PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

The Experience of Daoism in Dutch Taijiquan, Qigong and Healing Tao

Lisanne van Haften
Supervisor: Dr. Paul van Els
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Introduction

This study analyzes the experience of Daoism in the Netherlands among practitioners of three body practices: taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao. It describes how this ancient Chinese tradition has found its place in the daily life of practitioners of three "Daoist" body practices and how the practitioners experience Daoism.

In recent decades the attitudes of the West towards China have started to change. Eastern ideas and practices, such as Daoism, had long been viewed as being stuck in the past and their study seemed only to hold historical value. Since the past century, as J.J. Clarke explains in his *The Tao of the West,* these Western misconceptions of the East have begun to be challenged. China's modernization and openness has triggered a change in perception. Chinese culture is no longer considered backwards, and a general conception has emerged that there is much to be learned from its ideas and traditions (Clarke 2000, 13-15).

As religious scholar Livia Kohn notes, Daoism in the West is centered around the notion of the Dao (often translated as "the Way" *dào* 道) and is associated with principles such as naturalness (*zìrán* 自然) and nonaction (*wúwéi* 無為) (Kohn 2001, 1). Elijah Siegler, historian of American religions, explains that through the works of among others Jung, Maspéro, Needham and Van Gulik, Daoism was no longer seen as just an ancient, exotic philosophy but became centered around health, longevity and immortality (Siegler 2006, 261). From the 1970s, Chinese immigrants left China and came to North-America and Europe. They saw how much body-centered practices appealed in the West and started teaching practices such as taijiquan (Siegler 2006, 266-267). Siegler argues that they laid the basis for "American Daoism." He explains that many of these masters did not have a real Daoist background but did have a strong nostalgic feeling towards their country. This resulted in a romantic and idealistic view of China, which they conveyed through their trainings. The teachings came from China, but the way they were marketed and conceptualized were North-American (Siegler 2006, 263). Sinologist Kristofer Schipper points out that within Daoism the main focus is the human body (Schipper 1988, 14). This seems to be the case for American Daoism as well. Siegler argues that the core of American Daoism lies in the focus on practice. Practice is important in all religions and worldviews,

however within American Daoism it is more important than history, values or community (Siegler 2003, 298-299). This practicing is mostly physical, and the most common practices are taijiquan, qigong and meditation. However, the study of Chinese classics is also commonplace. This study is mainly centered on three classical Chinese texts: the *Daodejing* ("Book of the Dao and its Virtue"), the *Yijing* ("Book of Changes") and the *Zhuangzi* ("Master Zhuang") (Siegler 2006, 272-274).

As much as American Daoism has been studied, less research has been done on the influence of Daoism in Europe. While the "study of Daoism" has garnered some academic interest in Europe over the years, barely any scholarship exists on Daoism in the popular context. Therefore, I have conducted a descriptive analysis of the Daoist principles and traditions within my own country: the Netherlands. The focus of this study is on the physical practices that are perceived as most common in American Daoism: taijiquan and qigong. Additionally, this study examines the specific practice of Healing Tao to see if the usage of "Tao in the name", referring to the central concept of Dao within Daoism, has an effect on the practitioners' experience. The personal experience of Daoism is examined among the practitioners of these three body practices in the Netherlands.

Research Question & Hypothesis

To determine the experience of the practitioners, the study is based on the following research question:

> How do practitioners in the Netherlands experience Daoism within the body practices of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao?

Since barely any research has been conducted on the subject, the purpose of this study is to map the experience of Daoism based on a number of aspects that play a role in American Daoism. "Daoism" is a complex concept and has therefore been treated carefully in this research. The questions that were asked during the interviews with practitioners focused on more concrete aspects of American Daoism, such as whether they had read the *Daodejing*. Participants of the study group included both teachers and students.

To answer the main question, it is first of all important to determine whether Daoism plays a significant role within the body practices. Therefore, the first sub-question of this study is:

1. Does Daoism play a significant role in the body practices of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao in the Netherlands?

Secondly, after determining the significance of Daoism to the practitioners, it is important to discover how their experience is connected to physical aspects of the body practices, such as the lessons:

2. To what extent is the practitioners' experience of Daoism linked to the physical aspects of the body practices of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao?

Thirdly, it is necessary to look beyond how the physical aspects link to that experience and also understand the influence of the literature on Daoism that practitioners read. As mentioned, studying Daoist texts is a part of American Daoism and it could be revealing to determine the role of textual information on how they practice and experience Daoism:

3. To what extent is the practitioners' experience of Daoism linked to the literature that they read on their body practice and Daoism?

Finally, Daoism has its origin in China and the perception of Daoism in the West changed when the perception of China changed. It would therefore be interesting to see whether the practitioners connect the experience of Daoism, as determined by the previous questions, to China and Chinese culture:

4. To what extent is the practitioners' experience of Daoism linked to China and Chinese culture?

American Daoism is focused on self-improvement and health. Daoist teachings came to be seen as having contemporary value to the West. Elijah Siegler points out that Daoism is experienced as individual and adaptable and that it is centered around the practical experience (Siegler 2003, 17). I presume that the body practices in the Netherlands are experienced similarly, with a focus on health and adaptability. Since the body practices are

most important to the practitioners, I expect that Daoism is mainly viewed in a practical way. American Daoism plays for many an influential role in daily life and is sometimes even experienced religiously. I presume that in the Netherlands the experience of Daoism plays a relatively insignificant role in daily life, much less functions as a religion but is instead regarded as an ancient Chinese tradition containing valuable knowledge.

Methodology

This research is aimed at creating an overview of experiences of practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao with the purpose of allowing the reader to understand these experiences. I gathered the data in this research mainly through qualitative interviews. According to Michael Patton's book on qualitative research, this type of "in-depth" interviewing allows me to get into the interviewees perspective and form a comprehensive impression of their experiences (Patton 2002, 341). The interviews are semi-structured, which means that I used a basic list of questions to begin but allowed room for deviation or adjustment for each of the interviews. The advantage of this method, as Patton explains, is on the one hand that it leaves space for the personal and situational differences in the experience of the interviewees. On the other hand, there is still a basic structure and the same topics are discussed with all interviewees. This allows for new subjects to be explored when they are mentioned by the interviewee but also keeps a focus on the main questions that need to be answered. The disadvantage of this type of interview, as indicated by Patton, is that it is harder to facilitate analysis since the topics discussed may differ per interviewee (Patton 2002, 342-346). For this reason, I decided to combine the interviews with a questionnaire, which will be discussed further below.

The 39 interviewees were acquired via purposeful sampling. This type of sampling is aimed at getting as many different perspectives from as many different sites and people as possible by actively searching for participants (Seidman 1998, 47-48). This method was achieved through sending emails to schools in different parts of the country and asking interviewees whether they have other people in mind that would want to participate. The interviews were conducted mostly through Skype, a communications application software, which allowed me to see the interviewee and also helped to efficiently conduct interviews

with people from all over the country. A few interviews were held in person or via the phone when necessary or if preferred by the interviewee.

Additionally, a questionnaire was used to facilitate analysis on the experience of the body practices and Daoism (Simon 1978, 199). I decided to use an online questionnaire, since practitioners did not have time to fill in the questionnaire after a class. Since it was not possible to get a significant number of completed questionnaires for the whole of the Netherlands, I decided to have the questionnaire serve as a supplement to the interviews.

The structure of the interview was based on Wim Donders' *Praktische gespreksvoering (Practical Interviewing)* and Michael Patton's *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* The questionnaire was based on Baarda's et al. *Basisboek Enquêteren* (*Survey Handbook*) and on Simon's *Basic research methods in social science*. An English translation of the basic outline of the interview and the questionnaire can be found in appendix I.

Interview

I interviewed 39 people (excluding pilot interviews) over the course of 3 months (December to February). There were five personal interviews, six interviews over the phone and 28 interviews via skype. The interviews lasted from 20 minutes until one hour and 20 minutes. The average time for an interview was 35 minutes. The personal interviews usually lasted longer.

There were 24 women and 15 men, varying in age between 25 and above 70. Most people were between the ages of 50 and 69. I interviewed 35 teachers and four students. Most teachers came from either the provinces of North or South Holland as there are many more schools in larger cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Taijiquan was practiced by 22 interviewees, Healing Tao by 11 and qigong by three. There were also three people that taught taiji and qigong separately (not as part of a taiji style). 24 teachers had their own school or gave classes by themselves. Nine teachers gave classes at a bigger organization. Two teachers barely taught anymore but used to have their own school or gave classes by themselves. The amount of time that teachers have been teaching varied between a few years and more than twenty years. Most people took less

than twenty years of training before starting to teach. There was an equal distribution between people who had trained less than five years, five to nine years or ten to twenty years before starting to teach.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, it is important to keep in mind that there were topics that arose during the interview, e.g. the humor within Daoism, that were not discussed with other interviewees. In my research I show both the responses given by the interviewees during the interview, as well as some that were sent by interviewees via email after the actual interview.

A full anonymized overview of the interviewees can be found in appendix II. Throughout the thesis, I will be referring to this overview.

Questionnaire

I collected the questionnaires in a period of approximately a month (from the end of January until the end of February), with a total of 107 results. Taijiquan as a sole practice was practiced by 25 people, Healing Tao by ten and qigong by seven. A significant number of participants combine practices: 59 people do both taiji and qigong, three people do Qigong and Healing Tao and three people practice all three.

There were in total 68 women and 39 men who answered my questionnaire. Among them most people were either in their 50s (39 people) or their 60s (36 people). The questionnaire did not contain a question about the role of the practitioners – student or teacher – but was sent out to both.

Chapter Outline

This study gives an overview of the experience of Daoism among practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao. The first chapter explains the history of the body practices of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao and briefly describes their connection to Daoism. It concludes with an overview of the various styles of body practice in the Netherlands relevant for this study. The second chapter determines the significance of the role that Daoism plays in the experience of practitioners and discusses reasons for the difference in this role between various styles of practice. The third chapter explains how the experience

of Daoism is related to the physical aspects of the body practices and reveals how Daoism is, contrary to what was expected prior to this study, experienced by many practitioners as a way of life. In the fourth chapter, the experience of Daoism is analyzed in connection to the literature read by practitioners. The fifth chapter explains to which extent Daoism and the body practices are connected to China and Chinese culture. It discusses the effects of globalization and a modernized China on the experience of this originally Chinese tradition. The last chapter concludes the findings from this study and shows that Daoism is mostly experienced as a practical guideline and the basis for the practitioners' body practices.

Conventions

This thesis uses the pinyin system of romanization for Chinese transliterations (e.g. *Dao*, *taijiquan*), except when referring to a specific text or organization that uses a different form of transliteration (e.g. *Tao*, *tai chi chuan*). The practices of taijiquan and qigong are written without capital letters, but Healing Tao is the name of a school of practice and hence written with title case.

Chapter One

From Pushing Hands to Inner Smile

This chapter begins with an explanation of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao and their link to Daoism. This is then followed by an overview of these practices in the Netherlands and shows various styles of practice relevant for this study.

History of Taijiquan, Qigong and Healing Tao

Taijiquan

Taijiquan (*tàijíquán* 太極拳) or in short taiji is, as Livia Kohn says, often translated as "great ultimate boxing", in which the term "taiji" is taken from Daoist philosophy to mean "great ultimate" (this term will be explained in-depth below). The term "quan" is translated as "boxing". Taijiquan is a system of physical movements that emphasizes balance, coordination and effortlessness and is focused on achieving physical and mental well-being. This is done individually through a fixed set of moves, sometimes by using weapons like swords or sticks or through partner practices such as "pushing hands" (*tuīshǒu* 推手) (Kohn 2005, 191-192).

In the 17th century, Chen Wangting (1600-1680), a retired soldier, is said to have created the practice of taijiquan (Kohn 2005, 194-197). Yang Jianying explains in an article on the development of taijiquan that during the shift from Ming to Qing dynasty (17th century) the idea of "stressing civil matters above the military" (*zhòngwénqīngwǔ* 重文輕武) became wide-spread and this meant that everyone outside of the military was forbidden to use weapons (Yang 2017, 69). Chen and later generations in his family combined martial arts and forms of breathing exercises as a new form of practice. It became a combination of slow movements that served purposes of both self-defense and health practice (Yang 2017, 70).

There are generally five classic styles recognized: the Chen, Yang, Wǔ, Wú and Sun style. The first person to have learned taiji outside of the Chen family was Yang Luchan (1799-1872). His Yang style (and the derived forms from this) is now the most common in the world (Guo et al. 2014, 3-4).

As mentioned above, taijiquan is connected to the philosophical term "taiji" or "great ultimate." This term already appears in books and documents before the Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.) and is directed at the origin of the universe. It appears in the *Yijing*:

> 易有**太極**，是生兩儀 (*Yijing* xi ci shang 11)
> There is in the Changes the **Great Primal Beginning**. This generates the two primary forces. (Tr. Wilhelm 2003, 318)

And it also appears in the *Zhuangzi:*

> 夫道，［…］在**太極**之先而不為高 (*Zhuangzi* 6.3)
> The Way, […] exists beyond the **highest point**, and yet you cannot call it lofty. (Tr. Watson 1968, 81.)

Yang indicates that this concept was explained as the absolute "one", the combination of yin and yang, two opposite forces which are found in every aspect of the universe (Yang 2017, 69). In the 16th century, the now universally recognized symbol arose that accurately gave shape to the concept: the half-black, half-white round symbol depicting yin and yang. Kohn explains that it shaped the scholarly field at that time and it is not surprising that around the same time this concept was used to describe a new type of practice, taijiquan, and its connection to ancient Chinese philosophy. It had inherited the Confucian martial concepts of honor and respect and the Daoist concepts of pliability and softness (Kohn 2005, 194-197). This way of fighting was explained as "using softness to conquer strength" (*yǐróukègāng* 以柔克剛) (Yang 2017, 69).

Qigong

The practice of qigong (*qìgōng* 氣功) has a less clear history. The term itself was actually only used for these practices from the last century and literally means "effort" or "merit" of qi (Kohn 2005, 181). Qi is hard to translate, but Livia Kohn says that it means "air" or "breath" and can be referred to as "life energy" (Kohn 2005, 11). According to sociologist David Palmer, a cadre from the Communist Party named Liu Guizhen used the term qigong to describe the form of breathing exercises that he learned from his uncle and that cured his illnesses. Later, the term qigong was applied to all kinds of techniques connected with the training, control and circulation of qi (Palmer 2006, 152). However, the practices from

which qigong derives have been present in China for centuries. It can be seen in the line of traditions of breathing and gymnastics, usually referred to as daoyin (*dǎoyǐn* 導引), a form of practice used by Daoists to cultivate their health and spirituality (Horwood 2008, 19-20). These exercises (either physical or mental) were directed at one's health and qi-activation (Zhu 1993, 34).

Qigong (and the former daoyin) has more recently also been combined with martial arts (Kohn 2005, 181). As aforementioned, the breathing exercises were integrated in among others taijiquan during the 16th century. The line between taiji and qigong is therefore blurry. Siegler points out that taiji masters might consider qigong a part of taiji in and qigong masters may see taiji as a part of their qigong (Siegler 2003, 327).

Healing Tao

Healing Tao is created by Daoist master Mantak Chia in Thailand. He was trained in different practices, among others thai boxing and taijiquan, as well as Chinese and Western medicine. In 1979 he moved to New York and opened his Universal Healing Tao Center, where he combined the disciplines that he had learned in the "Universal Healing Tao System", resulting in exercises such as the Inner Smile (relaxing one's organs) and a focus on the five elements (*wǔxíng* 五行): wood, fire, earth, metal and water (Mantak Chia Universal Healing Tao, n.d.).

Livia Kohn explains Healing Tao as a modern adaptation of inner alchemy (*nèidān* 內丹), which is a form of Daoist meditation that focuses on the internal energies of the body and is aimed at physical, emotional and mental health (Kohn 2005, 213). Mantak Chia combined different methods with Western thinking to "enhance health, reduce stress, and open higher spiritual awareness" (Kohn 2005, 218). I chose to view Healing Tao as a separate practice in order to examine whether it has any influence on the participants experience of Daoism that the name of the practice has the term "Tao" in it, which is a central concept in Daoism.

Body Practices and their Origin in Daoism

From the explanation above it seems clear that these practices all have their origin in Daoism. However, it needs to be stressed that this is not as straightforward and definitive as it may appear. These body practices have all been influenced by Daoist tradition as shown above, but just like how Daoism itself is to a degree a syncretic system of notions, cults and practices equally these body practices have also been subject to influences from other traditions and they are not seen as explicitly "Daoist" within China itself. As Siegler explains, the view on Daoism in the West changed during the last century when the focus shifted to the teachings that it could provide for the West. The idea was picked up by Chinese immigrants to combine teachings that had a clear Daoist origin and popularize them among the foreign public (Siegler 2003, 356).

This Daoism was different from the Daoism in China. It was much more practice-oriented with little institutional basis and with a focus on health through balance and harmony and the writings of the *Daodejing* and the *Yijing,* two Chinese classics. Sinologist Isabelle Robinet explains that Daoism within China is a combination of teachings that has taken on all kind of characteristics throughout its long history (Robinet 1997, 3). In our Western system of classification and differentiation, it seems impossible to draw clear lines of delineation. However, it is important to keep in mind that this form of Daoism has taken many different ideas and practices from other Chinese traditions, such as Confucianism and Buddhism and is not only focused on the *Daodejing* and the *Yijing*.

While the body practices might not have been Daoist in origin, the first section of this chapter shows that they have definitely been influenced by it. Furthermore, in America over the last century these practices have increasingly been connected to Daoist teachings and a clear Daoist basis for these practices has since formed. Therefore, Daoism does plays an important role in the experience of practitioners in America.

In this study, the focus is on the Netherlands and whether Daoism plays an equally significant role as it does in the US. The next section introduces the organizations and styles of these body practices that are relevant in the Netherlands and for this research.

Body Practices in the Netherlands

There are many organizations, schools and individual teachers for taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao in the Netherlands. This section gives an overview of the most common forms and styles. It is important to keep in mind that there are many more variations and styles that can be found. However, the research has to be limited to the following ones to be able to create an overview befitting the length of this thesis.

Chen Style Taijiquan

As mentioned, the Chen style is the oldest yet still popular style of taijiquan characterized by exercises such as empty-hand forms, pushing hands, alternating fast and slow movements with blows of force (*fājìn* 發勁) and weapon forms (Wang and Cai 2009, 4-6). One teacher within this style was Chen Fake (1887-1957) who taught students such as Feng Zhiqiang and Hong Junsheng (Gaffney and Sim 21-22, 2002).

Feng Zhiqiang (1928-2012) created his own training system of Xinyi Hunyuan taijiquan. His style combines Xinyi quan (or mind-intent boxing) with taiji and qigong (Song and Sun 2010, 7). One of his students, Chen Liansheng, also known as master Kristanto, became the representative for Xinyi Hunyuan taijiquan in the Netherlands and through him this practice spread here as well (Budo Stichting Boot, n.d.). I interviewed two teachers from this style.

Yang Style Taijiquan

The Yang style is the most spread and most popular taiji style in the world. Yang Luchan's grandson, Yang Chengfu (1883-1936), started teaching taiji to people outside the family (Fu et al. 1980, 4-6). One of his students was Cheng Man-ch'ing (Zheng Manqing 1902-1975), who taught many well-known students, such as Benjamin Lo and William C.C. Chen (Cheng and Smith 1972, 12). I interviewed nine teachers from the Yang style who were students from one or more teachers within the Cheng Man-Ch'ing Yang style. I also interviewed one teacher and one student that were taught in the Yang style from an unidentified lineage.

Besides Cheng Man-ch'ing, there have also been teachers in the line of Dong Ying Jie (1898-1961), another student of Yang Chengfu. His grandchild, Dong Zeng Chen, taught San

Gee Tam, the founder of the Golden Flower Tai Chi Association, with schools in five countries (Golden Flower, n.d.). In 1983, San Gee Tam also started teaching in the Netherlands and it currently has nine locations throughout the country (Golden Flower 2013). I interviewed two teachers from this style.

Taoist Tai Chi

This organization was founded by master Moy Lin Shin (1931-1998) and is not linked to a specific taiji style. Master Moy learned multiple styles from various teachers. He learned among others from master Liang Zipeng (1900-1974), who was skilled in Liuhe Bafa (*liùhé bāfǎ* 六合八法), a form of internal Chinese martial arts. In 1970 he immigrated to Canada and founded the International Taoist Tai Chi Society. He named it "Taoist Tai Chi" to focus on the Daoist origin of the art (Taoist Tai Chi, n.d. (a)).

The organization might be focused on Daoism, but centers around Confucianism and Buddhism as well. In their main location in Canada, they have a three religions temple with deities from all of these three religions. Taoist Tai Chi is therefore not just a school for taiji but is a much broader organization (Taoist Tai Chi, n.d. (b)).

In 1989 the first classes began in the Netherlands. According to their website they now teach in 26 different locations and have one national training center (Taoïstische Tai Chi Vereniging Nederland, n.d.). I interviewed four teachers from this organization.

Tai Chi Tao

Another form of taiji that should be mentioned in the Dutch context is Tai Chi Tao. It is a specific form of taiji created in 1978 by Dutch martial artist Jan Kraak (1936-2008).

Kraak created his own form called Tai Chi Tao, based on his teachings in qigong and taiji and his research in Chinese culture and philosophy. He saw taiji as a fighting sport, but as a self-defense technique. His main purpose was to focus on the health aspects, so that everyone could practice it. One of the focuses is on the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water and their connection to different parts of the body. (Kraak 2014).

Since Kraak never created an organization or fixed teaching program, his students can be found throughout the Netherlands but are not linked to a specific organization. They

have learned the forms from Tai Chi Tao, but also integrate their own methods into it. I interviewed four teachers in Tai Chi Tao.

Qigong

In the Netherlands, qigong is mostly taught as part of a taiji style. Three interviewees taught qigong separately from taiji. One other interviewee taught qigong based on teachings from various practices. Two other interviewees taught a specific type of qigong: Zhineng Qigong.

Zhineng Qigong was created by dr. Pang Ming. In the beginning of the 1980s, he combined his knowledge of Western and Chinese medicine to create Zhineng Qigong. He established a hospital without medicine in China, the Huaxia center, the focus of which lay in curing people through practice in qigong (Hering 2012, 29-30).

Zhineng Qigong is aimed at healing the body by getting rid of disruptions in the qi flow of the meridians, which are qi-paths in the body. An important aspect of this is the Hunyuan (*hùnyuán* 混元) or Universal Qi theory. This theory holds that everything has its own qi and that by taking in the qi from the universe, one can restore the flow of their own qi (Hering 2012, 18-19).

In the Netherlands there are currently two institutes that offer trainings in becoming a certified Zhineng Qigong teacher: the Chineng Institute, established in 1998 (Chi Neng Instituut, n.d.) and the Zhigong Institute Europe, established first in Germany in 2000 and later in the Netherlands in 2006 (Zhigong Institute Europe, n.d.).

Training Schools for Taijiquan and Qigong

Two interviewees came from training schools for taijiquan and qigong. They teach taijiquan and qigong separately and not as a part of a specific taiji style.

The first one is the BOCAM program at the CNGO (Center for Natural Health Development) in Tilburg. This is a vocational training for therapists in traditional Chinese medicine and for teachers in Chinese body practices. The program started in 1987 and the training takes three years. Their form of qigong is focused on relaxation, health and improvement within work or sport. Taijiquan is taught in basic exercises and in the Yang style of dr. Qi Jiang Tao (1919-1994), a student of Cheng Man-ch'ing (CNGO, n.d.).

The other training school, where some Dutch teachers have had their training, is located in China and Austria, the International Laoshan Center for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). It was established in 1994 by prof. Sui Qingbo and his wife Lena Du Hong. The training is focused on the health function of qigong and taiji, teaching about the meridians (the paths through which qi flows and taiji philosophy). The taiji forms that Sui Qingbo teaches is based mostly on the Yang style (Laoshan Zentrum, n.d.).

Healing Tao

Healing Tao is created by Mantak Chia. It came to the Netherlands in the 1990s when Healing Tao Holland was established (Healing Tao Holland, n.d.). To become a teacher, one had to complete the teacher training in Thailand. Since 2005 it has also been possible to do this in the Netherlands. Since then the numbers of teachers has seen an increase.

Some teachers call their training "Tao training" and not Healing Tao, but since they still have a background in Healing Tao and the purpose of this study is to gauge whether there is an influence on their experience of Daoism because of the specific use of "Tao" in the name, they can be found in the overview under the category of "Healing Tao Instructor." I interviewed 10 instructors and one student from this practice.

This chapter gave an overview of the three body practices and styles that are relevant in the Netherlands for this research. Taijiquan is in this study researched through the family styles of Chen and Yang, the organization of Taoist Tai Chi by master Moy Lin Shin and the Jan Kraak style of Tai Chi Tao. Qigong is researched through individual practitioners and Zhineng Qigong and together with taijiquan through the training schools of BOCAM and the Laoshan Zentrum of prof. Sui Qingbo. Healing Tao is researched through practitioners from the school of founder Mantak Chia. The next chapter explains to what extent Daoism plays a role in the experience of the practitioners from the body practices discussed above. It elaborates on the difference in experience by discussing the various styles of these practices.

Chapter Two

The Path of Understanding

This chapter begins by showing broadly how Daoism is experienced in the Netherlands and which characteristics and principles of Daoism play the most significant role in this experience. The second section explores more in-depth the difference in experience between various styles of the body practices.

Daoism as an Experience

Does Daoism play a significant role in the body practices in the Netherlands? How do the practitioners view Daoism and the concept of Dao? And which characteristics of Daoism are most important to them? This section offers a brief overview of the experiences of Daoism in the Netherlands by providing a concise answer to these questions.

Role of Daoism

As discussed in the previous chapter on the history of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao, Daoism plays an important role in these body practices in America, which motivated Elijah Siegler to name it "American Daoism." Based on my interviews, most practitioners connect Daoism to their practice (30 interviewees) and half of them note the role of Daoism to be significant (14 interviewees). Nine of these practitioners even describe it as a "way of life" (interviewees 1, 2, 5, 8, 12, 13, 18, 21 and 26). On the other hand, there are also people who indicate that Daoism does not play a role in their life, by explaining that it is not of relevance to them (interviewees 11, 31, 37 and 39) or that they do not have a personal interest in Daoism (interviewees 14, 15, 25, 30 and 33). The majority of the practitioners, however, experience Daoism in their practice. This shows that for most practitioners, Daoism plays a sizeable role in their body practice and for about a third of them it even plays a greatly significant role, meaning that it is an essential part of their practice. The role of Daoism in the Netherlands is therefore similar to the role of Daoism in America and Daoism thus plays a more significant role in the Netherlands than I expected prior to this study.

Characteristics and Principles of Daoism

With Daoism playing a role to a certain extent in most practitioners' experience, it is important to analyze which parts of Daoism are most valued by practitioners. This section therefore presents the characteristics and principles that practitioners used most to describe Daoism. This first part summarizes the five most important characteristics. Daoism is in the first place experienced as very practical (13 interviewees). This practicality comes from the fact that it is concerned with action and doing rather than with theory. It is secondly also important for the practitioners that Daoism is based on the laws of nature (12 interviewees). This means that it is connected to the principles that govern the natural phenomena in the world, from the weather to our bodies. Daoism for them is thirdly also about finding balance in opposites (8 interviewees), fourthly about everything influencing its surroundings (6 interviewees) and lastly about being part of a bigger whole (6 interviewees).

During the interviews, practitioners also emphasized three core principles that are important within their experience of Daoism: yin-yang (*yīnyáng* 陰陽, 8 interviewees), five elements (*wǔxíng* 五行, 7 interviewees) and wuwei (*wúwéi* 無為, 6 interviewees). The first principles of yin and yang, as Kohn explains, are the two alternating sides of qi, the energy of which everything in the world is made of. Yin and yang move in and out of each other constantly, similar to night and day. They exist together in all things and have overlapping periods, just like dawn and dusk. These periods are differentiated in five phases or so-called five elements (Kohn 2001, 44). The second principle of five elements are more processes than essences. The elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water correspond to five organs in the body, five seasons, five colors and more. In my thesis I adopt the term "five elements" that is used in the body practices instead of "five phases", which is the more commonly used term in scientific work. The last principle of wuwei is usually translated as "nonaction". Van Norden, scholar of Chinese philosophy, explains that it can be understood as "action that is non-self-conscious yet perfectly responsive to the situation" (Van Norden 2011, 127). It is akin to riding a bike without having to think about it. There were more interviewees who mentioned these principles, but I only counted those who explicitly expressed them as being important.

Daoism is thus mainly described in practical principles or laws of nature that explain how the world and one's surroundings function. Terms as yin-yang and five elements are used to describe and clarify the way nature works. It is in that sense experienced as practical, since these principles are blended into their body practices letting the practitioners understand them through practice instead of merely through theory.

View on the Concept of Dao

Besides identifying the characteristics and principles of Daoism that are important to the practitioners it is also relevant to see how they view the Dao (or "Tao"), since this is a central concept in Daoism. This concept is hard to explain. Livia Kohn, an authority in this field, notes that the Dao, usually translated as "the Way", can be understood in three ways: metaphysically, practically or analytically. It can be explained "either metaphysically as the underlying source and power of the universe, practically as the way in which the world functions, or analytically as the way in which people can (or cannot) speak about reality" (Kohn 2001, 20). Two of these three views correspond closely to the views expressed by the practitioners that I interviewed. A large portion of them note that the Dao can be explained either in an analytical way since it is paradoxical and indescribable (8 interviewees) or in a practical way since it is our own natural path that we should follow (6 interviewees). This suggests that the Dao is viewed by most of the practitioners as an indescribable but practical way to follow. For them, the Dao cannot be explained but can be experienced through practice.

Generally speaking, Daoism does play a role in the experience of practitioners. For some people it even plays a significant role. Daoism is mostly experienced as a natural way of describing the world around us, which can then be practically adapted into their body practices. Does this also hold true when comparing the different styles of practices? Do they view Daoism similarly or are there distinct differences in their points of view?

Daoism Through Different Styles

When analyzing the different styles of practices, such as Chen style taiji or Zhineng Qigong it is clear that most of these styles hold similar views towards Daoism, describing it as mentioned above. There are however two styles that hold a few distinctly views. Practitioners of Healing Tao and Tai Chi Tao made the most frequent mentions of the principle of five elements (interviewees 6, 7, 8, 30, 33 and 35): six out of total seven times. The characteristic of inner alchemy was noted as important only by practitioners from Healing Tao (interviewees 4, 7 and 10). As explained in chapter one, inner alchemy is practiced as a form of Daoist meditation that focuses on the internal energies of the body and is aimed at physical, emotional and mental health (Kohn 2005, 213).

The Dao as a concept within Daoism is also experienced differently from style to style. Healing Tao interviewees are the only ones to describe it as the background from which all matter arises and ultimately returns to (interviewees 3, 7, 11), which is a metaphysical approach as explained by Kohn in the previous section. All of the Tai Chi Tao practitioners experience the Dao as their own natural path in life that they should follow (interviewees 30, 33, 35, 36), which is a practical approach.

It can therefore be said that some practitioners from Healing Tao and Tai Chi Tao hold different views towards Daoism, whereas other styles of practice mostly value similar characteristics and are largely uniform in the explanations they provide. The most interesting is that Healing Tao and Tai Chi Tao are both practices with "Tao" in their name and I chose to Healing Tao as a separate practice to determine whether the use of "Tao" in the name of these practices influences the practitioners' view towards Daoism?

As mentioned by Siegler, Healing Tao is not extremely focused on the background of Daoism in the sense of philosophy, ethics or everyday advice (Siegler 2006, 268). However, most Healing Tao practitioners feel Daoism has a significant role in their practice (interviewees 1, 2, 3, 6, 8) whereas there is no one who explicitly expressed that it does not play any a role whatsoever. For Tai Chi Tao this is not the case. Even though the founder Jan Kraak emphasized the importance of Daoism and thus added "Tao" in the name of the practice, the practitioners themselves do not place any emphasis on the importance of

Daoism in their experience (Kraak 2004). It can therefore not be said that including the term “Tao” in the name of a practice leads to a stronger attachment to Daoism.

The various principles, such as the five elements, that the practitioners from these two practices mention can be better explained by the main aspects of their body practices. As explained in chapter one, Healing Tao is focused on inner alchemy and both Healing Tao and Tai Chi Tao are focused on the five elements. It would therefore be logical for them to emphasize these characteristics and principles. The way that they describe the Dao can also be explained by the contextual background of these practices. The metaphysical approach of Healing Tao is connected to practices such as inner alchemy. The ultimate goal is to become one with Dao as this is seen as the background from which all matter arises and ultimately returns to. The practical approach of Tai Chi Tao can be explained by the mindset of founder Jan Kraak which emphasized that the practice should be applicable to anyone: by finding and following your own path in life.

How can we explain the strong focus on the role of Daoism within Healing Tao? A crucial difference between these two practices, is that Healing Tao is connected to a large organization, whereas Tai Chi Tao is not connected to any one organization. As shown in chapter one, Jan Kraak did not establish an organization and even emphasized the flexibility of the style. Two of the four interviewees also indicated that they combine different styles in their teachings (interviewees 30 and 36). Taoist Tai Chi and Golden Flower Tai Chi are, just like Healing Tao, worldwide organizations. These organizations in general show more interest in Daoism. People who learned their practice via one of these organizations made up nine of the fourteen people who feel Daoism has a significant role in their practice, whereas no one expressed that it does not play any role whatsoever. This is only mentioned by teachers with their own school or students. I would therefore argue that the focus on Daoism is not based on the name of a style of practice, but on whether the practice is taught through an organization. “Organizations” teach a much more fixed program, letting their practitioners get more familiar with the specific background. And as these three organizations value Daoism as an important part of their practice, as a consequence the practitioners also generally tend to value it more than practitioners outside of larger organizations.

All in all, this chapter shows that Daoism plays a role in the experience of practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao. It is by some even experienced as a way of life. Daoism is mainly seen as a practical, descriptive way of viewing the world around them, making it similar to the practical experience of American Daoism. Among the various styles of practice in the Netherlands, there is also a variety of experiences, which can mostly be ascribed to (a) the background of these styles, such as the focus on health and (b) the type of school at which practitioners learned their practice, like an individual school or an organization.

The next chapter continues on how the experience of Daoism described here is connected to various physical aspects of the body practices.

Chapter Three

Balance Through Non-Action

This chapter focuses on various physical aspects of the body practices and how these practices are connected to the experience of Daoism in the Netherlands. The first section explains how various physical parts of the body practices, such as lessons, stand in relation to the experience of Daoism. The last section elaborates on the effect that this experience has on the practitioners' outlook on life.

Physical Experience of Taijiquan, Qigong and Healing Tao

Personal Practice and Lessons

Do personal practice and lessons affect the practitioners' experience of Daoism? Most interviewees go to workshops or trainings (12 interviewees) and practice by themselves nearly every day (16 interviewees, 46 times in questionnaire). Most of the practitioners train partly alone and partly with others (35 times in questionnaire), but there are also many who always train alone (32 times in questionnaire) and those who often train with others (27 times in questionnaire). Remarkable is that some practitioners from different body practices indicate that they hardly practice since they "live it" and have already learned a lot (7 interviewees). These practitioners are all teachers and practice mostly through teaching. The particular method or frequency of the practitioners' training does however not contribute to diverging views on Daoism. There is no distinct difference in the experience of Daoism between people who train more and those that train less or by people who train alone or with others.

Since these body practices are also practiced throughout the entirety of China and other parts of Asia, some practitioners go to Asia to practice. Does this influence their experience of Daoism? There are practitioners who used to train in Asia (interviewees 1, 8, 9, 16 and 31) and practitioners who still regularly go to Asia for training (interviewees 15, 19, 24 and 29). The people who practice taijiquan or qigong go to China for practice and the people who practice Healing Tao go to Thailand. However, the fact that their training is connected to Asia does not have a specific influence on their experience of Daoism. The way

these people experience Daoism does not differ much from people who had their training outside of Asia.

Among the practitioners there are also many teachers (35 of the 39 interviewees). Is the way they teach connected to their experience of Daoism? There are eight interviewees who indicate that they explain the background of their practice in class and six interviewees who indicate that they adjusted the lessons to the group's needs. Whether or not teachers give background information during the lessons also shows how much they are interested in Daoism. All interviewees indicate that they are personally interested in Daoism and that Daoism plays a role in their experience of their body practice. For half of them, Daoism is even a way of life (interviewees 5, 12, 13 and 21). This shows that the way that they teach is connected to their experience of Daoism.

Aspects of the Body Practices

How do practitioners describe the physical aspects of their body practices? Which aspects are most important to them? Are these connected to their experience of Daoism? The most important aspects to practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao are positive health effects on themselves, both physically (21 interviewees) and mentally (18 interviewees). The practices are also experienced by many as a way of life, owing to their broad applicability (22 interviewees). This means that the results they produce, such as better balance, can also be felt outside of training. The third most significant aspect is the aspect of making contact with yourself, either your own body or your internal self (15 interviewees), which can lead to better self-consciousness.

The practitioners' experience of Daoism is related to these aspects. The practitioners give a variety of different descriptions of Daoism, but they all seem to experience Daoism as the practical background for the physical aspects of their body practices. Daoism provides a holistic view of the world that describes an interconnection of body and mind. The practitioners explain that it uses the principles of nature, such as a balance of yin and yang to explain how the world works. Their body practices apply this view in exercises and through this physical training the practitioners can get to understand the underlying Daoist principles, which leads to beneficial physical and mental health effects.

For this section, it can be concluded that the experience of various physical aspects of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao is partly related to the experience of Daoism. Lessons and personal practice do not affect the practitioners' view on Daoism, however the interest of teachers in Daoism has a direct influence on the way they arrange their classes, which in turn affects the role of Daoism in the practicing by their students. Daoism is mostly experienced as a background for the body practices through which they can get familiar with Daoist principles. The next section gives more insight into the experience of Daoism and the role it plays in their daily life.

Sport, Spirituality or Way of Life

Most practitioners do not explain their body practice as simply being a sport. Daoism serves for most of them as a background to their practice. Is it more than just the theoretical framework of their body practice? A few practitioners connect spirituality to their body practice (interviewees 13, 23, 29 and 32), whereas others specifically do not experience it as spiritual (interviewees 11, 14, 16, 19 and 24). There is no distinction in the style of body practices that they do. However, remarkable is that people who do not view the practices as being spiritual give relatively shorter explanations when talking about Daoism. The ones that view it as spiritual give much more elaborate descriptions and are more prone to talk about all things being interconnected and themselves being part of a larger whole (interviewees 23, 29, 32).

Around the same time that Daoism came to be viewed differently and the body practices discussed in this thesis gained popularity in the Netherlands, spirituality was also on the rise (Jespers 2010, 63). Frans Jespers, associate professor of religious studies at Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, describes in his article the characteristics of spirituality in the Netherlands. Most of these characteristics match with the descriptions of Daoism given by the practitioners I interviewed. To give a few examples, Jespers explains that spirituality in the Netherlands is very practically and intuitively orientated, which is one of the most mentioned characteristics of Daoism by the practitioners. Jespers also underlines the characteristic of a holistic worldview that expresses a connection between body, mind and soul (Jespers 2010, 61-63). This connection is also mentioned by nine practitioners. However, I would not go as far as to generally label practitioners as supporters of this

spirituality. As mentioned above there are also practitioners who explicitly do not experience their practice as spiritual and even many more who do not say anything about spirituality.

Nevertheless, from the interviews and questionnaire it is also clear that they do not experience their body practices as merely "sports." Many practitioners experience it also as a combination of philosophy and a sport (39 times in questionnaire), or even only as a philosophy (21 times in questionnaire). A few practitioners experience it purely as a sport (6 times in questionnaire). Most interviewees experience taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao as a way of life (22 interviewees). Anke Bisschops, pastoral psychologist, explains that life philosophies nowadays are different from religions or sources of spirituality in their traditional form. Beyond that, they are overwhelmingly concerned with finding meaning in the inner life. Adherents desire attaining personal growth and gaining personal experience, which can be seen in personal growth being an important factor when considering their choice of work (Bisschops 2015, 30-31). Aupers and Houtman explain in their book *Religions of Modernity* that in our modern society there has been a loss of meaning in life. Much of our world is defined in terms of science and there is no "bigger purpose." In their book they explain that this has led to a focus on individuality and the valuing of the "personal self." People look for personal meaning by combining elements from various traditions and backgrounds to form a way of life that provides them satisfaction and meaning. Finding meaning no longer necessitates having to "believe" or to "have faith" but is instead organically formed by one's personal experiences: by doing, performing and active practicing, one can find out themselves which elements suit them, and which can be discarded (Aupers and Houtman 2010, 10-11). For many practitioners the body practices function in much the same way: they represent more than a mere hobby or sport nor are they a fully spiritual experience, but they can give meaning to life as practitioners can decide how much and which aspects of the body practices they want to incorporate in their life. Some experience the body practices as a social occasion, some as a sport, but many also incorporate aspects of Daoism and even Buddhism or Confucianism (as will be shown in chapter five) to give meaning to their life.

This chapter gave an overview of the various physical aspects of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao and how these aspects are connected to the experience of Daoism. It shows that personal practice and lessons are not directly linked to how practitioners experience Daoism, but that the aspects they find most important are related to their experience of Daoism as a background for their body practices. Some practitioners even experience Daoism as a way of giving meaning to life. Results indicate that Daoism is experienced stronger in the Netherlands than I expected prior to this research. The next chapter focuses on another important aspect of Daoist practice: the study of texts.

Chapter Four

The Teachings of an Old Master

As stated in the introduction, studying Daoist texts is an important part of American Daoism and it could be revealing to determine the role of textual information on how practitioners experience Daoism. This chapter therefore focuses on the relevant literature read by practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao.

The Importance of Reading

A wide range of books have been written about taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao and it is therefore not surprising that many practitioners read books related to their body practices. These books are either selected by the practitioners themselves or recommended to them by their masters. Which books are these, what are they about and to what extent if at any do they affect the practitioners' view on Daoism?

Reading as a Practice?

To determine whether reading certain books has an effect on the practitioners' experience of Daoism, it is important to first ascertain the portion of practitioners that actually read books about their body practices and Daoism. Most practitioners, interestingly enough, explain that learning through active practice is more important than learning through reading (14 interviewees). They tend to stress the importance of practice but point out that they also read to supplement their training or simply out of personal interest. Based on the interviews, there are only three practitioners who state that they don't read about their body practice or Daoism (interviewees 14, 31 and 39) and one person who wants to read about Daoism but hasn't yet had the opportunity to do so (interviewee 15). There are also three people who state that they used to read, but no longer read about these topics (interviewees 20, 27 and 36). This means that only a small part of the practitioners currently does not read as part of their practice (7 interviewees, 21 times in questionnaires) and that most people do read about their body practices and Daoism. A

majority indicates that they read once a month (28 times in questionnaire). This means that for most practitioners reading books is an integral part of their practice.

Reading and the role of Daoism

Since most practitioners read books on their body practice and Daoism, we can examine whether these books are connected to the role that Daoism plays in their body practice.

The practitioners' reading of relevant texts on the body practices and Daoism is a good indicator with which to gauge the depth of their overall interest in Daoism. The practitioners who do not read on these topics, note that Daoism either does not play a role in their experience (interviewees 31 and 39) or that they are simply not personally interested in it (interviewees 14 and 15, questionnaire 21 times). The practitioners that had read books on these books in the past, express that some characteristics of Daoism play a role in their experience, the practicality of it being one of these, as well as the notion that Daoism is about one's own natural path to follow in life. The most outspoken views on Daoism are held by practitioners who currently continue to read books on these topics. Their explanation of the characteristics and principles of Daoism that play a role in their experience is markedly more extensive than explanations of the practitioners who belong in the other categories and they also more frequently indicate that Daoism plays a significant role in their respective lives. Among these readers, the people who read books specifically on Daoism show the most interest in this tradition. They often express that Daoism is a way of life to them (7 out of 12 interviewees). This shows that determining practitioners' reading behavior can help map their experience of Daoism.

In conclusion, reading is a clear part of many people's practice and is tied to their experience of Daoism. The prevalence of the habit of reading texts amongst practitioners seems directly correlated with their general interest in Daoism. The question then remains: what do they read? And what might this tell us about the experience of Daoism?

Books in Relation to Body Practices and Daoism

This section elaborates specifically on the most-read books and their relation to the experience of Daoism. It is based on the most-mentioned books during the interviews and from the questionnaires. There is a difference in the most-read books between the interviews and the questionnaires. This could be explained by the difference in number of participants in the interview (39) and the questionnaires (107) as well as a difference in phrasing of the question on books in both of these.

Popular Books

In my interviews the most-read book is by far the *Daodejing* (14 times). This then followed by the books from Mantak Chia (6 times), the *Yijing* (6 times), the *Zhuangzi* (6 times), books of Hua-Ching Ni (5 times) and *the Tao of Pooh* by Benjamin Hoff (4 times).

The most-read books in my questionnaire are the books from Mantak Chia (8 times), *The Way of Qigong* by Kenneth Cohen (7 times), *The Complete Book of Tai Chi Chuan* by Wong Kiew Kit (6 times), *Vuurman en Watervrouw* (*Fireman and Waterwoman*) by Silvana Schwitzer (5 times) and *De Tao van Gezondheid* (*the Dao of Health*) by Conny Coppen (4 times).

What are these books about? The books of Cohen and Wong are handbooks for qigong and taijiquan. Cohen explains in his book how to integrate qigong in one's daily life in order to find balance in body and mind and even to prevent certain illnesses. Wong's book gives a complete overview of the various aspects of taijiquan by discussing the background, the different styles it encompasses, the philosophy behind it, the basic techniques that involve it and how to integrate it in one's daily routine.

The topic of health is discussed in the books of Schwitzer and Coppen. The book of Schwitzer elaborates on the five elements and how they appear in one's body. It is a guide to finding balance and thereby creating mental and physical health. Coppen uses her years of experience and the knowledge of acupuncture and Daoism to explain how the organs function as connections to the five elements in one's body. By following one's true self, one can find harmony and balance within these elements and thereby create a healthy life.

Mantak Chia and Hua-Ching Ni have written both dozens of books. Mantak Chia, as the founder of Healing Tao, describes in his books most of the exercises and practice systems within his Universal Healing Tao program. In his books he describes exercises such as the Inner Smile (relaxing one's organs), qi self-massage and "iron shirt" qigong. The books explain the Chinese inner alchemy on which Healing Tao is based and form an addition to the teaching courses (Siegler 2003, 364-365). Hua-Ching Ni, also known as master Ni, came to America as a Daoist master in 1976 and has founded a clinic named the College of Tao. Nowadays there are many Ni-sponsored organizations and master Ni himself has written around sixty to seventy books. These books are less practical than the ones from Mantak Chia. They also contain philosophy and ethics, such as a translation of the *Daodejing* (Siegler 2003, 167-170).

Three "key books", as one practitioner calls them, are canonical texts that are often studied in American Daoism and are also read among Dutch practitioners. These are: the *Daodejing*, the *Yijing* and the *Zhuangzi*. The *Daodejing* is one of the foundational texts of Daoist philosophy and is said to have been based on the teachings of Laozi (the "old master"). This short text explains the basic principles of Daoism through concise paradoxes (Schipper 2007, 11-12). The *Zhuangzi*, another Daoist classic, is named after the teachings of master Zhuang. This text is more diverse than the *Daodejing*, containing short stories, poems, philosophical considerations as well as humoristic components (Schipper 2007, 12). The *Yijing,* not exclusively a Daoist text, plays an important role in Chinese culture, both in philosophy and science. This book presents the concept of the eight trigrams, symbols that represent transitions from one phenomenon into another (Wilhelm 2003, xlix-l).

The last book that is often read by practitioners is *the Tao of Pooh* by Benjamin Hoff. This is a short and easy-to-read book that, as Hoff himself said, "explained the principles of Taoism through Winnie-the-Pooh, and explained Winnie-the-Pooh through the principles of Taoism" (Hoff 1983, xii). He used the characters of Winnie-the-Pooh, written by A.A. Milne, to explain Daoist principles taken from texts such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*.

The Effects of Reading

Are the views of the books echoed in the way practitioners describe Daoism? The handbooks and most books from Mantak Chia and Hua-Ching Ni are predominately practically orientated. Practitioners experience Daoism in a similar way. They often describe Daoism as being practical (13 interviewees). The books on the health effects of the body practices are less reflected in the experience of Daoism since the practitioners experience the health effects as a result of the body practices. These practitioners do however mention terms as yin-yang and five elements when describing Daoism, which are a few of the most discussed principles in the health books.

The canonical texts have also had a marked influence on the readers. Interviewees who have read one of the "key books" of Daoism are the only ones to state that the Dao is indescribable (interviewees 2, 5, 8, 9, 25, 26 and 34). The people who call the Dao indescribable have all read the *Daodejing* and have therefore most likely been influenced by its first sentence: "The way [i.e. the Dao] that can be spoken of is not the constant way" (Lau 1963, 3). This is often interpreted as how it is impossible to describe the Dao with words. Its meaning is too complex to capture in language. This notion is also stressed by people who had read the books of Hua-Ching Ni, who has as mentioned also translated the *Daodejing* and also refers more often to this classical text.

Since the views of the books are echoed in the way practitioners describe Daoism, what can the reading of these books tell us about the experience of Daoism among the practitioners?

It is clear that the most-read books on Daoism are three canonical texts: *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi* and *Yijing*. Other Daoist canonical texts are barely read by practitioners, even though the Daoist canon (*dàozàng* 道藏) consists of around 1,500 texts, such as poetry, ritual texts and religious documents and includes a broad scope of topics, like philosophy, cosmology and medicine (Schipper and Verellen 2004, 1-3). The *Yijing* is not part of the Daoist Canon and even though the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi* and other philosophical texts all play a prominent role, they account for only 200 texts. For the practitioners, other books commonly read are handbooks and books on health. These works place Daoism generally in the context of how the world is formed and the effects it has on one's body, explaining

terms as yin-yang and the five elements. Through the works of masters such as Mantak Chia and Hua-Ching Ni Daoist principles are integrated in their body practices, giving Daoism a very practical explanation.

Since the practitioners only read a few canonical texts and mostly handbooks or books on health, I would argue that they are less interested in the broader philosophical or textual background of Daoism. Daoism is for most practitioners more about its potential practical applications. This argument is strengthened by the fact that a number of people describe Daoism as a philosophy (5 interviewees). However, these few people have also read books, such as *Filosofie met de Vlinderslag* (*Philosophy with the Butterfly Stroke*) by sinologist Woei-Lien Chong, which approaches the philosophy of the *Zhuangzi* from a practical perspective and illustrates how this philosophy can be an inspiration for modern daily life. I would therefore say that this experience of Daoism as a philosophy comes close to the experience as a "life philosophy" as discussed in the previous chapter and does not necessarily prove a strong interest in the broader philosophical or textual background.

It can be concluded that the role and types of books that practitioners read can help shed light on their experience of Daoism. The topics and types of books that they read are mostly focused on the practical and health side of their body practice and this is also the most common way in which they describe Daoism. They experience Daoism mainly as a practical explanation of the world around them instead of a broader philosophical or textual background. They get familiar with the Daoist principles partly through three basic canonical texts and books on their body practice, but mostly through actual practice of their body practices.

Chapter Five

The Tradition of the Middle Kingdom

As established in chapter one, the connection between Daoism and the body practices that holds in American Daoism is fundamentally different in China. The body practices in China are less connected to Daoism or are at least based on a more complex combination of various traditions. The perspective on Daoism adopted a different form when Chinese immigrants began teaching the body practices in America. Daoism functioned as a basis for the body practices and was connected to China through a strong nostalgic feeling towards the teachers' motherland (Siegler 2006, 263). This last chapter explains to what extent Daoism and the body practices as they are practiced in the Netherlands are connected to China and Chinese culture. It discusses the effects of globalization and a modernizing China on the experience of this originally ancient Chinese tradition.

The Importance of a Chinese Origin

This section begins by asking whether practitioners connect their body practice to China or see it instead as universal, meaning that the same principles can be found around the world. Afterwards, it determines to what extent the method of the body practices is important to the practitioners. This method refers to the way that the practices are taught by teachers and learned by students. Is it important to stick to the Chinese method or if it is universal, is it possible to deviate from it? This section ends by showing how the experience of two others major traditions in China, Buddhism and Confucianism, can shed more light on this.

Chinese or Not?

There are large differences in viewpoints amongst the practitioners on whether the body practices are experienced as distinctly Chinese or instead "universal". On the one hand, some practitioners hold the view that even though their body practice might originate from China, the principles behind it are universal in nature and therefore they do not connect their body practice to China or Chinese culture directly (16 times). To them, the principles that serve as the basis of the body practices, such as the principle of energy of qi or the

balance between yin and yang, are not actually Chinese. The body practices are simply ways to understand and apply these principles. Similar principles can also be found in other old traditions around the world and therefore the exact origin of their body practice and Daoism is not of significant importance to them. On the other hand, there are practitioners who experience their body practice as distinctly Chinese or more broadly as Asian (10 times). They explain that the classical wisdom comes from China, where it has been formed over thousands of years. It now serves as the basis for Chinese traditional medicine and the body practices that they practice. One practitioner, for example, explains that their body practice has been created by Asian for Asian bodies and that for some Western people certain poses could be difficult to handle (interviewee 35). For these practitioners it is important to understand the origin of the body practice and to stay faithful to the methods that they have been taught on how to practice their body practice.

Overall, the origin of the body practices plays a less significant role in the practitioners' experience than was expected prior to this study. A slight majority emphasized the universality of the principles behind their body practice and therefore does not expressly value their origin.

Adaptable Method

When looking more specifically as to what extent they value the methods that they were taught, there are different points of view to be distinguished as well. There are practitioners who believe that these methods can be adapted (13 times). This means that for them, as long as the basic universal principles stay the same, the methods can be adapted to suit Western needs. For example, one practitioner explains that the masters in China give barely any or even none explanation to the exercises that they teach. This would however not work as well in the Netherlands, as students want to know "why" they do certain exercises (interviewee 36). There are also practitioners who believe that they should stick to the methods (7 times). They explain that it is important to preserve the conveyed methods as they have proved to be the optimal way by which to learn the body practices. These practitioners argue that when the methods are changed, they will inevitably lose their effect. They illustrated this fact by recalling how changed methods led to many students in

the Netherlands having learnt “useless forms”, exercises that do not have the desired effects. Ultimately however there is therefore a clear majority of people who believe that the methods can or even should be adapted, meaning that they attach less importance to the original form and origin of the body practice.

Buddhism and Confucianism

Not only do some practitioners believe that methods can or should be adapted, but some practitioners also believe that these methods can be combined with other methods outside of Daoism. Buddhism, for instance, was experienced by half of the practitioners that were asked, as playing a significant role in their body practice and view on Daoism (15 times). And half of this group sees Buddhism as a useful addition to Daoism in learning their body practices (8 times). For them, the principles behind Daoism are universal and the methods are just different ways of getting to understand them. As one interviewee says: “In the end, all these methods teach the same principles” (interviewee 12). Buddhism is also one of these methods. It should be noted that there are about just as many people who do not regard Buddhism as part of their practice or who do not really know whether they regard it as such (16 times). Confucianism, on the other hand, is much less experienced as part of their practice. For only five people it plays a role in their experience of Daoism.

This section explains that, on the one hand, Daoism and the body practices are regarded as being connected to China and its culture by a number of practitioners. Some of them even go as far as to argue that the methods that have been formed in China are very important and should not be changed lightly or they may lose their effectiveness. On the other hand, there is a majority group that does not see a strong connection to China and its culture and believes that methods can be adapted without issue. In their opinion the methods are simply ways to teach the underlying principles. But as these principles are universal, one can learn them best through ways that are personally suited to them.

Daoism Through Globalization

This section explains which influences have affected the practitioners' experience of Daoism in relation to its Chinese origin. As shown in the previous section, firstly there are some practitioners who regard the origin of Daoism being Chinese as important. Secondly, there are also practitioners who believe that the origin from China is less important to Daoism and that its principles are universal. Where do these views come from? How can they be explained?

A Nostalgic Past

The first view has been influenced by the arrival of Daoism in America through the body practices. As shown in the introduction and chapter one, immigrants from China who started teaching body practices in America connected Daoism and a nostalgic feeling of their home country to the body practices. Over time this idea of Daoism and a strong connection to China was adopted by American students and became part of the body practices. Based on the first chapter of this study, a similar development can be traced in the Netherlands, where these body practices were also mainly introduced by immigrants or students from these immigrants, such as Cheng Man-ch'ing, master Moy Lin Shin and Mantak Chia.

Furthermore, in recent years China has acquired an increasingly prominent role in the world stage, leading to attention from media and academics. In recent years, many books have been written about the changing role of China in the world and about China's future (*China in 2020*; *The China Dream*; *2030 China: Towards Common Prosperity* etc.). William Callahan, professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics explains that many "Chinese futurologists" use China's past to paint an optimistic picture of China's economic future (Callahan 2012, 12). Journalist and author Marin Jacques argues that the same can be said about politics. China's long and rich history of philosophy that includes names such Confucius, Mencius and Laozi are used to carve out an exceptional position for China on the world stage. Where America was portrayed as the "world's first new nation", China is now hailed as the "world's first ancient civilization" (Jacques 2012, 593-594). For instance, Zhang Xiaoying, associate professor English and Journalism at

Beijing Foreign Studies University, points out that China's ancient tradition of formulating all-encompassing principles such as the complementary forces of yin and yang is part of "China's cultural gene" and has thus been "passed on from generation to generation" (Zhang 2014, 160). I would therefore argue that the emphasis on China's nostalgic past could have a strong influence on the importance of the Chinese origin in the experience of Daoism among practitioners of the body practices.

A Globalizing Future

The second view has also been influenced by the image of a modern China. Media and scholarship attempt, on the one hand, attempt to predict China's future based on its exceptional past, as shown above. On the other hand, they also portray a modern China that is sometimes far removed from this nostalgic picture, painting instead negative images such as its condemnations of China's internet censorship. TV programs like Ruben Terlou's documentary Door het Hart van China (Through the Heart of China) show daily life in China and thereby also give insight in present-day issues, such as overcrowding in hospitals that clash with the nostalgic picture of China. As a result, some participants have expressed that China is completely different nowadays from how it used to be and emphasize that the roles of Daoism and the body practices too have changed (7 times). Moreover, media also shows how China has begun to take in Western brands and stores, such as Nike and McDonalds. This globalized image of China, being presented as not so different from our own familiar surroundings also strengthens the disregard for the Chinese origin in the experience of Daoism.

At the same time, globalization also has a converse effect in America and Europe. While China is undergoing Western influences, the West is also influenced by Asian traditions. These traditions are increasingly finding a place in Western culture, where they have adapted to mold their own distinct role in Western society. Terms such as karma, feng shui and yin-yang have become commonplace in our vocabulary. For example, Yoga and Hinduism have undergone a similar development of integration in America as Daoism. Jeffery Long, Professor of Religion and Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College, USA, explains that there are practitioners who experience Yoga and Hinduism as having

universal relevance. For them, these traditions have become part of their own culture as well. It is important to note that Long also describes how other practitioners regard Yoga and or Hinduism as "primarily, or even exclusively, the […] cultural inheritance of Indian Hindus" (Long 2014, 126). This shows that these two types of views towards the origin of Yoga and Hinduism are similar to the two types of views towards the origin of Daoism as described in this section.

In conclusion, the origin of Daoism plays an important role in the experience of Daoism among practitioners in the Netherlands. Some people value it as very important because of the ancient wisdom that embodies it and others regard the origin as less important since the underlying principles are, in their opinion, universal. These two experiences of the origin of Daoism can be explained by (a) the different images of modern China presented in the media and in academic works and (b) a globalizing world in which various cultures are mutually influencing one another.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Daoism as a practical background plays a role in the experience of practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao in the Netherlands. For some practitioners this role is only small, but for the majority Daoism plays an important or even significant role in their experience. Half of these people even describe it as a way of life. The type of school at which practitioners learned their practice, whether an individual school or an organization, influences the extent to which Daoism plays a role in their body practice and also in daily life. Practitioners from larger organizations indicate a stronger role of Daoism than people from individual schools.

Physical aspects of the body practices that practitioners view as important are partly connected to their individual experience of Daoism. Daoism is mainly experienced as a practical, descriptive way of viewing the world that is widely applicable and can be learned through practicing their body practices. The practitioners mostly describe Daoism as a life philosophy or a way to view the world around them. Daoism is not experienced as a fully spiritual practice. With the focus on body practices, Daoism is seen as a practical experience. One that can give meaning to life, without requiring "faith" or "belief" in something or having to follow certain rituals. Daoism is therefore experienced stronger in the Netherlands than was expected prior to this research.

The literature that is read by practitioners underpins the conclusion that Daoism is experienced as a practical way to view the world. Practitioners who read books on their body practices and Daoism are more interested in Daoism in general and show in their explanation of Daoism influences from the texts that they have consumed. The types of texts that they read are largely represented by three canonical Daoist texts and books concerned with the practical and health side of their body practice. They experience Daoism mainly as a practical explanation of the world around them instead of a broader philosophical or textual background.

The Chinese origin of Daoism also plays a role in the experience of Daoism. Many practitioners explain that their body practice is based on the ancient knowledge of Daoism and inextricably tied to Chinese culture. This particular experience was brought to America by immigrants who started teaching body practices and connected it to their nostalgic view

of Daoism and its Chinese origin as their motherland. This experience is strengthened by the focus on the ancient past of China in the media and recent scholarship making predictions concerning China's future. However, contrary to what I expected before conducting this study, there is another group of practitioners who do not experience a strong connection to the Chinese origin of their practices. Instead, they focus on the underlying principles of Daoism which they view as universal and not uniquely Chinese. This view can be explained as response to a change of China's position on the international stage and the effects of globalization, which has led people's views on China to become more multifaceted. For them, the most important part are the practical principles that they learn and less so the exact origin of these principles.

In short, among practitioners of taijiquan, qigong and Healing Tao in the Netherlands Daoism is mostly experienced as a practical guideline and serves as the basis for their practice. For a significant number of practitioners, Daoism is applicable everywhere and gives meaning to life. It explains the world around them without requiring a strong "belief" in anything. Some practitioners connect Daoism and their body practice to its Chinese origin, whereas others believe the underlying principles are the most important. For all practitioners, however, the same principle applies: Practice. Makes. Perfect.

Further Research

Based on my limitations and the problems I encountered, I would advise further research to be focused on only one of the two methods that I used, interviews or questionnaires. This can either provide a better insight into the individual experiences by using more detailed questions in a study focused on interviews. Or by conducting a significant research study based on questionnaires it could also give a more comprehensive view of the experience of Daoism throughout the country.

My research has been focused on the experience of Daoism within physical practices. My selected scope thereby creates thereby opportunities for similar research to be done in different fields, such as Daoism among self-practicing Daoists or Daoist religious groups.

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