

武

wu — the Martial

Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Education

The martial path (wu 武) as one side of *wen wu* 文武
Volume I of a three-volume series on the martial, the civil,
and the cultivated person

A source-based scholarly investigation of its history,
its transmission, and its integration into modern life

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A scholarly work for practitioners, teachers, and masters

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*This volume treats the wu, the martial. A second volume of equal scope
will be devoted to the wen, the civil and cultural; their union,
wen wu shuang quan 文武雙全, is the guiding ideal, the two sides of the same coin.
A short third volume is devoted to inner cultivation (xiulian, including qigong),
which carries both sides as their common root.*

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Summary

The present work reconstructs the educational tradition of the Chinese martial arts and asks how this tradition can be preserved and revived under the conditions of a modern working life. It expressly understands itself as *one half* of a larger whole. Classical Chinese culture organized human accomplishment around the complementary pair of concepts *wen* 文, the civil and cultural, and *wu* 武, the martial; its ideal was *wen wu shuang quan* 文武雙全, completeness in both. This volume takes up the *wu* and traces it in its entirety; a second volume of equal scope will be devoted to the *wen*, and only together do the two form the single, undivided formation of the person that the tradition pursued. Inner cultivation (*xiulian*), together with the bodily practice of qigong, which carries both sides as their common root, is reserved for a short third volume and is touched on here only so far as understanding the *wu* requires.

Within the *wu*, the work treats four interlocking strands as a single, coherent curriculum: unarmed practice and weapons use (referred to collectively here as Kung Fu, in Chinese *gongfu* 功夫 or *wushu* 武術); mobility and maneuver (*yu* 御, originally charioteering and horsemanship); archery (*she* 射); and the art of war (*bingfa* 兵法). A fifth component, once inseparable in living lineages, combat medicine (*wuyi* 武醫), is honored as a historical constituent but is no longer carried as a viable primary strand in modern daily life. The work addresses an audience that also includes practicing teachers and masters, that is, readers who transmit a tradition and want to know what its formative core actually consists of.

The work pursues six aims. First, it recovers the framework of *wen* and *wu* as the tradition's true measure and explains why a serious investigation of the *wu* may provisionally set the *wen* part aside, but must never forget it. Second, on the basis of current scholarship, it reconstructs what the martial education of the dynasties actually was, spanning a long historical arc from the founding legend of the Yellow Emperor through the abolition of the imperial military examination in 1901 to the twentieth-century revival attempts and the sportive transformation of the tradition that directly explain today's situation. Throughout, the Zhou-dynasty educational canon of the Six Arts (*liuyi* 六藝) serves as documentary guideline. Third, it methodically and strictly separates received narrative from what can be secured through source criticism. Fourth, it carefully distinguishes the properly martial strands from inner cultivation (qigong), which the tradition treated as related but not identical to them and whose full treatment is reserved for the third volume; in particular, it assigns Taijiquan, insofar as it is practiced as health- and movement-cultivation, to that cultivation rather than to martial Kung Fu. Fifth, it turns to the present and, on the basis of the World Health Organization's movement recommendations, global inactivity data, and the systematic review evidence on the martial arts and the experimental evidence on archery, works out the benefits and the honest limits of a revival. Sixth and most practically, it presents elaborated training plans tailored to realistic modern time budgets, together with a twelve-week progression.

One clarification stands above all else: the lasting value of this tradition lies not in any single technique but in its pedagogy, that is, in a method of forming attention, body, and judgment together and within an ethical frame. While the historical institutions that carried this pedagogy cannot be restored, the pedagogy itself is transferable. It is worth preserving for reasons at once cultural, physical, cognitive, and ethical — and it is, let it be said in advance, only the one half of what the complete person of the tradition was meant to acquire.

A Note on the Sources

Anyone who wishes to give a clean account of the history of Chinese martial arts education faces a particular problem of sources. The premodern tradition is extraordinarily rich in legend and extraordinarily poor in contemporary documentation. Founding attributions to famous emperors, generals, and monks are a recurring pattern of later school-formation and are almost never supported by sources from the period they purport to describe.¹ This work therefore consistently distinguishes three types of statement: founding legends, that is, narratives written down long after the events they describe and prone to idealization; datable institutions and texts, that is, examinations, manuals, and archaeological finds; and modern empirical findings, that is, peer-reviewed clinical and experimental research. Where a statement rests on a legend, it is identified as such in the main text; where a date or institution is documented, the source is given in the footnote. This source-critical stance is, moreover, no import from outside, but has its own tradition within China: its founder is the historian Tang Hao 唐豪 (1897–1959), who was the first to systematically test the founding legends of the styles against the sources and largely reject them, thereby opening the modern critical historiography of the martial arts, in whose line this work stands.²

For the contemporary, and especially the cultivation-related, sections, a second and equally weighty demand of honesty applies. As soon as qigong and spiritual cultivation (*xiulian*) are at issue, an investigation enters a field in which serious religious-studies and medical research mixes with a great quantity of promotional, ideological, or politically charged literature. The present series treats this strand separately in its third volume; the *wu* volume touches it only where necessary for understanding martial education, and relies there exclusively on peer-reviewed scholarship and on the authoritative sinological and religious-studies syntheses.

The account draws on five groups of sources that together yield as undistorted a picture as possible. First, on classical primary sources and archaeological finds that long predate any modern standardization: the ritual classics *Zhouli*, *Liji*, and *Yili*, the military classics centered on the *Sunzi*, and the finds from Mawangdui and Yinqueshan. For the earliest body work, Donald Harper's standard edition of the medical Mawangdui manuscripts is authoritative here.³ Second, on the scholarly historiography of the Chinese martial arts, above all on Peter A. Lorge's comprehensive account, the source-critical work of Stanley E. Henning, Meir Shahar's study of the Shaolin monastery, and the historical overview by Brian Kennedy and Elizabeth Guo. To these are added Mark Edward Lewis's study of sanctioned violence in early China for the warrior aristocracy of the Zhou,⁴ Stephen Selby's source-based history of Chinese archery for the archery strand,⁵ Benjamin A. Elman's cultural history of the examination system for the institutional ranking of the civil and the military,⁶ and Andrew D. Morris's history of Republican-era

¹ Cf. Lorge, Peter A., *Chinese Martial Arts. From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge 2012; Henning, Stanley E., *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, in: *Journal of the Chen style Taijiquan Research Association of Hawaii* 2/3 (1994), pp. 1–7.

² On Tang Hao as founder of critical martial arts historiography cf. Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*, chapter on Tang Hao; Henning, *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, pp. 1–7.

³ Harper, Donald, *Early Chinese Medical Literature. The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*, London 1998. The first complete translation and study of the medical Mawangdui manuscripts, including the earliest pictorial evidence of *daoyin*.

⁴ Lewis, Mark Edward, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Albany 1990. Fundamental on the warrior aristocracy of the Zhou and on the theory of command.

⁵ Selby, Stephen, *Chinese Archery*, Hong Kong 2000. A source-based comprehensive account of Chinese archery, based on parallel-text translations of the classical archery literature from the Shang period into the modern era; supplemented by the more recent collection of Chao/Ma/Kim, *Chinese Archery Studies*, Singapore 2022.

⁶ Elman, Benjamin A., *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley 2000. Authoritative on the culture of the examination system and on the precedence of the civil over the military career.

physical culture for the twentieth-century aftermath.⁷ For the conceptual pair *wen* and *wu* itself, Kam Louie's cultural-historical analysis is authoritative.⁸ Third, on the scholarly reference apparatus of ChinaKnowledge.de for data and institutional detail. Fourth, insofar as the *wu* volume touches the cultivation tradition at all (its full treatment remains reserved for the third volume), on the religious-studies literature on Daoism, above all on Livia Kohn and Louis Komjathy for classical self-cultivation. Fifth, for the health-related sections, on peer-reviewed sports-medical, epidemiological, and cognitive-science research, in particular on systematic reviews of the martial arts themselves, weighted by strength of evidence.

1. Introduction

At the outset of this investigation stand two images. In the first, a young nobleman of the Zhou period spends his youth in a single, unbroken course of education: he learns the rites that order conduct, the music that structures feeling, archery, which disciplines eye and will, charioteering, which demands nerve, and writing and reckoning, which train the mind. Martial skill here is no hobby appended to education; it is the education, inseparable from ethics, ceremony, and learning. In the second image, a present-day adult sits nine or ten hours at a screen, belongs, according to the World Health Organization, to that scant third of adults worldwide who fail to meet the minimum recommendations for physical activity,⁹ and tries, in the remaining fragments of time, to recover something of what the first image took for granted. The question of this work is how the path from the second image to the first can be traveled without self-deception.

Yet the first image carries a second message, decisive for the design of this investigation. The young nobleman acquired bow *and* book, war-chariot *and* writing; his ideal was neither the fighter nor the scholar, but both in one person. Classical culture captured this in the conceptual pair *wen* 文 and *wu* 武, the civil and the martial, whose union, *wen wu shuang quan* 文武雙全, was the true measure of the complete person.¹⁰ The present work takes this ideal as its horizon, but deliberately undertakes only one of its two halves: the *wu*. It traces the martial person in his entirety — his body, his mobility, his bow, and his strategic judgment —, and it does so in the clear awareness that the person so formed becomes complete only through the *wen*. A second volume of equal scope will be devoted to the *wen*; together the two form the two sides of the same coin. Inner cultivation (*xiulian*), together with the bodily practice of qigong, which lies beneath both as their common root, is reserved for a short third volume; it appears in this *wu* volume only where understanding martial education requires it. Why this division is sensible and not arbitrary is explained in Chapter 2.

This is no nostalgic question. The curriculum of the Zhou cannot be reinstated, and most of what is marketed today as “ancient” martial knowledge is of more recent, and often commercial, origin. The pedagogy behind the old curriculum, however, its insistence that body, attention, and judgment be trained together and as a matter of character, is neither outdated nor culturally inaccessible. It can be studied, preserved, and adapted, and it is precisely in this pedagogy, not

⁷ Morris, Andrew D., *Marrow of the Nation. A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Berkeley 2004.

⁸ Louie, Kam, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity. Society and Gender in China*, Cambridge 2002; foundational earlier, Louie, Kam / Edwards, Louise, *Chinese Masculinity. Theorising Wen and Wu*, in: *East Asian History* 8 (1994), pp. 135–148.

⁹ Cf. Strain, Tessa et al., *National, regional, and global trends in insufficient physical activity among adults from 2000 to 2022. A pooled analysis of 507 population-based surveys with 5.7 million participants*, in: *The Lancet Global Health* 12/8 (2024); World Health Organization, *Physical activity. Fact sheet*, Geneva 2024.

¹⁰ On the conceptual pair and its cultural history cf. Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*; Louie / Edwards, *Chinese Masculinity*.

in any single technique, that the lasting value of the tradition lies. The work is therefore written for a particular reader: for the sincere practitioners, the teachers, and the masters who have received a tradition and wish to pass it on honestly. This guiding thesis is defended neither romantically, as though the old world could be restored, nor cynically, as though nothing of it survives the passage into modernity, but soberly and on the basis of evidence.

The argument proceeds in five movements. First, it determines what “education” meant in the Chinese martial tradition, recovers the framework of *wen* and *wu* together with the Six Arts as an organizing frame, and names the four strands of which the *wu* consists (Chapter 2). It then traces the long history of this tradition through the dynasties, from the founding legend through the curriculum of the Zhou, the birth of war theory in the Warring States period, the institutionalization of the military examination under the Tang and Song, the systematization of combat methods in the Ming period, down to the conclusion of the imperial tradition with the abolition of the military examination in 1901 and its twentieth-century aftermath, which explains the field’s present shape (Chapters 3 to 6). Third, it considers the four strands, Kung Fu, mobility, archery, and the art of war, as parts of an integrated education and explains why they should interlock (Chapter 7). Fourth, it turns to the present: the obstacles to integration, the evidence-based benefits, and the honest limits (Chapters 8 to 10). Fifth, it presents a set of design principles together with concrete training plans and a twelve-week progression (Chapters 11 and 12). A conclusion formulates the plea to preserve a living tradition rather than embalm a dead one, while pointing ahead to the outstanding *wen* part (Chapter 13). Figure 1 previews in overview the historical arc that Chapters 3 through 6 unfold.

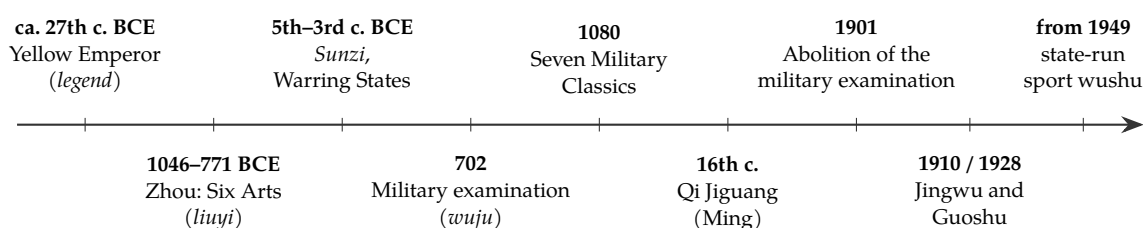


Figure 1: The historical arc of martial education (timeline not to scale; founding legend marked as such)

A word on tone should be said at the outset. The tradition needs no exaggeration to be worth preserving; it gains when one looks at it closely.

2. The Concept of Education in the Martial Sphere

2.1 Wen and wu: the civil and the martial as a unity — and this work as the Wu

Classical Chinese culture organized human achievement around a complementary conceptual pair: *wen* 文, the civil, literary, and cultural, and *wu* 武, the martial. The educated person of the early empire did not have to choose between the two. The ideal was *wen wu shuang quan* 文武雙全, “complete in both the civil and the martial,” and the institutions of the Zhou and the early empire were designed precisely to produce such persons.¹¹ The later separation of the scholar from the fighter, of the literatus who despised the soldier, and of the soldier who could not read, is a development of the middle and late empire, not an original feature of the tradition.

¹¹ Cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Kennedy, Brian / Guo, Elizabeth, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals. A Historical Survey*, Berkeley 2005; for the conceptual analysis, Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*.

To understand traditional martial arts education is therefore to recover a state in which bow and book lay in the same hands.

Kam Louie has shown that *wen* and *wu* are not a rigid opposition of “pen against sword,” but a flexible, complementary pair whose balance determined the cultural ideal of the whole person.¹² It is precisely this flexibility that justifies the design of the present investigation. If *wen* and *wu* are two sides of a single formation, then one side can be presented thoroughly without denying the other — provided the unity is kept visible. This volume traces the *wu* in its entirety; but it does so throughout in the awareness that the *wu* remains incomplete without the *wen*, just as the bow is incomplete without the book. Wherever the account reaches the boundary with the *wen* — for instance in the ethics of *wude*, in the ritual theory of archery, or in the spiritual depth of cultivation —, it names that boundary and points to the outstanding sister volume, rather than blurring it.

This matters for the modern question. If the martial arts were once part of a general formation of character, then their modern revival need not be narrowly conceived as athletic or self-defense training. It can, as originally, be understood as formation: as a way of shaping a person. And it demands, so that it does not become one-sided, that the *wu* practitioner keep the *wen* in view as its necessary complement. Figure 2 shows this architecture, which is at the same time the design of the present series.

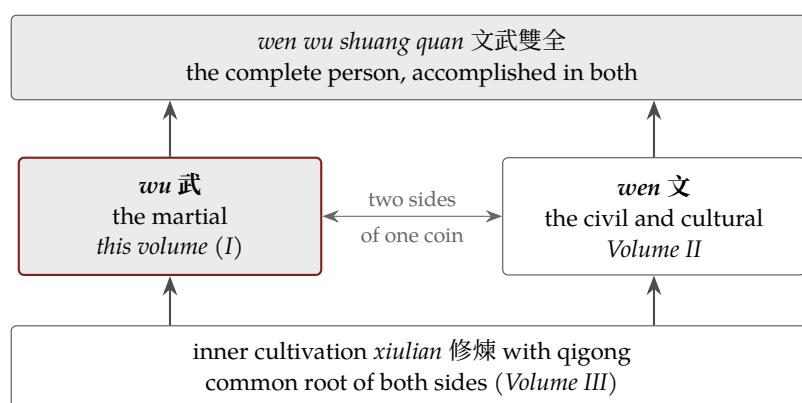


Figure 2: The conceptual pair *wen* and *wu*, the common root of cultivation, and the design of the three volumes

2.2 The Six Arts (liuyi 六藝) as the original curriculum

The clearest documentary evidence for martial training as education is the curriculum of the Six Arts. The term *liuyi* 六藝 carries two meanings in the classical sources. In one, it denotes the Six Confucian Classics. In the other, older and physical, meaning, it denotes six practical skills: ritual (*li* 禮), music (*yue* 樂), archery (*she* 射), charioteering (*yu* 御, also written 馭), writing (*shu* 書), and reckoning (*shu* 數).¹³ The locus classicus is the chapter on the Guardian (*Baoshi* 保氏) in the Rites of Zhou (*Zhouli* 周禮), which describes how the sons of the nobility were educated by means of these six skills.¹⁴

The distribution of *wen* and *wu* within this one curriculum is remarkable. Two of the six

¹² Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, chaps. 1–2; the *wen-wu* pair as an analytical frame for Chinese conceptions of the accomplished man, against the widespread equation of *wu* with mere brutality.

¹³ Theobald, Ulrich, *liuyi* 六藝, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de – An Encyclopaedia on Chinese History and Literature*, 2013. The following account of the Six Arts follows this article throughout.

¹⁴ *Zhouli* 周禮, chap. *Baoshi* 保氏; cf. Theobald, *liuyi*.

are unambiguously martial: archery and charioteering, that is, the bow and the war-chariot. A third, ritual, comprises the *junli* 軍禮, the “military rites,” concerning campaigns, hunts, and the sacrifices bound up with them.¹⁵ Music, far from being mere ornament, was regarded as an ordering of feeling and as a discipline of that timing and composure on which both ritual and combat depend. Writing and reckoning — the clearest *wen* skills — supplied the literacy and numeracy an officer needed to read orders, account for supplies, and survey terrain. The curriculum was thus a unified whole, in which the martial and the civil were two sides of one formation. For the present work, this is precisely the reason to treat the *wu* separately, yet never in isolation: already in the Six Arts, no martial skill stood on its own.

The sources even preserve the internal articulation of the martial skills. The “five archery skills” (*wushe* 五射) were named and graded: the *baishi* 白矢 (the “white arrow,” a clean shot that pierces the target so that the white tip becomes visible), the *sanlian* 參連 (rapid successive shots), the *yanzhu* 剡注 (a shot with a distinctive trajectory), the *xiangchi* 襄尺 (an etiquette rule, by which a person of lower rank yields a step at the shooting line to one of higher rank), and the *jingyi* 井儀 (four arrows grouped in the shape of the character 井, “well”).¹⁶ It is instructive that one of the five “archery skills” is not a shooting technique at all, but a rule of politeness: skill and conduct were taught as a single matter.

The *Zhouli* further distinguishes “lesser arts” (*xiaoyi* 小藝), learned by children, namely writing and reckoning, from “greater arts” (*dayi* 大藝), taken up by adolescents and young adults, namely ritual, music, archery, and charioteering.¹⁷ The martial skills were, in other words, the advanced curriculum, reserved for the mature student and built on a foundation of literacy. This is the opposite of the modern intuition that fighting is something for the young and untrained, and study something for the old and refined.

2.3 Cultivation (*xiulian* 修煉): from spiritual practice to daily exercise

A second feature distinguishes traditional martial arts education from the modern class more fundamentally than any technique. Chinese tradition treated the body itself as a site of knowledge to be cultivated over a lifetime, not merely as a bundle of skills to be acquired and then held in reserve. The relevant verb is *xiulian* 修煉, usually rendered as “to cultivate and refine.” It is worth examining the term closely, because on it hangs how the entire pedagogy presented here is to be understood.

Xiu 修 means “to tend, to repair, to discipline oneself”; *lian* 煉 means “to smelt, to refine, to temper in fire” and originates in metallurgy and alchemy. Taken together, *xiulian* denotes the patient, gradual refinement of body and mind toward a higher state — not the accumulation of ability, but the transformation of the person. The term is old and of indigenous, religious-philosophical origin; it belongs not to the language of modern sport, but to the language of self-cultivation. It is closely related to *xiuzhen* 修真 (“to cultivate the truth,” a classical expression for the pursuit of perfection and immortality) and to the Confucian *xiushen* 修身 (“to cultivate one’s own body/person”), which already in the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) forms the foundation of

¹⁵ Theobald, *liuyi*; id., *Zhou Period Military*, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de*. The five rites (auspicious, mourning, guest, military, and felicitous rites) according to Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200).

¹⁶ Theobald, *liuyi*. The interpretation of the individual terms is partly technical, partly ceremonial; it is telling that one of the five “archery skills” is not a shooting technique at all, but a rule of courtesy.

¹⁷ Theobald, *liuyi*.

all order.¹⁸

The term received its densest expression in Daoist inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), systematized above all from the Song period onward and in the Quanzhen school 全真. There, one's own body is held to be the crucible in which the "three treasures" — *jing* 精 (vital essence), *qi* 氣 (vital breath/life-force), and *shen* 神 (spirit) — are refined in an ordered sequence: "refine *jing* into *qi*, refine *qi* into *shen*, refine *shen* and return to emptiness."¹⁹ In parallel, Buddhist practice knows *xiuxing* 修行, the steady meditative and moral exercise that gradually reshapes consciousness. In all these contexts, cultivation is first and foremost a *mental and moral* matter, whose bodily exercises are vehicles, not ends.

It is important to name this origin clearly and not to artificially shorten it: *xiulian* is a spiritual term, stemming from Daoist-Buddhist cultivation, long before it was applied to physical or combative training. Only from this spiritual meaning can one derive what it contributes to the daily practice of the martial arts. For if progress means not the number of techniques mastered but the gradual transformation of the practitioner in posture, breath, attention, and disposition, then a particular form of practice follows directly: regular, daily practice in small steps, maintained over years. This is exactly the form of practice available to a busy modern adult; a tradition founded solely on the accumulation of technique could not offer it to him. The cultivating meaning of *xiulian* is thus not mere pious ornament, but the reason why the revival proposed here fits into a modern life at all.

The term, moreover, is not merely historical. Where cultivation is still practiced today in its full, spiritual sense and not as mere gymnastics, *xiulian* survives as a living practice; the best-known contemporary example is Falun Dafa 法輪大法, publicly introduced by Li Hongzhi 李洪志 in 1992, which expressly understands itself as a path of cultivation and places the refinement of moral nature (*xinxing* 心性) above its physical exercises.²⁰

For the purposes of this *wu* volume, the derivation is thus complete: *xiulian* originates in the spiritual cultivation of Daoism and Buddhism, and from precisely this cultivating sense derives the principle that underlies the entire martial exercise proposed here — daily, regular, patient practice that transforms the person over years, rather than filling him with techniques in weeks. Inner cultivation itself, as its own path with qigong as bodily practice, does not count among the martial strands and is unfolded in the third volume; in the *wu* volume, *xiulian* operates as the pedagogical principle of practice, not as a strand of its own.

2.4 Wude 武德: martial virtue as the ethical core

Finally, the tradition placed an explicit ethics at the center of martial training. *Wude* 武德, "martial virtue" or "martial morality," named the conduct expected of one to whom the power to harm had been granted: restraint, respect for teacher and opponent, humility, and the subordination of force to right purpose.²¹ The point of *wude* was no ornament. A formation that trains the capacity for violence without equally training the disposition to master it is incomplete

¹⁸ On the family of terms *xiu/lian/xiushen/xiuzhen* and on Daoist and Buddhist self-cultivation cf. Kohn, Livia (ed.) / Komjathy, Louis et al., *Daoist Body Cultivation. Traditional Models and Contemporary Practices*, Magdalena (NM) 2006; Komjathy, Louis, *Cultivating Perfection. Mysticism and Self-Transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism*, Leiden 2007.

¹⁹ On the *neidan* model and the sequence *lian jing hua qi – lian qi hua shen – lian shen huan xu* cf. Komjathy, *Cultivating Perfection*; Kohn, *Daoist Body Cultivation*. Daoist self-cultivation is at once physical (breath, movement, diet) and mental-ethical.

²⁰ On the religious-studies classification of Falun Dafa within the long history of Chinese cultivation cf. Ownby, David, *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, New York 2008; Penny, Benjamin, *The Religion of Falun Gong*, Chicago 2012. Its detailed treatment, like that of the entire cultivation tradition, belongs to the third volume of this series.

²¹ Cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*.

and dangerous. The classical curriculum understood this and built ethics into practice rather than appending it as an afterthought. Every serious modern revival must do the same, and the present work returns to this when it weighs benefit against risk.

Wude is, moreover, the clearest point at which the *wu* calls for the *wen*. For the virtue that regulates the use of force is itself a piece of *wen*: moral formation, ritual, judgment about right purpose. This volume therefore treats *wude* as the inner ground of the martial, but for its full grounding — Confucian virtue theory, ritual theory, the question of the just use of power — refers to the outstanding *wen* volume. Already here it becomes visible that the two sides of the coin do not merely lie side by side, but interlock.

2.5 The anatomy of the Wu: four interlocking strands

To present the *wu* in its entirety, it is necessary to divide it. The present work distinguishes within the martial sphere four strands that have historically distinct roots, but that functioned in the mature tradition as a single curriculum. The division itself follows, as Chapters 3 to 6 show, from the sources: archery (*she*) and charioteering (*yu*) are the martial Six Arts, the art of war (*bingfa*) was canonized and examined, and body and weapons methods are documented from the Ming period onward. Modern, and expressly marked as interpretation, is only the translation of these strands into present-day forms of exercise, in particular the reading of charioteering as training in mobility (Chapter 7.2).

The first strand is **body and weapons art**, for which the word Kung Fu (*gongfu* 功夫, *wushu* 武術) has become the established English term: unarmed practice and weapons use, which lay the structural foundation — alignment, stance, coordination, conditioning — of all the other skills. The second strand is **mobility and maneuver** (*yu* 御, originally charioteering and horsemanship), the second of the unambiguously martial Six Arts: the art of moving one's own body (and once chariot and horse) through space under pressure, that is, footwork, distance, positioning, and movement. The third strand is **archery** (*she* 射), the other martial member of the Six Arts, examined for twelve centuries in the military examination and the classical model of moral self-examination. The fourth strand is the **art of war** (*bingfa* 兵法), the body of strategic theory canonized in the Seven Military Classics, the intellectual crown of the martial.

Two components that older accounts include this work deliberately does *not* carry as separate primary strands, and both decisions bear on the design of the whole series. The first is **combat medicine** (*wuyi* 武醫, bonesetting and the traumatology of the *dieda* tradition): in living lineages it was often inseparable from combat, for whoever can injure should also be able to heal, and it thereby completes the ethics of *wude*. As an independent strand of practice viable in modern daily life, however, it is scarcely suited, because it requires medical training that lies outside the present-day life of most practitioners; it is therefore honored as a historical component and briefly treated in Chapter 7, but not counted among the four primary strands. The second is **inner cultivation** (*xiulian*) in the form of **qigong** 氣功. It is closely related to the martial and stems from the same *daoyin* root (Chapter 4.4), but its goal is not martial, but the health-related and mental transformation of the person; by its nature it belongs closer to civil-mental formation than to combat. It is therefore detached from the martial strands and reserved for the third volume of this series; in the *wu* volume, *xiulian* remains present only as the pedagogical principle of daily practice (Chapter 2.3).

From this follows a clarification regarding **Taijiquan** 太極拳 that holds for the series as a whole. Historically it arose as a combative family system of the Qing period (Chapter 6.2); insofar as it is genuinely practiced as a martial art, with partner work, push-hands, and application, it belongs to the first strand, Kung Fu. Insofar as it functions, as in its worldwide modern reception and in medical research, as slow, health-oriented movement cultivation, it belongs to

inner cultivation and thus to the third volume. The assignment follows function, not name.

The four martial strands are, as the following Chapter 7 sets out in detail, connected to one another through the ethics of *wude* and through the shared mechanism of trained breath, and all four aim, taken by themselves, only at the one half of the complete person: the *wu*. Only the *wen*, to which the second volume is devoted, brings them to the wholeness of *wen wu shuang quan*; the inner cultivation of the third volume lies beneath both as their common root.

3. Historical Development I: From Legend to the Curriculum of the Zhou

3.1 The founding legend: the Yellow Emperor, Chiyou, and jiaodi

Chinese tradition traces the martial arts back to the beginning of its mythical history, to the Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi* 黃帝) and his victory over the rebel Chiyou 蚩尤 in the legendary Battle of Zhuolu 涿鹿, conventionally placed in the twenty-seventh century BCE.²² From this duel later authors derived *jiaodi* 角抵 (“horn-butting”), an early form of wrestling in which competitors are said to have worn horned headdresses and wrestled in imitation of the butting described in the legend; the related term *jiaoli* 角力 (“testing of strength”) appears in the ritual literature of the Zhou.²³ The same tradition credits the Yellow Emperor with the invention of writing, medicine, and the calendar; he is a culture-founding figure to whom invention as such is attributed.

Strictly by source criticism, this is a founding legend, not a documented event. For the third millennium BCE there are no contemporary written sources whatsoever; the narratives were set down only much later. The earliest of the great historical works, the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 – ca. 86 BCE), begins its account of high antiquity with the Yellow Emperor, yet the *Shiji* itself was completed only around 94 BCE, more than two millennia after the events it describes.²⁴ The legend is nonetheless culturally significant for this investigation, for it shows that the Chinese themselves understood the martial arts as coeval with civilization and as the work of a sage ruler, not a brute. From the outset, martial skill was framed as a quality of the educated person — an early intimation of the *wen wu* ideal.

3.2 Shang and early Zhou: the bow-bearing nobility

With the Shang (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) and above all the Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE), the ground grows firmer. Warfare in this period was aristocratic and centered on the war-chariot and the composite bow. Command itself was symbolized through archery: the ritual texts report that a ruler entrusted a regional lord with a campaign by presenting him with bow and arrows (*gongshi* 弓矢) together with a ceremonial axe, an act attested both in the *Liji* and in bronze inscriptions.²⁵ The armies of the Western Zhou combined chariot units with infantry; the figures are uncertain, but tradition remembers the founding Battle of Muye 牧野 as fought with some three hundred chariots, and after later reforms royal forces are described on the or-

²² On the legend cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; on the tradition of *Huangdi* as culture hero, Henning, *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, pp. 1–3.

²³ On the semantic field *jiaodi*/*jiaoli* and its later development into wrestling (*shuaijiao* 摔跤) cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

²⁴ Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記, chap. 1 (*Wudi benji* 五帝本紀). On the dating and legendary character of the early chapters cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

²⁵ Theobald, *Zhou Period Military*; the example of the presentation of bow and arrow or axe following the *Liji* (chap. *Wangzhi* 王制) and the inscription of the *Guo Jizi Baipan* 虢季子白盤.

der of thousands of chariots.²⁶ To belong to the Zhou nobility meant, almost by definition, to be a man trained to the bow and the chariot. The martial skills of the Six Arts were the skills of this class, and their educational character follows directly from the social fact that warrior and nobleman were the same person.

3.3 The educational order of the Zhou and the Six Arts in practice

Against this background, the curriculum described in Chapter 2 is to be read. The Six Arts were no abstract scheme; they were the practical training of a ruling class whose duties were at once ceremonial, administrative, and military. The levy and supply of the common troops was organized separately under the *Zhouli*, on the principle that ten families furnished one soldier, whose food, horse, and equipment the state provided.²⁷ The martial education of the nobleman, by contrast, was personal and lifelong, and it was inseparable from his education in ritual, music, and learning. This is the historical core of the present investigation: at the documented origin of the tradition, martial skill is a branch of general education, taught to the mature student, embedded in ethics and ceremony, and, as the next section shows, crowned by an explicit theory of moral conduct.

3.4 Ritual archery: Xiangsheli, Dashe, Sheyi, and Confucius

No single practice expresses the educational character of the Chinese martial tradition more completely than ritual archery. The custom of practicing the bow was early bound to ritual prescription. The ritual classics describe formal archery ceremonies in detail: the *Etiquette and Rites* (*Yili* 儀禮) contain the “District Archery Ceremony” (*Xiangsheli* 鄉射禮) and the “Great Archery” (*Dashe* 大射), and the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) contains its own chapter, “The Meaning of Archery” (*Sheyi* 射義).²⁸ The district ceremony combined a graded shooting contest with drinking courtesies and elaborate etiquette; the Great Archery was a ceremony at the state level. Archery was thus at once martial skill, contest, and rite.²⁹

The philosophical interpretation of the rite makes it decisive for this work. In the *Sheyi*, archery becomes a model of moral self-examination: the archer who misses the target attributes the fault neither to the target nor to the bow, but seeks the cause of the miss within himself. The same thought appears in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) of Confucius, who insists that the contest of archery is the only form of rivalry befitting the gentleman, precisely because it is governed by deference: the archers bow and yield as they ascend and descend, and drink together afterward; “this is the rivalry of the gentleman.”³⁰ Here the structure of traditional martial arts education becomes visible in miniature. A weapon is mastered; the contest is real; and yet the entire practice is arranged so that, in the end, character is what is trained: the capacity to compete without loss of courtesy and to fail without loss of composure. This is why the *Analects* could treat archery as a school of the gentleman’s character, and why, as Chapter 9 shows, modern research finds measurable effects of archery on attention and cognitive control. Ritual archery is at once the purest early union of *wen* and *wu*: a martial skill wholly permeated by ritual and morality.

²⁶ Theobald, *Zhou Period Military* (following Yang 1994): Muye reportedly 300 chariots; after King Li’s reform, armies of up to 3,000 chariots. The figures are traditional, not contemporaneously documented.

²⁷ Theobald, *Zhou Period Military* (following He 1987): under the regulations of the *Zhouli*, ten families furnished one soldier, whom the state equipped.

²⁸ Theobald, *Zhou Period Military*; id., *liuyi*.

²⁹ Cf. Selby, *Chinese Archery*, on the ritual texts of the district and the great archery ceremonies.

³⁰ *Lunyu* 論語 3.7 (*Bayi* 八佾): “君子無所爭，必也射乎！揖讓而升，下而飲，其爭也君子。” On the interpretation of archery ethics cf. *Liji* 禮記, chap. *Sheyi* 射義.

4. Historical Development II: From the Warring States to the Han

4.1 From chariot to mass infantry

The Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE) and the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) transformed Chinese warfare and, with it, martial arts education. As the Zhou order disintegrated into competing states, the aristocratic chariot duel gave way to mass infantry armies raised by general levy.³¹ The sources record very large forces: in the Spring and Autumn period, the state of Jin is estimated at perhaps 150,000 men, Chu at 300,000, and Qin at 60,000, while the crossbow became the decisive infantry weapon of the Warring States.³² The older custom of practicing archery as an aristocratic ritual no longer sufficed; the states now had to train, equip, and command vast numbers of ordinary men. Two consequences shaped the tradition permanently: the professionalization of military skill and the birth of a written theory of war.

4.2 The birth of war theory: Sunzi and the strategic classics

The most consequential product of this era is *The Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法), attributed to Sun Wu 孫武 (Sun Tzu), conventionally placed in the late Spring and Autumn period and associated with service under King Helü 闔閭 of Wu around 512 BCE.³³ For centuries, authorship and even the existence of Sun Wu were disputed, and some scholars suspected that the *Sunzi* and the later *Art of War* of Sun Bin 孫臏 were a single text. The dispute was settled archaeologically in 1972, when tombs at Yinqueshan 銀雀山 near Linyi in Shandong, sealed in the second century BCE (roughly between 134 and 118 BCE), yielded bamboo-strip copies of both texts; this proved that they are two distinct works and that the *Sunzi* was already circulating by the early Han at the latest.³⁴ The current scholarly consensus dates the composition of the received text to the Warring States period.

The intellectual content of the *Sunzi* is as important as its dating. Its teaching, famously, is that the highest excellence lies in subduing the enemy without battle, that war is a matter of calculation, deception, and the management of one's own and the enemy's psychology, and that the wise commander wins first and fights afterward.³⁵ This is no manual of technique, but a discipline of judgment, and it belongs in an investigation of martial arts education precisely because it shows that the tradition theorized the mind of the strategist as carefully as it trained the body of the soldier. The art of war is, in the most literal sense, the intellectual wing of martial formation — and at the same time the strand of the *wu* that comes closest to the *wen*, because it is a body of knowledge that is read, written, and examined.

4.3 The swordswoman of Yue and the first theory of combat

The same era produced what is generally regarded as the earliest theoretical account of single combat in the Chinese sources: the episode of the Maiden of Yue (*Yuenü* 越女), preserved in

³¹ Cf. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, on the transition from aristocratic chariot warfare to mass infantry warfare.

³² Theobald, *Zhou Period Military* (following Wang & Yang 1996 and He 1987): Jin ca. 150,000, Chu ca. 300,000, Qin ca. 60,000 men; on the displacement of the aristocratic chariot by mass infantry cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

³³ On the traditional attribution to Sun Wu and its dating cf. Ames, Roger T., *Sun-Tzu. The Art of Warfare*, New York 1993; Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith, Oxford 1963, Introduction.

³⁴ On the 1972 Yinqueshan find and its significance for the authenticity debate cf. Ames, *Sun-Tzu*; Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*. The tombs were dated to the second century BCE (sealed ca. 134–118 BCE).

³⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Griffith, chap. III (“Offensive Strategy”): “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill”; cf. Ames, *Sun-Tzu*.

the Han-period *Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue* (*Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋).³⁶ In it, a young woman expounds to the King of Yue principles of swordsmanship in terms of stillness and motion, fullness and emptiness, opening and responding, the same polar categories that the later “internal” arts would make their own. Like the *Sunzi*, this is a literary-historical document, not a technical manual, and it describes events of the Warring States period from the vantage of a later century. Its significance is conceptual: it shows that by the Han period the Chinese were already articulating combat as a theory of opposites and of timing, not merely as a catalogue of blows.

4.4 Body cultivation in the Han period: *daoyin*, Mawangdui, and Hua Tuo — the root of qigong

The Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) contributes a strand from which the later cultivation tradition would emerge, and to which this series devotes its third volume: systematic body cultivation. That such practice was already pursued methodically in the second century BCE is proven by an archaeological find.³⁷ The “Chart of Guiding and Pulling” (*Daoyintu* 導引圖), recovered in 1973 from Tomb 3 at Mawangdui 馬王堆 and dated to roughly 168 BCE, shows dozens of figures performing stretching and breathing exercises; *daoyin* 導引 (“guiding and pulling”) as a practice is even mentioned earlier, in the fourth-century BCE *Zhuangzi*.³⁸ Toward the end of the Han period, the physician Hua Tuo 華佗 (ca. 140–208 CE) is credited with creating the “Five Animal Frolics” (*Wuqinxi* 五禽戲), a sequence of exercises imitating the tiger, deer, bear, ape, and bird, which combines the stretching of *daoyin* with the breathwork of *tuna* 吐納; it is often described as the earliest complete medical-gymnastic system in the Chinese record.³⁹

This medical and meditative tradition is the ancestor of the health-oriented practices gathered today under the twentieth-century collective name qigong 氣功, and, in its moving form, of Taijiquan as well. For the conceptual ordering of this series, the decisive point to record here is this: this cultivation lineage has its documented root here, in the *daoyin* tradition of the Han period, and from here an unbroken line runs through Daoist inner alchemy to today’s qigong systems. It fed, on the one hand, the later “internal” martial arts, but developed, on the other, into a cultivation path of its own, whose account, together with its modern health evidence, is reserved for the third volume and is not carried as a strand of its own in the present *wu* volume. Already in the Han period, then, the constituents of the later tradition are present in embryo: trained combat skill, a theory of strategy and combat, and a cultivated, health-promoting body practice.

4.5 Qin and Han: standing armies, the crossbow, and weapons control

The Warring States period ended in 221 BCE with imperial unification under the Qin. The new order changed the place of the martial arts in society in a way that would recur throughout Chinese history: a centralizing state that depended on mass military skill also feared it in private hands. The First Emperor is reported to have confiscated the weapons of the realm and had them recast into bronze, a symbolic disarmament of the population that expresses the enduring

³⁶ On the *Yuenü* episode as the earliest theoretical text on single combat cf. Henning, Stanley E., *The Maiden of Yue. Fount of Chinese Martial Arts Theory*, in: *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 16/3 (2007); Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

³⁷ On the *Daoyintu* and early therapeutic body work cf. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*.

³⁸ On the *Daoyintu* from Mawangdui (Tomb 3, ca. 168 BCE, excavated 1973) and the early mention of *daoyin* in the *Zhuangzi* cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

³⁹ On Hua Tuo (ca. 140–208) and the Five Animal Frolics (*Wuqinxi*) as early medical body exercise cf. *Hua Tuo’s Wu Qin Xi (Five Animal Frolics) Movements and the Internal Organs*, in: *Chinese Medicine and Culture* 1 (2018); on its classification, Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

tension between the state's need for trained fighters and its fear of them.⁴⁰ The succeeding Han dynasty maintained large standing and levied armies, in which the crossbow (*nu* 弩), a weapon that demanded drilled, mass discipline rather than aristocratic virtuosity, was decisive.⁴¹ This tension, martial skill as a civic good to be cultivated and as a danger to be controlled, belongs to the historical background of every later attempt, including the modern one, to make martial training a normal part of ordinary life. It also recalls that the educational strand of the tradition, the cultivation of the person, always existed alongside the purely military demand for usable force, and was at times suppressed by it.

5. Historical Development III: Tang to Song and Institutionalization

5.1 The military examination (Wu Zetian, 702)

The decisive institutional step in the history of Chinese martial arts education was the creation of a state examination of military skill. The civil examination system (*keju* 科舉), the mechanism by which the empire selected its officials by tested merit, took shape under the Sui (581–618) and was perfected under the Tang (618–907).⁴² It was Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690–704) who introduced both the palace examination and, decisive for this investigation, the military examination (*wuju* 武舉); from 702 the names of examinees were masked so that examiners could not identify them.⁴³

The content of the Tang-period military examination is itself a concise statement of what military competence was held to consist of. Candidates were examined in distance shooting (*changduo* 長垛), mounted archery (*mashe* 馬射), archery on foot (*bushe* 步射), and further shooting disciplines; in horsemanship and the use of the lance (*maqiang* 馬槍); and in physical strength, measured by feats such as lifting the heavy door-bar (*qiaoguan* 翹關) and carrying loads (*fuzhong* 負重), with the candidate's physique (*shencai* 身材) also assessed.⁴⁴ Archery dominates the list and confirms continuity with the Six Arts of the Zhou; yet the examination also tested strength and horsemanship, and successful military graduates could be appointed directly to office. With this institution, martial skill, like literary skill, became a documented qualification for state service. All the same, the military examination always carried less prestige than the civil one, a ranking of *wen* above *wu* that would deepen in later centuries.

5.2 The Song military academy and the Seven Military Classics (1072–1080)

If the Tang gave martial skill an examination, the Song (960–1279) gave it a canon. Under Emperor Shenzong 宋神宗 (r. 1067–1085), the state reopened the military academy in 1072 and ordered that a body of classics to be studied by officers be fixed; in 1080 seven texts were determined as the official military canon, the “Seven Military Classics” (*Wujing qishu* 武經七書).⁴⁵ The seven were the *Sunzi bingfa*, the *Wuzi* 吳子, the *Sima fa* 司馬法, the *Six Secret Teachings*

⁴⁰ On the confiscation of weapons under the First Emperor and the tension between the state's need for military skill and its distrust of private armament cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁴¹ On the significance of the crossbow and on Han-period army organization cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁴² On the emergence of the examination system under the Sui and Tang cf. Theobald, Ulrich, *The Chinese Imperial Examination System*, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de*.

⁴³ Theobald, *Examination System*: “Empress Wu Zetian (r. 690–704) introduced a palace examination (*dianshi*) and a military examination (*wuju*). From 702 on the names of examinees were masked.”

⁴⁴ Theobald, *Examination System*. The subjects of the Tang-period *wuju* following the same source.

⁴⁵ Theobald, Ulrich, *Wujing qishu* 武經七書, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de*: “In 1072 Emperor Shenzong reopened the military academy ... In 1080 seven books ... were determined as the classical military canon.” On the reopening of the military academy cf. also Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

(*Liutao* 六韜), the *Weiliaozi* 尉繚子, the *Three Strategies of Huang Shigong* (*Huangshigong sanlüe* 黃石公三略), and the *Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong* (*Tang Taizong Li Weigong wendui* 唐太宗李衛公問對).⁴⁶ These texts span dates of composition from the fifth century BCE to the Tang period, and their canonization made strategic theory a formal, examinable subject. The art of war was now not merely written, but taught and examined as part of officer education, the clearest possible evidence that the Chinese treated strategy as a discipline of formation on a par with the literary classics.

5.3 Urban martial arts culture and the general as cultural figure

The Song period also saw martial practice penetrate beyond the battlefield and the examination hall into urban civilian life. The cities of the Song maintained entertainment quarters in which weapons demonstrations, wrestling (*jiaodi*), and martial performances were staged for paying audiences, and voluntary martial arts associations emerged.⁴⁷ The era also produced the most enduring of the patriotic martial arts icons, General Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–1142), to whom later tradition attributed the founding of several boxing styles. These attributions, however, are legendary: Yue Fei is securely attested as a commander, but the attribution to him of specific unarmed systems is supported by no contemporary source and follows the recurring pattern by which later styles sought prestige through famous founders.⁴⁸ The Song period thus shows the tradition in full institutional and cultural flower: examined, canonized, urbanized, and already producing the founder legends that would complicate its later history.

5.4 The ranking of wen above wu and the scope of the examinations

Two facts about the examination system frame the long decline of martial arts education relative to literary education. The first is scope and selectivity. The civil examination was fiercely competitive: in the Tang period, the annual number of candidates for the degree of “presented scholar” (*jinshi* 進士) stood at roughly 800 to 1,200, of whom only a dozen or a few dozen passed, so that success conferred immense prestige and was likened to “ascending through the Dragon Gate.”⁴⁹ The second is the relative rank of the two careers. The military examination, though regularly held and expanded over the centuries, consistently carried less prestige than its civil counterpart, and under the Qing it was of little importance for actual command authority, because alongside it stood a hereditary professional army.⁵⁰ Over the long run, the prestige of the *wen* drew the ambitious toward scholarship and away from arms, and the educated fighter of the Six Arts gave way to a sharper division between the scholar who did not fight and the soldier who did not read. The modern revival is, in seeking to reunite body, attention, and judgment, in part an attempt to heal precisely this division — and the final reason why this work cannot do without its *wen* sister volume.

⁴⁶ Sawyer, Ralph D., *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, Boulder 1993 (introduction and list of the seven texts); cf. Theobald, *Wujing qishu*.

⁴⁷ On Song-period urban martial arts culture cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁴⁸ Yue Fei (1103–1142) is historically well attested as a commander; the attribution of specific boxing styles (Xingyiquan, Eagle Claw, and others) to him is, by contrast, legendary and supported by no contemporary source. Cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Henning, *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, pp. 1–7.

⁴⁹ Theobald, *Examination System*: annually ca. 800–1,200 *jinshi* candidates, of whom only a dozen to several dozen passed (“*deng longmen*” 登龍門).

⁵⁰ Theobald, *Examination System*: the *wuju* had “a far less prominent status” than the civil examinations; cf. below, Chapter 6.3.

6. Historical Development IV: Ming to Qing, Systematization and Conclusion

6.1 Ming: Qi Jiguang and the first documented systems

The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) produced the first technical sources that allow the historian to speak of named, described combat methods rather than legends about them. The central figure is General Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588), whose military manual, the *New Treatise on Military Efficiency* (*Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書), contains a chapter, the “Essentials of Boxing Classic” (*Quan-jing jieyao pian* 拳經捷要篇), that catalogues unarmed boxing methods and illustrates stances.⁵¹ Two points deserve emphasis. First, Qi wrote for the practical training of soldiers and expressly subordinated display to combat effectiveness, warning against “flowery” techniques that look impressive but fail in combat.⁵² Second, his catalogue already gathers methods then in circulation, meaning that by the sixteenth century a developed unarmed tradition existed, whose origins lie in the undocumented centuries before it. The Ming period is the moment at which the tradition becomes legible.

It is also the period in which the famous Shaolin 少林 monastery acquires its documented military significance. As Meir Shahar has shown, Shaolin monks were indeed active as fighters during the Ming period, but the now-ubiquitous narrative that attributes the origin of Shaolin boxing to the Indian monk Bodhidharma cannot be traced back before the seventeenth century and is a later, partly literary construction.⁵³ The documented and the legendary Shaolin must be kept apart.

6.2 Qing: the great transmitted systems, lineage, and secrecy

Most of the unarmed systems practiced today as “traditional” took their recognizable form during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912): the various family styles of Taijiquan 太極拳, Xingyiquan 形意拳, and Baguazhang 八卦掌 of the so-called internal school, as well as the southern systems from which the modern Cantonese arts descend. The manner of transmission in this period is as important as its content. Before the twentieth century there was no central authority that could fix the “correct” version of a style; correctness was determined locally, through combat effectiveness and the authority of the teacher, and knowledge passed through personal master-disciple lineages (*shifu* 師父 to *tudi* 徒弟) under considerable secrecy.⁵⁴ This lineage model is the classical answer to the question of how an embodied skill, difficult to verbalize, is preserved across generations. It is at the same time, as Chapter 8 sets out, the greatest obstacle to modern revival, for it presupposes a density of contact between teacher and student that modern life rarely permits.

For the conceptual ordering of this series, an observation should be recorded here, one that Chapter 2.5 draws on. Among the Qing systems named above, Taijiquan arose as a combative family system; its worldwide rise in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, occurred almost entirely as a slow, health-oriented movement practice, practiced by most of its present-day practitioners not as a martial art but as cultivation. This shift is no devaluation, but a return of Taijiquan to the proximity of its *daoyin* kinship; it justifies assigning Taijiquan, insofar as it is

⁵¹ Qi Jiguang, *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書, chap. *Quan-jing jieyao pian* 拳經捷要篇 (16th c.). Cf. Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*; Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁵² Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*; on the polemic against purely showy techniques (*huaquan xiutui* 花拳繡腿) cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁵³ Shahar, Meir, *The Shaolin Monastery. History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts*, Honolulu 2008. The Bodhidharma attribution is not attested before the seventeenth century.

⁵⁴ On local, lineage-bound transmission without central standardization before the twentieth century cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*.

practiced as health cultivation, to inner cultivation (the third volume) rather than to combative Kung Fu, while its combative use naturally belongs to Kung Fu.

6.3 The Qing military examination and its abolition (1901)

The Qing maintained the military examination inherited from the Tang and Song and even expanded it. It was structured in four stages, held every three years, in parallel with the civil examination. In its Qing form, the first session tested mounted archery (*mashe*), the second archery on foot (*bushe*), and the third theoretical knowledge, finally requiring an essay on the “military classic” (*wujing* 武經); successful candidates rose through the grades of military licentiate (*wusheng* 武生), provincial military graduate (*wu juren* 武舉人), and metropolitan military graduate (*wu jinshi* 武進士), with the top three called *wu zhuangyuan* 武狀元, *wu bangyan* 武榜眼, and *wu tanhua* 武探花.⁵⁵ Yet the examination had been pushed to the margin. Because the Qing maintained a hereditary professional army in the Eight Banners (*baqi* 八旗) and the Green Standard (*lüying* 綠營) with its own promotion rules, the examination was of little importance for actual command authority, and its emphasis on archery and physical strength grew increasingly anachronistic in the age of firearms.⁵⁶

In 1901 the military examination was abolished.⁵⁷ The civil examination followed in 1905.⁵⁸ The abolition of the military examination is the natural endpoint of this work’s historical arc, and it carries a double significance. On the one hand, it marks the formal death of the imperial institution that for twelve centuries had treated martial skill as an examinable qualification and thus as a form of education. On the other, it opens the modern situation with which the rest of this work is concerned: with it, the martial arts lost their imperial educational home. This loss did not go unanswered, as the following section shows; but none of the modern answers restored the old unity of skill and education.

6.4 Aftermath in the twentieth century: Jingwu, Guoshu, and the transformation into sport

As early as 1910, the Jingwu Athletic Association (*Jingwu tiyu hui* 精武體育會) was founded in Shanghai, China’s first modern civilian martial arts organization. It released instruction from the secret master-disciple lineage and made it generally accessible through membership, a fixed curriculum, textbooks, and public demonstrations; its declared purpose was not the training of fighters but the physical and moral uplift of the population.⁵⁹ The Republic soon undertook an even more ambitious state refounding: in 1928 the Central Guoshu Institute (*Zhongyang guoshu guan* 中央國術館) opened in Nanking under Zhang Zhijiang 張之江, elevating the martial arts to a “national art” (*guoshu* 國術), establishing branches in the provinces, and holding nationwide examinations (*guokao* 國考) in 1928 and 1933 — in form a conscious successor to the military examination, in spirit a national-pedagogical project.⁶⁰ The attempt remained an episode:

⁵⁵ Theobald, *Examination System*. The structure and titles of the Qing-period *wuke*/military examination following the same source.

⁵⁶ Theobald, *Examination System*: because of the professional forces of the Eight Banners and the Green Standard, “the military examination [had] not a great importance.”

⁵⁷ Theobald, *Examination System*: “It was abolished in 1901.”

⁵⁸ On the civil examination system and its abolition in 1905 cf. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations*; on the military examination, Theobald, *The Chinese Imperial Examination System*. The civil examination system was abolished in 1905 by edict of Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, Brian / Guo, Elizabeth, *Jingwu. The School that Transformed Kung Fu*, Berkeley 2010; Morris, Andrew D., *Marrow of the Nation. A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Berkeley 2004.

⁶⁰ Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*, on the Guoshu movement and the national examinations of 1928 and 1933; cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

chronically underfunded, riven by factional disputes among the styles, and finally ended by the war against Japan.

After 1949 the People's Republic reshaped the martial arts a second time, now into a state-standardized performance and competition sport: standardized *taolu*, point scoring, medals. The traditional lineages were pushed to the margin and at times suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, while part of the tradition migrated to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the worldwide diaspora.⁶¹ Modern competitive wushu, with its acrobatic intensification and the injury burden treated in Chapter 10.1, is the product of this second transformation, not of the old educational tradition.

For the question of this work, this aftermath is doubly instructive. It shows, first, that institutional revivals are possible and can achieve considerable reach. It shows, second, that every institution that carries the tradition reshapes it to its own purposes — the nation in the case of Jingwu and Guoshu, the medal in the sport system —, and that what is regularly lost first is precisely what this work is concerned with: the pedagogy of jointly forming body, attention, and judgment within an ethical frame. A revival in the sense of this work therefore begins not with a new institution, but with the practice of the individual and the small community (Chapter 11).

6.5 The social world of transmission: households, monasteries, and the teacher's livelihood

How was martial arts education actually funded and housed across these dynasties? The answer shows why the tradition remained robust for so long and why it became fragile in modern times. Martial skill was carried by several overlapping institutions: the hereditary military households and the examination career, which opened a path from skill to office and income; the great estates and local communities, which trained men for defense; religious establishments such as Shaolin, whose monks were indeed militarily active during the Ming period; and, above all, personal lineage, in which a master instructed a small number of disciples within a web of obligations that was as much social and quasi-familial as commercial.⁶² In every case, teaching was embedded in a durable social structure that secured both continuity and accountability: a teacher's reputation, and often livelihood, depended on the demonstrated competence of his students.

The modern landscape possesses none of these structures and must improvise a substitute. Martial arts education today survives mainly through commercial schools, voluntary clubs and associations, sport federations, and a vast, unvetted online market of books and videos. The strengths of this landscape are openness and access: anyone can begin, and once-secret instruction is now freely published. Its weakness is precisely the loss of the old accountability. Where lineage tied a teacher's reputation to the actual skill of his students, the commercial and online market often rewards spectacle and marketing, which is why the habit of verification urged in Chapter 8.4 is indispensable today. A modern revival must therefore consciously rebuild in miniature what the old social world provided: where possible, a real teacher, a community of fellow practitioners, and honest, private standards of progress in place of the external judgment of lineage.

⁶¹ Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*, on the nationalization of wushu and the situation of the traditional lineages in the People's Republic; Morris, *Marrow of the Nation*.

⁶² On the carriers of transmission (military households, examination career, local communities, religious institutions, personal lineage) cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*; Shaha, *The Shaolin Monastery*.

6.6 What was lost and what was preserved

The long history just sketched allows a precise determination of what a modern revival seeks to recover. Lost with the conclusion of the imperial tradition were, first, the institutional embedding of martial skill in a general formation of character, the world of the Six Arts, in which bow and book were one; and second, the density of transmission that the lineage system offered. What remains, and is recoverable, is the pedagogy: the cultivation model of lifelong, incremental practice; the ethics of *wude*; the theoretical disciplines of strategy and combat as a play of opposites; and the health-promoting body practices of the *daoyin* tradition, which survive today as qigong. The remainder of this work takes these preserved elements as the raw material of revival and asks how they can be recombined within a modern life — as the *wu* half of a formation whose *wen* half the sister volume will treat.

7. The Four Strands as an Integrated Education of the Wu

The task of this work is to present the *wu* in its entirety. The historical sections have shown that it was not four independent occupations, but four branches of a single formation. This chapter names explicitly what each branch trains and how the four should interlock: body and weapons art (Kung Fu), mobility and maneuver (*yu*), archery, and the art of war. It closes with a brief word on combat medicine, which the tradition counted but which is no longer a viable primary strand in modern daily life, and with a note that inner cultivation (qigong), as its own path, belongs to the third volume.

7.1 Kung Fu (quan and weapons): the body as foundation

The first domain is unarmed practice and weapons use, for which the word “Kung Fu” has become the standard designation. The Chinese term *gongfu* 功夫 literally means skill gained through sustained effort and time; *wushu* 武術 means “martial technique.”⁶³ Whatever the style, this domain trains the body as the foundation of everything else: the structural alignment of the skeleton, so that force is transmitted from the ground through the frame; rooted, stable stances; the coordination of the whole body in a single action rather than the isolated use of a limb; balance, timing, and distance; and the conditioning of breath and sinew. In the cultivation model, these qualities are developed slowly through repeated forms (*taolu* 套路), basic exercises (*jibengong* 基本功), and partner work.

It is important at this point to keep the combative character of this domain pure and not to conflate it with inner cultivation. Kung Fu in the sense meant here is the strand whose final measure is effectiveness under resistance: the ability to maintain structure, force, and timing against a real opponent or a real implement. For this reason, Taijiquan, which in its modern reception functions predominantly as a slow health practice, is not taken as a representative of Kung Fu here, but is assigned to inner cultivation (the third volume). Where Taijiquan is genuinely practiced as a martial art, with partner work, push-hands, and application, it naturally belongs to this first domain; the assignment follows function, not name. The body so trained is not merely an instrument of combat; on the tradition’s own understanding, it is the necessary ground for the steadiness of attention that archery and strategy demand. One cannot hold a quiet mind in an unstable body.

⁶³ On the terminology *gongfu*/*wushu* cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*.

7.2 Mobility and maneuver (yu): the body in space

The second domain is mobility. Among the Six Arts it was charioteering (*yu* 御), the martial twin of archery: where the one art made the stationary archer precise, the other made the warrior on chariot and horse mobile. It would be inconsistent to elevate archery to a full strand and pass over its explicit companion among the *liuyi*. The historical form, the war-chariot and later cavalry, cannot be restored in modern life; its formative core, however, very much can, and it deserves weight of its own.

What this domain trains is mastery of one's own body in motion through space: footwork and stepping, the leading and breaking of distance, the taking of angles and positioning, balance in weight transfer — in short, the ability to hold structure not only in a stance, but in locomotion and under the pressure of a moving counterpart. Where Kung Fu establishes the body as foundation and archery trains precision within a stable form, mobility trains the in-between: the transition, the timing of movement, the economy of the path. In both unarmed and weapons systems, it is often the unspoken difference between one who knows techniques and one who deploys them at the right time and place. For the modern practitioner, this strand has the further advantage that it can be practiced almost anywhere and without equipment, since its sole implement is the moving body itself.

A remark on the literal form of this strand is nonetheless in order here. Historically, *yu* did not resolve into footwork alone, but into horsemanship: as the chariot gave way to cavalry, the horse took its place, and the military examination tested riding, mounted archery (*mashe*), and the lance from horseback (*maqiang*) for twelve centuries as core skills of the martial person (Chapters 5.1 and 6.3). Anyone with access to horses today can therefore deepen the *yu* strand in its most literal modern form: through work with the horse. Among today's approaches, that of Natural Horsemanship corresponds most closely to the pedagogy reconstructed here. This school, tracing back to Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt, replaces coercion with communication: it works with finely calibrated pressure and immediate release, with body language, calm, and what Dorrance called “feel and timing,” the felt sense for the right moment.⁶⁴

The kinship with martial education is no mere analogy, but structural. The horse is, like the target of the *Sheyi*, an incorruptible mirror: it does not respond to the human's intention but to his actual state, to tension, breath, and unclarity of guidance, and thereby forces the practitioner to precisely the turn inward that the ritual classics demanded of the archer. At the same time, horsemanship is a school of mastery over force in the sense of *wude*: the human possesses means of coercion and methodically forgoes them, because finer communication yields the better result. The limits, too, must be honestly named. Access to horses is demanding in its prerequisites and costly, the health evidence on riding concerns mainly its therapeutic application (there, effects on balance, trunk control, and gait are documented meta-analytically),⁶⁵ and the Natural Horsemanship movement has, like the martial arts, produced its own commercial mythology, to which the same habit of scrutiny should be applied as to styles and lineages.⁶⁶ Riding is therefore treated here as an optional deepening of the *yu* strand, not as its core: the core remains the universally practicable training of one's own body in space, and the plans in Chapter 12

⁶⁴ Dorrance, Tom, *True Unity. Willing Communication Between Horse and Human*, ed. Milly Hunt Porter, 1987; Hunt, Ray, *Think Harmony with Horses. An In-Depth Study of Horse/Man Relationship*, Fresno 1978. On the social-scientific classification of the movement cf. Birke, Lynda, “Learning to Speak Horse.” *The Culture of “Natural Horsemanship”*, in: *Society & Animals* 15/3 (2007), pp. 217–239.

⁶⁵ Stergiou, Alexandra et al., *Therapeutic Effects of Horseback Riding Interventions. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*, in: *American Journal of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation* 96/10 (2017), pp. 717–725.

⁶⁶ Birke, *Learning to Speak Horse*; ead., *Talking about Horses. Control and Freedom in the World of “Natural Horsemanship”*, in: *Society & Animals* 16/2 (2008), pp. 107–126, also on the marketing of the movement.

presuppose no horse.

7.3 Archery (she): precision, ritual, and self

The third domain is archery, and the historical reason for giving it equal weight is overwhelming: archery is one of the original Six Arts, the central skill examined in the military examination for twelve centuries, and the practice that the ritual classics chose as their model of moral self-examination.⁶⁷ What archery trains is distinct from, and complementary to, what unarmed practice trains. It is the discipline of precision within a stable form: a fixed, repeatable sequence of stance, nocking, draw, anchor, aim, and release, in which the smallest disturbance of breath, attention, or posture registers immediately in the result. Because the feedback is external and unforgiving, archery teaches the practitioner to seek the cause of error within himself, precisely the lesson the *Sheyi* drew from it. It is, in the exact sense, a form of moving meditation: a practice in which sustained attention is not an accompaniment but the skill itself. Archery thus concentrates what the ritual classics taught about moral self-examination, while at the same time supplying the attentional discipline whose measurable effects Chapter 9 presents.

7.4 The art of war (bingfa): strategy as a discipline of the mind

The fourth domain is the art of war, the body of strategic theory canonized in the Seven Military Classics and led by the *Sunzi*. Its inclusion in an investigation of martial arts education is no metaphor. The Song state examined officers in these texts; strategy was a learned, examined discipline.⁶⁸ What this domain trains is judgment: the assessment of a situation before acting; the economy of force that prefers victory without battle; the management of one's own and the opponent's psychology; the value of preparation, position, timing, and information; and the insight that the decisive contest is often decided before a blow falls.⁶⁹ In the integrated curriculum, the art of war is the intellectual crown of martial arts education, the domain in which the steadiness trained by the body and the attention trained by the bow are placed in the service of clear thinking under pressure. Because it is knowledge that is read and written, the art of war forms, at the same time, the natural bridge of the *wu* to the *wen*: whoever studies the military classics already practices a form of scholarship.

7.5 Combat medicine (wuyi): honored, but not a modern primary strand

A fifth component accompanied martial education so closely in living lineages that it must not go unmentioned here, even though it is not counted among the four primary strands: combat medicine (*wuyi* 武醫), above all bonesetting and the traumatology of the *dieda* tradition (*dieda* 跌打, literally “falling and striking”). Many masters were healers as well; whoever knew how to injure the body should also be able to restore it. In this lies a deep logic that completes the ethics of *wude*: the power to harm is truly mastered only when it is accompanied by the ability and the willingness to heal.

As an independent strand of practice for modern daily life, however, combat medicine is scarcely suited. By its nature it is a medical discipline that requires its own lengthy training and today an embedding in current health law; it cannot be fitted into the remaining hours of a working week the way stance, step, or breath can. This work therefore honors it as a historical

⁶⁷ Cf. above, Chapters 2.2, 3.4, and 5.1; on the central place of archery, Theobald, *liuyi* and id., *Examination System*; supplementing this, Chao/Ma/Kim, *Chinese Archery Studies*, Singapore 2022.

⁶⁸ Cf. above, Chapter 5.2; Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics*.

⁶⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Griffith, chaps. I, III–VI; Ames, *Sun-Tzu*.

component and as an ethical admonition, but deliberately does not carry it as a viable fifth primary strand. For the modern practitioner, what remains sensible and applicable is this: basic knowledge of injury prevention, first aid, and recovery, and the disposition that concern for the body, one's own as much as one's partner's, is inseparable from martial maturity.

Finally, inner cultivation (qigong / *xiulian*) is to be distinguished from the four primary strands; it stems from the same *daoyin* root (Chapter 4.4), but its goal is not combat, but the health-related and mental transformation of the person. It is the actual ground on which all practice rests, but by its nature belongs not to the martial but closer to civil-mental formation; its detailed treatment, together with the health evidence on qigong and Taijiquan, is therefore reserved for the third volume. In the *wu* volume, what remains of it is only what combat needs in any case: trained breath and the basic calm that enters into each of the following chapters as a component of all four exercises.

7.6 How the four strands interlock

The four strands form a deliberate structure, and each supports the others. Body practice (Kung Fu) establishes the body as foundation and trains conditioned strength and structural steadiness, without which nothing further is possible. Mobility (*yu*) takes this steadiness and sets it in motion, training the management of distance and the timing of the step, the body in space. Archery takes the calm so gained and refines it into precise, repeatable attention under external test, preserving the ethical frame, the turn inward in search of the cause of error, that the whole tradition prizes. The art of war takes disciplined attention and directs it outward toward the assessment of real situations, completing the movement from self-mastery to the mastery of circumstance.

The connecting thread is twofold. On the one hand, the ethics of *wude*: at every level, trained power is bound to restraint and right purpose. On the other, trained breath, which, as Chapter 9.5 sets out, underlies all four strands and physiologically binds them into a single practice; it is at the same time what the *wu* volume needs from, and takes up from, the inner cultivation of the third volume. This is the architecture that a modern revival should strive to reproduce, not by copying the Zhou curriculum, which is impossible, but by ensuring that a modern practice trains body, mobility, attention, and judgment together and holds them within an ethics, rather than isolating one strand and passing it off for the whole. And it should, let it be repeated, understand the *wu* person so formed as one half, whose *wen* half — scholarship, art, moral formation in the narrower sense — the second volume unfolds, while the inner cultivation of the third volume carries both.

Figure 3 illustrates this architecture; the following table summarizes the division of labor among the four strands and shows why the tradition treated them as a single curriculum rather than four occupations.

8. The Modern Problem: Why Integration Is Difficult

Before describing how the tradition can be revived, intellectual honesty demands a clear statement of the reasons why revival is difficult. Four obstacles stand in its way, and to underestimate them is the surest path to failure.

8.1 The time economy of the modern adult

The first obstacle is time, and the scale of the problem is measurable. According to a pooled analysis of 507 population-based surveys with 5.7 million participants, nearly a third of adults

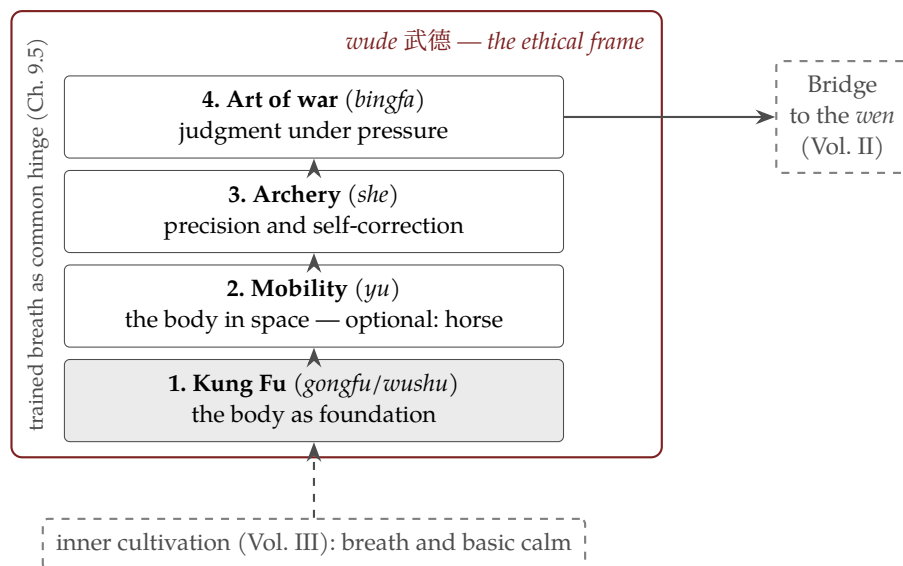


Figure 3: The four strands of the *wu* as a cumulative curriculum, bound by *wude* and connected by trained breath

Table 1: The four strands of martial education (*wu*) at a glance

Strand	Chinese term	What is primarily trained	Modern evidence (cf. Ch. 9)
Kung Fu (body and weapons)	<i>gongfu</i> 功夫 / <i>wushu</i> 武術	Structure, balance, conditioned strength, effectiveness under resistance	Systematic reviews on strength, balance, and cognition; injury data on competitive <i>taolu</i>
Mobility (ma- neuver)	<i>yu</i> 御	Footwork, distance, positioning, timing of movement	Functional mobility and balance gains (martial arts reviews)
Archery	<i>she</i> 射	Precision, sustained attention, self-correction	EEG and intervention studies on attention
Art of war	<i>bingfa</i> 兵法	Judgment, situation assessment, economy of force	Continued reception in strategy and leadership

worldwide, some 1.8 billion people, failed to meet recommended activity levels in 2022, up from about 23 percent in 2000, with a trend expected to worsen through 2030.⁷⁰ The World Health Organization’s 2020 activity guidelines call for at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity endurance activity per week, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous activity, together with muscle-strengthening work on two or more days; a large share of the population does not even reach this baseline.⁷¹ The traditional curriculum presupposed the unbroken youth of a leisured class; the modern practitioner must build a martial arts education out of the remaining hours of a working life. Every honest program must proceed from this constraint rather than wish it away. Figure 4 shows the scale and direction of the problem.

⁷⁰ Strain et al., *National, regional, and global trends in insufficient physical activity*, in: *The Lancet Global Health* 12/8 (2024); World Health Organization, *Nearly 1.8 billion adults at risk of disease from not doing enough physical activity*, press release, 26 June 2024.

⁷¹ Bull, Fiona C. et al., *World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour*, in: *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54/24 (2020), pp. 1451–1462.

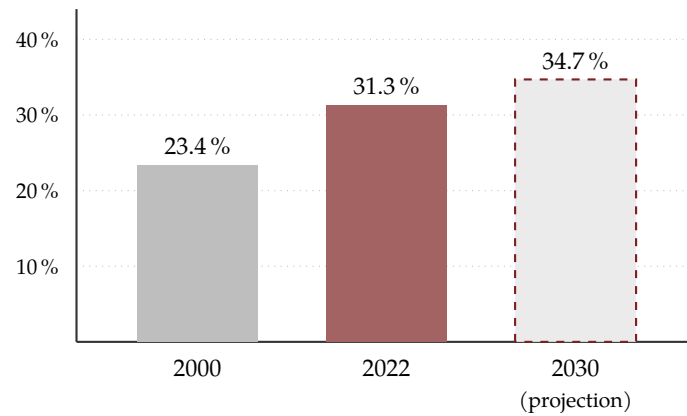


Figure 4: Share of adults worldwide not meeting WHO minimum recommendations for physical activity (after Strain et al. 2024; projection assumes continuation of the trend)

8.2 The pedagogical gap: master teaching versus part-time practice

The second obstacle is structural. As Chapter 6 showed, the classical model of transmission was a dense, personal teaching, in which a student spent years in close contact with a master and absorbed, through correction and imitation, a skill that resists being put into writing.⁷² Embodied skill of this kind, the felt sense of correct alignment or correct timing, is notoriously difficult to convey in words or videos; it traditionally demands hands-on correction. The part-time modern student, who trains a few hours per week and often learns from books, recordings, or large classes, tries to acquire through thin contact what the tradition transmitted through dense contact. This gap cannot be fully closed, and to pretend otherwise produces practitioners who know the shape of a form but not its substance.

8.3 Decontextualization and loss of meaning

The third obstacle is the loss of the meaning-giving context. In the classical frame, archery meant something because it sat within a ritual order; *wude* meant something because it regulated a real capacity for violence within a real community. Removed from this world and transplanted into a gym, the same movements risk becoming empty gymnastics and the ethical vocabulary mere marketing.⁷³ Revival is therefore not only a matter of reproducing techniques, but of reconstructing a sufficiently meaningful frame, a community, a code of conduct, a sense of purpose, so that the techniques retain their formative power. This applies with particular force to the *wu* strand, because its meaning-giving frame lies to a large extent in the *wen* — a further reason to understand the sister volume not as ornament, but as necessary complement.

8.4 Authenticity, commercialization, and the crisis of transmission

The fourth obstacle is the corrupted information environment. Because, as Chapter 6 noted, there was never a central authority to fix the “correct” version of a style, the field is unusually vulnerable to invented lineages and inflated claims, a vulnerability greatly amplified by the

⁷² Cf. above, Chapter 6.2; Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁷³ On the danger of decontextualization and the commercial reshaping of the tradition cf. Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*; Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

commercialization of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁷⁴ Much of what is marketed as ancient is young; much of what is sold as battle-tested was never tested. For the aspiring practitioner, distinguishing serious transmission from theatrical imitation is genuinely difficult, and a wrong choice costs years. A clear-sighted revival must therefore build in the habit of verification, the same source-critical skepticism that this work applies to history, and direct it at teachers and claims.

9. Benefits of a Revival: The Evidence

Against the obstacles named stands a substantial case for revival, and this case is strongest where it can be tested. This chapter presents the benefits in descending order of strength of evidence, beginning with evidence from randomized studies and ending with the ethical claims that by their nature cannot be measured.

9.1 Physical health: the evidence on martial practice

An honest classification is needed in advance. The densest health evidence in the entire field, resting on randomized controlled trials and meta-analyses, concerns not the combative strands but the slow, breath-led cultivation arts of qigong and Taijiquan. Because this series reserves inner cultivation for its third volume, the *wu* volume deliberately does not base its health case on them, but on the evidence for martial practice itself; the deeper cultivation evidence is presented where it belongs.

The starting point is the plain fact of inactivity. Since nearly a third of adults do not meet the minimum recommendations for physical activity (Chapter 8.1), any regularly practiced physical activity that reaches this threshold already makes a substantial health contribution. For the martial arts in the narrower sense, this contribution has by now been systematically studied. An early systematic review of the health status of martial arts practitioners found indications of benefit for cardiorespiratory fitness, body composition, metabolism, and psychological measures.⁷⁵ A later systematic review devoted specifically to the “hard” martial arts (karate, taekwondo, kung fu) found that the majority of included studies report positive effects, in particular the improvement and maintenance of balance, cognitive function, and mental health.⁷⁶

Precisely for older adults, for whom the benefit counts most, the evidence is encouraging, if still limited. A review of the functional effects of hard martial arts in older adults reports gains in strength, mobility, aerobic endurance, flexibility, and balance, but expressly urges caution because of the small number of studies and inconsistent training stimuli.⁷⁷ The strongest evidence for actual fall prevention still concerns Taijiquan, which is assigned to the third volume as health cultivation; for combative practice, the case rests on the balance, strength, and mobility gains named above, which are plausible but less robustly documented. This restraint is owed to honesty: the case for martial practice as a health practice is real, but it is not as densely documented as the case for the slow cultivation arts.

⁷⁴ On the field’s vulnerability to invented lineages and inflated claims cf. Henning, *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, pp. 1–7; Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁷⁵ Bu, Bin et al., *Effects of Martial Arts on Health Status. A Systematic Review*, in: *Journal of Evidence-Based Medicine* 3/4 (2010), pp. 205–219.

⁷⁶ Origua Rios, Sonia et al., *Health Benefits of Hard Martial Arts in Adults. A Systematic Review*, in: *Journal of Sports Sciences* 36/14 (2018), pp. 1614–1622.

⁷⁷ *Functional Benefits of Hard Martial Arts for Older Adults. A Scoping Review*, in: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19/24 (2022), article 16970. Reported gains include strength, mobility, endurance, flexibility, and balance; limited number of studies.

Decisive for the time-constrained modern practitioner, finally, are the properties that make the martial arts suitable as a lifelong practice: the scalability of dose, suitability across age groups when intensity and impact loading are kept moderate, and the fact that stance, step, and form work require almost no equipment or space. The injury risk named in Chapter 10 concerns the performance- and competition-oriented intensification of the arts, not the foundation-based practice recommended here.

9.2 Cognition and attention: the evidence from archery

Archery has a smaller but real experimental literature, and it points exactly where the classical sources predicted: to attention and cognitive control. Electroencephalographic studies of trained archers find characteristic patterns of cortical activity in the seconds before release that are linked to focused, efficient attention, and comparisons of elite with merely experienced archers find that the elite reach the required attentional state with lower cortical expenditure, a hallmark of trained “neural efficiency.”⁷⁸ Intervention studies with archers further show that targeted attention training improves both cognitive control (for instance on the Stroop test) and shooting performance itself, indicating that sustained attention is indeed the trainable core skill of this discipline.⁷⁹ Direct experimental proof that, conversely, archery training itself improves the general attention of beginners is, however, still lacking; this assumption is made plausible by the expertise literature, but not proven. The samples are small and the field young, so these findings should be held more loosely than the large martial-arts reviews. Yet they agree with the tradition’s own claim that the bow trains the mind, and they give the modern practitioner a concrete, evidence-adjacent reason to take up archery rather than treat it as ornament.

9.3 Strategic education: the art of war in modern decision-making

The art of war offers a benefit of a different kind, not measurable in a clinical trial, but visible in the continuing modern reception of the *Sunzi* outside the military sphere. For more than a century, *The Art of War* has been read as a general treatise on competition, decision, and leadership, and a broad management and leadership literature has absorbed its principles into strategic analysis: the priority of preparation and information, the economy that prefers victory without costly conflict, attention to position and timing, and the conception of leadership as a balance of wisdom, trust, benevolence, courage, and discipline.⁸⁰ This reception can become superficial when it reduces a subtle text to slogans, and this danger must be named. Yet in its best form, the study of the strategic classics cultivates exactly the judgment the tradition intended: the habit of assessing before acting, of seeing the whole field, and of preferring foresight to force. For the modern practitioner, the art of war is the domain that most directly connects martial formation to working and civic life.

9.4 Ethical and psychological formation

The penultimate and least quantifiable benefit is the one the tradition itself prized most highly: the formation of character. The integrated curriculum was designed to produce not merely a

⁷⁸ Research on Top Archer’s EEG Microstates and Source Analysis in Different States, in: *Brain Sciences* 12/8 (2022), article 1017; on the greater neural efficiency of elite versus expert archers, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Wu, Ting-Yi et al., *The Effects of Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Shooting Performance and Cognitive Functions in Archers*, in: *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), article 661961. 23 archers, eight sessions over four weeks; significant improvement in shooting performance and several cognitive functions.

⁸⁰ Cf. McNeilly, Mark R., *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business. Six Strategic Principles for Managers*, rev. ed., New York 2011; on the reception history of the *Sunzi* outside the military, Ames, *Sun-Tzu*.

capable fighter, but a composed, disciplined, and ethically governed person, through the daily practice of *wude*, the archer's turn inward upon a missed shot, and the strategist's restraint. Modern psychology has its own vocabulary for parts of this: the cultivation of sustained attention and present-focused concentration, the building of genuine self-efficacy through graduated mastery, and the regulation of arousal through trained breathing. These closely match what archery and body arts demonstrably train.⁸¹ For the psychological component, moreover, a systematic review specifically on martial arts and combat sports finds consistent indications of cognitive effects (perception, inhibition) and of the value of social embeddedness for mental health.⁸² The claim here is deliberately measured and bounded: the ethical aims of the tradition are not scientifically proven, but they are coherent, continuous with measurable effects on attention and stress, and they answer a real modern need for practices that form character and not merely fitness. That this ethical formation finds its full grounding only in the *wen* should again be noted; as a benefit of the *wu*, it is nonetheless real enough to be taken seriously in program design.

9.5 Breath, arousal regulation, and the shared mechanism

A single physiological mechanism connects much of the foregoing and deserves its own treatment, because it mutually reinforces the four strands. All the practices share a trained, slow, diaphragm-led breath, and slow breathing is one of the few voluntary levers by which the human being can act on the autonomic nervous system: it raises vagal tone, increases heart-rate variability, and shifts the body into a calmer, more regulated state.⁸³ More recent meta-analyses confirm that guided breathwork significantly reduces self-reported stress.⁸⁴ In body and mobility work, this trained breath underlies the calm of the stance and the economy of movement; in archery, it is the deliberate slowing before release that the sources describe and that competitive archers exploit; in the strategist, it is the composure that allows clear assessment under pressure. It is, at the same time, the inheritance that the *wu* volume takes from the inner cultivation of the third volume and weaves into each of its strands. The tradition sensed, and modern physiology confirms, that breath is the common hinge between body, attention, and judgment. This is the single strongest reason to practice the strands together rather than separately, for each rehearses, in a different key, the same fundamental skill of regulating one's own state. For the time-constrained modern practitioner, it is at the same time encouraging, because even a few minutes of trained breathing carry measurable benefit and can be practiced anywhere.

10. Challenges and Honest Limits

A defensible revival must honestly name what it cannot achieve and where it can go wrong. It owes its reader not encouragement but accuracy, and four limits deserve emphasis.

⁸¹ The psychological research on attention training, self-efficacy, and breath regulation closely matches what archery and body work demonstrably train; cf. the literature cited in Chs. 9.1 and 9.2, and, on breath and arousal regulation, the general sport-psychology literature.

⁸² *Martial Arts, Combat Sports, and Mental Health in Adults. A Systematic Review*, in: *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 70 (2024), article 102530; on social connectedness as a protective factor, *ibid*.

⁸³ Zaccaro, Andrea et al., *How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life. A Systematic Review on Psycho-Physiological Correlates of Slow Breathing*, in: *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 12 (2018), article 353. Slow breathing (fewer than ten breaths per minute) raises vagal tone and heart-rate variability and reduces anxiety, depression, and anger.

⁸⁴ Fincham, Guy W. et al., *Effect of Breathwork on Stress and Mental Health. A Meta-Analysis of Randomised-Controlled Trials*, in: *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023), article 432 (12 RCTs, n=785).

10.1 Injury risk and early specialization

The first limit is physical risk, and it is real wherever traditional practice is pushed toward performance or premature intensity. The competitive, performance-oriented form of modern wushu, with its high kicks and demanding jumps, carries a considerable injury burden; surveys of competitive *taolu* athletes report high rates of overuse injury, concentrated in the knees and ankles.⁸⁵ More generally, the trend toward early single-sport specialization and intensive training in young athletes is associated with increased risk of overuse injury and burnout, as the American Academy of Pediatrics has warned.⁸⁶ The lesson for revival is to prefer the cultivation model to the performance model, especially for adults returning to movement: to build foundations before intensity, to protect the joints through correct alignment, and to treat the slow, joint-sparing basic exercises as the core rather than mere warm-up.

10.2 Limits of the evidence and the danger of overstatement

The second limit is that of the evidence. As Chapter 9.1 disclosed, the densest health evidence concerns the slow cultivation arts (qigong, Taijiquan), which this series presents only in its third volume; the evidence for combative practice itself is thinner, samples are often small, and publication bias is a known problem in exercise research. It would betray the source-critical spirit of the tradition itself, the spirit of Tang Hao and the modern historians, to overstate the science.⁸⁷ The honest position is that martial practice as a physical health practice is well supported by systematic reviews, though not as densely as the cultivation arts; that the cognitive benefit of archery is promising but provisional; and that the ethical and strategic benefit are reasoned claims, not measured facts. A revival built on this honest gradient will outlast one built on exaggeration.

10.3 Cultural distortion and appropriation

The third limit is cultural. This is a Chinese tradition with a particular history, a particular vocabulary, and a particular ethical world. To extract its movements while discarding their meaning, or to repackage them as generic “ancient wisdom,” is intellectually wrong and a form of disrespect that the field has repeatedly suffered.⁸⁸ This holds with particular force for terms such as *xiulian*, *qi*, and *wude*, which come from a religious-philosophical and moral world and must not be reduced to wellness or marketing vocabulary. A serious revival studies the history, uses the terms correctly, learns where possible from teachers within living lineages, and acknowledges what it has changed and why. This work’s insistence on precise source work is itself part of this ethic.

⁸⁵ Tan, K., *Prevalence of Lower Extremity Overuse Injuries in Competitive Youth Wushu Taolu Athletes*, thesis, National Institute of Education / Nanyang Technological University, Singapore 2022: of 209 adolescent taolu athletes, 44 % reported overuse injuries, most commonly at the front of the knee (29.7 %) and the outside of the ankle (18.7 %). The peer-reviewed injury literature specifically on competitive taolu is still thin; the finding nonetheless agrees with the general warning against early specialization (Brenner / AAP, below).

⁸⁶ Brenner, Joel S. / AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, *Sports Specialization and Intensive Training in Young Athletes*, in: *Pediatrics* 138/3 (2016), e20162148.

⁸⁷ On the critical historiography of the Chinese martial arts and the need for sober source and evidence criticism cf. Henning, *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, pp. 1–7; Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*.

⁸⁸ On the commercial flattening and cultural distortion of the tradition cf. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts*; Kennedy / Guo, *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals*.

10.4 The irreducible investment of time

The fourth limit is one that no method can remove. Embodied skill takes time; the word *gongfu* says as much. No training plan can compress the years of patient repetition that competence demands, and any program that promises mastery in weeks is, on principle, to be distrusted. What a well-designed modern program can achieve is to make the available time count: to keep the practitioner training over years rather than months, to protect against injury, and to stage the work so that real, if slow, progress accumulates. The plans in Chapter 12 are built on this realistic premise, not on the fantasy that the time investment can be bypassed.

11. A Model of Integration: Design Principles

The training plans that follow are not arbitrary. They are derived from six principles, each of which links the historical tradition to the modern constraint. All six apply to the *wu*; where the later *wen* volume is added, they will need to be supplemented by the principles of civil education, without anything changing at their core.

The first principle is the minimum effective dose. The WHO baseline of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week, with strengthening twice weekly, is at once a public-health floor and a workable design target.⁸⁹ A program that reliably delivers this baseline through traditional practice already does more for the health of most adults than what they currently do, and it does so in a form that simultaneously trains attention and character. The goal is not the daily hours of the leisured adolescent, but the defensible minimum of the working adult, steadily practiced.

The second principle is daily ritual plus weekly depth. The cultivation model (*xiulian*) rewards little-and-often: short, daily sessions that keep body, breath, and attention in training, interspersed with one or two longer weekly sessions that allow real skill work and, where possible, contact with a teacher or training partners. A ten-minute daily practice maintained over a year teaches more than a three-hour session abandoned after a month. This principle is the direct practical translation of what *xiulian* means as a spiritual term: not the great one-time feat of effort, but the steady, transforming repetition.

The third principle is the staggering of the four strands in the order the tradition itself suggests: first the body (Kung Fu), then mobility (*yu*), then the bow, then strategy. The physical foundations (alignment, stance, trained breath) come first, because they form the ground of everything else; step and mobility work set the resting body into motion; archery is added once a stable body and stable breath exist; the study of the strategic classics runs in parallel as reading and reflection, since it costs little bodily time and can fill a commute or an evening. Trained breath, the inheritance of inner cultivation, runs through every stage. This respects the architecture set out in Chapter 7 while accommodating the realities of a schedule.

The fourth principle is progress without competition. The classical measure of progress was the transformation of the practitioner, not victory over others. For the modern adult this is liberating: progress can be tracked by simple, private measures, holding a stance with correct alignment for longer, tighter arrow groupings, a calmer breath under exertion, rather than by tournaments, which invite the injuries and early specialization warned against above. Competition is optional; cultivation is the point.

The fifth principle is verified transmission. Because the old accountability of lineage is absent and the market rewards spectacle (Chapters 6.5 and 8.4), the modern practitioner must consciously replace two things: living contact and scrutiny. Where possible, at least one regular,

⁸⁹ Bull et al., *WHO 2020 guidelines*, in: *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54/24 (2020), pp. 1451–1462.

corrective lesson with a real teacher belongs in every program, for it is there that the embodied error no video reveals is caught. And the same source-critical skepticism that this work applies to history should be directed at teachers, styles, and claims: whoever honestly names origin, ability, and limits deserves trust; whoever promises the ancient, the secret, or the fast does not.

The sixth principle is the ethical frame. Following *wude*, the program should be practiced as formation, not as aggression: with care for the body, respect for teachers and partners, patience with slow progress, and the explicit purpose of mastering violence rather than glorifying it. This is no moral decoration on a fitness plan; it is, as the whole history has shown, the element that makes the practice an education rather than a workout, and at the same time the point at which the *wu* most clearly calls for its *wen* complement.

The following table makes explicit the gap between the classical and the modern conditions of martial arts education; the design principles above are, at bottom, a set of answers to each row.

Table 2: Classical versus modern conditions of martial education

Feature	Classical condition	Modern condition	Design response
Integration	One curriculum (Six Arts) uniting <i>wen</i> and <i>wu</i>	Fragmented into sport, fitness, wellness, and self-defense	Train body, mobility, bow, and judgment together in one program
Time	Leisured, full-time formation of a class	Remaining hours of a working life	Minimum effective dose; daily ritual plus weekly depth
Transmission	Dense, personal master teaching	Thin contact; classes, books, video	Where possible, secure at least weekly teacher contact
Accountability	Reputation tied to students' actual skill	Market rewards spectacle and marketing	Private, honest measures; scrutiny of claims
Measure of progress	Transformation of the person	Competition, ranks, tournaments	Cultivation before competition; measure oneself, not others
Ethics	<i>Wude</i> , embedded in a real community	Easily lost in commercial contexts	Keep the ethical frame explicit and central

12. Sample Training Plans for Modern Working Loads

The following three plans apply the above principles to three realistic life situations. Each is designed first to reach or approach the WHO baseline of activity and then to distribute practice across the four strands, with trained breath and body foundations as the daily ground. All presuppose access to a small floor area for body and mobility practice, a few hours per month at an archery range or club (a hall, a club session, or a garden with a suitable arrow backstop and proper safety supervision), and a reading list drawn from the sources and bibliography for the strategic component. The times are deliberately conservative, so that the plans survive contact with a full week. They deliberately treat only the *wu* portion; once the *wen* volume is available, each plan will need to be supplemented by a civil-cultural portion (reading, writing, art, moral reflection) that fits into the same remaining hours.

12.1 Plan A: The working person (ca. 3 to 4 hours per week)

This plan is built for the reader with a full-time job and little freely available time. It puts short daily practice first, grounds it in trained breath and body foundations, and concentrates skill work in a weekend session.

Table 3: Plan A for the working person

Day	Practice	Strand	Time
Mon	Breathwork and slow basic movements (loosening, alignment)	Kung Fu (body/breath)	15 min
Tue	Stance holding (<i>zhanzhuang</i>) and basic stance work	Kung Fu (body)	15 min
Wed	Reading: a passage of the <i>Sunzi</i> with notes	Art of war	20 min
Thu	Form practice plus simple strengthening (squats, planks)	Kung Fu (body/strength)	20 min
Fri	Step and mobility work; review the week's reading	Mobility/strategy	10 min
Sat	Longer session: forms, basics, strengthening, partner or bag work	Kung Fu (skill/strength)	60 min
Sun	Archery at a range or club; close with breathwork	Archery	60 min

The weekly total is about 3 hours 20 minutes, of which 3 hours are physical practice and 20 minutes reading; depending on execution, roughly ninety minutes to two and a half hours of this fall in the moderate-intensity range, so that the WHO baseline is reached or narrowly missed, with strengthening built in twice (Thursday and Saturday) and all four strands touched weekly. The archery portion is placed on the one day when access to a range is realistic; in weeks when the range is impossible, the hour is replaced by a second body session and dry-draw exercises with a resistance band.

12.2 Plan B: The committed practitioner (ca. 6 to 8 hours per week)

This plan suits the reader who can protect more time and wants to develop real depth across all four strands. It clearly exceeds the WHO baseline and builds in weekly teacher contact, the most valuable investment given the pedagogical gap of Chapter 8.2.

Table 4: Plan B for the committed practitioner

Day	Practice	Strand	Time
Mon	Stance practice, basics, conditioning	Kung Fu (body/strength)	45 min
Tue	Archery: form and grouping practice	Archery	60 min
Wed	Lesson with a teacher (forms, application, correction)	Kung Fu (skill)	90 min
Thu	Strategic classics: reading and written reflection	Art of war	30 min
Fri	Mobility and step work; breath, mobility, and recovery	Mobility (<i>yu</i>)	45 min
Sat	Long session: forms, partner work, practice sparring	Kung Fu (skill)	90 min
Sun	Archery at a range; close with seated breath practice	Archery	75 min

The weekly totals are about 7 hours, distributed so that no single strand crowds out the others, with one supervised lesson for correction, two archery sessions for attention training, a dedicated mobility session, and a standing reading practice for the strategic domain. The Wednesday session is treated as non-negotiable: it is there that the embodied error is caught.

12.3 Plan C: Family or shift work (fragmented time)

This plan is for the reader whose time falls in unpredictable fragments: caregiving duties, irregular shifts, no fixed evenings. It forgoes the fixed weekly grid in favor of a “menu” of short modules, assembled according to the shape of the week, with a weekly minimum rather than a daily schedule.

Table 5: Plan C for fragmented time (module menu)

Module	Practice	Strand	Time
M1	Breath, stance holding, and step work (practicable anywhere)	Kung Fu / mobility	10 min
M2	Short form, one repetition cycle	Kung Fu (body)	10 min
M3	Band draw simulation and target practice at home	Archery (dry)	10 min
M4	Bodyweight strengthening (squats, push-ups, planks)	Strength	15 min
M5	One page of the strategic classics (audio on a commute counts)	Art of war	10 min
M6	Monthly: one longer range visit and, where possible, a lesson	Archery/skill	90 min

The goal is to complete any combination totaling at least 150 minutes across the week, with at least two strengthening modules and at least one module from each strand — in particular the short basic module M1 (breath, stance, and step) daily where possible —, plus the monthly longer session for live archery and teacher contact. The plan accepts that some weeks will be thin; its purpose is to keep the practice alive through difficult stretches, not to optimize any single week.

12.4 A twelve-week progression and its adaptation

Whichever weekly plan is chosen, the following twelve-week arc gives practice direction. In keeping with Chapter 11, it moves from the body through mobility to the bow to integration, and sets private, competition-free measures rather than tournament goals.

Table 6: Twelve-week progression with private measures

Weeks	Focus	Body and mobility measure	Archery measure	Strategy measure
1–4	Foundations	Establish diaphragmatic breath; hold a stable low stance for 60 sec.; a short form fluently; clean basic step	Stabilize stance, draw, and anchor; master safety	Read <i>Sunzi</i> , chaps. 1–3; summarize each in one paragraph
5–8	Refinement	Add conditioning; the form with even breath and no balance breaks; step work under tempo	Tighten arrow grouping at a fixed distance; steady the release	Read <i>Sunzi</i> , chaps. 4–9; relate two ideas to one’s own work
9–12	Integration	Join body and movement with calm, steady breath under light exertion	Hold the grouping while also slowing the heart-beat before release	Finish the <i>Sunzi</i> ; write a page on what “winning without battle” means in one’s own life

The progression is deliberately measured and repeatable: at the end of the twelve weeks the

practitioner begins anew at a higher baseline, and this is exactly how the cultivation model is meant to work (Figure 5).

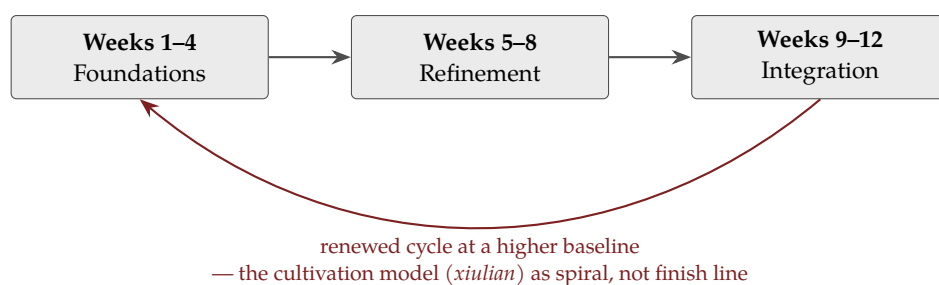


Figure 5: The twelve-week progression as a repeatable cycle

Adjustment is anticipated. Anyone with a knee problem substitutes higher stances and emphasizes the slow, joint-sparing basic exercises and gentle mobility work; anyone without access to a range practices the bow dry with a band and bundles live shooting monthly; anyone under heavy work pressure falls back on the Plan C menu without guilt, for constancy over years, not intensity over weeks, is the whole point. Anyone, finally, with access to horses can replace the mobility session once or twice a month with groundwork or riding in the spirit of Natural Horsemanship (Chapter 7.2): it trains the same core of the *yu* strand, calm, timing, and the management of distance, against a living counterpart.

13. Conclusion

The present work has asked how traditional Chinese martial arts education, in all its martial strands — Kung Fu, mobility (*yu*), archery, and the art of war — can be preserved and revived within a modern working life, and why the attempt is worthwhile. It has done so expressly as an account of only the one half of a larger whole: the *wu*, the martial, as one side of the conceptual pair *wen wu*, whose other side, the *wen*, a second volume of equal scope will unfold, while a short third volume treats inner cultivation (*xiulian* and *qigong*) as the common root of both.

The historical investigation has yielded a clear answer to the “why.” From the documented origin of the tradition in the Six Arts of the Zhou onward, martial skill was never something set apart. It was a branch of a general formation of character, taught to the mature student, embedded in ritual and learning, theorized in the mind of the strategist as carefully as it was trained in the body of the soldier, and bound throughout by the ethics of *wude*. The institutions that carried this synthesis — the curriculum of the Six Arts, the ritual archery of the *Sheyi*, the Seven Military Classics canonized in 1080, the military examination that ran from Wu Zetian’s reform around 702 to its abolition in 1901 — are datable facts, not legends, and they show a civilization that for more than two millennia treated the formation of the martial person as a serious educational task. And already in this origin it is visible that the *wu* never stood alone: bow and book lay in the same hands. The twentieth century added a final lesson to this history: institutional revivals, from Jingwu through the Guoshu Institute to state sport, are possible and achieve reach, but reshape the tradition to their own purposes. What is worth preserving and transferable is the pedagogy, not the institution.

What a modern revival recovers is not the institutions, which cannot be rebuilt, nor the legends, which should not be believed, but the pedagogy: the cultivation model (*xiulian*) of life-long, incremental practice, which by origin is a spiritual concept and whose daily, transforming repetition transfers directly to martial exercise; the joint training of breath, body, attention, and judgment; and the binding of trained power to restraint. The case for reviving this pedagogy is

strong and, where it can be tested, evidence-based. Martial practice as a physical health practice is supported by systematic reviews of strength, balance, and cognition; the attentional discipline of archery by a young, still provisional, but internally consistent experimental literature; the strategic classics continue to train judgment a hundred generations after their composition; and the ethical formation the tradition prized answers a real modern hunger for practices that shape character and not merely physique. The densest health evidence, that on the slow cultivation arts such as qigong and Taijiquan, belongs by its subject matter to the third volume and has here only been noted, not claimed in support of the *wu*.

The challenges are equally real and have been named without embellishment: the poverty of time, the gap between dense traditional transmission and thin modern contact, the loss of meaning when practice is uprooted from its world, the corrupted market of false claims, the injury risk when practice is driven into performance, and the irreducible truth that skill takes years. The training plans presented here are designed around these limits, not against them. They aim at the defensible minimum, steadily practiced, stagger the strands as the tradition suggests, measure progress by private transformation rather than public victory, and keep the ethical frame at the center.

The honest conclusion is therefore neither the romantic claim that the old world can be restored, nor the cynical one that nothing of it survives the passage into modern life. It is that a living tradition can be preserved only by being practiced, and can be practiced only by being adapted. Whoever, in the remaining hours of a working week, gathers their breath each morning and stands in a stable posture, draws the bow once a week with full attention, reads the *Sunzi* on a commute, and holds all this within an ethic of restraint is not playing at antiquity. This person does, in a modern key, exactly what the *wu* was always for: to form a steadier body, a clearer attention, and a better-regulated judgment.

And yet, with the *wu* alone, this person remains a half figure. The tradition wanted the whole person, *wen wu shuang quan*, the bow and the book in the same hands. This volume has traced one side of the coin in its entirety; the second volume, on the *wen*, will trace the other, and a short third, on inner cultivation, the root that nourishes both. Only together do they depict the formation that the Chinese tradition understood under the education of the person. This is why the *wu* is worth preserving, this is how it can realistically be preserved — and this is why it is only the beginning.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Meaning
<i>bingfa</i> 兵法	“Methods of war”; the art of war, the body of Chinese military and strategic theory.
<i>daoyin</i> 導引	“Guiding and pulling”; early therapeutic stretching and breathing exercise, ancestor of qigong and the internal arts.
<i>Dashe</i> 大射	The “Great Archery” of the <i>Yili</i> , a ritual archery ceremony at the state level.
<i>dieda</i> / <i>wuyi</i> 跌打 / 武醫	“Falling and striking”; combat medicine, the bonesetting and traumatology of the martial arts lineages; a historical component, not a primary strand in modern daily life.
<i>gongfu</i> / <i>Kung Fu</i> 功夫	Skill gained through sustained effort and time; in the broader sense a collective term for the Chinese martial arts (combative strand).
<i>guoshu</i> 國術	“National art”; the Republican-era renaming of the martial arts by the Guoshu movement (Central Guoshu Institute, Nanking 1928), which sought to renew them as a national educational asset.

Term	Meaning
<i>jiaodi</i> 角抵	“Horn-butting”; an early wrestling form traced in legend to the Yellow Emperor; ancestor of <i>shuaijiao</i> .
<i>jing-qi-shen</i> 精氣神	The “three treasures” of inner alchemy: vital essence, life-force, and spirit, refined in stages through cultivation.
<i>keju</i> 科舉	The imperial civil examination system; its military counterpart is the <i>wuju</i> .
<i>liuyi</i> 六藝	The “Six Arts” of Zhou education: ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, reckoning.
<i>neidan</i> 內丹	Daoist “inner alchemy”; the refinement of <i>jing</i> , <i>qi</i> , and <i>shen</i> within one’s own body; the classical home of the term <i>xiulian</i> .
<i>qigong</i> 氣功	Modern collective name for the health- and breath-related cultivation exercises stemming from <i>daoyin</i> ; devoted to the third volume as its own path, not counted among the martial strands.
<i>Sheyi</i> 射義	“The Meaning of Archery,” the chapter of the <i>Liji</i> that interprets archery as moral self-examination.
<i>shifu</i> / <i>tudi</i> 師父 / 徒弟	Master and disciple; the personal lineage relationship through which skill was transmitted.
<i>taolu</i> 套路	A “form” or fixed sequence of movements, the basic unit of unarmed and weapons practice.
<i>wen</i> / <i>wu</i> 文 / 武	The civil and the martial; the complementary pair whose union (<i>wen wu shuang quan</i>) was the classical ideal. This volume treats the <i>wu</i> .
<i>wen wu shuang quan</i> 文武雙全	“Complete in both the civil and the martial”; the guiding ideal of the whole, accomplished person.
<i>wude</i> 武德	“Martial virtue”; the ethics of restraint, respect, and right purpose that governs the use of trained force.
<i>wuju</i> / <i>wu jinshi</i> 武舉 / 武進士	The military examination and its highest graduate grade.
<i>Wujing qishu</i> 武經七書	The “Seven Military Classics,” canonized in 1080 as the official curriculum of war theory.
<i>Wuqinxi</i> 五禽戲	The “Five Animal Frolics” attributed to Hua Tuo; an early medical-gymnastic exercise sequence.
<i>Xiangsheli</i> 鄉射禮	The “District Archery Ceremony” of the <i>Yili</i> , a local ritual archery contest with elaborate etiquette.
<i>xinxing</i> 心性	“Heart-nature,” the moral nature or character; in cultivation, the actual goal that the physical exercises serve.
<i>xiulian</i> 修煉	To cultivate and refine; a spiritual term stemming from Daoist-Buddhist self-cultivation, for the gradual, transforming refinement of the person; in the <i>wu</i> volume, the model of lifelong daily practice, in its full meaning the subject of the third volume.
<i>yu</i> 御	The charioteering of the Six Arts, historically continued as horsemanship; here the strand of mobility and maneuver: footwork, distance, positioning, the body in space; optionally deepened through work with the horse (Natural Horsemanship, Ch. 7.2).
<i>zhanzhuang</i> 站樁	“Standing like a post”; static stance practice for posture, structure, and breath.

Sources and Literature

The list is organized by source type, following the method set out in the note on sources. Classical Chinese titles are given with characters, pinyin, and an English rendering. Citation follows the English scholarly convention; on contested points of premodern dating, the running foot-

notes report the state of scholarship rather than asserting a settled fact. For the cultivation- and health-related sections, sources are weighted by strength of evidence; where the evidence is provisional or contested, this is indicated in the main text and in the footnotes.

A. Classical and premodern primary sources

Daoyin tu 導引圖 (Chart of Guiding and Pulling). Mawangdui 馬王堆, Tomb 3, ca. 168 BCE (excavated 1973). Archaeological evidence of early systematic body work.

Liji 禮記 (Book of Rites), chaps. *Sheyi* 射義 (The Meaning of Archery) and *Wangzhi* 王制. Han-period redaction of older material; ritual-theoretical interpretation of archery.

Lunyu 論語 (Analects of Confucius), 3.7 (*Bayi* 八佾). Locus classicus on archery as the contest of the gentleman.

Qi Jiguang 戚繼光: *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書 (New Treatise on Military Efficiency), chap. *Quanjing jieyao pian* 拳經捷要篇 (Essentials of Boxing Classic), 16th c. Earliest systematic catalogue of boxing methods.

Sima Qian 司馬遷: *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), chap. 1, *Wudi benji* 五帝本紀, ca. 94 BCE. Begins the historical account with the Yellow Emperor (legendary).

Sunzi bingfa 孫子兵法 (The Art of War), attributed to Sun Wu 孫武, redacted in the Warring States period. Foundational text of the art of war; cf. the translations under B.

Wu Yue chunqiu 吳越春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue), Zhao Ye 趙曄, Han period. Contains the episode of the swordswoman of Yue (*Yuenü* 越女).

Yili 儀禮 (Etiquette and Rites), chaps. *Xiangsheli* 鄉射禮 (District Archery Ceremony) and *Dashe* 大射 (Great Archery). Ritual orders of archery.

Zhouli 周禮 (Rites of Zhou), chap. *Baoshi* 保氏 (The Guardian). Locus classicus of the Six Arts (*liuyi*) as an educational program.

B. Modern critical editions and translations of the classics

Ames, Roger T.: *Sun-Tzu. The Art of Warfare*, New York 1993. Translation with an extensive introduction on the Yinqueshan find and its dating.

Harper, Donald: *Early Chinese Medical Literature. The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*, London 1998. The first complete translation and study of the medical Mawangdui manuscripts, including the earliest pictorial evidence of *daoyin* (*Daoyintu*).

Sawyer, Ralph D.: *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, Boulder 1993. The authoritative English edition of the *Wujing qishu*.

Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*, translated and introduced by Samuel B. Griffith, Oxford 1963. Classic scholarly translation of the *Sunzi bingfa*.

C. Research literature on the Chinese martial arts and their history

Chao, Hsiao-tung / Ma, Lianzhen / Kim, Loong Wong (eds.): *Chinese Archery Studies. Theoretical and Historic Approaches to a Martial Discipline* (Martial Studies, vol. 1), Singapore 2022. The first English-language collected volume specifically on Chinese archery; supplements Selby.

Elman, Benjamin A.: *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley 2000. Authoritative on the culture of the examination system and the institutional precedence of the civil over the military career.

Henning, Stanley E.: *Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan*, in: *Journal of the Chen style Taijiquan Research Association of Hawaii* 2/3 (1994), pp. 1–7. Source-critical demystification of the origin legends.

Henning, Stanley E.: *The Maiden of Yue. Fount of Chinese Martial Arts Theory*, in: *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 16/3 (2007). On the Yuenü episode as the earliest combat-theory text.

Kennedy, Brian / Guo, Elizabeth: *Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals. A Historical Survey*, Berkeley 2005. Overview of manuals, the living conditions of martial artists, and the military examination; contains the foundational appreciation of Tang Hao.

Kennedy, Brian / Guo, Elizabeth: *Jingwu. The School that Transformed Kung Fu*, Berkeley 2010. Monograph on the Jingwu Athletic Association as the first modern civilian martial arts organization.

Lewis, Mark Edward: *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Albany 1990. Fundamental on the warrior aristocracy of the Zhou and the transition from noble chariot warfare to mass infantry warfare.

Lorge, Peter A.: *Chinese Martial Arts. From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge 2012. Scholarly comprehensive account; relied upon throughout.

Louie, Kam: *Theorising Chinese Masculinity. Society and Gender in China*, Cambridge 2002. Authoritative analysis of the conceptual pair *wen* and *wu*.

Louie, Kam / Edwards, Louise: *Chinese Masculinity. Theorising Wen and Wu*, in: *East Asian History* 8 (1994), pp. 135–148. Foundational article on the *wen-wu* framework.

Morris, Andrew D.: *Marrow of the Nation. A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Berkeley 2004. Standard work on Republican-era physical culture, on the Jingwu and Guoshu movements.

Selby, Stephen: *Chinese Archery*, Hong Kong 2000. Source-based comprehensive account of Chinese archery from the Shang period into the modern era, with parallel-text translations of the classical archery texts.

Shahar, Meir: *The Shaolin Monastery. History, Religion, and the Chinese Martial Arts*, Honolulu 2008. Separates the documented history of Shaolin from the Bodhidharma legend.

D. Religious-studies literature on cultivation, Daoism, and qigong

Kohn, Livia (ed.) / Komjathy, Louis et al.: *Daoist Body Cultivation. Traditional Models and Contemporary Practices*, Magdalena (NM) 2006. Connects the classical cultivation models with present-day body and qigong practice.

Komjathy, Louis: *Cultivating Perfection. Mysticism and Self-Transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism*, Leiden 2007. Monograph on Daoist inner alchemy and the term *xiulian*.

Ownby, David: *Falun Gong and the Future of China*, New York 2008. Standard religious-historical account; places Falun Dafa soberly within the long history of Chinese cultivation and “redemptive societies.”

Penny, Benjamin: *The Religion of Falun Gong*, Chicago 2012. Close textual religious-studies examination of the teaching and cosmology of Falun Dafa.

Note: The detailed literature on qigong, Taijiquan, and spiritual cultivation (among others Palmer, *Qigong Fever*, as well as the clinical review literature) belongs to the third volume of this series and is listed there.

E. Reference works and encyclopedic sources

Theobald, Ulrich: *liuyi* 六藝, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de – An Encyclopaedia on Chinese History and Literature*, 2013. Scholarly reference article on the Six Arts.

Theobald, Ulrich: *The Chinese Imperial Examination System*, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de*. On the civil and military examinations from the Sui to the Qing, including their abolition in 1901 and 1905 respectively.

Theobald, Ulrich: *Zhou Period Military*, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de*. On the military system, chariots, levy, and archery ritual of the Zhou period.

Theobald, Ulrich: *Wujing qishu* 武經七書, in: *ChinaKnowledge.de*. On the 1080 canonization of the Seven Military Classics.

F. Sports-medical, health-related, and cognitive-science research

Brenner, Joel S. / AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness: *Sports Specialization and Intensive Training in Young Athletes*, in: *Pediatrics* 138/3 (2016), e20162148. On overuse and burnout risks from early specialization.

Bu, Bin et al.: *Effects of Martial Arts on Health Status. A Systematic Review*, in: *Journal of Evidence-Based Medicine* 3/4 (2010), pp. 205–219. Indications of benefit for cardiorespiratory fitness, body composition, metabolism, and psychological measures.

Bull, Fiona C. et al.: *World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour*, in: *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54/24 (2020), pp. 1451–1462. Basis of the activity recommendations (150 to 300 min./week).

Fincham, Guy W. et al.: *Effect of Breathwork on Stress and Mental Health. A Meta-Analysis of Randomised-Controlled Trials*, in: *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023), article 432. 12 RCTs, n=785; significant stress reduction through guided breathwork.

Functional Benefits of Hard Martial Arts for Older Adults. A Scoping Review, in: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19/24 (2022), article 16970. Gains in strength, mobility, endurance, flexibility, and balance with a limited number of studies.

Hua Tuo's Wu Qin Xi (Five Animal Frolics) Movements and the Internal Organs, in: *Chinese Medicine and Culture* 1 (2018). On Hua Tuo and early medical body exercise.

Martial Arts, Combat Sports, and Mental Health in Adults. A Systematic Review, in: *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 70 (2024), article 102530. Consistent indications of cognitive effects and of the value of social embeddedness for mental health.

McNeilly, Mark R.: *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business. Six Strategic Principles for Managers*, rev. ed., New York 2011. On the modern reception of the *Sunzi* in strategy and leadership.

Origua Rios, Sonia et al.: *Health Benefits of Hard Martial Arts in Adults. A Systematic Review*, in: *Journal of Sports Sciences* 36/14 (2018), pp. 1614–1622. Majority of studies with positive effects on balance, cognitive function, and mental health.

Research on Top Archer's EEG Microstates and Source Analysis in Different States, in: *Brain Sciences* 12/8 (2022), article 1017. On neural efficiency and attention in archers.

Strain, Tessa et al.: *National, regional, and global trends in insufficient physical activity among adults from 2000 to 2022*, in: *The Lancet Global Health* 12/8 (2024). Global inactivity data (ca. 31 % resp. 1.8 billion adults, 2022).

Tan, K.: *Prevalence of Lower Extremity Overuse Injuries in Competitive Youth Wushu Taolu Athletes*, thesis, National Institute of Education / Nanyang Technological University, Singapore 2022.

Survey of 209 adolescent taolu athletes; identified as grey literature, since the peer-reviewed injury literature on competitive taolu is still thin.

World Health Organization: *Physical activity. Fact sheet*, Geneva 2024; id.: *Nearly 1.8 billion adults at risk of disease from not doing enough physical activity*, press release, 26 June 2024.

Wu, Ting-Yi et al.: *The Effects of Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Shooting Performance and Cognitive Functions in Archers*, in: *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), article 661961. Attention training improves shooting performance and cognitive function (including Stroop) in archers.

Zaccaro, Andrea et al.: *How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life. A Systematic Review on Psycho-Physiological Correlates of Slow Breathing*, in: *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 12 (2018), article 353. On slow breathing, increased vagal tone, and elevated heart-rate variability.

G. Literature on horsemanship and horseback riding (optional deepening of the *yu* strand)

Birke, Lynda: *“Learning to Speak Horse.” The Culture of “Natural Horsemanship”*, in: *Society & Animals* 15/3 (2007), pp. 217–239. Social-scientific study of the movement, including its commercial dimension.

Birke, Lynda: *Talking about Horses. Control and Freedom in the World of “Natural Horsemanship”*, in: *Society & Animals* 16/2 (2008), pp. 107–126.

Dorrance, Tom: *True Unity. Willing Communication Between Horse and Human*, ed. Milly Hunt Porter, 1987. Foundational text of Natural Horsemanship (“feel and timing”).

Hunt, Ray: *Think Harmony with Horses. An In-Depth Study of Horse/Man Relationship*, Fresno 1978. Practical classic of Dorrance’s school.

Stergiou, Alexandra et al.: *Therapeutic Effects of Horseback Riding Interventions. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis*, in: *American Journal of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation* 96/10 (2017), pp. 717–725. Meta-analytically documented effects of therapeutic riding on balance and motor function.

Methodological postscript. This work combines the consensus of current martial arts historiography (above all Lorge, Shaha, Henning, Kennedy and Guo, in the line of Tang Hao; for the twentieth century, Morris), the cultural-historical analysis of the *wen-wu* pair (Louie), the documentary and archaeological record (the ritual and military classics; the finds of Mawangdui and Yinqueshan), and the scholarly reference apparatus of ChinaKnowledge.de for data and institutional detail. Insofar as the *wu* volume touches the concept of cultivation at all, it relies on the standard religious-studies literature on Daoism (Kohn, Komjathy) and, for Falun Dafa, mentioned only as an example, on Ownby and Penny; the detailed cultivation and qigong literature remains reserved for the third volume. For the optional deepening of the *yu* strand through work with the horse, it relies on the practical literature of Natural Horsemanship (Dorrance, Hunt), its social-scientific classification (Birke), and the clinical review literature on therapeutic riding (Stergiou et al.). For the health-related sections, it relies on peer-reviewed sports-medical, epidemiological, and cognitive-science research, in particular on systematic reviews of the martial arts themselves, weighted by strength of evidence, as explained in Chapters 9 and 10; where the evidence is provisional (archery) or thinner than for the cultivation arts (combative practice), this is expressly noted. Founding attributions and precise datings of premodern styles are in principle uncertain and are presented as positions within the state of research, not as settled facts. This volume forms the *wu* half of the conceptual pair *wen wu*; a second volume on the *wen* and a short third on inner cultivation follow the same method.