest among his siblings, Teacher Ang often tagged along with his elder brothers and sisters whenever they went out to the streets to visit professional story-tellers, a primary source of entertainment in his time. This and regular interactions with his elders who had survived the war imprinted in his memory stories about the Chinese people's tumultuous history, from the battles of the Spring and Autumn era to the struggles against the Eight Nation Alliance to the persecution of Chinese Singaporeans by Japanese troops. Teacher Ang's intimate identification with Chinese history was further entrenched in his schooling days, of which he spent a large part of in vernacular Chinese schools, most of them set up by Chinese clan associations or financed by the British colonial government. The lessons on classical Chinese thought and history, he reminisced, were his favorite of all, and to this day, he still possesses the yellowed and doodled Chinese textbooks that he used to carry around when he was in primary school.

When China was in its post-1949 years, Teacher Ang was just a teenager. However, he reminisced, he was already deeply influenced by Marxist and Maoist ideas, and eagerly devoured whatever bits and pieces of news he could find about the progress of communism on the mainland. He excelled in his studies, and began to develop an interest in the scientific method, which I believe has partially to do with a curious lack of religiosity in his family members. Out of his siblings, he was one of the two, in addition to his elder sister, to have made it to university, where his communist ideals and Chinese intellectualism developed into full bloom. As an active member of the student union at

With the influx of popular entertainments like television and radio, these story-tellers can no longer be found in Singapore. According to my elder relatives, these story-tellers served an important function of educating young children about Chinese literary favorites like The Water Margin (shuihuzhuan) or The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (sanguo yanyi), as they read and acted out the dialogues and battle scenes from the novels. Sticks of incense were used as timers, and audiences were expected to pay a token fee once a stick burns out.

As Van Der Kroef (1964: 97) argues, Chinese schools' "general educational character was focused on a resurgent China and a blend of traditional cultural chauvinism and modern nationalism directed their entire teaching process towards creating a highly charged atmosphere of youthful militancy."
the Nanyang University, Teacher Ang often led his schoolmates in fund-raising campaigns which provided him with the opportunity to rub shoulders with what he called, with a twinkle in his eye, “professional activists”, of which included members from the Malayan Communist Party. It was also through his extra-curricula activities that he met his future wife, Teacher Ng, whom he described as “sharing the same aspirations (zhitong daohe 志同道合)”.

Teacher Ang together with the other teachers were members of a marginalized Chinese intelligentsia and had always been patriots of sorts, making them a truly once-vocal minority. Several scholars have observed that Singaporeans, especially those from the middle-class, are chronically apathetic towards politics (Chua & Tan, 1999: 142; Leong, 1999: 207), be it concerning the fairness of government policies, the neutrality of the media, the rights to freedom of speech, or the independence of civil society. However, political sterility has not always defined Singaporean society; public demonstrations during the 1940s to the 1960s were not an extraordinary sight at all111. Teacher Ang, Teacher Ng, Teacher Chin and other teachers were also once part of this vibrant political scene, representing what Teacher Chin described as “a form of democratic socialism”. Like most Chinese intellectuals from their generation, especially graduates of the late Nanyang University, Zhineng Qigong teachers were extremely reluctant to comment on their past political endeavors and ideological alignments.

Nanyang University 南洋大学 (Nantah 南大) was the first privately-funded Chinese-language University founded outside mainland China. It was established in 1953 by Chinese businessmen and professionals who were worried that Chinese-educated high school students could not gain entry into the English-medium University

111 Under the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act, any public demonstrations must first be approved by the state. So far, only one demonstration in 1988 by the trade union against Washington's decision to remove Singapore from the General System of Preferences had been permitted. However, during the recent 2008 National Day Rally speech by the Prime Minister, he declared that public demonstrations will be considered legal as long as they are held in a designated plot of land called the Speaker's Corner. To date, five demonstrations have been held at the Speaker's Corner, including one against media censorship in local universities and another against the abuse of domestic workers in Singapore.
of Malaya. Nantah was later, under a flurry of political and economic rhetoric, dissolved and combined with the then Singapore University to form the National University of Singapore. Its location was later taken over by Nanyang Technological Institute in 1981 and subsequently ‘upgraded’ as the 2nd English-medium University in 1991 and renamed Nanyang Technological University 南洋理工大学 (NTU). Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, was the mastermind behind the dissolution of Nantah, citing reasons that included the growing irrelevance of a Chinese-medium university in an economy with English as the language of commerce, the questionable standards of the degrees conferred, and the decrease in the number of applicants. However, there were other political agendas involved, including the sensitivity of having a “Chinese university” in a country surrounded by Malay nations but most importantly, the belief that Nantah was a haven for “communist insurgents” who posed the most serious threat to the PAP’s base of power (cf. Nantah Alumni, 2000; Van der Kroef, 1964).

Although a Chinese-medium tertiary institution, English was also used in some courses at Nantah but often approached, by the students, as a foreign language rather than a learning tool. Teacher Ang explained that the English language was virtually neglected because of its association with western imperialism, and that was the reason why he had earlier resisted picking it up, which was, he added on hindsight, “quite a childish thing to do”112. Natural sciences were also a major part of the curriculum at the university, and many students graduated with Bachelors degrees in the sciences with minors in either the Arts or Commerce. Teacher Chin too, was a Nanyang University alumnus, and like Teacher Ang was formally trained in Biology and Chemistry. Both eventually picked up TCM in their late 20s and early 30s after having suffered career setbacks due to a lack of recognition for Nantah’s degree in the market113 (see MacDougall & Chew, 1976). What they brought with them into their clinical and qigong practices was more than a familiarity with the methods of science, but also, I read,

112 Because of their problems with the English language, Teacher Ang and Chin often required me to hang around their clinics whenever they had patients who could not speak Mandarin or Chinese dialects; they were however quite at ease with the Malay language.

113 Because of the devaluation of Nantah’s degree, many graduates left Singapore for greener pastures. This explains why the largest Nantah Alumni is located in Toronto, Canada.
painful memories of political persecution, deeply entrenched ideological beliefs, and a pride in Chinese intellectualism.

In the 50s and 60s, Chinese intellectuals were often associated with leftist radicalism by the PAP (Hong, 2002), and many were systematically purged from the political scene. The closure of Nantah was the ultimate showdown between Lee Kuan Yew's western-educated PAP camp and the Chinese-educated politicians, with irreversible repercussions for the educational system of the entire country (Sai & Huang, 1999). The loss of Nantah as the only Chinese-medium university saw subsequent drops in student registrations in other Chinese schools, either through the state's attempt at centralizing education with English as the medium of instruction or the people's own choices at having their children educated in English. All these led to discontent from the Chinese intellectuals (especially the Nantah alumni) which have lasted until today. The memory of this particular historical event was resurrected by a recent debate over the renaming of Nanyang Technological University back to Nanyang University; however, the decision was eventually postponed indefinitely by the officials in charge. Some reasons given included the fear that the re-naming would cause confusion between the old and the new varsity as NTU's brand-name was already well-established. Opposing voices from the Nantah alumni (including Teacher Ang and Chin) were also in consensus that the two represent different histories and identities, and should forever be kept apart (Chen, Y. K., Jiang, Bo, & Zhu, 2003). Fortunately, as a lecturer in the new NTU, I was treated with certain degree of camaraderie even though I am no alumnus of the institution. My ability to speak proper Mandarin and to discuss Chinese philosophy and literature, was an indicator that I belong to NTU. It was partly due to this affiliation that I got to know about the political aspirations of the teachers which were never revealed in the qigong training context before.

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\[132\] At the time of this writing, Teacher Ang had applied for a teaching position for a double degree programme in Bio-sciences and TCM at NTU. I can only guess how it will feel like to return to his alma-mater which no longer holds its original name, as a lecturer in a discipline which he turned to because his degree was made a sacrificial goat in a game of politics. Teacher Ang was however, rather stoical about his plans, and if anything, he did not express any awareness regarding the irony of the matter.
Teacher Ang had never spoken about the significance of Chairman Mao’s dusty sculpture in his room, that is, until I told him about my teaching Marxist theory at NTU\textsuperscript{115}. The gleam in his eyes when we talked about Marxism demonstrated his love for a political and philosophical system that had been persecuted in Singapore for the past few decades. It was during this particular exchange that Teacher Ang revealed, with a peculiar degree of fondness, that he was imprisoned twice for taking part in political activities. He was jailed for two weeks for boycotting examinations at Nantah in the sixties. This campaign was just one in a series of anti-government public demonstrations involving Chinese intellectuals, workers and students. These demonstrations, particularly a major one in 1956, were labeled by the then dominant party, the Labor Front, as communist insurgency. Prior to the 1956 riot, the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Union was dissolved together with what the then Chief Minister considered pro-communist organizations, namely the Singapore Women’s Association and the Chinese Musical Gong Society. Student protests in the streets that followed resulted in clashes with anti-riot forces that saw 13 killed and some 900 arrested (Fong, 1980: 33-38; Van der Kroef, 1967; Yeo, 1973).

The aftermath of these incidents led to a political surveillance of Chinese intellectuals, particularly those at Nantah which was seen as an activist breeding ground. The boycotting of examinations was just one of the ways in which Nantah students showed their anger at the systematic exclusion and violent persecution of Chinese intelligentsia since the PAP assumed power in 1959. These included the arrest of several Nanyang University Student Union leaders who were also members of the major opposition party, the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front). The crackdown on Nantah student protestors saw Teacher Ang interrogated, beaten, and imprisoned, but Teacher Ng managed to escape by hiding in a bus, describing theatrically how she witnessed the brutality of the riot police as they pummeled and flung one of her friends onto a truck. I found out subsequently from her that other Zhineng Qigong practitioners, including

\textsuperscript{115} I have to practice a lot of prudence when stepping into political grounds, given the adversity of Singaporeans towards voicing their political beliefs in public. Talking to Teacher Ang about my teaching of Marxist theory in the division of sociology was my way of leading him to talk about Mao’s sculpture’s significance.
Teacher Chin and Mr. Wong, were active members of the students union as well. Both Teacher Chin and Mr. Wong were also arrested, although on different days from Teacher Ang, but were released after a few days of interrogation. Although Teacher Chin did finally speak to me about those events\textsuperscript{16}, Mr. Wong had consistently rejected all my requests for his take on the matter. I found out, indirectly, that he had reservations about my identity as a mere anthropologist without any party affiliation.

The discourse on communism continued well into the 70s and the early 80s, and until the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre, “Marxists” and “communists” remain one of the PAP’s most often-used label on its opponents. However, some who were arrested for being pro-communists never identified themselves as such\textsuperscript{17}. In the seventies, when Teacher Ang began his practice as a TCM physician, he was once again embroiled in the struggles between the PAP and the residues of the pro-communist/Chinese political activists. Just like many others before him, Teacher Ang did not confess to being a communist even under abuse and interrogation. He recalled how officers from the Internal Security Department battered his limbs and rubbed ice on his wounds while taunting him with: \textit{“this treatment method is against your TCM training right?”} From the ways he spoke about these incidents, I could not detect any signs of anger in Teacher Ang’s words or gestures at all. On the contrary, he described his time behind bars as “quite interesting”, for he spent his time playing cards, cooking with aluminum cans, and enjoying “decent meals”. \textit{“After all”}, he chuckled, \textit{“The second time I was brought in was purely because I was betrayed. I think the friend who did it just had to give the Internal Security a name...everyone cracks under torture...I guess

\textsuperscript{16} Speaking in public about one’s political alignment has become some sort of a taboo. Even in the university, getting students to speak up in class about political issues was an uphill task. I remember one particular episode where at the end of a course on the sociology of Singapore society, I asked the class if anyone still believed that the whole tutorial process had been secretly recorded. Half of the students raised their hands.

\textsuperscript{17} In May 1987, in Operation Spectrum, 22 individuals were arrested, without trial, and accused of involvement in what the state called the ‘Marxist conspiracy’, in which both members of a Roman Catholic Church and a women’s organization were detained. The accused initially refused to admit to participating in communist activities, but soon caved in to pressures from all sides. Operation Spectrum reinforced a general climate of fear of being associated with Marxist or communist ideologies, and a greater awareness of the Internal Security Act (see Seow, 1998 for detailed coverage of Operation Spectrum).
mine was the first that popped up in his mind...but I'm not a communist, I am just a political activist”.

Teacher Ang’s abusive encounters reflect an ideological and cultural divide between the Chinese-educated new immigrants, whose families arrived in Singapore in the 20th century, and the English-educated ‘Straits-Chinese’ who have been around the Malay archipelago for a few centuries (Huang, 2007). Many of the founding members of the PAP, including the Straits-Chinese Lee Kuan Yew, were educated in western countries, hailing from renowned institutions like Cambridge and Harvard while the new immigrants came from humble backgrounds and received their education in Chinese-medium vernacular schools. Under the ideological climate of the fifties and the sixties, Zhineng Qigong teachers were relegated to the pro-communist camp by default of their social and educational background. It was therefore also by default that they were embroiled with the discursive struggles against the western-educated political elite. Teacher Ng for example, contributed regularly to political newsletters and sold flowers on the streets to raise money for the Barisan Sosialis. Teacher Lam, a gifted speaker, often lent his voice for the PAP’s opponents on radio programmes and public political rallies. Their past commitment to political activism against the powerful anti-communist alliance of the PAP and the British authorities stands out obtrusively as a stark contrast to the political apathy of Singaporeans today. From the ways in which they peacefully manage their clinics and spend their weekends teaching Zhineng Qigong now, one could easily mistake them for any other elderly Singaporean on the street.

Today, teachers continue to maintain that political life forms an indispensable part of, after Marx, “a person’s social being (yigeren de shehui cunzai —^A^fi^li^-^A^fi^li^A^fi^li")”. Compared to what they used to do and say in their younger days, teachers no longer seem fanatic about one’s right to the freedom of speech. Politics need no longer involve mass demonstrations, hunger strikes or fiery public speeches, acts which are now taken by teachers (even the once-vocal Teacher Ang and Chin) as empty symbolism without any concrete results. Teachers instead believe in “lixing bianlun 理性辩论” or “rational debate”, in stating one’s opinions in a measured, informed, respectful and
empirically verifiable manner. This, interestingly, is exactly the standard that the local political elite demands from members of civil society. The difference however, is that the criterion had been used by the state to exorcise recent threats to its power, including those from what it calls “Chinese chauvinists” who, through emotive speeches, called for more inclusion in running the country. The term emerged after the 1997 election, where Tang Liang Hong, an opposition party member, was accused by the state of being a Chinese chauvinist for alleging that the political elite is filled with English-educated Christians. Tang was subsequently, through legal means, sued into bankruptcy and went on a self-imposed exile to Australia and later, Malaysia.

Being labeled chauvinists was the most recent salvo fired against Chinese intellectuals in the country, and an issue that never failed to incur furious reactions from the teachers. However, in response to being labeled communist sympathizers and being persecuted according to the Internal Security Act\textsuperscript{118}, many teachers simply said that the state’s method of associating its enemies with communism is just “one of those political guillotines (zhengzhi hutouzhan 其中一种整治虎头斩)” left by the British and later adopted by the PAP. It is as if being called chauvinists carries a greater negative connotation than being associated with communism. Inasmuch as they could not do anything to allay the sense of injustice, teachers seem resigned to hoping that the rise of China and future generations of Singapore Chinese intellectuals will eventually vindicate them. The most important lessons they have learnt from their political defeat was, to quote Teacher Ang, “the winner becomes the king and the loser, bandits

\textsuperscript{118} The Internal Security Act (ISA), an anti-communist legal apparatus left over by the British, continues to exist in both Malaysia and Singapore today. The current Singapore version of the Act provides for the detention of suspects without trial for up to two years open to review and renewal by the President. The Act had been used against suspected communists and more recently, ‘terrorists’ from the Jemaah-Islamiah organization. In 1963, Operation Coldstore, an “anti-communist” operation targeted at the Barisan Sosialis and the Singapore Association of Trade Unions rounded up people like Lim Hock Siew and Said Zahari who were subsequently imprisoned for 19 and 17 years respectively under the ISA. The most famous figure, however, to have been incarcerated under the ISA was Chia Thye Poh, the longest-serving political prisoner of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century. Chia was an ex-lecturer at Nantah who was imprisoned, under charge of being involved communist activities, for 23 years followed by another nine years of house arrest on Sentosa (see Hussin, 2004), an offshore island known more as a tourist attraction to most rather than a Singapore version of Alcatraz. Chia was released in the mid 90s and subsequently went on to complete a PhD in economics in the Netherlands in 2006. Like many of his contemporaries, Chia never confessed to being a communist, and like many political activists in the 60s, he was not someone whom the average young Singaporean has much, if any, impression of.
(shengzhe weiwang baizhe weikou 胜者為王败者为寇)’ and ‘one has no mastery over oneself within the circumstances of human social-political reality (renzai jianghu shen bu youji 人在江湖身不由己)’\(^\text{119}\). They seem to have accepted their fate as the defeated party of a political war, but their knowledge of history also made them believe that it was only the lack of fit between ‘the timing of Heaven, the relations between Humans, and the conditions of Earth (tianshi renhe dili 天时人和地利)’ that accounted for their designation as ‘bandits’. But insofar as the permutations between Heaven, Earth and Humans never remain the same, I had the feeling that teachers were just waiting for the right time to rise from the ashes. As Teacher Chin confidently declared,

“It’s only a matter of time before China becomes the world superpower, when you’ll see the ang-mohs (Fujian dialect for hongmao 红毛, “red-hairs” or Europeans) adopting Chinese names and learning Mandarin like what they did during the Ming dynasty. Fengshui takes its turns (every dog has its day) so we the Chinese-educated in Singapore will also see daybreak when the PAP starts treating us as indispensable tools for polishing China’s apples. That’ll be the day when people like you educated in Chinese will continue our work while we sit back and be commemorated”

As a dying breed of Chinese intellectuals, Zhineng Qigong teachers are positioned at the forefront of political and social marginalization. The contacts they have with average Singaporeans are made mostly through their work as TCM physicians and as Zhineng Qigong teachers. Their status group is tightly bounded by the cultural capital that the members possess; gaining entry is not easy unless one has journeyed through a similar educational track. They tend to stick to people of the same profession and cultural background, but are quite welcoming toward younger people interested in learning from them – provided that the potential candidate is proficient enough in Mandarin. From the

\(^{119}\) Jianghu 江湖 is a difficult term to translate, one that approximates the notion of Real Politik to a certain extent. Literally, it refers to ‘rivers and lakes’, but contains allusions to wulin 武林, the pugilistic community, and the dog-eat-dog political nature of human society. Implied within the concept of jianghu are also references to the serious consequences of defeat, of having to know the rules of political games, and of the importance of guanxi 关系 or social capital.
types of social networks they have, it appears that Zhineng Qigong teachers themselves are complicit in their own marginalization from Singaporean society-at-large, excluding others, interacting with their own, and staying close to the periphery while playing out their roles as detached and deviant social commentators.

Although Zhineng Qigong teachers can be quite forthcoming about their experiences in their youths, there were still particular issues which they practiced caution with, employing rather cryptic means to express ideas which they felt were too politically sensitive. For instance, as Teacher Ang sifted through his library late one night looking for an article on Mao that he had wanted me to read, he remarked with a sudden spark of inspiration:

“The word ‘society’ can never be explained clearly; instead of arguing over it, why not try changing it?”

I realized, on hindsight, that Teacher Ang’s statement was more than another typical random comment, but one of his subtle attempts at telling me about the Marx121 that lay buried within him. As I got to know the teachers better over the years, I began to uncover deeper significance to various enigmatic words, gestures, and symbols that they surround themselves with. Teacher Ang’s cryptic calligraphic poster was, I believe, his subtle way of telling a story, a personal tale with a moral carried forward by a qigong face while Mao’s figure hangs hidden from public view in a backroom where opium is burnt illegally, and where he engrosses himself in an ocean of ideas that modern Singapore has largely discarded as unpragmatic or even dangerous.

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120 His exact words were: “shehui zhe liangge zi shi yongyuan jiang buqing de, yuqi zhenglun buxiu, buru shizhe qu gaobian ta 社会这两个字是永远讲不清的；与其争论不休，不如试着去改变它”.
121 “Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it” (Marx, Engels, & Arthur, 1985: 123).
Zhineng Qigong as a carrier of political ideals

Teacher Ang shares with other Zhineng Qigong teachers, certain inconvenient political ideals that include facets of Marxist philosophy and classical Chinese thought mixed and matched with Singapore’s political circumstances. These political ideals are not copies of western political liberalism or aspirations for the establishment of a classless society, but rather, include ideas about religion, education, health, and culture built around monistic materialist and humanistic fundamentalist epistemologies. However, to raise the public’s awareness of these epistemological systems, or what Teacher Chin called “the central tenets of Chinese philosophy”, requires a discursive space which Chinese intellectuals have been excluded from for the past 40 years. It is the chronic exclusion of their status group from the public sphere and not the demise of socialism that Zhineng Qigong teachers find hard to make peace with. And as long as their ideological beliefs remain heavily laden with facets of Marxism and “Chinese chauvinism”, it would be near impossible for them to make their presence felt in the decision-making processes of the state, except as the demonized party.

Although a class-less society is far from what Teacher Ang wants, he still prefers socialism to other political ideologies because of the former’s devotion to human capacities devoid of “bull-ghosts and snake-deities (niugui sheshen 牛鬼蛇神)”. Teacher Ang believes that this-worldly mortal potentials, when amassed, possess the power to “topple mountains and overturn seas (fanshan daohai 翻山倒海)”. Zhineng Qigong’s materialist emphases on ‘public qigong’ and on qichang are similar expressions of a belief in the powers of the masses, which though differs metaphysically from the Marxist ‘praxis’, nevertheless commensurates in its atheism, communalistic practices, and faith in the human will. However, despite their beliefs that only human intervention can bring forth social and political change, Zhineng Qigong teachers are no longer active participants of civil society. Their fears of reprisals from the authoritarian state, the possibility of losing their current achievements, and the marginalization of Chinese intellectuals lead to a resigned sense of powerlessness that pushes Zhineng Qigong teachers to withdraw further and further into the private sphere. Without a legitimate
channel for expressing their political beliefs, Marxism and other politically illegitimate ideas had emerged packaged with the technical jargon of Zhineng Qigong theories as a humanistic, Daoistic, and monistic form of materialism.

I remember a conversation I had with Teacher Ang in his clinic, as he was cleaning up after the last patient of the day had left. We were once again discussing Marxist philosophy when he brought up Mao’s version of dialectical materialism. In his own words:

“I believe that science and technology were embraced by the Chinese communists not only for ideological reasons. If you look at scientific philosophy and compare it with Daoism and Marxism, it’s not a coincidence that all three did not interpret the world in theological terms at all. The *yin-yang* theory is similar to the dialectic that Hegel and Marx mentioned, but unlike Daoism which is other-worldly (chushi 出世), *yin* and *yang* are represented by classes of humans. The struggles between the weak and the strong will continue unless some ways are found to unite them all. I think science, because it is a value-neutral art, is the only way out from this battle unlike religion which manipulates people’s sentiments of hatred and fear. You don’t have to package Zhineng Qigong with socialist rhetoric in order to see how it [Zhineng Qigong] encompasses the most potential to reach truth, but also in its potential to guide humans towards political maturity and harmonious social relations. Unfortunately, in China, some people like Li Hongzhi [founder of Falungong] chose to include elements of religion into qigong; if we stick to a purely scientific way of practicing qigong, perhaps we can really see the end of history. It all depends on each individual’s willingness to use reason in his or her daily affairs and to convince others that everything depends on the human volition. I like Zhineng Qigong precisely because it trains the volition.”
Besides sharing common experiences in their youths and a common cultural capital, the teachers had also found a sense of camaraderie with one another through their practice of an art that is relatively free from state scrutiny. Zhineng Qigong has become not merely an instrument for acquiring health, but probably the most state-unadulterated method of transmitting a set of ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical beliefs. Due to the technical appearance of its principles, Zhineng Qigong languages had also become the safest means through which political ideologies could be expressed in a non-political manner. Although Zhineng Qigong had been marginalized in Singapore because of the state’s designation of qigong as a mere physical exercise or a Chinese heritage, it is its very location at the periphery that had granted its practitioners the freedom that other channels could not provide.

Self-discipline as an actualization of volitional power

Teacher Ang’s devotion to self-cultivation came across to me as his one sole purpose of existence; his teleological beliefs are framed within this-worldly concerns, directed at shaping the here and the now rather than eschatological anxieties about the after-life. Teacher Ang received his PhD when he was 60 years old. He had taught himself how to play the piano and the erhu 二胡 (a stringed Chinese instrument), how to use the computer, and how to operate music-making software. All these are in addition to his dedication to scholarly activities and qigong training, where he continues to conduct research on TCM, publish articles and books on qigong, and practice pengqi guanding twice a day. I cannot confidently generalize all these specific traits and habits to all other teachers, but my time with them did reveal considerable similarities in the manner in which they dedicate themselves to self-betterment. Teacher Chin for example, in addition to publishing papers with Teacher Ang, practices calligraphy and Zhineng Qigong everyday, participates actively in the local Chinese literature scene, serves as a judge for Chinese writing competitions, and regularly contributes his own compositions in magazines and book chapters. Regardless of whether the teachers call it ‘self-cultivation
(xiushen 修身), ‘self-strengthening (ziqiang 自强)’ or ‘self-betterment (ziwo gaijin 自我改进)’, all these acts require a will-full management of the self, i.e. self-discipline.

Monistic materialism and humanistic fundamentalism preach the limitless possibilities of human intervention in the cosmos, functioning as a powerful motivation and scholarly justification for the exercise of political agency. This, however, as implied by the four Chinese characters “ziqiang qiguo 自强齐国” on the door of Teacher Ang’s clinic, must be preceded by a strengthening of the self122, without which political campaigns could very well result in disaster. The link between self-cultivation and political change, regardless of the many ways I have tried to interpret it, was quite simply put by Teacher Ang:

“If a person can’t even make himself righteous, when he can’t even overcome his own weaknesses, how can he even think about making it right for other people? The reason why communism didn’t work out in China was not because of flaws in Marxism, but that of the ones trying to realize it. I believe that social change starts with the self.”

Perhaps Teacher Ang’s explanation is the authentic reason for his behavior, but I suspect that the teachers’ exercise of self-discipline also has a lot to do with being battered and herded to the margins, withdrawing further into a world filled with self-cultivational activities that they feel most at ease and secure with. Self-discipline, power that is executed over the executor, and political activism, power directed at restructuring society, are treated by the teachers in a self-evident taken-for-granted manner as the inseparable two sides of the same coin. However, through their devotion to self-cultivation, power directed at society had taken shape among a list of possible course of actions as first and foremost, self-discipline, the teachers’ struggles over and against themselves. Even

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122 This was clearly a paraphrasing of the Confucian eight-fold stages towards the pacification of the world, which includes in ascending order: distinction of objects (gewu 格物), culmination of knowledge (zhizhi 知), rectification of the heart-mind (zhengxin 正心), sincerity of the will (chengyi 诚意), cultivation of the self (xiushen 修身), solidification of the family (qijia 共家), governance of the state (zhiguo 治国), and pacification of the world (ping tianxia 平天下).
though the volitional theory and the notion of lianxi may shed light upon why the
teachers engage in volitional effort, it is because of their adaptation to the political
circumstances of Singapore that accounts for their directing of their volitions towards
themselves. At least, I am certain, shaping themselves is much easier than trying to
change the world. Most importantly, the teachers found in Zhineng Qigong, a scholarly
and technical set of languages and practices with which they guide and rationalize this
practice of inward-directed volitional effort.

Self-discipline as the practice of ‘having faith’

‘Faith’ or ‘xinnian 信念’ is one of the most fundamental requirements in the
practice of Zhineng Qigong. The centrality of the concept to qigong competency is
reflected in Pang Ming’s devotion of one single chapter in his book to the notion of “xin
ze ling 信则灵 (faith brings efficacy)”. Besides believing in the efficacy of training,
sticking to the arduous demand of mindful conduct beyond the confines of formal
sessions, i.e. lianxi , requires a considerable degree of faith in the infallibility of monistic
materialism, humanistic fundamentalism, or schools of thought that resemble their main
propositions. I derived this conclusion from comparing the conduct of teachers with that
of students. My observations revealed a significant difference in the degree of discipline
in the ways which the two groups of practitioners carry themselves. If students approach
the art for its healing potentials and teachers embrace it as a model for reality, it follows
that the belief in Zhineng Qigong cosmology or whatever that lies behind its scholarly
mask certainly has a role to play in the exercise of mindfulness over oneself. Although
Zhineng Qigong is presented as a scientific art founded on reason and empiricism, it
similarly requires the serious practitioner to accept, with unwavering faith, its
cosmology as the one and only truth.

Demanding faith in monistic materialism expresses what I had initially
considered a logical contradiction. On one hand, this is supposed to be a practical
requirement, a means necessary to achieve qigong competency and to avoid malpractice. Yet in order for monistic materialism to have any effects, one must suspend one’s disbelief by treating it as an absolute truth. Practitioners are henceforth required to take monistic materialism both as a means, in one’s adoption of Zhineng Qigong methods, and an end in-itself, as a taken-for-granted reality that pre-exists one’s birth. Bourdieu’s concept of ‘practical logic’ seeks to overcome logical contradictions like this. His rather dense account in *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990) leads to his main argument for “practical logic” against “scientistic logic”. His ultimate intention was to point us towards another kind of logic that runs through practices, a logic that does not obey the prescriptions of scholasticism, but one which is ‘practical’. If one were to re-interpret the Zhineng Qigong demand on having faith according to Bourdieu’s framework, then the logical contradiction that I have identified becomes irrelevant.

Insofar as the habitus is a set of quasi-conscious and semi-bodily practices, the practice of faith and other demands of Zhineng Qigong do not preclude a reflexive rationalization of the art’s principles; belief does not precede practice nor is practice merely the acting out of belief. As Bourdieu again reminds us, “the body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimics grief...What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is” (Bourdieu, 1990: 73). Committing oneself to Zhineng Qigong’s materialism, for the teachers at least, does not require a conscious evaluation of materialist principles; I did not detect any incapacitating contradiction between monistic materialism as a means and an end or as a belief and practice in the teachers’ everyday lianxi. For the beginner however, it supposedly takes years of conscious practice, of exercising the prescribed niantou in order to disregard without effort, the various side-effects of qigong training. I doubt however, that the teachers’ commitment to Zhineng Qigong philosophy is merely a product of practicing monistic materialism and humanistic fundamentalism regularly over a matter of years. Monistic materialism and humanistic fundamentalism, with their overt scientism and rationalism, are more likely the legitimate articulable faces of a much more deeply-ingrained body-hexis of which the belief in human agency was already part and parcel of even before teachers encountered Zhineng Qigong. The
teachers’ decades of experiences as a marginalized minority status group is a major, if not primary contributor to their habitus that feature a gritty commitment to the powers of the human volition, a practicing belief system which they have expressed in a single all-embracing concept of ‘having faith’.

Even though the instrumental and the substantive dimensions of Zhineng Qigong cosmology are indistinguishable in the teachers’ everyday lianxi, ‘having faith’ as a means to ends emerges regularly in the teachers’ reflection on their practice of self-cultivation. Having faith as a technical means to qigong competency serves as Zhineng Qigong teachers’ justification for sticking to the disciplinary demands of self-cultivational activities. The teachers’ expression and proselytizing of faith is therefore not simply a trans-rational trans-empirical leap onto wagering their entire mental-bodily resources (精神 jingshen) on a particular epistemological system; practicing faith ‘pacifies’ their desires for activism. In other words, the practice of having faith in Zhineng Qigong prescriptions allows Zhineng Qigong teachers to legitimately carry on shaping themselves rather than expending their energies on political activism.

Faith and self-cultivation: the case of Teacher Chin

Among the teachers, Teacher Chin is the one who stands out in his regular employment of ‘faith’ in his reflections on life. Teacher Chin, like Teacher Ang, was educated in Chinese-medium schools all his life. However, in contrast to the humble background of the latter, Teacher Chin, a Hakka (Cantonese for kejia 客家, the “guest people”), hails from a family of scholars and officials, vocations which he believes to be part of the tradition123 of his dialect group. His experiences with Chinese intellectualism

123 Wee (1988) argues that the Hakkas, originally from northern China, possesses a language that resembles Mandarin, the official imperial examination language. This explains why the Hakkas had traditionally done well in these examinations, accounting for a considerable proportion of Chinese officials in the Qing dynasty. Several of Teacher Chin’s ancestors did indeed serve in the Chinese imperial court, including his great-grandfather whose portrait (showing him in his Mandarin attire and pigtail) still hangs on the wall in his study room.
was thus much more profound than most of his contemporaries, having been brought up
reciting classical Chinese poetry and memorizing Confucian texts. Teacher Chin's
family is quite well-to-do, as his father’s job as an antique-dealer provided the latter with
opportunities to mingle with Chinese businessmen and politicians, making business
rather brisk. The young Teacher Chin grew up listening to debates about Chinese
politics and customs that were often held right in the living room of his father’s house.
Instead of attending vernacular primary schools, Teacher Chin had a private tutor who
taught him and his siblings all the subjects his father believed were necessary for a
‘gentleman (junzi 君子)’, including science, history, divinity, calligraphy, chess and
music. Through his father’s connections with the local Chinese community, Teacher
Chin found his way, with ease, into the elite Chinese High School\textsuperscript{124}, where he learnt
more about what he considered “contemporary” Chinese thought, including republican
nationalism and Maoism. It was during his time in Chinese High that he took part in the
student riots of 1956.

Unlike that of Teacher Ang, Teacher Chin’s political life was considerably less
turbulent, something which Teacher Chin feels strangely regrettful about. Although he
took part in almost every significant anti-government campaign that Teacher Ang did,
Teacher Chin had never been incarcerated before. Perhaps the remorse he feels towards
his compatriots is due to his getting off the hook so easily while the others had to suffer.
Teacher Chin’s father was an important figure of the Hakka clan association in
Singapore, and was thus given a significant amount of respect from his acquaintances in
the PAP. Although these clan associations were treated with a certain degree of distrust
in Singapore’s formative years, the PAP still needed them to reach out to the various
Chinese groups which were still quite divided along dialect lines. As a “mere
businessman” without any communist connections, Teacher Chin’s father was thus an

\textsuperscript{124} Chinese High (huaqiao zhongxue 华侨中学) remains a school for the elite today, having survived
being associated with communist pedagogy. As one of the top Special Assistance Plan participants today,
the secondary school (that takes in only male students) produces graduates who find their ways into Hwa
Chong Junior College (huazhong chuji xueyuan 华中初级学院), another top pre-university college in
Singapore. In recent years, Chinese High and Hwa Chong had been merged into a single entity (called
Hwa Chong Institution) that provides continuous six years of pre-university education (the Through-Train
Programme) instead of breaking them up into four and two like the rest of the less elite schools.
important resource for the state. This social capital proved handy, as Teacher Chin’s release from interrogation was, he revealed eventually, due to his father’s “reluctant” intervention. It was also under pressure from his father and other family members that Teacher Chin decided to rein in his political aspirations and as a show of filial piety, give up his decision to run for Barisan Sosialis and instead become a teacher. His subsequent displeasure with the state of Chinese education in Singapore eventually saw him leaving the vocation and picking up TCM.

Comparing the life-histories of both Teacher Ang and Chin, I could discern certain differences and similarities in the ways which they caved in to pressures. Teacher Ang compromised his belief through facing direct political reprisals while Teacher Chin did it as part of his duties as a son, but both were equal victims of an untimely involvement with a social movement that directly threatened the political status quo. Although Teacher Chin suffered much less, at least in terms of physical abuse, his resentment towards the state, which he perceived to be inhabited by western-educated Christians, was much more pronounced than Teacher Ang. Unlike the rather sang froid manners in which Teacher Ang reminisced over his youthful ventures, Teacher Chin appears much more bitter at not only being forced to compromise on his aspirations, but also because he had missed the one and only chance in his lifetime to do what he thought had to be done. “Perhaps”, he mused, “this is one of the drawbacks of being an atheist, that no after-life exists for one to recover lost opportunities”.

Teacher Chin’s unfulfilled wishes and sense of powerlessness in the face of unfavorable social and political climate had driven him towards a withdrawal into a state of subdued simmering sentiments, of which did not boil over into his public life, but remains managed by his practice of ‘having faith’. For example, there were several instances where I noticed an inner conflict within Teacher Chin whenever he came into contact with what he considered repulsive acts against humanity. Teacher Chin often spoke about his experiences with the Internal Security Department, comparing some of his less fortunate compatriots with other political prisoners like Nelson Mandela or
Aung San Suu Kyi. He was reminiscing over his parents’ reaction to his being tortured at the detention centre when he uttered the following:

“My parents never understood why I wanted to be a politician. My father was a businessman, to him, politics is suicide; it makes much more sense to build a business empire. I went into teaching to make him happy that’s all, but it was also through teaching that I realized that educating the younger generations is the only way out. You see, the PAP is still in power today because people vote for them! No one condones violent protests nowadays…times have changed… Singaporeans just don’t care, so you can forget about being Gandhi, just look at what happened to me and Teacher Ang. We’re getting old, so what can we do? We have no choice but let the younger generations take over our work. My sister often asks me, what’s the use of getting involved in politics? But my sister is just like any other Singaporean who’s concerned with the material life. I tell her that humans need more than food and clothing; we are highly evolved social animals that live in complex societies. We have morals, we have language, and we have science…Singaporean society will eventually become really modernized, where our culture goes beyond just pragmatic concerns. We need to have faith that they [Singaporeans] will see through the lies being fed to them; they just need to be guided in the right directions… Faith is very important, without it we will lose all directions in life. But we must be mindful of choosing the right things to believe. We have to believe in humans; God is nonsense…but we must also acknowledge that there is good and bad in every one of us. So we must direct our heart-minds into cultivating the good sides and steer away from distractions of the mortal world. We need to exercise our beliefs and strengthen them through constant practice. The results are not immediate so we must stay on course and have faith in our training and the recorded experiences of the ancients. Just keep training, read a lot of books, be mindful of your own behaviors, and the results will show eventually.”
Teacher Chin’s words express a combination of resignation, powerlessness and sublimation of aspirations onto what he calls the younger generations. This worldview mirrors much of the coping strategies adopted by many other Zhineng Qigong teachers, although they vary in how much they believe in Singaporeans’ ability to initiate political change. For the less optimistic, their behaviors tend to be even more inward-directed towards private matters, where cultivating themselves and their own children have almost become their **raison d’etre**. The combination of their education in classical Chinese philosophy and science and their political experiences engendered a monistic materialism and humanistic fundamentalism that took on a unique, both in the ‘practice’ and ‘functional’ sense, **practical form**. The teachers’ utilization of ‘having faith’ as an explanation for their participation in self-cultivation expresses a **practical re-orientation** of persecuted belief systems and actions to external possibilities. By ‘practical’, I borrow Bourdieu’s conceptions in referring to the teachers’ exercise of discipline over themselves as a **micro-structure** structured according to social and political possibilities. Disciplining themselves in the process of engaging in self-cultivational activities is a habitus that allows them to continue functioning within discursive circumstances antithetical to their conceptions of an ideal society.

Even though teachers believe that it is merely a product of reasoning and **lianxi**, developing faith is not, judging from my own experiences with Zhineng Qigong, something that one can achieve in a matter of years. One’s habitus cannot be acquired overnight; it is a “**history turned into nature**” (Bourdieu, 1977: 78), history that is politically defined and embodied. From my observation of the more industrious and intellectually-oriented of the students, their conduct, personalities, and beliefs are still conspicuously discernible from that of the teachers. By calling the practice of faith a ‘practical re-orientation’, I am not implying that teachers adopt it calculatingly as the optimum recourse to other more appealing but inconvenient practices. The devotion to self-cultivation is more than practicing beliefs in classical Chinese thought, Marxism or Zhineng Qigong, but rather, a habitus that evolved from decades of experiences to arrive at a harmonious existence with, in the words of Bourdieu, “**objective probabilities**” (Bourdieu, 1990: 54).
Exercising faith in humanistic fundamentalism and monistic materialism serves as the golden mean that allows teachers to make peace between failed attempts at exercising their political agency upon others and being the ones who have to bear the brunt of the wills of others. When combined with a belief in self-rectification as the prerequisite for other-rectification, the concept of lianxi, and the volitional theory, the practice of faith acquires a potent passivity; its actualization is first and foremost directed towards the self. Teachers often quote Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist classics to support their belief that self-cultivation is a process that stretches on infinitely. For example, they like to talk about how Confucius “knew the will of Heaven” only at the age of 50 and how his desires no longer deviate from mores at the age of 70\(^{125}\), and how Siddharta had to face numerous failures and mocking before he achieved nirvana. Their very emphases on the processual aspect of self-cultivation help to explain why their volitions, efforts, and resources, i.e. jingshen, are always used in overcoming themselves. This practice is more than a consequent of being loyal to Confucian teaching or bearing arbitrary conceptions of human perfection; convincing themselves to have faith in the powers of the human volition while immersing in endless self-cultivation allow them to postpone and subdue or re-channel indefinitely, the impulse and duty to initiate social and political change.

Their justifications of their own conduct with the arbitrary notion of faith instead of systematized scientific and philosophical abstracts also allow Zhineng Qigong teachers to avoid the discomfort of consciously confronting their ‘selling out to the system’. The embeddedness of practice within the field in which it is oriented to makes one continue taking-for-granted one’s existential conditions like a “fish in water” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 127). The mindful disciplined manners in which teachers conduct themselves, in which they practice self-regulation, and in which they practice ‘having faith’ are simply what they do most unreflexively and comfortably. Packaging their behaviors in the language of faith is much more legitimate and less revealing of

\(^{125}\) The exact wordings were: “Wushi zhi tianming...qishi xin suo yu er bu yuju 五十知天命…七十心所欲而不逾矩”.

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Part 2: Habitus in Action

This part of the chapter describes the role that Zhineng Qigong principles play in the teachers' everyday conduct, primarily in providing the scholarly tools for legitimizing their practice of self-cultivation. The central theme that runs through the following sections is the significance of the volitional theory to the teachers' self-disciplined approach towards religion, education, ethics and emotional management.

Humanistic fundamentalism

Among the list of 'truths' which the teachers spoke of, including the superiority of Zhineng Qigong over modern science and the potential of qigong theories to explain the mechanisms of the universe, human fundamentalism emerged as the only one which they doggedly refuse to compromise. Zhineng Qigong teachers' stubborn insistence on atheism is one of the most obvious expressions of their belief in the necessity of exercising human effort over all matters of life, against any appeal to the supernatural or the idea of 'fate'. This rather hostile attitude towards the practice of religion can be seen in all Zhineng Qigong teachers, who believe that atheism is the inevitable product of Chinese wisdom and modern science. Although Teacher Ang does not express his
atheism in extreme manners, he too believes that deities and fate has absolutely no place in his life.

As a late bloomer, Teacher Ang did not pick up TCM until he was 27, and his eldest son, Ming, was born only when he was 36. I inferred, from various signs, that he is particularly proud of the fact that even though he had started late, he had arrived early, having defied ‘fate (mingyun 命运)’ to achieve what he has today through sheer grit and passion. In comparison, Ming’s laid-back attitude towards self-mastery is a stark contrast to his father’s industriousness, becoming a clear target for regular nagging which Teacher Ng dishes out tactlessly in front of the patients. Teacher Ang, on the other hand, is always ready to jump to Ming’s defenses, pointing out calmly that Ming is “still searching, and weren’t we just like him with wind in our empty sleeves (liangxiu qingfeng 两袖清风) at his age?” Teacher Ang somewhat expects his son to inherit his traits and not to have any memorable achievements until later in life. More importantly, Teacher Ang believes that the ability to take control over one’s own life is inherent in the very sentiency of each and every human being, and that it is only a matter of time and of effort that his son comes to realize and actualize this universal human potential laying dormant within.

The idea of “fate” assumes a paramount status in Teacher Ang’s life as a contrast to his faith in human capacities. Fate is something that he consciously struggles against, something that he simultaneously acknowledges and ostracizes as an extrinsic and supernatural prophesizing force, and something that he has selected from a multiplicity of possible challengers as that which he pits himself against. Fate, Teacher Ang asserted, is ultimately a belief in and of the superstitious that should be eradicated from the consciousness of all those who are enlightened. Most importantly, he believes that Zhineng Qigong methods of volitional cultivation enable the purging of religion and all other forms of superstition, including fatalism, from the surface of the Earth. Deistic and theistic explanations are, to him, merely attempts at making sense of reality under the primitive conditions of ignorance. As language and consciousness develops greater precision, higher forms of knowing replace that of the lower. Qigong theory, he believes,
is a product of thousands of years of human reckoning with themselves and the cosmos; it has the ability to resolve age-old western philosophical problems like etiology, clairvoyance, faith-healing and even contemporary issues in quantum physics\textsuperscript{126}. The survival of the theory of qi and of monistic materialism is to him the self-evident proof of qigong theories’ ability to fully explain everything that has only been partially covered by various philosophical systems for as long as humanity remembers.

On more than one occasion have I heard Teacher Ang use the word “yuanshi 原始” or “primitive” to account for the persistence of religiosity and its retarding effects on human progress. Religious beliefs are, he argued, nothing more than the anti-thesis to every positive consequence of human sentiency. Referring to religion as the belief in the superhuman and the supernatural, he asserted that such beliefs are merely out-dated explanations for natural phenomena that primitive humans could not comprehend. With the increasing sophistication in consciousness, language and research methods, “the idea of fate”, he added adamantly, “\textit{should not even exist anymore today, but yet it does...because people are superstitious, suspended in an animalistic state which they have ignorantly locked themselves in}”. Teacher Ang’s belief in reason and empiricism against spiritualism is not only a direct product of his educational background in the sciences and the accomplishments that he interprets as fruits of his own labor, but also a life-long dedication to the study of philosophy.

As an ardent student of Chinese philosophy, Teacher Ang is highly conscious of what the discipline has done for him. Often comparing himself to his wife who is more inclined towards literature, he believes that his relative clarity of thought in contrast to the unmeasured disposition of his wife is a direct product of nurturing his faculty of reason rather than indulging in his desires. His devotion to integrating classical Chinese philosophy and modern science came across to me as an attempt at allying himself with

\textsuperscript{126} A 60-episode mainland Chinese documentary about the \textit{Huangdi Neijing} suggests that many similarities can be found between Einsteian theories of relativity and that found in the classical scripture. It argues that theories about qi established thousands of years ago in China had already tackled what quantum physicists are turning to today, primarily a move towards the uncertain, fluid, and qualitative nature of reality. Similar connections were also drawn to the discovery of Chaos Theory and the Heisenberg Principle.
a tradition he took pride in, and at identifying with a progressive form of knowledge in which he finds great potential. The combination of classical Chinese thought and modern science, he insists, leads inevitably to a rejection of the existence of divine beings, sentient creatures that work behind the scenes manipulating the course of human history. Instead of allowing such "superstition" to continue misleading humankind, Teacher Ang believes that the first step towards emancipation from such ignorance is to start taking charge of one's own life by accepting the infallibility of monistic materialism. As he was flipping through Feng Yu Lan's (Feng, Y. & Bodde, 1952) *A History of Chinese Philosophy* looking for a particular passage he wanted to show me, Teacher Ang paused at a particular page and stared at Mao's sculpture before uttering:

“Western civilization had risen and fallen along religious lines, but Chinese history had been defined through a three thousand year struggle between philosophical schools of thought. Our lack of religiosity is our very strength, which western philosophy had finally realized through science.”

Although at times he expressed certain discomfort at the obscure manner in which Chinese philosophy presented itself and the lack of scientific support for much of what it proposes, his undying faith in the potential of a revolutionary syncretic product between the two provided a principle that guides both his academic and personal life. “My experience” he remarked, “from years of dabbling in science, Chinese philosophy, and Marxist philosophy, always leads me to the same conclusion, that only materialism can fully account for why and how the cosmos is the way it is.” On other occasions when my presence was less obvious, some teachers’ expressions of bias against religiosity became more uninhibited. I once accompanied Teacher Ang and Ng to their younger son’s new house when Teacher Ng caught sight of an altar right smack in the living room the moment she walked through the door. She did not bother concealing her irritation, contorting her face into a look of absolute disgust as she rebuked her daughter-in-law127, “*Why did you put this here? It’s so ugly!* You really think praying to these

127 Teacher Ang’s daughter-in-law was his student at the TCM college. At the time of this writing, she was
deities is of any use? You’re studying TCM, you should know that you’re being superstitious!” Teacher Ang on the other hand, smiled and whispered to his wife as I stood quietly behind them, “It doesn’t matter, as long as it gives her a peace of mind. She’ll come around sooner or later.”

It is hard, as an anthropologist, not to be skeptical about the teachers’ consistency at practicing their beliefs. Although he is adamant about monistic materialism as the only truth, there were still occasions when Teacher Ang did not attempt to reduce certain peculiar phenomena (as with the case of a spirit-medium healer) into materialist accounts. In instances like these, he was apt to suspend his judgment with a shrug and a “I don’t know”. Nonetheless, Teacher Ang’s unwavering faith in human capacity always appears in my mind when I think about how he manages to practice qigong twice a day, compose his music, treat his patients and yet still find the time and energy to offer free consultations on the weekends.

Even though Teacher Ang claims that his atheism is merely a product of a rationalization process involving classical Chinese philosophy and modern science, his personal experience with the power of the Singaporean state surely plays a role in strengthening his belief. Zhineng Qigong teachers witnessed first-hand, how a person’s “mingyun 命运”, or destiny, is not a product of divine predetermination, but the works of humans. Their failure to initiate political change did not therefore cause them to stop believing in human agency; on the contrary, they saw that when power is consolidated, a few human individuals are able to mold millions of lives in a matter of a few decades. It just happened that these teachers turned out to be at the receiving end rather than being those behind the wheel. Even if Teacher Ang’s political experience was not a cause for his anti-religiosity, at least his scholarly training provided him with non-religious interpretations of those experiences that can only lead to the reinforcement of his

about to graduate and plans to help out at Teacher Ang’s clinic. Although Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng often joked about her ‘shallowness’ in private, they also revealed that they are pleased that their younger son, a shy and self-conscious computer engineer, has found someone much more mature (she is 11 years older than her husband) to look after him.
atheistic beliefs and consequently, the necessity of exercising one’s own effort in shaping one’s own life.

Education as self-cultivation

The teachers’ belief in the power of the human volition is also revealed in their discontent with the design of Singapore’s educational curricula. They believe that education should be used to ensure proper cultivation, that good qualities should be further nurtured and flawed ones rectified. Most importantly, human qualities, good or bad, can be shaped by will-full human intervention. Having attended Chinese vernacular schools, the experiences of Zhineng Qigong teachers with education was quite a contrast with what one finds in public schools in Singapore today. In Chinese vernacular schools, Chinese literature, philosophy, history and political thought were compulsory subjects from the primary to the secondary levels. In the current education system, access to such domains of knowledge are only available to those who study Chinese literature at the secondary or pre-university level or who have chosen Chinese studies as a major at the university. The teachers’ educational background in classical Chinese modes of thought established a dominant interpretive framework with which they approach fundamental questions about the human condition.

The role of Zhineng Qigong’s human ontology in the conception of socialization

The teachers’ exposures to modern science and western philosophy are mostly filtered through Chinese philosophical lenses. The nature versus nurture dichotomy is one such example, and is tightly linked to their conception of human ontology, socialization, and subsequently, their evaluation of education. In their encounters with the debate of nature against nurture, teachers often utilize common Chinese concepts like xiantian 先天 or ‘inborn potentials’ and houtian 后天 or ‘acquired capabilities’ or
Zhineng Qigong notions of *yuanshen* 元神, the ‘primordial sentiency-knowledge’ and *shishen* 识神, the ‘cognitive sentiency-knowledge’. Compared to the dualism between nature and nurture, notions of *xiantian* and *houtian* do not presume ontological distinctions. This could be due to the lack of a term in Chinese that is equivalent to the notion of ‘nature’. Needham and other sinologists (e.g. Bennet, 1978; Needham, J., 1981; Needham, J. et al., 1954; Sivin, 1995a; b) have dedicated volumes of writing to the concept of ‘nature’ in Chinese traditions. ‘Nature’, translated in modern day Chinese language as ‘*ziran* 自然’ or ‘*tianran* 天然’, denotes ‘self-so’ or ‘heaven-so’ respectively (Zito, 1997: 114). Greek philosophy, Judeo-Christian traditions and science concur in the conception that nature is subject to laws, and thus all natural phenomena follow predictable patterns. The natural sciences are tasked with uncovering the laws of nature with the intention of taming it. Similarly, the notion of ‘law’ in classical Chinese thought has also been heavily discussed in Needham et al’s work. The conclusion drawn is that nature subjected to laws is relatively absent in classical Chinese thought (Needham, J., 1969); “nature” in Chinese conception is best understood as what exists “out there” or in other words, “*tiandi* 天地” or Heaven and Earth (Peterson, 1980: 87).

In Zhineng Qigong texts, *ziran* and *tiandi* or *tianran* 天然 or *tian* (Heaven) are used interchangeably and are often expressed in comparison with that which is personal. See the following statement from a Zhineng Qigong text for example:

“气机开放就是把自身之气和自然之气接通，外气（自然之气）内收，
内气（自身之气）外放，通过人和自然之间气的交换...最终达到天人相化的高级境界” (Centre, 1995: 30)

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128 This law-like characteristic was derived from the Greek notion of a ‘law-giver’ (Needham, J., 1956), a ‘watch-maker’ who after having designed and created the universe, leaves it alone to run by itself. Teacher Ang calls this cosmological model, mechanistic materialism (*jixie weiwu zhuyi* 机械唯物主义).

129 There are of course, those who disagree with this view, e.g. Bodde (1979; 1957).
"The opening up of qi-mechanisms refers to the establishment of contact between personal and ziran qi, the adduction of external qi (ziran qi) and the release of internal qi (personal qi), through an exchange between humans and ziran...to finally achieve an advanced state where Humans and Heaven are dissolved together."

There are also other translations of the word "nature" when it is used to make allusions to ontology. "Xingzhi 性质" and "benzhi 本质" are two such examples. Xingzhi refers to the properties of a thing, and benzhi refers to its primordial qualities. Take the following Zhineng Qigong textual excerpt, for example,

"思维的工具是语言，人借助于语言把丰富的感情材料加以分析和综合...从而揭露不能直接感知到的事物的本质和规律" (Wong et al., 1989: 109)

"Language is the tool of thought, humans utilize language to analyze and synthesize rich emotional materials...through which we uncover the benzhi and regulatory structure of things which cannot be directly perceived."

As shown above in the extracts, the word ‘ziran’ resembles ‘nature’ when referring to the ecological environment. However, when referring to the ‘nature’ or the inborn qualities of humans, ‘benzhi’ does not distinguish itself ontologically from qualities derived from nurture. Even though they do acknowledge the role of the inborn in shaping human qualities, Zhineng Qigong teachers do not treat xiantian and houtian as mutually exclusive traits, but as two poles of a dialectical feedback loop. Personal qualities do not remain invariable over space and time, instead, that which is inborn and that which is acquired afterwards are only distinguishable in a temporal manner, i.e. ‘nature’ is merely that which is possessed before ‘nurture’. The knowledge that one has learnt in one’s life is transmitted through one’s ‘concentrated qualities acquired from one’s parents (xiantian zhijing 先天之精)’ to one’s offspring and to subsequent generations but it can also be ‘uninstalled’ by one’s offspring as well. In the same line,
the teachers’ conceptions of *yuanshen* are not equal to biological immutable genetic structures. *Yuanshen* refers to knowledge that is acquired from one’s ancestors through the processes of conception and birth; genetic structures are merely one of the *formal* dimensions of *yuanshen*. *Shishen*, on the other hand, refers to knowledge that one acquires after birth, or as the term suggests, acquired ‘cognitively (shi 识)’. Both *yuanshen* and *shishen* exist in a constant process of transformation. *Shishen* is not causally derived from *yuanshen* nor does it seek to repress it; as polarities, they are qualitative derivations of one another in both oppositional and formative manners. *Yuanshen* acquires lucidity as a person matures through its combination with *shishen*, knowledge which is acquired through learning. The result is a person’s *shen*, or sentiency-knowledge, a state of awareness which only humans possess. Although there are many similarities between *xiantian* and *houtian*, and *yuanshen* and *shishen*, the latter pair is much more precise in identifying the inseparability of *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledges. The binary opposition that exists between nature and nurture are thus collapsed within a single notion of *shen*, the sentiency-knowledge that encompasses both aspects of the mind and the body. Most importantly, Zhineng Qigong’s theory about human sentiency-knowledges increases significantly, the possibility of human intervention in shaping oneself, of reviving valuable knowledges laying inert within oneself or of erasing those which are undesirable. This conception allocates much more power and responsibility to the human volition in taking charge of one’s own socialization.

**Human ontology, education, and self-discipline**

My time in the field coincided with the arrival of the tsunami that battered the beaches of Southeast Asia. As reported in the news, some locals witnessed that prior to the arrival of the tidal waves, scores of animals became strangely restless, fleeing inland and escaping death. Teacher Ang argued that the inability of humans to foretell a natural disaster the way animals can is a result of the over-indulgence in *shishen*. Comparatively, *yuanshen*, that which has been passed down through thousands or millions of years,
‘knows’ much more about the mysteries of the universe than what the shishen can acquire in a single lifetime. Quoting Lao Zi, he added that only new-born babies and animals possess the dao, and adult human beings have deviated from it not because they have erased it, but because of the latter’s attachment to textual, rational, and ‘vulgar’ (suqian 俗浅) forms of shishen that is dominant in modernity while neglecting their yuanshen into a state of hibernation. Therefore, any form of education that insists on such vulgar forms of knowing is by definition, flawed pedagogy.

To the teachers, the word ‘education’ or ‘jiaoyu 教育’ refers to institutionalized methods of guiding people in the arts of self-cultivation with sharpening the shishen, reviving the yuanshen, and establishing unity between the two as the ultimate purpose. The concepts of yuanshen and shishen provide potent technical justifications for the teachers’ disappointment with Singapore’s “vulgar” education system that is geared towards producing a workforce relevant to the economy. This, teachers believe, inevitably cultivates dismal qualities in the average Singaporean, and accounts for the “stagnation” of Singapore’s cultural development. This view is encapsulated in the following excerpt from a conversation I had with Teacher Chin, one of the most vocal on the topic of education:

“What is education? Most Singaporeans think it’s a means towards a high-paying career. I believe that the government is fully responsible for generating such attitudes in its people. I understand the importance of generating work for the people, but how can education be purely about finding a job? That’s why Singaporeans are so un-cultured (mei xiuyang 没修养)...just look at the way they talk when they’re interviewed by news crews! We’re a first-world country but we are only developed in our infrastructure; how about the quality of our people and the culture of the country? If children do not learn the right things now, they will be doing a great disservice to the sufferings that their ancestors went through. Their yuanshen will always remain dormant and in time, their corrupted shishen will negate the good qualities that evolution has selected for them. I feel sad
whenever I look at children carrying heavy bags with nothing but assessment books that train them to be examination-smart.”

Teacher Ang’s son, Ming, has always shown a lot of potential in intellectual pursuits, especially subjects pertaining to philosophy and the arts. However, the education system which favors income-generating disciplines does not allow him to excel. After his graduation with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology and geography, Ming held several different jobs, ranging from a car salesman to a civil servant. In contrast to Teacher Ang, Teacher Ng is more concerned with the social status of her son than his intellectual accomplishments. Unlike his wife who wants Ming to settle down and start a family, Teacher Ang hopes that his son will further his studies in whatever discipline that interests the latter. Teacher Ang is so unconcerned with the pragmatic consequences of Ming’s education that he wants to send his son to Japan for a course in Japanese Manga art. This drew stigmatizing comments from many of his relatives and patients, but Teacher Ang remains adamant about his decision. In addition, so willing is Teacher Ang to ensure that Ming receives a proper education that he is ready to invest S$100,000 in it. While complaining to me about his wife during a trip in his car, Teacher Ang expressed his aspirations for his son’s education:

“Actually I find it quite a waste that Ming isn’t interested in the academic stuff I’m doing now, if not he can help me a lot with the translation of my publications. However, he has inherited potentials in the arts from me and that’s good but we need to ensure that these potentials can be actualized. We only live once, if we don’t do it now, there will not be a second chance. Unfortunately, that there isn’t any opportunity for that in Singapore…it’s all about making money here, so unless you package your creations as pop culture, it is quite difficult to survive as an artist in Singapore. I only started

\[130\] At the time of this writing, Ming has quit his job as a civil servant and moved on to work for a local art gallery which he described as "government funded and filled with bureaucrats who know nuts about art". He left the latter job after four months and found a new one as an events manager, subsequently taking over the overall management of the small company. Ironically, his main source of income is his free-lance contribution to the Ministry of Transport’s website.
reading TCM when I was 27; sometimes you don’t really know what you’re really good at till much later in life. I don’t know which one of my ancestors is good at healing...maybe my great grandfather...who knows? If Ming wants to go overseas for further education, I’ll definitely support him. I don’t really know how to spend my money anyway, haha...It’s unfortunate that my wife doesn’t fully understand the importance of cultivating the modes of thought (siwei fangshi 思维方式) of our future generations; sure she does gripe about it but you see the way she treats Ming’s future, she’s just like any other average Singaporean really. Singaporeans are already that superficial, I do not want my offspring to continue like this; if we do not intervene in education, how else can we hope to change anything? A socialist revolution? What one learns now will become part of one’s offspring, that’s why I want Ming to develop his potential fully, if not it’ll be a waste of what I’ve accumulated all my life. It takes time and effort to do it, but I believe that one who has the will, succeeds.”

As shown above, Teacher Ang’s words often carry several references to the importance of proper socialization and the existence of certain malleable innate human potentials that must be subjected to quality control. Like Teacher Ang and Chin, Zhineng Qigong teachers’ critiques of education in Singapore are one of the primary channels through which they argue for the power of human intervention, the necessity of mindful self-rectification, and the importance of education as a form of self-cultivation. The teachers’ conception of human ontology, informed by Zhineng Qigong theories, provides scholarly defense against the mainstream view of education as a means to ends (see chapter six), critiques of the state, and most importantly, further justifies their practice of self-cultivation. Given that self-cultivation does not merely affect the one who practices it, but also one’s offspring, Zhineng Qigong teachers have found more urgent reasons to carry on with a life of self-cultivation.
Teacher Ang often talks about the importance of the Confucian notion of “ren 仁” or benevolence, particularly in his capacity as a Chinese physician. Zhineng Qigong has combined the Confucian idea of benevolence with the Buddhist notion of compassion (ci 慈) to produce its own unique moral standard that Teacher Ang tries to live up to. Ethical conduct not only plays a central role in preventing and curing qigong deviation (see page 165 - 167) but more importantly, it serves the function of transporting the prescriptions of the volitional theory to the arena of everyday life.

Although the role of ethics in Zhineng Qigong is not something that Teacher Ang emphasizes regularly in the beginner’s class, in the privacy of his house, the notion of ‘virtue’ makes regular appearances in his reflection on Zhineng Qigong, his evaluation of what it means to be good human being, and his criteria for a good ruler. In his own words,

“Both Confucius and Lao Zi spoke about practicing virtue in governing a country. I think that’s one of the main differences between western and Chinese political philosophy. I know Lee Kuan Yew wants to believe that he and his followers possess the mandate of Heaven but he himself has admitted that he is ultimately a Machiavellian. What exactly is virtue? I think both eastern and western scholars will agree that it’s got to do with the respect for human dignity; you can call it human rights or anything, but they are basically referring to the same thing. In Chinese we call it de 德, it is through the practice of de in the small matters of life that we cultivate a de personality (dexing 德性). Pang Ming’s books state very clearly how we...
should go about doing that...I don’t always believe that humans are born good...what is good anyway? It takes practice and it is reflected in the appearances of your routi (the physical self), your jingshen (psychological health), people’s respect for you, etc. I believe that virtuous governance is a product of a dialectic between a virtuous ruler and virtuous people, just like circumstances make the hero and he too makes the circumstances (shishi zao yingxiong, yingxiong zao shishi 时势造英雄，英雄造时势). Do our political leaders possess virtue? The fact that there are old people collecting cans and cardboards to make a living shows that they don’t.”

Ethical conduct as a methodological requirement

As narrated by Teacher Ang, Zhineng Qigong texts and teachers generally refer to the moral dimensions of qigong practice and everyday life as “de 德”. De is often mentioned together with dao 道, uttered as the generic phrase ‘dao de 道德’, a concept which have been subjected to precise definition and operationalization in Pang Ming’s writings. As defined in chapter three, dao refers to the most fundamental building block of the universe, but without an accompanying essentialist twist. De, on the other hand, has been defined by Pang Ming as the following:

简单说德是道的功能体性，是道外在的体现...宇宙大息的万事万物都是由道化生而由德来畜养的...在宇宙大息中，有不同层次的物质，它们各自有其道和德，有它们各自的体和用.

To put it simply, de refers to the nature of dao’s function, it is the external appearance of dao...the ten thousand things in the universe and nature are all transformed from dao and are nurtured by de. (Pang, 1992a: 259)...Within the universe and nature, different levels of materials exist, they each possess

‘undeniability’ of human sociality that gives the notion of dexing a ‘law-like’ dharmic character.

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their own *dao* and *de*, each with their own tangibles and utilities. (Pang, 1992a: 263)

Pang distinguishes between two types of *de*: *ziran daode* 自然道德 (natural virtue) and *shehui daode* 社会道德 (social virtue). Natural virtue refers to that which is possessed by the ‘ten thousand things’ while social virtue, that which is possessed by humans. As one of the “four equal emphases” in the practice of Zhineng Qigong, *de* takes up a significant portion in the texts and manuals. Regardless of what the manuals prescribe, what caught my attention was the consequentialist but not necessarily utilitarian manner in which teachers spoke about ethical conduct. With the cultivation of *dao* as *de*’s purpose, to engage in ethical conduct does not necessarily mean an adherence to social norms or moral imperatives; it can also be a technical requirement.

In contrast to popular conceptions of morality, taking virtue as a means to an end can appear rather counter-intuitive. Instead of the common conception of virtuous acts as duties or maxims, the practice of virtues can be seen as a set of heuristics that guide the practitioner towards a higher level of *gongli* 功利 (qigong competency or general ability). As *technical means to ends*, the practice of compassion and benevolence can also be treated as *methods* that acquire particular significance in relation to qigong deviation. Although it had been emphasized again and again by teachers and in the texts that Zhineng Qigong was designed specifically to lower the risk of deviation, they have also warned me that malpractice is always a hovering possibility for the careless, the epistemologically infidel, and the unethical. Prime among the causes of deviation is one’s impulsion towards ‘*tan* 贪’ or greed. To neutralize its effects, one could either seek a competent qigong practitioner’s help, or cure himself or herself through the mindful practice of “*wuwo* 无我” or literally, “selflessness”.

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133 The four equal emphases, or *sizhe bingzhong* 四着实重 includes *gongli* 功理 (qigong principles), *gongfa* 功法 (qigong method), *gongli* 功力 (qigong power-competency), and *gongde* 功德 (qigong virtue).
As one progresses with training, it is common to experience what Teacher Ang calls *qufen* 区分 or “distinctions”. Prolonged training in Zhineng Qigong causes one’s thoughts to acquire phenomenological clarity beyond normal levels, where conspicuous demarcations between sensual perceptions like colors, tastes and smells emerge, as well as those between abstract ideas regarding truth and falsehood, beauty and ugly, good and evil. Forming distinctions informs one’s choices and actions in everyday life, and is thus treated in Zhineng Qigong as a necessary and normal volitional mechanism. However, through regular training, such distinctions acquire a hyper-clarity that produces forms that appear substantial, animated, and sentient, i.e. ‘real’. Of particular threat to proper training are the manifestations of the distinctions between good (*shan* 善) and evil (*e* 恶). I had thought it necessary, as part of the teachers’ pedagogical responsibilities, for them to further elaborate the meaning of *shan* and *e*. However, I have yet to come across any definitions of the two terms and Teacher Ang had consistently avoided taking any moral absolutist position on the issue. “That is because”, he explained tersely, “The exact nature of moralities is irrelevant to training”. Selflessness is therefore worthy of attention not necessarily because of its ethical content, but what it good it can bring forth for the one who practices it.

A famous story was often told by teachers about qigong practice gone woefully wrong. A particular practitioner who was training by himself encountered among other things, what he believed to be Jesus Christ. Having been convinced that the apparition was real and inspired by its overpowering “grace”, he converted to Christianity, becoming a zealously evangelistic protestant and a scathing critic of qigong as heresy. To Zhineng Qigong teachers, there is absolutely nothing divine about the experience but merely a consequence of proper training but misplaced belief. An example like this serves not only to strengthen the teachers’ insistence on proper grounding in monistic materialism, but also supplying empirical ammunition for their critiques of religion as a product of ignorance and delusion. Greed and a weak grounding in *gongli* 功理 (qigong principles) are sufficient enough, without a need for theological recourse, to account for a very personal inclination to believe in something transcendental.
Zhineng Qigong draws upon Buddhist philosophy in its understanding of greed as an impulse that creates *attachments*. Given that nothing remains permanent, the object of attachment eventually ceases to remain the same, causing suffering to the one who attaches. A practitioner who could overcome greed therefore acquires the ability to remain *detached* from all objects of values. This allows the practitioner to disregard the temptations of ‘distractions (molo 魔略)’ and focus on prescribed qigong training which will eventually allow him or her to surmount the ephemerality of distinctions. Appearances of good and evil come in different shapes and sizes, depending on the stock of symbols available to a practitioner. I have come across, in both written testimonies and personal anecdotes, distinctions that include the Goddess of Mercy, Hades’ generals, and the God of Fortune. Even though the likes of Jesus and the Goddess of Mercy are generally considered to be benevolent characters, to repeat what Teacher Ang had advised, “no one can really tell anyway, one has therefore no excuse to be tempted by these supposed kindly characters, for they might very well be evil with benevolent faces”. It is therefore the attachments to these “naturally occurring part of qigong training” that endangers the practitioner, regardless of what forms good and evil take or whether one pursues goodness or evil. As the volition has the capacity to direct qi, the greedy pursuit of illusory forms causes qi to tag along with the obsessed volition, leading to qi-misdirection and thus qigong deviation. Yielding to temptations stem from a desire to gratify oneself; what selflessness does is to neutralize this greed by turning one’s attention away from oneself through the practice of altruistic intentions and conduct.

**Ethical conduct in everyday life**

Even though notions of greed and selflessness assume certain technicalities in Zhineng Qigong, they do not necessarily depart from how they are understood in lay

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134 Hades or the King of Hell in Chinese tradition is often depicted sitting on a throne with his generals standing guard by his sides. The generals are known as *Niutou* (bull-head) and *Mamian* (horse-face), human bodies with respectively the head of a bull and a horse. Apparently, the practitioner who encountered the two generals had been cheating on his wife, and he believed that the generals had visited him to retrieve his soul for trial in hell.
terms. The meaning of commonly-used words like ‘kindness’ or ‘goodness’ (liang 良), and actions like donating to charity or saving a life might not relate directly to questions regarding qigong deviation or competency. Lay conceptions and everyday actions serve as the means through which the practice of selflessness acquires its functionality and meaningfulness through integrating qigong training with everyday conduct. As observed by Farquhar (1994) in TCM clinical encounters, medical texts and techniques only make sense in and through practice; TCM’s epistemological foundation originates not from abstract presupposed principles, but takes shape in the moving back and forth between experience, practice, and medical literature. Similarly, the notion of selflessness requires more than an intellectual appreciation as much as greed is more than an abstract concept; both acquire their relevance to qigong training from their practical and experiential forms beyond the confines of training sessions. Since Zhineng Qigong can be practiced anytime and anywhere, the exercise of selflessness extends to the practitioner’s everyday conduct and acquires meaning (instrumental or otherwise) and legitimacy through the practices of everyday life. Lay conceptions and practices of good and evil are thus equally relevant to Zhineng Qigong training, for they are the ones responsible for transporting training to the realm of everyday life or rather, making everyday life an indispensable training ground.

I have always appreciated the kindness shown to me by Zhineng Qigong teachers, intellectuals who are in positions of authority within academic and Zhineng Qigong contexts and of seniority deserving respect in accordance to Chinese customs. They are not required to assist an anthropologist leeching on their knowledge and their social networks, yet their humility and helpfulness stand out starkly, in a way described by one classmate, “hong laoshi bu bai jiazi 洪老师不摆架子” (Teacher Ang does not put on airs). My first meeting with Teacher Ang was arranged by Ming, set on a Saturday morning, during the peak hours of the clinic. There were seven patients in the waiting room, and three more in the consultation area, and both Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng were each busy with their own patients. With her dislike of Ming’s lifestyle and therefore his sunyou 损友 (friends of bad influences), Teacher Ng had initially greeted me with a tactless “who are you?”, much to the chagrin of Teacher Ang who on the
other hand, abandoned his patient, shook my hand, and asked me about my research. Unlike biomedical clinics, the consultation room buzzed with an aura of informality\textsuperscript{135}, with the patients looking on bemusedly as both teachers competed with one another in suggesting topics that I should write about while juggling pulse-reading or acupressure.

The above scene was to be repeated again and again, as I dropped by the clinic on a regular basis, not only for my fieldwork, but also during festivals as part of customary practice. Getting gifts for teachers is a head-cracking process, especially during Chinese New Year. The gifts must be expensive enough to reflect the quality of the relationship, but these usually include barbequed pork and other unhealthy tidbits which are not particularly appreciated by Chinese physicians. Yet if one is to go for the other extreme, i.e. tonics, these are equally unsuitable as the teachers’ clinics are stockpiled with them, and the risk of getting a second-rate product is always possible under the scrutiny of the teachers’ expert eyes. Finally, fruits are too cheap a commodity for an important occasion like Chinese New Year and a serious sign of disrespect for one’s elders. I resorted to getting both barbequed pork and fruits as a middle path, and fortunately, Teacher Ang and Ng turned out to be quite unconcerned about such ceremonies, always putting me at ease with: "ren lai jiu hao, buyong pofei 人来就好，不用破费 (it’s good enough that you’re here, you don’t have to spend money on these things)". I was also Teacher Ang’s regular patient, dropping by his clinic for acupunctural, acupressural and other treatment for various martial arts injuries. I only found out after a couple of treatments that he had not charged me for the consultation fees at all, and my subsequent attempts to pay him were always waved away with a "just pay for the medicine, I didn’t do much anyway".

Every Sunday morning, after the training session, I am always invited to Teacher Ang and Teacher Ng’s place for breakfast as they prepare to go for their weekly provision of free consultations at the Singapore Chung Hwa Medical Institution, the

\textsuperscript{135} As reviewed by Good (1994: 26), cross-cultural studies of healing systems established ideal-types of biomedical practice characterized by treatments which are "mechanical and impersonal" and healers who maintain "distance, coolness, formal relations, and the use of abstract concepts". My experiences with both Chinese medical and biomedical clinic correspond with the above findings.
largest TCM charity organization in Singapore. These occasions are one of the ways that I got to observe the interactions between teachers and students on a one-to-one basis. Teachers are always ready to listen to students seeking advice on a myriad of problems, medical or otherwise. As many of the teachers are trained Chinese physicians, they are often approached to help deal with common ailments like nausea and backaches. However, I have also come across students seeking advice on family conflicts, financial problems and moral dilemmas. It is not rare to hear teachers describing problems like these as ‘xinbing 心病’ (sicknesses of the heart-mind), and given their backgrounds in TCM, I am not surprised at their tendencies to ‘TCM-ize’ moral issues. Teacher Ang however, has the habit of framing symptoms and complaints in the language of qi, mo 魔 (distractions), or xinnian 信念 (faith), much more so than in TCM nosology. For example, Madam See, a mother of four children, griped to Teacher Ang about not being able to focus on her work because of her concerns with her domestic responsibilities and her children’s academic performances, with which Teacher Ang replied as he patted her on her shoulder:

“Practice your Zhinenggong, it will help you tranquilize your mind-heart (xin jing xialai 心静下来), but you’ll have to develop a better grasp of qigong principles and have faith in them. Do not be over-attached to your kids’ grades, if not you’ll have a lot of distractions of the heart-mind (xinmo 心魔) and become psychologically imbalanced (xinli bupingheng 心理不平衡). Be mindful of your family life; do not be over-greedy about social status and mistake your concerns with your face (mianzi 面子) for your children’s welfare. Come to me again if your level of alertness gets worse; I’ll give you some heart-mind calming medicine (dingxin yao 定心药)”.

Although I can hardly call these encounters formal consultations, the fact that the same few patients or students kept coming back to gripe about the same few problems while the two teachers gave out the same old advices, made me believe that through these exchanges of talk, some healing was taking place.
Teacher Ang’s usual strategy of dealing with others’ complaints about life was often guided by what I would consider a ‘Taiji maneuver’. Armed with an extensive armament of Chinese proverbs and historical case studies, he worms his way, with tip-toe finesse, around directly addressing the problems at hand while summoning allegories that often imply that the patient him/herself is the one responsible for creating those problems. It is also this particular prudent approach towards others’ self-righteousness that is most revealing of Teacher Ang’s mindful approach towards ethical self-regulation.

I remember an encounter where a fellow trainee, Mrs. Wong, grumbled with intended vehemence in front of Teacher Ang about how lacking in etiquette the mainland Chinese are. Teacher Ang has always been a critic of Singaporeans’ pragmatism, which he believes to be the primary cause of cultural erosion within the local Chinese population. In his own words, “Singaporeans are un-cultured compared to the mainland Chinese...some of them [Singaporeans] can’t even speak proper Mandarin.” Although he did not explicitly express his disagreement with Mrs. Wong, I could discern a slight transformation in his usual genial demeanor. In his typical style of making random irrelevant statements, he began a meandering recount of the myths surrounding lay conceptions of turtle soup’s medical properties. Peppering his narration with the usual attempts at humor, he argued that people should really consider eating tortoises instead of turtles because both creatures are not very different from one another; one should therefore not persecute only turtles because the two species similarly do not possess any tails. Unaware of the patronizing chuckle from his wife, he proceeded to emphasize the absurdity that turtles had to suffer while the tortoises get to “laugh at turtles for not having tails”. Then with a slight transformation in his tone, almost indiscernible, from candid clownishness to quasi-seriousness, he suggested to Mrs. Wong that she should consider having some tortoise soup that could help “lower her heatiness” and thus take away the current irritation that was plaguing her. Mrs. Wong laughed along, I suspected, out of courtesy rather than an

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137 According to Teacher Ang, turtle soup, a delicacy in Singapore, causes heatiness which leads to symptoms like nasal bleeding and sore throats which is often interpreted as an indicator of tonic properties. It is therefore ridiculous, he added, to suggest that turtle soup is a tonic for the same logic would imply that deep-fried heaty foods make good tonic as well.
appreciation of the irony behind the story: that she was not very different from those she was criticizing.

On the surface, this looks like any exchange between a diplomatic elder and a tactless youngster. However, the significance of the encounter was Teacher Ang’s finely calibrated attempt to balance the intention to help with his criticism of Mrs. Wong and his ability to express his opinions without coming across as being imperious. Medically mincing his advice neutralizes any expression of bias, yet reveals his acknowledgement of Mrs. Wong’s complaint as a genuine problem that requires a solution. Using humor to deal with a misunderstanding of TCM principles addresses both a personal concern with pedagogy and the management of TCM’s image. Finally, drawing upon a Fujian dialect proverb138 similar in meaning to “a pot calling a kettle black”, dispels any tension yet accommodates the drawing of one’s attention to the root and solution of the problem. Such maneuvers no doubt require a certain degree of literary competence and an ability to harness the legitimacy of folk sayings, but more importantly it indicates a practical wisdom and adroitness at the art of diplomacy. However, skills like these can similarly be used to harm rather than to help; it is one’s intention behind their utilization that is particularly revealing of an inner world of values. Because of his status as an authority in TCM in Singapore and his senior position in Zhineng Qigong circles, Teacher Ang’s relations with his students and contemporaries are often politically-charged (especially with those from Group A) and thus requires a heightened sensitivity to the intricacies of human relations. Without a self-conscious management of conduct and image, his professional life would have been imaginably rocky and his strategies of dealing with patients like Mrs. Wong would have been tough to pull off. From the measured manners in which he conducted himself in front of the patient, I could imagine the mindfulness required in Teacher Ang’s choice of words, his tone, his gestures, and his facial

138 Although Teacher Ang was a Cantonese by his dialect group, he had some working knowledge of Chaozhou and Fujian dialect, but most of the time, even in the privacy of his home, Mandarin was his language of choice. I was thus pleasantly surprised at his knowledge of, what I consider to be, a rather esoteric proverb, which in Fujian dialect, reads “gu chio bi bo buay” or “the tortoise laughs at the turtle for not having any tail”.
expressions. It is this mindfulness in their presentation of self that stands out starkly as a one of the most distinctive markers of Zhineng Qigong teachers’ status group.

Because of its counter-intuitive nature, if one were to practice de purely as a means towards qigong competency, the process requires conscious effort and constant reminders to keep the objectives in mind. However, the teachers’ ethical conduct need not and did not always come laden with Zhineng Qigong preconceptions; I observed that the instrumental dimension of ethics serves more as an additional motivation and public justification to act righteously and not as the central impetus for ethical behavior. I once asked Teacher Chin how he could afford the time and energy\textsuperscript{139} to volunteer his services for free consultations on weekends. Teacher Chin smiled and replied,

“Actually it doesn’t take up a lot of my time, but my TCM training includes learning about the fatherly duties of a physician. We must show compassion to all, especially the sick and the elderly. In fact it is not just as physicians that we should practice daode actions. I see it as a shehui daode (social virtue) to be kind towards all others, especially when I am capable of doing so. All humans are connected by our shehui xingzhi (social nature) and daode is how we conceive this shehui xingzhi. Partaking in moral actions strengthens this bond between people; it overcomes differences and it refines our character. Doing qigong in a group has the same function, but it is just a more direct way of achieving the same objective...in fact now that you mention it, I believe that showing compassion is also a form of xiulian fangshi (cultivational method, both for qigong and general abilities); it allows us to focus our attention away from ourselves rather than indulge in greed. I think this is essential for developing a calm and focused heart-mind.

\textsuperscript{139} My intention behind this question was to find out why he did it, but my queries could be interpreted as an insult or an expression of shallow-mindedness, henceforth the ‘how’ question instead.
As uttered by Teacher Chin above, the nurturing function of de is often employed by the teachers to rationalize ethical conduct as a means to qigong competency. To speak of ethical conduct as a methodological requirement serves the same function as emphasizing the technical aspects of having faith in Zhineng Qigong cosmology: it provides more legitimacy for Zhineng Qigong teachers to continue with their practice of self-discipline. However, compared to the practice of having faith, Zhineng Qigong’s ethical prescriptions are much more effective in maintaining the complementary relationship between the teachers’ habitus and the field. This is because Zhineng Qigong’s ethical demand can be much more easily transported to other domains of life due to the centrality of moral choices and actions in social life. This works effectively to blur the distinction between theory and practice, subsequently making ethical conduct lianxi de exemplar.

The teachers’ habits at explaining ethical self-discipline with Zhineng Qigong concepts helps maintain what Freund calls a state of “bodily false-consciousness” (Freund, 1988: 858). Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus overcomes the mind-body dualism in Marx’s conceptions, in bringing ‘false-consciousness’ that is traditionally treated as a state of mind to the realm of the material, conceptualizing it as a state of body-mind. However, in comparison to the Marxian tradition, bodily false-consciousness similarly obfuscates the social and political origins of inequality, suffering, and in my case, the teachers’ self-disciplinary habitus. Zhineng Qigong language helps maintain the teachers’ self-regulatory approach towards everyday conduct, so long as it is used to ‘technicize’ and thus invisibilize the power relations embedded within the field. Technicization (see Schmidt, 2005) shares certain similar effects with medicalization (see Conrad, 1992; 2007), of which includes the veiling of social inequalities and power relations as the origins of suffering. A key point to note, however, is that technicization is a much more precise concept, referring to the process of justifying decisions as necessary technical means to ends while blotting out other substantive variables. For example, some organ-transplant surgeons argue that certain patients are selected to receive new organs because of their projected prognosis and not because of social, political, or moral considerations (Schmidt & Lim, 2004).
Technicization allows these surgeons to avoid the uncomfortable process of facing the non-technical variables of their decisions by appealing to the technical imperativeness of their actions. Similarly, to argue for ethical self-regulation as a technical requirement allows Zhineng Qigong teachers to exist in a state of selective awareness, in which they remain highly critical about philosophical and political issues while being chronically unreflexive about the possible non-technical origins of their beliefs and behaviors. The technicizing function of Zhineng Qigong principles thus allows Zhineng Qigong teachers to convince themselves that their practice of mindful self-regulation is merely a technical requirement, adding a layer of scholarly decorum to everyday moral conceptions and conduct.

**Emotions as Symptoms of Gongli***

One could often tell selected teachers from the other practitioners simply from a certain aura they exude: in the ways they walk, the tones of their voices, or the looks in their eyes. In terms of physical abilities, Teacher Ang moves like a 20 year old chap, leaping up the stairs two steps at a time effortlessly while carrying a small TV set. His eyes, though beady-looking, peers penetratingly over his glasses while his gestures emanate deliberation, resilience, and self-assurance. He speaks slowly, particularly when addressing serious issues, pausing regularly as he searches for the right words which when coming from his mouth, sounds neutered of (except with regards to local politics and religion) extreme prejudice. It never fails to amaze me, given their age, how upright the teachers’ standing and sitting postures are. I could easily identify within a crowd of practitioners, who the teachers are, simply from their silhouettes that stand out among the mass of hunched-back torsos which exude signs of weathering and a certain air of self-doubt. I was always reminded of Zhineng Qigong’s demand to “prop up the sky and to stand firm on the ground (dingtian lidi 顶天立地)” whenever I compare between the two contrasting bundles of bodies. *Dingtian lidi* as a commonly used idiom in the Chinese language refers to having an indomitable spirit, free from guilt, and from
shameful secrets. Its apparent usage in *pengqi guanding* for physical rectification is therefore merely part of its purpose; to *dingtian lidi* implies a deeper moral and volitional demand on Zhineng Qigong practitioners. This idiom reflects the holistic diagnostics used in Zhineng Qigong that considers not only the convergence of sense and sensibility as in the case of exercising one’s *niantou*, but also to take the person as an entirety without separating the evaluation of his or her ethical and physical performances. Among those dimensions of personhood, in addition to ethics and faith, that stands undifferentiated from one’s physical conditioning, is the volitional management of one’s emotions.

Although Zhineng Qigong texts do mention the role that emotions or *qingzhi* 情志 play in qigong training, unlike concepts like the volition and the heart-mind, little emphasis is placed on emotions. On the contrary, the exercise of self-regulation which involves the volition and the development of faith which involves the heart-mind feature strongly in acquiring qigong competency and other benefits that qigong training brings forth. Emotions then occupy a secondary status in Zhineng Qigong, designated, once again, as something to be managed by inwardly-directed volitional effort.

**Ideal-types of emotional management style**

I found it intriguing that some students, who are supposed to rank below the teachers in the pedagogical hierarchy, come across at times as rather arrogant and self-righteous. This is particularly noticeable in the conduct of assistant teachers, who having to tackle their liminal status, seek to associate themselves with the teachers rather than the students by a myriad of posturing strategies. It was often entertaining to overhear other students gossiping about Teacher/Mister Lam, an assistant instructor who was taking a course in TCM at a local TCM college. Lam’s knowledge of TCM principles provides him with a rich collection of esoteric terms which he lets loose at others (particularly the amateurs) in a rather uninhibited manner. The uninitiated would usually be bowled over by Lam’s show of knowledge and philosophical depth, but the more
experienced, especially the teachers, are more reserved and at times, sardonic with their comments on Lam. Teacher Ang, who was Lam’s lecturer at the TCM college, once joked that Lam was so “deep” (profound) that one cannot see the bottom of his pit\textsuperscript{140}, an allusion to the latter’s inability to accumulate any learning.

Lam had been teaching the beginner’s class for a couple of years and seemed condemned to remain as an assistant instructor. His outgoing personality and loquacious conduct were often treated with disapproval by his seniors. His amateurish gongli* (qigong competency and skill) was often associated with his lack of sobriety and self-control. His habit of rattling off prejudice was seen as an indicator of a low level of xiuwang 修养 (cultured-ness), a condition that results from a mismanagement of his inner conjectures. His shifty eyes were interpreted as a result of a disturbed inner tranquility that was caused by dishonesty with himself. Some teachers even assigned responsibility to his chongyang 崇洋 (western-idolizing) family members, who in the teachers’ eyes had not provided Lam with a properly-cultured environment\textsuperscript{141}. Teacher Chin went as far as tracing Lam’s behavior to what he called a “western mode of thought (xifang xiwei fangshi 西方思维方式)”, using it to emphasize the virtue of directing one’s volition towards the self:

“Westerners’ political success and their imperious behaviors have a lot to do with a mode of thought that extends outwards in search of truth out there. This contrasts with the eastern version of an inwardly directed volition that seeks tranquility, clarity, and wisdom. This explains the West’s attempts and success at overcoming the external world, which we can see in colonialism and modern science…but as a result, they are not people with a

\textsuperscript{140} His exact words were: “tashi ge wudidong, shen bu he ce, zenme tian ye tian buchu ge suoyiran 他是个无底洞，深不可测，怎么填也填不出个所以然．”

\textsuperscript{141} After having met Lam’s siblings, I believe that the teachers were also referring to the former’s lack of Chinese-ness, which to some of the more conservative practitioners, are considered “chilipawai 吃里爬外 (getting food from the insiders and crawling out to serve the outsiders).”
lot of substance. Lam and his family members are good examples of such people."

Lam, although being much more competent in the Chinese language and Chinese customs than many other practitioners, was stigmatized as being too westernized because of an interpretation that bundles together his inner projections, his emotional expression, his style of thinking, and his social background. As Teacher Ang peered at Lam from the corner of his eyes during a training session, he commented,

"A person’s quality can only be achieved by an act of reflexive volition (zixing de yishi huodong 自省的意识活动); it is a product of taming one’s cluttered thoughts, abstaining from expressive rashness, and maintaining an inner state of tranquility...what he lacks are precisely self-regulation (zilù 自律) and abstinence (jiezhi 节制)".

Holistic diagnostics like the ones above form the central methods through which teachers evaluate a students’ progress in training and through which they measure themselves against a model of human perfection. However, Zhineng Qigong’s corrective methods, at least at the basic levels, do not involve the intervention of a healer transmitting his or her external qi onto the beginner. Without the practitioner’s own efforts at self-evaluation and correction, the diagnostics then become, in Teacher Ang’s words, meaningless “speaking of warfare on paper (zhishang tanbing 纸上谈兵)”. Development and maintenance of one’s own overall quality thus depends solely on the practitioner’s own efforts at self-discipline.

In contrast to Lam, Master Kong, a Buddhist monk, is one of the teachers’ favorite students for possessing roots of wisdom (huigen 慧根), a noble personality (pinge gaoshang 品格高尚) and the ability to overcome difficulties and to endure laborious tasks (keku nailao 刻苦耐劳). Although teachers insist on being addressed as

142 At the time of this writing, Master Kong had been ‘promoted’ to teaching the beginner’s class.
"teacher (laoshi 老师)" instead of "master (shifu/shimu 师父/师母)", an exception had been granted to Master Kong (Kong Shifu 孔师父) because the label no longer indicates a master-disciple relationship, but distinguishes between this and other-worldliness. As a monk based in a local monastery, Master Kong had adopted more or less, an other-worldly asceticism that is a conviction secretly admired by several Zhineng Qigong teachers. This is not only because of the demanding lifestyle required of monk-hood, but the teachers’ awareness that they themselves are not courageous enough to attempt such an extreme detachment from mortal affairs.

As a young child who migrated to Singapore from Indonesia in the 1950s, Master Kong did not have the fortune of receiving any formal education; everything he knows (including the Indonesian language, Sanskrit and Chinese languages) is self-taught. He is one of the very few students interested in Zhineng Qigong philosophy, conducting research on qigong and contributing regularly to the finer details of tranquil techniques as he sought the teachers out for after-classes consultation. His relationships with other students were characterized with kindly dispassion; I could often see him smiling and nodding his head philosophically to the students’ comments as he placed his callused palms one over the other on a tattered green sling bag propped on his right hip. A character of curiosity because of his shaven head and monastic robes juxtaposed with a tattoo of a lotus on his inner right forearm, Master Kong was often surrounded by my inquisitive classmates. His ability to withstand strenuous training, his lack of outwardly expressed extremities and stoical responses towards life’s ups and downs are all considered qualities of one steeped in what Teacher Chin called “the attitudinal-psychological prerequisites of Zhineng Qigong (zhineng qigong de xintai xianqiu 智能气功的心态先求)”. Master Kong is such a role model for qigong excellence that Teacher Ng once wondered aloud: “actually Master Kong does not really need to learn Zhineng...the only benefit he gets from this is probably just exercise!”

Lam and Master Kong’s conduct represents two ideal-types of emotional management styles. Emotions, or in TCM and Zhineng Qigong terms, qingzhi 情志, plays a covert role in Zhineng Qigong. Both teachers and students seldom use the phrase
qingzhi, but in replacement, other generic terms like ‘xinqing 心情 (mood)’ or referrals to specific emotional states like ‘shangxin 伤心 (grief/grieve)’, or ‘fennu 愤怒 (anger)’ are employed to allude to qigong self-cultivational requirements. In Zhineng Qigong texts, the significance of qingzhi is related to its propensity to affect the flow of qi, for example, happiness slows down the flow of qi, and excessive worrying causes it to coagulate (Pang, 1992a: 255). Reversely, qigong training also leads, through the manipulation of qi, to particular qingzhi experiences. These include, for example, a jerky qi-rhythm that correlates with the experiencing of free-falling together with sensations of extreme ecstasy. Managing qingzhi is therefore not only a meaningful social practice (see Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990; White, 1993) nor is qingzhi merely a felt quality of embodied existence (see Csordas, T.J, 1993; 1994; Desjarlais, 1992; Ots, 1994); emotional management has very real health, gongfa (qigong methods) and gongli* (qigong competency-accomplishment) consequences; believing that one is really free-falling could very well lead to qigong deviation.

Emotions in Zhineng Qigong

As reviewed by Zhang (2007), anthropological writings on emotions in Chinese culture produced varying and contradicting conclusions. Kleinman (1980; 1986) and Ots (1994) portray certain emotional expressions as stigmatized forms of behaviors, Potter and Potter (1989) treat emotions as natural phenomena lacking social and symbolic significance while Kipnis (1997) interprets emotions as a performance that maintains social relations. Zhang, on the other hand, suggests her own ‘aesthetics’ framework for understanding emotions in Chinese societies:

“Qing [emotions] is a relational and situational concept. Chinese tend not to conceptualize emotions as pure inner feelings separated from concrete situations. Emotions are not talked about and experienced as abstract concepts but in relation to particular social situations. Qing, therefore, is correlated with reason or rationality (li 理) or language (yan 言) behavior or action (xing 行) and appropriateness (yi 义)” (Zhang, Y., 2007: 57).
The holistic and contextual nature of emotions in Chinese culture defies easy reduction into either an outward mode of expression or an inner phenomenological state. The strict partitioning of the person into his or her inner and outer dimensions distorts one’s understanding of what Zhang considers the Chinese approach towards emotions. Qing takes on different forms and move within the person and between persons; it is exchanged between the mind and body and between minds and bodies (see Zhang, Y., 2007 for concrete examples). This ‘osmotic’ property of emotion has very concrete implications for its need to be disciplined in Zhineng Qigong. As Kleinman and Ots argue, within Chinese customs, individuals are stigmatized for unnecessary expressions of certain emotions, as with Lam’s talkativeness, but certain qing-manifestations are also respected and socially desirable, as with Master Kong’s calm demeanor. Teacher Ang has always been much more candidly clownish towards the less-educated of his patients and students while assuming a kindly sobriety when dealing with me and other what he considers “academics”; his adoption of certain qingzhi states varies from one social context to the next, depending on situations that call for more propriety or those which allow him to exhibit more spontaneity. In addition to li (both reason 理 and propriety 礼), yan (language or speech patterns), xing (behavior) and yi (appropriateness or sense of honor), qing is also correlated with gong 功 (competency-accomplishment), a personal quality that elicits respect and which can, at least as believed by the teachers, only be acquired through years of dedicated disciplined training.

Teacher Ang was not overtly impressed by an analytical approach towards qing. In his capacities as a TCM practitioner and teacher, medical rendering of qing is part and parcel of his professional practice, but Teacher Ang does not fancy contextualizing qing in what he calls xueshu yuyan 学术语言 (academic languages). Instead, he prefers to express it in Zhineng Qigong terms. While we were walking back to his house after a training session, he explained his stand on the matter:

“What is qing? TCM calls it qingzhi or wuzhi 五志 (five emotions) while we [lay people] know it as qiqing liuyu 七情六欲 (seven emotions and six
passions), but it is only in TCM that we bother to distinguish between the seven and the six. Actually we don’t have to frame it so separately from a basic understanding of xinli 心理 (psychology or matters concerning the heart-mind). If you ask me what qing is, I say as long as you have a tranquil heart-mind (xinjing 心静), you wouldn’t have any problems with qing. When a person’s jingshen zhuangkuang 精神状况 (conditions of person-state of sentiency) is good, his xinli would be balanced, you wouldn’t be plagued by your qiqing liuyu. That then depends on how much self-control and faith you have.”

Emotions are thus not treated as an abstract self-contained concept or a felt quality independent of other ‘faculties’ of the person. Be it experienced or expressed, qing is subsumed under other notions like yi (volition), qi, shen*, and xin (the heart-mind). The heart-mind, a concept that defies reduction to a biological organ, a mental process, or a ‘spiritual’ state (see Elvin, 1994; Zhang, Y., 2007: 38 - 41), is often used synonymously with the notion of yi, the volition. In practice however, the heart-mind carries a certain connotation of “faithfulness” and “sincerity” while yi presumes “directionality”; each however, cannot do without the other. In Teacher Chin’s words, “yi yin xin cheng jin, xin yin yi cheng xin 意因信成金，心因意成信 (the volition becomes as tough as metal because of faith, the heart-mind establishes faith through volitional focus)”. Xin and yi thus assist one another in the proper projection of niantou: xin provides the belief-boundaries and structures within which yi creates the concrete perceivables with which the xingtVs (phenomenal-self) movements corresponds. Emotional expressions, inscribed on one’s xingt, provide a way of evaluating the overall quality of a person, offering insights into one’s mode of thought, degree of faith, and the tightness of what one believes in. Qings can therefore be understood as the symptomatic dimension of one’s volitional trajectory and the state of one’s heart-mind.

Emotion’s liminal identity in Zhineng Qigong is most clearly seen in the sancai 三才 (three potentials), especially when juxtaposed with the model of the person
constituted by the mind, soul and body. Instead of talking about the soul that carries religious connotation or references to emotional states and sensations, Zhineng Qigong utilizes the concept of qi as that which slots between semblances of the mind (yi 意) and the body (xing 形). This shows that emotions in Zhineng Qigong occupy a secondary position to that of the other dimensions of the person. One’s qingzhi is therefore subjected to control indirectly through ‘brokers’ like one’s jingshen (state of sentiency), xintai 心态 (attitude or state of one’s heart-mind) or xingtì (the phenomenal-self). All these not only point to the relative lack of status of emotions as the ‘ghost that animates the shell’, but also the central roles of the volition and the heart-mind as the guardians overseeing the overall developmental progress of the person.

As Zhang (2007: 47) argues in her analysis of qingzhi in TCM, “it is not "emotion," but the excess defined in concrete social contexts with certain social and bodily effects that is harmful to one's health.” In Zhineng Qigong, it is similarly the excess of certain emotions that threatens one’s qigong competency. The methods for handling such excesses do not work through suppressing, releasing, or sublimating specific ‘undesirable’ passions, but rather achieves efficacy via reinforcing faith as a bolster against emotional extremities. In such cases, instead of the mind-body dualism that provides for the possibility of catharsis or sublimation, the person-body is treated as a garrison in constant vigilance against foreign invaders and domestic traitors, surrounded by a defensive wall called ‘faith’.

Faith, just like many other prescriptions of Zhineng Qigong, had been touted by the teachers as a product of lianxi, of both training in formal qigong sessions and practice in everyday life. Shared between the two artificial distinctions of training and practice, however, is the role of the volition in the process of understanding Zhineng Qigong principles, of adhering to proper teaching, and of regulating one’s own conduct. Without faith, without the utilization of one’s heart-mind (yongxin 用心), the volition loses both its impetus and purpose. Therefore, regardless of whether one believes that one is really free-falling or having a conversation with Jesus, faith in materialism as the only truth is itself enough to bolster against one’s passions. The volition, with its utility
of directing the practitioner towards the right teachings and of providing lucid targets for projection, is thus allocated the primary responsibility of exercising control over both one’s inner phenomenological world and over one’s expressions of passion through the very cultivation of faith. These mechanisms contain observable implication in the ways in which teachers express themselves.

**Emotional management in everyday life**

Although the teachers’ degree of expressiveness varies from one context to the next, I could detect that behind their various faces lay certain personality traits that not only remain unchanged, but also shared widely among the teachers. Such personality traits can be summed up by two words: measured and stoical. Being a Zhineng Qigong teacher is not easy; one has to juggle several roles and tasks while reckoning with the aging process. Teacher Ang for example, cooks for the family, teaches TCM and qigong, treats patients at his clinic, helps out at his friend’s clinic, offers free consultation on weekends, travels overseas for conferences and charity work, conducts research, publishes articles, composes and performs music, and practices qigong regularly. In addition, he was also working on his PhD thesis just a few years ago when I first got to know him. All these and other miscellaneous duties at Group B and the TCM college add a heavy burden on his 67 year-old jingshen and routi. However, not once have I seen him express any frustration or show any signs of irritation, even in the privacy of his house among only the members of his family.

Teacher Ang’s personality can be characterized as ‘detached’; he was apt to laugh things off and dispense challenges with good humor. He was never totally jovial or entirely grave, and within his statements flow a quasi-seriousness that does not make others feel intimidated or encourage them to toy with the idea of taking advantage of

184 King (1988 ) and Hu (1944) argue that external constraints through stigmatization also acts as a mode of social control.
him. Teacher Ang’s eldest son, Ming, told me that the only time he came face to face with his father’s temper was several years ago when he forgot to lock the gates to his father’s clinic. Teacher Ang, apparently, grabbed and dug his fingers into Ming’s shoulder, causing the latter to drop his cup of coffee. Ming left the house in a fit of anger but received a phone call from his father a few minutes later. According to Ming, Teacher Ang uttered the following: “I made another cup of coffee for you, come back before it gets cold. I’m sorry that I hit your acupoints just now, haha...don’t be angry, it wasn’t intentional.” Similarly, Teacher Chin consistently maintains an unflappable attitude towards the trials of life. Even though he becomes visibly agitated over matters concerning his past political endeavors, he appears much more collected towards current developments in local and international politics. Teacher Chin’s training in Chinese literature arms him with a considerable range of idioms, metaphors and stories which he uses to rationalize away any potentially perturbing encounters. For instance, I witnessed an exchange between Teacher Chin and one of his patients who was griping about office politics that she has to endure in her work at the Ministry of Home Affairs. Apparently, her department had been split into two factions, each headed by a single supervisor. Her descriptions of the various under-handed methods employed by her colleagues to curry favor with the superiors drew a faint smile from Teacher Chin, who dispensed her anger with a single Chinese idiom: “gewei qizhu, bingbu yanzha 各为其主，兵不厌诈 (each person only works for his/her master, in the art of war, deception is not considered despicable)”.

As my practice of monistic materialism and volitional exercises became a habit, I began to understand and appreciate, through phenomenological means, the teachers’ stoicism. Practicing Zhineng Qigong results in an entanglement of one’s volition, sensations, and physical movements with the flow of qi; I could often sense what Teacher Ang called “disruption (zhongduan中断)” in the fluidity of existence. He gave the example of anger, a “natural” reaction towards injustice that causes muscular tension and irregular breathing. For someone who is used to extreme fluctuation in emotions, perhaps, Teacher Ang added, he/she would not find anger exceptionally threatening. However,
“For people like me and you, who are used to self-control, be it because of qigong, martial arts or military training, such emotional extremities can do a lot of damage to the very core of our personalities. Perhaps you don’t feel it yet, but in time to come, every time you *pianli guihua shenghuo yunlu* 偏离规划生活韵律 (deviate from a regulated-regular rhyme and rhythm of life), you’ll start feeling uncomfortable inside. That’s when you know that your qi is not flowing properly. And once you start experiencing these disruptions, you know that you have not been training hard enough. That’s why we always say in Zhineng Qigong, that we need to put ourselves in a qigong-state as frequently as possible. If we only practice qigong during the training session, then how can we go about strengthening our will and developing our faith? People like Lam who talk too much only know theory; they know little about practice. The secret to a healthy life is constant self-regulation.”

Perhaps the measured and mindful manners that teachers carry themselves are a result of being “used to self-control”, where regulating volitional activities, inner sensations, and outward expressions are all part of a bundle of a “rhyme and rhythm of life”. Although they have often ascribed the proper ways of carrying oneself to Zhineng Qigong’s emphasis on the volitional management of the self, I could see that the teachers’ mindful conduct were mostly carried out in a unreflexive manner. Although they constantly instruct their patients and students to practice living a life of conscious self-regulation, I could see that teachers are so used to self-regulation that it is no longer a practice that requires any overt awareness.

Although Teacher Ang’s words describe it in the language of qi, regulating oneself could very well be just a comfortably natural thing to do. Zhineng Qigong terms are employed to explicitly prescribe the involvement of volitional effort over oneself in order to avoid emotional extremities, return to the rhyme and rhythm of life, and acquire a healthy state of heart-mind. However, what Zhineng Qigong theories have provided is
also legitimation for naturalizing and normalizing a life that involves a habitual and comfortable commitment to self-discipline.

**Conclusion**

Zhineng Qigong teachers’ shared habitus is more than just a product of what they have learnt from classical Chinese thought or merely a result of practicing Zhineng Qigong. From their take on religion and education, their ethical conduct, their insistence on having faith and their regulation of emotional expressions, I could see that all these are also intimately tied in with their adaptation to the political circumstances they found themselves in. As Bourdieu suggested, political order is inscribed on the body, that the body-hexis constitutes a “veritable embodied politics” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 172). One’s very expression of propriety or of normative behaviors are all reflections of power relations; “cultures are disciplines that provide codes and social scripts for the domestication of the individual body in conformity to the needs of the social and political order” (Lock, M. & Scheper-Hughes, 1987: 26). Having suffered political reprisals, witnessed the erosion of Chinese culture, and struggled with social marginalization, the teachers’ sardonic sense of humor, their mindful conduct, their stoical air, and their physical postures are all evidence of decades-long processes that involve adaptation to Singapore’s social and political circumstances.

Throughout this entire chapter I have been trying to describe the nuanced traits that teachers share, traits which did not catch my attention initially, but turned out to be significant distinctive markers of their heterodoxy. What I have been trying to emphasize as a single thread that runs through the teachers’ habitus is the disciplined manners in which they carry themselves, which although forms a necessary prerequisite for their devotion to self-cultivation, also indicates a durable practical orientation that maintains the longevity of the doxa and the field. Although Zhineng Qigong has provided Zhineng Qigong teachers with a legitimate means of expressing their political ideals and a channel for actualizing their belief in the powers of the human volition, the
art also functions to technicize and thus invisibilize the power relations embedded in the field. The holistic and monistic epistemology of Zhineng Qigong should therefore not be seen as merely scholarly tools for professional impression management, but forms an indispensable part of the teachers’ habitus because it ensures their unreflexive approach towards the origin of their self-disciplinary practices. Zhineng Qigong is therefore, to use Foucault’s term, a disciplinary technology that has shaped Zhineng Qigong teachers into docile individuals; it is through the teachers’ self-disciplinary semi-bodily and quasi-conscious conduct justified as self-cultivational activities, that the lianxi of Zhineng Qigong has become an accomplice of power.
CHAPTER 6:

IDEOLOGY AS ORTHODOXY

Introduction

“你读这个人类学有什么用，作老师啊？”
“What’s the use of studying this thing called anthropology, to become a teacher?”

: -- Mr. Tan

Mr. Tan was born and bred in Singapore. Just like Teacher Ang’s parents, Mr. Tan’s migrated from Southern China in search of a better life. Mr. Tan’s father was a triad member from Fujian province, and the young Mr. Tan grew up learning the tricks of the underground trade, which often involved spats over territory that were resolved through violence. Under the unintentional tutelage of his father, he grew up to express his short temper through physical aggression, which eventually got him into trouble with the law. Certain that a life with the triad was not something he wanted for his son, Mr. Tan’s father decided that junior needed more self-control, and sent the latter to stay with a friend who taught him martial arts. With his newly acquired skills, Mr. Tan took up a series of menial odd jobs, from working as a security guard to performing with a Lion Dance troupe. He eventually landed himself, with some help from a friend from his triad days, an apprenticeship position at an automobile repair garage. He rose through the ranks to become the most senior mechanic, and subsequently severed his ties with his underground brethren.

I met Mr. Tan after one year of training with my usual Zhineng Qigong group. He had, on advice from Teacher Chin, decided to pick up the art to deal with his chronic hypertension. Fearing side-effects from mixing Chinese medicine with his regular intake of biomedicines and refusing to trust Teacher Chin’s judgments on the right combination between the two, Mr. Tan had thought it safer to stick to his doctor’s prescriptions. Mr.
Tan has a son who had just completed his National Service with the Singapore 42nd Armored Regiment, and was waiting to begin his university education. After having found out that I was teaching at NTU, Mr. Tan struck up a conversation with the intention of finding out more about university life and I suspect, establish some useful connections for his son. As with many parents of his generation, he is mostly concerned with the marketability of his son’s degree; the young man’s personal intellectual interests and other artistic passions are considered inconsequential. Mr. Tan has not heard much about the arts and social sciences, which he believes proves that they are “impractical or unpragmatic (bushiji/meiyongde 不实际/没用的)” subjects. Watching him dangle his pride in son’s acceptance into the accountancy programme in front of others, I could see that Mr. Tan’s immediate concern is with his son’s future career prospects and his family’s mianzi 面子 (face) rather than empathizing with the young man’s aspirations.

On a visit to his house, I met Mr. Tan’s son, Alan, a sporty-looking young bloke who spends much of his time in the gym developing his “pecs and wings”. Unlike his father, Alan speaks mostly Singlish, a Creole form of English that makes his conversation with his Mandarin-speaking parents rather clumsy. However, his parents do not seem to mind at all, seeing it as an inevitable consequence of the nation’s

144 All medically-fit Singaporean men are required to serve two to two and a half years of National Service (followed by another nine to thirteen cycles of yearly re-training), where they are allocated to either the armed forces or the civil defense. Allocation criteria include one’s level of fitness, one’s educational level, sexual inclination, and religious beliefs. Military units like the artillery, signal, or armor (where I was allocated) which handle more sophisticated weaponries take in those with higher educational levels, while the rest are channeled to the infantry, the guards, or the support units. The religious criterion also found Muslims excluded from ‘big guns’ units like artillery and combat engineers. With surrounding Muslim nations like Malaysia and Indonesia as the projected enemies, the state is careful, as expressed publicly by the Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew (S.T., 2000a), with placing “a Malay officer in charge of a machine-gun unit”. Many Muslim men are therefore found in the civil defense branches like the police or the fire brigades.

145 Most Chinese Singaporean university candidates in Alan’s generation are registered with English names, and even when not part of their official records, give themselves one. Unlike their parents, these youngsters are brought up in a centralized English-medium curriculum. This breeds a generation of Chinese Singaporeans who are more proficient in English than Mandarin or Chinese dialects. Singapore society is thus characterized by a generational distance between grandparents and grandchildren who are unable to communicate through a common language. This phenomenon is particularly salient in the Chinese and Indian population.
progress and an indicator of one’s social status. Alan has always been interested in history and literature, primarily those related to the First and the Second World War. Unfortunately, the demands of his school work, particularly mathematics, pulled him away from collecting and perusing war documentaries and reference books. Caught between his personal interests and beliefs about the purpose of education, he has, following his parents’ advice, decided on an academic path that he dreads, but which offers him some sense of security for the future. Even though father and son do not share a common first language or interests, both are avid practitioners of the Singaporean version of “pragmatism”, which the father exercises in his medical choices, and the son, in his educational pursuits.

Mr. Tan and Alan’s pragmatism, a philosophy that emphasizes instrumentality rather than substance, is a disposition shared among most Singaporeans. The purpose of this chapter is to relate such dispositions of Zhineng Qigong students to the Singaporean state’s discursive practices and their epistemological foundation. As shown in chapter four, embedded within certain laws and institutional taxonomy are dualistic conceptions of human nature. This chapter further expands the argument by demonstrating how such conceptions are also present in other discursive practices with influences that stretch beyond the domain of medicine to affect Singaporean society as a whole. I aim to show that Singapore’s official state ideologies, its institutional practices, and the manners in

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146 In the 80s and early 90s while I was in my adolescence, Mandarin-speakers were often stigmatized as belonging to the lower classes. The ability to read, write and speak English was an important cultural capital which many parents who were either uneducated or schooled in vernacular languages tried hard to acquire for their children. I remember several occasions when I was eaves-dropping on the conversations between my elder relatives as they debated over whether they should send their children to Chinese-medium primary schools (huaxiao 华校) or English ones (yingxiao 英校). It was thus rather ironic that huaxiao was later used to refer to Special Assistance Plan schools (because they teach Mandarin at the same level as English) which take in the top 10% of each primary school cohort, restricted mostly to Chinese Singaporeans of course.

147 Foucault makes a distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, defining the latter as “an institutional field, a set of events, practices and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involve demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment, etc” (Foucault, 1972: 157). However, I do not see how institutional fields can possibly exist outside discursive practices. The epistemological or even metaphysical debate on whether anything exists outside discourse (see Purvis & Hunt, 1993) is not my concern. In keeping with probably his most explicit definition of discourse as “practices obeying certain rules” (Foucault, 1972: 18), I include both ideologies and institutional practices under the term ‘discourse’. 

which it typifies Singaporeans form a discursive climate conducive for producing docile bodies and pliant minds. The official ideologies of ‘pragmatism’, ‘meritocracy’ and ‘non-welfarism’ serve as behavioral prescriptions that the state believes are necessary for the achievement and maintenance of certain national objectives. When internalized by individuals, these behavioral prescriptions function as disciplinary power that serves the goal of Singapore’s body-politic. The state’s attempts at normalizing the national objectives and their corresponding ideological justifications establish an orthodoxy characterized by political apathy, materialism, and the practice of pragmatism and individual self-reliance. I argue that Zhineng Qigong students’ habitus reinforces this orthodoxy through their practice of pragmatism and self-reliance that, not unlike that of the teachers, deflect their attention away from the social and political origins of their circumstances.

Unlike my close relationships with the teachers, it was hard winning the trust of Zhineng Qigong students. Getting a comprehensive picture of their life histories was often disrupted by their reluctance to discuss their private lives. Unlike the teachers who welcome me into their clinics while they worked or into their homes for meals and chitchats, spending a few hours in Zhineng Qigong students’ residences and hanging around during their everyday activities was almost out of the question. The data I gathered from observing them in everyday life was thus considerably thinner than that of the teachers. However, there are three domains of life, namely, healthcare, religion, and education, which students were quite willing to talk about. I believe that these are not only the areas in which they do not feel that I was intruding into their privacy, but also issues that they are most concerned with and interested in sharing. Instead of trying to interpret such conduct by referring to their life histories, I shall attempt to make sense of what I can see in their current behaviors in light of certain identifiable traits in the state’s discursive practices.

The following sections of the chapter will begin with a discussion of the ideologies of pragmatism, meritocracy, non-welfarism and their institutional manifestations. This will be followed by descriptions of Zhineng Qigong students’
practice of pragmatism in the domains of healthcare, education, and religion and how such practices estrange them from singular belief systems. This is then followed by a section that shows how Cartesian conceptions of human nature that inform the state’s discourse establish a highly stressful living condition for Singaporeans. Finally, in the last section, I show how Zhineng Qigong students react to the stresses of life by maintaining a self-reliant habitus while drawing upon state ideologies in rationalizing such practices.

**Pragmatism**

The adoption of pragmatism, considered by scholars as a ‘non-ideological’ ideology (Chan, H. C. & Evers, 1972; Chua, 1985), was the golden mean solution to the political, economic, and social quagmire that the country found itself in during the early years of independence. The plight of a heterogeneous resource-scarce country without a means of self-defense was the major concern of the early political leaders. Various aspects of Singaporean life were shaped by the demands of these circumstances, including military conscription, the replacement of squatter colonies with government-leased residential buildings (called Housing Development Board or HDB flats), and the centralization of the educational curricula and healthcare system. Drastic measures were also taken to organize the citizenry into an industrious work force that provided cheap low-skilled labor for foreign industries, including the gradual phasing out of agriculture, forced resettlement of farmers, and the setting up of industrial estates. In the name of ‘surviving’ as an independent state under these circumstances, the first generation leaders, under the charge of Lee Kuan Yew, implemented policies which were designed to ‘work’, ‘pragmatic’ methods devoid of any ideological content directed single-mindedly, at the restructuring of Singaporean society.

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Benjamin (2006) argues that Singapore was not a resource-scarce island, but that it was portrayed as such in modern days as part of the ideological legitimation for mobilizing the labor force. However, decades of industrialization had transformed this ideological statement into a self-fulfilling prophecy.
As a political tool, pragmatism functioned, and still functions, as a regional symbol of neutrality. The imposing presence of a ‘Malay Malaysia’ against a Chinese dominated Singapore does not allow for a national identity forged along ethnic lines, while the domination of Western powers ruled out any alignment with socialist ideologies (Hill & Lian, 1995: 37). The “only way out” was to adopt a golden mean solution not molded in conspicuous nationalistic or ethnic models or established along a socialist/capitalist divide. This allows Singapore to avoid entanglement with any regional ideological conflict while simultaneously appeasing the various ethnic and religious factions within its own population. For a country with limited natural resources, trade was a major source of income, and diplomacy was crucial to establish long-term commercial relations.

The People’s Action Party (PAP) has had monopoly over the cabinet since its inception in 1959, claiming a 98% majority in the unicameral parliament today. The citizenry, since the British left the island, has never experienced rule under another political party. This overwhelming majority in the parliament also means that the PAP faces no resistance in making changes to the constitution to create more favorable electoral conditions for itself. Therefore, instead of a rule of law, the party rules by law, having made 28 amendments to the constitution over the past 35 years (Lim, 2007). With this power in hand, the party has an almost complete control of state apparatuses, including the mass media and the educational curricula. This allows the relative ease

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149 The PAP habitually redraws electoral boundaries during every election. Although Singapore is a small country, it had been carved up into constituencies with their respective Members of Parliament. The party argues that the boundaries between constituencies must be shifted regularly in order to take into account demographic changes. However, some Singaporeans have accused the PAP of using this as an excuse to bring constituencies that are supportive of the opposition under the jurisdiction of others loyal to the PAP, ensuring a higher percentage of supporting votes when aggregated. Other methods employed by the PAP include legal demands that any participating party must field candidates from different ‘racial’ groups, in order to represent the heterogeneous nature of any constituency population. This has been criticized as making things difficult for the opposition who are already finding it hard recruiting new members. Finally, for any candidate running for election, he/she must pay the elections department an upfront registration fee of S$15,000. This had been criticized again as another disincentive for any aspiring opposition politician.

150 The advent of the internet poses a serious challenge to state censorship of media content. Instead of setting up ‘the Great Firewall’ like China, the state recognizes the importance of the free flow of online information to the creation of a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, as a middle path, the Ministry of
of broadcasting the party’s ideological frameworks to the masses, which in addition to utilizing the news media, employs state-sponsored television series and certain compulsory subjects in public schools (e.g. Moral Education and National Education) that carry implicit propaganda. Pragmatism appears in various forms, changing accordingly to the challenges that face governance and the overall discursive climate. For instance, in recent years, whenever the state tries to recover from its own mistakes or when soothing public nerves after major national mishaps, the Prime Minister is apt to make statements like “no point harping on the past, let’s fix the problem and move on”. “Moving on” has subsequently found its way into the mouths of other politicians, bureaucrats and members of the public, serving as the most recent rhetorical face of pragmatism. In its defense against opposition party members, PAP politicians also often utter phrases like “dealing with it in a rational manner” while accusing opposition politicians for “only knowing how to criticize without coming up with practical solutions”. Such discursive components built around the central idea of pragmatism has reached so far and wide that pragmatism has “penetrated the political consciousness of the population and provided the parameters for their common-sense knowledge” (Chua, 1983; 1985).

Communications, Information and the Arts decided to limit its regulation of the internet to 100 pornographic sites as a “symbolic token” of the state’s stance on moral media contents (S.T., 1994b). Besides pornography, political uses of the internet are also regulated, but this is restricted to podcasts and vodcasts during election periods. However, the state also considers the internet a public media, which immediately found laws restricting certain forms of public speeches being applied to cyberspace as well. This makes it easier to categorize unfavorable comments made on the websites of political parties as cases of slander. Recently, laws that restrict discussion of ‘racial’ and religious issues in public spaces led to the arrest and punishment of two Singaporeans for making discriminating remarks against members of certain ‘racial’ and religious groups.

151 To provide a few examples, soap opera-like drama series often depict the roles speaking positively about certain policy initiatives of the PAP. These include emphasizing the importance of the family, the joys of having children, the virtues of staying active in old age, and during the SARS outbreak, lessons in personal hygiene. Schoolchildren are also made to participate in Religious Harmony Day on 21 July, where rituals include dressing up in the ethnic clothing of ‘other races’ to perform skits to inform one another of each ethnic group’s tradition and to remind everyone the importance of ‘racial harmony’.

152 These include for example, the SARS crisis, the collapse of Nicoll Highway that killed a few construction workers, and the escape of Mas Selamat (a suspected “terrorist”) from a detention centre.
Due to the PAP’s consistency in ensuring material well-being to Singaporeans, pragmatism has become the explanatory framework for the party’s competency and thus its very **raison d’être** (Chua, 1995b: 10). The ideology serves as a political-scholarly rhetoric for what a cabinet minister called “a Darwinian duty to survive and prosper”, embodied in the ex-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s “Deng-ist” declaration that “it did not matter what one calls the Singapore economic system, as long as it worked” (Kwok, 1999: 50). The ideology, at times re-phrased as “survivalism” (Chan, H. C. & Evers, 1972), thus functions as an official expression of instrumental rationality (Chan, H. C., 1971). In the name of “survival”, what the party calls “tough but unpopular policies” are often implemented against resisting ground sentiments (Chua, 1989: 1017; 1995b: 20). These include, for example, the installation of the Electronic Road Pricing system aimed at easing traffic congestion. This system utilizes devices that automatically deduct a fee whenever motorists pass through selected road gantries, serving as a discouragement for using certain routes and distributing traffic more evenly. This and other monetary disincentives designed to manage behaviors have earned the PAP the title “Pay And Pay” and bestowed Singapore the reputation of being “a fine city”. The PAP’s pragmatism is also often expressed in its willingness to make a complete U-turn on its earlier policies. For example, during the SARS crisis, Chinese dialects were allowed on public media for communicating epidemiological knowledge to elderly Chinese Singaporeans. This was an unprecedented move against a language policy aimed at integrating the different dialect groups within the Chinese population, but showed the centrality of pragmatism in governing mentality.

Even though the PAP attempts to sell pragmatism as a comprehensive explanation for the party’s popularity, the ideology still fails to account for the desirability of the goals to be achieved. Pragmatism is limited by its emphasis on efficiency and not objectives; its legitimacy is derived from the value placed on bringing about effects in the most direct and cost-effective manner. Two primary “national”

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153 In order to eradicate regional dialect differences within the Chinese population, Chinese dialects are banned on public media and replaced by Mandarin. However, to cater to the older generations, a single radio station, FM 95.8, broadcasts half an hour of news each day in Fujian, Chaozhou, Kejia, Hainan, and Cantonese dialects.
objectives are therefore employed by the state to maintain the legitimacy of the pragmatic framework. These two objectives are usually expressed in the exact words “economic competitiveness” and “social integration” or uttered in phrases of family resemblances in the speeches of politicians and formulaic responses of bureaucrats to public enquiries. These include “staying competitive in a globalized world”, “preserving the social fabric”, and “maintaining racial and religious harmony”.

The dominance of economic competitiveness and social integration in state discourse has bestowed upon them statuses that are almost sacred; their appearances of infallibility make them potent justifications for a myriad of government policies. For instance, laws against speaking about issues regarding “race” and religion in public spaces are presented as measures against threats to “racial” and religious harmony, a status quo that the state constantly tells its citizens not to take-for-granted by reminding them of the dystopian 50s and 60s\textsuperscript{154} when ethnic riots were a familiar sight in the country. Other laws like the Society Act, the Printing Press Act, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and the Internal Security Act regulate public demonstrations, fraternity activities, media content, and religious proselytizing and are justified in the name of maintaining social integration\textsuperscript{155}. Labor policies like the state’s refusal to implement a minimum wage level for workers are always justified in the name of economic competitiveness, defending it as a necessity for staying “economically viable” in a “global economy” with “countries like India and China” providing cheap labor. Behind these national sacred cows, however, is a third political objective that has not quite acquired the conspicuity of economic competitiveness or social integration. Even though the PAP attempts to explain the virtues of a one-party system through bringing attention to the caliber of its members, the party’s excellent track-record, and the importance of incorruptible leaders to political stability, maintaining the party’s

\textsuperscript{154} “Racial harmony” education forms part of the National Education program compulsory for all schooling children up to the pre-university level (see M.O.E., S., 1996). This part of the curriculum includes stories of ethnic riots in Singapore’s formative years.

\textsuperscript{155} This constant fear of social disintegration along racial, religious, and linguistic lines finds another boost from the 11\textsuperscript{th} September assault on the World Trade Centre, adding another slice of ‘evidence’ for the state to use in its rhetoric on the dangers of racial and religious conflict.
dominance has proven much more difficult to dress up as a national interest. The language of economics and the threat of "racial" and religious conflict thus remain the most useful tools with which the state employs to convince the public of the soundness of its policies and consequently, its right to rule.

The question of social integration has not been, from my 32 years of experience as a citizen, much of an issue for the various ethnic and religious groups. Decades of centralized education, campaigns, and military conscription has more or less created, although the state thinks otherwise156, a Singapore culture that transcends ethnic and religious differences, to the extent that, as local sociologists concluded from their research, "cultural differences" between groups of Singaporeans are dependent on class rather than ethnic differences (Chua & Tan, 1999; Tan, 2004). The concern with economics, in comparison, can be found deeply embedded in public consciousness (and unconsciousness) in various forms. Rapid modernization and the state’s depoliticization of popular awareness has replaced participation in civil society with a culture of pursuing material life as the greatest good, and making money as the self-evident means of achieving this goal157. The state too, prides itself in being able to provide material goods to Singaporeans, which it believes, is the primary reason for its electoral popularity. The flourishing of capitalism and consumerism, together with the state’s employment of monetary (dis)incentives and its association of economics with pragmatism find their reflections in both the behaviors and rationalization processes of the average Singaporean. This can be seen in how the language of economy is used synonymously with the language of pragmatism; economic rationality has been adopted by Singaporeans as a major decision-making method, where financial returns are used as the measure of just how pragmatic one’s choices are. The interpenetration between the state’s confounding of pragmatism with economism and the behaviors of Singaporeans

156 The Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew maintains publicly that a Singapore culture is not likely to emerge, “not even for a few hundred years”, and that “the basis of our culture is what we inherited from our original countries, our original cultures” (S.T., 2006a).

157 This zeitgeist is best captured by former Foreign Minister S. Rajaratnam, that Singapore’s national creed is “money-theism” (Goh, 1995: 215).
can be seen in, for example, the latter’s choices about the best time to get married, the best place to live, and the learning of languages.

For the past 20 years, Singapore has seen its fertility rate drop below the population’s ability to replace itself through reproduction. The state however, chooses to emphasize the economic dimensions of the problem, stating it in terms of the required labor power to keep the economy afloat and having enough working adults to support an aging population that inevitably has to rely on public welfare. As a “pragmatic solution”, the state began providing housing financial incentives for married couples while singles are barred from purchasing public housing until they reach the age of 35. The relationship between marriage and housing has become so intimately related that some Singaporeans schedule their marriages to correspond with the availability of public housing locations while others propose marriage with the statement “let’s go register for a flat”. The state also offers subsidies to those who choose to stay near their parents, justifying it as a way to encourage children to take care of their elderly so that the latter do not have to, once again, rely on public welfare. These housing incentives are enough to make one of my friends decide to auction off his flat and get another one beside his parents’, even though he, in the literal sense of the word, “hates” his father for being a “whiner”.

In view of the rise of China, the state has also been reminding Singaporeans of the importance of being proficient in Mandarin. Singaporeans’ (including the non-Chinese) responses range from attempts at revising or picking up the language, attending

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158 Even for those who choose to marry at a later age (beyond 30 years old), the housing grants they receive from the state is considerably lesser than the younger ones.

159 A few years ago, a new law was also established to give parents the right to sue their children for not looking after them in their old age.

160 Such reminders come in different forms, from official speeches to news media carrying inspirational stories about those who have ‘recovered’ their Mandarin abilities to celebrities vouching for the value of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. The campaign slogans have also changed over the years, depending on the target audiences, from “jiang huayu, qinqie you bianli, jiandan you rongyi” (Speak Mandarin, It’s Friendly and Convenient, Simple and Easy) in the 80s to the most recent “huayu ku! 华语酷! (Mandarin Cool!)”
courses which teach business or technological Mandarin, to getting their children to take up additional Mandarin classes. These are, however, not done for the sake of ethnic pride, aesthetic or intellectual reasons, but because many have accepted the state’s reasoning that proficiency in Mandarin will be the ticket to better career prospects. This trend, reflected in the wide proliferation of Mandarin classes in community clubs, the “Speak-Mandarin Campaign” that had shifted its target from dialect-speakers to English-speakers, and the increasing import of Mainland Chinese TV programmes, have become an undeniable pressure for people like Alan to start learning Mandarin all over again. Even though he hated the subject in school, Alan nevertheless forces himself to buy Chinese magazines and watch the 10 p.m. Mandarin news with his father. He is also planning to spend some time in an exchange programme in China, to immerse himself in a Chinese-speaking environment, and perhaps, “get to know some Chinese businessmen”. Mr. Tan, visibly pleased at his son’s “līzī 理智” (rationality), began saving up for the latter’s trip to the mainland. Although I am certain that Alan’s effort at mastering his ‘mother tongue’ has contributed to better communication with his parents and grandparents, Mr. Tan only interprets his son’s actions as a wise investment for what he considers “an inevitability”.

**Meritocracy and Non-welfarism**

As part of its framework for legitimizing its authoritarianism, the state employs what it calls “Asian values” and in recent years, “the Five Shared Values” that preaches society over the self, using it as a buffer against “western individualism” that includes political liberalism. In addition to ‘western forms of democracy’ that include freedom of the press and rights to free speech, welfarism has also been demonized by the state

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161 One’s rights to the freedom of speech and assembly are guaranteed by Singapore’s Constitution, but subjected to several conditions including not threatening national security, public order, friendly relations with neighboring countries, public morality, privileges of Parliament, integrity of the Supreme Court, and reputation of political leaders.
(Friedman, 1981: 3) as a system from the West that leads to a decline in economic competitiveness and work ethic (Chua, 1995b: 26). ‘Non-welfarism’, though the exact phrase seldom appears in official rhetoric, is combined with ‘multiracialism’, ‘pragmatism’, and ‘meritocracy’ to form the discourse of individual hard work and equality across all ‘racial’ and religious groups. Non-welfarism is often packaged as “self-reliance”, “self-responsibility”, or “self-dependency” in the state’s attempts to cultivate a psychological habit in Singaporeans to rely on themselves rather than depend on the state.

The virtues of non-welfarism is always bolstered with advocacy for ‘meritocracy’ – the second ‘founding myth’, after pragmatism, of Singapore’s nationhood (Benjamin, 1976). Meritocracy serves as another ideological solution to a set of ‘survival’ problems, used by the state as one of the explanations for Singapore’s success. Meritocracy refers to a system of distribution which rewards and punishes in accordance to one’s achievements rather than affiliations. It serves as the expression of what the state understands as equality and equity and as an ideology that justifies a paternalistic style of governance. For example, political leaders explain their positions as consequences of the meritocratic system, that they are where they are because they “know better”. It is no secret that the political elite look upon Singaporeans as somewhat child-like in their abilities to look after themselves. This political attitude has subsequently earned the Singapore government the label “the nanny state”. Other ‘meritocratic’ policies include providing Ministers with the highest salaries for politicians in the world, justified as the only way to retain the ‘best talents’ and to prevent corruption (Mauzy & Milne, 2002: 60-61). Meritocracy also helps maintain the state’s patriarchal practices, as it argues that men should be paid more than women.

The Prime Minister was paid a basic salary of US$1100, 000, and Cabinet Ministers US$655,530 to US$819,124 per annum (W.S.J.A., 2000). This will be raised to US$2.04 million and US$1.6 million respectively by 2008. This is compared to the average income of US$26,000 for the average Singaporean.

Singapore’s constitution does not acknowledge gender equality explicitly, and from the various policies that benefit men more than women, females definitely do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men in Singapore. To give an example, in article 12 of the constitution, it is stated that “all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law...there shall be no discrimination against citizens of Singapore on the ground only of [emphasis mine] religion, race, descent or place of birth in any law”. Gender equality is also excluded in one’s rights towards education, repeating article 12’s emphasis.
because males are considered to have contributed more to national defense\textsuperscript{164}. Regardless of how it has been used to justify the design of policies, meritocracy functions, through rewarding achievements only, to extract the most amount of effort and utility out of each and every Singaporean, ensuring that they continuously labor for the “national objectives”\textsuperscript{165} instead of relying on the state for the dole.

Besides the ideological aspects, the institutional manifestations of meritocracy and non-welfarism can be seen, for example, in the administration of the Central Provident Fund (CPF). The CPF board was established to manage the spending behaviors of Singaporeans through ensuring that enough funds are available for a person’s retirement, to pay for his/her medical expenditures, and other areas of expenditures which the state considers “priorities”\textsuperscript{166}. The CPF is a compulsory savings system where workers have to contribute a certain percentage of their salaries to designated savings accounts. Witnessing 20\% of their salaries “disappearing” into a “government bank” is often a good enough reason for the average working Singaporean to moan loudly on payday. The funds from CPF can only be used by the account holder for state-defined priorities like their children’s education and purchasing houses. A certain on religion, race, descent and place of birth only. Gender discrimination in the access to educational opportunities can be seen in the restriction of the number of female students in the faculty of medicine at the National University of Singapore, where the state argues that investing in female doctors is not economically viable given their tendencies to quit their jobs to become full-time mothers. Attempts to address gender inequalities are mostly covered in the Women’s Charter, a set of legal stipulation meant to protect the rights of women. Under this Charter, however, the rights of women are all framed in relation to either marriage or the family, for instance, stipulations which protect women from their husband’s polygamy and which requires the husband to pay ‘maintenance fees’ for his wife in cases of divorce (see Heng, 1996). A woman’s rights in Singapore are thus defined by her gendered role rather than the status of her citizenship.

\textsuperscript{164} Men receive a few hundred dollars more per month than women in the civil service. Some women, in response to this, retort that their national service is to carry men, the ‘breadwinners’, in their wombs. Since each national service stint lasts about 24 months, bearing three or more children (as encouraged by the state), which adds up to 27 months of pregnancy, already exceeds what the men have contributed. Women should therefore, following the state’s reasoning, be paid more than men.

\textsuperscript{165} As I write this, the state is, in view of the aging population and a declining fertility rate, mulling over plans to delay the CPF withdrawal age and to postpone the retirement age. Many Singaporeans I had spoken to were flabbergasted at the possibility that they would have to “work till I die while the government spends my money”.

\textsuperscript{166} The recent US mortgage loan crisis provided the state with more justifications for the virtues of the CPF system, for some elderly Singaporeans lost much of their savings in the stock market.
percentage of a Singaporean’s CPF savings is deducted and channeled to Medisave, another savings account that pays for the patient’s medical bills and the premiums for a series of medical insurance schemes collectively called Medishield. An auxiliary provision, the “co-payment scheme” ensures that Medisave and Medishield only pays for a portion of one’s medical bills; the patient must contribute the rest out of his/her own pockets, no matter how little that amount can be. Finally, a portion of one’s Medisave savings can also be used to pay for the healthcare needs of one’s next-of-kin.

The CPF and the Medisave system are one of the most explicit expressions of the state’s insistence on meritocracy and non-welfarism as systems of reward and punishment, and due to their compulsory nature, they are also one of the most penetrative methods at cultivating self-reliance among Singaporeans.

As embodied by the Medisave and Medishield programmes, Singapore’s healthcare system is essentially non-welfarist (Chua, 1995b: 9-40; Clammer, 1993: 34-52; Rodan, 1996a: 20-45) and meritocratic (Quah, 1981: 149-156; 1989: 122-160). As publicized by the Ministry of Health, “The financing philosophy of Singapore’s healthcare delivery system is based on individual responsibility and community support” (M.O.H., 2007). The emphasis on “individual responsibility” and “community support” reflects not only a fiscal thriftiness, but also implies an underlying retributive form of state-defined national morality. Singaporeans are ultimately expected by the state to be responsible for much of their own misfortune, and they or their relatives must pay for it. This brand of distributive and retributive justice and the insistence on self-reliance as a virtue can often be found in the speeches of Ministers broadcasted through the news media. For example, recent debates about changing the CPF system and healthcare subsidy policies had several eminent political leaders speaking out against calls for more government hand-outs. These include Lee Kuan Yew’s (S.T., 2008e) recent statement, “The Government will not allow anybody to die of starvation. But we are not going to cover you for your indiscretions. Singapore has made it because we have assumed individual responsibility for our lives” and the second Finance Minister’s (S.T., 2007b)

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167 I had personally paid S$0.50 for a consultation as part of my participation in the co-payment scheme and perhaps also helped in developing my own sense of self-reliance.
commentary that self-reliance “is the principle at the heart of the system here, where everyone knows and understands he must save for his future needs”. The discourse on self-reliance features particularly prominently in the state’s address of problems that arise with an aging population. Encouraging senior citizens to ‘stay active’ through a series of campaigns is one method of encouraging ‘healthy’ behaviors. These include a series of TV advertisements and posters depicting older Singaporeans coaching soccer, doing social work, or picking up dancing, and a series of awards asking Singaporeans to nominate senior citizens devoted to ‘life-long learning’.

**Pragmatism as docility**

Just as Zhineng Qigong principles provide legitimacy to the teachers’ devotion to self-cultivation, the state’s ideological framework helps Zhineng Qigong students justify their practice of channeling energies towards themselves. What the discourse on pragmatism, non-welfarism, and meritocracy has provided is a set of disciplines that reproduces the social structure through cultivating Singaporeans who are apathetic towards or fearful of challenging the status quo. Embedded deep within Zhineng Qigong students’ articulations of being pragmatic and being self-reliant is a habitus that contains an overall detachment from social, political, and cosmological concerns and a channeling of energy towards making money, staying healthy, and maintaining their social statuses. Their practice of pragmatism expresses an instrumental rationality that estranges them from tenacious attachments to single teleological-cosmological models of truth, political, and social ideals, freeing them to move easily from one belief system to another while the practice of self-reliance restricts such movements to the private sphere. All in all, the ideologies of pragmatism and self-reliance provide freedom of choice, yet persuade the practitioner not to exercise this freedom within civil society or the political domain.
The pragmatist philosophy inclines a Zhineng Qigong student to direct his/her attention away from issues concerning the public sphere towards his/her own private concerns, which are dominated by the pursuit of health, wealth, and social status. The freedom that pragmatism provides dulls and numbs the pragmatist's feelings towards any ideals, devoicing them of any reasons to feel strongly and to do something about anything which might appear false or unethical, particularly towards social and political issues. Therefore, to be pragmatic, to exercise instrumental rationality in the pursuit of health, wealth, and status is to adopt a kind of conduct that is characterized by docility.

**Pragmatism in health-seeking behaviors**

In many ways, Zhineng Qigong students exemplify the average Singaporean of their age group. Their decisions are often justified in relation to “being pragmatic (shijide 实际的/shiyongde 实用的)”, a term which most often includes allusions to economic considerations. Although the specific medical reasons vary for each individual, when it comes to picking up Zhineng Qigong, the art’s inexpensiveness is definitely one of the pull factors for those who have attempted it. Mr. Tan, for instance, discovered during a consultation with a general practitioner for a common cold, that his high-blood pressure was way off the healthy range. He was not in the habit of going for regular medical check-ups, and so the news came as quite a shock. Even more shocking, he cried, are the costs of treating the range of sicknesses that can result from his condition. These include for example, a simple case of ‘chest pain’ that costs between S$1600 to S$2600, a ‘stroke with complications’ which requires between S$6000 to S$19,000 or a heart bypass surgery for S$24,000 to S$28,000 (M.O.H., 2008).

Because he has never suffered from any serious ailment, instead of the fear of pain and death, Mr. Tan’s reaction towards the above possible afflictions is mostly a distress over how he can possibly afford the medical expenses. Rising medical bills remains a common griping topic among the students, and Mr. Tan’s distress was commonly reported by my classmates. As summed up by one of them, not without a
sense of irony, that “In Singapore, it is cheaper to die than to fall sick”. Being concerned with the cost of medication is, however, nothing unique to Singaporeans or Zhineng Qigong students; it is rationalizing health-seeking behaviors in economic terms that is most revealing of one’s participation in a discourse that equates pragmatism to economism. Referring to the cost of Zhineng Qigong lessons, Mr. Tan chuckled self-assuredly, as if he has just made a wise financial investment, that

“I think I was quite clever to have picked up Zhineng Qigong. If my condition gets any worse, I’ll probably go bankrupt. A membership fee of S$40 per year is much cheaper than changing my heart. I’m not afraid of dying; it’s just the pain of having to see my family members worry over my medical fees. When you get to my age you won’t be so idealistic any more...you have to be pragmatic about life, and the most important is to make sure you have enough money to pay for the consequences of aging.”

In addition to speaking of their healthcare decisions in monetary terms, the other thing that drew my attention about Zhineng Qigong students’ pragmatism is their general lack of concern for the epistemological or methodological foundation of any system of therapy that they happen to chance upon. This however, does not mean that they do not care whether medical principles are true or false. A certain ‘truthfulness’ is required of any method that claims to produce results, so even though one might not understand or bother with the epistemological foundations, one must at least take faith that deliberate interventions lead to predictable or at least probable ends. A Zhineng Qigong pragmatist thus pays much more attention to the predictability of the consequences of Zhineng Qigong’s methods rather than what the art declares about the nature of reality. Zhineng Qigong principles are henceforth accepted by students to be true insofar as they produce the desired results.

Even if they do believe in the utility of Zhineng Qigong, students lack a personal existential attachment to therapeutic principles when compared to the teachers’ investment of jingshen (attention, energy, and resources) in the art. Although some
students do find the cosmological model prescribed by Zhineng Qigong “interesting”, they tend to see it as nothing more than, echoing one of the state’s typification of qigong, a preservation of Chinese customs, valuing its association with tradition rather than musing over its claims about truth or its potential for social change. The most comprehensive and representative reflection on Zhineng Qigong cosmology came from Mrs. Teo, who remarked,

“I think all that stuff about yin and yang and Dao and hunyuan-qi is interesting... according to what Teacher Ang said, these are the ways in which the Chinese think about the world. I don’t know but I think it’s good that Zhineng Qigong helps to preserve our Chinese culture....do I think it’s true? I don’t know...I’m not well-educated...I should think it is, if not how is it possible that it cures my backache? There must be something right about Zhineng Qigong for it to be effective for old-people’s illnesses. I practice Zhineng because it’s good for health...I know Teacher Ang and Ng keeps asking us to read the manuals but I don’t think I need to in order to benefit from training. I won’t understand them anyway...I don’t know why you’re asking me these questions...let’s be pragmatic about this, there’s no need to know so much in order to benefit from Zhineng. Shouldn’t you know better since you’re a university graduate?”

When it comes to the status of Zhineng Qigong in Singapore, students are not bothered at all by the official classification of Zhineng Qigong as a physical exercise or the stereotype that it is an “old person’s activity”. They are instead quite happy that the marginalization of Zhineng Qigong has evacuated a legitimate space for them to practice what they believe is intentionally designed and beneficial for them, agreeing quite wholesomely that qigong is merely a form of exercise suitable for the aged. Some are even thankful that the state has not moved in to crack down on qigong in Singapore in light of the Falungong incident in Mainland China. Mrs. Wong expressed this mentality quite clearly in her commentary on Falungong:
“You see Falungong tries to be a religion when in actual fact it’s just a form of qigong, a form of exercise (yun dong 运动) which many old people like me can practice. Why not just leave it that way, why try to be so cheem 深 (Fujian dialect for ‘deep’ or ‘profound’) and political and get themselves into trouble? Shudazhaofeng 树大招风 (a big tree attracts the wind) ah! I don’t understand why people want to create big theories out of qigong; what has qigong to do with religion and politics? I think it’s just something that works for old people. I don’t know much about Falungong but I think you should just be content that no one bothers you when you do your qigong. It’s a good thing that we the Chinese have got other forms of qigong as well, so those Falungong students can always try another one that works better.”

Zhineng Qigong teachers often argue that Zhineng Qigong theories account for how the cosmos came to be and the role of humans within the larger scheme of things. These questions are rarely explored by the students; it is not their habit to address such questions through and in their practice of Zhineng Qigong. Neither do students wonder about teleological issues; my attempts to discuss these topics were often waved away with querying looks, a “what are you talking about?”, or most often “what’s the use of asking such questions?” I gradually began to see the students’ worldviews as typical inscriptions of Singapore’s rapid modernization and the state’s effort at depoliticizing public consciousness. The students’ lack of concern for existential, social and political issues reveals not only their pragmatic economism, but also a discernible fragmentation of their symbolic universes. Their realities are constituted by pieces of means-ends schematic tools laying side-by-side without an integrating, comprehensive, and all-encompassing semantic glue that assures one of the purposes of existence. It seems as though their worlds are merely methodologically meaningful, that objects appear to them most often as, in Heidegger’s terms, ‘ready-to-hand’ (Heidegger, 1962) like a broom or a pair of scissors. Even before, provided they do, embark on teleological pursuits, Zhineng Qigong students already seem unaware of the need for an existential purpose. In the words of Mr. Tan,
"What purpose of existence? You mean the purpose of living? Just be happy! What’s there to think about? You’re like the teachers, you like to make simple things complex. You want to change the world? Don’t be foolish, just eat, sleep, work, make money, spend money, bring up your children, give them a good education and die. Just make sure that your death is not painful...and that’s why I’m here [at the Zhineng Qigong training session], haha...”

Pragmatism in religious practices

Pragmatism is ultimately an ideological expression of instrumental rationality, which as Weber argued, leads to disenchantment (Weber, 1976). Although students do not always subject everything to technical reasoning, their form of religiosity does exhibit evidence of demystification. Although about 30% of the students I know practice some form of religion, they are not particularly concerned with religion’s capacity at offering ultimate purpose. Due to a lack of taxonomic rigor, Chinese Singaporeans who practice a form of syncretic animism that incorporates practices and symbols from various traditions are officially classified by the state as Buddhists or Daoists. Zhineng Qigong students most often describe themselves as practicing “baishen 拜神” (worshipping deities), “baifo 拜佛” (worshipping Buddha) or “baizuxian 拜祖先” (worshipping ancestors). Regardless of what they call their religion, students tend to see their religious practices as another set of means to ends, and do not pay much attention to the meaning of the rituals they participate in. As a test of this hypothesis, I had gone around asking them the question: “why do you bow three times when you offer incense?”

168 I had the opportunity to witness how Singaporeans are classified into specific religious categories during the once every ten years national census. Because many Chinese Singaporeans are themselves unsure of the differences between Daoism and Buddhism, census surveyors have to work on certain loose indicators. During one particular census interview where I was present, the surveyor simply looked at the figures on the altar, which happened to include a statue of Buddha (among others like the Third Crown Prince Nezha 三太子哪吒 and indigenous deities), and decided there and then that the family members are Buddhists.
to which all of them replied, “yinwei yizhi doushi zheyang zuode 因为一直都是这样做的 (because it had always been done this way)”.

Ah Hee is one of those who practices what he calls ancestral worship. Due to his work in a bicycle shop, Ah Hee suffers from stiff and painful fingers because of a career that requires him to handle small tools and fragile machinery for extended periods of time. Ah Hee has always consulted priests and fortune-tellers, deities and spirits, to find guidance for all aspects of life. Like most of his classmates, Ah Hee usually asks for three things from the deities, namely, health, fortune, and his children’s academic excellence. His immediate concern is, however, with his health and especially his fingers. He has tried, for example, tying red and black strings around his index and middle fingers to applying ointment made from blessed talismans to smoking his palm with incense. Ah Hee’s religiosity, like many of his “Buddhist” and “Daoist” classmates, consists of a worldview where spirits inhabit the mortal world together with humans, where the two classes of sentient beings are treated as distinct creatures that exist in a reciprocal relationship. This reciprocity allows humans to ‘bribe’ deities with all sorts of mortal consumer goods, allowing Zhineng Qigong students to move easily from Hindu to Daoist to Buddhist temples, from Fengshui fish to ‘fortune trees’ as they seek out the spirits most willing to grant their wishes. This worldview provides students with another set of schematic tools in addition to what they know about modern science, folk medicine, biomedicine, TCM and Zhineng Qigong. Even though, on the epistemological level, their animism might not fit in with their utilization of materialist solutions, they do

169 Prayers to spirits often include the following Fujian dialect statement: “...bobee simteh giankong, huatzai, gin-nah tatcheh tat guigui 保佑身体健康，发财，小孩读书读高高”(bless me with a healthy person-body, striking it rich, and my children studying to advanced levels).

170 For a more detailed account of ‘Shenism’ or shenjiao 神教, Chinese deity-worshipping religion in Singapore and Southeast Asia, see Chan (2006) and Cheu (1993).

171 A few years ago, the sales of Luohan 罗汉 (“Arhat” or Flowerhorn Cichlid) and Molly fish hit an all time high because the patterns on these fish’s bodies resemble numbers which punters believe are lucky. Another recent lottery fad was with the appearances of the faces of monkeys and elephants on tree trunks near a temple (see Appendix 4). This drew devotees from all ethnic groups to offer prayers and receive ‘lucky numbers’ from these divine manifestations. Just like the fad with Luohan and Molly fishes, this soon died away.
not seem to find any contradictions between their religiosity and their mortal concerns. Zhineng Qigong students merely treat this-worldly and other-worldly help as means which are distinguishable methodologically rather than metaphysically. In the words of Ah Hee, in response to my query about epistemological contradiction,

“Contradiction? What contradiction? I don’t know what you’re talking about. The difference between asking deities and asking humans for help is only the methods we use. Humans and deities are the same, they like good food, money, wine, respect, etc. You must know who likes what; some deities are vegetarian so you can’t offer them roast pig while some deities are like gangsters so they like meat and beer. We must also understand that the ways we give these things to them are different. I must burn my offerings to deities because they are not on this Earth, but for you I’ll probably pay you money in return for some services...that’s all.”

If one were to employ Tylor’s (1891) and Malinowski’s conceptions (1954), Zhineng Qigong students’ religiosity qualifies more as a form of magic, where the emphasis is on the instrumental rather than the substantive dimensions. It is this instrumental rationality within their everyday practices that allows Zhineng Qigong students to gloss over any incompatibility between their deistic and non-deistic practices; it does not bother the students what the epistemological assumptions of the methods are, as long as they work. Compared to the teachers who maintain their distance from religious practices while remaining attached to other belief systems, Zhineng Qigong students are not only estranged from religious imperatives but also from other this-worldly belief systems.

Pragmatism, as both a rationalizing tool and a set of practices, dispossesses the students of good reasons to feel strongly about and act upon what they believe to be true or righteous. Even in occasions where I could tell that some students feel particularly angry or bitter about the changes in Singapore, for instance, the influx of foreign workers, they were apt to dismiss such concerns with “no use thinking/arguing about it”
Although the pragmatist philosophy isolates the students from certain ideals, it also contributes significantly to the degree of freedom in their choices of solutions for life’s problems, allowing them to move from one set of means to another without having to deal with guilt that come with ‘epistemological infidelity’. This freedom serves as a prerequisite for their practice of what I call medical tourism.

The Medical Tourist

‘Medical tourism’ refers to the belief in and the practice of trying out different therapeutic systems in order to discover or hybridize one that is most appealing. The process involves inventive, adaptive and courageous attempts at mixing and matching healing methods from different therapeutic systems. Aspects of medical tourism, although he did not name it explicitly that, forms part of Lee’s (2002) research on alternative ‘new-age’ therapeutic systems in Singapore. He concludes that middle and upper middle-class Singaporeans are, in addition to the aesthetic values of the chosen therapies, mainly attracted by their efficacy. Quah’s (1989) research in the 80s also arrives at a conclusion that Singaporeans are a pragmatic lot when it comes to using alternative medicines. She observes that it does not matter what traditions the healing methods hail from, as long as they work for the individual patient. The main difference between the two publications, in addition to the timeline of research, is the sample populations which the authors were working with. Lee’s respondents were mostly young professionals while Quah surveyed a broad sweep of the populace. Zhineng Qigong students hardly qualify as young and rich; the main criterion with which they filter off unsuitable healing methods is thus not very different from the people Quah surveyed in the 80s. When it comes to the selecting medical systems, pragmatism or the search for efficacious healing methods remains the modus operandi of Zhineng Qigong students.

The process of deciding which medical solution works better varies from one Zhineng Qigong student to the next, influenced by the availability and the perceived
reliability of information. With biomedicine as the only legitimate medical system in Singapore and its dominance in medical discourse, its presence in popular consciousness makes it the de facto first choice among Zhineng Qigong students. However, when intervening variables like the cost of biomedical procedures, the side-effects of medication, or the “incompetence of xiyi 西医 (Western medicine-doctor)” appear, students readily turn to alternative medicines. Either way, the trust that students have in biomedicine, regardless of how much (or little) they understand its principles, are quite readily diluted by encounters with other healing methods which work better or are less expensive. Besides using the cost of medicine as an explanation for their switch to Zhineng Qigong, students were also apt to emphasize the health benefits they receive from practicing the art, with efficacy defined by subjective sensations of well-being. Mrs. Chan for example, suffers from what she calls jingshen shuairuo 精神衰弱 or neurasthenia, for which visits to her family doctor “did nothing”. She describes her experience with Zhineng Qigong in the following manner:

“I used to take a lot of weird smelly pills prescribed by my doctor, but it only makes me feel more lethargic even though I could feel that my mind becomes clearer. I suspect that the western medicine I took was too heavy for me so I drank a lot of herbal tea to cool down. Maybe it was because my doctor could not understand my problems because I heard from my friends who said that he [the doctor] is inexperienced with old people’s illnesses. Anyway, my neighbor advised me to take Chinese tonic instead but I didn’t know which types are better suited for me and I don’t want to buy those tonic wines because alcohol gives me gastric problems. I asked Teacher Ng for advice and she said that what I lack is fresh air and exercise…so I took up Zhineng Qigong. Initially I thought that it was because of waking up early in the morning that had some effects on my ailment but even when I switched to night training, I could still feel that it was working for me. I think Zhineng Qigong is really good for old people; it’s not strenuous on the heart and it doesn’t hurt the joints. Just look at the teachers; they look twenty years younger than they really are!”
The advice from relatives, friends, strangers, and general hearsay ranks second to that from personal experiences in deciding which medical system to turn to. Such advice can range from traditional ethnomedical cures to religious healing mixed and matched for specific ailments. For example, a classmate, Mrs. Wong, who was suffering from a weakness in her legs, consumed soup double boiled with chicken legs and ginger on advice from her sister-in-law. She explained however, that she is merely applying the TCM principle of “replenishing form with form (yixingbuxing 以形补形)”\(^\text{172}\). After learning of what Mrs. Wong was doing, Teacher Ng remarked exasperatedly that \textit{yixingbuxing} only applies to the treatment of bone and brain-related ailments through the consumption of bone marrow\(^\text{173}\). Teacher Ang too has to deal regularly with such approaches towards the utilization of Chinese proprietary medicines (CPM) or \textit{zhongchengyao} 中成药, ready-made bite-sized Chinese medical products that usually come in the form of pills, syrups, or ointments. Many of his patients, including his students, have at one time or another, resorted to self-medication with CPM products readily bought over the counter from Chinese medical halls. Besides the Poisons Act and the Medicines Act which regulate the toxic contents of these medicines, CPMs can be quite conveniently purchased in any amount without a need for prescriptions from physicians\(^\text{174}\).

Teacher Ang had, on more than one occasion, lamented loudly that he finds it strange how patients can utilize medical procedures without understanding the mechanisms behind them. My interpretation, however, is that patients believe that they do understand TCM, just that they do not distinguish between literati professional TCM and folk medical conceptions. Therefore, to Mrs. Wong, \textit{yixingbuxing} is replenishing her

\(^{172}\) \textit{Yixingbuxing} also serves popularly, in Singapore, as the theoretical basis for the consumption of tiger and bull penises for the male libido, and pig’s brains for students preparing for examinations.

\(^{173}\) Bone marrow contains \textit{sui} 髓, a constituent of both bones and brains. In classical TCM texts, the brain is sometimes referred to as \textit{suihai} 髓海, or \textit{sui-ocean}.

\(^{174}\) This unchecked practice sometimes leads to side-effects which some consumers blame on the quackery of TCM rather than their own usage.
legs with chicken legs. I do not see these behaviors as particularly irrational even though I have come across some cases of misuse which led to death\textsuperscript{175}. Those who self-administer Chinese medication, because of the range of CPM products available and their mild effects, do not to stick to a single product if it does not work for them. Mrs. Wong, for example, did not continue with her consumption of chicken legs for more than a few months. Under the advice of a friend, she moved on to climbing stairs and taking some unknown powder\textsuperscript{176} that the friend gave her. Mrs. Wong’s medical tourism thus contains a flexibility and adaptability that is much wiser than Teacher Ang believes.

\textbf{Medical tourism and the practice of Zhineng Qigong}

In contrast to the utilization of CPM, the fear of qigong deviation leaves a much deeper impression on students than the dangers of improper medication. Few students have imported their medical tourist habitus into their practice of Zhineng Qigong; they have instead chosen to stick unquestionably to the curriculum rather than trying anything imaginative. When I asked one student why she did not try combining Zhineng Qigong with her Taijiquan moves, she readily admitted, "Because I do not dare to". Instead of mixing and matching qigong methods with those from beyond the art, those who have not experienced any benefit from training simply decide to move on to other healing methods. This probably accounts for the high attrition rate among Zhineng Qigong students. During an accidental meeting with a former student who had disappeared from training for a few months, I found out that he had given up Zhineng Qigong and instead consulted a visiting folk healer from Malaysia. His headache, he declared, had gotten worse after four months of qigong training, but this “shenyi 神医 (miracle doctor)”

\textsuperscript{175} For example, Singapore recorded its first case of death from consuming virility-boosting tonics, in this case “Power 1 Walnut” from China. The middle-aged man passed away after falling into a month-long coma (S.T., 2008b).

\textsuperscript{176} I discovered later that she was taking \textit{tianqi} 田七 or \textit{sanqi} 三七 powder (\textit{Panax notoginseng}), which is described in the Materia Medica as a tonic for the blood. After Teacher Ang found out about this, he laughed, “I don’t know who asked her to take \textit{tianqi}, but she should perhaps stick to chicken legs.”
whom he met through personal connections cured him by simply whipping his upper torso with a rattan stick.

Although it lacks a professionalized image compared to TCM, Zhineng Qigong is treated by students with much more respect. This is because it is seen as a highly esoteric mysterious art that exists in a totally different league from folk medicine, biomedicine, and TCM, all of which students believe they know something about. This severely limits the space within which students can exercise their usual inventiveness with Zhineng Qigong. With rumors of the symptoms of qigong deviation rampant in mainstream media and entrenched images of martial artists gone insane from ‘misfiring’ their qi, few students are brave enough to attempt a mix-and-match of “Zhineng Qigong self-medication”. It should thus follow, I had initially thought, that students would be more eager in exploring the intricacies of Zhineng Qigong so that they could acquire the confidence and skills to manipulate its techniques. However, only a handful of Zhineng Qigong students out of the approximately 120 I know have shown any interest in the substantive dimension of Zhineng Qigong or have bothered to more than check out the first few pages of the manuals. It appears that students find it much more painless to shuttle between therapeutic systems than reading Pang Ming’s writings. Zhineng Qigong thus continues to appear to the student as a single package of useful tools irreducible to its components.

Mrs. Wong’s approach towards Zhineng Qigong represents that of the majority of the other students. She treats Zhineng Qigong with a combination of reverence, fear, awe, and obedience. Zhineng Qigong is to her, first and foremost, a form of exercise, one that “gets me out of the morning to move myself around”, yet because of her belief that she “can never understand it”, Zhineng Qigong is still quite different from taking a

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177 Pang’s writings are not exactly very accessible to the lay person, although he does write in a simple prose. His introductory text to Zhineng Qigong (Pang, 1992a) was already over 600 pages long, within which 80% of the content was allocated to discussing the theoretical aspects of the art. It did not help that many concepts he employed were either drawn from esoteric traditions or modern day academic science, translated into Chinese. I myself took about three months to digest the book cover to cover and I must say that it takes more than a concern with the healing effects of Zhineng Qigong to motivate oneself to tackle it. Even Teacher Cheng from Group A admitted that he did not understand 40% of what Pang was trying to say.
walk or playing tennis. Her reverence for the mystery of the art makes her adamantly avoid reading the manuals or attending seminars; my attempts at discussing qigong theory with her were also often met with either an impressed expression, a blank look, or a “ask Teacher Ang, I don’t know”. The fear of qigong deviation makes her follow unquestioningly whatever the teachers taught while learning the motions of pengqi guanding through pure imitation. And when I asked her which technique in pengqi guanding is most effective in treating her ailment, she replied, “I don’t know, I always do the entire set”.

Exceptions do exist, however, regarding students’ adversity towards administering qigong self-medication. Zhineng Qigong’s exercises are usually taught undifferentiated from one another; seldom have I come across teachers speaking of specific techniques for specific ailments within the framework of the hunyuan-qi theory. A reductionistic approach, however, is adopted when teachers’ accounts are framed in the language of physiology, using words like ‘bones’, ‘skin’, ‘muscles’, and ‘tendons’ without mentioning yi, shen*, or qi. Such Cartesian ways of representing Zhineng Qigong are however, strictly restricted to pengqi guanding and never demonstrated in the second level and above. Teacher Chin, for example, had on several occasions explained that the grasping and loosening of one’s fist, a certain move from pengqi guanding, is used to “strengthen the wrist’s tendons” rather than articulating it in terms of clearing meridians or directing qi. I asked several teachers why such distinctions are made between the first and other levels. They explained that beginners do not need to and do not like to know too much about the theoretical aspects; speaking in physiological terms makes Zhineng Qigong sound much more familiar and easier to pick up.

Unbeknownst to and probably abhored by the teachers is that accounts like these make students feel safer at practicing Zhineng Qigong selectively; even a theory-fearing person like Mrs. Wong had taken up the initiative to try certain neck-maneuvers which Teacher Ang introduced on a TV programme as a treatment for upper-spinal ankylosis. Because students do not show the same level of apprehension when using TCM
compared to practicing Zhineng Qigong, I gathered that it is ultimately the theory that qi can be directly manipulated by volitional activity that discourages students from attempting any alteration to the curriculum. However, when techniques are rationalized without any recourse to the theory, they become once again readily incorporated into a student’s medical tourism.

Pragmatism in the pursuit of education

Education is another area in which pragmatic concerns dominate Zhineng Qigong students’ choices, and which illustrates their lack of concern and knowledge of the social and political implications of their children’s education. Once again, Zhineng Qigong students treat education as a means to ends, paying little or no attention to its self-cultivational aspects. They tend to rationalize their children’s academic paths in economic terms, treating education as economic investments for greater future returns. This concern with education as an economic investment is not merely a populist practice; the Ministry of Education has made it explicit repeatedly that economic circumstances are the primary driving force behind the design of the national educational curricula, often justifying it with the word “relevance”. For example, the current Minister of State for Education commented recently that “Our higher education system is also unapologetically...closely attuned to the need to make education relevant to help Singaporeans find a job and remain employable. This gives them confidence that the education they have received is meaningful” (S.T., 2008h). It is notable that the state equates the meaningfulness of education with its pragmatic economic purpose, which does not deviate far from Zhineng Qigong students’ points of views. Besides changes to Mandarin-teaching methods, recent additions to university programmes like the life sciences, media design, double degree in biology and TCM are what I consider highly

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178 If one takes academic performances of the various ethnic groups as an indicator of concerns with education, Chinese Singaporeans come in tops. See McInerny and McInerny (2007) for the differences in academic performances between ethnic groups in Singapore.
instrumental rational solutions to the volatile situation of a country deeply embedded in the global economy.

In addition to a concern with money, Zhineng Qigong students are also highly motivated when it comes to preserving or upgrading their “mianzi” or “face”, and being able to advance far in one’s education is one of the major ways in which one improves upon one’s mianzi. Zhineng Qigong students are mostly concerned with their social rather than moral faces (lian). Mianzi relates to one’s social prestige (see Hu, 1944; Hwang, 1987; King, 1988); it is a capital that students believe can be acquired through economic means, which at times leads them to compromise on their moral faces. For example, Teacher Ang had caustically commented that Mr. Tan’s attempt to befriend me was a typical case of yao mianzi buyao lian (giving up one’s moral face for the sake of one’s social face). Although students do acknowledge cultural capital as a contributor to one’s social face (as demonstrated in their respect for the teachers), economic capital remains the major symbol of one’s status. This leads to some Zhineng Qigong students incurring debts from overspending in order to catch-up with the Joneses. Mr. Tan, for instance, is someone quite willing to believe in anything as long as it can help him strike the lottery or any other means of making lots of money. It was hard not to notice the glaring Rolex watch he wears to the training sessions and his silver Mercedes Benz parked outside the stadium. He is also someone adept at, in the midst of a conversation, making vague references to newly acquired luxurious possessions, which for the past two years that I have known him, include a 39-inch LCD monitor, a new car, and an OSIM brand massage arm-chair. Compared to his father, Alan sees such hedonistic lifestyles as rather philistine and his father’s attempts at predicting lottery numbers superstitious. Although Alan behaves patronizingly towards his father’s behaviors, he admitted that his goal in life is to retire at the age of 45 and

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179 Mr. Tan’s spending behavior reflects what the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong called “a worrying trend”. Lee had expressed concerns about Singaporeans like Mr. Tan who “live beyond their means” (S.T., 2008g), that many of them had to turn to their respective Members of Parliament for help with the mortgage for expensive furniture and housing renovation loans. Another Member of Parliament also commented that for some of those who came to him for help, they carried “the latest mobile phones, a clear sign they have wrong priorities” (S.T., 2008d).
buy himself a house with a garage large enough for his future Porsche. Most importantly, Alan believes that with a degree in accountancy, this goal is definitely within his reach.

Education as an end in-itself or as part of personal self-cultivation appears to the average Zhineng Qigong student as something quite incomprehensible, reserved for the queer, the ancient, and ironically, “those who have read many books (duguo hengduo shu de)”, i.e. the well-educated. Teachers, fitting into the last category, are thus treated with reverence for possessing not only the knowledge that students need for their health-seeking ends, but also simply because they are well-educated. It is thus quite peculiar that the respect that students have for the well-educated, regardless of the economic returns that these ‘scholars’ have acquired, have not translated into concrete actions. I had earlier gone around ‘breaching’ the students’ life-worlds by pointing out this obvious inconsistency in their attitudes towards education, and I received a myriad of responses. These include arguing that they and their children are “not made for studying (bushi dushu de tiao 不是读书的料)”, that they do not have the money to invest too much in education, and that, not unexpectedly, having too much education can make one over-qualified and hence unemployable. The most commonly-used response to my interrogation was summed up in a single Fujian dialect term: “bobian 没办” or “no choice”, that they have no other options but to retain their current practices.

Regardless of the reasons they gave, students share a common aversion towards emulating the scholarly practices of Zhineng Qigong teachers, exhibiting noticeable discomfort at the mere mention of the prospects of doing so. It appears to me that deep inside, Zhineng Qigong students yearn very much for the lifestyles that the teachers lead and the characters that the teachers possess. However, instead of exploring the means of acquiring those very lifestyles and characters, the students have adopted a rationalization process that employs pragmatism as a legitimation for avoiding becoming entangled

180 Having taught in two local universities for over past five years, one of the first few questions that university greenhorns asked me was “what are the career prospects for majoring in sociology?” None, so far, had queried what they would be learning in the course.
with the non-economic dimension of education. This rationalization method is best expressed by Mr. Chow,

“I feel that the teachers really deserve a lot of respect. I heard some rumors that Teacher Ang was [lowers his voice] imprisoned by the government before, is that true? [I shrugged and shook my head]. It’s quite a feat for him to bounce back on his feet...doesn’t he feel angry about it? Maybe because he is cultured in the gentleman’s way...people who have read a lot of books are really different from us...just look at their gestures and the way they talk. What to do? I’m a boorish man, I’ve got little education. I have no choice; I have to be more pragmatic because I need to feed my family...being a scholar is a luxury, being cultured is a privilege. I doubt if my children can be scholars; I think the boorish character runs in the family, haha...”

To Zhineng Qigong practitioners, the word ‘education’ (jiaoyu 教育) echoes with three layers of meaning, namely, the accumulation of knowledge (zhishi 知识), culture (xiuyang 修养), and skills (jineng 技能). Among the three, the third is employed most by the students and their children to refer to the purpose of education while the other two, by the teachers. Students tend to accept the state’s version of education as a means towards accumulating pragmatic skills while the teachers consider the pursuit of jineng as a product of the state’s ideological indoctrination and an indicator of being uncultured. It comes as no surprise that, in the privacy of their homes, teachers are apt to use certain selected students and their children as classical examples of the state’s engineering success.

Mr. Tan embodies much of how the other Zhineng Qigong students view their children’s education. Singapore won political independence in 1965 when Mr. Tan was 11, and initiated a series of economic policies that saw the market demanding workers who could administer the English language. Having been educated in Chinese-medium schools until the age of 16, Mr. Tan faced several setbacks looking for a job that could
support his rather extravagant lifestyle. Certain that he did not want his children to end up in a ‘physical job’ like he did, Mr. Tan, like many other Zhineng Qigong students, is adamant about making sure that his offspring receive the best education possible. Because of his bad experiences with looking for employment with his Chinese-educated background, Mr. Tan has always insisted that his son and daughter receive English tuition after classes. Giving his children English names was also part of his plan for their future, that “having English names will give people the impression that my children are well-educated”\(^\text{181}\). This concern with education as a means to ends saw other ploys employed by well-intentioned parents in Singapore. These include volunteering their services at ‘elite schools’ to up the chances of getting their children accepted, spending money on ‘10-year series’ assessment books\(^\text{182}\) to train their kids to be exam-smart, and most commonly, after-classes tuition for ‘important subjects’ (those that determine one’s place in universities) like English and Mathematics (and more recently, Mandarin). I had come across several working-class parents laboring double-shift in order to pay for educational supplements while at the same time willing to use any disciplinary methods to make sure that their kids do well in school\(^\text{183}\). With the increasing emphasis on ‘e-learning’, parents now have computers and educational software to add to their list of ‘must-haves’. Singaporean parents are thus generally and literally, ‘kiasu’ (a local

\(^{181}\) Two of my Zhineng Qigong classmates were also thinking of sending their children to Christian schools because they believe that the youngsters could then get to know people of high social standing, which would consequently be useful for upping their life-chances. Given the survey finding that a correlation exists between Christianity as one’s religion, English as a one’s first language, and one’s higher socio-economic status, my classmates’ methods were not unfounded.

\(^{182}\) The 10-year series assessment books are collections of examination questions for the preceding 10 years. Students in Singapore have to clear three main obstacles in their lives, namely the PSLE (primary school leaving examination) which they take at the age of 12, the Cambridge ‘Ordinary’ Level examination at age 16, and the ‘Advanced’ Level examination at age 18. This makes university education a breeze compared to the earlier years. All the three major hurdles come with their respective 10-year series assessment books that can be easily found in major bookstores. Recently, because of a new national school-ranking system, the examination papers of ‘elite schools’ are also being sold on the market, where a set of papers for each subject costs between S$20 to S$30, depending on how ‘elite’ the school is.

\(^{183}\) The tougher parents have no qualms about beating their kids for failing tests or examinations. Mr. Tan once related to me how he whipped his son with a bamboo cane until the instrument broke when Alan could not memorize the table of multiplication. My experiences with my father were not very different from that of Alan, which in addition to caning, included other creative methods like being made to kneel on cockleshells until my knees bled and being bagged in a sack and thrown into the refrigerator. This style of disciplining one’s children has become less fashionable in recent years, judging from how difficult it is to find bamboo or rattan canes at convenience stores nowadays.
Fujian term for describing Singapore’s ‘fear of losing’ national culture) when it comes to ensuring that their children acquire the ‘one-up’ over others.

Even as grown-ups, many Singaporeans continue with further education beyond the university. However, their selection of courses and their explanation for their choices are again framed in the language of economics and pragmatism. A Masters in Business Administration remains the most popular post-graduate degree that Singaporeans clamber over, often attending night classes while holding full-time day jobs. NTU had recently started offering a Masters degree in contemporary China, which saw an increasing number of part-time students signing up. I had the fortune of giving a lecture in one of these Masters seminars on contemporary China, and took the opportunity to speak to several students. All of them were above the age of 35 and held day jobs in the civil services, including teachers, administrators, and researchers. I asked eleven students why they had decided to take up night classes after a hard day’s work, and ten of them used the terms “upgrade” or “upgrading” in their explanations. ‘Upgrading’ is another keynote phrase that one finds regularly in the state’s rhetoric; it is a way to speak of further education in economic terms, that an ‘up-grade’ of one’s skill through further studies ensures a level of competitiveness in the market.

The pragmatic take on education makes many Singaporeans view ‘arts’ subjects with suspicion and derision. It was common for my Zhineng Qigong classmates to react with a “shenme laide, du zhege you shenme yong 什么来的，读这个有什么用?” (What’s that, what’s the use of studying it?)”, when I told them about my Bachelors in sociology and philosophy. Mr. Tan is one of the most vocal about the worthlessness of subjects like literature and philosophy. His daughter, Joanna, spent a year in the university studying electrical engineering and had begun toying with the idea of switching over to political science. Mr. Tan was furious over Joanna’s decision; he felt particularly righteous that after spending a few thousand dollars on her university education, she should not be thinking of attempting something as “dangerous and

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184 It costs a Singaporean citizen about S$5000 – S$6000 a year in any of the three local state universities, depending on the discipline that one is registered with. Arts and social sciences subjects are one of the
stupid” as becoming a politician. After learning that I was a social science graduate, he softened his tone but not without the finishing line, “If she wants to study something like this, she should become a professor like you, if not, what’s the fucking use!”

A Zhineng Qigong student whom Mr. Tan regularly hangs out with was Mr. Lee, a 57-year-old widower with two sons in the university, twins who are both engineering undergraduates. I asked one of them why he chose engineering, to which he replied as his father nodded in agreement, “deciding to go into the engineering faculty was not a difficult process – it was simply the default choice. No offense man, but guys studying arts subjects are usually the ones who can’t get into engineering.” Mr. Lee’s background shares an uncanny resemblance to that of Mr. Tan. Although Mr. Lee did not take part in triad activities, he was also educated in Chinese schools, dropped out in his teens, married young, and found a job as a technician. I asked him what he thought about his sons’ academic performances, to which he replied,

“Great, they’re doing well, not first-class standard but they’ll get their honors degree. When I was young, I didn’t care about school...look at what I’m working as right now. My back aches like hell, the skin on my fingers are almost worn out, and I stink of lubricating oil all day...all because I didn’t study hard. I don’t want my son to do physical work like me when they grow up, so I used to beat them whenever they didn’t do well in school...getting good grades is very important, they must at least get a university degree and find a comfortable job, be able to afford a grand wedding, have the money to travel, etc. If you can’t find a good job after you graduate, then what’s the use of spending so much money on studies? I

cheapest, which some of my Zhineng Qigong classmates use as a proof of how “useless” these degrees are.

185 Throughout my past ten years as a social scientist, I have come across countless encounters with people who assumed that my intention with studying ‘arts subjects’ was to become a teacher. These preconceptions are so prevalent that in my first year as an undergraduate, that was exactly what I had in mind.

186 Mr. Lee’s son hit the nail on the head with his comment, because I was indeed one of those who majored in the social sciences because my grades were not good enough to qualify for engineering courses. As he observed, becoming an engineer was the default choice, at least for men.
think you really have balls to go all the way to Australia for that anthropology PhD of yours; if my sons want to do something as crazy as that, I'll ask them to go sell chicken rice instead. At least Singaporeans will always be mad about food."

Zhineng Qigong’s pragmatic approach towards education is not something that is particularly unique to Singaporeans, however, when one compares Zhineng Qigong students with the teachers, the very impenetrability of the teachers’ beliefs about education into the students’ life-worlds becomes rather peculiar when other advices that teachers offer are quite readily accepted. However, one thing about the teachers’ attitude towards education which is shared by the students is the emphasis on individual effort. Even though it is the volitional theory that bolsters the teachers’ faith in the individual’s hard work while to be self-reliant is merely the pragmatic thing to do for the students, both groups of practitioners concur in the practice of taking up the responsibility themselves in the pursuit of scholarly excellence.

Zhineng Qigong teachers’ identities are always defined in relation to the larger picture; they consider themselves members of a specific intellectual-ethnic community and important role-players in history, society, and politics. The theory of qi offers a way for the teachers to explicate some sort of connection between themselves and the larger cosmos, both natural and social. This chiastic relationship between self, nature, and society provides them with a greater sense of purpose, clearly-defined roles, and well-integrated identities. The students on the other hand, avoid reaching beyond private means in their search for solutions, and do not like to perceive themselves as members of a larger group or as participants of a bigger purpose. Their identities are thus defined only with respect to the roles they play in the family and in their work, and their sense of self-worth is measured by their abilities to make pragmatic decisions.

Zhineng Qigong epistemological assumptions play a definite role in the teachers’ feelings about personal, social, and political change, and much of it has to do with the legitimacy that concepts like hunyuan-qi and shishen has provided. In comparison, the
students treat the notion of qi with considerable caution, as if they could not quite handle the social, political, and cosmological obligations that come with monistic materialism and humanistic fundamentalism. I suspect that pragmatism’s implications for docile conduct carry an elective affinity with an aversion towards the teachers’ interpretation of Zhineng Qigong principles. Perhaps students simply find the obligation to think about and act upon nature and society too incompatible with their habitus that is oriented to the private sphere. In the meantime, the only aspects of Zhineng Qigong that overlap with their pragmatism remains to be the art’s economy, health-giving properties, and its emphasis on individual effort.

**Body-politics and the state’s discursive spectrum**

Although Zhineng Qigong teachers often assign the behaviors of Singaporeans to the state’s engineering efforts, a linear causal relationship cannot be established that simplistically. The ideologies of pragmatism, meritocracy, and non-welfarism could very well have acquired dominance because such attitudes were already present in the populace. Discourse, or “practices obeying certain rules” (Foucault, 1972: 18), is possible only with the participation of both the state and its subjects. To argue that Zhineng Qigong students simply obey the prescriptions of the state is to assume that the state has absolute monopoly over discursive production. Inasmuch as discourse is not autonomous from political practices, neither can political will be exercised independent of discourse; both are connected in formative manners (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 44-78; Foucault, 1972). The exact origins of pragmatism, meritocracy, and non-welfarism require extensive genealogical work that is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, when one looks at both the ideological and institutional practices of the state, the mechanisms of its body-politics become quite apparent.

As a small developed country with an authoritarian state and an economic system that relies on human labor rather than natural resources, it is not surprising that much of
what Foucault theorized about the development of pastoral power (Foucault, 1975; 1978; 1979a) can be found in Singaporean society. As he argued, the advent of modernity saw the rise of a form of power that is productive rather than repressive. Pastoral power derives its effects from disciplinary power, a form of surveillance that is internalized within individuals and directed towards producing docility. Disciplinary power together with scientific categories of human beings provide for the emergence and maintenance of a regime of body-politics. In Singapore, ‘national objectives’ that delineate ideals of the common good together with pragmatism, meritocracy and non-welfarism as the behavioral prescriptive means of achieving those objectives, make up the mechanisms of disciplinary power, while essentialist Cartesian conceptions of human nature and what the state calls “society’s values” provide the ways of classifying Singaporeans.

Due to the imposing figure of Lee Kuan Yew, much of his personal beliefs about human nature and “society’s values” have been routinized into official discourse. It is therefore hard to ascertain if the other members of the political elite believe in what they use to explain social policies or are merely paying lip service to Lee. As Michael Barr suggests, Lee’s retiring of (enforced or otherwise) the older politicians and his hiring of newer and younger ones eliminates opposition from his contemporaries while allowing him to enlist those who are “dependent on his patronage” (Barr, 2000: 188). As reported in a local newspaper (TNP, 1989), Lee did not bother consulting his new deferent colleagues but simply told them what he wanted. Nevertheless, references to human nature and society’s values remains one of the primary justifications used by members of the PAP for a range of policies, some highly controversial, established over the past three decades. I shall employ policies pertaining to gender roles and education to illustrate the penetration of Lee’s beliefs in biological reductionism into the ways in which Singaporeans are typified, and the implications of such typifications for the maintenance of a regime of body-politics.

See Sandhu et al (Sandhu, Wheatley, & Koh, 1989) for arguments and examples of how Singapore’s governing philosophy are results of a routinization of Lee’s charisma.
Starting in the late 70s and early 80s, female university graduates were gradually postponing marriage and having fewer children in exchange for their careers. Lee Kuan Yew saw the low birthrate of these “intelligent citizens” as a serious threat to the island’s “intelligent gene pool”. In the name of survival, state intervention into female reproductive decision-making processes was systematically worked-out. The result was the Graduate Mother Scheme in the 80s that involved rewarding women with university education for having more children and the less-educated for having fewer\textsuperscript{188}. The scheme was insulting enough to the ‘graduate mothers’ that in the following election in 1984, the PAP lost a parliamentary seat to an opposition party, an unprecedented defeat since the party’s inception, and a clear sign of how out-of-touch the party was with public sentiments.

Lee traced his biological reductionism\textsuperscript{189}, albeit weakly, to social eugenics (Heng & Devan, 1992). In a public rally given on 14\textsuperscript{th} August 1983\textsuperscript{190}, he expressed his regrets for providing women with educational and career opportunities, which he argues, is the cause of declining marriage and birth rates. Lee believes that in every given population, only five percent are endowed, “physically and mentally” to lead the country and to keep

\textsuperscript{188} The Graduate Mother Scheme was complemented by another scheme, the Small Family Incentive Scheme which encouraged less-educated Singaporeans to “stop at two” children. For those who did, particularly women who undergo sterilization, a S$10,000 tax rebate was awarded. Other disincentives were also implemented to discourage these select Singaporeans from ‘over-breeding’, including making it difficult to secure a place in schools for one’s third and subsequent children (for a more detailed account of population policies in Singapore, see Wee, 1995).

\textsuperscript{189} Biological reductionism, in a nutshell, assumes that all human characteristics can be accounted for by its biological or genetic make-up (Curry, Cronin, & Ashworth, 1996; Lewontin, Rose, & Kamin, 1984; Rose, 1984), and plays down or eliminates the role of upbringing in the formation of a person’s quality, namely intelligence, physical strength and personality. It assumes a natural vs. social or cultural divide, and gives primacy to the biological. This strand of thought is expressed most forcefully in evolutionary psychology (e.g. Pinker, 1997), which “promotes biology to the exclusion of all forms of social understanding” (Dickens, 2001: 97). A form of biological reductionism is held in biomedicine as well, although the reduction does not necessarily terminate at the genetic level. Biomedicine assumes that disease, real disease, is exclusively and fundamentally biological (Hahn, 1995: 131-172); even though biomedical doctors have acknowledged the importance of social life and emotions to health, these are not considered to be the “real objects of medical practice” (Good, B., 1994: 90).

\textsuperscript{190} This speech is a yearly event, called the national rally speech that is usually given a few days after national day, Ninth of August, by the Prime Minister, and broadcasted live in the four official languages, namely English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. All local television channels suspend their usual broadcasts on such occasions in order to allocate bandwidth to the speech.
it on the top (Rodan, 1989). As argued by Wee (1995: 196), Lee did not conceive of population control policies as ethical issues involving ‘pro-life’ and ‘pro-choice’ debates, but rather, of a “class-based discourse”. Lee quoted research in eugenics in explaining his reproductive policy, as shown below in an excerpt from the public rally broadcasted to the nation:

“The researches [sic] on identical twins who were given away at birth to different families of different social, economic classes show that their performance is very close although their environments are different... The conclusion the researchers draw is that 80 percent is nature, or inherited, and 20 percent the differences from different environment and upbringing... only 20 percent of the performance of a human being is due to nurture... The 1980 Census disclosed that whilst we have brought down the birth rate, we have reduced it most unequally. The better educated the woman is, the less children she has... If we continue to reproduce ourselves in this lop-sided way, we will be unable to maintain our present standards. Levels of competence will decline... Our economy will falter, the administration will suffer, and the society will decline.” (S.T., 1983)

Although, as argued by Wee (1995), Lee’s reference to “researches” was a misinterpretation of scientific findings, his biological reductionism191, carried forward by

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191 To put things into perspective, Lee’s biological reductionism was and still is part of a package that includes progressivism, elitism, geneticism, climatic determinism and cultural evolutionism (see Barr, 2000 for further discussion on Lee’s belief system). His eugenics (and dysgenics) did not come into full bloom until the late 70s, where personal experiences (particularly as a child under both the British and Japanese administration) and the lifting of structural inhibitions allowed him to audaciously express his racist and sexist views in public. His racism include ranking East Asians over South and Southeast Asians in terms of what he called “the X factor”, i.e. genetic (what he used to call “glands”) quality, while his sexist parables include supporting polygamy for more “successful” men indicated by their socio-economic status and his famous declaration that his only regret as a statesman was to provide women with education. Although he began his career with a belief in the equality of all humans, he eventually developed ideas about cultural and biological supremacy of certain what he calls ‘races’ and finally to his geneticism today. His belief in the geographical shaping of biological and cultural traits eventually gave way to his conception of the utility of harsh and stressful environments in cultivating superior genes and cultural practices that reproduce those genes. To quote Lee, “the drive to protect your own offspring is... in the genes. And built into that is a certain cultural pattern, which varies from society to society” (Lee, K. Y., Han, Fernandez, & Tan, 1998: 163).
his successors, continues to underpin policies in Singapore today. This can be seen clearly in the educational policies¹⁹², which possess the most far-reaching effects because of their compulsory nature¹⁹³. Lee once again appealed to biomedical research to support his arguments:

“Modern medicine has evidence that...the emotional make-up of a man – or a woman – his responses, can be observed fairly early in life. I am told by some pediatricians that you can often foretell the kind of person a child is going to grow up to be. I do not know if that is true, but I do know that by the middle twenties a man is complete. However, he may not have disclosed what he is because he has not yet been put under severe stress. It depends on the qualities of the population, the genetic pool we have inherited. We get the leaders we are capable of throwing up...The subsequent results in University show one good brain in a thousand. These have more than average intelligence, more than average energy, more than average capacity.” (S.T., 1978)

According to Lee Kuan Yew, the educational system should function as a filtering device, a form of ‘severe stress’¹⁹⁴ that cultivates eugenic practices that extract the best genetic qualities from the population. The subsequent crème de la crème, indicated by good academic results, should then be targeted with incentives through family-planning policies to encourage them to bear more children and subsequently flood the country

¹⁹² The changes in Chinese language educational policies were also justified in the language of biology. In addition to arguing that IQ and intelligence determine one’s ability to be bilingual, the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (Lee Kuan Yew’s eldest son), added that Chinese boys are weaker in Mandarin than girls, and that this "reflects innate differences between males and females, in brain function and aptitude for learning languages. It is a well-established fact that girls are much better at languages than boys. We must acknowledge and allow for this reality" (M.O.E., 1999).

¹⁹³ The law states that all Singapore citizens, unless under special circumstances, have to attend public primary schools until the age of 12. The compulsory schooling law drew flak from some Muslim parents because they prefer to send their children to Madrasahs. It is ironic that one of Lee Kuan Yew’s grandsons was allowed to study in the Singapore American School, citing ‘learning disabilities’ although the kid possesses an IQ of 140.

¹⁹⁴ Refer to Wee (1995: 202-215) for the stressful nature of Singapore’s educational system, and for further elaboration of the effects of Lee’s eugenics.
with their ‘elite genes’. Policies like these had been hotly-debated between the PAP and its adversaries, but were often justified by Lee, his contemporaries and subsequent replacements with the sweeping retort: “nature is undemocratic” (Chua, 1995a: 64).

Lee’s replacement in 1990, Goh Chok Tong, carried on his predecessor’s position in emphasizing the biological role of women in the traditional family unit, bolstering his view with the argument that “society’s values” define women as “child-bearers” and men, the “bread-winners” (see Appendix 5). This allows the state to continue its patriarchal practices, for instance, denying women access to equal salaries and medical benefits. The notion of society’s values is tightly woven into the state’s conception of ‘culture’, again derived from a biological reductionistic framework. Lee and other members of the political elite regularly mention that ‘Singapore culture’ is merely a mosaic amalgamation of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and ‘Others’ traditions, reducing ethnic differences to ‘racial’ differences (see Benjamin, 1976). The ideology of multiracialism is thus more than a way for the state to express its apparent concerns for equality between Singaporeans, but also reveals its biological deterministic interpretation of human culture. “Society’s values” is therefore a derivation of the state’s insistence on Singapore being an “Asian” society, simply because Singaporeans are, by virtue of birth, “Asians”. This not only allows the state to designate gender roles officially or to argue for an “Asian” form of democracy, but to also ban certain ‘unacceptable’ behaviors like homosexuality. The laws against homosexuality have however, been compromised recently. In its efforts to nurture a creative workforce necessary for a knowledge economy, party lobbyists have stepped forward to argue for a vibrant cultural climate that necessarily has to welcome all types of people. The contradiction between society’s values and pragmatic concerns were subsequently resolved by Lee Kuan Yew’s appeal to once again, biological reductionism that foretells a possible U-turn on laws against homosexuality: “I have asked doctors this, that you are genetically born a homosexual - because that’s the nature of the genetic random transmission of genes” (S.T., 2007a). Lee’s naturalism has ironically provided the state with justifications for decriminalizing homosexuality for ‘pragmatic’ reasons.
Combined with the state’s endorsement of biological reductionism, meritocracy and non-welfarism legitimize economic stratification as a natural outcome of individuals’ differences in effort and intelligence (Chua, 1995b: 27). This means that social inequality, as a moral or a social problem, is glossed over as having its origin in 80% ‘genes’, intelligence determined by nature, and in 20% ‘nurture’, one’s own effort or the lack of. It appears that Singapore’s overall discursive climate aids in establishing, as Lee Kuan Yew believes, a stressful environment that produces eugenic behaviors essential for keeping the nation ahead. Besides explicit ideological prescriptions, further pressures also result from the state’s adoption of what some writers call “the siege mentality” (e.g. Buszynski, 1985; Low, 1998: 68), which delineates three factors that pose serious threats to Singapore’s social, economic, and political achievements. These three factors are namely, welfarism, westernization, and political liberalism (Purushotam, 1998). In addition to these, events in recent years like the SARS epidemic, the 9-11 assault, and the American mortgage loan crisis have also became part of the state’s discourse on the only way to keep Singapore afloat – unflagging vigilance.

If one were to look closely again at the discursive spectrum of the state, one can see how the pieces of local governmentality fit together. National objectives, pragmatism, meritocracy, and non-welfarism as disciplinary power, together with eugenics that provides the framework for classifying Singaporeans, justifies intervention into all aspects of the Singaporean’s life. In the name of national interests, filtering devices must be employed to handle 80% of human potentials while ideological pedagogy deals with the remaining 20%. Given that a stressful environment works as the primary sieving mechanism for quality genes, it follows rather logically that the ideological framework that targets the part of humans that can be nurtured, also serves the function of selecting superior innate human qualities through establishing an overall climate of stressfulness. Reminders to stay vigilant against foreign and domestic threats, a perceived elusiveness of a social safety net, coated with a layer of non-welfarist,

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195 Recently, Lee once again publicly announced that he is a “Social Darwinist”, that it is the need to survive that pushes societies to change (S.T., 2008f).

196 Besides the Medishield and the Medisave, the needy can find solace in Medifund, which allocates
meritocratic, and biological reductionistic rhetoric all converge to produce a discursive climate that emphasizes self-reliance. This individualizes the effects of power into the nooks and crannies of society, placing a significant amount of stress on the average individual Singaporean. This is reflected most clearly in the emigration of Singaporeans, approximately 1000 each year (S.T., 2008c). Although the problem has been presented by the state as one of “brain-drain”, not without an allusion to the loss of the talented, well-educated, and good genes, the significance of the brain-drain phenomenon lies in the reasons for the desire to emigrate. According to a recent survey that polled 2,548 teenagers from India, China, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore, Singapore teenagers are the most eager to emigrate (with 53% wanting to do so), citing two major reasons: “stress” and “economic lures of foreign countries” (S.T., 2006b). Other health, moral and social problems that result from a stressful environment had also been reported on several occasions in the mainstream newspapers. These include school children committing suicide over poor academic performances, the most number of cases per million population of myopia in the world, and the lowest frequency of sexual intercourse between spouses in the world (see Appendix 6, 7, and 8).

Self-reliance as docility

The stressful nature of life in Singapore is not unique to the country. According to a survey conducted a few years ago, Singapore ranks third in Asia, after China and Taiwan, for having the most stressed population (CNA, 2001). What caught my

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197 The survey also reveals that in the region (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hongkong, China and Taiwan), Singapore students from the age group 15-20 are the most stressed.
attention were the manners in which Zhineng Qigong students adapt themselves to the stresses of life while employing the state’s ideological rhetoric in rationalizing their behaviors. Just as how Zhineng Qigong principles help maintain the teachers’ lack of reflexivity towards the social and political origins of their habitus, the state’s ideological framework also do the same for Zhineng Qigong students. However, unlike the teachers’ appeal to heterodox belief systems in technicizing their practices, the students maintain a doxic attitude by accepting pragmatism and self-reliance as the default right ways to conduct themselves. As shown earlier, Zhineng Qigong students’ pragmatism can be seen in their approach towards healthcare, religion, and education. Their participation in the discourse of self-reliance is on the other hand much more obvious in how they deal with the middle-age crisis. Their coping strategies involve fine-tuning minute details of everyday routine while remaining ignorant and unconcerned with local legislation, social policies or political rights. All these can be seen in the cases of Madam Chua and Auntie Yuan, who possess a habitus characterized by the practice of self-reliance.

**A self-reliant habitus**

Having made it past their mid-50s, many Zhineng Qigong students feel that they have, as Auntie Yuan remarked, “become another type of citizen”, i.e. ‘the senior citizen’. With this new identity comes a habit of ascribing personal problems to what some of them call the “inevitable consequences of aging”. Instead of blaming their family members or the healthcare system for being unsupportive, the state for not looking after their welfare, or the overall cultural climate that looks upon the aged as burdens, Zhineng Qigong students have resigned themselves to their plights by taking up and enduring much of those inevitable consequences of aging. Zhineng Qigong, with its emphasis on self-therapy, serves as an ideal solution for their problems, not only because it provides them with a sense of camaraderie, of being in control of their problems but most importantly, the tools for a self-reliant approach towards aging.
Madam Chua and her more reserved sidekick Auntie Yuan are two permanent fixtures who have stayed on with my Zhineng Qigong group for the past 3-4 years. Compared to their classmates who practice once or twice a week, I consider the pair regular attendees as they shuttle between the Sunday morning, Thursday, and Friday night sessions. Madam Chua, age 55, had because of her ill-health, retired from her job as an administrator for a construction company while Auntie Yuan, a friend of hers for more than 20 years, is still working part-time as a caretaker in a Daoist temple. Madam Chua’s job required her to spend long hours poring over accounting documents, monitoring purchases and production quantities, while handling communication between her boss and his clients. With an inattention to proper sitting posture while leading a sedentary lifestyle, Madam Chua developed a serious case of ankylosis in her neck and lower back. Auntie Yuan on the other hand, has a history of high-blood pressure and irregular heart palpitations, which was aggravated by her previous full-time job as a frozen-food stall assistant. Taking up Zhineng Qigong was one of the solutions they came up with, after having tried TCM, Taijiquan and even folk dancing lessons at a community club. When I asked them why they have chosen Zhineng Qigong over the others, in addition to the usual economic and pragmatic justifications, they added, “Because I can do it by myself”.

Like many of her classmates, Madam Chua describes life in Singapore as “stressful and competitive”. In her earlier days, she clocked an average of ten hours a day at the office and often had to bring work back home while juggling housework and childcare expected of her. Her children, however, were her main worry. Their lack of interest in schoolwork, addiction to the TV, and their hanging out with what she called paikia 坏仔 (Fujian dialect for “bad kids”), were a constant source of anxiety. It was hence somewhat a relief that they had passed their adolescence relatively unscathed and had gone on to the university or the Army. That left her job as an accountant the major gripe about life, not only due to the working hours but also the damage it had left on her. Most importantly, her encounter with a debilitating condition had significantly raised her awareness about the financial consequences of falling sick in Singapore, to which she responded by paying particular attention to the state’s preventive healthcare programmes.
Regular visits to polyclinics (state-subsidized biomedical clinics) and hospitals has provided Madam Chua with in-depth knowledge of the costs of orthopedic treatments and the various public healthcare programmes of which she dedicatedly participates in, especially for those she considers *niren bing* 女人病 (women’s sicknesses) like osteoporosis and breast cancer. She has in possession, several pamphlets she took from public hospitals that seek to educate women and the elderly about the physiological and financial costs of not engaging in preventive healthcare. As precautionary measures against women’s sicknesses, Madam Chua goes for regular full-bodily check-ups for her blood pressure, blood-sugar content, cancer, and cholesterol level. She believes a lot in consuming food in rich in calcium for her bones and chondroitin pills for her joints, spending a few hundred dollars every month for dietary supplements that also include cod-liver oil tablets, ‘detoxifying agents’, and other miscellaneous traditional Chinese tonics.

Auntie Yuan, after having quit her job as a stall assistant, had initially wanted to retire completely in order to spend more time on her own *tiaoyang* 调养 (attunement-care). However, for financial reasons, she eventually decided to go back to work, but under ‘orders’ from Teacher Ng, took up a part-time rather than a full-time job instead. Auntie Yuan comes from a lower-middle class family, with a total household income of S$4000 that includes her husband’s salary from his work as a taxi driver. Two of her children were moving on to tertiary education and still rely on their parents for their expenses. Auntie Yuan described her heart-attack several years ago as “*huo bu dan xing* 祸不单行 (misfortune does not travel alone)”, as her father was also having health problems requiring costly medical care and that her children were still young. Her coronary bypass surgery and her father’s treatment for his stroke had eaten significantly into her personal savings and Medisave, to the extent that she once confessed that her father’s death was a kind of relief for the whole extended family.

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198 The Singapore Department of Statistics classifies Singaporean families with monthly incomes of S$3000 – S$9,999 as “Middle-class”.

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The nagging fear of the range of sicknesses waiting to pounce, the obligation towards having to take various preventive measures, the anxiety of having to draw upon one’s relative’s Medisave, and the perceived inaccessibility of public welfare all work towards a classic “manufactured risk” mentality, in which one worries about the future which the past has little advice to offer (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999). Auntie Yuan’s experience with a sudden heart attack had made her realize, in her own words, “the unpredictability of life”. This epiphany and her diminished Medisave savings spurred her to channel a larger portion of her money towards buying insurance, both Medishield and private schemes for both herself and her family members. This put a significant amount of financial burden as the premiums work out to about a quarter of her total household income. Investing in insurance is just one of the ways in which Zhineng Qigong students deal with the sense of risk; there are other more nuanced behaviors that speak of a general strategy that involve fine-tuning their everyday conduct. For instance, since her recovery from the surgical operation, Auntie Yuan had stuck faithfully to a vegetarian diet. She had bought a blender just for the sake of making vegetable and fruit juices that she consumes in copious quantities. Because Zhineng Qigong sessions are not held everyday, some of her early mornings are spent walking around on a foot-reflexology footpath at a nearby playground while doing pengqi guanding. Her economic behaviors had also taken a turn, although her pre-surgical lifestyle hardly qualifies as luxurious. Recent rises in food prices had her going around telling others how much cheaper local brands of groceries are, as she mindfully compares between different convenience stores and labels. Instead of shopping at grocery stores, she had started taking a 20-minute walk to a fresh-food market where meat and vegetables are slightly cheaper.

These footpaths resemble cobbled roads, but with the smoothened rocks protruding at sharper angles. Apparently walking on them barefooted helps massage certain acupoints on the sole and is therefore good for health. Teacher Ang cautioned against these self-administered acupressural maneuvers, because “who knows, you might hit some critical acupoint and cause you to lose control over your bowels”, he laughed heartily. Foot reflexology is quite a popular relaxation method in Singapore and those offering these services, including selling foot reflexology machines, had because of the recent state quasi-recognition of TCM, gradually begun speaking of its benefits in TCM jargons.
Auntie Yuan’s nuanced behaviors reflect what I call a ‘working-class habitus’ characterized by penny-wisdom and pound-foolishness. Such behaviors ring of a devotion to nondescript actions that could save fractions of a penny while behaving callously towards larger amounts of money. These include, in Auntie Yuan’s practices, saving water from a dripping tap so that the meter does not run, using water from washing rice to douse the spring onions she grows for her own consumption, eating porridge with soy sauce for breakfast, haggling over cents in the fresh-food market, storing used batteries underneath her refrigerator “to re-charge” them, and refusing to discard any used utensil or equipment like toothbrushes and slippers. On the contrary, instead of investing her savings in low-risk trust funds, she had left them stagnant in a bank as inflation slowly devalues her liquidities. My suggestions of wiser methods of managing her finances were often met with dodgy responses, including appealing to her own lack of education, her inability to understand English, and insisting that investing her money is just too risky. Although the specificities vary across individual Zhineng Qigong students, Auntie Yuan’s case generally represents the ways in which many of my classmates conduct themselves in mundane tasks. Mr. Lim, for example, clears his plate of every grain of food, rides a bicycle to work to save on transport fees, makes his children shower in a huge tub so that the leftover water can be used to flush the toilet, employs rubber bands to secure his socks that have lost their elasticity, uses toothpaste sparingly while spending S$300 on lottery tickets every month.

Rationalizing their habitus

Personal, moral, and social dimensions form part and parcel of their sickness narratives as Zhineng Qigong students try to communicate the damage that aging had done to their lives. The state is sometimes identified as one of those responsible for

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200 As the recent American mortgage loan crisis unfolded, Auntie Yuan took the effort to give me a “I told you so” phone call and inform me of her financial wisdom in not investing her savings.

201 “Sickness narratives” (Kleinman, 1988) are also known as “idioms of distress” (Nichter, 1982), “ideologies of suffering” (Hahn, 1984), and “stories of sickness” (Brody, 1987).
making falling sick a distressing experience. However, the relationship between the state and the student is not one of acrimony, but often expressed with a mixture of identification and disfavor. Zhineng Qigong students do argue that the state should do more for senior citizens, yet they often finish off rationalizing such sentiments away with rhetorical elements of pragmatism, meritocracy and non-welfarism. Exact phrases like “renkou laohua 人口老化 (aging population)”, “jingji zengzhang 经济增长 (economic growth)”, “shijidi jiejue wenti 实际地解决问题 (dealing with problems in a pragmatic manner)”, and “kao ziji 靠自己 (rely on oneself)” make regular appearances in my classmates’ speeches, providing the means of justifying their choices and maintaining their practice of pragmatism and self-reliance.

Compared to Madam Chua, Auntie Yuan pays much more tribute to the discourse on self-reliance. Since her father’s death, she had since resolved not to let her children or her husband go through a similar ordeal, of having to “waste their money to keep me alive”, that she would “rather die than to lose the ability to look after myself.” Being in their 50s, both Madam Chua and Auntie Yuan face a shenti, jingshen, financial and social turning-point in their lives. Many of their friends and relatives their age had in one way or another, suffered some form of what they called “laoren bing 老人病 (sicknesses of the aged)”. Although they expect their children to take care of them as an expression of filial piety, both Madam Chua and Auntie Yuan are unwilling to give up all sense of independency. Health, to them, is thus not only a personal medical and financial concern, but also a moral responsibility. Like many of their classmates, they are constantly bugged by a nagging fear of becoming deadweights to their children, who with their own families to take care of, are already “stressed enough”. If they could be financially and physically independent, they would rather not receive large sums of money from their sons and daughters. As Auntie Yuan noted philosophically,

“When you grow old and useless, you sort of become young and rash again, because dignity becomes as important as it was 30 years ago. I don’t want to use my children’s CPF savings; they themselves are already stressed out with their own lives and their children’s education. I should’ve saved more
money when I was younger so that I don’t have to swallow my pride and take money from my children. Like what the government says, old people should rely on themselves... doing and promoting Zhineng Qigong is one of the ways in which I stay active and useful to society.

The increasing financial burden she was facing, as her children grew older and their financial needs increased, added to Auntie Yuan’s general pessimistic disposition. It was during one of Auntie Yuan’s mood swings that she started praising the virtues of communism, of offering universal healthcare to all, that even though everyone is equally poor, no one will ever feel alone in times of crises. However, she still conceded that the system would only lead to laziness and over-reliance on the government:

“I think you weren’t born yet when the government went around arresting communists…that was in the 60s and 70s. I remember watching the news on TV back then and I thought why are these people [communists] trying to destroy our country? I don’t know much about politics and I don’t really care…what’s important is that people have rice to eat. I think what the communists preach is good…but that’s impossible because humans are selfish and lazy…why would I want to work hard when I know that what I produce will be taken away and given to a beggar on the street? I think our government is right that public welfare leads to laziness; we need to learn to depend on ourselves if we want to become a strong nation. Humans can-should depend on themselves (ren zhineng kao ziji 人只能靠自己)”

Although Madam Chua is much healthier than Auntie Yuan, she too had a painful past when she suffered from spinal spurs. Like Auntie Yuan, her sickness narratives were also peppered by ideological elements. For instance, I was talking to her about her spinal spurs after a training session when she uttered the following:

“I used to suffer from spinal spurs, the pain was intolerable, so the doctor asked me to go for an operation…it’s very expensive, my Medisave
doesn’t have enough money, and so my daughter suggested using hers. I wanted to die then, taking so much medicine was useless, it made me feel weak all over, and my temper was very bad, my husband was so afraid of me, haha...And then I consulted Teacher Ang, taking Chinese medicine did some good, but I have to spend money buying tonics again. Old people are useless, we keep falling sick and become burdens....I didn’t take care of my health when I was young...the PAP is so stingy some more, and there are more and more old people in Singapore, and you young people don’t like to get married and don’t want to bear children what can the government do...even old people have to go learn how to use the computer, if not we can’t find any jobs, all are taken up by foreign talents. You see there are so many mainland Chinese around, with globalization everyone has to work so hard. The pragmatic thing to do is to go upgrade yourself, if not the government can’t do much too. My husband says he wants to go for that retraining course, if not he’ll get fired for no reason and you won’t even know why. My friend says that in Singapore it’s better to die than to fall sick; better earn more money when you’re young to support yourself at old age, if not might as well go jump from a building. You’d better exercise more and not smoke so much, if not your CPF won’t even be enough for you.”

Scattered in Madam Chua’s account, are elements of fears for her own future, despair over her old age, and grudges and empathy for the state. Heeding the call to go for ‘retraining’, blaming the young for dismal reproductive performance, and importing exact phrases (e.g. “globalization”, “upgrade”, and “retraining”) and resonating ideas (e.g. “support yourself at old age”, “don’t want to get married what can the government do”) all indicate an active participation in the state’s discourse. Although the state does at times act as the whipping boy for healthcare woes, systematic and informed critique of public policies are never the fortes of my classmates. The best Zhineng Qigong students can do is to accuse the state for being stingy (“zhengfu tai linse 政府太吝啬”). The relationship between Zhineng Qigong students and the Singapore social-polity is
therefore characterized by a quasi-conscious exercise of, in both the ‘careful’ and ‘fore-warning’ sense of the word, ‘caution’. They are careful not to voice their displeasures at the state vociferously, especially those issues that involve possible defamation lawsuits. Their practice of caution is also accompanied by apathy towards social or political issues, being unable to comment on the history, policies, and laws of Singapore beyond what is carried in the state-friendly media and what they have experienced personally. Like what Auntie Yuan remarked, they are only concerned with the economic dimensions of politics, with putting food on their tables. Although they like to accuse the state for not dealing with the cost of living, Zhineng Qigong students have, as far as they are willing to reveal, been voting for the PAP in every single election.

**Conclusion**

The habitus of Zhineng Qigong students can be described, concisely, as being constituted by resignation, caution, and apathy. They fear ‘falling from grace’, from their current situation that is characterized by neither luxury nor poverty, from a life that involves consistent work that is neither tormenting nor easy. Their everyday practices often speak of a concern with the uncertainty of the future; whatever they come across that can serve as a fore-warning for hazards ahead are habitually noted, regardless of how little they understand the mechanisms or where the methods come from. Most importantly, their practice of caution directs their energy towards themselves, as if the only way to make life better depends solely on the individual rather than making changes to the status quo.

Although, in some ways, Zhineng Qigong students’ conduct appear similar to the disciplined manners in which teachers carry themselves, their everyday practices lack convictions to belief systems and are rarely directed towards transforming external structures. Their managements of their own behaviors are either geared towards the pursuit of utility or at avoiding losing their current possessions. Their exercise of instrumental rationality leads to inconsistencies with their points of view, flip-flopping
from one position to the next, picking and choosing justifications and methods which fit in with their pragmatic and self-reliant habitus. Unlike the alert and stoic ways in which Zhineng Qigong teachers carry themselves, students seem inattentive and ‘jumpy’ most of the time. Few of them possess the teachers’ erect postures; their sluggish gait and shifty eyes betray an uncertainty with themselves and the lack of obstinate attachments to any systems of belief.

As argued earlier, the pragmatist philosophy detaches Zhineng Qigong students from any singular belief system. This has the effect of isolating them from any long-term multi-stranded social relations beyond their immediate families, creating identities and roles that are not clearly defined and duties that are not highly obligatory. This is compared to the teachers who consider themselves parts of a larger historical-intellectual tradition and community with shared ideals, objectives, and enemies. Pragmatism has therefore estranged Zhineng Qigong students from tradition, substantive ideals, and other communal obligations, atomizing them into free-floating ‘tourists’ who are then much more inclined towards the practice of individual self-reliance. If government is defined as the conduct of conduct, then what the discourse of pragmatism, meritocracy, and non-welfarism does is to disperse and individualize power through Zhineng Qigong students’ complicit adoption of pragmatism and self-reliance as behavioral guidelines and justifications.

Although Auntie Yuan’s cluster of minute measures does not improve upon her circumstances, these behavioral patterns are not exactly calculatingly pre-designed strategies in the first place. The habitus makes, in Bourdieu’s words, “a virtue out of necessity”; objective probabilities and subjective aspirations converge in a nexus within an individual, making improbable options unthinkable (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). Even though there might be other better methods of escaping her current quagmire, the structural conditioning erected by her position within Singapore makes these seemingly

202 I was not the only one to have noticed these general traits in the students; many teachers had also voiced their puzzlement at how shishen 失神 (having lost jingshen) students are, how they look like sangjia quan 喪家犬, or dogs that have lost their homes. However, instead of assigning responsibility to the stressful nature of living in Singapore, most teachers have medicalized these symptoms.
‘irrational’ actions the only natural thing for her to do. By directing her energy (a significant amount if one compares those innumerable acts to other forms of economic behaviors) towards practices that make little contribution to bettering her situation, what Auntie Yuan has done unthinkingly, is to avoid confrontation with the structures responsible for her plight. As Bourdieu noted, “the realistic, even resigned or fatalistic, dispositions which lead members of the dominated classes to put up with objective conditions ...help to reproduce the conditions of oppression”. (Bourdieu, 2000: 217). One can thus argue that even though her actions might appear irrational, they are rational and practical insofar as they are oriented and adapted to the objective probabilities delineated by Singapore’s discursive climate.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Throughout this entire thesis, I have been trying to relate epistemology to habitus, discourse, and power. I draw upon both the embodiment and the body approach in order to show how holistic ways of looking at the human body translates into everyday practices that are complicit with the state’s attempts at cultivating docile bodies and pliant minds. Chapter three was used to introduce the reader to a few central concepts of Zhineng Qigong that are most often enacted in training. Through a case study of a Zhineng Qigong healing session, I tried to show how an epistemological overhaul is crucial to a valid interpretation of Zhineng Qigong’s monistic materialism that can easily be distorted by dualistic frameworks employed in the social sciences. The discussion on Zhineng Qigong’s principles and their operationalization in therapy was intended to help the reader move away from making ontological distinctions between the mind and the body, the ideal and the material, and the symbolic and the real in the interpretation of Chinese bodily epistemologies. Being able to accept that the volition, the heart-mind, and words contain direct material effects on reality is a necessary prerequisite in appreciating how monistic materialism potentially increases a practitioner’s locus of control and subsequently, its implications for the exercise of self-discipline.

In contrast to chapter three, chapter four deals with Cartesian dualisms found in the institutional practices of the state and their effects on the practice of TCM and Zhineng Qigong in Singapore. I argue that the conception of the body as a container for personhood serves as the epistemological foundation of laws and policies that regulate the practice of TCM and qigong. This conception makes distinctions between spirit and matter, the physical and non-physical aspects, and the inner and outer regions of the individual, leading to inhibiting classifications of TCM practices and the marginalization of qigong as a mere physical form of exercise. Cartesianism in institutional taxonomy, however, has also provided considerable freedom to Zhineng Qigong practitioners to
define what constitutes Zhineng Qigong and how it should be practiced. The teachers’ selective appropriation of dualistic conceptions in their legitimizing strategies shows that although, at the epistemological level, Cartesianism appears to clash with Zhineng Qigong holism, at the practical level, it empowers rather than weakens the practice of the art.

Chapter five describes in detail, the life histories of selected Zhineng Qigong teachers, their everyday conduct, and their techniques of justifying their behaviors. I argue that the central thread that runs through their habitus is the measured and mindful manners in which they subject themselves to self-discipline, of which Zhineng Qigong concepts provide the tools for rationalization. Although Zhineng Qigong teachers often claim that their self-cultivational practices are technical requirements in acquiring gongli*, Zhineng Qigong principles may not be the sole reason for their mindful conduct. The teachers’ semi-conscious practice of self-discipline could very well be a product of their encounters with political reprisal and social marginalization. This helps to explain why they have chosen to identify the state as the primary party responsible for the flaws they find in Singaporean society, and why Zhineng Qigong, free from institutional regulation, provides the ideal channel for the expression of their beliefs and a means to actualize their will. However, even though Zhineng Qigong principles provide the epistemological foundation of their political critiques, it also functions to invisibilize the origins of their self-disciplinary habitus through technicizing it as self-cultivation.

Through using Zhineng Qigong students as representatives of the average Singaporean of their age group, chapter six demonstrates how the state’s prescription of pragmatism and self-reliance establishes a behavioral orthodoxy that is reflected in the conduct of its citizens. I utilize Foucault’s concept of body-politic to analyze the state’s discursive spectrum that consists of behavioral prescriptions encapsulated by its ideological framework, and typification of Singaporeans informed by biological reductionism. I attempt to show that Zhineng Qigong students possess a habitus characterized by pragmatic concerns and self-reliant practices, and that they have more or less adopted the state’s ideological framework in rationalizing their behaviors. The
students' practice of pragmatism and self-reliance, which although resemble the habitus of teachers in some ways, nevertheless depart in the lack of conviction to single teleological-ethical-cosmological systems of value. It is their very instrumental approach towards life that frees them to move with relative ease between systems of belief but which also subjects them to the mechanisms of the discourse on reliance. This instrumental rationality, coupled with their working-class habitus, accounts for their channeling of energies towards themselves while being ignorant, fearful or apathetic towards making any changes to the political and social structures.

If one were to compare, prematurely, Zhineng Qigong teachers to students, the behaviors of the two groups of practitioners appear to resemble one another in the self-regulative manners in which they attempt to transform their private lives. However, on further observation and analysis of their life-worlds, they differ from one another considerably in the reasons and goals of their exercise of self-discipline. To put it in Weberian terms, Zhineng Qigong students exhibit a form of instrumental rationality, packaged as pragmatism, in their pursuit of wealth, health, and social status while the teachers exercise a form of substantive rationality articulated as Zhineng Qigong concepts, in their pursuits of endless self-cultivation. Regardless of their real reasons for engaging in self-cultivation, Zhineng Qigong teachers' habitus are indeed quite similar, not only in appearance but also in consequence and function, to the students' practice of self-reliance. The consequences of self-cultivation, when seen in relation to local governmentality, show the existence of a symbiosis between the heterodoxical conduct of Zhineng Qigong teachers and the attempts of the state at cultivating docile bodies and pliant minds.

Although Cartesianism appears to contradict Zhineng Qigong epistemology, it has also granted the art considerable freedom from institutional regulations. Together with the teachers' appropriation of dualistic categories, Zhineng Qigong has managed to retain or even increase its appeal to the teachers. Cartesianism has therefore not weakened the teachers' devotion to Zhineng Qigong but has instead made Zhineng Qigong's prescriptions much more compelling, subsequently increasing its effectiveness.
as a disciplinary technology. In conclusion, even though Zhineng Qigong teachers explicitly debase the state through appealing to holistic and monistic principles, their practices of everyday life exist with considerable complicity with the dualistic and reductionistic epistemology underpinning Singapore’s body-politics.
法轮功是气功而非宗教
847字 1999年5月19日
联合早报

By 陈有炳言论

《联合早报》5月13日的言论版登了汤本的文章：《信仰危机和诡异的气功教政治化》，针对法轮功提出批评。笔者在这里提出个人的看法。

我知道法轮功练功人是不参与政治，也不多谈政治。汤本是美国克莱蒙研究所亚洲研究中心主任，应该对中国文化有基本认识。比如他说的“气功教”，就不知所云。气功是中国文化的宝贵资产，“气功”的出现，在所有人类宗教之前。古中国人在没有宗教信仰的时候，已经修炼身心。（它就是今日所谓的气功）。只要翻开中国历代的书籍，就可看到“气功”这个词。气功是现代人取的名词，气功就是修炼身心。

修炼身心有佛家与道家两大体系。这不只是指在古代和今日的中国，在世界其他地区也有。修炼身心，我们就称为气功吧！也不是只中国才有，在印度、在欧洲，也有，他们有他们的称呼和传统。

比如说，老子是道家。老子在世的时候，根本就没有道教的概念，道教是张天师以老子道家的修法创立的。所以太极拳是道家功，没有人会误认为太极拳是道教功，利用太极拳来做法事。同样的，法轮功是佛家气功，哪里可说是法轮功教呢？岂不是不伦不类？

不论是佛教和道教都是在承传佛家和道家的理念。在实践它们的理念，这就是修行。难道说这是伪科学吗？现在所说的科学，明天也许不是科学，所以伪科学也是迷信。

太极拳是道家功，法轮功是佛家功，这个功法好，就有人来练，
都是自愿的。怕练法轮功的人多了，变成政治运动，好比怕自己的影子变成鬼一样是教人啼笑皆非的。

从社会责任的角度看，说法轮功是有人深思熟虑的策略也和事实不符。练功是自愿的，没有名册，没有会费，没有捐款。说这个人今天是练法轮功，明天可能不是了，说今天这个人反对法轮功，明天也许是练功人了。

法轮功练功人都有一份正当工作，要练功就聚起来，练完功又回到自己的岗位（只强调修心做好人。）

从道德的角度看，对法轮功的错误抨击，练功人是不理会的。但人类也到了该反省的时候了。看人家出书就想到赚钱，看人家聚在一起练功，就想到搞政治，看人家看佛家书籍就想到搞宗教。对这么好的东西，我们看不到，人类的观念已经变异到无可救药了。

笔者写本文的目的不在为法轮功辩护，也不是在指责汤本。只希望大家正视法轮功，既然这个功法可引起亿多人在学习，我们就应该弄明白，法轮功是什么？
Appendix 2

(LHZB, 1999b)

健身气功不宜有宗教色彩
994 字 1999 年 8 月 3 日
联合早报

By 陈石凌交流

气功运动，能促使血脉流通，运气舒畅，是普遍受到各界人士欢迎的健身运动。其他各门派的武术，不但招式繁杂变化多，运动量大，消耗体力也多，而且还得弹跳翻滚，搏击对打，不小心可能会受伤。但是气功运动，参与者没有肢体的接触，招式简单，因此，中年人和老年人参加气功运动是最为适合。

中国武术的发展，可说是渊远流长，深受5000年历史文化的影响，经过许多不同的朝代的流传、发扬光大、宗派众多、派中有派、多姿多采。

现在流行的气功运动，也都是脱胎于传统的各门派武术，经过模仿或招式简化，即学即上手，促成了气功运动盛行起来。武林界一些人士看在眼里，纷纷策划研究，冠以不同的名堂，创立各种不同招式的气功，以广招徕、吸收门徒，使到一些有意参加气功运动者，眼花缭乱，不知作何选择。

如果从现代市场竞争的形势来看，凡是有利可图的行业兴起，跟风很快就会热起来，而且各出奇招，在市场上争取促销的佳绩。也许，以现代企业管理，市场竞争的战略，来形容迅速兴起，名堂五花八门的各种气功，并不很恰当，不过，既然有人动脑筋，为气功开创新天地，肯定有他的目的，凭着一股傻劲和干劲，不为牟利，志在推广气功运动的武林发烧友固然有之，想利用气功招收门徒，试图开拓一条财路者，应该也大有人在。令人担心的是以练气功为饵，骗财骗色，进行邪恶的勾当，受害者金钱损失是其次，精神受挫，美满家庭被破坏，那就非同小可了。
因此，今后我国各机构与组织要从国外引进任何气功和指导员，须非常谨慎和彻底查核清楚，气功的运作与指导员的详细履历，同时也派入参与练功运动，以了解状况和负起监督的工作。

有兴趣参加晨运健身的人，应该选择组织健全的气功团体。

新加坡是一个多元种族、宗教的国家，凡是有各族群同时参与的一切活动，都不适合宣扬任何宗教或有关系者。散布在全国各区，许多组织健全的气功团体，练功者包括各族同胞、志同道合，都成了好朋友，练功之余，不时相聚品茗、聚餐，或组团出国旅行，只有浓郁的各族群和谐相处气氛，丝毫没有宗教色彩。

有感于现时气功名堂品牌繁多，存心不良者可能乘机崛起，混水摸鱼，利用练功，进行不法勾当，我国华、巫印以及跆拳道、柔道、西洋拳等各武术团体，何不找个机会，相聚一堂，交换意见，互相研究，集合各宗派武术精华，再加以简化，创造出一套新加坡式的气功，开班授训示范者，再由他们到全国各区、联络所、居委会和气功团体等，向有兴趣参加晨运练功者示范。

新加坡人如果练新加坡式气功，那多有意思啊！
Appendix 3

(LHZB, 1999c)

气功宜避免受野心家利用
883字 1999年5月29日
联合早报

By章河交流

我也练过气功，虽然练的并非法轮功。由于功法太多，流派繁
杂，在北京发生法轮功信徒示威之前，我还不知道原来还有这么一种
气功，而且有一亿以上的信徒。

在报章上读了几篇阐述法轮功精义的文章后，才知道真、善、忍
是信徒们重要的精神追求，练功达到抗拒百病是他们最大目的，练功
纯属自愿，没有名册（也即是没有组织），不收费，也从未发动捐
款。这大抵是法轮功同别的气功流派较大的不同点。

平心而论，法轮功这些精义和优点，是无可指责的，作为一种强
身健体的气功功法，若并没能导人走火入魔的境地，则它本身何尝有
罪？我相信大部分信徒，都是抱着这样天真单纯的目的，为强身健体
而练功的。

然而，在北京上万人聚集在天安门广场示威事件发生后，却使人
迷惑和震惊，对法轮功原来所执着的信念也产生了怀疑。示威本身就
是一项有组织的政治运动（一种有目的的抗争行动），能从各地纠集
万余人集中在一处，十人一组，统一行动，这同法轮功口口声声宣扬
的“无组织”，练功完就散；“不参与政治”之类响亮口号，早已背道而
驰；“真、善、忍”中有计划的示威活动同“忍”字诀也已格格不入，示
威本身同“善”也很难打上等号。

笔者同意陈有炳先生发表在5月19日《言论》上的大作：《法轮功
是气功而非宗教》，但不同意他以下的看法：“怕练法轮功的人多了，
变成政治运动，好比怕自己的影子变成鬼一样是教人啼笑皆非的。”

事实是，北京的示威行动已经是一项声势浩大的政治运动，震动
中南海也震惊世界，不是像陈先生说的未知数“怕”不“怕”的问题；示威是有组织的抗争，是实际行动，早已化成“鬼”而非虚无缥缈的“影子”。

法轮功的信徒要求组织团体，陈先生说的“练功的人都有一份适当工作，要练功就聚起来，练完功又回到自己的岗位（只强调修心做好人）。”固然美化得异常潇洒，可惜组织团体、示威，同这种轻描淡写的潇洒又是两回事，倒是同“无组织”、“不参与政治”、“善、忍”之类教义（或真义）自相矛盾、背道而驰的。

口头宣示怎样漂亮堂皇都没有用，要看实际行动。法轮功原来所宣扬的一套精义无疑都是好的、能引人相善的，练功的人相信大部分都没有什么政治目的，只为达到强身健体而单纯练功。北京信徒示威发生以后，法轮功信徒若仍执迷不悟，就不免有点食古不化之嫌了。

单纯的信徒多了，要求组织本来是很自然的，一旦化为统一的抗争（政治运功），完全可能被少数野心家、阴谋家所利用。
Catch of the day... 4-D numbers
10 February 2008
Straits Times

4-D punters have found a new way to score lucky numbers - by buying and 'picking' molly fish with the numerals zero to nine tattooed on them

AMONG the array of aquatic creatures darting about in the tanks at Low Chuan Kee Bird & Fish Shop in Tampines, a lone glass bowl containing four tiny fish sits proudly on a counter near the entrance.

It is a prized possession that is not for sale, says boisterous shop owner Goh Peng Lai, better known among her customers as 'Tua Pui Soh' (Hokkien for 'big fat woman').

'This is my 'gold cup', okay,' she cries in a booming voice, flashing you a smile as wide as her girth.

Indeed, the peculiar tale of Madam Goh, 63, and her lucky fish has by now become hot heartland gossip.

It all began on Jan 18, when her supplier from Qian Hu Fish Farm arrived at the shop with four specimens of its newest ornamental fish - tropical freshwater molly fish, but with a twist.

Cleverly dubbed 4-D mollies by Qian Hu, each had been tattooed with a numeral from zero to nine to tickle punters of the thrice-weekly, four-digit lottery draw organised by Singapore Pools.

Madam Goh quickly placed a bet at her nearest 4-D outlet for all permutations of the digits found on her fish: zero, six, zero and eight.

The next day, the combination 0608 struck first prize.

She collected a small fortune of $1,082, having bet just $8. Four of her friends, a gaggle of 'aunties' who gather regularly at her shop to chat and play cards, had, at Madam Goh's behest, also put some money on the fish. They too won between $300 and $2,000 each.

If it didn't seem too long ago that Singaporeans were deciphering the markings and spots on luohan fish to score lucky numbers, well, there's a new fish fad in town. Thanks - or no thanks - to stories such as Madam Goh's, 4-D mollies are now the latest coveted among social gamblers in their quest for instant riches.
But unlike the luohan or flower horn fish, which sport a distinct, ugly hump on their heads and grow up to about 30cm, mollies are small, nondescript fish with a maximum size of about 10cm.

Though they come in different colours, the tattooed mollies available here are white with multi-coloured but crudely drawn tattoos on them.

Mollies are livebearers, meaning they give birth to their young, and usually have lifespans of between one and five years.

In general, the Chinese rear fish because the creatures are considered to be harbingers of wealth - the word 'fish' in Chinese is 'yu', which signals abundance.

Qian Hu - which claims to be the sole importer of such fish in Singapore - brought in a batch of 500 4-D mollies for the first time last month, ahead of the Chinese New Year punting season. Bred by its supplier in Thailand and tattooed by Qian Hu's Thai operations in Bangkok, they were distributed to local fish shops and sold at the company's own fish farm, which does retail business, at Sungei Tengah.

Response was unexpectedly good, with the fish selling out in one week. The next batch of 600, brought in about two weeks ago, lasted two days. About a week ago, another 1,200 mollies arrived, of which almost 900 have been snapped up.

Qian Hu's business development manager Jimmy Yap says customers at his fish farm use the mollies to score 4-D numbers by swirling a net in the tank to see which four fish are caught at random. They then take the chosen ones home, but not before making a stop at a 4-D shop along the way.

Each fish costs $3.

'Most people buy four but some actually buy 10 with the numerals zero to nine on them so they can do the picking at home,' he adds.

Other customers simply pick their lucky numbers - the most popular digits are eight, three, seven and four.

Qian Hu's stock goes out to about 15 to 20 fish shops here, most of them heartland outlets with a 4-D loving clientele. The fish are also sold for about $3.

Among those shops, sales seem to be brisk too.

At Petmart in Serangoon North, owner Benjamin Wee started selling 4-D mollies last month after customers began requesting for them. About half of the 60 fish he brought in have been sold.
Mr Wee has also seen customers who buy mollies tattooed with their house, car or telephone numbers.

At Xing Xing Aquarium in Yishun, owner Cheng Ghee Kian first ordered 150 such fish two weeks ago. At last count, he had sold about 130 of them.

'We're right opposite a 4-D betting outlet which is said to be 'lucky',' he says in Mandarin, with a chuckle. 'So customers who have bought the fish just go straight across to buy their numbers.'

Mr Ker Chuan Hiap, 39, who owns soya bean drinks stall Queen Street A1 88 Soya Bean at Albert Centre, was another buyer who hit the jackpot.

He had picked four mollies bearing the numerals four, nine, eight and eight two Wednesdays ago. Anticipating that night's 4-D draw, he bought the numbers immediately.

But upon returning to his stall, Mr Ker found that one of the fish had been tattooed with 'eight' on one side, and 'two' on the other. He recalls in Mandarin: 'It was already about 5pm, near closing time at the 4-D shop, so I rushed out to buy another combination, 4982.'

He won a starter prize of about $250, money which he instantly plonked into 4-D again.

As for Madam Goh, the lucky mollies brought her more than just an influx of cash. After her win, the shrewd businesswoman promptly ordered another 150 4-D mollies.

Now, only a handful are left after a steady stream of customers, all eager to share in her good fortune, began flocking to Low Chuan Kee to buy the fish.

'Business has been poor over the past few years. Now, my luck is changing,' the widowed mother-of-four says in Mandarin.

Of course, Lady Luck doesn't quite smile on everyone. Operations executive Vincent Tan picked the combination 1106 from his mollies.

'I haven't come close to striking 4-D at all,' he laments in mock despair. 'I'm still waiting.'

But while some 4-D-loving folk and fish-shop owners may be smiling all the way to the bank, there are others who think the current molly fish craze smacks of fishy business.

Fish lovers, for one, are protesting the tattooing of fish as 'cruel' and 'unnecessary'.

Though the 4-D mollies are a new phenomenon, the practice of tattooing light-coloured tropical fish such as mollies, red parrots and gouramis with patterns and wordings for
novelty value was pioneered about two years ago in Taiwan, explains Qian Hu's Mr Yap. Breeders and traders in Thailand then cottoned on to the trend.

Fish are not harmed This year, Qian Hu also has a shipment of red parrot fish tattooed with Chinese characters that say 'Gong Xi Fa Cai' or 'Xin Nian Kuai Le', traditional Chinese New Year greetings.

The Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA) does not allow the tattooing of fish to be done in Singapore.

Mr Jimmy Tan, managing director of Qian Hu's Thai operations, explains that the tattooing procedure, which is permanent, is carried out in a humane way.

Anaesthesia is put into a tank of fish and the fish are laid out on their sides to be tattooed. A small tattooing needle, not unlike what is used on humans, injects natural dye into the fish scales. Care is taken to ensure the needle does not penetrate the scales and into the fish's body.

The tattooing takes a few minutes, after which the fish are quarantined for four to five days to prevent infection.

Because mollies are healthy, hardy fish, it is rare for them to die from the process, says Mr Tan. 'If they do, it's usually because the fish are weak to begin with.'

The Society For Prevention Of Cruelty To Animals (SPCA), however, is unconvinced. Says its executive officer Deirdre Moss: 'The SPCA objects strongly to the practice of tattooing the molly fish; there can be no doubt that some of the fish die during and after the process.

'It is clear that people are buying the animals for 4-D and Toto. Marketing of the fish is focusing on the 'luck' aspect. Why is it necessary to do this?'

She adds that growing sales will encourage the tattooing of the fish.

The SPCA says it wrote to AVA to request that the authority stopped the import of such fish. To this, AVA says it has not encountered any significant mortality in the dyed fish imported.

It adds: 'There is also currently no international ban on trade in dyed fish. In view of this, AVA currently has no plans to disallow the import or sale of dyed fish.'

Veterinary surgeon Lennie Lee, too, is worried that the tattooing procedure may endanger the fish.
Every fish, he explains, has a protective slime coat that is eroded whenever it is handled, leaving it susceptible to infection. Although a healthy fish will eventually grow the layer back, the in-between period could still be hazardous.

The fish will also become vulnerable if its scales are damaged by the tattooing needle, he adds.

There is also the problem of administering the same amount of anaesthetic to all the fish in the tank, which may be of differing sizes. 'Some may get too much, some, too little. How can you tell?' he asks.

He adds: 'I'm against this procedure because it is more to satisfy human curiosity than anything else.'

And like the ill-fated luohan, there's the danger of owners abandoning their mollies once they become too tiresome to care for.

Petmart's Mr Wee, however, has a different take on the issue. Mollies, he says, are traditionally used as food for bigger fish. But with the 4-D versions gaining sudden popularity - and notoriety - as pets, these fish could well lead better lives.

Adds Xing Xing's Mr Cheng: 'People who like 4-D are usually fish lovers too because they believe the fish bring them good luck. So I wouldn't expect them to abandon the fish.'

Qian Hu's Mr Yap even goes so far as to say: 'This tattooing of fish - it could even be art. As long as we don't go to extremes, I think it's okay.'

He does admit, however, that the buzz surrounding the 4-D mollies will probably die down after the Chinese New Year.

'We'll have to think about doing something else next year. Maybe we'll come up with Toto fish, numbers one to 45, who knows?' he says with a laugh.

Molly fish 101

HERE'S what you need to know about the molly fish before you decide to buy them:

They are a freshwater fish species that originate from Central America

They eat flakes - frozen or freeze dried - and some live foods.

They prefer water temperatures between 21 deg C and 28 deg C but like all fish, they should not be introduced directly into your tank. Fish shop owners recommend soaking
the new fish in a separate container or plastic bag within the tank for at least 20 minutes
- longer if you want to play safe.

They breed easily so it may be advisable to keep them in a single sex if you are a
beginner.

They are livebearers, which means they give birth to their young. They may eat their
young if not separated from them.

They do well with aquatic plants and prefer a little salt in their water.

Never release them into canals or reservoirs. If, for some reason, you can no longer rear
your fish, surrender them to AVA’s Centre For Animal Welfare And Control at 75 Pasir
Panjang Road.

Other ways Singaporeans pick their numbers

HOW much do Singaporeans love 4-D? LifeStyle counts the ways punters score
winning numbers:

Accidents

One motorist's misfortune could well be another's fortune, if you believe the punters
slowing down to scribble down numbers of the licence plate of vehicles involved in an
accident.

Luohan

About five years ago, the flower horn fish, or luohan, sent gamblers into a tizzy when
stories surfaced that the markings on its body signified lucky 4-D winning numbers.
Some owners even urged their fish to pick numbered balls with their mouths in an
attempt to get the digits. The fad died off after a year or so.

Monkey tree

Last October, a tree in Jurong West Street 42 - yes, a tree - became famous almost
overnight after a life-like outline of two monkeys emerged on its trunk. Dubbed the
Monkey Tree, devotees believed the images were a manifestation of the Monkey God
and began praying to it for good luck - and of course, for 4-D numbers.

Crime scenes

Hardcore 4-D hunters believe that numbers associated with violent crimes have high
chances of becoming winning combinations. When the Huang Na murder mystery made
the news in 2004, punters bought 4-D combinations inspired by her birthday, the address
of the place where she was murdered and even the licence plate numbers of the lorries deployed in the search for the missing girl.

Deaths

Death anniversaries of people in the news also make for great 4-D inspiration. Most recently, when Suharto died on Jan 27, the combination 2701 was the second prize in Jan 30's draw.
Gender roles: Debate hotting up
10 September 1994
Straits Times

A LOOK AT THE ISSUES OF THE DAY BY THE STRAITS TIMES POLITICAL DESK

The debate over the changing roles of men and women in Singapore society has become louder after the Prime Minister's recent speech upholding the traditional view that men should continue to head households here. Chua Mui Hoong reports.

DR CHOW Hsun Huei, 34, wields the dental drill as adroitly as she changes a diaper.

At work, she is her own boss, with a dental practice she set up with a friend three years ago.

At home, she is the one who supervises the maid and takes care of her three-year-old daughter and her one-year-old son.

Her husband, Mr Jerry Yang, 35, who manages his own trading firm, helps out with the heavier tasks and repair jobs at home.

Decisions on where to live and how to invest their savings are shared. Still, she considers her husband the head of the family.

"I believe the man should be the head of household. If there is a disagreement, I feel the man should have the last say," she says.

This is the sort of family set-up the Prime Minister wants to encourage, in which the husband is the "primary provider" for the family and helps out with the household chores, and the wife is the "homemaker and co-breadwinner".

In his National Day Rally speech last month, Mr Goh Chok Tong spoke of the importance of preserving the way the family unit had been structured in Singapore society and how it had helped in enhancing stability and progress.

He said Singapore must never go the way of some Western societies in which women had children out of wedlock, with the men becoming no more than a "non-essential extra".
Instead, the "traditional balance of responsibility" with the man as the head of the household must be preserved. Mr Goh said that rights and benefits targeted at the family would be channelled through the man, and laws and rules would be framed towards this objective.

His remarks were not unexpected. In fact, quite a bit had already been said about the differing roles of men and women over the past year or so.

Last June, Mr Goh said that it was neither possible nor wise for the sexes to be treated equally because there were "anthropological asymmetries" - traditions in a patriarchal society - which had to be accepted.

In November, Finance Minister Richard Hu noted that it was unwise to tamper with traditional structures which made men responsible for the family. This was the reason he gave for not extending medical benefits to dependants of female civil servants, which male officers' dependants are eligible for.

Earlier this year, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew told a conference in Australia that he regretted giving Singapore women equal education and employment rights so quickly, because this had made it harder for well-educated women to find husbands.

Instead, he favoured the Japanese situation in which "attractive and intelligent young ladies went to finishing colleges where they learned modern languages and all the social graces which would make them marvellous helpers of their husband's career".

He said in July that he would have opted for a more gradual opening of opportunities to women, if he had known that so many graduate women would stay unmarried. He would have time to re-educate the men and their mothers to accept well-educated women as wives or daughters-in-law.

Mr Goh's rally speech was thus one of a series of pronouncements on why the Government would be wary of changing deep-seated Asian views about the differing roles of men and women.

But it was the first time that the Government had said explicitly that it would translate the principle of male responsibility into practice. Mr Goh did not elaborate.

Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in a recent interview, made the same point, saying that the Government would review policies to see which ones could be changed so that rights and benefits meant for the family, were channelled through the man.

Hardening of government stance on women?

These remarks have, not unexpectedly, provoked a heated reaction from women's organisations.
They said the Government was being "anti-women" in its policies, by emphasising the man's position as head of household instead of pushing for women's equal treatment. Policies such as the ban on single mothers buying subsidised HDB flats penalised the woman left carrying the baby, while ignoring the man who fathered the child, they said.

Some women have gone further in arguing that a male-dominated political leadership wants to preserve the patriarchal structure so that it can hoard male power.

Much of this debate has, however, taken place in a vacuum, and information about the real division of responsibility within the family is sorely lacking.

It should also be stated that the debate on gender roles is not a new one. Nor has there been a hardening of government stance.

As Brigadier-General (NS) Lee put it, the Government wanted simply to stem the tide of change, such as an increase in single motherhood, that could erode traditional family values.

"Because once you have gone the wrong way, there is no U-turn. Therefore, better bring this out and register the point clearly now when values are still conservative and we can reinforce them."

In fact, the PAP Government's position on gender roles has been consistent throughout its three decades of rule.

It believes in equal opportunities for both sexes, and introduced the Women's Charter in 1961 to protect women in marriage and to enshrine their civil rights, and also put in place an education system that allowed both boys and girls to excel.

But it has eschewed what one official called "doctrinaire symmetry" between the sexes.

For example, traditionally, the Government has held the man financially responsible for the family and seen the woman and children as his dependants, and introduced policies to that effect.

So the man is liable under the law to maintain wife and family even after a divorce and can claim income tax relief for a non-working wife (women cannot claim such relief for non-working husbands).

Immigration rules are also designed so that foreign wives of Singaporean men, and their children, are given citizenship rights more easily than foreign husbands of Singapore women and their children.

Other policies reinforce the woman's position as mother and caregiver to the
child: She gets tax reliefs against the maid levy only if she is married, and a grant to offset part of childcare fees if she is a working mother.

There is reason to believe that the Government's conception of the family - man as chief breadwinner, woman as chief caregiver - has popular support.

BG Lee believes so: "If you look at the attitudes which prevail when people choose spouses and get married, whom they choose and what they look for, and whether they will marry somebody equal to them or not, these are trends which take a long time to change."

Is he head of household?

His beliefs are borne out by most of the 30 women and men - from housewives and professionals to prominent women - interviewed. Data collected from the 1990 census support this point of view too.

The census and other statistical studies show quite conclusively that in Singapore, the man heads most households.

Men were acknowledged heads in eight out of 10 households. Those headed by women made up 16.7 per cent.

Despite the recent court ruling in a divorce case which awarded the man a share of the family flat for his housekeeping efforts, a miniscule proportion of men aged above 10 were homemakers - 0.2 per cent.

Only 3.3 per cent of households had only the wife working.

But the traditional family set-up in which the woman stayed at home, and the man went to work has changed with universal education and industrialisation.


In 1990, both spouses worked in four in 10 households.

Nor is her income negligible. Without her pay cheque, average monthly income for married couples with only the husband working, was $1,778. Add her share, and the average family had $3,557 a month.

As Mr Goh acknowledged, the woman today is both homemaker and co-breadwinner.
Yet, traditional assumptions still hold sway within the family, although nine of the 20 women interviewed say they believe in a shared partnership.

But the other 11 women prefer their men to head the family, to have the final say if there is a dispute, and to take responsibility for making sure the family has a decent life. But he must earn the authority by being a responsible father and a husband who takes his wife's views into consideration.

Says heart specialist and former politician Dixie Tan, 58: "Someone has to make the decision, and it is deeply ingrained in our culture that the man does so. I don't see a need to fight that if the man is responsible."

When it comes to housework, women say the men will help out, especially shopping for heavy groceries like cooking oil and rice, and do the washing up.

But as a 1989 Singapore Council of Women's Organisations survey showed, in 86 to 99 per cent of households, it was still the wife who was mainly responsible for grocery shopping, cooking, house cleaning, and washing dishes.

Educated, high-powered women cite several reasons for adhering to their traditional roles: because men are traditionally used to being the decision-maker; because their religion says women should play a subordinate role; or simply for the sake of peace within the home.

Part-time tutor Letha Karunakaran, 67, who has a doctorate in zoology, says:

"Women should be a bit submissive, so that there will be peace in the family. Otherwise, there is a lot of shouting, that is bad for the children."

The widespread support for such a traditional viewpoint has not discouraged other women from taking umbrage with it.

Businesswoman Jannie Tay is one of them. She says: "These views are outmoded. Women today are educated.

"Decisions on when to have children, how to adjust their lives to take care of children, where to live are all shared. Couples communicate a lot more with each other. It's no longer the case where the father speaks and the mother listens submissively."

While all interviewed believe the Government should strengthen the family unit, only five agree that channelling benefits and privileges through the men for the family is one way to do so.

But what worried most women interviewed were not the philosophical arguments
whether this should or should not be a male dominated society. They were more concerned about what the Government planned to do to further entrench the man as head of household.

This would lead to even more policies that are unfair to women, they fear.

As Mrs Jannie Tay sees it, the intention behind the move must be examined.

If the Government fears that men might become a "non-essential extra" to the family, the problem of single motherhood or absent fathers must be tackled. These problems should be studied and the trends reversed.

Agreeing, sociologist Vivienne Wee says that if the Government fears that irresponsible fatherhood threatens family unity, then it should look at how to prepare boys to become good fathers, rather than institutionalise the father's position and give him more benefits he may abuse.

She adds that the "man-as-head-of-household" ideal ignored reality - the "thousands" of men who are poor fathers.

Census figures show that there are 110,509 households headed by women, and that in 18,000 households, only the wife works.

Like social workers who have voiced their concerns on this, she warns that irresponsible or selfish fathers may use up benefits intended for the family on himself.

Says Dr Wee: "Studies have shown that women tend to spend more of their money on the family, whereas men spend more of it on their own pursuits. Look around you. Who are the ones sitting in HDB coffeeshops drinking their money away? Who are the ones who spend their money on "male hobbies", keeping exotic fish, and birds in cages?

"Go to the turf club. Who are the ones gambling their money away? Who are the clients of karaoke bars and lounges and prostitutes? The men."

Mrs Tay adds that the recent explicit emphasis that men should be heads of households is inconsistent with the education system in which boys and girls study alongside and compete with each other on equal terms.

"Suddenly, after school and university, the rules change. When you work, there is a glass ceiling. When you marry, you are no longer equal with the man, but subordinate to him."

Rather than try to mould roles into a set traditional pattern, the Government should teach young boys and girls to accept each other as equal partners, she says.

Dentist Asha Karunkaran, 35, adds: "If you want more women leaders, you must
realise that some of these women are going to be heads of their households. You cannot expect a woman CEO to go back home and kowtow to her husband."

She says that well-educated single women would be further discouraged from marrying if they are expected to play second fiddle at home.

The Prime Minister's assessment is that the women who take offence at his message are in a minority. In an interview with Singapore journalists covering his visit to Langkawi three days ago, he said that many Singaporeans, and some foreigners, had given "very positive" feedback to his speech, which was not "anti-women". It was "pro-family", he added.

It is unlikely that there will be a quick meeting of minds between the pro-feminist groups and the conservatives on the roles of women and men in the family.

For this to happen, some say that the debate, which has tended to be somewhat emotional, should continue at a more moderate level.

The highest-ranking woman in Government, Minister of State for Health and Education Aline Wong, said recently that the call to preserve traditional family values should be seen in a wider context. It was not about drawing battle lines between the sexes, she said.

"It is about the family and how to strengthen it and how to have some kind of understanding on family responsibilities."

Dr Wong is right, of course. This is not a feminists-vs-Government issue. No r is the debate one that can be decided purely at a national level.

How it will be resolved eventually depends to a large extent on how the men and women running each of the 661,730 households here structure and organise their lives day to day, and over the long term.

How they do so and how they change their relationships over the years will determine the final outcome, if indeed there is such a thing as an outcome to such a debate.

It is in the nature of these issues that any resolution will be a long time in evolving.

In the meantime, it would be a pity if vocal women's groups alienate themselves by their criticisms, and others shut their ears to their concerns.
Appendix 6

(S.T., 2003)

Why kids snap.
5 October 2003
Straits Times

It's easy to blame schools but problems with peers, parents and kids' expectations play a part.

As 12-YEAR-OLD Harold (not his real name) was lousy in Chinese, his teacher made him sit next to the top student in the language.

He was often late in handing in his homework and his teacher would ask him to explain why to the class.

If he was upset, he did not show it. In fact, hours before he jumped from the 15th floor of his HDB block, he had asked his father, a businessman, for a cellphone.

However, one of the three notes he pasted on his bedroom door was brutal in its accusation: 'If you want to blame, blame my Chinese teacher. She made me do it.'

Not true, ruled State Coroner Malcolm Tan recently, who said the teacher's methods were 'not at all excessive'.

Harold's mother, who works in a factory, said while her son's grades had dropped, he always seemed to be able to cope.

She said: 'I keep asking myself why. Even till today, I cannot satisfy myself with a good answer.'

A study of unnatural deaths among children below the age of 13 shows 20 primary school pupils jumped to their deaths between 1997 and 2001.

The study was done Dr Paul Chui, director of the Centre for Forensic Medicine at the Health Sciences Authority.

Often, the knee-jerk reaction is to blame the school system. But figures on children seeking psychiatric help at the Institute of Mental Health show only a minority receiving help there are over-stressed.

Last year, its psychiatrists treated 16,487 children, including 2,485 newcomers.
The No. 1 problem, it found, is a medical condition: learning disorder or attention deficiency. Four in 10 schoolchildren suffer from it.

Only one in 10 suffered emotional disorders, such as depression and anxiety, said Dr Ong Say How, an associate consultant at its department of child and adolescent psychiatry.

Dr Ong said: 'Many of the depression cases stem from problems in interpersonal relations, especially with peers and parents. Fewer than half are related to school-work stress.'

The father of a 12-year-old girl who committed suicide two years ago, recalled how she felt she was an outcast in school.

The 40-year-old, who wanted to be known only as Eric, said: 'My wife and I tried telling her she would make more friends as she grew older and took her out more often to meet other children, but she still felt no one wanted to be her friend.'

Yet, the Samaritans of Singapore, which runs a crisis hotline, said most of the children who call express anxiety about their grades or examinations.

Its public affairs executive Susan Lim said: 'In many cases, a lot has to do with their own expectations. Some children are upset when their grades fall below 80 or 90.'

Tinkle Friend, a telephone help-line for primary school children, received a call from a girl who scored 98 per cent for her exams but still feared being caned by her parents.

Some psychiatrists feel parents who failed to excel in their own studies are especially harsh.

However, Ms Lim said most parents are understanding. Often, the children put pressure on themselves.

'What matters is how the child perceives society and his parent's expectations of him.'

The voluntary Students Care Service, which runs a hotline for PSLE pupils during the critical examination period, said that most of the children who call have discussed their problem with their parents, teachers or friends.

Only a tiny proportion, 6 to 10 per cent, did not talk to anyone about their worries.

The hotline starts a fortnight before the exam begins and ends a week after the results are released.

When it began in 2001, it received 1,124 calls. Last year it got 781 calls, almost one-third fewer.
While schools encourage students to seek help when distressed, the Education Ministry maintains that parents must check on their child's stress level.

What parents can do: help their children set realistic expectations, and develop resilience and strength of character in their children so they can cope with life's challenges.

Schools are careful about their students' emotions whenever there is a suicide in their midst.

Said Yuhua principal Robin Ong: 'I'd not tell a child that his friend committed suicide without also explaining the circumstances and counselling him about it.'

Danger signals

SOME signs to look out for in your child: Physical Changes: - Rapid weight loss or gain - Disturbed sleep patterns - Tiredness, weakness or exhaustion - Frequent headache or dizziness

Emotional Changes: - Loss of energy - Loss of interest - Irritability, anger or sudden outbursts - Chronic anxiety - Tearful - Avoids friends and activities - Starts neglecting appearance - Giving away possessions

Verbal Clues - Makes statements such as 'I want to die', 'things will never get better' and 'no one would miss me if I am gone' - Expresses feelings of despair, hopelessness and helplessness
The worst eyesight in the world ... and it's going to get worse.
15 August 2000
Straits Times

Research shows the number of myopic children is growing at an alarming rate - and it is about to sky-rocket

SINGAPOREANS have the worst eyesight in the world - and the situation is getting worse.

Among seven-year-olds, more than one in four is myopic today, compared with one in eight in 1996.

By the time they are nine, more than two in five suffer from myopia, or short-sightedness.

Overall, 34 per cent of young children in Singapore are short-sighted.

Rates in other nations are much lower: 19 per cent in Taiwan and 12 per cent in Hongkong. In the US, the figure is just 7.5 per cent.

Associate Professor Donald Tan, director of the Singapore Eye Research Institute, described the figures as the tip of the iceberg.

He said: "We're predicting a rising prevalence of very severe myopia, much worse than we've seen in the older cohorts."

In 1997, a study of young men enlisting for national service found that 83 per cent were myopic.

Prof Tan said when the young children in the current study grow up, the number with myopia is likely to be even higher.

He was referring to a study by the eye centre and other organisations last year, involving 1,005 school children from Tao Nan and Yio Chu Kang primary schools, aged between seven and nine.
The severity of the myopia is also worrying. Eight per cent of the children have myopia of more than 300 degrees, while about 1 per cent already have myopia of over 600 degrees.

In the West, 600 degrees is considered severe myopia.

In Singapore, this is normal and severe myopia starts at 800 degrees, said Prof Tan.

""When you start with children who are myopic at seven, where are they going to end up as adults?" asked Associate Professor Vivian Balakrishnan, head of the Singapore National Eye Centre.

He took over the position of chief executive officer of Singapore General Hospital in June, and will leave the eye centre once a successor is appointed.

Prof Balakrishnan attributes Singapore's poor eyesight to both genetic and environmental factors, which a new study is trying to determine.

The rate of astigmatism is also high, with one in five children suffering.

In Singapore, the study will be repeated on the same children, at least until they reach 12.

Dr Saw Seang Mei, a principal investigator of the study, plans to include more schools in the longitudinal study this year.

Dr Tan said that based on the first year's results ""we think we have identified certain environmental risk factors. By next year, may be able to confirm what they are."
Appendix 8

(S.T., 2004)

Sex-less in Singapore.
18 January 2004
Straits Times

Sex is always on the mind of this doctor, who wants Singaporeans to have more babies but knows all about the problems that get in the way. Dr V. Atputharajah talks to Asad Latif about what is happening in the bedroom

AFFLUENCE is good for many things, but apparently not for having babies.

Dr V. Atputharajah, a wiry 63-year-old gynaecologist who has been following trends here for almost 30 years, suggests that if Singapore is serious about reversing its falling birth rate, going back to being poor might just be a good idea.

He is joking, of course. But there is no doubt that he sees the fertility rate as a serious problem.

In describing the difference between the sexual moods of the poorer and less educated, and the well-to-do, he throws up some interesting insights.

Among poorer Singaporeans, the key word is ego, he notes. 'The man asserts himself and dominates the woman. She agrees because she depends on him financially. He is able to have his way,' the doctor says briskly. 'When they have a child, they are both happy. They believe that they have fulfilled their social role.'

The more highly educated are different, he says. A wife thinks about what a child will mean for her career. While she thinks, her biological clock ticks away. And her husband is not assertive.

'They want to enjoy the good life. They keep the family small to provide a quality life for their children,' says the visiting consultant at KK Women's and Children's Hospital, who has worked in several other hospitals as well.

The good life is evident in Hillview Crescent, where he lives. A quiet suburban charm pervades the neighbourhood of newish terrace houses. His house is furnished tastefully, with photographs of children displayed prominently in the living room.

The Ipoh-born doctor, who became a Singapore citizen in the mid-1970s, modestly prefers to talk about others than about himself. He and his general-practitioner wife have two sons and five grandchildren.

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Both sons are engineers. 'They gave up on medicine when they saw me running around trying to help people have children,' he recalls with a hearty laugh.

While the Government runs around trying to do the same, the divergent attitudes between the rich and the poor which the doctor mentions are being replicated across the world.

The global population today stands at 6.3 billion. A forecast says that it could grow to 7.8 billion people by 2025. Almost all the growth will take place in the developing world, and the populations of a large number of developed countries can be expected to shrink over the next two decades.

These dwindling populations raise questions about whether labour force sizes can be maintained and countries can raise enough taxes from the working population to meet expenses.

That warning came from Mr Erik R. Peterson and Mr Jay C. Farrar of the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies, at a conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies here on Tuesday.

Singapore is on the falling-birth-rate side of history. It needs at least 50,000 births a year to sustain economic, defence and other manpower needs. But, as was reported last month, there were only 31,171 births between January and October last year. That could mean that the country is headed for its lowest birth rate in 26 years.

Singapore will also be an ageing society. Low fertility and longer lifespans make a deadly demographic cocktail.

Asked if incentives and other current measures encouraging Singaporeans to have children will make a difference, Dr Atputharajah takes a sip of water.

'Social life is such that people will not have a family just to please the politicians,' he says candidly. 'As in all industrialised countries, people here do not want to be overburdened.'

So is there hope for Singapore?

He takes another sip of water. 'Let's see,' he says.

What goes wrong

THE way Dr Atputharajah sees things, declining fertility rates are part of the larger issue of sexuality in Singapore, which is beset by three sets of problems: medical, social and personal.
Although he couches medical issues delicately, he is uninhibited about speaking of them because he thinks that public awareness encourages women and men to seek help.

Medical problems are numerous. They include vaginismus, or the involuntary contraction of the vaginal muscles that makes penetration difficult and sex very painful.

It is the subject of his book, Virgin Wives. 'For all the talk about impotency in men, Singapore's best-kept secret is the fact that many healthy, married women of reproductive age are celibate by choice. For these often unhappy, guilt-ridden young women, sex is painful, difficult and even abhorrent,' the 1995 book says.

The condition leads to unconsummated marriages, hence the title of the book. 'The single most compelling reason that brings couples to my clinic is their desire for a child, for childlessness is the natural outcome of years of unconsummated marriage,' Dr Atputharajah declares.

The longest case of non-consummation that he has treated is 13 years - when, ironically, as he points out, therapy can cure most cases of vaginismus in a mere six weeks.

In an updated version of the book, which he is working on, he says that he saw 275 cases at his sexual counselling sessions in 2001 and 2002; 164 of them were complaints of painful sexual intercourse. Of them, 140 cases were of non-consummation because of vaginismus.

He admits that non-consummation arising from the condition was the major problem that he saw because he is a gynaecologist.

Doctors in general practice, urology or psychiatry, might come across a wider set of problems, including those peculiar to men.

But what remains true is that medical problems take on a life of their own because of social mindsets.

'Sexual problems like vaginismus are closely tied in with attitudes to sex in our society. In an environment where children are given a traditional upbringing, where sex education is ignored not just in school but even in medical school, where tough censorship laws prevail, it is no surprise that an honest, non-judgmental approach to sex and its possible problems is wanting.

'The irony is that young marriages and abundant families are encouraged, yet the open discussion of sex is not,' he writes in the draft of the new edition.

Notwithstanding the sunshine outside his home, the angst in the book is reflected on the doctor's face.
While acknowledging that there is sex education in schools, he argues that social prejudices hold it back. For example, one school wanted him to talk to boys and girls separately. 'I said no.'

Social problems range from the mundane to the embarrassing, from the workplace to home.

Among some Singaporeans, long working hours, particularly duties that keep husband and wife apart at night, get in the way of sex. Financial concerns are another problem.

There is also the question of privacy. In the course of treating more than 5,000 cases of people with sexual problems, he realised that simple things like living with in-laws could be a hindrance to sex.

'Couples are embarrassed that people outside the room can hear them. So I advise them to turn on the music or go to a hotel,' he says, adding that parents who have a child sleeping with them may also be put off sex.

Some social problems bear down heavily on particular ethnic groups. His patients have included a few Indians who have had arranged marriages with close relatives. 'Some men confessed that they looked on their wives almost as sisters.'

Among the Chinese, some men abhor touching; a few will not even kiss their wives.

Counsellors need to deal with these problems sensitively, he says.

Getting it right

BUT while medical problems can be treated in the clinic and social problems through public discussion, personal problems are perhaps the most difficult to address.

That is so especially when they emerge from the family.

When one of his patients was a child, she had been caned by her mother for sitting with her legs uncrossed. The patient was so conditioned by her upbringing that it interfered with her sexual life as a woman.

Dr Atputharajah calls on inhibited couples to de-condition themselves.

His advice: 'Sex is like riding a bicycle. When you begin, you will fall off, but you will learn to strike a balance.'

He delights in using analogies.

Addressing Singaporeans who say that they are in no mood for sex, he says that the mood can always be created because it is like food. 'If you are not hungry, I can say to
you: 'Come to the canteen and have a drink.' There, you will smell the food and you will want to eat.'

A survey by condom-maker Durex last year said that people around the world had sex an average of 127 times a year. Eastern Europeans (Hungarians, Bulgarians and Russians) were the most sexually active at 150. Americans scored a low at 118.

But the three countries with the lowest sexual frequency were Sweden (102), Malaysia (100) and Singapore (96).

An earlier Durex survey gave a reason for low interest. People around the world, it noted, would rather go out with their friends than have sex.

That is exactly the problem, Dr Atputharajah declares, with Singaporeans who claim that they are too tired for sex. They cannot be, since they have time for leisure activities. They should prioritise what is important, he says, and place sex high on the list.

'Everybody in Singapore is tired, but many people are still having sex. Why can't others?' he asks.

He underscores the fact that sex is not just a physical act by reminding couples of the need to communicate well.

'The woman does not dare to express herself to the man; the man does not ask her,' he laments.

Each side should ask the other what he or she wants. 'Be adventurous.'

As for babies, Dr Atputharajah has a word of advice for those who do not want them.

'Think of the couples dying to have them,' he says, a kindly smile spreading across his face.
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